
Neighbourhood Information Post

May 15, 2009

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

Dear Ms. Walli:

**Re: File Number--EB-2008-0150
Nomination of Gladys Wong to the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group**

As the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Information Post (NIP), which has been co-ordinating and delivering Winter Warmth services in Toronto since the program started in the 2003 winter season, I am writing this letter to applaud the Ontario Energy Board's efforts in assisting low-income energy consumers, and express my interest in participating in the LEAP Financial Assistance Implementation Working Group.

Neighbourhood Information Post is a non-profit community resource centre in Toronto Downtown. Its current services include: Self-Help Drop-In (including assistance in helping people fill out forms, free use of phone and computers); community education; mediated information and referral services; case management and counselling; advocacy and mediation; settlement services; interpretation and translation; mail and message services for the homeless; housing support services; the Toronto Rent Bank Program; energy assistance programs (Winter Warmth and Emergency Energy Fund); Housing Trusteeship services and Annual Income Tax Clinic.

The population groups that NIP serves include: low-income individuals and families facing barriers in accessing information and services; individuals and families facing housing issues or evictions; newcomers to Canada; individuals with chronic mental health or physical health issues/addictions issues; socially isolated elderly; the under-housed/homeless individuals and families. We served 15,000 individuals last year.

As an original partner, NIP launched the pilot phase of the Winter Warmth Program in Toronto in the winter of 2003. Assuming the duo role of both the Central Administration site and an intake centre in Toronto for the past six years, NIP has played a major role in the creation, design and development of the Winter Warmth Program. In addition to Winter Warmth, in 2006, NIP and its network agencies in Toronto became an official partner with the City of Toronto's Social Services, and began delivering the City's Emergency Energy Fund to some of their applicants. In the current winter season, NIP has processed 788 energy assistance applications thus far. NIP is also able to incorporate the emergency assistance programs with our successful Rent Bank

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MEMBER OF FEDERATION OF COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRES IN TORONTO AREA

services (provision of interest-free loans to help low-income households cover rental arrears). We are therefore able to provide effective one-stop access to low-income households who face the risk of losing housing and heating when they experience sudden crises. Last year, NIP delivered close to \$2 million of Rent Bank loans and energy assistance to 1,658 low-income households in Toronto.

Highlights of NIP's experience and contributions to energy assistance programs are listed below:

- As the lead/central co-ordinating agency in Toronto for the Rent Bank/energy assistance programs, NIP has successfully built a strong network of 8 intake agencies (which consists of Albion Neighbourhood Services; COSTI North York Housing Help; East York East Toronto Housing Help; Flemingdon Neighbourhood Services; Scarborough Housing Help Centre; Woodgreen Community Services and York Community Services) that are located in various parts of Toronto to effectively deliver financial assistance to low-income households who require housing and/or energy assistance.
- NIP has put in place a number of procedural guidelines that have greatly enhanced the efficiency in processing Winter Warmth applications. We have shared them with our provincial counterparts through the provincial training sessions that we prepared and delivered (through teleconference) for all Winter Warmth sites in Ontario. We have also been recommended by United Way of Greater Toronto to provide ongoing telephone support to other Winter Warmth sites, and assist them in resolving any issues or problems that they may encounter in relation to the day-to-day operation of the Winter Warmth Program. NIP's Winter Warmth staff and myself have participated in the Winter Warmth Steering Committee meetings on a regular basis and provided utilities providers with recommendations on program operational issues, and assistance in identifying emerging community needs and trends.
- NIP has designed, developed and maintained a sophisticated web-based computer software that enables NIP, as the central co-ordinating agency in Toronto to review and verify all energy assistance program applications, and their supporting documents; and approve Winter Warmth grants through the Internet. The web-based program also maintains the clients' database and compiles relevant statistics for the Winter Warmth Program in Toronto.
- NIP has three years of experience in assembling provincial semi-monthly and year-end financial reports for utilities providers. We currently compile provincial year-end reports for Enbridge Distribution Inc., Toronto Hydro, Union Gas, Enersource, Hydro One, Hydro Ottawa and PowerStream. In the process of collecting data from various Winter Warmth sites in the province, we have established strong working relationships with both staff of the service-delivery sites as well as staff from utilities companies province-wide.
- NIP has a solid track record of successfully stewarding financial programs. NIP has been the lead agency of the Toronto Rent Bank Program (funded by the City of Toronto and the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing) since 1998. In the last ten years, NIP has processed over \$9 million of Rent Bank loans and collected over \$4 million of repayment. On average, NIP collects approximately \$70,000 of repayment from our Rent Bank clients on a monthly basis and delivers \$1.7 millions of Rent Bank loans annually. In April 2009, the City of Toronto has provided NIP with an additional \$500,000 to create a new Rent Bank fund for low-income households in need of assistance with rent deposits. NIP has always been able to produce detailed and clear updated financial reports in a timely fashion on the funds that we manage.

- NIP has participated in energy assistance public education and advocacy in Toronto.

If selected to be a member of the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group, I will be bringing forth the collective ideas and suggestions of the Housing Help Centres in Toronto, which are also the current Rent Bank/energy assistance delivery agencies. I believe that the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group would be able to benefit from my agency's extensive experience in developing, co-ordinating and delivering energy assistance programs, providing training and ongoing support for other Winter Warmth sites in the province, and collaborating with other Winter Warmth sites in terms of compiling provincial semi-monthly and annual statistical reports for utilities providers. At the same time, my own familiarity with government and community resources, my experience in working with low-income energy consumers, my understanding of the needs and issues faced by social service agencies and the financial and human resources required to operate energy assistance programs, as well as my knowledge of stewarding financial assistance programs will enable me to help the Working Group ensure that LEAP will address the needs of the community in an effective and efficient manner, and develop productive relationships with community partners.

