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**PATHWAYS**

**TO HOUSING AND JOBS**

**TORONTO: DECEMBER 2003**

**AN EVALUATION BY:  
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## *The Cover*

*The cover depicts a representative number of “pictograms” which were created by youth graduates of Eva’s Phoenix as part of the evaluation interviews conducted for the purpose of this study.*

*Youth were asked to display, in whatever fashion they felt was appropriate, the issues they dealt with when involved at Eva’s Phoenix, and the sequence in which those issues were addressed.*

*Each youth interviewed prioritized and arranged the issues in a different way, demonstrating in a very visual fashion the particular set of challenges each youth faced and the unique personal path taken by each youth to overcome those challenges and achieve their goals.*

# **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1) Background to Eva's Initiatives**

Eva's Initiatives is the umbrella organization for a series of programs aimed at helping homeless and at-risk youth to get 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
- 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 counselor 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.

#### **2) Background to Eva's Phoenix**

Eva's Phoenix is a transitional housing and training facility, which formally opened in June 2000. 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.

Since opening in June 2000, Eva's Phoenix provides housing for up to 50 youth, aged 16 to 24 years, for up to a full year, and since 2002 has also allowed up to 160 youth each year, aged 16 to 29 years, to participate in its employment and pre-apprenticeship programs. Working with business, labour and community partners, Eva's Phoenix provides homeless and at-risk youth with the opportunities needed to develop life skills, build careers and live independently.

Youth at Eva's Phoenix live in shared townhouse-style units with access to common areas. While at Eva's Phoenix youth develop the skills to live independently through goal setting exercises, workshops and hands-on programs that are delivered in a supportive environment. In combination with a mentorship program they are able to build stable support networks outside of the social service system.

The vision and planning for Eva's Phoenix focused on providing a range of employment supports and training opportunities for youth who were living at Eva's Phoenix and they commenced the process to secure the funding from HRDC to provide these services in 2000. Due to massive changes in the political direction and bureaucracy of HRDC during that time, it took them almost eighteen months to review and approve the funding for the Eva's Phoenix employment program, despite overwhelming support for the program from HRDC staff.

As a result of the delays with HRDC, in its first year and half, Eva's Phoenix was forced to operate without the full range of intended employment programs. During this period, Eva's Phoenix was essentially a shelter with important support services, including access to limited employment counselling and job development support offered by two full-time staff which Eva's Initiatives was compelled to pay for by fundraising privately.

Upon resolution of the delays in approving their submission, starting in 2002 Eva's Phoenix began receiving funding from HRDC to provide a formal employment program for shelter residents and other homeless and at-risk youth, including funding for counselling staff and the wage subsidies for the youth required by their employers. Every youth who goes through the Eva's Phoenix employment program receives a minimum of three weeks of life skills programming focused on employment readiness, job search and job maintenance skills. Once a youth has successfully completed the requirements of the life skills program, they are placed in a 20-week work experience with one of Eva's Phoenix's partner employers. In addition to the 85 employers they have worked with in the past two years, Eva's Phoenix also operates an on-site social enterprise, the Phoenix Print Shop, and a Cisco Systems Local Area Academy. These two programs offer training and job placement support for twenty homeless and at-risk youth a year.

**While every youth who is accepted to live at Eva's Phoenix must be engaged in a training or employment program**, it is important to emphasize the different streams of programs at Eva's Phoenix. Youth who live at Eva's Phoenix may participate in the employment programs at Eva's Phoenix. There are also youth who do not live at Eva's Phoenix who enroll in its employment programs. Finally there are youth who live at Eva's Phoenix who access their training and employment through another program or agency. These different streams are identified throughout this report as:

- Eva's Phoenix Housing Program/External Training (i.e. youth who live at Eva's Phoenix and participate in the housing program but access their training and employment support through another program or agency);
- Eva's Phoenix Housing and Employment Program (i.e. youth who live at Eva's Phoenix and access their HRDC-funded employment program – since March, 2002);
- Eva's Phoenix Employment Program (i.e. youth who do not live at Eva's Phoenix but access their HRDC-funded employment program – since March, 2002)

The distinction between the various programs, and the time of start-up of the HRDC-funded employment programs, is important in recognizing the evolution of Eva's Phoenix and the different services which were available to youth over its initial years.

### **3) Overview to the Evaluation**

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?

