

**Project Case Study  
Triage Centre  
Vancouver, BC**

**1. Introduction**

This case study of the Triage Centre 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 Triage Emergency Services and Care Society began its mission as a shelter provider in 1982. The agency changed its name to the Triage Centre in 1990 and moved to larger facilities in 1993, where it maintains a 28-emergency bed facility for homeless men and women. The Triage Centre also partners with two non-profit housing providers that offer 32 low-rent units to adults and 15 units to seniors who are homeless or at a high risk of homelessness. As well, the centre administers the Windchimes Community Living Support Centre, a 27-bed facility for women and men with mental health conditions and limited incomes. Triage Centre staff are available to residents for support and help with daily living activities.

The demand for the centre's help has increased. According to a recently published report (*State of the Crisis, 2001 – A report on housing and homelessness in Canada* by the National Housing and Homeless Network), in 1998 at least 600 people were sleeping outside every night in Vancouver while 400 people were using the city's shelters. Accordingly, shelter providers like the Triage Centre have made efforts to create more transitional or longer-term housing for their clients.

#### What the project involves

In 2001, the Triage Centre purchased a 47-unit rooming house in downtown Vancouver to provide second-stage housing to former clients of the emergency shelter who have managed to develop enough stability in their lives to accomplish this transition. The purchase was funded through the Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative (SCPI), BC Housing and private community donations.

Staff hoped that the purchase of the rooming house, known as the Princess Rooms, would free up some of the 28 shelter beds being occupied on a fairly regular basis by clients considered ready for transitional housing.

During their stay at the rooming house, the female and male residents are encouraged to take advantage of services in the community to deal with their psychiatric problems and/or their addictions. Others seek to improve their life skills and participate in pre-employment training programs. Eventually, residents are expected to reintegrate into the community. They are invited to search for permanent accommodations and/or add their names to the city's lengthy waiting list for affordable housing.

Along with shelter services, the Triage Centre also received SCPI funds to administer a Dual Diagnosis Assertive Community Outreach Team Pilot project. This project involves the hiring of temporary staff to conduct case management for homeless persons with dual diagnosis issues. This seven-month program is expected to terminate in May 2002.

#### Objectives of the project

The Centre's main goal is to provide community living support in the form of temporary or transitional refuge and support to homeless women and men in the Vancouver community. The specific objective of the Princess Rooms was to increase the amount of transitional housing for homeless and hard-to-serve men and women seeking shelter at the Triage Centre.

### **3. Implementation to Date**

Triage Centre staff experienced no difficulties in filling the Princess Rooms. In November 2001, the centre had received 560 referrals for the 47 available units. The shelter manager believes there are an estimated 3,000 persons (homeless and at risk of becoming homeless) with mental health conditions waiting for supported housing. De-institutionalization has had a significant impact on the ability of shelter providers like the Triage Centre to cope with this situation.

The centre maintains partners in the community to provide supported housing. For instance, staff work closely with health professionals from the local Health Board and the city's mental health

team. Staff also share information with other shelters such as the Lookout Emergency Aid Society and the St. James Community Services Society. They also refer clients to the methadone centre for treatment and rely on the support of a number of addictions services.

The majority of clients residing temporarily at the Princess Rooms is eligible for Levels 1 or 2 handicapped pensions and pay a part of their pensions for rent. The Triage Centre also receives some funding from the province to assist with the operations of the rooming house. Besides stable transitional housing, tenants also have access to the services of the Dual Diagnosis Assertive Community Outreach Team during their stay.

#### **4. Outcomes to Date**

##### Preliminary observations

While it is premature to make any assessment of the impacts of the Triage Centre – Princess Rooms on the lives of its many clients in the longer term, it is possible to make the following preliminary observations:

- Staff at the Triage Centre is convinced that if homeless individuals with mental health conditions can access stable transitional housing along with the support of case managers, it can have a significant impact on their lives. Although it is too early to assess if the availability of the rooming house has achieved this, it would appear that it has improved the lives of some of the tenants, simply by virtue of providing them with a stable and supported living environment, where previously they relied on emergency shelters or slept outdoors.
- The assistance of the temporary case workers has added to the satisfaction expressed by the rooming house residents. The shelter manager is encouraged by the support provided by outreach workers at the housing facility. Consequently, he is concerned about the future of the Dual Diagnosis Assertive Community Outreach Team as its funding is temporary.

##### Client comments

In order to get a sense of the project's impact on clients, the researcher spent a day at the Triage Centre – Princess Rooms having informal conversations with five 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.

Clients expressed happiness at having a space to stay in and reported being surrounded by friends in the rooming house. One individual was glad to be able to invite his children for visits at the rooming house. All consistently stated that they would be on the streets, in a temporary shelter or incarcerated if space at Princess Rooms was not available to them.

"Triage is the best...they work with you, help you, understand you...I've been off booze and drugs for the past 12 years...I'd probably be back on the streets if Princess Rooms wasn't available."

"I'm from Inuvik in the Northwest Territories...I was staying in a park before coming here...I'm moving into Princess Rooms soon...I appreciate the help I get here...the staff are helping me to get into a detox program...I want to get away from alcohol and drugs."

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