

## Summary of Verbal Presentation by Tracey Coady (Housing Support Worker)

Good evening everyone, my name is Tracey Coady and I am the Housing Support Worker for the Clarenville-Bonavista region. This is a fairly new position, which just began in June this year. This position was created through a partnership between the Regional Action Committee on Housing (also known as the REACH Board) and the Neighbourhood of Friends Family Resource Centre. This was made possible through funding from the Supportive Living Community Partnership Program, which is provincially funded by the department formerly known as Human Resources, Labour, and Employment.

My position covers the Clarenville –Bonavista Rural Secretariat region and it is one of eight similar positions strategically located in rural regions across the Province. My particular region includes the Bonavista Peninsula, Clarenville area, and extends to Terra Nova, Swift Current and Long Harbour.

As a Housing Support Worker, my job is to help people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, find and maintain safe, affordable, stable housing. As some of you may or may not be aware, trying to find an affordable place to live in this region now is very challenging indeed. Needless to say my caseload is quickly filling up and I am very busy to say the least. Since starting this position in June, I have had to help almost 30 people with their housing needs. That is not too say that I found housing for all thirty, because I have not been that lucky. I have been able to secure new housing for only nine of these individuals. For some of the others, I was able to help them sustain the places that they already had by preventing eviction, working with landlords to help resolve issues with rental arrears, mold, things of that nature. There is still currently another 16 individuals on my caseload who are in desperate need of affordable housing.

Since the announcement of the Hebron project, the rent prices in Clarenville and surrounding areas have pretty much gone through the roof. We understand that nearly 3,000 workers will be employed at the Bull Arm Site. While most of these workers will be housing at the on-site camp, it is anticipated that a significant number of new residents to the Clarenville-Arnold's Cove area will seek accommodations in these nearby communities. The anticipation of the influx of new renters is having a dramatic negative impact on the community. A three bedroom apartment or house will usually cost anywhere from 1000/mth to 3000/mth to rent. I just recently moved home from Alberta and much to my surprise, it cost more to rent a 3 bdrm apt here in Milton (which is less than 10 mins from Clarenville) than it did to rent a 3 bdrm apt in Edmonton, Alberta. I ended up buying a house after, as the money I was paying out for rent was the same price as a mortgage on a new home.

Unfortunately, not everyone can afford to buy their own home and therefore there are many people left trying to find an affordable place to rent. In 2007, according to Statistics Canada, the majority of those in the Labour Force in the Clarenville-Bonavista region were employed in services and retail, construction and primary industries. Assuming the average wages was less than \$15.00 per hour, the annual gross income would be \$32,000. However, most of the employees in these sectors worked less than 38 weeks per year. Consequently, the maximum gross income was \$25,000. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation states that if a family is paying more than 30% of its net income on shelter, then they are in a core housing need. 30% of \$25,000 equates to a maximum monthly rent of \$625.00. As I have stated the average rent in the Clarenville-Arnold's Cove region far exceeded this amount. With very little vacancies, and very high rents this is making it very difficult for low to moderate income people to afford a

place to live. Some of the rents are so high that the only people who can afford to rent them anyway is workers from the Hebron project or other projects like this.

So having said that, if people who are working and receiving low to moderate income are having difficulty affording a place to live, then how are people who are not working and who are income support going to afford a place to live? The answer is they are not. Or if they are lucky enough to afford a place, it is most likely very sub-standard living conditions which is probably leaky, moldy, unsafe, and inadequate. The absolute most a person on income support can receive for rent is 472, and that is considered the enhanced rental allowance, so not just anyone would be entitled to that much. So considering most one bedroom apartments will usually cost anywhere from 600-900/mth for rent, this means if someone on income support wants to rent a one bedroom apt then they must use their money that they are given for food to pay for their rent. In today's world, especially in this province where we are now finally experiencing an economic boom, people should not have to choose between food or rent.

Even some bedsitting rooms in the Clarendville area now are renting for anywhere from 750/mth to 1800/mth. Even though the rents are outrageous prices, we can't really blame the landlords for trying to get the most they can for their apartments. There is actually a local entrepreneur here in the area who has started his own rental management company, where he rents peoples place for them at highest rates possible, even higher than the original owner would rent it for themselves. He in turn, gets a get a cut of the extra money he was able to rent it for. Again, I guess you can't really blame e him for trying.....even if it does make my job that much harder.

So needless to say, if food and shelter is a basic human need, then there are many people in this region who are not even getting their basic needs met. Believe it or not, homelessness does exist in this region. It may not be visible on the streets like it is in bigger cities, but there is a fair amount of people here who are sleeping on other people's couches (couch surfers), or living in places that are not affordable, accessible, or adequate. I am seeing an increasing number of people come through my doors that are completely homeless and have nowhere else to go. I would like to note that not all of the homeless clients that I see fit your stereotypical image of a homeless person. Some of them are employed, very well educated people who through no fault of their own may have lost their job, become ill, may have experienced an relationship breakdown or simply may have been forced to give up their apt due to increased rent or an eviction notice. With no emergency shelters, transitional housing, or subsidized housing available in the area people really don't have anywhere else to go but to be left homeless.

I have also heard from many people who were at risk of being homeless, as they may have gotten a rent increase or an eviction notice from there landlords. Some landlords have even told the tenants that they want them out so that they could rent to workers associated with the oil companies. Some landlords have even tripled the rent from 500-1500. When low or moderate income person or family is expected to pay this much for rent all of a sudden when they were used to paying 1000 less than they have no choice but to move out. If they are unable to find a new place to rent that is more affordable then they either move in with family or move out of the area all together to avoid being homeless.

If more and more people move out of the area as a result of not being able to afford to live here anymore, then as a result some businesses will start to lose employees .If the pay is only minimum wage and people cannot afford to work for this wage anymore and still be able to live comfortably then some of these business or retail stores may end up shutting down as a result of not being able to get workers. Craig Williams, President and CEO of the Home Builders

Association stated during the 2011 St. John's Housing Forum that "housing choice is critical to attracting and retaining a talented workforce".

The solutions to addressing the impacts the Hebron Project is having on the cost, access and availability of housing cannot be the sole responsibility of community-based organizations, municipal governments or industry: the solutions require open dialogue and collaboration. The Hebron proponents must be part of this dialogue.

Some of the other impacts that are likely to happen as a result of the housing issue in this area include increase demands on infrastructure such as roads; increase demands for social supports such as child care and mental health services, and increases in criminal activity. If people are struggling to keep a roof over their head, they may turn to illegal activities such as drinking and driving and drug abuse and drug trafficking. This is especially true if the worker's camp at the Bull Arm site remains a dry camp.

Furthermore, people are certainly going to be more stressed, which may lead to substance abuse, domestic violence, and poor physical and mental health. As a result, hospitals, police, mental health, social service providers, and my caseload will also see in an increase in demand for services which will affect staffing and mean longer wait times for everyone. So needless to say, the whole community will be affected.

Currently, this region is already seeing a housing shortage and housing crisis, and we have been hearing that this project has not even fully come on-stream yet, so I can't even imagine how bad the housing crisis will get when things get even busier. I hate to admit it but I think a client of mine was right when he said an economic boom only means that the rich will get richer and the poor will get poorer.

Thank you!