







KEEPING in TOUCH

News from the South Shore Housing Action Coalition

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Participating Organizations

- Aspotogan Heritage Trust
- Bridgewater Family Support Centre
- Community Links
- Inn from the Cold
- Lunenburg Community Health Board
- 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

SSHAC: Looking Back, Thinking Ahead

The end of one year and beginning of another is traditionally a time of both reflection and planning. The South Shore Housing Action Coalition is no exception to this tradition. The first couple months of this year have seen sub-committees developing and presenting to the whole group action plans for 2014. Items high on the agenda include:

- developing the foundation for a Collaborative Housing Needs Assessment in towns/municipal units on the South Shore (including building a business case/proposal and getting buy-in from all municipal units, and hopefully other potential funders), with a goal of conducting the study in 2015;
- researching best practices for housing in a rural context, and developing and promoting a concise report and presentation on the topic;
- strengthening the meeting and coordination structure of SSHAC, as well as broadening public representation on SSHAC;
- increasing communication and awareness through the SSHAC newsletter, Facebook page and (upcoming) website;
- Conducting appropriate follow-up on 2013 Resolution on Housing Standards (put forth at annual conference of Union of Nova Scotia municipalities).

Other plans we are considering but for which don't yet have the necessary working groups in place, include:

- hosting a Housing Forum; and
- promoting/advocating for Age Friendly Construction (i.e. changes in construction / renovation activities, to be more inclusive of barrier-free design (accessibility, fixtures).

Reflecting over the past year, it would seem that SSHAC has been doing well in terms

If you are interested in being part of a working group participating in any of the above plans, please let us know. Remember, many hands make light(er) work.



achieving our goal of raising awareness and action on the need for quality affordable housing. Presentations to all municipal councils in Lunenburg Queens resulted in each unit now being represented on our committee. We also saw a resolution put forth to Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities on housing standards, increased community engagement at our meetings, and through our newsletter and Facebook page, production (through assistance of Public Health) of a demographic report on housing in our area, and eight members attending the annual conference of the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia..

It may be possible that the work of SSHAC has not yet had an impact on the quality or availability of affordable housing in our area. But we're pleased with the many advances that have been made over the past few years. Remembering the saying "seek progress not perfection" we're confident that 2014 will see continued forward momentum.

Affordable Housing for Women Leaving Abusive Relationships

An interview with Sally Hutchinson of Second Story Women's Centre

By Elisabeth Bailey

Sally Hutchinson, the Support Coordinator at Second Story Women's Centre, has given a lot of thought about affordable housing over her years working with women in Lunenburg County. She works with clients in a variety of life situations, including survivors of relationship violence. Sally also facilitates core programming within the Centre as well as off site programs partnering with Department of Community Services. I spoke with Sally on February 24th about her work and the issues she perceives for women seeking long-term shelter.

Initially, I asked Sally what she thought the central problem was in terms of housing for women leaving abusive relationships. "Problem?" she replied, "There isn't any housing. There is simply nowhere that is affordable, especially on income assistance. It's one of the things that keeps women in abusive situations even when they want to leave: there's just nowhere to go. Some women go to a shelter and then end up going back again because there's nowhere else."

According to Sally, "If women are on social assistance there's a very minimal amount given... ..it's not enough to meet most housing costs in Bridgewater and Lunenburg. Rentals are way above that. The allowance for shelter needs to match what's happening in community with cost of actual housing. It's not reasonable to think that a single mother with two kids can pay \$900/month rent plus utilities without getting into the food budget, even if she's adequately employed."

Many women in these situations opt for an apartment that includes utilities in the rent—although these are often more expensive overall than other living options, they also offer tenants the

ability to plan ahead for costs rather than struggle with cost spikes in the winter. Sometimes the ex-partner will end up contributing financially—often to maintain a portion of power or control in the woman's life. If

Community Services discovers his name linked to a utility bill or finds him at the residence, however, they may consider it evidence that they are living together and withdraw assistance from the woman.