## **B. EVALUATION APPROACH**

Given the range of what needed to be covered, the evaluation consisted of a number of activities.

### **1) Interviews with Stakeholders**

In order to assess how Eva's Phoenix was meeting its organizational goals, interviews were conducted with key stakeholders. Stakeholders for the purposes of this evaluation were defined as:

- Staff;
- Community agency partners (those agencies making or receiving referrals, or providing services in conjunction with Eva's Phoenix);
- Employers working with Eva's Phoenix;
- Partners supporting specific activities related to Eva's Phoenix (labour unions providing training and employment placement);
- Funders.

Issues explored through these interviews included the degree to which Eva's Phoenix had a well-articulated vision, its follow-through on its mission, its engagement with partners, and perceptions of its programming activities.

Research on best practices in youth training and employment programs helped to identify themes and activities which were critical in order for a program of this kind to be successful. Stakeholders were then interviewed to determine whether those program elements existed at Eva's Phoenix and how well they were accomplished. Given the unique nature of the Eva's Phoenix model, the research was conducted into programs in the United States, as similar programs and research do not yet exist in Canada.

Interviews were also conducted with the key staff responsible for the development of Eva's Phoenix for the purposes of assessing and commenting on the potential replicability of the model.

## **2) Compilation of Statistics**

As much data about all the clients as could reasonably be assembled was compiled to inform the evaluation work. The overall demographic breakdown of the clients served provided a broad descriptive picture of the participants in all of the programs offered by Eva's Phoenix. This also allowed for the identification of sub-populations among the youth and provided a check when it came to assessing how representative were the samples of youth chosen for interviews and case files reviews.

## **3) Interviews with Youth**

In order to acquire more detailed qualitative data, interviews were undertaken with graduates of Eva's Phoenix's programs. It was decided that more frank exchanges and more reliable data could be obtained if the youth were interviewed by their peers. As a result, two graduates of Eva's Phoenix were recruited and trained to conduct the interviews.

Youth interview candidates were first approached according to a randomized list of all graduates of Eva's Phoenix and through broad outreach, involving displaying posters and frequenting locations where it was assumed that such graduates might be found (including a number of youth programs, drop-ins as well as hang-out areas). After several weeks of searching and outreach, the final number interviewed was 35. Interviews took up to two hours each and were conducted at a location chosen by the youth.

## **4) Review of Case Files**

In addition to the information gathered through the interviews, a review was undertaken of a randomly selected number of case files. An attempt was made to ensure that the profile of the clients whose files were reviewed matched the profile of the overall participant population at Eva's Phoenix, according to program enrolled in, year, gender and age of the youth. The methodology included not only reading the files and noting findings, but also attempting to document common issues and predictors of potential difficulties.

## **C. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

Evaluation aims to make assessments of the impact of a program. A great emphasis is placed on quantifying measurable results. In a program such as Eva's Phoenix, which aims to guide homeless youth back into stable housing and employment, there is a great tendency to measure "success" by the number of youth who attain regular housing and steady employment.

However, working with a population which faces significant barriers to maintaining regular housing and employment, one finds that there are a great array of other issues which must be identified and addressed before such goals as housing or employment can even be considered. There is a reason why these youth have reached the stage they have, whether it is due to difficult

family histories, personal inner conflicts, challenges in dealing with authority or with social interaction, problems with the law, substance abuse, mental illness or dysfunctions, and so on.

A good start at a more relevant approach can be found in a study prepared on behalf of The Women and Economic Development Consortium (WEDC), reviewing micro-enterprise initiatives among low-income women, entitled *Women in Transition Out of Poverty: An asset-based approach to building sustainable livelihoods (2001)*.<sup>1</sup> This report proposes that success with employment in working with a more disadvantaged population needs to be measured by improvements along several sectors and that improvements in *each of these sectors* needs to occur if change in the life circumstances of these people is to be sustainable. The sectors outlined in their study include physical assets (e.g. shelter), human assets (e.g. skills, health), financial assets (e.g. income, savings), social assets (e.g. supportive relationships) and personal assets (e.g. motivation, self-confidence).

**Providing individuals with employment training and then access to employment will not have the desired effect if these individuals are being weighed down by health issues, a substance abuse problem or family difficulties which are sapping their strength and motivation.** Similarly, one needs to ensure that they are building reservoirs of resilience, by enhancing their sense of self-worth or connecting them with individuals as well as services which can provide support.

