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HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

Bulletin

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Labour Market Integration

Message from the Director General

Dear Colleagues,

I hope you had a safe and enjoyable summer.

With fall now upon us, I am pleased to share with you the fourth edition of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) Bulletin, dedicated to homelessness and labour market integration (LMI).

We have heard from several communities about how skills development and LMI are important issues in addressing homelessness. Accordingly, this Bulletin explores successful community practices and provincial initiatives aimed at integrating people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness into the labour market.

I am also pleased to highlight a new section of the Bulletin: The P/T Corner. This section will focus on various promising practices and initiatives implemented by provinces and territories to address homelessness. In this issue, we highlight a few innovative practices supported by the Governments of Alberta and Manitoba to help vulnerable people find jobs.

I trust that you will find this information useful and inspiring. As always, we welcome your feedback and comments on the Bulletin.

Best regards,

Barbara Lawless
Director General



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YOUTH HOMELESSNESS AND LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION

By Stephen Gaetz, Director
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In helping to support young people to move out of homelessness — or indeed to avoid homelessness in the first place — Labour Market Integration (LMI) presents both one of the greatest challenges, and at the same time, an incredible opportunity. The benefits of employment for at-risk youth should be self-evident: income that can support housing and improved nutrition; positive engagement with adults and other employed youth; improved self-esteem, health and well-being. The barriers to employment, however, are not always so obvious.

Although there is no doubt that a lack of skills contributes to the underemployment of homeless youth, there is much more to this story, as the reality of life on the streets is much different than the stereotypical depiction that youth homelessness suggests. Canadian research highlights that motivation is not really the problem, as the overwhelming majority of homeless youth would much rather have a regular job than earn money through panhandling, squeegeeing or criminal activity (Gaetz & O'Grady, 2002). These activities are seen as demeaning and humiliating to many young people who have to rely on them for income (Gwadz, et al. 2009).

In early 2013, the Canadian Homelessness Research Network (CHRN), with support from the HPS, is releasing *Youth Homelessness in Canada: Implications for Policy and Practice*, an e-book on youth homelessness, with a dedicated section on LMI. The first chapter focuses on what we know about youth homelessness and employment, the most significant barriers to labour market participation, and key elements of a successful strategy for



training and integration into the workforce. The second chapter highlights the role of corporate engagement in LMI for homeless youth. Here, the authors highlight the major findings from Raising the Roof's Private Sector Engagement project. The final two chapters present 'promising practices' in employment training for homeless youth. Case studies of *Train for Trades* in St. John's, Newfoundland, and *BladeRunners* in Vancouver, British Columbia, highlight successful and innovative program models that address the barriers that homeless youth face; models with potential for adaptation elsewhere in Canada.

A newsletter entitled *Income, Employment & Education: Labour Market Integration* is now available online. Please visit the Homeless Hub Web site at <http://www.homelesshub.ca/Topics/Labour-Market-Integration-837.aspx>.

References

- Gaetz, S., & O'Grady, B. (2002). Making money: Exploring the economy of young homeless workers. *Work, Employment & Society*, 16, 433–456.
- Gwadz, M. V., Gostnell, K., Smolenski, C., Willis, B., Nish, D., Nolan, T. C., et al. (2009). The initiation of homeless youth into the street economy. *Journal of Adolescence*, 32(2), 357–377.

SUCCESS STORY:

Asphalt Gals, a Recycling Social Enterprise

Studies have shown that it is harder for female ex-offenders to re-integrate into the labour market than male ex-offenders. Women leaving a correctional institution with a criminal record, low skills and education levels, as well as limited work experience are particularly vulnerable to recidivism and homelessness.

Accordingly, the HPS, through a Horizontal Pilot Project with Correctional Service of Canada and Public Safety Canada, partnered with the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver (EFry) to test whether offering work experience through a social enterprise¹ could enhance the self-sufficiency of low-skilled female ex-offenders, reduce homelessness and recidivism, and improve their integration into the broader community.