Furthermore, the more children a woman has, the more difficult it is to leave an abusive situation—especially as there are very few apartments available with more than two bedrooms. In order to find housing with more than two bedrooms it's usually necessary to rent an entire house, which is out of the range of affordability.

So what *do* women and children in this demographic need? Here's Sally's wish list:

- Accessibility to services in the community;
- Affordability for women on social assistance who are in the process of establishing independence;
- Safety in the physical building itself—including safe wiring and plumbing that is up to code and fire marshal inspected and adequate locks on doors and windows;



Cont'd on p.4



March 5, 2014

1:30—4 p.m.

**Next meeting of the South Shore Housing Action Coalition
at Bridgewater Fire Hall (81 Dominion Street Bridgewater)**

Special Guests:

Quin Nilsson, Builder, Monolithic Dome Homes

Stephan Richard, Housing First

Housing Critics Give Federal Budget a Failing Grade

February's federal budget got a failing grade from key housing groups across the country. Michael Shapcott, from the noted Toronto think tank, the Wellesley Institute, reported that "Canada's federal budget 2014 has failed to allocate a single new dollar for critical housing investments. This is despite the overwhelming national need and a growing chorus of experts pointing to the severe impact of the long-term erosion of existing federal housing investments." Shapcott went on to say "The latest federal budget repeats government commitments to tighten mortgage rules and make it harder for low and moderate-income households to get financing to purchase a home. The budget explains that these new rules are required to 'increase market discipline in residential lending and reduce taxpayer exposure to the housing sector.' But making it harder for Canadians to buy a home puts more pressure on the private rented and affordable/social housing sector.... Ottawa seems to remain committed to a rapidly increasing downward trend in housing funding that is causing a sharp reduction in affordable homes."



Claude Dauphin, President of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), echoed these concerns. "Municipalities were looking to today's budget to see real measures to address the growing housing crisis facing Canada's families, communities, and economy. Unfortunately, Budget 2014 fell short of that goal, failing to include any targets, timelines or a commitment to a long-term housing plan. Without a long-term plan and leadership from the federal government, up to a 1/3 of the country's social housing units - home to more than half a million Canadians - will eventually be lost."

The Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) also expressed frustration over the lack of a commitment to further invest in affordable housing. They felt that, instead of a concrete plan, "initiatives and consultations announced in previous budgets were reiterated for public consumption....While we recognize the many fiscal priorities facing this government, we are disappointed that this budget was effectively silent on affordable housing, given so many Canadians remain in need, and given that having an affordable, safe home is so closely tied to having a more productive, stable life," said CHRA President Phil Brown. "With over 1.5 million households unable to afford a decent home and far too many Canadians going without a roof over their head on any given night, more support from the federal government is needed."

Sources: <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/housing/federal-budget-2014-fails-to-deliver-housing-investments-to-meet-national-needs/>
<http://www.fcm.ca/home/media/news-releases/2014/statement-by-fcm-president-on-the-2014-federal-budget.htm>
<http://www.chra-achru.ca/en/index.php/news-events/news/support-for-affordable-housing-and-homelessness-missing-in-action-in-the-20>

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<http://sshac.wordpress.com/>



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Affordable Housing for Women Leaving Abusive Relationships (cont'd from p. 2)

- Neighbours who are safe people to be around;
- Clean and safe outdoor space for kids; and
- Living arrangements that encourage community and sharing of resources.

In addition, Sally would like to see Community Services include more flexibility in their policies about who is and isn't allowed to live with a woman on assistance so that people may choose to pool their resources creatively.

We concluded our conversation with a creative eye to the future by discussing the possibility of charging tax on homes that are unoccupied for the majority of the year (creating "dead spaces" in our communities) and using the funds generated to support affordable housing for low-income women and families. Sally would also like to see students from the Women Unlimited program at NSCC band together in an all-female trades company who could then engage in social enterprise to create supportive housing. Such housing could serve as a happy medium between transition houses (shelters) and the general rental market by renovating pre-existing structures, such as closed schools, into housing.

What do you think about Sally's thoughts and ideas? Do you agree or disagree? Let us know.