For the clients of Eva's Phoenix, it is not just a matter of finding an apartment or of getting a job which prevents them from having stable lives. Just as importantly, being able to maintain that apartment or that job requires that other issues which had brought the youth to their desperate situation be addressed, otherwise the apartment or the job is not going to be sustained for long. The sustainable livelihoods index was adapted to reflect the typical challenges faced by homeless youth, all of which have an impact on their long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

In addition to a series of quantitative questions, our approach allowed the youth who were interviewed to explain to us which of these issues were concerns or challenges to them when they arrived at Eva's Phoenix, and to indicate *in what sequence* these issues were tackled – how were the issues related, what progress was made with each issue, *for each youth*.

Firstly, youth were shown 12 cards with issues or concerns listed on them. These issues were:

- (1) The bare essentials (getting food, having a place to stay)
- (2) Having a job (an income)
- (3) People to count on
- (4) Health
- (5) Getting a good job (skills, contacts)
- (6) Relying on myself
- (7) Feeling safe
- (8) Getting a place
- (9) Weed/drugs/alcohol (that they don't screw up one's life)

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<sup>1</sup> This report may be found on the website of the Canadian Women's Foundation, at [http://www.cdnwomen.org/eng/3share/WIT01/wit\\_eng.pdf](http://www.cdnwomen.org/eng/3share/WIT01/wit_eng.pdf).

- (10) How others see me
- (11) Motivated (feeling good about the direction of his/her life)
- (12) Dealing with the law

They were asked, reflecting back to the time they first came to Eva's Phoenix, to group the cards into the following categories:

- (1) Issues which were not on the radar screen at the time;
- (2) Issues or challenges they had to deal with;
- (3) Not an issue or question at all.

Secondly, taking the issues which were of concern to them, they were asked to rate their progress in relation to that issue while at Eva's Phoenix, along the following scale:

- (1) Recognizing the challenge;
- (2) Taking the first steps;
- (3) Making progress;
- (4) Overcoming the issue or challenge.

Thirdly, youth were asked to take all the cards and indicate how they tackled these issues, in what sequence and how one or more of these issues were related to each other. In this way, it was hoped that we could not only identify the issues relevant for each youth, but also map how these issues were dealt with, and what difference their time at Eva's Phoenix had in addressing these issues. The findings from this part of the interview are described in section F. 1) below.

In keeping with Eva's Phoenix's client-centered approach, this method of interviewing the youth, and the use of Peer Interviewers, was innovative and allowed each of them to describe their individual experience in the program and what helped them along their own path to self-sufficiency.

## **D. EVALUATION FINDINGS**

### **1) Demographics of Evaluation Sample**

As of July 2003, 456 youth had graduated from Eva's Phoenix. Of these youth:

- 69% are male, 31% are female
- Average age at the start of the program is 21
- Average length of stay in the program is 6 months
- Where the data is known, 84% of youth coming to Eva's Phoenix have lived in shelters, and 62% are unemployed

**The overall profile of youth coming to Eva's Phoenix is commonly: living in a shelter, unemployed, with relatively lower levels of educational attainment, half of whom have had**

counselling, half of whom have non-existent or infrequent contact with their families, and a significant number who have involvement with the law and/or a substance abuse issue.

## **2) Youth Interview Sample**

A sample of 35 youth graduates were interviewed for the evaluation and their characteristics were as follows:

### **Gender**

<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>TG</b>
63%	37%	0

### **Visible minority and aboriginal status**

<b>Visible minority</b>		<b>Aboriginal</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	
29%	71%	9%

*Note: Visible minority in this case includes Aboriginal.*

### **Year started at Eva's Phoenix**

<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>
14%	29%	43%	14%

### **Age when started at Eva's Phoenix**

<b>16-18</b>	<b>19-21</b>	<b>22-24</b>	<b>25-29</b>
11%	37%	40%	11%

### **Program enrolled in at Eva's Phoenix**

<b>Housing Program/External Training</b>	<b>Employment Program</b>	<b>Housing &amp; Employment Program</b>
23%	17%	60%

### **Legal status in Canada**

<b>Citizen</b>	<b>Landed immigrant</b>	<b>Sponsored immigrant</b>	<b>Refugee claimant</b>
91%	6%	3%	0

### **Education level at the time of starting at Eva's Phoenix**

<b>Grade 11 or less</b>	<b>Grade 12, GED, OAC</b>	<b>Some College/ University</b>
34%	37%	29%

