

The Neighbourhood of Friends Family Resource Centre (NFFRC) is a not-for-profit organization which receives its funding from the Province under the Early Childhood Development Initiative (ECDI). The NFFRC has recently been transitioned from Eastern Health to the newly developed Department of Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS).

The NFFRC is committed to providing programs and services which nurture children and their families in Clarenville and the surrounding area. Its goal is to continue to provide safe, non-judgmental and culturally sensitive community-based programs, which will encourage healthy prenatal and child development and enhance family relationships and interaction.

The NFFRC currently operates from a hub site in Clarenville and offers outreach to six other sites in the region: Arnold's Cove, Come By Chance, Swift Current, South West Arm, Random Island and a second location in Clarenville.

The Hebron project has had, and will continue to have, an effect on our programs, staff and families. We love to see new participants come to our programs and make every effort to make it a positive experience for both families and staff. In the past few weeks, we have seen an increase in the number of new families using three of our sites; many of these new participants are from families who have stated that they relocated for employment with the Hebron project. We predict a further demand for our services as more families move to the area for the next phase of the Hebron project.

New families have also indicated the following:

- they have no family support here
- they are “baffled” at the lack of childcare
- the NFFRC is the main source of socialization for young children

As you can appreciate, we have had to increase the number of weekly programs to accommodate higher numbers, with no increase in staff. This has caused extra work for our staff, not only in their day-to-day preparation, but also in their ability to ensure that new families get the attention they need and deserve.

I believe it takes exceptional individuals to work in an early childhood atmosphere, a person who is very compassionate. This is true in our organization because staff sometimes use their own, unpaid time to make it a more pleasant community for new families who move to the area. (I will give a verbal example here). To be honest, we could use another position to address just parent concerns.

As a part of our programming, we offer a Healthy Baby Club (HBC). This is a prenatal program for pregnant women who are at risk of having low birth weight babies. In this program, we offer prenatal support as well as a supplement of milk, fruit and eggs. The

most determining factor for entry into this program is low income. Being pregnant with a low income is hard enough, but recently we have discovered that some of our participants were facing homelessness because of high rent.

The NFFRC has also assisted the Regional Action Committee on Housing (REACH) by sponsoring a contract to hire a new Housing Support Worker (HSW). During the HSW's orientation, I was asked by one of our Facilitators if I could speak to parents before our program started. Thinking that this was an unusual request, I excused myself to speak with them. There were three women in our centre who had all been given notices that week. One was asked to move out that very next month with a notice that was back dated two months; another was told that her rent was increasing from \$650 to \$1600 in the upcoming month; and the other was advised to look for other accommodations because she would not be able to afford the rent anymore. I understand the landlords' wanting to rent to someone for a much higher amount because that's the logical thing to do. I also know that sometimes people are not the best tenants and, by increasing the rent beyond their means, this will often force them to move. This is not the case with the above-mentioned people; all three of them were long term tenants and were very content in their homes. In one case, this was the only home the children ever knew.

Unfortunately, the HSW could not help these families as her position is mostly focused on individuals with complex needs. The families turned to our staff for help. These are actual accounts of what we attempted to do for these families:

- One facilitator called in a favour from a friend and asked if she could provide housing for a family
- I spoke with Newfoundland/Labrador Housing to try to get one family into subsidized housing
- the administrative officer called our landlord to ask him if he could help us secure at least one home.
- We copied the appropriate section of the Tenancy Act and explained it to the people affected in the hope they would know their rights before they were forced to move.

With many hours of dedication from staff, the end result was less that we had hoped. One family did find a person who showed compassion and rented to them at a higher but manageable rate. Another family was allowed to stay in their rental unit as the landlord agreed to delay the increase, but this is only a temporary solution. The third family was forced to leave the area. (Insert verbal story here).

The NFFRC are wondering if we should be concerned about our upcoming lease renewal. We fear that with all the rent increases since the Hebron project began, we will be forced out of our current location. This is the only space in the area suitable

for our needs as we have outgrown two other buildings. Being a not-for-profit on a fixed budget, we are unable to absorb a rent increase. If we were unable to secure suitable space, some 725 participants would be negatively affected.

I know there are positive outcomes from having this project in the area, but my greatest concern is, “at what cost to our most at risk populations - young parents, children, pregnant moms”. Are we going to force families away from the area, and when the project is over, realize what we have done?

Thank you for your time.