



KEEPING in TOUCH

News from the South Shore Housing Action Coalition

Housing Nova Scotia's First Year

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Participating Organizations

- Aspotogan Heritage Trust
- Bridgewater Family Support Centre
- Mahone Bay Seniors Project
- Municipality of the District of Chester
- Municipality of the District of Lunenburg
- Queens Community Health Board
- Region of Queens Municipality
- Second Story Women's Centre
- South Shore Health
- South Shore Transition House Association
- Town of Bridgewater
- Town of Lunenburg
- Town of Mahone Bay
- Western Regional Housing Authority

A soon-to-be-released five year strategic plan moving ahead Nova Scotia's housing strategy is one of the accomplishments Kevin Malloy* can look back to over his first year as CEO of Housing Nova Scotia. Hired in October 2013 and guest speaker at the September 2014 monthly meeting of SSHAC, Kevin said it's been a "whirlwind of a year" as the newly formed agency tried to put some 'meat on the bones' of the strategy. "While its strength came from the highly consultative process that was put into its creation, its weakness is the need for more specifics."



Kevin Malloy (housing First) and Jamie Vigliarolo (Western Nova Scotia Housing Authority) at the September SSHAC meeting.

One goal of the strategic plan is to show in a concrete way "what exactly Housing Nova Scotia is going to do differently and how we are going to do it." This is being done within the context that HNS must develop an approach that makes the most of the recently extended Affordable Housing Agreement with CMHC against the backdrop of the end of federal funding in five years.

The past year also saw the province announcing \$4 million for repairs and upgrades to social and \$5 million for repairs and upgrades to large public housing properties. An eight person advisory board was appointed to draw on the expertise and experience of the community and to hopefully keep communication flowing between the community and Minister

Joanne Bernard. And two major projects have begun (the 400+ units of affordable housing to be created from the Bloomfield School in Halifax, and a neighbourhood revitalization project targeting Alice Street in Truro for housing improvements.)

One of the challenges experienced by HNS was in determining how it should be defined, as its neither a crown corporation nor a government department. A review and evaluation of governance models was con-

ducted. Work is now underway on separating HNS from the Department of Community Services.

"Housing needs to be a broader concept," says Kevin.

The HNS CEO also hopes his new agency will have a strong "client service" focus, an orientation he brings from his previous role with Access Nova Scotia. He's a strong advocate of co-ops, rent-supplement programs, and figuring out ways of helping more Nova Scotians become home-owners. When asked how HNS and SSHAC can collaborate on further implementation of the housing strategy, he stressed "talk to me. There are a number of ways we can work together and that HNS can support the directions that SSHAC is taking."

You can be sure that the SSHAC members will be sure to keep that conversation going!

New Funds for Affordable Housing in Nova Scotia?

In the years that SSHAC has been working on affordable housing, we've learned that funding announcements can be hard to decipher. Previous announcements often seem to be recycled in a way that makes one wonder if there is actually new money being allocated or not. We're keeping our fingers crossed that the Nova Scotia Government's announcement on October 28 will indeed mean new funds.

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*** In mid-October, Municipality of the District of Lunenburg announced that Kevin Malloy will become the unit's CAO on January 1. SSHAC looks forward to continuing to have Mr. Malloy's support and experience in his new and more local role. Welcome, Kevin!**

Women, Poverty, Violence and Housing: Making the Connections

There is almost universal agreement that housing is a basic human right, but the reality is that an overwhelming number of people - many of whom are women - remain in search of safe, adequate, affordable housing. Why is this so?

We know that there is an irrefutable connection between poverty and housing vulnerability. Women in Canada are more likely to be poor than men and thus more likely to be in core housing need (e.g. 80% of all lone-parent families are headed by women and they are among the poorest groups in the country.)

There is also an undeniable connection between domestic violence and housing vulnerability/homelessness. Every six days (on average) a woman in Canada is killed by her intimate partner. Each day, more than 3,000 women (along with their children) are living in shelters to escape domestic violence. In 2009, 31,000 residents of Nova Scotia reported spousal violence in the previous five years. Since most do not report, we are forced to extrapolate to determine the real numbers - based on an estimation by the World Health Organization (1 in 4 women in Canada), there may be 5700 women in Lunenburg County who are living with violence right now!

Domestic violence is the leading cause of women's homelessness in Canada.

Many women recognize that if they choose to leave a violent relationship, they are five times more likely to be poor. They also know too well that, in the aftermath of leaving, they are at heightened risk for further violence or even death. In the absence of safe, supported and affordable housing, many are left with no other choice but to return to the relationship, move away from their communities or become homeless.

Each day an average of 168 women and children seek protection in a transition home in Nova Scotia. Women enter Harbour House in Bridgewater and during their stay (up to 90 days), workers assist them with making choices about next steps for themselves and their children. Unfortunately in the aftermath of trauma, women must not only deal with poverty, but often with post-traumatic stress disorder, mental health challenges and addictions. When they leave, they must be able to access supported, adequate, safe and affordable housing to continue their healing. But supported housing (housing in which supports and services are available on site or in close proximity) and second-stage housing (longer term, supported housing for women leaving transition homes) are unavailable anywhere in Lunenburg County. This leaves many women and their children in our community at great risk.

What can we do to help? We can plan for supported/second stage housing and implement a Housing First model to ensure that abused women and their children are supported and safely and adequately housed. We can understand how difficult it is for women to leave abusive relationships and respect the choices that they make. We can work towards more equitable relationships and develop more affordable housing options. We can care about this issue!

