



Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network Profile of Effective Practice:

Eva's Initiatives

“When I was 12 years old I was kicked out of my home. I came to Eva’s Phoenix after living on the streets and in foster homes for many years. Eva’s Phoenix was exactly what I needed, as I had no self-confidence, emotional issues with my situation and no idea how to present myself to an employer. The staff worked hard to give me as much training, support and counselling as possible when I felt I might not make it at times. By the time my placement in the film industry came up, I was ready and had great success. When my year at Phoenix was up, they helped me find housing. For the past year and a half I have been working in a full-time job at a non-profit organization. I wouldn’t be where I am now without all the support and care of Eva’s Phoenix staff.”

Eva’s Phoenix Graduateⁱ

Introduction

The mission of Eva's Initiatives is to work collaboratively with homeless and at-risk youth, helping them reach their potential to lead productive, self-sufficient and healthy lives by providing safe shelter and a range of services, and to create long term solutions for homeless youth by developing and implementing proactive and progressive services.

This Profile of Effective Practice is one of fifteen stories examining how innovative, community-based initiatives are using comprehensive approaches to improve social and economic conditions on a local level.

The profiles were prepared as part of a 2.5-year project of the Canadian CED Network looking at the links between social inclusion and community economic development.

For other profiles, more information on the project and additional resources on social inclusion and CED, see the notes at the end of this document.

Eva’s Initiatives is the umbrella organization for a series of programs aimed at getting homeless and at-risk youth off the streets permanently. Currently this involves three shelters operating in Toronto which house up to 122 youth a night. The shelters are:

- Eva’s Place, the first Eva’s project and home to their Family Re-Connect Program;
- Eva’s Satellite, the only harm-reduction shelter for youth in Toronto with substance use issues; and

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- Eva's Phoenix, a transitional shelter that incorporates training, education and employment in its programming.

The name "Eva's" is adopted in honour of Eva Smith (1923 – 1993), a North York community outreach worker and counsellor who assisted people in despair, particularly youth. In 1987, she helped found the North York Emergency Home for Youth. Her work and advocacy resulted in the construction of Eva's Place, which was named in memory of her. Eva's Satellite followed, an initiative focusing on the needs of homeless youth who have substance use issues. Eva's Initiatives is currently in the process of building a new facility for Eva's Satellite, which would operate 24 hours a day. Most recently, Eva's Initiatives opened Eva's Phoenix in 2000 to help youth to acquire the life and employment skills they need to leave the shelter system permanently.

Background

Eva's Place first opened its doors in 1994 and in 10 short years has expanded from one to three shelters - with the addition of Eva's Satellite and Eva's Phoenix - each offering an innovative combination of programs and services for homeless and at-risk youth. Since its first day of operation, Eva's Initiatives has helped over 17,500 youth from the Greater Toronto Area and across Canada. Every year, approximately 2,300 youth receive help with such diverse issues as substance abuse, employment skills training and job search, finishing school, learning life skills, receiving career training, sex education, exploring recreational opportunities and family re-connection.

Prior to opening, Eva's Phoenix ran its first successful employment program funded by Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), which supported 50 homeless and at-risk youth in life skills training and on-site employment on the Eva's Phoenix construction site with their partners the Carpenter's Local 27, the Interior Systems Contractors Association Local 675, and the Painter's Union.ⁱⁱ

Programs offered through Eva's Initiatives

Housing: Transitional housing is available for 50 homeless or at risk youth for up to one year. Groups of five youth live together collaboratively, with staff support to shop, cook and learn life skills in a hands-on way. These are all skills that people need in order to live sustainably.

Employment: The centrepiece of employment services is a HRSDC-funded training program that serves up to 100 youth each year. Participants go through an employment-focused life skills program, one to one and group employment counselling to identify skills, interests and career

Youth Homelessness in Toronto

It is estimated that 10,000 young people are currently 'living' in poverty on Toronto streets - that's three out of every 100 Toronto youth, or the equivalent of eight average Toronto high schools. The statistics for this marginalized group are less than optimistic:-

- The youth unemployment rate is nearing 17% - almost double the Toronto average.
- Suicide among street youth remains a major problem, occurring at rates over 100 times the national average.
- The mortality rate for homeless youth is 13 times higher than other youth in their age group.
- 23% of male youth and 43% of female youth on the streets show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.
- It costs more than \$250 a day - close to \$100,000 a year - to keep one young person in detention, more than three times what it costs to keep that same person in a shelter.

