

Affordable Housing & Homelessness Working Group

NEWSLETTER



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Meeting The Most Basic Needs in the Time of COVID

We can all remember a time when we were out somewhere and all of a sudden nature calls and you have to use the toilet. You look around for the nearest public washroom. Is it Tim's or the gas station up the street or maybe some other location? When you finally get there you don't really have to buy anything so you feel a little guilty as you quickly walk past the worker to get to that washroom. Now imagine that you had to seek out a public washroom a couple of times a day because you are experiencing homelessness. That is a hardship few of us understand. Now fast forward to a pandemic – nothing is open and the places that are open are not allowing anyone in to use their washroom. This includes all recreation centres, office buildings, stores, coffee shops, and even the public use outdoor washrooms in the park or harbourfront. They are all locked up. **What would you do?**

In Sydney, an older woman comes to an organization that gives out food at the door. She asks to come inside to use the washroom but is told they are not permitted to let anyone inside. "Can I at least get some toilet paper or some napkins", she asks. She leaves with a handful of napkins and returns ten minutes later to pick up her food order. Another young man known to be sleeping outside walks by later that day with a roll of toilet paper under his arm. An older man in obvious distress told a staff person, "I can't even get a drink of water anywhere let alone find a toilet and I am in desperate need." **What would you do?**

Many urban centres across Canada have similar stories as the ones from Sydney. We are so used to relying on retailers and open doors of organizations to access washrooms that when a pandemic hits we are caught off guard. (I would say caught with our pants down but maybe that's a little too cheeky) If a natural disaster hit our community tomorrow that caused a great deal of homelessness, the first response would be shelter, food, water, hygiene and bathroom facilities. A pandemic of a highly communicable disease doesn't cause widespread homelessness but it deepens the hardship of those who are already experiencing homelessness or are precariously housed. **So what do we do?**

Caring and dedicated front line organizations like the Ally Centre put out the call to other organizations. A plan is struck and with help of municipal and provincial government funds. Seven portable toilets were placed in accessible locations throughout CBRM and four comfort centres were opened for showers and other amenities. **That's what we do!**

What we heard.

A man staying in an abandoned building said it was too cold to think of looking for a shower somewhere. On the first warm day of the pandemic he took the opportunity to shower at the comfort centre. First shower in forty two days. Now that the weather is warmer he regularly comes for a shower and tells the staff how grateful for a place like this.

One man looking for help for the sores on his feet and legs was able to get washed and was given socks, underwear and hygiene products. The staff contacted the physician at the Ally Centre Health Clinic to assist him in getting treatment for his sores. Not only are people getting showers, but they are treated with dignity and kindness.

How we can move forward.

1. Create an advisory group consisting of organizational representatives as well as individuals with lived and living experience of poverty to provide input into municipal actions.
2. Develop a pandemic preparedness plan that addresses the needs of marginalized groups and individuals.
3. Work with all levels of government to ensure that funds that are committed to support basic needs are not delayed in cases where there would be an immediate benefit to residents.



Ally Centre, Sydney Comfort Centre



Undercurrent, Sydney Comfort Centre



Community Cares, Sydney Mines Comfort Centre



Undercurrent, Glace Bay Comfort Centre

Reaching Home COVID-19 Response Funding

In April 2020 the Community Entity (CE) and Community Advisory Board (CAB) received COVID-19 Response funding from the Federal Government through the Reaching Home: Canada's Homelessness funding stream. This funding was in addition to the regular Reaching Home funding stream and intended to help communities address the needs of vulnerable populations during the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 10 applications were received and approved for funding. 9 are currently active and 1 is still being negotiated. Below is a brief description of the 10 projects approved for funding.

- **Ally Centre Cape Breton** – 7 Portable Washrooms were placed around CBRM to address this issue of lack of washroom facilities while local businesses and organizations were closed during the pandemic. The funding covered the cost of staff to clean portables, cleaning equipment, and supplies.



