

Fuel fund helps prepare for winter

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With temperatures starting to drop, the need for heat will increase for many families who cannot afford the cost.

That's where the Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund comes in.

"There are too many families that do not have the resources to adequately heat their homes," fuel fund board member Lucille Harper said.

The fuel fund - which helped 30 households stay warm last winter - is in its second year. Originally known as the Antigonish Heat Poverty Initiative, the fund has been restructured with the goal of becoming a permanent organization serving Antigonish town and county areas.

A new board has been formed to oversee the direction and operation of the fund. All other short and long-term strategies, including education on heat poverty, winterization of homes are also part of this board's mandate.

The board is also in the process of securing recognition as a not-for-profit organization with a charity status.

"It is very much like the food bank. It is an ongoing organization," Harper said, noting the work of board member Mike MacDonald in creating the model.

"We continue to work to

raise awareness of what we are doing. We are also going to be looking for some supporters," she said.

Last year, Harper said the average household income of fuel fund recipients was about \$13,000.

"People don't realize how low household incomes are here," she added.

"There are too many families that do not have the resources to adequately heat their homes."

Lucille Harper

Harper said people often have to decide between "heat or eat."

"Often, it is neither. People are both cold and hungry," she added.

Although people cannot access the emergency fuel fund until January, Harper said the organization continues to offer other measures to assist those with heating challenges.

"We have kits at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre to help people winterize their homes," Harper said, noting they include plastic and caulking to help seal windows.

"One of the ideas behind winterizing homes is to try to ensure people can as much as possible try to preserve the heat they have," Harper said.

Anyone interested in becoming a member of the fuel fund board can contact Harper at the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre at 863-6221.

Although monies will not be available until January, Harper said the group continues to collect donations for the fund, which can be dropped off at the AWRC or Town Hall labelled Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund.

"We want to make sure the people that need it get it within our fund limitations," Harper said.

The primary challenge for the fuel fund has been reaching the goal of raising \$50,000 per year.

In 2008-09, \$23,500 was raised and disbursed. In 2009-10, only \$14,000 was collected and distributed.

For 2010-11, the goal remains \$50,000.

Provided that funding is confirmed, Antigonish Emergency Fuel Fund application forms will be available at Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and at the town and county municipal offices starting December 15. If possible, the forms will also be available on the municipalities' websites.

Applications will be accepted until March 15, 2011.