Sources: Toronto Vital Signs 2004; Sean Kidd, 2003: Voice for Children report; Department of Justice: National Crime Prevention Centre, 2001, Eva's Initiatives website: www.evasinitiatives.com/who.htm

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goals, a 5-6 month paid work placement, and finally receive assistance to find permanent work. The goal is for them to move into permanent career-related employment within a year.

Social Enterprise: An on-site print shop trains 12 to 15 youth per year in all aspects of graphic communications from design to production. Participants split their time between the Phoenix Print Shop's production work for private sector clients and on-site instruction. By year three of the social enterprise, at the end of 2006, the Phoenix Print Shop expects to cover 100% of business costs, while still receiving funds for training costs.

Mentorship: This program evolved from a desperate need for follow-up services in the sector. An evaluation conducted in 2003 identified Follow-up Support as one of the key determinants of whether or not youth would be successful in the long-term. Unfortunately, no funder is willing to support it to the extent that it is required (mentorship programs tend to be under-funded in many community agencies) so the program is totally volunteer driven, with coordination by staff. There are two primary mentorship programs at Eva's Initiatives:

- Peer mentorship program: Graduates of Eva's Phoenix come back to teach youth how to cook, conduct effective job or housing searches, help run resident committees (Governance, Social, Maintenance etc.) and support ongoing engagement with graduates.
- One to one mentorship program: In this program, adults are matched with youth for three months or longer. They have developed their own curriculum and training for the program, and have 15 to 20 matches going on at a time.

National Initiative Program: works with other groups and communities to develop their own integrated models of support for homeless youth that focus on helping youth create self-sufficiency. Inherent in the Eva's Phoenix model is the goal of addressing social and economic inclusion.

Participatory and Comprehensive Analysis

The conceptual framework that drives the work of Eva's Initiatives is the Sustainable Livelihoods model (see Diagram #1, next page). From its work in the community, Eva's Initiatives knew that it wasn't sufficient to provide shelter or job training alone, but that both needed to be done at the same time. Youth have to be able to address all the barriers in their lives in order to be successful in the long-term, so an organization serving youth needed to develop a client-focused, case-management model that would identify the barriers each individual youth was facing, as well as the spectrum of interventions that would be required. This included assisting youth to address their health, mental health, addictions, education, motivation and self-esteem in order to help them to achieve self-sufficiency – not simply shelter and employment. In short, all aspects of a youth's life that are integral to achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency must be addressed, or any job and shelter will be unstable as a result.

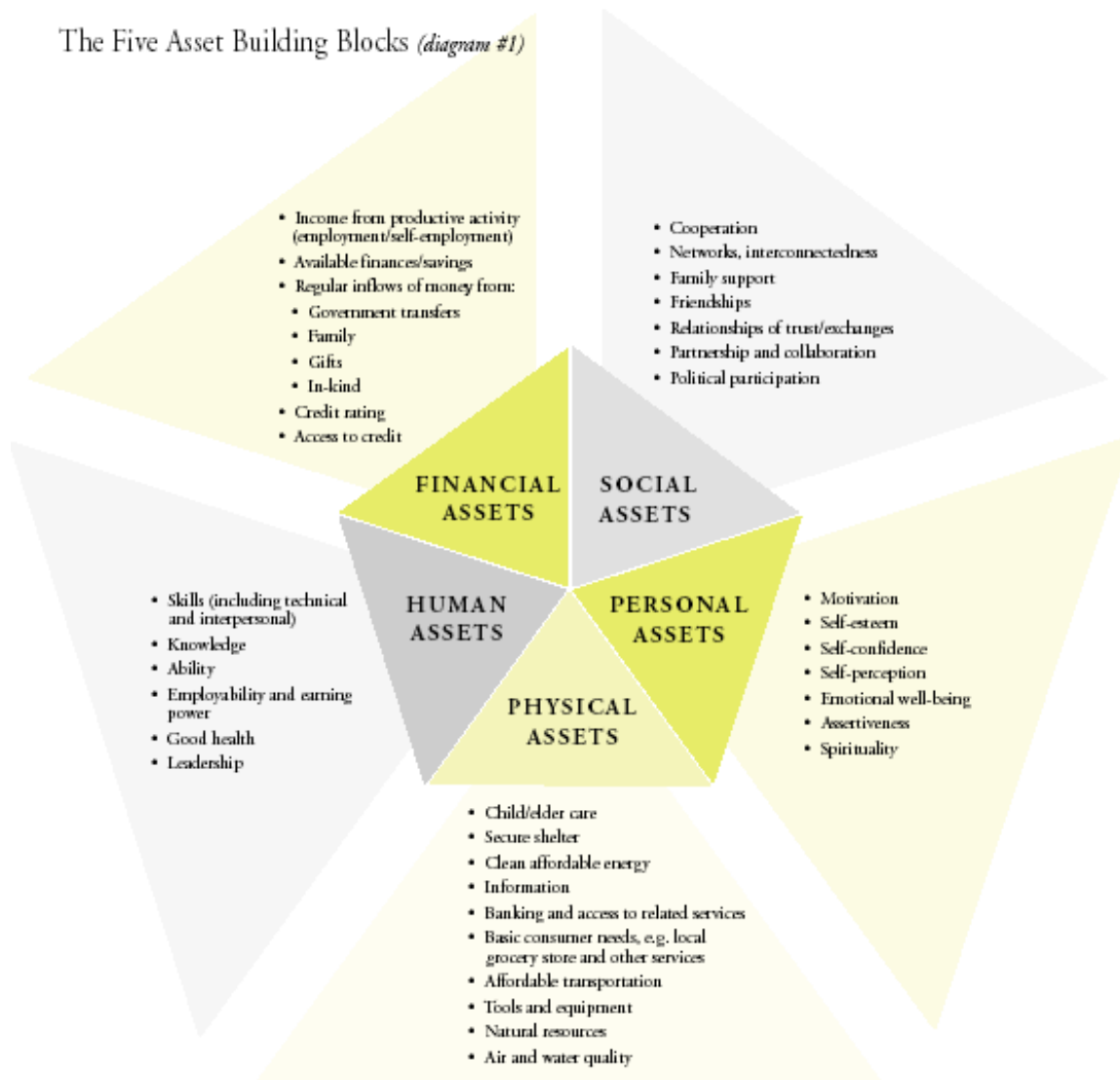
"In short, all aspects of a youth's life that are integral to achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency must be addressed, or any job and shelter will be unstable as a result."

