

# ANTIGONISH HEAT POVERTY REPORT 2008

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A REPORT ON THE ANTIGONISH HEAT POVERTY INITIATIVE



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2008-09, a community-based Heat Poverty Initiative was launched in Antigonish. The purpose of the Initiative is to identify and implement ways to support low-income individuals and families with heating and winterization costs. This Report provides an in-depth review of the first year of operations and recommendations for future continuity of the Initiative.

The level of concern raised by community members for Heat Poverty in Antigonish has been steadily rising over the past number of years. This growing concern prompted the convening of a community meeting in October 2008 to discuss Heat Poverty and identify solutions. Over 120 people attended the meeting and as a result the Heat poverty Initiative was launched in November 2008 to address three areas: establishment of a fuel fund, home winterization and Heat Poverty education. This initiative was operated by volunteers from the community as well as representatives from the private, not-for-profit and public sectors.

1. The Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund (AEFF) was established through the contributions of individuals, businesses and local municipalities. The Committee raised C\$23,700 for the 2008-09 Winter Season. The funds were used to pay for electricity and fuel use for low-income individuals and households in Antigonish that demonstrated an emergency need during the Winter Season. The Committee established criteria and developed an application process for the AEFF. Applications were accepted and evaluated on an on-going basis between January and April 2009. Out of a total of 122 received applications, 75 applications were approved for a total amount of C\$22,500.
2. The Antigonish Home Winterization Program was developed to provide materials and volunteer support to air-seal windows for households that fall in the low-income threshold. The sealing of windows helps increase heat efficiency by decreasing heat loss. The program helped lower household expenses related to energy as well as realize savings associated with sealing of windows. The Program's goal in 2008/09 was to help 20 homes (as a pilot project) based on need and the emergency nature of the request. The program was implemented successfully with funding of less than C\$1,000 and volunteer support.
3. The purpose of Heat Poverty Education was to raise awareness in the community about the Heat Poverty Initiative as well as about government programs available to help people conserve heat; especially those living on low-incomes. This was accomplished through the development of materials such as fact sheets on Heat Poverty, Heating Homes efficiently and promotion through educational workshops.

Overall, the 2008 Heat Poverty Initiative was as success. With 96 low-income households receiving support in the amount of \$23,500 in 2008 and with over 122 applications, there is clearly a need in Antigonish for the Heat Poverty Initiative to continue in 2009.

## INTRODUCTION

While Poverty exists in many forms, one of the prominent social challenges of this century is Heat Poverty. Heat Poverty is defined as the inability of individuals and families to adequately meet their heating needs during the winter season. Many individuals and families are left to choose between heating their homes and putting food on their table – both basic necessities that people cannot live without. Heat Poverty is increasingly becoming a major concern for communities across Canada. The prime reasons for this concern are:

- Increasing costs of fuels (electricity, oil and wood)
- Rising food prices often leaving a challenging choice between “heat versus eat”
- The rise in the number of low-income individuals and families

While governments are tackling a host of social issues related to health and poverty, there is a lack of adequate programs to address Heat Poverty, particularly for those individuals and families that fall in the low-income thresholds. As a result, communities are beginning to consider the matter of Heat Poverty directly at a local-level and identifying ways to tackle the issue. 2007 was one of the most difficult years due to skyrocketing fuel prices where the price of a barrel of crude oil increased from \$80 to \$148 over a six-month period and prompted hikes in rates by fuel providers. Similarly, the cost of coal went up significantly and prompted electricity hikes. While these high prices were not sustainable in the short-term and eventually came down, the rates paid by consumers to heat their homes have not declined. In addition, the world has seen a new challenge emerge in the wake of these extraordinary fuel prices and has prompted a re-think of how we use one of our most precious finite resources – fossil fuels. Both, Economists and Environmentalists predict that the price of a barrel of crude oil could again rise to the highs seen in 2007 and possibly surpass those levels to see a barrel of crude costing above \$200.

