

GREAT GRANT STORIES

Paloma/Youth Shelters Learning Partnership

The Paloma Foundation works with frontline non-profit organizations that offer intervention and support programs to meet the health and education needs of women and children, and the needs of the homeless, focused on Toronto’s most underserved downtown communities.



The Foundation’s largest ‘cluster’ of donees is nine Toronto-based youth shelters. Through 2008/2009, the Foundation worked with senior management of these youth shelters to identify how they might best provide additional, meaningful support, beyond the monetary assistance already in place through their multiyear grants. The consistent message from all the shelters was concern about the growing number of youth with a wide range of mental health issues and concurrent disorders coming to the shelters for help – coupled with the lack

of specialized training in these areas found among the majority of shelter frontline workers. Shelter providers estimate that, at any given time, over 50% of the youth in their shelters are struggling with mental health issues.

The Paloma Foundation has two funding streams: one for grants to non-profit, charitable frontline organizations that operate crisis intervention programs that fit the foundation’s funding mandate; and two, for a limited number of Paloma initiated projects for purposes of raising the level of service within the sectors that they

support. These projects are designed to address common obstacles across multiple agencies, partnering with relevant organizations in order to produce more effective levels of service –approaching old problems with a fresh approach.

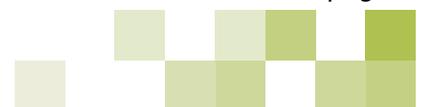
The Paloma Foundation formed a partnership with the youth shelters to initiate the Paloma/ Youth Shelters Learning Partnership. This collaboration has been designed jointly by the Foundation and representatives from all 9 youth shelters, to offer ongoing, specialized learning

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to those working directly with shelter residents, to the betterment of both staff and the youth they work with.

The Paloma/Youth Shelters Learning Series began with a pilot session in February 2010 for 60 frontline staff from the 9 shelters, focused on Trauma. Subsequent sessions will be focused on different mental health issues, (i.e. addictions, concurrent disorders, psychotic disorders, depression and anxiety).

The sessions rely heavily on the 'examples' model of learning. The sessions are led by experts experienced in working with the youth shelter population, and active involvement from participants.

Each session is videotaped for further learning and archival purposes. All 9 youth shelters receive an edited version of each session's training day, along with a Training Guide, which will enable non-participating staff to work through the same material. Throughout the

series, each additional topic will help to unveil the most current information on issues being addressed by shelter staff, to build a mental health 'library' of in-house tools that can be used and reused.

Because this is a new initiative, all aspects of the Paloma/Youth Shelters Learning Series are being evaluated internally through questionnaires and follow up. Of note, 89% of staff reported that after attending the Trauma session, they expected that they would do some things differently as a result of the information they received.

The second session in the series will take place in November 2010. The ongoing series will continue to offer 2 sessions per year. The initial year's two sessions were totally funded by the Paloma Foundation, in order to place no financial burden on the shelters themselves. Paloma is now seeking a name sponsor to partner with them in this initiative for future years.

PARTICIPATORY PROGRAM EVALUATION

A second initiative, in which the Paloma Foundation partnered with the Wellesley Institute, produced *Working Together: Paloma-Wellesley Guide to Participatory Program Evaluation*.

This guide is a unique, intensely-researched guide for organizations that have never attempted to evaluate their own programs, and also for those that may be more conversant with program evaluation tools, but not with this type of participatory model. It provides all the necessary information to implement participatory program evaluation in a wide range of non-profit organizations. Understanding that most non-profits have heavy workloads focused first and foremost on meeting their clients' needs, this Guide has been produced with that reality in mind.

The Guide is free to all, and is available for reference and download at palomafoundation.ca and wellesleyinstitute.com.