EFry, with support from the three federal departments, launched its first social enterprise called Asphalt Gals Recycling Ltd (AGRL) in 2011. Working in close collaboration with the roofing sector, AGRL employs female ex-inmates to clean up roofing companies' job sites. AGRL was able to identify a labour market need which allows roofing companies to complete their job faster and provides the basis for a stable business.

AGRL employees separate discarded shingles from other roofing debris for recycling. Shingles, which are heavy in petroleum and can pollute landfills and drinking water, were ending up in landfills because it was not cost-effective for roofing companies

to spend time separating materials for recycling. By providing this service, AGRL is helping to reduce the environmental footprint of re-roofing. To our knowledge, it is currently the only company in Canada offering such a service to roofing companies.

But more importantly, this enterprise helps female ex-offenders get back on their feet. Employees are recruited from prisons, halfway houses and craigslist ads. To help them get started, AGRL provides their employees with loans to purchase work equipment, such as steel-toed boots and work gloves. In addition, they provide meals since, initially, many of the women cannot afford to buy the food required to be able to do physical outdoor work all day.

The women receive job training and develop marketable skills; some are also given the opportunity to develop leadership and supervisory skills by becoming crew leaders. An important part of the training provided is related to health and safety, which requires constant attention as workplace locations change frequently.

Studies show that providing access to a range of services and supports, including skills training, is essential to addressing the numerous barriers faced by the people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and AGRL is putting this knowledge into action.

But also, the AGRL enterprise is committed to providing women with a living wage. Before landing a job with AGRL, most of the women were living in transitional housing (halfway houses), homeless shelters, or on social assistance. They were spending as much as 75 per cent of their income on housing, placing them at high risk of homelessness. Paying employees a living wage enables them to afford housing, reduces the portion of their income spent on housing, and helps to build their self-esteem.

Carrie, a mother of three, grandmother of three and ex-inmate in recovery from a 10-year battle with addiction is an example of what this opportunity means. She was first approached by an EFry volunteer shortly before being discharged from custody and has not looked back. She is now a crew manager for AGRL and well on her way to rebuilding her life. She strongly believes that the support provided through AGRL made a huge difference in her success, and that having this support in place before



¹ A social enterprise is a stand-alone business operated by a non-profit organization with the dual purpose of generating income by selling a product or service in the marketplace **and** creating a social, environmental or cultural value. (http://www.enterprisingnonprofits.ca/about_social_enterprise/definitions/)

leaving prison was critical to her avoiding recidivism. She also sees the progress that other female ex-offenders working with the enterprise are making.

“The women are happy for the opportunity to work. They appreciate having an employer that opens doors—who will train them, lend them money for equipment and feed them until they can feed themselves,” said Shawn Bayes, Executive Director of EFry. “EFry believes in our women and that if given the opportunity, they can rebuild their lives and become contributing members of society. That belief has been rewarded with enthusiastic employees who work hard.”

Transitioning into the labour market requires stability — not only secure housing, but also training supports and a social network. This is what EFry and AGRL offer women, and they are showing impressive results.

Launched less than a year ago, AGRL now employs approximately 15 women and is currently training new crew leaders in order to expand its operations. Up to 40 women are expected to benefit from this job opportunity by its third year.

Launching a social enterprise is very different from launching a program or a project, highlights Shawn Bayes. There is no safety net — you need to compete in the marketplace for work. There is no guaranteed revenue or market for services offered. Her recommendation to other organizations interested in launching a similar enterprise is to have a strong business plan, get good legal and accounting advice to ensure that all legal and tax implications are addressed, and hire a consultant to develop a communication strategy, if needed.

The HPS would like to thank Shawn Bayes, Executive Director of EFry, and Karen McCluskey, EFry’s media spokesperson, who provided us with information on this successful LMI initiative.

