

A Roof Over Your Head program launched

Reducing homelessness focus of Antigonish, Guysborough initiative

COREY LEBLANC

✉ coreyleblanc@thecasket.ca

A Roof Over Your Head, an initiative focussed on reducing homelessness, has been launched in Antigonish and Guysborough counties.

The federally-funded program, which has been established by more than 60 local organizations across Canada, is supported by the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS) and the Affordable Housing Association of Nova Scotia (AHANS).

The focus for A Roof Over Your Head is supporting individuals who are chronically and episodically homeless.

"Long term, we would like to see a shelter in our area," Dale Bogle said.

The Antigonish Community Transit Society manager said, although homelessness is not as visible as it is in urban centres, it is an issue in rural areas, such as this region.

"There are often band-aid solutions," Bogle said, such as couch-surfing and staying with friends.

In announcing A Roof Over Your Head, partners noted the program is based on the Housing First model, 'which shows that providing housing is a first step toward well-being.'



A Roof Over Your Head project partners include Jubanti Toppo (front, left), Kimberly MacDonald, Michael Martell (back, left), Dana Mason and Dale Bogle. The federally-funded pilot project, which focuses on homelessness, has been launched in Antigonish and Guysborough counties.

The retired RCMP officer noted he saw the effects of homelessness in the Antigonish area. He remembered there were people who admitted to, or committed, crimes to be taken into custody because they had nowhere else to go.

"It can happen for so many reasons," Bogle said.

He outlined some of the many factors that can, ultimately, lead to homelessness, including financial barriers, due to low education and lack of employment opportunities, lack of transportation, involvement in the criminal justice system and food insecurity.

Bogle added there can be issues such as mental health, addiction, bankruptcy or marital issues.

A Roof Over Your Head 'will include, but will not be limited to, a service strategy, service design, training and operations.'

Although, as Bogle mentioned, the ultimate goal is the establishment of a shelter, there are ways in which the two-year pilot program can provide assistance, including providing emergency funding for areas such as furnishings, damage deposits and insurance.

"We want to grow and sustain this effort," he said.

For more information or outreach by clients, contact Bogle at aroyh@eastlink.ca or 902-318-3299.

Contributed

As for its roots, Bogle credited Dana Mason, a public health educator/promoter with the Nova Scotia Health Authority, with making the "big push" to establish the program.

When it comes to those 'critical partnerships,' A Roof Over Your Head — along with Bogle and Mason — includes Jubanti Toppo (Antigonish Women's Resource

He, and the group, is confident that will happen.

"There are a lot of great partnerships and outreach organizations in our community," Bogle