In Antigonish, the level of concern by community members for Heat Poverty has been steadily rising over the past number of years. The growing concern prompted local organizations in Antigonish to convene a community meeting in October 2008 to discuss Heat Poverty and identify solutions, both for the short and longer terms. Over 120 people attended the meeting. The Community meeting helped in establishing the “Antigonish Heat Poverty Initiative” which was launched in November 2008. Three volunteer working groups were formed to address Heat Poverty with specific mandates:

- Fuel Fund Group: establish a Fuel Fund for Antigonish
- Home Winterization Group: develop Home Winterization packages
- Heat Poverty Education Group: develop educational material and communication

This Report provides an analysis on the successes and challenges in the first year of the Antigonish Heat Poverty Initiative and recommendations for the future. It may also prove to be a useful model for other communities seeking to address the challenge of Heat Poverty.

## **ANTIGONISH EMERGENCY FUEL FUND (AEFF)**

The purpose of AEFF is to offer limited, emergency financial support to low income individuals and households that are unable to pay the full cost of heating their homes during the winter season. Through the AEFF, individuals and families may apply for help with their heating costs (oil, electricity and wood). A volunteer AEFF Committee made up of community representatives and public officials was set up in November 2008 to oversee the development and operation of the AEFF. The AEFF was launched on January 5th, 2009. Due to the late start of the AEFF into the winter season, the Committee identified that applications for the 2008 winter season would be accepted between January 5, 2009 and April 15, 2009. During the six-month period between November 2008 and April 2009, the Committee achieved the following:

- Developed a Terms of Reference for the Committee
- Created the AEFF Policy and Application Procedure
- Developed communication strategy and materials
- Raised funds to support the Heat Poverty Initiative
- Launched the initiative
- Met regularly to assess the AEFF operation

### **AEFF Operations**

The following application process and funding eligibility criteria were applied by the AEFF Committee:

1. Applicants to the fuel fund were required to submit an application form. The Committee identified in the AEFF Policy an application deadline date of April 15, 2009. Applications for the fund were disbursed beginning December 20, 2008. However, the review process started on January 5, 2009.
2. Paper copies of application forms and the Policy were made available for pick up at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre, Municipality of the Town of Antigonish, Municipality of the County of Antigonish, Lions Club, Kinsmen and various other locations in Antigonish. Electronic copies were also made available on municipal websites as well as the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre website.
3. The AEFF Committee designated two committee members to review and approve applications. All applicants were required to provide their full name, address, statement of income for 2007, and the number of people residing in their home. Applications were reviewed from Monday to Friday excluding holidays and in most cases contact was made within 48 hours of receipt. The longest time taken for assessment of applications was one week.

