



SHYFT Youth Services, PO Box 2000, Yarmouth, NS, B5A 1E5

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March 13, 2012 - **Press Release**

**Group providing housing to homeless youth in Western Nova Scotia are outraged by the indifference of the provincial government**

SHYFT Youth Services Society is perplexed and outraged that the provincial government is refusing to provide operational funding to house at-risk and homeless youth in the western region of the province.

“We have maintained a 24/7 transitional housing option for these youth over the last 14 months, providing housing to 34 youth and assisted another 20 youth with outreach services in that period”, states Jude Fulton co-chair of the society. “This has enabled us to stabilize their current housing crises, get the youth back or stay in school, keep them out of jail and hospitals while providing a supportive and safe home environment so the youth can move forward”.

“After a considerable amount of fundraising in the community we were able to open our doors in January 2011”, expressed Bernadette MacDonald, society co-chair. “We knew there was a huge problem with homeless youth in our community and by getting our facility opened and staffed we felt we could clearly prove the benefit for such a housing option. With the number of youth that have come forward, accessed the services, and have successfully transitioned to stable living conditions, we have clearly proven the model is effective for the youth and efficient for the tax payer.”

Once the monies were raised by the communities were depleted, the Department of Community Services (DCS) supported SHYFT by covering the operating deficit. Now DCS has told the SHYFT Society they will no longer fund the operation of the service for 24/7 after the end of March 2012.

“Many of these youth have had some involvement in the criminal justice system and instead of jail we have been able to provide a positive housing option to the courts. An option that is less expensive for the province and less terrifying for the youth with focus on rehabilitation. With referrals from therapists and psychiatrists these youth are not being admitted to the hospital. This speaks to the tremendous amount of money we are saving the tax payer” explained Ms. MacDonald.

Society Members say they are simply **perplexed and outraged** that the provincial government hasn't done a simple cost benefit analysis to say, in the best interest of the tax payer, as well as in

the best interest of the homeless youth, SHYFT Youth Services is essential and needs to be financially supported.

SHYFT is the only service that provides a youth centered housing model for at-risk and homeless youth, both female and males between 16-24 years, in this area of the province.

"The Department of Community Services (DCS) already funds these services to homeless youth in H.R.M. but fails to recognise that these same needs exist in rural Nova Scotia. It is time for our political leaders to address this blatant discrepancy and to support this opportunity which the SHYFT Youth Services provides", Society Members explained.

SHYFT Society has been informed that \$61,400. will be available from the Department of Community Services for the next fiscal year, as part of a provincial initiative. Knowing this isn't enough to operate the current service the Society has been working on other funding sources and is waiting to hear the status of their proposals. As referrals to the service comes from 4 major departments of the provincial government - Community Services, Justice, Health, and Education - the Society has asked the provincial government to cost share across these departments.

"The potential closure of SHYFT is the failure of all of us to provide a safe and supportive housing option to at risk and homeless youth", states Ms. MacDonald. "Our plea to the provincial government is, **enable SHYFT to stay open so we can provide the level of service we are currently offering, which we know and have shown is having a positive impact on these youth**".

Society Members are asking tax payers, elected representatives, and the civil servants who are directly responsible for these youth to ask themselves, "If it was your child who needed SHYFT Housing Services would you want anything less than what is being offered; a safe and supportive home environment?"

Press Contact

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