

Presentation to Standing Committee on Social Services

January 8th 2012.

Co-Presenters: Jim Graham, Programme Facilitator, AHANS

Claudia Jahn, Programme Facilitator, AHANS

Claudia Jahn:

Thank you very kindly for giving me and my colleague, Jim Graham, the opportunity to provide an update on the work of the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (AHANS) and to present constructive recommendations.

The mission of AHANS is to promote and support access to clean, safe decent and affordable housing throughout Nova Scotia. Since 1990, AHANS pursues this goal through supporting research, facilitating dialogue, improving policy and programs and promoting active and respectful co-operation and collaboration.

As a social, economic and cultural good, housing impacts the lives of all Nova Scotians in countless ways. Arguably then, concerted action on the production, deployment, financing, maintenance and management of housing goes a long way to addressing the government's three stated goals to bring us "back to balance", "grow the economy", and "create better health outcomes".

As of August 2012, AHANS has been contracted by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRDCS) to administer the federal Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) for HRM. With its allocation of 4.6 million to March 2014 the program provides funding for projects that address homelessness. Over the last 13 years, HPS has proven itself as a best practise model for community based program delivery in 62 communities across the country. It demonstrates the value and the capacity of community entities to administer such programs.

AHANS takes its mission to representing all parts of the province seriously and has applied to HRSDC to become the community entity for the rural allocation of HPS as of February 2013. Previous AHANS led province-wide consultations have confirmed that any strategy has to be able to respond to places as diverse as New Waterford and Antigonish, Brickton and Wolfville, Inverness and so on. As the community entity for both the rural and urban allocation AHANS will be in a position to developing place-specific solutions to homelessness.

All our work is based on data that defines baselines and measures results. Our key data tools are:

1. The Halifax Report Card on Homelessness
- 2: The Health and Homelessness in Halifax
- 3: HPS Community Plan.

The second edition of the Health and Homelessness in Halifax Report aims to once again stimulate discussion, generate interventions that will reduce homelessness and ultimately improve the health and lives of the most vulnerable population in our city.

The comprehensive datasets and detailed profiles of the homeless population of its first edition in 2009 were instrumental for the development of a Cost Benefit Analysis that subsequently led to the approval of a community-based housing support program. Thanks to the concerted effort of the Department of Community Services, shelter and service providers and private landlords, within only eight month over 240 people were able to move from the shelter system into permanent private sector housing.

The existing health care system works on many levels but its rigid structure lacks the ability to take care of the homeless. It does not have the flexibility to work in the context of people whose lives are extremely unstable and chaotic. The lack of a home base, a phone, transportation, and lack of money are the main barriers in accessing the health care system. Therefore, community based “out of the box” services are required to

As much as research data is helpful for policy and program development, it easily lets us forget that behind every statistic stands a living, breathing person. The women and men who were gracious enough to share their stories with us have placed their trust in us to ensure that AHANS,

the 'shakers' work collaboratively with you, the 'movers' to effect positive, life-changing advancements.

The second instrumental data tool is the Halifax Report Card on Homelessness that documents the current state of homelessness in HRM, using indicators that monitor changes in homelessness, housing and income over time. The data sets aim to stimulate discussion and generate interventions that will reduce homelessness. They show us that providing a variety of affordable housing and support options is the key to moving people out of shelters and key for the prevention of homelessness.

1,973 individuals stayed in a shelter in Halifax in 2011. This translates to 70,311 used shelter beds. Each homeless individual pays a high price in health, well-being and quality of life. As a community, we also pay a price. As we have demonstrated in our last Cost Benefit analysis, homelessness poses not only a burden to the Department of Community Services but to the Department of Justice and most importantly to the Department of Health (75%). Including the public service use (prison, emergency room visits, ambulance use, etc) the total cost amounted in 2009 to 27.4 million.

A thorough analysis for 2011 has not been done yet but doing a quick calculation reveals that a minimum of \$ 4,921,070 was spend just on operational shelter cost (based on the \$70/bed/night). Using conservatively the same formula as in (\$ 15,948.00/person/year) a total of \$ 31,465,404 was spend in 2011 HRM to provide shelter and services to the 1,973 homeless individuals in HRM.

Over the years, concerted efforts to address homelessness have been made by all levels of government, service and shelter providers, the faith community, and countless volunteers that support the almost 2,000 individuals whose only option is to stay at a shelter. The homeless numbers would be much higher without the existing and newly implemented services and programs such as Halifax Housing Help, the Housing Support Worker Program, and newly developed supportive housing options.

Jim Graham

In April 2011 AHANS released its Housing Nova Scotians – A Fresh Look. The report’s 2 principle recommendations are:

1. That the Province undertake an Affordable Housing Consultation which would have a province wide scope and cover the full range of “affordability” from deeply to modestly subsidized and the various forms of tenure – rental, ownership, and cooperative.
2. That oversight of this Consultation be led by a “Secretariat” comprised of individuals with extensive knowledge and experience drawn from Government and Community.

Some months later the Department of Community Services, currently the Department which administers housing programs both past and present and charged with the responsibilities associated with the Nova Scotia Housing Development Corporation, announced its intention to develop a Provincial Housing Strategy.