I also support and recommend the nomination of Rosemary O'Donnell, Manager of the Housing Resource Centre in Peterborough to the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group. She has years of experience in energy assistance program development, research, public education and advocacy both in the Peterborough area and in the province. She and I will be able to represent the urban, sub-urban and rural contexts and clients in Ontario.

My nomination to the LEAP Implementation Working Group is supported by:

- City of Toronto—Shelter, Housing and Support (contacts: Katherine Chislett; Jan Bangle; Gwynne Cheung)—please refer to attached letter of support
- Enbridge Gas Distribution Inc. (contact: Manny Sousa)
- Toronto Hydro (contact: Jennifer Reynolds)
- Albion Neighbourhood Services (contact: John Bagnall)
- Centre for Equality Rights in Accommodation (contact: Theresa Thornton)
- COSTI North York Housing Help (contact: Carolina Gajardo)
- East York East Toronto Housing Help (contact: Elisabeth Ziegler)
- Flemingdon Neighbourhood Services (contact: Alaka Brahma)
- Scarborough Housing Help Services (contact: Gopi Krishna)
- Woodgreen Community Services (contact: Harvey Stein)
- York Community Services (contact: Kam Lau)
- Peterborough Housing Resource Centre (contact: Rosemary O'Donnell)

I do not wish to request cost eligibility for my participation.

I am very excited about the LEAP initiative and look forward to working with OEB to develop and deliver this worthwhile and important province-wide initiative. Thank you again for taking a lead in assisting low-income energy consumers in relation to their use of natural gas and electricity, and considering my nomination. I can be reached at 416-924-2543 (ext. 224). My email address is gladys@nipost.org and my fax number is 416-924-4748. My contact address can be found on the letterhead.

Yours truly,


Gladys Wong
Executive Director



Shelter, Support & Housing Administration
Phil Brown, General Manager

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Katherine Chislett
Director

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May 19, 2009

Kirsten Walli
Board Secretary
Ontario Energy Board
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2300 Yonge St.
Toronto ON M4P 1E4

RE: FILE NUMBER EB-2008-0150

Dear Ms. Walli:

I am writing to support Ms. Gladys Wong's nomination for a position on the Low Income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) Financial Assistance Working Group. I believe that her agency and its partners will be able to play a key role in the service delivery of the new energy assistance program.

Ms. Wong is the Executive Director of Neighbourhood Information Post (NIP), a non-profit community resource centre in Toronto that provides a variety of services to low-income individuals and families, including community education, information and referral services, newcomers settlement services, housing support services, Rent Bank Program and Energy Assistance Programs (Winter Warmth Fund and Emergency Energy Fund).

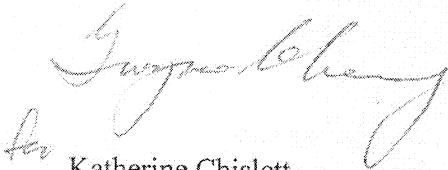
Under the leadership of Ms. Wong, NIP is a vital partner in helping the City's Shelter, Support and Housing Administration Division to administer the Rent Bank program which assists low-income individuals and families in preventing evictions because of rent arrears. Ms. Wong was a pioneer in designing the Toronto Rent Bank program in 1998 and establishing the housing help network to increase access to the program as it developed. This model, with one central administration agency (NIP) that manages the loan funds and approves the applications while providing convenience access points across the City for residents to apply for the rent bank loans, has become a best practice model for many other rent bank programs. With the additional provincial funding in 2004, the Toronto Rent Bank has successfully helped almost 4,000 individuals and families to avoid losing their rental homes over the past 4 years.

In addition, NIP implemented the Winter Warmth Fund (WWF) in Toronto since its inception in December 2003. The Fund helps eligible low-income households that have utility arrears to pay their energy bills and is funded by Toronto Hydro, Enbridge Gas and Union Gas. NIP has played a key role in the creation, design and development of the program. In addition to the Winter Warmth Fund, in 2006, NIP and its network agencies became an official partner with the City of Toronto's Employment

and Social Services Division, and began delivering the Emergency Energy Fund for some of their applicants.

Through her work with the rent bank network and energy assistance programs, Ms. Wong has developed excellent relationships with agencies serving low-income residents and with utility providers. She has extensive experience in addressing housing and energy issues and knowledge of the role of the Ontario Energy Board in regulating electricity and natural gas utilities. She would like to be a part of the LEAP Financial Assistance Working Group to represent the interests of all the Rent Bank and Housing Help Centres and play a role in the service delivery of the new LEAP energy assistance program in Toronto. I believe Ms. Wong's background in the Rent Bank and energy assistance programs, and her partnership experience with the City of Toronto, will serve the OEB and the LEAP Financial Assistance Work Group well. I strongly support Ms. Wong's nomination to participate on this Work Group, and I am confident that her agency and its Rent Bank partners can make a meaningful contribution to the future Low Income Energy Assistance Program.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Katherine Chislett".

Katherine Chislett
Director, Housing & Homelessness Supports and Initiatives