

BUDGET CONSULTATION

Days Inn, Stephenville

Prepared by
Bay St. George Status of Women Council
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Contact: Janice Kennedy, Executive Director
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February 27, 2015

RE: Budget Submission of the Bay St. George Status of Women Council

To: The Honourable Ross Wiseman, Minister of Finance and President of Treasury Board

The Bay St. George Status of Women Council has been a vital part of the Bay St. George area since 1985. Our mission is to promote peace, justice, and equality for women and their families through support, education, and advocacy. We are one of eight Status of Women Councils/Women Centres that provide women centred supports and services throughout this province. We practice a feminist-based approach in our community work. Through our experience in leading and managing projects within our local communities, we have created a positive impact for local women and their families.

In many communities, we are the “canary in the mine”, in that often we see first-hand the impact of fluctuations in the economy: lack of housing, lack of childcare, a rise in sex work, mental health and addiction, closures, poverty and family violence. We have also had to adapt effectively over the years because of cuts to core services such as social workers, employment counsellors and legal aid. It was noted in the NL Poverty Reduction Strategy Progress Report that in 2012-2013, we offered approximately 50 programs to over 5,000 women and girls across the province.

In the Bay St. George area, we are one of the few organizations available within the community that provide direct programs and services. We strive to empower women and girls and by extension their children, with supports in regards to housing, employment, mental health, food, furniture and clothing, transportation and childcare, violence prevention, life skills, education, advocacy and awareness. We also operate Karen's Place, a temporary affordable housing unit.

In 2013-2014, we had 1,195 contacts from women and girls, community/government agencies and educational institutions. Sixty-seven percent of these contacts were from women and girls in need of our services. We also housed six women at Karen's Place. We continue to see an increase in the needs of our community, particularly in the areas of violence, housing, mental health and addictions, and food security.

We have attached the global budget request that was submitted to Women's Policy Office and it outlines the necessity for additional funding to meet the needs of our communities. It is imperative that you know that additional funding cuts, on top of decreased core services compounded by a failing economy will have devastating outcomes for our organizations.

Further, it is vital that any critical analysis of further funding cuts utilize a gender lens. We ask you to consider our four key messages.

1. Women are disproportionately affected in bad economic times (lower paying jobs, lack of childcare, and the increase in domestic violence where jobs are lost). When this government clearly states that we are in challenging economic times, they should shore up funding to community based women's organizations, which provide the bulk of violence prevention and intervention work, as a mitigating factor, and allow them to continue to support the needs of their communities.
2. Continued cuts to women's led organizations are in themselves a pervasive form of violence against women. It is time that we recognize and redress the fact that diminished or no access to basic services because of chronic underfunding places women's lives - and by extension their children, and their communities -at risk.
3. The Status of Women Councils in NL receives only 127,000 per year from government. There has been no change in that funding since 2011 – We have been doing much more with less funding for years while experiencing dramatic cost increases in food, transportation, housing, salaries – leaving us scrambling to provide basic supports for women and their families.
4. Historical and continued funding cuts have forced us to respond to communities with band aid solutions, patch work support and never the time nor the resources to tackle the fundamental issues of gender inequality and justice, human rights and advocacy in this province.

As noted, in the 2014 Poverty Reduction Strategy Progress Report,

"Poverty and social exclusion have a negative impact on the province as a whole. A comprehensive and integrated approach is necessary in order to make connections between poverty and gender, education, housing, employment, health, social and financial supports and tax measures, as well as the complex link between women's

poverty and their increased vulnerability to violence. In partnership with the broader community, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador is committed to continue building this strategy.”

