

## **Project Case Study FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project Toronto, Ontario**

### **1. Introduction**

This case study of the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project is one of a series of case studies of projects funded at least in part through the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative (NHI). The case study first describes the project including: conditions prior to implementation, what the project involves and its objectives. It then describes project implementation to date. Finally, it notes outcomes to date, including comments from clients where available.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) is producing these case studies in order to contribute to the government's understanding of how NHI is working in individual communities at the project level, to gauge the extent to which the objectives are being achieved at this mid-way stage of the three-year Initiative, and to determine what can be learned from the experiences of particular projects that may be applicable to others participating in the Initiative.

The case study is based on a review of the initial proposal for the project and other available documents describing the project and its objectives and how it fits into the community's plans to address homelessness, and on a series of interviews with people representing the following groups:

- managers and staff of the project
- clients of the project
- community organizations working in areas related to this project that might share clientele with the project or whose service to people who are homeless might be influenced by this project

## 2. Description of the Project

### Conditions prior to project implementation

The Sisters of the Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ) operate the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project. They owned a house occupied by two of the Sisters and purchased a small house next door when the owners agreed to sell at a reduced price to the non-profit organization. The two Sisters then moved into the smaller house in order to permit the larger one to be converted to transitional housing for refugee clients.

### What the project involves

SCPI funding was received to help convert a single dwelling house owned by FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project into two one-bedroom apartments and one three-bedroom apartment. Most of the furnishings were donated and the project purchased a stove and two refrigerators. It is expected that tenants will stay in the self-contained, transitional housing apartments from six months to three years.

As of March 2002, there are four full-time staff at the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project. The community supports the salaries of two paid staff and the other two are volunteers. The tenants have on-going contact with the volunteer support people who live next door.

The second part of this project involved purchasing and installing seven appliances at another of the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project shelters.

### Objectives of the project

The objectives of the first part of the project are:

- to provide three new apartments at affordable rents for refugee women and their children who do not have the necessary skills to live on their own;
- to continue supporting the women to ensure they are not isolated and to help them adjust to Canadian society.

The second part of the project objective is:

- to replace the seven appliances at a six-bedroom house, another of the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project shelters.

### 3. Implementation to Date

The conversion of the house into apartments has been completed and basic furnishings installed. On November 1, 2001, six people moved into the apartments from the three shelters the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project runs.

The tenants selected had lived for a longer than normal period of time in the shelters and continued to have special needs with respect to living on their own. One elderly woman is experiencing a great deal of difficulty learning English. Another woman, the mother of a young child, is dealing with a lot of mental and physical trauma and has been suicidal in the past. She also requires support to continue with her efforts to learn English. Two young women, who are learning how to care for a 9-year-old relative within a Canadian context, occupy the third apartment.

The two adults are attending English as a Second Language classes and one is doing volunteer work in the community. The FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project will provide a Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) pass to tenants who do volunteer work. For people who do not have a TTC pass, tickets are given to those requiring transportation to school or to a prearranged appointment.

Tenants at the house are expected to pay rent. The cost is the allocation for rent from the Ministry of Community and Social Services, which is \$325 a month for a single person and \$450 a month for two people. The rent money helps pay for utilities, insurance and minor repairs. Occasionally someone will have an emergency situation back in their country of origin and need to send part or all of the rent money to another country. When this happens, the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project will facilitate back payment of the rent.

At all of the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project shelters, meetings are held once a week to discuss the house management. All tenants are expected to do one outside chore, such as maintain the front or back yard. Tenants are also expected to clean their own rooms or apartment. As the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project is for women and their children, male children over the age of 12 are not accepted and male guests are not allowed to stay over-night. No visitors are allowed after 11 pm.

The two Sisters residing next door are the support volunteers and have daily contact with the tenants. The Sisters have registered the 9 year-old in school and act as the school contact. They help the child with homework and explain the school notices to her guardians. They have also taught the tenants how to care for the outdoor area.

The appliances for the second project (two stoves, two refrigerators, one freezer, one washer/dryer, and one vacuum cleaner) were purchased in October 2001. They have been installed and tenants have received instructions on proper use.

#### 4. Outcomes to Date

For the second part of this project, the new appliances have helped to free financial resources previously used for appliance maintenance.

At the transitional residence, once the project staff start to hear tenants complain about the rules or become lax in their communal job, it is usually an indication that the tenant is ready to move out and live a more independent life. Staff help tenants look for a place to live and maintain supportive contact as long as the individual requires it. Tenants often return for support, for example with filling out documentation and loans so people can obtain their landing papers.

Other supports provided relate to the refugee determination process such as counselling, interpretation services, referral for legal assistance, legal representation, getting appointments for medicals, orientation to Canadian culture and life and other workshops as required. The FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project also runs a project called Refugee Help in Refugee Hands, in which training and information about the changes to federal immigration law are provided to staff within the mainstream shelters and hostels. The training helps them to better assist clients preparing for refugee hearings and other post-hearing procedures.

#### Preliminary observations

While it is premature to make any assessment of the impacts of the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project on the lives of its many clients in the longer term, it is possible to make the following preliminary observations:

- People who use the services at the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project learn a lot from each other. People are in various stages of the refugee process so they are able to share their experiences with others. Learning how to budget the \$190 that is left each month for a single person, after paying rent, requires knowledge of where to obtain inexpensive food and clothing. Also, learning to adapt to a new culture takes time and support which tenants are able to give one another.
- The volunteers are the main link and support for the tenants in helping them to understand and learn to cope with Canadian legal procedures, especially related to their refugee status, and to Canadian culture. The four FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project staff visit with the tenants to collect the rent or help with immigration issues. Volunteers are accessible on a daily as-needed basis.

- No new partnerships have been developed, but those that existed before have been enhanced. For example the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project and Access Alliance have a good working relationship. Now, when the two groups meet, they are more likely to discuss refugees who are at risk of homelessness, although this is not the mandate of either group's work.

### Client comments

In order to get a sense of the project's impact on clients, the researcher spent half a day at the FCJ Hamilton House Refugee Project having informal conversations with clients. The researcher asked clients what changes, if any, they have experienced as a result of the inception of the project or of additional services made possible by NHI funding. The responses are, by their nature, the subjective comments of those individuals willing to respond.

- One woman said that the other FCJ Hamilton Refugee House Project where she was originally housed was crowded and it was difficult to get some privacy. "Here it is my home, I have a fridge and stove and I can keep every thing clean and there is no trouble."
- When asked if there was anything that they missed from their old house the only thing two people mentioned was "my friends."
- Another woman felt somewhat lonely because she did not have the same number of people around her to help look after her child. After moving into the apartment, she had connected with a local drop-in group for mothers run in her native language.

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