For more information about the Elizabeth Fry Society of Greater Vancouver, please visit <http://www.elizabethfry.com/>

There are useful toolkits and resources available online for organizations interested in undertaking this type of initiative. For more information, please visit:

- Enterprising Non-Profit, *The Canadian Social Enterprise Guide*, 2nd edition:
http://www.enterprisingnonprofits.ca/projects/the_guide²
- Social Enterprise Council of Canada,
<http://www.secouncil.ca>.
- Social Finance, *Your Guide to Social Finance*,
<http://socialfinance.ca/index.php/guide>²

THINGS TO CONSIDER

When Launching a Social Enterprise

There are a range of factors to consider in developing a social enterprise; your approach will be influenced by your vision, mandate, organizational structure and the type of clients you serve. The following are important steps to consider:

- **Identification:** identify a niche in the labour market and perform a feasibility analysis based on your vision.
- **Planning:** develop a solid Business Plan and keep it updated.
- **Legal aspect:** interrelated with planning, legal and accounting advice is essential to determine your enterprise’s structure in order to meet Canada Revenue Agency policies and guidelines.
- **Health and safety:** ensure that employees will work in a healthy and safe environment, consistent with health and safety codes in force in your province or territory.
- **Promotion strategy:** determine how you will inform potential clients about your products/services, (e.g.: creation of a Web site).
- **Preparing to launch:** hire manager, determine criteria to select employees, develop employee training plan, obtain required equipment and any required permits.
- **Performance measurement:** develop ways to measure the enterprise effectiveness in order to adjust and improve.

² These Web sites are run by organizations that are not subject to the *Official Languages Act* and are available in only one official language.

HOMELESSNESS KNOWLEDGE DEVELOPMENT LABOUR MARKET INTEGRATION PROJECTS

Individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness face challenges entering or remaining in the job market. Homeless or at-risk youth are having even greater difficulties to find meaningful, stable employment (Barr, 2011). Nonetheless, according to a study by Start Me Up Niagara (Lethby, 2006), the homeless population strongly identifies with and hopes to obtain formal employment. In fact, 80 to 97 per cent of homeless people have been employed in the labour market at some point in their lifetime, and 83 per cent would like a mainstream job (Lethby, 2006). When employed, homeless people are more vulnerable to labour exploitation and are generally clustered in marginal occupations involving sporadic, short-term, unregulated work with frequent lay-offs. At the same time, research suggests that there are numerous corporate benefits for businesses who engage in homelessness initiatives. Branding opportunities exist for businesses and products aligned with social causes such as homelessness (Burrett and Pomeroy, 2008). Accordingly, there is a need to better understand employment barriers facing the homeless population and the role of the private sector in order to develop tools and promising practices to facilitate employment access, retention and advancement.

As such, Raising the Roof's Private Sector Engagement project is reviewing how businesses and community agencies currently work together to provide training, employment and mentorship opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth. The goal is to use this knowledge as a catalyst for change in attitude, policy and practice within the private sector, paving the way for new employment opportunities for at-risk and homeless youth across Canada.

Based on interviews with community agency employment programs, employment partners, and at-risk youth, Raising the Roof will release a report, *It's Everybody's Business: Engaging the Private Sector in Solutions to Youth Homelessness*, this November.

The report will highlight:

- successful employment program models;
- strategies for bringing programs and potential employers together;
- the basis of good program/employer partnerships;
- supports and resources employers need to get, and stay, involved;



- opportunities for government, the private sector, and community agencies to support disadvantaged youth to gain employment.

Practical Toolkit:

A one-stop resource hub for employers and agencies

Along with the research report, Raising the Roof will launch a bilingual on-line toolkit for prospective employers and community agencies. This will be a 'one-stop' hub for resources, practical help and inspiration for employers who are interested in offering job training or employment opportunities to at-risk youth, and for community agencies that are helping youth find their place in the workforce and are looking for ways to engage potential employers.

Watch for these resources at www.raisingtheroof.org, this November.

Studies Consulted

- Barr, C. (2011). *Youthworks: Private Sector Engagement*. Raising the Roof. Toronto.
- Burrett, J. & Pomeroy, S. (2008). *Doing Well by Doing Good: Analysis of the Business Case for Private Sector Engagement in Homelessness*.
- Lethby, M. (2006). *Homeless Employment Access Region*. Start Me Up Niagara. Toronto.

P/T CORNER

This inaugural P/T Corner showcases innovative practices supported by the Governments of Alberta and Manitoba to help vulnerable populations integrate into the labour market.