**At the time of starting Eva’s Phoenix, number who had dropped out of school, and for how long**

Had dropped out*		Years since had dropped out			
Yes	No	>1 year	1-2 years	2-3 years	3 years+
40%	49%	14%	29%	29%	29%

\* 4 youth did not answer this question

**At the time of starting Eva’s Phoenix, number who had children, and full or partial custody of the children**

Number who had children		Number who had full or partial custody	
Yes	No	Yes	No
14%	86%	40%	60%

**Prior to enrolling at Eva’s Phoenix, number who had been in the care of CAS or CCAS**

Yes	No
17%	83%

**At the time of starting Eva’s Phoenix, number who had a criminal record or were facing a criminal charge**

Yes	No
31%	69%

While the size of the interview sample does not allow us to draw definitive conclusions on the experience of all 456 graduates of Eva’s Phoenix, it does generally reflect the characteristics of the larger group and trends can be identified.

## **E. OUTCOMES**

Program outcomes have been grouped into the two main program streams: housing and employment. Where the data is available, outcomes are noted and described for a sample group larger than the 35 youth interviewed. The youth interviewed also offered detailed qualitative information on their experience in the program.

Outcomes of the stakeholder interviews are also described in section E. 3) below - “Organizational Capacity.”

### **1) Housing Outcomes**

Data was available to provide a before and after picture of 111 youth on move-in to Eva’s Phoenix and 172 youth on move-out. Of these youth:

- 84% had stayed in a shelter prior to living at Eva’s Phoenix. After graduating from Eva’s Phoenix that number dropped to 32%

- Only 2% of the youth were living with their families prior to living at Eva's Phoenix. After graduation, that number grew to 15%
- 4% of clients lived in their own or shared accommodation on move-in. At move-out, 35% of clients lived in their own or shared accommodation

The qualitative data gathered through the youth interviews paints an interesting picture of improved housing and family relations after graduating from the program. Of the 35 youth interviewed:

- 71% noted an improvement in their housing conditions after going through Eva's Phoenix
- 66% of those youth who participated in Eva's Phoenix's Housing Program said that they improved their ability to find and maintain housing of their own
- 86% felt that the one year program at Eva's Phoenix was a sufficient amount of time to address their issues
- Before the program, 23% of the youth interviewed said they had contact often/regularly with their family. This number doubled to 46% after the program.
- Before the program, 36% of the youth interviewed said they had non-existent contact with their family. That number dropped to 9% after the program.

## **2) Employment Outcomes**

In the first year of HRDC-funded employment programs (March 2002 – Feb. 2003), 160 homeless and at-risk youth were served at Eva's Phoenix. Staff resources are available through the HRDC program to track outcomes for all HRDC participants at 3, 6, 9 and 12-month intervals after completing the program. It is worth noting that there is clear difficulty maintaining contact with youth once they have graduated from the program. As a result, the sample contacted at each interval gets smaller. Of the 110 youth who graduated in the first year that could be located at the 3-month interval:

- 51% were employed or in school
- 25% were unemployed and looking for work
- 16% were unemployed and not looking for work due to health or other reasons and
- 8% were engaged in volunteer work or community service.

Of the 96 youth that could be located at the 6-month interval:

- 54% were employed or in school
- 19% were unemployed and looking for work
- 19% were unemployed and not looking for work due to health or other reasons
- 8% were engaged in volunteer work or community service

Of the 32 youth that could be located at the 9-month interval:

- 59% were employed or in school
- 19% were unemployed and looking for work

- 13% were unemployed and not looking for work due to health or other reasons and
- 9% were engaged in volunteer work or community service

Of the 35 youth interviewed:

- 28% said they had a good job at some point prior to their involvement at Eva's Phoenix and 49% said they had a good job after graduating from the program
- 78% of those enrolled in Eva's Phoenix employment programs said that they had improved their ability to find and keep a job
- 66% enrolled in an educational or training program since leaving Eva's Phoenix – of those - Grade 11 (4%), Grade 12 (30%), GED (4%), Community College (26%), University (9%), Training program (35%)
- For those youth interviewed with Grade 11 or less, 80% of them entered school or a training program after Eva's Phoenix
- For those youth interviewed for whom it had been three or more years since they had dropped out of school, which are the youth the literature describes as hardest to help, notably 100% enrolled in school or a training program after Eva's Phoenix
- Those who went through the program in 2003 scored higher in their assessment of whether Eva's had helped them, and in particular in the area of finding and maintaining employment. This may reflect the fact that in their second full year of HRDC funding, Eva's Phoenix's employment programs are more stable and less likely to be undergoing the kind of changes and ongoing development that characterized its programs in prior years.