Eva's Initiatives had always been thinking in those terms, and about how to define success for youth in the Eva's Phoenix program. Each youth comes with his or her own individual skills and barriers, and not all can achieve their own stable job and place to live over the course of one year due to the different challenges they are addressing. For a

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young person, staying in a job three weeks could be an important outcome, and is the first step to he or she staying another three weeks and continuing to move along road to self-sufficiency. Any tangible improvement to a youth's assets, even improvements that don't immediately result in stable housing or a job, must be seen as a successes since each youth, based on their own circumstances, has a different path to self-sufficiency.

Eva's Initiatives had conceived of their approach in that way, but had not been able to articulate it in terms of outcomes until they came across the Sustainable Livelihoods Index. They took the Index and adapted it for youth, using the same asset building blocks, but substituting youth language around it (see diagram #1 below). That was the first time they were able to describe their work in those terms, and so began to measure it in those terms as well, not just numbers of jobs and places to live.



Adapted from Department for International Development Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance Sheets 1999 - 2000 with participations from WEDC grantee staff

From Eko Nomos, 2001

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For Eva's Initiatives, the Sustainable Livelihoods model represents a way of describing the interconnectedness of their approach, even in the measurement of outcomes. People understand the fact that if you have no friends or family to rely on, it's really hard to sustain self-sufficiency. If you have a substance abuse issue, it's really hard to maintain decent employment. While having a roof over your head is an essential first step, when Eva's Initiatives asked youth what they were interested in addressing when they moved into Eva's Phoenix, many said that things like health, substance use, and motivation were not issues that were priorities for them, but through the program, they realized that they had to address those issues to live independently in the community. They come to understand that self-sufficiency is about more than having a job and a roof over your head.

Outcomes and Evaluation

In December 2003, Eva's Phoenix undertook an evaluation of its program. This evaluation was commissioned to examine three issues:

- How well was Eva's Phoenix serving its youth participants?
- How well was Eva's Phoenix performing as an organization delivering programs to youth?
- Is Eva's Phoenix replicable as a program in other communities?