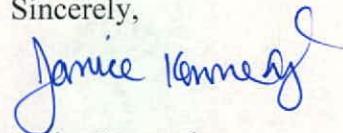
We hope that this commitment is fulfilled. Violence against women and our most vulnerable populations in Newfoundland and Labrador is an epidemic and a detriment to our communities' health, wellness, safety and economy. Violence against women remains the most prevalent form of violence in our province; meaning 1 in 2 of our province's girls and young women (our sisters and daughters) will experience some form physical and/or sexual violence by age 16. In addition to the prevalence of gender based violence, aboriginal communities, seniors, children, LGBTQ communities are 3 to 4 times more likely to be at risk of violence compared to the overall population. The epidemic of violence costs our healthcare and judicial systems millions each year. The cost of violence on the lives of victims and their loved ones is unmeasurable. A persons, employment, mental health, family, housing, children are all negatively impacted. The impact is normally long lasting and sometimes permanent.

As the work of our sisters and partners have demonstrated, and as national research continues to support, women's led and violence prevention organizations – working with communities, women and vulnerable populations – are the key mitigating factor in effectively supporting victims and preventing the social and economic costs of violence. The communities in Bay St. George have benefited from the Poverty Reduction Strategy through the funding of our Status of Women Council/Women's Centre and the Southwestern Coalition to End Violence to address the needs of women and children in our communities who experience poverty and violence on a daily basis.

By supporting women and their families in the Bay St. George area in these key ways, we strive to improve women's and children's life chances to ensure full participation in Newfoundland and Labrador and Canadian society more generally.

While we understand that the province is facing uncertain economic times and that all options must be examined, we respectfully ask that you reconsider any proposed budget cuts to the Status of Women Councils. We respectfully ask that you consult with us.

Sincerely,



Janice Kennedy
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The Bay St. George Status of Women Council
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February 2nd 2015

Attention: Honourable Judy Manning, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women.

Re: Status of Women Councils/Women's Centre of Newfoundland and Labrador
Provincial Budget Request.

Budget rationale

As the Provincial Status of Women Councils/Women's Centres, we are jointly requesting a funding increase to be graduated over the next three years. This increase will offset rising costs in rent, maintenance, food, transportation, programs, training and salaries – and address specific regional issues within our communities such as lack of housing, healthcare, daycare and an increase in family violence.

1. Year 1: Increase of \$15, 000 per council
2. Year 2: Increase of \$15, 000 per council
3. Year 3: Increase of \$42, 500 per council
4. Total funding increase: 200, 000 by April 2017

Throughout the province the Centres are experiencing a dramatic increase in the need for front line services along the spectrum of basic needs such as food to complex needs including mental health and addictions, which require a tremendous amount of specialized resources and system navigation.

Regionally, we are often one of only a few resources in our community where long wait lists, no public transportation, lack of doctors, social workers, and lawyers forces us to take on a multitude of social issues, fill service gaps and work outside of our expertise. This runs the risk of providing only band aid solutions and/or a reactive and crisis approach to real issues.

We have all increased our professional development of staff, collaborated with community partners, obtained grants, and fundraised to meet the needs in our community. We quite simply, need more resources to meet new growing need.

There is an immediate need to increase staff salaries in line with the cost of living increase and provide basic health benefits/RRSP contribution for all staff. This ensures staff (women employed by the Councils) are receiving a fair wage and assists with recruitment and retention of qualified staff.

Please consider that prior to 2012; we received a 5% increase.

If this had continued our current budget would be \$147,597

We are currently receiving \$127, 500

Issues of poverty, violence, housing, healthcare and daycare are all gendered issues which leave women in our province vulnerable and often unable to reach their full potential. The Status of Women Councils are deeply concerned about current status of women in our province and we ask for a commitment in funding to continue to deliver women centred programing, housing, and advocacy.

Lastly, The Status of Women Councils/centres provincially have a long standing and successful history of developing and delivering unique, women centred services and for advocating for gender equality and justice. There is no doubt that we are best suited to address these needs provincially and regionally we simple ask for adequate funding to continue.

Should you wish to discuss this provincial budget further, please do not hesitate to contact:

Jenny Wright, Executive Director
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Sincerely

Status of Women Councils/Centres of Newfoundland and Labrador