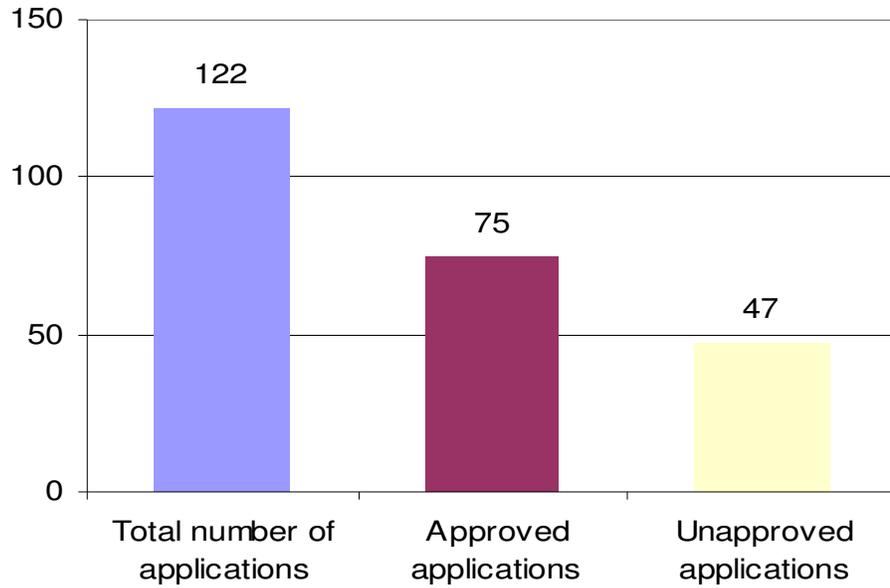
4. Applicants were eligible to apply only once during the heating season. Only one application per household was considered. All information in the applications was kept strictly confidential and was used only for determining eligibility and in the case of approval, providing the fuel. The names of the individuals designated to review the applications were not made public.
5. Eligibility was determined based on need and the emergency nature of the request. Monthly household income level guidelines established for eligibility were based on the following annual thresholds:
  - a. Single Adult with children – maximum household income \$40,000
  - b. Low Income family – maximum household income \$40,000
  - c. Disabled individual – maximum household income \$25,000
  - d. Senior individual – maximum household income \$25,000
6. All applications were assessed and approved prior to any release or commitment to release of funds. While emergency fuel assistance was provided according to need, a limit of \$300 per application was established as the goal was to provide help to as many eligible households as possible.
7. Business relationships were established with Fuel Service Providers and payments were made directly to the providers delivering the fuel to the household. There were no direct payments made to fuel fund recipients. Eligible fuel types included oil, electricity and fire-wood. Assistance was not provided through the fuel fund for other costs incurred such as costs associated with reconnecting power, priming furnaces and fixing frozen pipes.
8. The Fuel Fund monies were managed by the Antigonish Regional Development Authority (ARDA). The committee members charged with reviewing and approving the applications notified ARDA of approvals and requested a payment be made to the appropriate fuel provider. In most cases, this was achieved within 24 hours of the request.

Here are the highlights of the AEFF operation for the 2008 winter season:

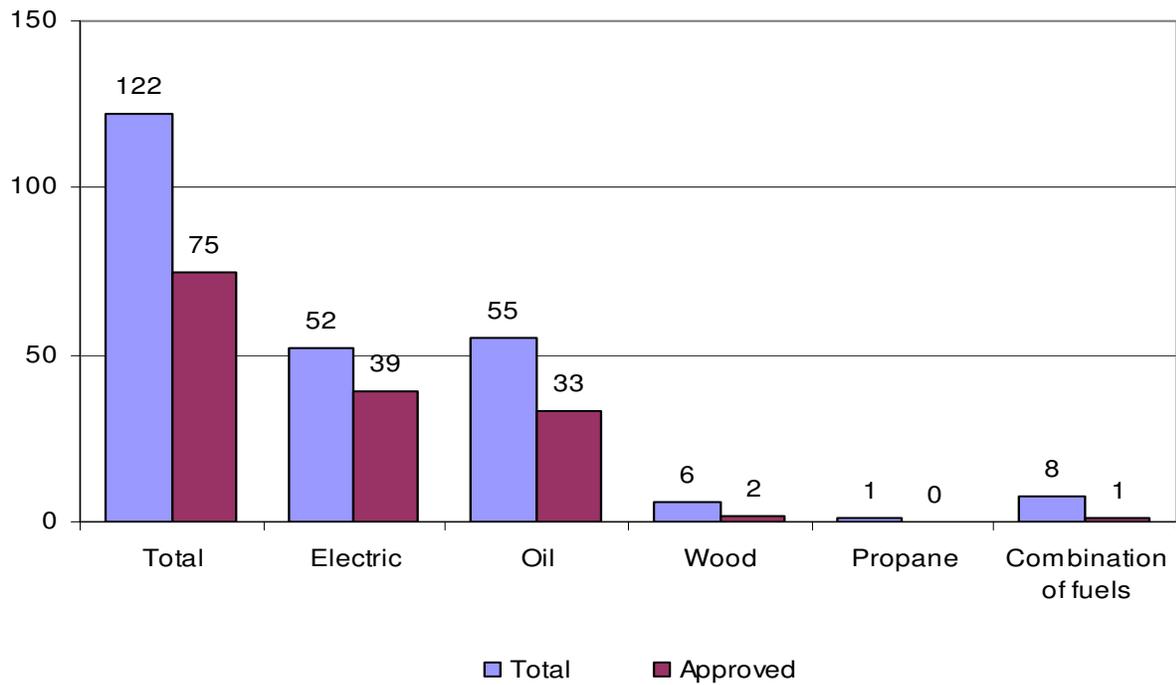
- \$23,700 was raised through donor support and \$23,500 was used.
- Average support in the amount of \$299 was provided for approved applications.
- 75 applications were accepted out of a total of 122 that were received.
- Out of the accepted applications, 33 were for Oil, 2 for Wood, 39 for Electricity and 1 for combined Oil and Wood.
- Out of the 75 applications accepted, 26 were in the jurisdiction of the Town boundary and 49 were within the County.
- An estimated amount of 125 volunteer hours were contributed by the Committee:
  - Development of the AEFF Concept, Terms, Committee: 20 hours
  - Developing policy and application process: 5 hours
  - Reviewing, approving and acting on applications: 65 hours
  - Committee meetings to assess operation on a on-going basis: 25 hours
  - Fundraising and communication: 20 hours

