



**Antigonish Women's Resource Centre
& Sexual Assault Services Association**

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March 8, 2012

Honourable Denise Peterson-Rafuse
Minister of Community Services
PO Box 696
Halifax, Nova Scotia
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(sent by e-mail)

Dear Minister,

It is with disappointment and much concern that we received the news that the Department of Community Services would not be providing funding to keep the Strait Area Women's Place open for women. The Strait Area Women's Place was established in May 2011 in response to urgent pleas from women and service providers calling for the provision of women's centre services in the Strait area. Women and service providers identified poverty, housing, employment, addictions, and emotional and mental health concerns as longstanding issues facing women in the area. They also identified that there were few services in the area where women and adolescent could turn for help.

To try to meet the demand for services the Antigonish Women's Resource Centre and Sexual Assault Services Association working in partnership with Leaside Society applied for and was fortunate to secure limited, one-year funding in the amount of \$28,000 from the IWK Foundation. The funding enabled us to open a women's centre and, with each partner contributing some staff time on a part-time basis, we were able to provide services three days per week. Since we opened, we have provided one-to-one support to women on a wide range of issues and we have delivered programs that provide information and problem-solving support. Moreover, we have invited Addiction Services and Public Health to provide programs out of the centre. In February alone 76 individual women accessed services and programming at the Women's Place, 23 women came for the first time.

Right now, the Port Hawkesbury area is struggling to survive the closure of the New Page plant. The plant closure has had wide ranging impact on families across the Strait area and added to the issues facing too many women and families in the community. The uncertainty about the future of the community has been heightened by changes to services at the Inverness Hospital and by the exodus of skilled workers from the area.

I am writing to urge you to reconsider your decision not to provide funding for the Strait Area Women's Place. The Strait Area needs the Women's Place to stay open. Please provide this support for the women and families who are so very vulnerable in this time of economic

hardship and uncertainty. Taking this service away from the community is not an option.

I look forward to hearing a positive response and to celebrating a year of dedicated work put in by the Strait Area Women's Place.

Sincerely,

Lucille Harper
Executive Director

cc: Honourable Darrell Dexter, Premier
Allan MacMaster, MLA, Inverness
Michel Samson, MLA, Richmond
Maurice Smith, MLA, Antigonish