### **3) Organizational Capacity**

Interviews with stakeholders probed further into their perceptions of the capacity of Eva's Phoenix to deliver its programs and live up to its mission as well as whether they felt the model was replicable. The interviews showed that:

- Stakeholders understand and can articulate the mission of Eva's Phoenix clearly
- Staff clearly identified the organization as "innovative and empowering" and they are committed to the mission and their work but also felt that Phoenix might be trying to do too much on its own.
- Stakeholders are extremely positive in terms of the abilities, attitude and professionalism of staff and the quality of the programs delivered at Phoenix
- Stakeholders felt that Phoenix had the capabilities to carry out its functions and the agency was well respected
- A few stakeholders said that they thought Eva's Phoenix could do more in the way of seeking out opportunities with other service providers to design and deliver programs
- Stakeholders felt the model was replicable, where the model is a strong vision which incorporates a holistic approach to the challenges faced by homeless youth

## **F. YOUTH VIEWS OF THEIR EXPERIENCE AT EVA'S PHOENIX**

### **1) Identification of Issues and Sequence of Outcomes**

While the statistics described above indicate that youth are being effectively helped to find housing and employment, this tells us little about the actual underlying issues the youth are struggling to address and how they think Eva's Phoenix helps them.

Using the methodology described in Section C. above, youth interviewed were asked to describe what issues were a challenge for them when they started the program, whether they noted any improvement as a result of the program and to what they attribute that improvement. The results were as follows:

- Every youth has different issues and a different sequence for addressing those issues.
- The following issues were cited by the youth interviewed as being the issues they **had to deal with** when they started Phoenix in order of priority: bare essentials (food and shelter) (25), having a job (25), getting a place (24) and getting a good job (21).

The basics of managing in the world – the bare essentials, a job, housing, were the high frequency items.

- Slightly lower on the list were feeling safe (16), people to count on (16), self-reliance (16) and feeling motivated (13).

In a sense, these issues could describe the contributing circumstances, which allow for the ability to manage on one's own.

- The following issues were cited by the youth interviewed as **not** being a challenge or issue for them when they started Phoenix in order of importance: dealing with the law (20), drugs (19), how others see them (18), motivation (16), people to count on (15), health (14), self-reliance (13), and feeling safe (12)
- Youth interviewed said they experienced the greatest improvements from their participation in the program in the areas of (in order of priority): bare essentials, feeling safe, having a job, people to count on, drug use, motivation, health, having a good job and self-reliance. It is notable that some issues, specifically drug use and health, which were not on the list of priority issues when youth came to Phoenix, now appear on the list of issues showing the greatest improvement

The challenge which is typically addressed first is “dealing with the bare essentials” – given that these youth are going from a shelter, getting a place to stay for a longer period of time, and being able to access services and supports, does mean the essential livelihood items are dealt with early on.

Among the next items, “feeling safe” is another issue, which should come as no surprise as something dealt with early in the process. The surprise may be the other issue, “health,” which often does not merit much mention on the part of youth. The fact that the youth did not typically

note health as a priority issue they needed to address when they started the program, yet they then described it as an issue which was addressed early on in the program, suggests that the issue got “placed” on their radar screen because of their involvement with Eva’s Phoenix.

Once these preliminary matters are addressed, the next level of issues tended to include “relying on myself,” and “people to count on”. It was after these stages that “getting a job,” “getting a place” and “getting a good job” tended to come into the play, with the last item often being “feeling motivated.”