## AEFF 2008 Winter Statistical Data

### Number of Applications

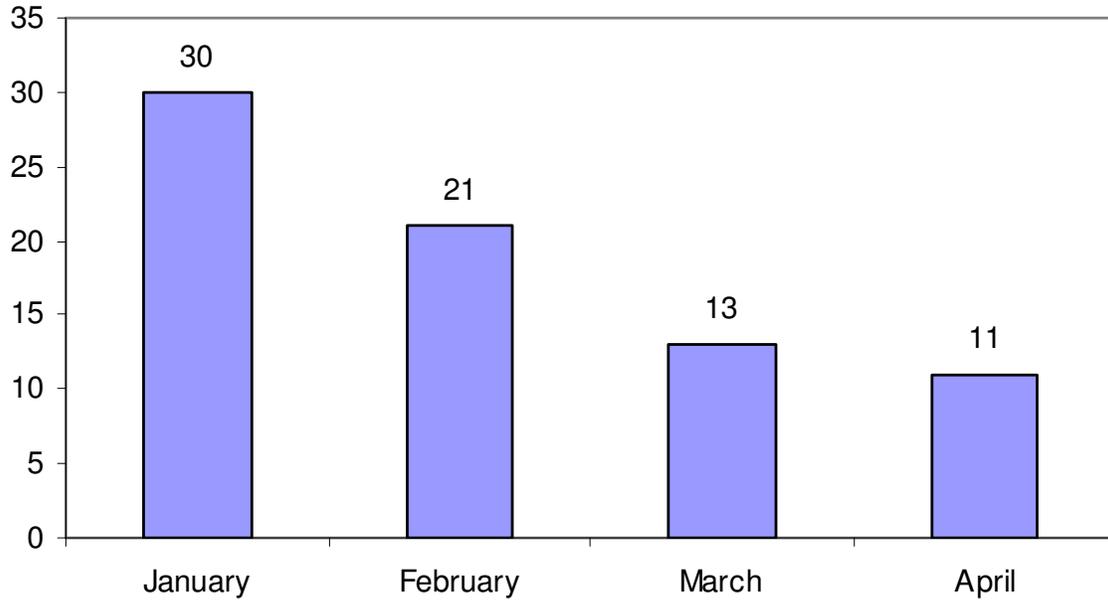


### Applications by Fuel Type

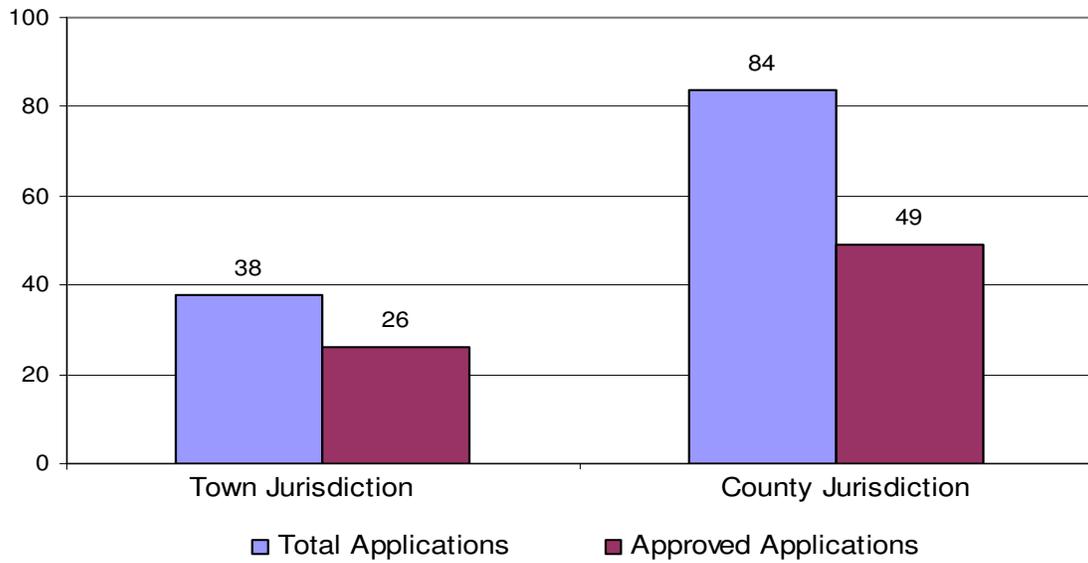


## AEFF 2008 Winter Statistical Data

### Monthly breakdown of Approved Applications

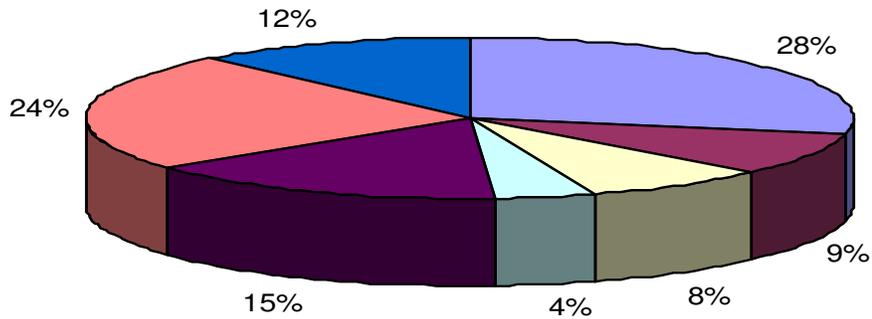


### Residency of Applications



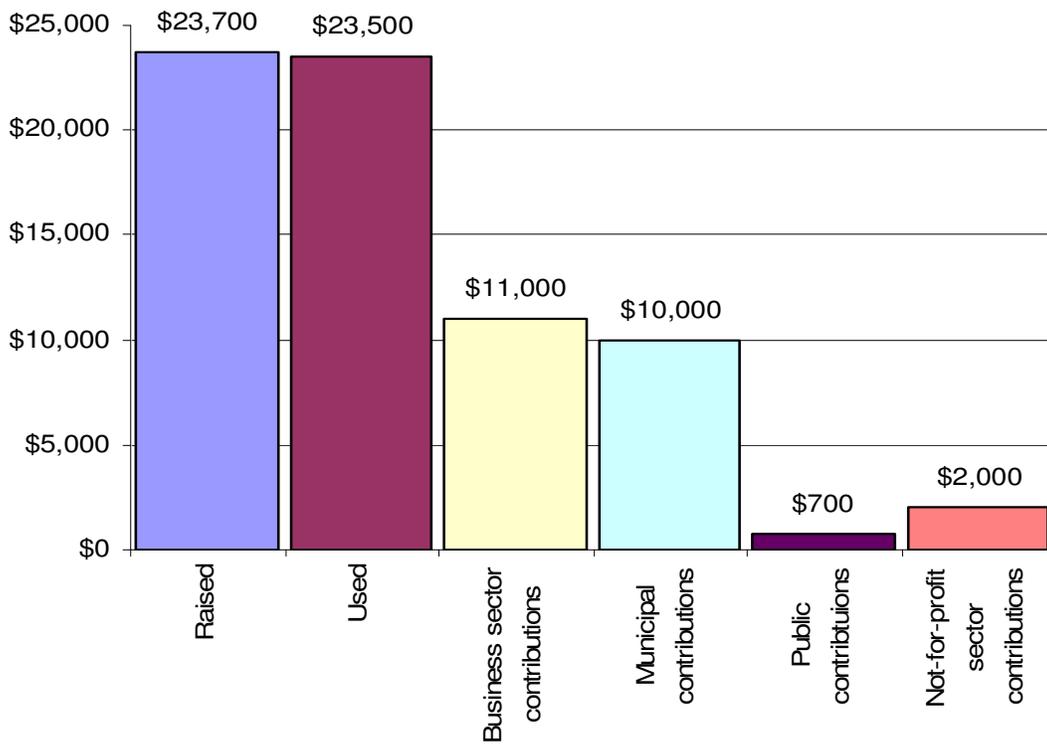
## AEFF 2008 Winter Statistical Data

### Household data



- Households with children
- Households with non-elderly singles (age 54 and under)
- Households with elderly singles (age 55 and over)
- Households with elderly couples (age 55 and over)
- Households paying \$400 or less for housing (rent, mortgage, lot rent)
- Households paying between \$401 and \$600 for housing
- Households paying more than \$601 for housing

### Fuel Fund Financial Data



## AEFF Conclusion and Recommendations

The AEFF Committee developed a list of questions in reviewing the program:

1. Does the AEFF Operation of Winter 2008 demonstrate the need in Antigonish?

Data shows that the Fund was able to assist 75 households stay warm during the winter of 2008. Data also demonstrates that there is a high demand based on the large number of applications (122) received. A financial analysis showed that all funds raised have been expended and that there is additional need.

2. What other programs provide emergency assistance of this nature?

A few local Charity organizations provide limited emergency assistance but there are no government programs current available that can match this type of program. What was provided in emergency assistance in the past was based on an ad-hoc approach.

