

May 15, 2009

Kirsten Walli, Board Secretary
Ontario Energy Board
P.O. Box 2319
2300 Yonge Street, Suite 2700
Toronto, Ontario M4P 1E4

Dear Ms Walli:

RE: **EB-2008-0150**

I would like to apply for membership on the LEAP - Financial Assistance Working Group. For fifteen years I have managed the Housing Resource Centre (HRC) in Peterborough, a not for profit, community-based housing help service and a program of Community Counselling & Resource Centre (CCRC). We serve hundreds of low income households per year from both the City of Peterborough and our County, a geographically large and diverse rural area.

We provide targeted financial assistance to low income clients for the purpose of addressing energy poverty. The HRC assists over 5,000 low-income households annually to find or retain housing and currently deliver over \$500,000 annually in emergency financial assistance to hundreds of lower income households.

Our organization previously participated in Share The Warmth. However, in 2004 we created a more locally responsive fund, the Fund for Utility Service Emergencies (FUSE) in partnership with Peterborough Utilities Services (PUS). Since then, more than \$40,000 annually is donated to the fund by the PUS and it's customers through an on-bill donation program. The HRC provides this fund to eligible, low-income customers of the utility who are at risk of disconnection or who have lost their services. FUSE is a very successful and *mutually beneficial* partnership, reducing bad debts to the utility, providing tax receipts to donors and preventing loss of service to low income people. The model has been replicated in a number of other communities in Ontario.

In addition to FUSE, we also administer the *Provincial Emergency Energy Fund, Winter Warmth (Enbridge and Hydro One)*, as well as the *Emergency Assistance Fund for Peterborough City and County*, funded by local donations. We are able to combine the energy programs with Rent Bank, Vacancy Listings, Housing Support & Information services. Together, these create very effective support for low income households who experience a housing crisis due to events such as job loss, injury at work, death of spouse etc., to avoid both the social and fiscal costs of homelessness.

For many years I have participated in local and provincial initiatives that improve housing affordability and energy assistance such as the local Affordable Housing Action Committee (AHAC) who created a research report in 2002: The Energy Assistance Plan for Low Income Households in Peterborough City and County. This project produced recommendations related to Emergency and Transition Assistance, Crisis Prevention and Consumer Protections. It is acknowledged as the first on this subject in Canada and was presented to municipal and provincial government and advocacy groups. In 2006, this same committee hosted a provincial conference on energy poverty issues: "Heat, Eat or Pay the Rent", co-sponsored by The Low Income Energy Network (LIEN).

My expertise in providing services to a smaller city and rural area is complemented by frequent consultation with *Gladys Wong* from Neighbourhood Information Post in Toronto, who is also nominated for this working group. I support and recommend her membership based on her unique expertise in coordinating the delivery of energy assistance to low income households in a large urban context. Gladys and I co-presented a workshop at the 2008 Housing Help Association of Ontario's (HHAO) conference on the delivery of the provincial Rent Bank in Ontario. Our organization also designed and delivered a workshop on Energy Poverty at this same conference.

I was sorry to be unable to attend the OEB consultations last fall on Low Income Energy due to a conflicting commitment presenting to the Ontario Municipal Social Services Association (OMSSA) Annual Conference in Toronto. This presentation focused on the role of community-based 'housing help' organizations in preventing homelessness by providing housing access, stabilization and energy related assistance. We were also very pleased to host a consumer education session '*The Energy Choice is Yours*' last October in Peterborough, with presenters from the OEB.

I further believe delivery of such assistance is greatly enhanced by professional client assessment and screening, and housing support and advocacy. Housing help organizations have knowledge and skill in Income Support Program regulations (Ontario Works, ODSP), the availability of other government and charitable assistance (e.g. Salvation Army) and the multiple sector that providing support to lower income people. These skills and referral base is critical to maximizing available financial assistance, avoiding duplication of services, and leverage all possible funds to fully resolve client arrears or restore services. As a member of the Steering Committee of the Housing Help Association of Ontario I am connected to organizations throughout the province with these core competencies.

If selected for the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group, I feel confident I could make a valuable contribution to the OEB's design and implementation of this important initiative. Thank you for considering my nomination. which is supported by the following organizations:

Community Counselling & Resource Centre
Peterborough Utilities Services
City of Peterborough
Neighbourhood Information Post (Toronto)
Affordable Housing Action Committee of Peterborough City and County
United Way of Peterborough and District
Peterborough Community Legal Centre

Yours truly,

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Cc: Casey Ready, Executive Director, CCRC