**This suggests that the natural sequence of addressing the employment and housing needs of the youth may perhaps only be capable of being addressed after a number of prior issues are tackled. If that is the case, then it may also mean that where those ultimate goals of securing employment and housing have not been met with a particular youth, some of the other prior steps may nonetheless have been fulfilled.**

## **2) How did Eva’s Phoenix Help?**

It is significant that no matter what challenges the youth may be facing, 97% of the youth interviewed said that Eva’s Phoenix had helped them. The youth interviewed said the program particularly helped them in the following ways:

- Employability skills, work experience, chance for a career – 46%
- Stable housing – 26%
- Private room – 20%
- Independence – 20%
- A place to fix my life for a year – 17%
- Motivation – 9%
- Access to resources – 6%
- Good counselling – 6%
- Positive role models and influences – 6%

In terms of their relations with staff, of the youth interviewed:

- 86% said staff were knowledgeable about the things they needed help with
- 100% said staff were respectful of them
- 82% of youth interviewed said staff cared about them

When they reflected further on the program, of the youth interviewed:

- 97% said they would recommend friends to the program – perhaps the most significant indicator that the program has helped
- 66% said Eva’s Phoenix was a place to which they felt connected
- 51% said they would have done things differently when they were at Phoenix including save more money earlier, and not used as many drugs
- 69% said that Eva’s could have done some things differently (26% “Yes”, 43% “Yes and No”). Their specific opinions were grouped into the areas of:

- Staff dealings with youth – including perceived favouritism, and strictness;
  - Programs – including lack of follow-up, and a need for more personalized life skills;
  - Hygiene/cleanliness –including implementing standards for personal hygiene and consequences for not cleaning living spaces;
  - Security – including increased security in grocery store and staff attention to complaints of theft between residents;
  - Length of stay – including wanting to stay longer, and holding beds when youth are incarcerated;
  - Expectations of the youth – including the need to screen youth better, and treating Eva’s as a privilege, not a right;
  - Counselling – including mandatory counselling and referrals to therapy;
  - Drugs – including monitoring younger residents for drug use
- Those who enrolled in both the Housing and Employment Programs rated Eva’s Phoenix as being more helpful generally, were more likely to attend school or training, and improve both their housing and employment circumstances post-program, than those youth who enrolled only in the Housing/External Training Program or only in the Employment Program.
  - Most said they had little in common with other youth and that connecting with other youth was not a priority. Having said that, several others said that while it was not a priority for them, they have forged close friendships with others at Eva’s Phoenix.

## **G. ISSUES FOR FURTHER ACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The quantitative and qualitative data described above clearly indicates that Eva’s Phoenix is successfully helping youth to stabilize their lives, and find and maintain housing and employment. But as in any program serving a high-needs client group with a multitude of barriers, there are parts of the program that require further attention and, in some cases, resources. The significant challenges are as follows:

### **1) High Rate of discharge**

Almost 1/3 of residents of Eva’s Phoenix are discharged, of which half of them are discharged within the first three months of being in the shelter. This accords with the review of the case files, where discharges tended to occur fairly early, when behavioural, substance abuse and/or discipline issues surfaced as the youth confronted the rules and requirements of living at Eva’s Phoenix.

What this means is that as youth come into Eva’s Phoenix’s programs, there is a further *informal* screening process which occurs, one that is over and above the *formal* initial screening and assessment which takes place in determining whether a youth should be admitted in the first place. Within a relatively short period of time, a fairly large number of youth end up leaving the programs, either voluntarily because a proper fit does not exist for them (they are not ready to commit to such a program or they have been on the street for so long that returning to an

environment of rules is too difficult for them) or involuntarily (discharged for repeatedly breaking the rules).

It is in this way that we can speak of two clusters of youth reflected in the population participating in Eva's Phoenix. One group falls out, often relatively early. One group remains, generally to the end. The first group's "results" are somewhat non-existent – they will account for a large number of the "unknowns" and their subsequent connection to Eva's Phoenix will be tenuous (although a few will return and seek re-admittance, often recognizing, in their own words, that they are now "ready" for Eva's Phoenix). Apart from offering a welcoming environment, there is probably not much more that Eva's Phoenix can do to keep these youth in their programs – these are, after all, voluntary, and these are youth who exhibit many personal challenges. Managing an environment with such a disparate group with their attendant issues does require some structure and rules.

Eva's Phoenix might consider developing an early warning system to try to predict which cases pose greater challenges and which may warrant stronger initial attention. While this appears to be done intuitively by staff, this needs to happen in a more formal and systematic way.

In particular, it is striking to note that, going back to the seventeen case files which were reviewed, there was a strong concordance between the number of risk factors experienced by the youth (high number of employment barriers, involvement with the law, drugs/alcohol abuse, mental health issues and/or problems in family relations) and the likelihood they would be discharged. Where three or more of such factors were present, 100% of the youth were either discharged or quit. Where two or more factors were present, 73% of the youth were either discharged or quit. Where one factor or less was present, 33% were discharged or left.