Submitted by Helen Lanthier
Project Co-coordinator, Be The Peace



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Community Member Profile: *Laura Uhlman*

Although there is no emergency shelter for the general population on the South Shore yet, there have always been people in our communities motivated by their hearts, their beliefs, and their morals to help where help is needed. For the last 35 years, Laura Uhlman has been one of them.

As a young family starting out, Uhlman and her husband Clyde were asked by a neighbour if they could spare a room for a friend of his who had been the victim of a violent crime. Just out of the hospital, he found it difficult to be by himself. They said yes to him, and that started them on a long path of taking people in.

“We never advertised for boarders,” Uhlman told me, yet word of their willingness and generosity got around. “We felt that it was our place of honour to be able to utilize the resources we had—a spare room, a bed, sometimes a couch, to help somebody on the path of getting on their feet. Over the years we have always said yes when people call.”

For many years the family lived in the Mount Pleasant area and continued to take people in, although their rural location was inconvenient for people who needed to access services and employment opportunities in Bridgewater. Uhlman lamented that there weren't shelter services in town. One weekend she attended a youth conference in the valley. Two people from the shelter program there, Inn from the Cold, came to speak. “That's exactly what Bridgewater needs!” she thought.

Uhlman campaigned to organize a similar program by going to all the churches in Lunenburg County to ask them to provide volunteers and open doors between the months of December and April. Several congregants in different churches stepped up to the plate. Even then, however, she began to imagine a way to provide emergency housing year round.

In the last couple years, Uhlman noted, there have been

significant changes in church demographics. As congregational populations aged and shrank, it became simply too difficult to staff a shelter program. Since 2012 a group of people—first informal, then organized as non-profit society Hope River Community Outreach—have worked to help people in need find places to stay.

“In January we were given the opportunity to move into an apartment with basement and attic space available to us to use as we wanted,” Uhlman told me. They have been preparing the basement and attic for future temporary housing. “It's not a shelter. We are continuing to do what we've always done—but with a better location.” After renovations, the basement will provide a place to sleep overnight but people will not be allowed to keep their things there during the day. The attic will contain a few rooms for people who need longer-term space. In the immediate future, Uhlman and her family are looking for a licensed electrician and plumber who can volunteer their time to the project. Other help moving the living spaces towards completion is welcome as well.

Uhlman finds that working with people who do not have housing can lead to a lot of frustrations with the system. Different people on social assistance get different amounts, and it isn't always clear why. What is clear is that the amounts provided for housing generally don't cover the actual costs. “I've been at this for a long time,” she said. “I hear people say, “Are there really that many homeless people here?” I think that misses the whole point. If there are just a few people, those people matter. My dream is that we will obtain a building at some point that will be a shelter, but not there yet. I see us moving forward in little steps. We won't turn anyone away. We'll find space.”

(submitted by Elisabeth Bailey, Second Story Women's Centre)

November 12, 2014 (1:30—3:30)

Next regular meeting

of the South Shore Housing Action Coalition

at Bridgewater Fire Hall

(81 Dominion Street Bridgewater)



New Funding ?

Cont'd from p. 1

Here's their press release:

More Nova Scotians will move from wait lists into safe, affordable housing with a \$52 million investment in rental supplements, co-ops, seniors housing and upgrades to public housing the Premier announced today, Oct. 28.

"These investments will help more Nova Scotians find a good home that they can afford," said Premier Stephen McNeil. "By preserving existing public housing, investing in new projects, and using innovative approaches such as rent supplements, we will help more people find a place to call home."

The investment will use \$42 million of unspent federal housing contributions, \$10 million in provincial funding and innovative public-private partnerships to increase affordable housing options.

The province is investing \$9.4 million in rental supplements, which private landlords will augment through innovative solutions. This will create 300 units of affordable housing for Nova Scotians.

"We are pleased to see this program expanded so more families can find homes," says Mark Bergman, of the Investment Property Owners of Nova Scotia. "Landlords are proud to be equal partners in this program, bringing reduced rent, matching dollars and other innovative solutions to work with government and help families find safe, affordable homes."

Funds will also go to improving public housing, seniors' housing renovations and to capital projects.

"This plan will allow Housing Nova Scotia to make the best use of available funds to help as many people as possible access safe and affordable housing," said Minister responsible for Housing Nova Scotia Joanne Bernard. "This will address waiting lists almost immediately, while also building housing capacity over time, while also building housing capacity over time." (Source: <http://novascotia.ca/news/release/?id=20141028002>)



Planning 101

A SSHAC subcommittee (Doug Reid, Nancy Green and Phyllis Price) has been researching better practices for affordable housing in rural communities (more about that in a future issue.) Deep into the research, the non-planners of the committee (Nancy and Phyllis) jokingly referred to their process as Planning 101. We thought it might be helpful to explain some of the terms they have gotten more familiar with as the research has gone on.

Here's the first:

Density Bonusing : a type of regulation that allows developers to build an increased number of units than what is provided for in regulation in return for some sort of "social amenity." One possible amenity would be the inclusion of a number of affordable units in the project. Density bonusing is promotes more efficient use of available and works well in higher density neighbourhoods and some rural locales where clustering development is possible. On the down side it may not be sufficient enough to motivate the developer to build affordable units and can be controversial in low to medium density neighbourhoods.

Taken from the report "The State of Homelessness in Canada 2014

See more at <http://homelesshub.ca/SOHC2014>