- **Cape Breton Community Housing Association** – Margaret Street Emergency shelter reopened to women experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. This made physical distancing easier and helped reduce overcrowding in the Townsend St. shelter.
- **Community Cares Youth Outreach** – CCYO hired a coordinator to help manage their meal delivery program that started during the pandemic. They will also complete several capital improvements such upgrading their washroom facilities to increase capacity, as purchasing a new cooler to allow them to keep more fresh donated produce and building raised garden beds.
- **Cairdeil Place Society** – Purchase of Personal Protective Equipment and additional cleaning supplies so they can safely reopen to members. They will also purchase “Take out” containers and switch their weekly “sit down” meal to a “to go” meal to meet physical distancing requirements.
- **Elizabeth Fry Society** – In order to maintain physical distancing E-fry will rent a nearby apartment to use as an overflow / quarantine space. New clients will be housed separately for the 2 weeks before joining the larger group and if any client were to show symptoms, they will have the ability to separate that person until test results are received.
- **Glace Bay Food Bank** – The foodbanks very successful community garden program will continue to run this summer with physical distancing measures in place. The foodbank will have a garden to provide fresh produce to clients and their meal program but they will also help clients get a vegetable garden established at their home. During these difficult times gardening provides positive mental health benefits as well as helps address food security.
- **Undercurrent Youth Centre** – When the pandemic began and schools closed Undercurrent began providing their in-school Lunch Bag program as a Lunch Bag delivery service. Since March they have been delivering 1000 meals a week and will continue to do so until school resumes in September. They will also complete some minor capital renovations to increase the washroom and kitchen capacity.
- **Ally Centre Cape Breton** - A mobile COVID-19 resource bus is available to vulnerable populations around CBRM. The bus will travel around the municipality to provide education and resources to clients and if need be they can arrange for transportation to the Ally Centre COVID-19 testing site.
- **Cape Breton Hope Project** – Renovations to create a separate apartment space for quarantining new clients before they join the larger group. Also, expansion of garden office to include a hygiene/laundry/washroom site to allow them to safely have clients return to programs and activities. (Approved but not yet active)



- **Loaves and Fishes** – Unable to provide a “sit down” meals service to its clients Loaves and Fishes quickly switched to a “Take Out” model. This funding will help address the increased costs of purchasing the thousands of take out containers, juice boxes and milk boxes.

Mobilizing for Food Security

There is a common acknowledgement that many families and individuals simply can't afford to buy enough food to sustain themselves. As a result, many communities have food banks, meal programs and in-school breakfast or lunch programs. Many of these programs exist because of volunteers that show up to help out. In March, the Covid 19 pandemic caused the closure of schools, businesses and organizations leaving only essential services opened and as a result, food security became a concern for community organizations. Whether through job loss, self-isolation or an increase in household food demand, COVID 19 had an impact on our relationship with food.

Local food banks and meal programs remained opened making adjustments to how they deliver services. Many volunteers stepped up to make sure people had access to food. Community based organizations such as New Dawn's Better Bite Kitchen - Sydney, Undercurrent - Glace Bay, Community Cares - Sydney Mines, made food hampers and lunch bags and delivered them to hundreds of people.

It really is quite remarkable to see how people step into these gaps to ensure that everyone would have access to food. One such program was implemented by the staff and volunteers of Undercurrent in Glace Bay. They provided up to 1,000 lunch bags for students per week as well as family food events for 100-180 families. All packaged and delivered by volunteers. Undercurrent's Dave Sawler says that "one of the highlights for us has been doing our family food events which help meet a few needs. We literally get dozens of messages thanking us every time we run these events."



Volunteers at Undercurrent getting lunch bags ready for delivery



Community Cares Youth Outreach (CCYO) in Sydney Mines was one of those organizations that received hampers from the Good Food Pack program plus made their own food orders. Volunteers distributed grocery orders to 80 households in Sydney Mines and area. Additionally, the CCYO centre is operating a comfort centre for those in need of a shower, hygiene products, clothes, supplies, food, a cup of coffee and a safe and welcoming place to go. Executive Director, Dorothy Halliday reports that they have received referrals for individuals both young and senior and families struggling to make ends meet.



Backpacks and snacks at Community Cares

A Better Bite Community Kitchen have been running a community food program out of New Dawn since early April but has ended on June 25th. "Basically, we organized an emergency food response program and have prepared and delivered almost 6,100 food hampers to individuals facing food insecurity in the CBRM", says Claire Turpin, Manager of Better Bite Community Kitchen. The **Good Food Packs** grew from 75 to 750 households per week and were delivered to community organizations, schools, individual and family households. Many donors and scores of volunteers helped make this twelve week program a huge success.



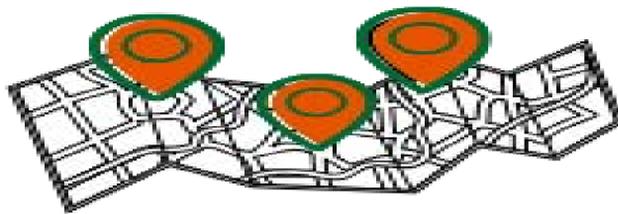
Volunteers making the Good Food Packs

Food security programs made possible by the Atlantic Compassion Fund through the United Way Cape Breton

The Atlantic Compassion Fund was established by Tom Rose, the President of Atlantic Business Interiors, with a generous offer to match up to \$100,000 in initial donations, the fund is helping agencies across the Atlantic Canada respond to the unique, immediate and emerging needs of their local communities. The fund has three phases. The first (Response) addresses immediate need such as food security & shelter, the second (Recovery) addressing issues such as mental health & internet access, and the third (Rebuild) will help organizations who have experience financial gaps due to COVID-19 restrictions or cancellations.

