

Are we truly trying to end the housing crisis in Halifax?



by Rick Scott,
Vendor and
Editorial Contributor

On Thursday, October 19th, I had the honour of attending a workshop put on by The Community Action on Homelessness in Halifax. The idea behind the workshop was that people who were directly affected by

homelessness, and their advocates in the community were supposed to draw up a budget. The Federal Government in Ottawa is supposedly allotting \$23M in to housing here in Nova Scotia, plus an additional \$30M, that is specifically earmarked for Off-Reserve Native Housing. The object for the workshop was to let the community come up with a blueprint for how we felt that this federal money should be spent.

I felt that we did a good job with coming up with a budget, and it felt good that First Voice Individuals like myself were being asked for our opinion on how we felt this new money should be spent, but I'm waiting to see if anything concrete will come out of our hard work, or if our work will become a study that everyone will forget about six months after the results are released? Unfortunately, CAH, like many non-profit organizations of its kind are to a great extent dependent on federal money for their survival. In the case of CAH, there isn't

any guarantee that the federal funding that has kept the organization's programmes running up to this point will be extended beyond this fiscal year. In other words, by the end of March, The Community Action On Homelessness organization may no longer exist.

What does all of this mean to First Voice Individuals like myself? What this means is that First Voice Individuals like myself can't count on CAH to help end the housing crises here in Halifax. The reality of the situation is that CAH won't bite the hand that feeds it, and therefore, they're saying almost nothing about the fact that governments at all levels have failed to live up to their own promises to alleviate homelessness in this country by the year 2000. It's safer for CAH, and organizations like it to have First Voice Individuals participate in studies and workshops that improve our self-esteem, while doing little, if anything to end the appalling housing conditions in this country, because if organizations like CAH were to (God forbid!) call government to accounts for the squalid conditions that many First Voice individuals actually have to consider home, they might lose their funding.

The situation I've described may look bleak, but there is still hope if CAH, and other organizations that advocate on our behalf, become less concerned about their bottom line, and more concerned about the people who are going to freeze to death like animals if the housing crises in this country doesn't end soon. CAH, and organizations like it have a golden opportunity to actually speak forcefully against the housing crises in

this country, as well as the crimes against humanity that many First Voice Individuals are subjected to every day, because their funding might not be extended beyond the end of March, and therefore, they really have nothing to lose if they were to criticize governments at all levels for their lack of action around the housing crises in this country.

I truly believe that we live in one of the best countries in the world, and that if we truly wanted to end the housing crises in this country, we could do it.

The problem is that in order to make a difference, organizations that advocate on behalf of First Voice Individuals have to make a stand against governments, even if that means the possibility of losing their funding, and thus far, no one wants to bite the hand that feeds them. However if CAH and other organizations were to make a stand, and governments were made accountable for their decisions, that is, decisions that negatively impact First Voice People every day, eventually all levels of government would be shamed in to doing something about housing.

When that happened, stories about people being summarily evicted from their rooming houses, or worse, and freezing to death on our streets would be a story we told our grandchildren, rather than the stark reality it is today. God willing, we'll see that day, but the situation I described in this last paragraph will only happen if and when the organizations that advocate for us stop being afraid of losing their funding, and make a stand to improve the lives of people like myself.

The Holidays Are Here Again!

by Judy Deal, Vendor
and Editorial Contributor

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conjures up the fantasy of an expanded RENT TO OWN kind of scenario. A realistic rent-to-buy contract between property owner and tenant could help relieve much in the way of homelessness, or even *indoor* homelessness.

(Indoor homelessness: This is how many poor people have lived off and on, through the years: slumlord housing, which is not fit to live in, but rent changes hands anyway, way too much rent; thus, one is technically *not* homeless. But this is typically a place where vermin, bugs, mice, lots of drafts due to broken windows, plumbing problems, heat problems, like not enough in the winter, and an endless parade of pimps, prostitutes, enforcers, dealers, junkies, crackers and meth freaks, as well as gangsters stomp through the building and keep everyone awake by partying from midnight to dawn. Welcome to my nightmare!)

Rent to own would offer the poor a decent, most likely, place to live. This is best configured through government social housing programs than private development and speculative investment, or any other kind of investment, it is widely thought. To feel safe and more secure in one's home is a wonderful feeling that many middle class people take for granted, for the most part. One does not know this sensation, until you've lived it. *Felt experience.* Some have lived both privileged and affluent lives, and then down and out in the streets. Perhaps more than others they know, yet any poor person most probably profoundly appreciates a decent, clean, well looked after, safe, secure home.