3. What were the challenges with program delivery and how can they be improved if the program continues? Can the operation be sustainable as volunteer-based?

The main challenge is the amount of strain put on the volunteer committee. 135 volunteer hours went into the initiative and this is considering that reviewers had a high-level of expertise. A secondary challenge is to determine the appropriate centre as hub for all the activity for the initiative. Since it was first year of the program, it is expected that in the future it will become more efficient. Consideration should be given in the future to compensate the hours of individuals assessing applications. Committee members agreed that the need by far exceeds any one organization's ability to support Heat Poverty and that the AEFF model allows organizations to work collectively.

4. What is the estimated amount of funds needed for 2009, the feasibility of raising funds, who will do this and where should the committee seek these funds?

Based on the number of applications received for the 2008, \$53,000 will be needed during the winter of 2009 for emergency fuel assistance in Antigonish to meet the majority of the demand. It is recommended that the Funds be raised from local municipalities, Provincial and Federal Governments, local businesses and individuals willing to support the Heat Poverty Initiative.

5. Will some or all of the current volunteer committee consider taking the leadership for the Fuel Fund next year?

Several members that were on the Committee in 2008 have indicated that they are willing to be involved in the Heat Poverty Initiative in 2009.

## **ANTIGONISH HOME WINTERIZATION PROGRAM**

The Antigonish Home Winterization Program was created in 2008 to provide materials and volunteer support to air-seal windows for households that fall in the low-income threshold. The sealing of windows helps increase heat efficiency by decreasing heat loss and therefore helps households by saving the additional costs due to heat-loss as well as the costs associated to seal the windows. The Home Winterization Program's goal in 2008 was to help 20 homes as a pilot project based on need and the emergency nature of the request.

### **Home Winterization Operations**

As part of the overall Antigonish Heat poverty Initiative, a volunteer-run Home Winterization Group was formed with representation from various community individuals and members from private, public and not-for-profit sector. The Group identified the following needs for the program to be successful:

- Logistics (identifying homes in need)
- Supplies and Procurement (Home Winterization Kit)
- Costs and Funding Sources
- Expertise and Delivery of the Program (through training, volunteer-driven)

#### Logistics

The Winterization Group engaged with Department of Community Services to identify households in need. The Department of Community Services mailed letters to these households to gauge interest in the Home Winterization Program. 21 homes were subsequently identified as a pilot group to receive support from the program.

