Canadian Union of Public Employees

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- Long-Term Care Homes & Services Part-Time
- Recreation Workers Part-Time
- Unit B Part-Time

Toronto Community Housing Corporation

SERVING OUR MEMBERS SINCE 1942

Monday, May 7, 2012

10th floor, West Tower, City Hall
100 Queen Street West
Toronto, ON M5H 2N2

Dear Councillor Del Grande and Members of the Budget Committee:

RE: BU 25.3 Operating Variance Report

Today, as you consider how to allocate the City's $292 million surplus, I ask that you consider the adage: *you can't know where you're going until you know where you've been.*

As front-line City employees, we of course know intimately where the City's been. And as a Social Services caseworker and my work at CUPE Local 79, I've closely followed news of Toronto's drastic demographic shift in poverty.

According to a study by the United Way, high-poverty neighbourhoods in the GTA were almost equally dispersed between Toronto and its neighbouring boroughs in 1981. But by 2001, that percentage shifted to 77% for the former cities of Etobicoke, York, East York, North York and Scarborough.

As a result of this shift, the City reallocated services to so-called priority neighbourhoods, mostly in these former cities, and set out to engage the demographic that holds the key to the City's future: Youth.

As part of that focus, the City held a Youth Rally in 2001. Councillors Lindsay Luby and Peter Milczyn were there to participate in an information session.

Said Councillor Milczyn at the time: "We should provide youth with the tools they need to become healthy and aware adults. The youth-based counselling and recreational programs developed by the City are an investment that will improve the lives of Torontonians for years to come."

According to the City's own press release, the event was organized to reflect the objectives of the **Youth Outreach Workers** program. At the time, an initiative of Toronto Parks and Recreation to provide outreach at TTC stations, offering information and referral services regarding recreation, employment and counseling at identified TTC stations.

While the Youth Outreach Workers program saw many successes in its first few years, it became obvious during Toronto's devastating 'summer of the gun' in 2005 that the City needed to boost its efforts. And it did, through among other things, hiring twenty-one more Youth Outreach Workers for various parts of the City.

After hearing so many inspirational stories about the work that these Youth Outreach Workers perform in their communities — some of which you'll hear today from other deputants — it came as a shock to many that the City would decide this year to delete 17 Youth Outreach Worker positions, severely undermining the program.

Dr. Debra Pepler, Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology at York University — who undertook a study on Youth Outreach programs in Toronto — wrote to us after hearing of the deletions, saying: "It seems to me that our country and city are pulling away from the critical supports for children and youth." And it seems like others on City Council agree.

In January, City Council decided to re-evaluate cuts to the Youth Outreach Program as part of the Recreation Service Review, which was originally slated to go to Community Development and Recreation Committee before these cuts were enacted. This review is now not anticipated until sometime this fall, yet this support for youth in several of Toronto's communities is slated to disappear May 29th.

You now have the opportunity, with the City's increased surplus, to provide bridge funding for these positions through the fall and support Council's intention of giving the future of this program the thorough review it deserves as part of the overall planning for recreational services.

It's a smart investment. Through the recreational service plan we can find ways to make this program even more effective and meaningful for the youth it is designed to support. And we all know that supporting youth, helping them succeed, pays dividends to the City's future.

The youth and their families who've been helped by this program are sorely disappointed at prospect of losing these Youth Outreach Workers. Please don't abandon them, or the dedication that these workers have showed over the years.

Yours truly,



Tim Maguire
President

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