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May 1, 2012

VIA EMAIL

City of Toronto Board of Health
277 Victoria Street, 4th Floor
Toronto, ON M5B 1W2

Dear Sirs:

We attended your meeting on April 30, 2012, in the hope of speaking in favour of your motions with respect to the City's Bed Bug Control Strategy.

Unfortunately we were not able to stay at the meeting long enough to make our submissions.

We hope therefore that you will accept our submissions in writing.

What is WoodGreen Community Services and why are bed bugs of concern to it?

For the last 75 years, WoodGreen has provided a range of important services to vulnerable members of Toronto's east end.

Right now, WoodGreen provides a safe and affordable place to call home and related support services, for more than one thousand people in our community, including seniors, single moms, and persons living with mental illness. WoodGreen is proud of the work it has done for 75 years and of the work it continues to do.

Housing has long been recognized as a key factor in supporting marginalized groups. With safe and secure housing, and WoodGreen's support, many members of Toronto's east end have been able to escape poverty and isolation. However, bed bug infestations undermine WoodGreen's housing support and services. This is because, while bed bugs can affect individuals at all socio-economic levels, the poor and marginalized are most harmed by infestations – the harm is serious, and it is physical, psychological and financial.



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WoodGreen began to receive calls from distraught community members in 2004. The calls came from many individuals, including worried parents who feared for their children's mental and physical health and from seniors who were concerned because they could not afford to hire a pest control company to eradicate bugs from their units, nor could they do the physical labour to get rid of the bugs themselves.

As the Board of Health knows, WoodGreen responded to the bed bug crisis and quickly developed considerable expertise on the issue of bed bugs. It began its fight with a research study.

Overview of WoodGreen's research study - Bed Bugs Are Back: Are We Ready?

In 2009, WoodGreen Community Services, together with Habitat Services, published a report called *Bed Bugs Are Back: Are We Ready?* The report was prepared with funding from the City of Toronto and the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. (A copy can be found on our website at www.woodgreen.org).

It was prepared in response to a growing number of inquiries and reported incidents of bed bugs. Failure to attend to the problem quickly was leading to alarming rates of increasing infestation.

The report canvassed a considerable amount of up-to-date literature on the subject and the authors spoke to bed bug experts worldwide.

The report concluded by identifying the four most effective ways to address the bed bug problem which include:

1. **Education** - Most people have little knowledge about bed bugs. Since bed bugs had all but been eliminated over 30 years ago, people have little information about detecting the problem or dealing with it.

As a result, it is often misdiagnosed by medical professionals. In addition, fear, stigma and misunderstanding frequently increase the problem by discouraging disclosure and early action. This delays effective response.





2. **Leadership** - History has shown that government has the leadership ability and the clout to establish the clear protocols required if any bed bug strategy is to be successful. Not-for-profit organizations do not have resources to deal with it on their own.
3. **Inspection** - Tenants and building owners need to know that they can contact local authorities and have an inspection done to confirm a bed bug infestation. Inspectors must be trained to look for live bugs, bug shells, eggs, bloodspots and fecal stains.
4. **Effective treatment** - Treatment is expensive, but a lack of funds cannot be an impediment to treatment. We must make an investment in the effort to support people facing infestation - they cannot manage alone.

WoodGreen supports the motions passed by the Board of Health.

The focus on the hiring of trained public health inspectors, funding for identifying vulnerable persons living with bed bugs and working with landlords to address persistent infestations are all consistent with the recommendations in the WoodGreen Report.

WoodGreen has supported the Board of Health in the past by raising awareness of this issue. We have coordinated the Community Bed Bug Committee, used social media tools to raise awareness of it, organized a media event at City Hall on March 31st to support your motion. We have been meeting with MPPs to raise awareness.

Cost savings to be gained from early treatment of bed bugs.

We note, as did the Board of Health, that our current provincial government has committed itself to a policy of patient-centred care which includes care at home. But home care, in accordance with this policy, does not happen when the patient's home has bed bugs. Therefore, a failure to address the problem and eradicate bed bugs directly contradicts and undermines the province's policy on patient care.

We acknowledge that the Board is seeking funding and other resources when governments at all levels are operating under fiscal restraints. However, in our respectful submission, and based on our considerable experience with bed bugs, if the recommendations by the Board of Health are not fulfilled, the bed bug problem will continue to escalate. Experience and history show that bed bug infestations spread quickly and aggressively if they are not eliminated quickly. As infestations take



hold, spread and expand, the cost of eliminating them continues to increase. It is more cost effective to dedicate resources to a preventative resolution now, than to respond to the crisis that will inevitably result if the bed bug problem is not tackled immediately.

In conclusion, we support the motions passed by the Board of Health on April 2, 2012. These motions seek financial resources and the implementation and continuation of a concerted strategy by Public Health to aggressively address the problem.

We commend the Board of Health for taking a leadership role in attempting to deal with this most serious health issue. We will continue to support you in your efforts to combat this problem.

WoodGreen Community Services

Elizabeth J. Forster
Advocacy Committee

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