#### Supplies

The Home Winterization Group created 21 Winterization Kits. Each Kit contained plastic and double-sided tape for 10 windows, 5 tubes of latex caulking, caulking gun and paper towel. The materials were purchased from a local home building supplier, Central Supplies, with a significant discount (approximately 30-50% or at cost).

#### Cost and Funding Sources

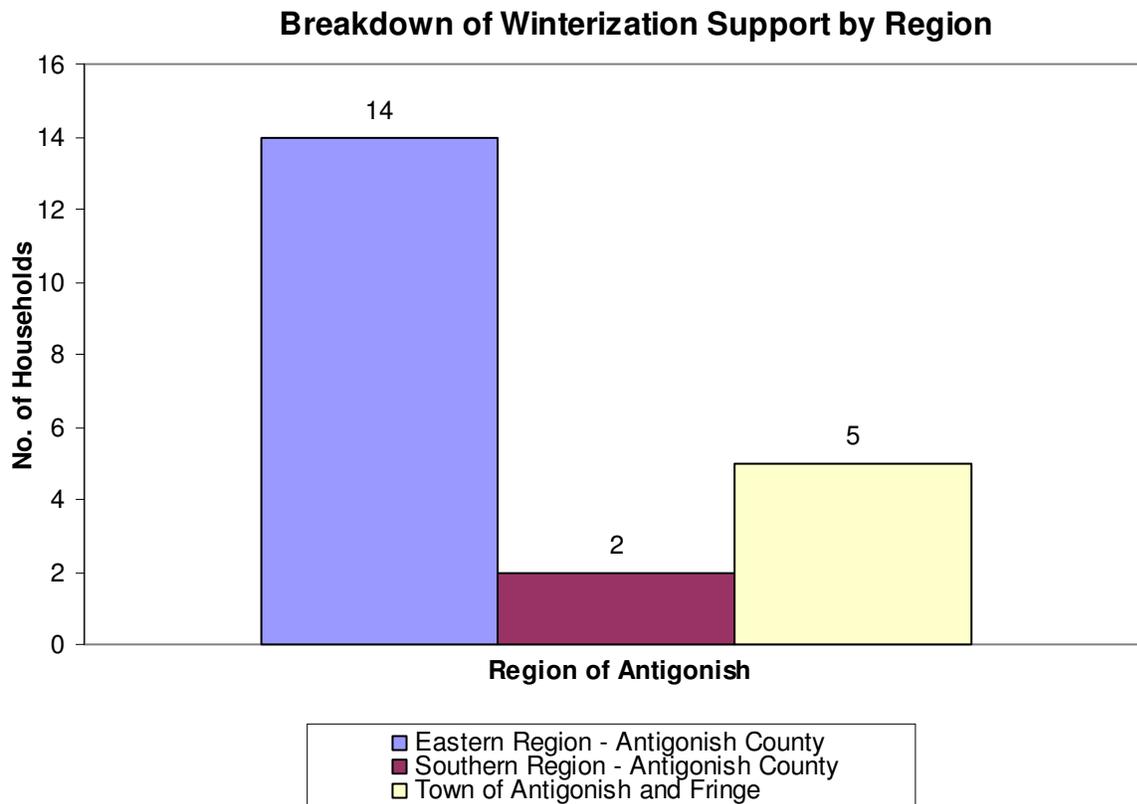
The total cost for supplies was \$782.90 excluding donations of paper towels and one box of plastic wrap for each Kit. The cost of the supplies was picked up through the funds raised for the Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund.