The United Way has already invested \$274,908.82 to strengthen local programs in Cape Breton. These funds have helped address food insecurity. Food delivery programs are taking place in communities across all 4 Cape Breton counties.

Vulnerable Tenants, Poor Proximity? A Research Update

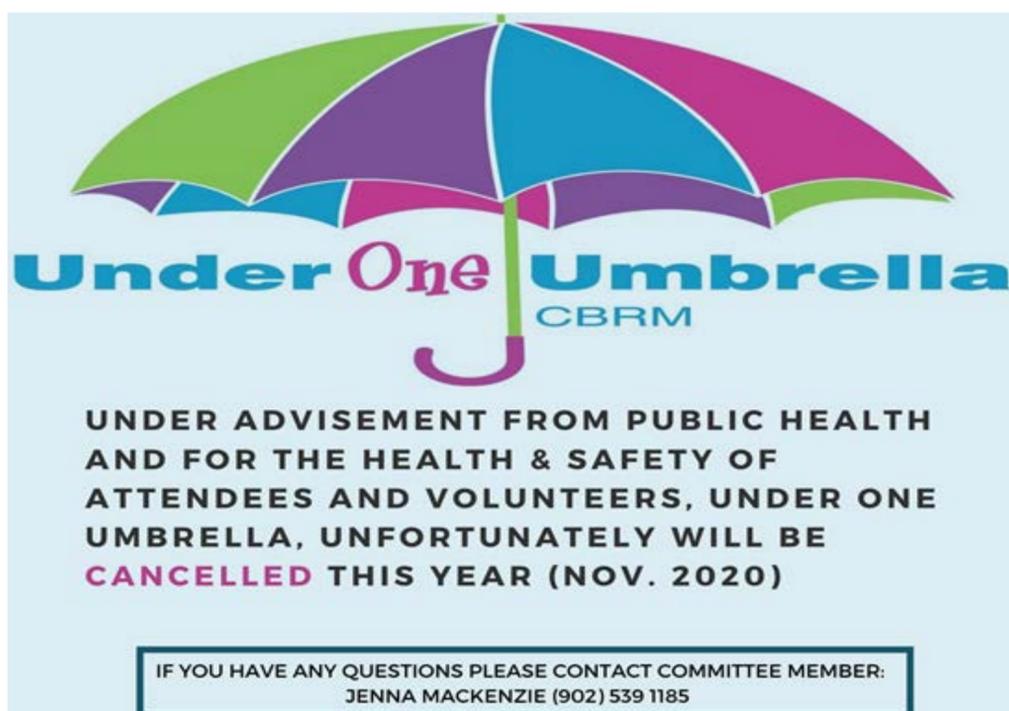


In this research, our team (including Mel MacDonald, Laura Syms and Dongxue Liu) looked at how close amenities and services are to people living in market rentals in the CBRM. We emphasized units with lower rents, under the assumption that this is the housing in which more vulnerable community members are living. Amenities and services we looked at included grocery stores, food banks, financial services, health services, employment services, educational organizations, libraries and community access sites, child care, recreational facilities, laundromats and bottle depots.

Looking at Sydney, the only amenities within walking distance (so 1,000 meters or less) from a high percentage of units with lower rents are licensed child care centres, pharmacies, dental offices, parks, playgrounds, banks/credit unions and bus stops. Amenities and services the furthest from low-cost units in Sydney are Access Nova Scotia, the emergency department and retail stores selling things like clothes and housewares. For those renters living outside of Sydney, only two amenities and services are walkable from a large percentage of rentals: parks and bus stops.

So what does this mean? For those working on the front lines, we think results offer evidence that mobile services are required to reach tenants – examples include the food bus, happening in the CBRM already, and Mobile Outreach Street Health. Results also suggest that renters living in low-cost units not only need financial support to help pay their rent, but also to assist with transportation costs, and that community hubs are needed, particularly outside of Sydney. For anyone interested in receiving a copy of our report, please contact catherine_leviten-reid@cbu.ca. This research is supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, and the Cape Breton Community Housing Association is a partner.

Cancellations and Postponements



OUR PLANS HAVE SINCE CHANGED.



By Corinne Mucha

Point in Time (PiT) and Service Based Homelessness Counts 2020

The Affordable Housing and Homelessness Working Group:
Cape Breton Community Housing Association, Public Health, Mental Health & Addictions, Cape Breton University, Community Advisory Board on Homelessness, Cape Breton Regional Municipality, Cape Breton Regional Police Services, Department of Community Services, Housing Nova Scotia, The Ally Centre, New Dawn, Cape Breton County Seniors Council, Pathways Cape Breton, Elizabeth Fry Society.