

Creating Safe Housing for Abused Seniors:

The Edmonton Model

May 2003

Final Report prepared by:
Karen Kerr, City of Edmonton Community Services Department
Katherine J. Kilgour, Consultant

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge all of the participating organizations for their overwhelming commitment to the creation of this unique service. We are particularly grateful to the Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing Steering Committee members and the Project Coordinator for their willingness to be interviewed, their insights, and their ongoing assistance in the preparation of this report.

Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired
Edmonton Meals on Wheels
Good Samaritan Telecare
Elder Abuse Intervention Team
City of Edmonton Community Services Department
Boyle-McCauley Health Centre
Edmonton John Howard Society Family Violence Prevention Program
Edmonton Gleaners Association
Alberta Human Resources and Employment
Edmonton Police Service

In addition, thank you to the safe housing clients and to the Building Manager in Location #1 who agreed to share their experiences.

Thank you to the Muttart Foundation, the funder of this pilot project.

We would also like to recognize other funding sources including:

Edmonton Community Foundation
Clifford E. Lee Foundation
Other Community Donors

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
KEY LEARNINGS	7
INTRODUCTION	9
How the Information will be used	9
PART 1 – HISTORY AND CONTEXT OF THE PILOT INITIATIVE	9
Rationale for Pilot Project	
Community Development	12
Summary of the Community Development Approach	13
Formation of the Steering Committee	14
Keeper of the Keys	14
Needs Assessment	15
PART 2 – CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE PILOT	15
Evaluation Component	
Evaluation Approach	15
Evaluation Framework	16
Methodological Approach	18
Evaluation – Limitations	19
Process of Designing the Service	19
Atmosphere of the Steering Committee	19
Emergency or Safe Housing – Availability/Accessibility	20
Safety	20
New or Existing Services	21
Liabilities of Steering Committee members	21
Risk Assessment	22
Decisions that Shaped the Service	23
Type and Number of Safe Housing Suites	23
Safe Housing with An Array of Services	24
From Immediate safety to emotional needs of client	25
Pressure to Implement	25
Role of Subcommittees	26
Need for Coordinator	27
PART 3 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SERVICE	27
Model in Action - “The Pilot Phase”	
The “fan out” Process	29

Demographics	30
Overview of Clients Served	30
Community Awareness/Public Education	31
Brochure	31
Planning for Sustainability	32
Structural/Committee Changes/The Process Involved in Change	32
Vision, Philosophy, Guiding Principles	33
Terms of Reference	34
Funding/Service Delivery Expansion	34
Crisis/Information Line for Abused Seniors	35
PART 4 – EXPERIENCES OF THOSE INTERVIEWED	36
Steering Committee Experiences	
Method	36
Learnings	36
“The Right People at the Table”	37
Leadership	38
Strengths and Challenges of the Organic Model	38
Benefits to Participating Agencies	40
Drawbacks	41
Coordinator’s Experience	42
Coordinator Role in Serving Clients	42
Intense Case Management	42
Client Response to Coordinator	44
Need for Follow-up Services	44
Peer Support	45
Coordinator Role with Steering Committee	47
Client Experiences	48
Method	48
Accessing Safe Housing	49
Safety	51
Within the suites, #1 and #2	51
Within the buildings	51
In the neighbourhood/community	52
Changes in the Lives of Clients	53
Reduced Isolation	53
Independence	54
Financial Help	55

Client Praise for the Program	55
The Coordinator	55
Connection to Community Resources	56
The Suites	57
The Tenants and Building Manager Location #1	58
Improvements	59
Building Manager Location #1 Experiences	59
REFERENCES	61
BIBLIOGRAPHY	62
APPENDICES	63
I. Types of Elder Abuse – Definitions	64
II. Evaluation Framework	65
III. Project Coordinator Job Description	70
IV. Participating Agencies/Project Affiliates	73
V. Vision, Philosophy and Guiding Principles	74
VI. New Terms of Reference	76
VII. Communication/Promotions Plan	78
VIII. Brochure	79
IX. Intake and Risk Assessment Form	81
X. Care Plan Form	86
XI. Release of Information and Departure Summary	93
XII. Notification of Move and Change of Address	95
XIII. Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing Pilot Project – Case Study	96

Executive Summary

The Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing service provides accommodation and support for a period of 60 days to Edmonton seniors: men and women, 60 years of age and older, who are leaving an abusive situation.

