

ENERGY ISSUES *Background*

What is Energy Poverty?

Historically, energy poverty has referred to the way in which an individual in the Global South's overall well-being is negatively affected by the lack of access to fuel, including the use of high polluting fuels or the need to spend extensive amounts of time collecting fuel. Conversely, fuel poverty was used to describe people in the Global North who had the ability to access energy but the lack of resources to pay for it (Goulding, 2014).

In Canada however, these terms tend to be used interchangeably to refer to individuals who are unable to afford the energy/fuel needed to maintain their life, particularly as related to heating/cooling. Specifically, energy poverty is “defined as households that spend more than 10 percent of their income on home energy” (Guelph & Wellington Task Force for Poverty Elimination). In 2011, it affected 1 million households in Canada, while those households in the lowest income bracket in Ontario averaged 12% spending on utilities (ibid).

In some communities, low-income households can apply for energy subsidies from their utility providers, municipality and/or province/territory. Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation (NLHC) provides energy subsidies to many of its tenants through the Heat Subsidy Program. This program tries to offset heating costs and the average subsidy is \$1,450/year. “NLHC has increased its emphasis on improving energy efficiency in units when regular modernization and improvement is ongoing. When units are made more energy efficient, the heat subsidy can go a lot further in helping tenants keep their homes warm throughout the year and improve overall housing affordability” ([NLHC Annual Report 2013-2014](#)).

What is Energy Retrofitting?

Energy retrofitting refers to the practice of improving a facility to make it more energy efficient. This can include a number of small fixes such as caulking windows, inserting covers on plugs, wrapping water pipes and weather-stripping doors. It can also include large-scale repairs such as improving the amount and type of insulation in walls and roofs.

The Train for Trades program conducts about 60 energy retrofits a year in social housing belonging to the Newfoundland Labrador Housing Corporation. This includes demolishing the existing drywall, mold remediation, improving insulation and rebuilding. Overall energy costs for the tenant decrease and the space becomes more useable as well.

“Back when I used to work in the basements as a support worker [a tenant] told me that her mom had hers done by us a year before I got hired and she was saving \$800 a year. She was an elderly lady with not much income and that \$800 went a long, long way. So now she got more food in the fridge and just a better sense of pride and love.”

—Corey Foley, Youth Supports Coordinator



Pictured above are former Train for Trades participants digging at a worksite.

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