AHANS welcomes this announcement and has already expressed its support for the principles of the Strategy directly to Minister Peterson-Rafuse. The AHANS membership is not naïve, and its support acknowledges the very significant triple challenges of limited resources, extensive and long standing needs and the length of time it will take to implement the required changes, present.

We are encouraged by the Minister’s acknowledgement that the creation and implementation of a successful Strategy to overcome these obstacles will take the active participation of the other 2 levels of government and the private and community based non-profit housing sectors.

AHANS has always believed that taking action to create desired outcomes is much preferable to talking about the problems. To this end we believe there are opportunities for action even as the Strategy is in its formative stages – after all we anticipate the Strategy to be influenced in future years by both changing circumstance and the impact of previous initiatives. There is no need to have every “I” dotted and every “t” crossed before actually doing something useful. AHANS suggests the following:

- Place responsibility for the Strategy within the NS Housing Development Corporation, not the Department of Community Services, and construct a sector based governance model for the Corporation as AHANS suggested.
- Begin immediately to do the research need to establish the Strategy’s targets, goals and objectives. For instance
 - What is the quantum of deferred maintenance and capital improvements needed in the social housing portfolio?
 - What is the quantum of major repairs needed to keep seniors in their own homes longer?
 - How many households in what income ranges can enjoy home ownership with assistance through lease purchase or shared equity programs?
 - What is the anticipated need for affordable rental housing and where does this need exist?

- What will be the measures of “affordability”?
- What has been the experience of the housing support workers’ in the private sector “Housing First” initiative? Should it stop? Should it expand?

It will take research to create a Strategy that is knowledge based and outcome targeted. To paraphrase the Cheshire Cat – any road will take you there if you don’t know where you are going! Only government has the resources to provide for this research and to prioritize the outcomes it wishes to achieve with the resources at hand both now and in the future.

Here are other immediate possibilities that will demonstrate the Government’s seriousness:

- Explore the benefits and challenges of contracting with the non-profit sector to deliver portions of existing Residential Rehabilitation and Shelter Enhancement programs and then do it, learning from practice how to make this method of service delivery as effective as possible.
- Explore the benefits and challenges of taking public housing management out of the civil service and putting it back into community. Find a community/municipality ready to accept the challenge and learn from the experience.
- Begin a conversation now with sector representatives before formal structures are put in place. Conversation can be extremely useful. HRM’s recent decision on the development of the Bloomfield site offered an opportunity for such engagement.
- Have the Housing staff of DCS actively participate as members of AHANS, the Nova Scotia Housing and Homelessness Network, Nova Scotia Home Builders Association, the Investment Property Owners Association of Nova Scotia, and other related sector organizations.
- Explore the benefits and challenges of introducing something akin to CMHC’s former Community Resource Organization Program funding which had as one of its goals increasing community capacity to deliver community based housing projects.

It has been 30 years since the Province of NS has had anything resembling a Housing Strategy. AHANS believes that action is needed to demonstrate that the Government is serious in its intentions and to begin to overcome the general inertia this gap has created.

I have attended several of the Minister Peterson-Rafuse’s presentations. I for one do not doubt her passion and commitment to the task ahead. I have spoken with Senior housing staff and their desire for a different path is evident. There is a very great danger that Housing will do tomorrow what it did today because it was what was done yesterday. Significant change is proffered and many of us know how hard significant change is to accomplish. AHANS believes that action, not just words, is needed to demonstrate that the Government is serious in its intentions and to begin to implement its new vision. However, as one of the table presenters warned the Minister at the Consultation in Kentville - “Beware because Culture eats Strategy for Breakfast”.

AHANS believes that action is needed as soon as possible to demonstrate that the Government is serious in its intentions.

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PRESENTATION TO STANDING
COMMITTEE ON COMMUNITY
SERVICES

TUESDAY, JANUARY 8, 2013

CLAUDIA JAHN

JIM GRAHAM

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ASSOCIATION

AHANS contracted by HRDCS to administer the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) for HRM.

4.6 million funding allocation to March 2014.

HPS successful model of community based program delivery.

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Data Tools:

1. Health and Homelessness in Halifax Report
2. Halifax Report Card on Homelessness
3. HPS Community Plan

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Housing Support Program:

240 individuals moved out of the shelter system within eight months.

Multi-dimensional solution:

Involvement of non-profit, private sector and government support crucial for effective, efficient and equitable solutions.

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Halifax Report Card 2011:

- 1,973 individuals stayed in a shelter in HRM
- 70,311 shelter beds used

31,400 million in shelter and public service cost

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Housing Nova Scotians – A Fresh Look

- “Affordable” Housing Consultation
- “Secretariat” oversight

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Provincial Housing Strategy Context

Principles:

- Collaboration/co-operation/participation
- Private/non-profit/3 levels of government challenges
- There are extensive and long standing needs
- There are limited resources
- It will take time to achieve

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Immediate Action

- Begin the Research – Knowledge-based and outcome focused
- Establish a “secretariat” for oversight

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- Have serious look at public housing – both outcomes and management
- Have Staff actively participate at sector related tables
- Invest in community capacity building
- Outsource program delivery

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CULTURE EATS STRATEGY FOR BREAKFAST



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