## Expertise and Delivery of the Program

Several members of the Home Winterization Group have expertise in air-sealing windows and therefore training was provided by these members to the rest of the group. The following is the breakdown of how the Kits were used to support the needs of 21 homes for Home Winterization:

- Kits along with volunteer labour and installation : 13 homes
- Do-it-yourself Kits delivered to homes: 2 homes
- Do-it-yourself Kits picked up from Women’s Centre: 5 homes
- Do-it-yourself partial Kit (package of plastic wrap for 5 windows): 1 home

The total number of volunteer hours spent on the Home Winterization program for winter 2008 is estimated at 170 hours. This estimation takes into account the planning time, procurement of supplies, preparation of kits, coordination, information sessions, and volunteer labour in homes. It can therefore be concluded that the average time spent per home is 8 hours.



## Home Winterization Conclusion and Recommendations

The Home Winterization recommends that the program continue in 2009 as Home Winterization provides a medium-term strategy in dealing with local Heat Poverty. This program helps lower the cost of heating homes through raising heat efficiency in homes.

### 1. What worked well:

- Dividing up the homes into groups of 5 to organize volunteers and visits.
- Contacting charity groups to support the program.

### 2. What didn't work well:

- Miscommunication between groups causing confusion.
- Require upfront money for purchase and time to put in the order.
- Did not have capacity to do selection or recruitment, got support from Women's Centre.

### 3. Suggestions for next year:

- Identify budget and funds for the Home Winterization Program upfront.
- Develop a fundraising strategy (as part of the overall Heat Poverty Initiative).
- Order and purchase materials in advance once funds are secured.
- Develop an upfront estimate of the time commitment of volunteers.
- Prepare Terms of Reference for the Home Winterization Committee.
- Work with local organizations on a process for selecting homes for Winterization.
- Work with volunteer groups to deliver materials and labour to homes.
- Support a steering committee to oversee projects and internal and external communication.

## ANTIGONISH HEAT POVERTY EDUCATION

The role of the Heat Poverty Education Committee was to raise awareness in the community about the Heat Poverty Initiative and the Emergency Fuel Fund as well as raise awareness about government programs available to help people conserve heat and to help people living on low-incomes pay for their heat. To this end, the Education Committee undertook the following activities.

- The Committee prepared and distributed a fact sheet on heat poverty, entitled “Heating Our Homes – Not All of Us Can”. The fact sheet provided basic information about heat poverty, the situation facing people living on low-incomes in Antigonish and Guysborough Counties, and information about how to access government rebate programs.
- The Committee prepared a “Help with Heat Programs” information sheet outlining provincial and municipal government programs and the Good Neighbour Energy Fund emergency program offered through the Salvation Army.
- The Committee volunteers were trained on assisting individuals with completing the various Heat Poverty forms and provided assistance to fill forms at a series of public health flu clinics.
- The Committee organized a public education event, *Welcoming Warmth*, where together with members of the Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund Committee and the Winterization Committee, people were provided with information about ways they could minimize their heating costs and could access government and community programs. A complimentary breakfast was provided and many people who attended picked up rebate forms or filled them on site with the assistance of volunteers.
- Various organizers of the Antigonish Heat Poverty Initiative conducted several media interviews with local and provincial media to inform the larger public about the Heat Poverty Initiative.

## Heat Poverty Education Conclusion and Recommendations

1. As a group, there is a need to clarify the role of the Education Committee and to clearly link it with the other committees.
2. Develop a strategy for getting information out to communities including presentations for in town and outlying communities (rural).
3. Continue to assist people with filling out forms at Public Health Flu clinics.
4. Link more effectively with Emergency Fuel Fund and Winterizing Committees.
5. Organize education – Welcoming Warmth Day and winterizing plans in the Fall.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

### **Heat Poverty Initiative Volunteers**

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Dana Mason, Public Health, GAHSA  
Irene MacLeod, Community Volunteer

AND

Community members and organizations that attended the various meetings, sessions and provided additional support

### **2008 Donors for the Antigonish Heat Poverty Initiative**

Bergengren Credit Union  
Municipality of the County of Antigonish  
Municipality of the Town of Antigonish  
MacLeod Group  
Lions Club  
R&B Gel Nails and Hair Salon  
Community Individuals

### **Individuals that made a contribution to this report**

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