There is nothing like coming home to a roof that does not leak. A bed that does not move because of the shifting shadows of vermin on the patchwork quilt. A home is a warm place that one can sit back and enjoy. With a warm cup of a fave tea, or a fave cup of soup. Little things that matter muchly. Housing and homelessness easily bring up whole galaxies of issues, flavours, textures of living. From Friday night nightmare in an indoor homeless situation, or rather, welcome to my home's warm embrace.

Maybe it's time for a survey. Yes, another survey. To see how many people for real are being helped by helping organizations. Nowadays everything is so expensive that it is hard to feel comfortable with one's self. Meaning that one feels one is being judged whether this is illusory or true. You're rattled when finding some expense that kind of broadsides the self and leaves one feeling low. The poor sometimes judge themselves too

harshly, because they need help, or because they need help over such a long period of time. Like: "It's you again, uh . . ." Again, sometimes it's just the littlest thing, a body language pose, a turn of phrase, a small gasp, and one is rattled by the possibilities . . . 'Has the loitering lamp been lit? Am I coming around too often, even though I desperately need to come by to pick up a few things, or visit this soup kitchen to get enough to eat?' Anxieties galore eat away at the body, mind and soul!

But at once and the same time, people need help if they are impoverished, every day of the year, not just the holidays. Of course many opulent and well off families are more conscious, it seems, regarding poverty during the holiday season. And this is rough as winter bears down on the months of January and February . . . and the gaze of the middle class turns away from the world of the dispossessed . . .

Sometimes I sense that some well off people feel that they are going to go broke trying to help those in need. Who knows? But how much can you take with, when you die? So don't worry, be happy, and enjoy the holiday season! Enjoy and share some of the good stuff with those in need! If need be, you know you can always write it off in taxes! If you can?

But I need some stuff, myself this season, especially food, and this impacts on self esteem and also peace of mind. It is a real no brainer, a basic need, and I feel that no one should go hungry, nor should anyone go without proper warm clothing, in the cold season, obviously. No one should be pushed aside, but like I've already mentioned, everyone should have a well kept roof and house, and a place to feel safe, warm and secure in. And not just shoved into a cold interior, and warehoused like in the United States, where the message is grim: "Get in there and shut the heck up!" Or: "Would you rather sleep with the shifting shadows under the freeway, and discover if you're still alive, or maybe you'll be just a cold, lifeless corpse in the morning?"

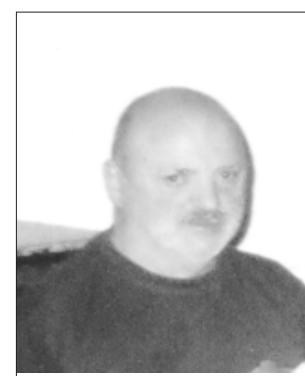
Well there are those who have it good. They eat a good nutritious diet and dress in the finery of the fashion season. Their home is safe and secure. So there are those who feel they have it all, and there are those who have nothing or next to nothing . . . but for how long? Can the affluent truly predict the future? Could some unfortunate happenstance befall them suddenly, God forbid? I realize that I am not alone in the day by day struggle and I do not plan to be alone this season. And

the way things are going with this present economy-- Holy Smokes! Intensive business activity, yet at once and the same time, this signals tons of economic growth, with a downward spiral of no jobs, massive unemployment, downsizing and outsourcing.

What an age we live in! No, nay, nyet, nein, I am not going to be alone in my poverty, heck no. So let's help each other more so now because why wait for some larger war to put us all in an economic depression, once the war's bills come due? So let's work together, rich, poor, or whatever . . . let's open our eyes to reality soon!

Straight From My Heart, Judy D.

Obituary: MURPHY, James Eric "Jackie"



59, Halifax, went home to the Lord at QEII Health Sciences Centre on August 24, 2006. James was the youngest son of the late John and Catherine (Sullivan) Murphy. He formerly worked at Victoria General

Hospital. Later, he volunteered at Northwood Manor and spent many days with the Share and Care Group at Bloomfield Centre in Halifax. He was a kind and gentle person. He is survived by his sister, Shirley Dollard, Canso; brothers Cecil (Eileen), Dartmouth; Donald (Olive), Ellershouse, and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by brother, Kenneth. Cremation has taken place. A memorial service took place at Donald K. Walker Funeral Directors, Dartmouth on Saturday August 26, Rev. Robert Floyd officiated. Private family internment in Gate of Heaven Cemetery. Donations may be made to Star of the Sea Building Fund, Canso, NS B0H 1H0. The folks at Street Feat wish to enhance the memory of him and wish to tell everyone that Jackie's good natured humour will be missed! Farewell, sweet friend.