The report from that evaluation, ***Eva's Phoenix: Pathways to Housing and Jobs***, is available on the Eva's Initiatives website, and provides the following highlights of the evaluation outcomes:

- 97% of the youth interviewed said that Eva's Phoenix had helped them to stabilize their lives.
- 84% of the youth served had stayed in a shelter prior to living at Eva's Phoenix. After graduating, that number dropped to 32%.
- 78% of those enrolled in Eva's Phoenix employment programs said that they had improved their ability to find and keep a job.
- 71% noted an improvement in their housing conditions after going through Eva's Phoenix.
- Before the program, 23% of the youth interviewed had frequent contact with their family. That number doubled to 46% after the program.
- Of the youth who participated in the first year of our HRDC-funded employment programs, nine months after completing the program 59% were employed or in school.
- Stakeholders describe Eva's Phoenix as capable, innovative, well-respected and effective.
- Overall, Eva's Phoenix was described as a high performance, innovative, mission-focused



Homeless youth gain employment experience in various trades through Eva's programs.



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organization, a leader in its field, that can serve as a useful model for other communities.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to Jennifer Morris, Director of National Initiatives at Eva's Initiatives, one of the priorities identified by the evaluation was the need for more follow up support and a more thorough high-risk assessment with youth. Although most participants did really well, there were always some that didn't. A third of the youth participants identified through a random file review as part of the evaluation dropped out or were discharged from the Eva's Phoenix program, most in the first three months. It was clear that something significant happens in those first three months, and additional resources were required during that critical window for those youth that were determined to be high-risk and that had more identified barriers. Being able to provide more specific interventions to those youth to increase retention rates past the three-month mark is something that they are now addressing.

Another interesting outcome from the evaluation had to do with family relations. In-depth interviews with 35 program graduates revealed that family contact rose from 23% at the time of intake to 46% at the end of the program. This was an unanticipated outcome, because it is not something that Eva's Phoenix clearly focuses on. But something in the program made it possible for youth to renew relations with families. Eva's Initiatives intends to research this outcome further to better understand how their programs help youth improve their relationships with their families, and the role families can continue to play in assisting youth to develop and maintain self-sufficiency.

Unique Success Factors, Policies and Lessons

Eva's Initiatives has benefited from some key support and partnerships:

- The Supporting Community Partnerships Initiative (SCPI) of the federal government's National Homelessness Initiative is a good local model that recognizes how local solutions address local needs and issues best.
- The Toronto Enterprise Fund has been enabling in its role as a developmental funder. They know that social enterprise is a new field, and are as interested in being flexible and trying new things such as Eva's Initiatives. TEF also makes a longer-term commitment, which is essential to stability and planning.
- Raising the Roof is funding the Technology Training Program.
- The Counselling Foundation of Canada made a three-year commitment to the mentorship program and helped to fund the project's development stages.
- Allies in the labour movement:
 - The Carpenters' Union provided Eva's Initiatives access to training opportunities with youth that were relevant.
 - The National Association of Broadcast and Employee Technicians, film and TV production, one of Eva's early employment partners, took on a number of youth to have work experience and be trained in all aspects of film and TV production (set decoration, sound, costumes etc.) Unfortunately, when SARS struck the Toronto area, the film industry declined significantly and they were no longer able to work with us as the jobs simply weren't available.

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- The Canadian Auto Workers were indispensable partners in the early stages, bringing significant funding and immediate credibility with others in the labour sector to the project. To this day, the CAW still supports Eva's Initiatives and Eva's Phoenix is now the home of the Buzz Hargrove Training Supports Program.

Unfortunately, there have been some problematic policies that have hindered the work of Eva's Initiatives:

- Human Resources and Skills Development Canada's (HRSDC) constantly changing and restrictive program guidelines, onerous accountability requirements and one-year project funding make it impossible to plan, develop, run and evaluate from year to year the most effective program for homeless youth.
- The City of Toronto funds the housing component of the work as an emergency shelter through a per diem for every bed that's filled. If a bed isn't filled for a few days, Eva's Initiatives doesn't get the funding, but still have staff, overhead and all the usual costs to pay. In this context, the per diem funding structure for the housing program does not make sense. The City has been made aware of issue, and the Toronto Region of the Ontario Association of Hostels is proposing some alternative funding models.

One of the elements that the evaluation report of Eva's Phoenix studied was the replicability of the program. According to the evaluation report, whether Eva's Phoenix is capable of being replicated, the issue is not so much whether one can take its *end product* and recreate it elsewhere, but rather can one take its *process and mindsets* and have those recreated. Recreating the product is perhaps physically possible – whether that should be the intention is another matter altogether, for the product may not fit circumstances found elsewhere.

