

City of Toronto
Budget Committee Deputation
Wednesday, February 18, 2009
For St. Stephen's Community House

My name is Tracey Rees. I am a resident of Toronto and a volunteer on the Board of Directors of St. Stephen's Community House. I am deputing today in support of this budget.

St. Stephen's Community House is a multiservice agency in downtown west Toronto serving the most vulnerable members of our community. In this time of economic crisis, we are in the neighbourhoods helping people look for employment, helping working parents with childcare, providing permanent housing to homeless people, helping newcomers to learn English and employment skills, helping people living in poverty with food and information and supports.

St. Stephen's supports this budget because it also supports the most vulnerable people in our city. A major theme of this budget is "Toronto Helps". Toronto will help more people on social assistance and people seeking employment. Toronto will help more seniors and people who are homeless who are hungry and isolated. Toronto will help more people who will need the TTC and people who need community services like ours.

We do recognize that this vital help costs money and we endorse the 4% increase in property taxes in the budget, along with the proposed Property Tax Increase Deferral and Cancellation programs for 90,000 low income households. This is the cost of helping our neighbours in this very troubled economic times.

Let me add briefly that as a property tax payer in the City of Toronto, I also personally endorse the 4% tax increase.

I would like to introduce you to Winnie Qiu, one of our English students at St. Stephen's Community House who can tell you how the city helps her family.

Hello my name is Winnie Qiu. I have come from China on October 21, 2008 with my family - my parents, my younger sister and my younger brother. I am very glad to be here in Canada and in Toronto. For now, I am not working. I am on social assistance and learning English, along with both of my parents. I am learning as fast as I can and attend two classes every day in the daytime and in the evening. I need the TTC to get to classes and I don't have much money. Soon, I will be applying to go to university. My father is an electrician.

My brother is younger than me and in school. He wants to make friends in Toronto and to do well in school. It is not easy for him. He needs a youth centre after school to get help and we worry about paying recreation fees.

My parents have had problems with their landlord, but we found a community centre where we can get information and help. They hope to get a better apartment soon, but finding good housing is difficult.

The city is important in our lives. Social Assistance -- TTC -- Affordable housing -- Employment help -- Youth Services -- Community Centres. These are important to our family.

We want to do well in Canada and we are glad to live in this city.

Thank you.