Report Purpose

The report entitled, "Creating Safe Housing for Abused Seniors: The Edmonton Model", describes the project from its inception to the end of the two-year pilot phase. The report was prepared to meet the requirements of the funder, to document the process and the resulting service for those who participated and to offer information to others that may wish to replicate the service.

Report Components

The report is divided into four sections:

1. History and Context of the Pilot
2. Conceptualization of the Pilot
3. Implementation of the Service
4. Experiences of Those Interviewed

The information was gathered using primarily a qualitative methodology. This included one-to-one, face-to-face, tape-recorded interviews. In the case of client interviews, detailed notes were taken and analyzed. As well, meeting minutes, other notes, the evaluation framework, grant applications, and progress reports were reviewed.

Evaluation

In order to document the process and learn about what difference this initiative would make in the lives of the clients it served, the Steering Committee incorporated an evaluation component early in the project.

Because the service provision in this project was innovative, the evaluation focused on learning:

- ✓ What was working and what was not working at specified points throughout the project?
- ✓ What were those involved learning as they proceeded?
- ✓ What barriers were encountered?
- ✓ What improvements and changes were required as the pilot proceeded?

The Need to Address Elder Abuse

It is estimated that approximately 7% of the senior population suffer from some sort of physical,

emotional, sexual, financial abuse or neglect (Statistics Canada, 2002). Utilizing these statistics, there were a possible 5,600 'at risk' seniors in Edmonton at the time of this report.

Formation of the Steering Committee

During the Fall of 1998 and into early 1999, a series of meetings and events reinforced the need for accommodation for seniors wanting to leave abusive relationships. A City of Edmonton Community Services Department social worker who was also an Elder Abuse Intervention Team member, had been spearheading the drive to raise awareness about elder abuse and provide some type of service for these seniors. Utilizing a community development model, this social worker formed a committee to design a service to provide safe housing for abused seniors in Edmonton.

Key Features of the Service:

- Seniors enter the service after a thorough screening and risk assessment.
- Those accepted are accommodated in a safe housing suite within a senior's housing complex for up to 60 days.
- The suite is fully furnished, stocked with staples, and daily meals are provided.
- Clients are connected to an array of existing community services as their needs are identified. Among others, these include DATS (Disabled Adult Transit System), ESL (English as a Second Language), community nursing, and other medical services.
- An "intense case management model" is utilized. The Project Coordinator assists the client in every way possible towards self-reliance.
- Assistance is provided in finding accommodation, furnishings and household supplies for the new accommodation.
- The service is offered free of charge, donations are accepted.
- Follow-up services are provided as needed for approximately six months.
- The service began with one suite and expanded to two. Currently seven suites are in operation.

Uniqueness of the Service:

- The service created connected safe housing suites with an array of existing community services under the supervision of a Coordinator.
- The pilot utilized existing resources rather than duplicating services which was seen as a major strength.

- The responsibility for the project was shared by a variety of agencies, strengthening those agencies and decreasing competition for funding.

Demographics

By the end of the two year Pilot Phase:

- 22 seniors had used the service at an over 90% capacity
- 2 were male
- All had suffered emotional abuse. In addition, 5 suffered physical abuse, 2 neglect, 2 threats of physical violence, and 4 financial abuse
- 50% had been abused by their spouse, 50% by another family member
- 19 of the 22 were living safely and self-reliantly in the community
- 1 person left safe housing without advising where she was going, 2 returned to their former living situations and 1 of those clients re-entered the program and has since moved into her own apartment.
- 46 seniors were referred to alternate accommodation due to lack of space and of these, 5 were deemed “high risk” and referred to other more secure locations (e.g. Kerby Shelter in Calgary, women’s shelters etc.)

Public Awareness/Education

One of the greatest challenges identified by the Steering Committee during the first year of the pilot was attempting to reach older adults who need the service.

Actions that were taken to address this challenge were:

- Provision of public presentations and displays describing the safe housing service.
- Provision of information on Elder Abuse
- Work to obtain funding for an information/crisis line for abused seniors. Rather than create a new service, the Committee has applied for funds to expand existing crisis line services.

Key Features of the Steering Committee

- The process by which this effective service was designed was seen as equally important as the actual service. The people who came together to develop the pilot were professionals accustomed to directing existing programs, not creating new ones. A tremendous amount of work was involved in thinking through the implications of each decision with respect to the safety and security of clients, other tenants and agency personnel.