But recreating the approach, the process, the factors which contribute to the success of Eva's Phoenix is quite another matter, and indeed, for a comparable product to be successful, it requires that same *process and mindset*, for then the proper product will follow, and likely be successful. The elements of this process and mindset include:

- Clear and understood mission: it is striking how the essence of what Eva's Phoenix is all about is easily articulated by all those who are involved with it, from staff, to clients to stakeholders.
- A mission rooted in a well-identified need: The vision for Eva's Phoenix arose out of the experiences of Eva's Place, and from extensive thinking and discussion regarding what was needed to meet the needs of youth who were not succeeding after receiving shelter and some direction; a mission has no relevance if it does not address a real and well understood need.
- The end-product is the means to the funding, rather than the funding defining the end product: Eva's Phoenix was clear about what was required to make its vision work, and that drove the process, including the search for funding, even when the funding requirements might have given other organizations reason to pause; Eva's

Key Success Factors

- Clearly understood mission
- Mission rooted in a well-identified need
- Services offered are defined by the needs, not by the funding
- Competent, creative and socially entrepreneurial staff
- Supportive board, willing to take risks
- Some luck!

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Phoenix believed in its vision and made others believe in it; no doubt at times it has sought funding because that funding was available, and has characterized its programs to ensure they fit existing eligibility, but it cannot be said that the overall vision has been shaped by the funding environment.

- **Competent staff:** A mission requires the ability to follow through – Eva's Phoenix is highly regarded for the expertise and commitment found among its staff.
- **Individuals who will drive the process:** A creative, innovative organization requires a social entrepreneur at its heart, someone who is driven by the vision, can inspire others to believe in the vision, and yet who has the practical skills to implement it – Eva's Phoenix has had this essential feature at its core.
- **A board which is supportive and which is prepared to take risks:** What Eva's Phoenix did to make its vision a reality is not a process for the faint-hearted – that is not to say that a board must support a project blindly; in the case of Eva's Phoenix, the board understood and believed the vision, and were able to provide support as the project proceeded, acting both as a sober reality check and a resource for identifying funding opportunities and partners.
- **Some luck:** There is not only effort but also serendipity behind most successful innovations; in the case of Eva's Phoenix, it was fortune to hit the wave of growing concern around homelessness and youth, and so found a receptive funding environment; as well, it was also fortunate to find cooperative bureaucrats who understood the vision and who were focused on how to make things happen, as opposed to determining whether a given procedure or approach fit funding or regulatory rules.^{iv}

Conclusion

Eva's Phoenix is driven by its mission to provide housing, employment and related support to at-risk and homeless youth. It is a mission which is well recognized by its staff and its stakeholders, and this focus is incorporated in all its activities and programs. As result, Eva's Phoenix is tightly focused as an organization, yet its purpose also gives rise to a culture of innovation, which creates a climate of dynamism and constant change. Eva's Phoenix is always striving to fulfil its mission.^v

From the perspective of the Pan-Canadian Community Development Learning Network and its goals to strengthen the links between CED and social and economic inclusion, it is clear that the work of Eva's Initiatives provides a crucial example of how well those two go together. Furthermore the rigorous research that Eva's Initiatives is conducting to assess the impact of its work and to further delve into the potential that the Sustainable Livelihoods model offers them is of great importance to the sector. Their contribution to increasing the knowledge of the sector in this area will be invaluable.

Monique Beaudoin

Monique Beaudoin is the Ontario regional coordinator for the Canadian CED Network. She can be reached at tel: (705) 671-9983, email: mbeaudoin@ccednet-rcdec.ca

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More information on *Eva's Initiatives* can be found on at <http://www.evasinitiatives.com>. Many thanks to Jennifer Morris, Director of National Initiatives at *Eva's Initiatives* for the time that she contributed by participating in the survey, sharing tools, and reviewing this case study.

For more information on the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, see the website of the Department for International Development (UK): Sustainable Livelihoods Guidance sheets at http://www.livelihoods.org/iinfo/info_guidancesheets.html#6 or Eko Nomos' website at <http://www.ekonomos.com>

For more Profiles of Effective Practice and other resources on social inclusion, go to: <http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca/en/pages/learningnetwork.asp>

Endnotes

- ⁱ Quote from News and Updates from *Eva's Initiatives*, Spring 2005 Newsletter, p.8.
- ⁱⁱ This paragraph is from *Eva's Phoenix: Pathways to Housing and Jobs*, an evaluation of *Eva's Phoenix*. December 2003, Zizys, Tom, et al.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ^{iv} Ibid., pp. 17-18
- ^v Ibid.

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610-620 View St., Victoria, BC V8W 1J6
Telephone: (250) 386-9980
Toll free: (877) 202-2268
Fax: (250) 386-9984
Website: <http://www.ccednet-rcdec.ca>

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