

BREAKING ^{the} CYCLE of HOMELESSNESS

Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program



Modelled on the Homeless Outreach Program, the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program has several unique attributes. It recognizes that the connection with an Aboriginal homeless person requires a different method of

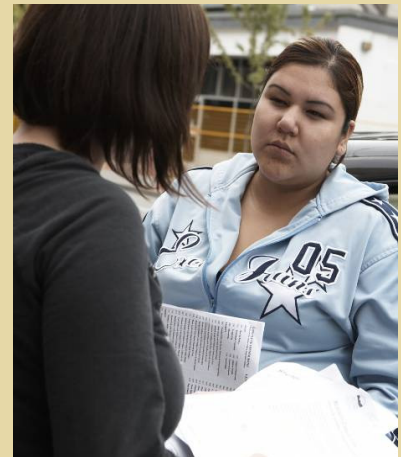
delivering services – one in which the cultural differences are recognized and honoured, and the approach of the service delivery is from the perspective of the individual’s cultural experience.

The program’s outreach workers are Aboriginal themselves and are working for organizations that specialize in delivering services to Aboriginal peoples. Aboriginal outreach workers ensure appropriate linkages to health, income, housing and cultural support programs and ensure that services are delivered in a culturally sensitive manner and that appropriate linkages are made to culturally specific services.

Prior to implementation of the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program, external evaluations and key informants of the Housing Outreach Program also identified that employing First Nations staff facilitates better engagement with First Nations clients. Aboriginal people were far more likely to engage with an outreach worker who was also Aboriginal.

Facts & Stats

- Outreach workers in nine locations serve their surrounding communities



The Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program in Kamloops

When BC Housing announced the creation of its Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program, the Kamloops Native Housing Society (KNHS) was eager to get involved. The society provides low-income housing to Aboriginal families but was not set up to provide outreach services. KNHS staff approached their colleagues at the AIDS Society of Kamloops (ASK) Wellness Centre for support. ASK has several outreach workers in the region and also manages a 28-unit development for people at risk of homelessness. ASK was happy to partner with KNHS to provide mentorship and guidance.

On ASK's recommendation, KNHS hired Rhyannon Alexander as its AHOP worker; she started in May 2008. Since then, Rhyannon estimates having opened approximately 250 cases and finding housing for about 30 per cent of those people. It's a difficult job in a tight rental market and where rents often far exceed what people on income assistance can afford. This challenge has been alleviated somewhat recently by the implementation of a rent supplement program.

"I get a lot of referrals from ASK and the Ministry of Housing and Social Development," said Rhyannon. "When I first meet clients, I talk with them about their immediate needs and connect them with income assistance and find them a place to live. I have taken clients to the food bank to find them some basics. My husband hunts and I am sometimes able to give people moose meat, which is really appreciated. My goal with all clients is to establish a relationship and gain trust. Then I can see if they are willing to go to treatment and detox."

Rhyannon also spends time networking with private landlords and explaining the Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Program to them. She spends some time advocating for people experiencing situational homelessness but is shifting her focus more to

helping those who are chronically homeless.

"I work a lot with ASK Wellness as they have so many resources already in place with landlords as well as for fast-tracking people with the ministry," said Rhyannon. "Working with them has made the job much easier."

ASK Executive Director Bob Hughes agrees. "It's been a really incredible partnership. Rhyannon brings so much to the table, particularly cultural sensitivity. It's been very important to add an Aboriginal component to the Homeless Outreach Program in Kamloops."

Testimonial

"When I first meet someone who needs help, I follow Aboriginal traditions by offering tobacco and water. That shows kindness and most people react well. It shows I'm ready to sit down and take the time to build a relationship with them. We talk about where we come from, our territory, our nations. We share stories and this puts them at ease".

~ Sonja Mountain, Aboriginal Homeless Outreach Worker, Ki-Low-Na Friendship Society

www.bchousing.org/breakingthecycle

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HOUSING MATTERS



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