



Media Release

Rainy River DSSAB Housing the Homeless

Fort Frances, Ontario – 2020/04/07 – 10:00 The Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board (RRDSSAB) continues to work with our communities to address homelessness. The province has provided a mandate to the RRDSSAB to assist with the mitigation of homelessness through the Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative (CHPI). The CHPI Program has two program outcomes:

1. People who are homeless obtain and retain housing
2. People at risk of homelessness remain housed

We address homelessness in many ways, building additional housing units (eight-plex in Fort Frances cost \$1.6M of which approximately \$400,000 is direct municipal funding), individual support programs, food security, repairs to private homes to maintain people in their homes as examples. Our board recognizes that the key to solving homelessness is additional affordable housing; however securing funding for capital builds within our district is difficult, given the reality of municipal finances and the high cost of building in our district.

The RRDSSAB does not directly receive funds to own or operate a shelter. In many communities, DSSABs assist in supporting shelters, operated by incorporated or not for profit agencies, such as Salvation Army, Native Friendship Centres, YMCA or Faith-based organizations.

Through the CHPI program we receive approximately, \$460K annually. These monies are fully allocated throughout the year and support many programs and staff across the district. The RRDSSAB assists in the coordination of the Homelessness Committee, which is comprised of the following organizations, the RRDSSAB, Riverside Health Care, Northern Community Development Services, Victims Services, Northwest Community Legal Clinic, Kenora Rainy River Child & Family Services, Fort Frances Community Living, Salvation Army, Northwestern Health Unit, Fort Frances Jail, Canadian Mental Health Association, Metis Nation of Ontario and the United Native Friendship Centre as examples. The committee is co-chaired currently by the RRDSSAB Community Engagement Coordinator (Homelessness) and the homeless outreach worker of the United Native Friendship Centre. The co-chairs are elected from within the membership. The group discusses issues and presents suggestions for dealing with homelessness, including fund raising and awareness activities such as Out of the Cold. The DSSAB liaison and staff have also been instrumental in setting up a Situation table in Fort Frances that deals with specific individuals that are in crisis. This table includes many of the members of the Homelessness Committee as well as the OPP, School Boards and Tribal Health.

On March 23rd, the Province announced that \$200M in new funding would be made available through Consolidated Municipal Service Managers (CMSMs) and District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) to support municipalities, food banks, homeless shelters and individuals. Our allocation letter was received on Thursday April 2nd and indicates we will be receiving \$92,500. This funding is to provide supports until March 31st, 2021 for current COVID-19, a reoccurrence of COVID-19 or new strains in 2021.

On Friday April 3rd, Minister Rickford, MPP for the Kenora and Rainy River Districts, announced that the total funding allocated for the two districts was in excess of \$2 Million. By doing the math, we assume the Kenora District received ~\$1.9 Million to address issues in their district. The RRDSSAB has asked Minister Rickford and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing to explain the rationale in the funding distribution. To date, the only explanation given is that needs of the Kenora district are greater and that additional funding will be flowed to our District through a Federal program, "Reaching Home". We have received acknowledgement of "Reaching Home" funding in the amount of \$200K, \$100K in 2020/21 and \$100K in 2021/22 relative to an application by the RRDSSAB. This funding is specific to capital repairs on buildings, not for COVID-19 issues. While it is true the Federal Government has announced additional funding through this program, nothing has been distributed and the application process has not yet been established.

"I would like to thank the Province for the continued investment in homelessness and the funding provided to address COVID-19, however the level of funding falls well short of what is needed to support homeless individuals in our ten municipalities across our district," stated Debbie Ewald, RRDSSAB Board Chair, "We will continue to lobby directly to the Ministers for an explanation of the funding allocation and to seek appropriate funding to address the needs of our district."

The Rainy River DSSAB continues to work with municipalities and our Homelessness Committee to address the issues across the district. With the funding provided the RRDSSAB is moving forward with a plan to address concerns related to COVID-19 in the homeless population. The best solution, decided with the assistance of the Fort Frances Municipal Control Group, was to enter into an agreement with the Sleepy Owl Motel in Fort Frances. The RRDSSAB will be transitioning the homeless to the motel commencing April 15th, in conjunction with the closure of the Warming Centre on April 17th. All individuals are screened daily on admittance to the Warming Center. Should an individual screen positive, a process is in place to ensure they will be able to self isolate prior to April 15th. The individual would be expected to follow the instructions of the Northwestern Health Unit, which would include self-isolation for 14 days and testing. Individuals housed at the Sleepy Owl will only be required to remain in their rooms and under isolation if they have screened or been confirmed as COVID-19 positive. All individuals will be required to follow rules and processes established to protect the community while using the service. Any individual required to be in isolation who leaves the premises will be reported to the NWHU and the OPP. We will only house individuals that agree to stay in the motel as we do not have any authority to make them accept this as an option. All individuals housed at the Sleepy Owl will be provided with three meals per day.

Dan McCormick, CAO for the RRDSSAB stated, "Thanks to the ongoing work of the Homelessness Committee, the Fort Frances Municipal Control Group, especially Mayor June Caul, the Northwestern Health Unit, specifically Dave Coats and our RRDSAB Staff for their continued dedication and leadership in assisting to create a workable plan within the Provincial Funding to assist our homeless."

-30-

We are glad to provide you with information on newsworthy events. Please assist us in our continuing efforts to meet the needs of the citizens in our district. Thank you.

Dan McCormick, CAO
Rainy River DSSAB
Phone: 807-274-5349 ext. 238
Fax: 807-274-0678
Email: dan.mccormick@rrdssab.on.ca

Sandra Weir, Integrated Services Manager
Rainy River DSSAB
Phone: 807-274-5348 ext. 230
Fax: 807-274-0678
Email: sandraw@rrdssab.on.ca