“The Right People Were at the Table”

Factors identified as crucial to the success of the Committee:

- Members were leaders in their individual fields.
- Members had the authority to make decisions for and take action on behalf of their organization.
- Members had respect for each other’s expertise.
- Members were deeply committed to designing the best service possible with the resources at hand.
- The leadership within the group was both formal and informal.
- Creativity and flexibility were essential attributes of members.

Funding

One of the biggest drawbacks identified by Steering Committee members is the lack of second stage and permanent funding for projects past the initial pilot phase. Members suggest exploring all funding options prior to starting and being sure that appropriate funders are identified early to incorporate necessary requirements and to avoid wasting limited resources.

Comments

Clients:

“I left with one overnight bag not knowing what I would do or where I would stay. I had no idea who to call. I had taken lots of dimes and quarters so I went to the mall and phoned everywhere in the phonebook.”

About the Program:

“You have saved my life. I don’t know what I would have done... without this program.”

About the Project Coordinator:

“I don’t know what I would have done without the Coordinator. She was my Rock of Gibraltar. She was always there for me, she is so special.”

The Coordinator about the Steering Committee:

“We are fortunate that the people on the Steering Committee had so much dedication and commitment because many of these people are not involved in the field of social work. They worked hard together and were supportive of one another. Each one had something really important to offer to the program and that is what makes this service so unique, each brought expertise from her/his own area.”

Key Learnings/Important Features

Creation of a Legal Entity

- *“The creation of a legal entity limiting the liability of each agency was an excellent learning which has proven relevant in other endeavors.”*

Safe Housing Suite with Arrayed Services

- The service was designed to provide safe housing suites with an array of support services available to clients as needed. This design utilized existing resources rather than duplicating services and created a program whereby responsibility was shared among a number of agencies.

Intense case management model

- Intense one-to-one case management is a vital aspect of the Edmonton Seniors' Safe Housing service and one which all involved believe enables clients to make quick progress towards their goals and contributes to seniors' greater success in remaining self-reliant once they leave the safe house.

Multiple safe housing locations throughout the city

- A model utilizing suites in a variety of locations would not be feasible for two main reasons:
 1. Inability to keep suites available throughout the city all year round
 2. Lack of resources – both financial and Project Coordinator's time

Funding

- It is important for pilot projects to know ALL potential funders early in the planning stages. Preliminary meetings with these potential funders will focus the area of funding application and predetermine the collection of evidence needed to help funders make their decisions.

Community Awareness/Public Education

- One of the greatest challenges for the Committee during the first year of the pilot was attempting to reach older adults who needed the service and making the community aware that the service existed. They recognized the need to develop a Communication Plan and to allocate resources to raise awareness.

Crisis Line

- A variety of circumstances led the Committee to investigate provision of a crisis line for seniors; the evidence to support the need for this service was compelling. Rather than create a new service, the Committee applied for funding to augment existing services to better meet the needs of seniors in crisis.

Need for housing contacts

- A major area of work for the Coordinator has been forging relationships with managers of apartment complexes throughout the City to build a network of resources to meet the needs of a wide variety of clients.
- There is particular difficulty for those aged 55-65 to access subsidized services.

Peer support workers need to be trained

- Peer support works best if volunteers have some formal training and are subject to a degree of supervision. Training should involve instruction in issues of confidentiality and be accompanied by prescribed procedures and established guidelines.

Steering Committee

“The right people at the table”

- Organizations involved had the necessary services for seniors
- Committee members had the following:
 - ✓ a sense of purpose and desire to create a program for abused seniors
 - ✓ strong personalities, negotiating skills, expertise in their individual fields, and were motivators and “doers”
 - ✓ authority on behalf of their individual organization to make decisions
 - ✓ a degree of trust in each other
 - ✓ willingness to take a risk

Leadership

- The Committee had formal and informal leadership, which was flexible, respectful, and open to creative ideas, and change, which contributed to a creative atmosphere.

Project Coordinator

All clients in one location

- Having all safe housing clients together on the same floor of a building provides opportunity for clients to informally support each other, helping them to be less lonely and less dependent on the Coordinator

Clients

Service

- Clients believed the service was effective in assisting them to live self-reliantly in the community free from abuse
- Clients had overwhelming praise for the work and support of the Project Coordinator
- Clients expressed the desire to have peer support from a volunteer of the same gender
- Clients expressed the belief that changes should not be made to the program

Safety

- Clients differentiated between safety within the suite, in the building and in the neighbourhood reinforcing the Committee’s belief in the importance of the appropriateness of the match between client and location.