A problematic family history was the most common risk factor for the youth whose case files were reviewed. It is also notable from the case file review that all the youth who identified a substance abuse issue were ultimately discharged or left the program before completion.

Finally, it appears that youth under-report their involvement with the law at intake. Of the files reviewed, 53% of the youth had some involvement with the law, compared to 31% of the youth interviewed. While involvement with the law is not surprising for this client group, it may pose a significant barrier to self-sufficiency if there are outstanding warrants or other unresolved legal issues that must be attended to before a youth can stabilize their employment and housing.

**Recommendation: Eva's Phoenix needs to institute a formalized risk factor assessment on intake to assist in determining which youth may require earlier and more forceful attention, to reduce the number of youth who are either discharged or who quit their programs.**

## **2) Follow-Up and Outcome Tracking**

Community agencies are not funded to put sufficient resources into follow-up, yet we know that maintaining contact with individuals with multiple barriers to employment and regular housing is very important. As has already been noted, the ability of Eva's Phoenix to follow-up with all

youth who have graduated from its programs is limited, due to this funding issue. In addition, due to the sometimes transient nature of their client group, contact numbers and forwarding addresses for youth who have left the program can quickly change.

There is a need not only to know whether the youth has employment and housing after participating in programs at Eva's Phoenix, but also over time how they have progressed. What is striking when examining the case files of the youth is the degree to which the trajectory of "improvement" in a youth's development is only sometimes a linear progression. More often than not, it reflects a series of ups and downs, a case of "two steps forward, one back" (and, indeed, sometimes "two steps back"). What this suggests is that the circumstance of the youth at the time of graduation may only be a momentary snapshot in time, without a sense of the true trend line of development for the youth, and indeed without a recognition that there are some future "one step backwards" which will arise, as well as further "two steps forward." For this reason alone, it seems that a more rigorous ability to track and stay in touch with youth graduates is warranted, for that contact would provide a further sense for the youth of being linked to potential resources (most importantly, assistance for referral to other services and supports).

**Recommendation: Funders need to understand the importance of tracking and keeping in contact with program graduates and should make provisions to resource this function appropriately.**

Once the resources are available to track outcomes,

**Recommendation: Eva's Phoenix needs to further enhance its ability to track and maintain contact with its program graduates.**

Recently, as an innovative response to the lack of funding for follow-up support generally in the sector, Eva's Phoenix has instituted a peer-mentoring program, where youth graduates are paired with youth currently in the program to provide them with advice or guidance based on their own knowledge of what it was like at that stage in their lives. This is an excellent way to provide additional support to current youth participants (one that will have much credibility and relevance in their eyes), while also maintaining a connection with youth graduates.

There was also a view among some stakeholders that Eva's Phoenix could do more work to keep them informed about how a youth is doing, whether it's an agency who has referred the youth, or an employer who has provided a work experience. Partners want to hear success stories and stay in touch with those youth they have helped, and better follow-up and outcome tracking would provide the information to do this more effectively and consistently.

### **3) Documentation**

Similar to the issue of follow-up and outcome tracking, staff needs to spend more time consistently documenting the progress of a youth in their case file. A better system for tracking progress or lack of progress with a youth, again as a way of highlighting potential problems before they emerge as incidents requiring discipline. While it may exist in day-to-day operations, it is not always clear from the files reviewed that there is a strong co-ordinated approach to client

service between the two primary program teams, housing and employment, and documentation of specific interventions is lacking. Better documentation in a program of this magnitude, and with the number of staff involved in each youth's case, will result in more effective client service.

**Recommendation: More rigorous adherence to consistent expectations regarding documentation, noting issues and interventions in case files as they occur, is required.**

#### **4) Family Relations**

The review of case files had shown that a problematic family history was present in over half of the cases reviewed, and was the most common risk factor, compared to employment barriers, involvement with the law, drugs/alcohol abuse or mental health issues. The degree to which a change in family relations may be an important component, either as effect, or perhaps even as a contributor to success, suggests more attention should be paid to this factor when considering interventions related to the youth.

