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Sonshine Community Services

Theme: Intersectional Policies and Service Provision

Sonshine Community Services is a non-for-profit social service agency that exists to help women and children fleeing domestic violence transform their lives. It works to create a community where women and children live safely in healthy families. Sonshine operates an 18-month second-stage shelter that each year becomes home to approximately 40 families, the majority of whom are considered at high risk for fatality or serious injury due to violence in the home. In addition to the second-stage shelter, Sonshine also delivers a Community Counselling Service program, accredited Family Day Homes and the Children's Centre. Although it is open to women and children of all backgrounds, Sonshine attracts a high proportion of newcomer population to all its programs.

Critical Elements

- The agency has a diverse staff contingent, ensuring that the staff composition reflects the client population. The staff can speak multiple different languages which also helps foster relationship building and engagement.
- Sonshine works closely with local settlement agencies, relying on them for interpretation and translation services, but also engaging them to provide staff training, so that the staff understand and receive training they need related to newcomer experience (e.g., dynamics related to honor based violence).
- This is a learning organization, always seeking to learn and find out how services can be delivered better. There is an understanding among staff that there is much diversity within each culture, and a related assumption that they may not know all the intricacies of peoples' experience, so they are constantly seeking to learn from people with different experience and expertise.
- The staff are aware of the relative importance of hierarchy in different cultures and how that impacts women's interactions with them. In their interactions with women the staff are mindful and intentional about flattening the hierarchical relationship to facilitate more effective connections with the families.
- Food is critical to these families, and so becomes an important part of the work. For example, all families residing at the shelter are encouraged and shelter staff also participate in meals during Ramadan.
- In order to better support women when they leave the shelter, the staff continue working with the families for six months after they leave, to ensure that the women remain safe, make necessary connections with resources, are able to manage crisis situations, retain housing and education or employment and, in general, help ensure stable transition to stability.