

FREEMAN HOUSE
www.fswns.org
Child, Youth & Family Hub Coordination of Services
Youth Outreach 16+
Family Support
Men's Intervention & Health Promotion
Supervised Access & Exchange
Primary Health Care Access
Housing Support/Housing First

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April 16, 2018

Privy Council Office
Attn: Impact and Innovation Unit
Room 1000
85 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A3

Re: Support for Town of Bridgewater Smart Cities Challenge Grant Application

To the Smart Cities Challenge jury panel,

This is a letter confirming the full support and confidence - of Family Service of Western Nova Scotia (FSWNS) & Freeman House - in the Town of Bridgewater's collective capacity to address energy poverty by pursuing the Smart Cities Challenge grant.

Family Service of Western Nova Scotia, and Freeman House in Bridgewater, were created in 2014 by the Board of Alternatives Association in partnership with the Nova Scotia Department of Community Services. Alternatives Association had an extensive history in the Province and achieved international recognition in fifteen countries from 2003 forward for innovations in rural practice responding to men's violence against women and family violence. Freeman House is an innovative product of the collaborative learning we've achieved together in Bridgewater and Lunenburg County in the past three decades, about the importance of community capacity building linking *Violence Intervention* with coordinated *Prevention, Early Intervention* and *Health Promotion*.

Freeman House is about supporting every Youth and Family across diversities of unique experience, culture, and identities to be included in a safe and sustainable community, and to be contributors to a diverse and thriving region. Freeman House and local Community Hub coordinated support and services are intended to help *underserved* Youth, Adults and Families access the services they identify are needed to help prevent problems like rural isolation, exclusion, poverty and homelessness. By "underserved" we mean the many people who typically do not access existing community supports, due to reasons including: lack of community understanding, stigma, shame, exclusion, and past and present experiences of interpersonal and systems violence. All of our services funded by multiple levels of government – including a local Youth Outreach Program, Family Support Program, Men's Intervention, Supervised Access for children and non-custodial parents, Primary Health Care access, coordinated Community Hub access to local services spanning the Social Determinants of Health, and a federally funded #HousingFirst/Housing Support Program - are free of charge.

For far too long - as service providers, communities, and as a Province and a Nation - we have blamed underserved and lowest-waged individual people, families and communities for their lived experience of energy poverty. This blame has permitted us to historically place the sole burden for addressing energy poverty on these most marginalized members of our communities (e.g., “they can’t pay their electric bill because they are lazy”, “what are they doing - cranking the heat up?”, “they just need to learn how to budget properly...”). This widespread blame of the most marginalized among us serves to mystify the issue of energy poverty by mistakenly locating this problem as a personal deficit of the poor, rather than a structural deficit of a nation.

Every day at FSWNS we work with youth and families who know first-hand what it is like to be unfairly held accountable for the structural issue of energy poverty that we collectively choose not to address. We support the community members who are the most impacted *by* energy poverty and the most excluded and blamed *for* energy poverty. In this context of individualistic blame, much of our work involves immediate and short-term *support* and *intervention* (e.g., advocacy supporting the rights of the people we serve, working with multiple levels of government and community partners to provide subsidies mitigating the impact of energy poverty issues like power arrears - from living in uninsulated electrically heated rental units - and working with landlords to create more inclusive lowest waged housing...). We can provide support, subsidies, and we can attempt to mitigate the collective shaming and exclusion of these community members, but we cannot tackle the structural issue of energy poverty *prevention* at this individualistic level.

Through addressing energy poverty as a structural deficit, to be faced transparently and collaboratively across personal, social and systems levels, the Town of Bridgewater is demonstrating national leadership on one of the key issues we face as a community, province and nation. The Town has already been recognized nationally for collaborative leadership regarding local energy solutions, through winning the 2018 Globe Climate Leadership Award in the Small Municipal Trailblazer category (e.g., <http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1555539-how-bridgewater-reduced-energy-consumption-by-23-per-cent>). Family Service of Western Nova Scotia and Freeman House are well positioned to collaborate in this leadership, through linking this work with: the members of our communities most impacted by and blamed for energy poverty, as well as the prevention strategies of our provincial and national funders. For example, our HousingFirst/Housing Support Program is funded through the Homelessness Partnering Strategy of Employment and Social Development Canada. Our existing linkages with provincial and national prevention strategies will help us.

Tackling the structural problem of energy poverty together, in this one small Nova Scotian community, can provide a philosophical and practical template for addressing energy poverty across the country. By supporting a local philosophical/practical shift toward a structural analysis of and response to energy poverty and energy solutions, we can contribute to provincial and national prevention initiatives spanning the Social Determinants of Health. All of us at Family Service of Western Nova Scotia and Freeman House are so proud of the Town of Bridgewater for the leadership demonstrated here at home on the issue of energy poverty. Bridgewater is well positioned to translate the local winning of the Smart Cities Challenge grant into a project with local, provincial and national implications and possibilities.

Art Fisher



Executive Director,

Family Service of Western Nova Scotia and Freeman House