**Recommendation: Eva's Phoenix should undertake further research into the role of family history as a contributing risk factor for its youth population, as well as into the potential for more direct interventions regarding family relations as a way to generate more positive overall results for the youth, and where appropriate, develop further programs to implement promising research findings.**

#### **5) Drug Use**

Eva's Phoenix houses youth between the ages of 16-24, a time for any youth during which there is more likely to be a higher level of experimentation with drugs and alcohol. This coupled with the private living arrangements means that, despite the rules prohibiting it, and the programming that youth are offered which outlines the risks inherent with substance abuse, youth commented often that drug use is common and difficult to avoid at Eva's Phoenix. Almost 10% of the youth interviewed identified their drug use during their stay at Eva's Phoenix as something that, on reflection, they would have done differently.

It would be unrealistic to suppose that this population of youth could be completely controlled when it comes to substance abuse, let alone substance use, however, a number of youth did mention that they felt the high level of substance use made it difficult for those who were actually seeking to control their habit.

**Recommendation: Eva's Phoenix needs to develop a different policy in an attempt to control substance use, or better enforce the existing policy.**

As a general observation, what one sees at Eva's Phoenix is a high performance, mission-focused organization, innovative and a leader in its field. The comments which suggested improvements in a number of areas often pointed to matters which were probably more acts of omission as a result of time constraints as opposed to a reflection of an attitude or mind-set at Eva's Phoenix.

But those lapses are as important to redress as faulty mindsets or practices, because a high performance organization reaches its peak when it not only delivers a quality product but also when its values and practices inform all its activities, including wide-reaching, inclusive and open communication with participants, staff and stakeholders.

## **H. REPLICABILITY OF EVA’S PHOENIX**

In many respects, what stands out about Eva’s Phoenix is the degree to which it exemplifies the principles underlying the concept of “social entrepreneurship.” Social entrepreneurship, in its broadest sense, encompasses a combination of a social purpose vision with a market-driven practicality. Eva’s Phoenix perhaps best personifies this in its drive to realize a particular vision relying on an entrepreneurial mindset.

That *vision* is embedded in its holistic approach to addressing the challenges faced by homeless youth, combining housing, employment training and a range of services and supports. Importantly, it is a vision which broadly permeates the thinking of staff and stakeholders alike, and which the youth recognize as the foremost factors which contribute to what allows Eva’s Phoenix to assist them.

That *entrepreneurial mindset* is found in its constant willingness to innovate and adapt, its focus on its “clients” – always being mindful of the particular needs of the youth, understanding that employers require job-ready candidates, explaining and advocating with funders – and in its knowing it has a strong product and promoting that product vigorously.

That being said, Eva’s Phoenix as an operation is not a social enterprise *business*, simply that it reflects many of the aspects which underlie a social enterprise business approach.

In evaluating 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.

What then are these elements? They 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 not 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 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.

The point being stressed is that the success of Eva’s Phoenix can be replicated, particularly in terms of its processes, leading to the results it has achieved.

Certainly, there are also components of Eva’s Phoenix, elements of its “product,” which also are clearly replicable – features such as its holistic approach, in particular the availability of employment programs linked to a shelter, or its peer mentor program, and so on. Obviously such features can serve as models, or options, of what other communities may wish to explore, using these ideas as discussion points within the sort of process of exploration and consultation discussed earlier.

This is not to say that a youth shelter, offering extended housing, employment training and job placement, combined with services and supports, for homeless youth could or should be the eventual response in other communities. Issues such as scale, fit and capacity would all come into play. Rather, the point is that such a product would need to be the result of a process similar

to what Eva's Phoenix went through, and not be a wholesale import of a solution sought to be put in place elsewhere. Similarly, elements of Eva's Phoenix could well apply to other communities, but again, the applicability of these elements need to be tested by way of an appropriate process to assess their suitability to the community in question.

## **I. 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 fulfill its mission.

This evaluation examined Eva's Phoenix from three perspectives:

- Its impact on the youth it served;
- Its performance as an organization; and
- Its replicability.

On all fronts, Eva's Phoenix receives a positive assessment. While there are areas throughout the report where improvements are proposed, overall it is apparent that Eva's Phoenix scores well in terms of helping the youth it targets, that it functions well as an organization, and that it can serve as a useful model for other communities.

This evaluation emphasized the wide and diverse range of the needs of the youth which Eva's Phoenix serves, and the unique pattern of how each youth addresses his or her own issues. Hopefully this report both validates a flexible, holistic approach to youth development regardless of the end goal (stable housing, sustainable employment) as well as assists in developing a tool for measuring and assessing the efficacy of such programs.