



Now and Tomorrow  
Excellence in Everything We Do

# HOMELESSNESS PARTNERING STRATEGY

## Summary

### **Prevention Strategy for Homeless Youth – Eva’s Initiatives Family Reconnect Program Dissemination 2011**

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#### **What is *Eva’s Initiatives*?**

Eva’s Initiatives (Eva’s) works with homeless and at-risk youth to get them off the streets permanently. They operate three shelters in the Greater Toronto Area that house 114 youth each night. Eva’s shelters provide homeless youth with emergency and transitional housing, harm reduction services to address drug and alcohol use, counselling, employment and training programs, housing support and services to reconnect youth with their families.

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#### **About the Family Reconnect Program (FRP)**

##### **What is the *FRP*?**

- The FRP is one of Eva’s most innovative programs, providing support to allow youth to return home or create more positive, healthy relationships with their families while living independently of their family.
- Part of the FRP involves supporting families to stay together rather than having at-risk youth enter the shelter system.
- This program perspective is unique in Canada.

##### **The FRP Staff includes:**

- Two family intervention counsellors
- A family reconnect supervisor
- An outside clinical consultant
- The program is overseen by the General Manager of the shelter

## Which population does the FRP serve?

Homeless and at-risk youth aged 14-25 interested in addressing and potentially resolving conflicts with their families.

## What is the foundation of the FRP?

The core idea of the FRP is that family is important to everyone and an effective response to youth homelessness must consider the role that family – and the potential of reconciliation of damaged relationships – can play in helping these youth move forward with their lives.

## What is the Definition of “Family” in the FRP?

- “Family” is defined by the youth and family members involved in the program.
- This may mean the “typical” family members of mother, father, and siblings but often for the youth in the program, it may also constitute a grandparent, cousin, neighbour, and/or family friend.

## How does the program work?

- Once a referral has been made, a staff member makes contact with referring agencies and/or family members within 72 hours of the initial contact to set up an appointment.
- In the shelter, referrals for the FRP are incorporated into Eva’s intake process. Efforts are made to meet with youth as quickly as possible if they arrive directly from a family home, or have had recent contact with family.
- If a family member calls or comes to the shelter, an FRP staff member will meet with them as soon as possible.
- Assessment - Once a youth has entered the FRP, they take part in a one-on-one counselling session with a staff member where they are thoroughly assessed.
- A three-pronged approach to counselling involves:
  - individual counselling with youth clients
  - family counselling involving youth and family member(s)
  - counselling with family members separately.
- The program supports youth and family members to take an in-depth look at the source of conflict, develop goals, and work to re-build their relationships.
- The program staff work with youth and families to:
  - improve communication and coping skills
  - develop tools to deal with conflict
  - address trauma
  - improve life skills.

- Weekly life skills groups offered at Eva’s serve to raise awareness of the FRP’s services with youth and staff. As well, staff work to engage youth in the group who may be new to the shelter or who may not feel that the program is appropriate for them.
- As part of the FRP’s outreach activities, the issue of homelessness and the program’s services are outlined with staff and youth at schools and community agencies.
- To encourage shelter staff professional development, education and support is provided in the area of family systems, mental health and community resources.

### **Youth say that the key underlying issues relating to tension in the family are:**

Ongoing conflict with family members; Family breakdown/divorce; Immigration/cultural conflict; Family member’s; mental health problems; Family member’s addictions; Being an adopted child; Family income/poverty; Family; death/trauma; Illness in family; and Sexual orientation issues.

### **What are the program outcomes?**

- Program outcomes vary for each client and their family involved in the program.
- Moving home is not the only program outcome because for many youth, moving home is just not an option.
- However, youth can be supported by family members as they get established in an independent environment (supported housing, shared accommodation, etc.).
- Some relationships with family members may improve so much that youth return home.
- For other youth, there may be no significant improvement with family members, but the counselling process will have helped the clients move forward in their lives in a meaningful way.

### **Has the FRP been evaluated?**

- A 2010 evaluation of the FRP found that while many indicators (financial management, employment, and mental health) stayed stable, there was a positive program impact for a minority of participants in each of these areas.
- Family relationships for youth generally improved, as did their housing situation.
- The evaluation showed that the program was cost effective, saving the shelter system more than \$661,000 per year.