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## PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### Fort Frances Homelessness Committee

Among social service providers and medical professionals, homelessness has long been a reality in Fort Frances and the surrounding area. For many residents of the Rainy River District, homelessness happens in large urban areas, but not here. The Fort Frances Homelessness Committee has spent the past several years undertaking projects to bring awareness and understanding to the issue. The group has been instrumental in defining the landscape of homelessness in the area.

The Homelessness Committee was formalized in late 2018, originating from an informal group that met in prior years. The committee is tasked with addressing and preventing homelessness. Its membership has changed very little from its inception – a testament to the dedication of the members. There are fifteen current members made up of representatives from: Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board (RRDSSAB), United Native Friendship Centre, Riverside Health Care Facilities, Rainy River District Victim Services Program, Northwestern Health Unit, Northwest Community Legal Clinic, Salvation Army, Kenora-Rainy River District Child & Family Services, Metis Nation of Ontario, the Fort Frances Jail, Canadian Mental Health Association, Community Living, NCDS and is working to fill a vacancy with Seven Generations Education Institute.

The Homelessness Committee supported the DSSABs creation of a Situation Table in Fort Frances – a model that provides custom supports for individuals before they reach a crisis point of crime or victimization. Notably, the committee is also responsible for opening an Out of the Cold Warming Centre in Fort Frances – the first time Fort Frances has ever seen a homeless shelter model. Out of the Cold recently closed its doors following a second winter of successful operation.

Additionally, they have supported the RRDSSAB in conducting a study of homelessness in 2018, participated in public education campaigns to bring understanding of the issue of homelessness, put on community fundraisers to support Out of the Cold, and worked with its member organizations to apply for funding to purchase or renovate a building to be used as supportive/transitional housing specific to homelessness.

The issue of homelessness is multi-faceted and incredibly complex. While there are promising trends and best practices emerging from various communities' response to homelessness, there is no one right answer. Co-chair for the Fort Frances Homelessness Committee, Jamie Petrin explained, "Finding a solution that works locally is going to take input, partnerships, funding, and community support all coming together. The committee has worked hard but there is much more work to do. We are always looking for ideas. Saying that, funding is the biggest barrier."

The group continues to work toward a supportive/ transitional housing model to assist people in becoming independently and stably housed. Such a model would see supports on-site to provide stabilization, teach daily living skills, and support mental health and addiction recovery, as examples. However without additional funds, making it a reality is impossible to achieve.

Petrin explained, “The continuing issue is the lack of both capital and operational funding. There is a lot of competition for relatively small amounts of money for these projects.”

The Rainy River District Social Services Administration Board’s Integrated Services Manager (Housing Lead), Sandra Weir said, “The reality of building housing complexes in this area is much more expensive than other areas of Ontario. If we replicate a housing complex used in another community, we see our costs significantly higher to construct.”

“If we can find a building to renovate or build new, secure capital to purchase it or build, we still have many hurdles to meet, including zoning restrictions, building & fire codes to allow sleeping, as well as accessibility. It’s doable, but without adequate funding and a commitment from the local municipalities it remains out of reach” added Weir.

CAO of the Rainy River DSSAB, Dan McCormick noted, “Unfortunately, this is a municipal problem that will only be solved by working together. Many communities have already adopted changes to zoning and official plans to allow the quicker construction of units to house the homeless as well as decreasing the red tape and costs of construction. We need these considerations to be implemented within our district to assist in working towards a resolution of this issue.”

Those interested in discussing ideas or learning more about the Homeless Committee can visit “Out of the Cold Fort Frances on Facebook”, or speak with Jamie Petrin at 807-274-5349 ext. 248 or by emailing [jpetrin@rrdssab.on.ca](mailto:jpetrin@rrdssab.on.ca).

Thank you for providing the opportunity to address the issue of homelessness in Fort Frances. For more information, please contact Sandra Weir at [sandraw@rrdssab.on.ca](mailto:sandraw@rrdssab.on.ca) or 807-274-5349 x 230.