Better Together:

A new way to support Alberta's homeless people

The Government of Alberta is working collaboratively with the City of Lethbridge and its service delivery partners to improve outcomes for homeless people in the Lethbridge area through an initiative called Homeless Outreach Support Services. This pilot is being led by the Human Services ministry and will assist homeless clients in finding the information they need to apply for and receive the supports they need.

Some programs require detailed medical information, and homeless clients often have difficulty in gathering the necessary documentation. Under this initiative, a career and employment counselor will:

- help people access existing assessment information;
- connect with programs to clarify application requirements;
- ensure funding is in place for specialized medical assessments; and
- ensure medical professionals have the information necessary to adequately complete forms for clients.

The initiative will streamline homeless client application and eligibility determination for:

- Alberta Works (income support and employment and training supports);
- Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped;
- Persons with Developmental Disabilities program; and
- other support, as required.

This pilot will test whether better access to these support programs will lead to improved client outcomes, such as being able to prepare for the labour market earlier or return to the labour market more quickly.

For more information, contact Michael Stansberry, Manager, Cross Ministry Projects at michael.stansberry@gov.ab.ca.

Success of a Social Enterprise in Manitoba

As part of its commitment to provide greater training and employment opportunities to low-income groups at risk of homelessness, Manitoba Housing and Community Development (HCD) is currently engaged with several organizations that have provided models of promising practices across the province.

For example, Building Urban Industries for Local Development (BUILD) is a social enterprise not-for-profit contractor with the purpose of reducing poverty and improving housing affordability and environmental sustainability in Winnipeg. BUILD provides a six-month training program and an Aboriginal apprenticeship program in partnership with HCD. As of May 2012, BUILD had completed energy retrofits across 4,883 Manitoba Housing units. This training program is designed for individuals facing multiple barriers to employment, including: limited education and work experience; addictions; contact with the criminal justice system; and unstable home environments.

In recognition that most BUILD trainees are of Aboriginal ancestry, the Aboriginal Apprenticeship Program teaches supervisory and peer-to-peer mentoring skills to participants while they complete Level 1 hours for their apprenticeship in carpentry. BUILD has won the 2011 Scotiabank EcoLiving Business Leadership Award and was awarded \$50,000, for its profound innovation and commitment to environmental responsibility.

For more information on BUILD, or similar HCD initiatives, please visit <http://www.gov.mb.ca/housing/> or contact Jill Perron at jill.perron@gov.mb.ca.

LITERACY AND ESSENTIAL SKILLS GUIDE FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS

The HPS and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's Office of Literacy and Essential Skills (OLES) are collaborating on the development of a guide outlining existing OLES tools and resources that can be adopted by service providers serving clients who are homeless.

OLES is focused on improving the literacy and essential skills of adult Canadians by providing expertise, project funding, and a wide range of learning tools and other resources. Through its activities, OLES aims to help Canadians acquire the skills they need to get a job, stay in the job market, and contribute to their communities and families.

The new Guide will provide concrete examples on how to tailor support to the specific interests, needs, and skill sets of homeless clients. It will provide service providers with an array of resources that they can use to help clients identify their own skill levels, vocational possibilities, and prepare them for further training.

Look for the new Literacy and Essential Skills Guide on the HPS Web site in the coming months at www.hrsdc.gc.ca/workingtogether.

OTHER NEWS AND EVENTS

HPS Teleforums

Upcoming: The next Teleforum will be held on October 25, 2012, and will feature the Literacy and Essential Skills Guide, developed by HPS and the Office of Literacy and Essential Skills.

Not on our invite list? Please send us an e-mail at na-hps-teleforums-spli-gd@hrsdc-rhdcc.gc.ca to be added.

National Housing Research Committee (NHRC)

The next NHRC's Homelessness Working Group meeting will be held on November 5, 2012, and will focus on housing and homelessness.

For more information on this event, or to watch NHRC videos online, go to <http://nhrc-cnrl.ca/>.

HPS Web site Expansion

The new **Working Together** Web section is now live! Find information on HPS funded projects, news and events. Please visit this new section at: www.hrsdc.gc.ca/workingtogether.

