

Deputation to the Executive Committee, City of Toronto Council
September 19th, 2011
Presented by Karen Loftus

Good Morning Mayor Ford, and Executive Committee Members

My name is Karen Loftus and I am here as a volunteer on the Program Committee for St. Stephens Community House. St. Stephen's covers those in the downtown west core, serving over 30 000 clients a year. By Creating Opportunities and Strengthening Communities, their motto, they are able to manage this with compassion, a tremendous amount of hard work and dedication, transparency and fiscal responsibility.

As a member of the Program Committee for the last 4 years I have learned about each of the programs, I've also toured the facilities, met some of the clients, and had opportunities to volunteer for their Corner drop in dinners. Being in St. Stephen's you see evidence everywhere of community working together. There are pictures on the walls of the various group outings (there is even a great picture of you Mayor Ford with our Seniors group).

Today, I am grateful to be here to raise my concern about potential cuts to core funding based on the recommendation in the City Managers report that they

“Reduce the Community Partnership and Investment Program where City funding represents less than five percent of the program budget or is less than \$10,000 “.

While this may seem like a modest and reasonable way to reduce expenses, the picture is far more complex than it appears on the surface. \$10,000 seems like a relatively small amount, as does 5%.

We have received Community Service Partnership and Major Recreation grants for some time, and we use them to maintain staffing and services for several of our community programs.

St. Stephen's staff have done their math, based on the City Manager's recommended criteria, and have told me that the actual reduction proposed for our Community Service and Major Recreation grant could be as much as \$96,700 or close to 54% of our City funding. That is a lot more than even the 10% that you are asking City staff to pare from the budget.

Most alarmingly, this will potentially completely eliminate the City Community Service and Recreation funding for our Youth Services.

Our Youth Arcade drop-in receives no core support from any other level of government. A full 70 % of the CSP and Major Rec funding goes to the Youth Arcade- about \$67,000. This falls below the 10% cut-off partly because we put a lot of effort into fund-raising and getting donations - **now we seem to be punished for that.**

The arcade is geared towards Youth between 12-21. Most in our program are from low-income, social housing neighborhoods. A large number of our youth have become disengaged from school and have criminal charges before the age of 17. About 75 kids come in per day because it is a comfortable and safe place for them to come; they know it and trust it.

It allows them to get involved in:

- **leadership, mentorship and peer employment opportunities**
- **informal counseling and daily crisis intervention**
- **Peer support programs like the girl's group "Venus" , and the young men's group " Gentlemen's Spot"**
- **life skills workshops on drug prevention, alternatives to violence , and responsible sexual behaviour**
- arts and culture activities like writing, photography, graphic arts and film-making
- making and sharing a healthy snack

Some of our youth are here today – (*points to them*) because this Youth Arcade is a place that they care about. They want to stay off the streets and better their lives, and they come to St. Stephens for the support that they may not receive elsewhere in their lives. Through the informal counseling and the mentorship programs offered, they can grow in their independence and confidence to go out into the world as young adults and make good choices.

Let's remember that these young people could go either way, and the fact that they choose to come to St. Stephens, and to come here today, shows that they're involved and that they do care!

Let's not take that away from them and leave them without supports for the real challenges they face at home, in school and in their neighbourhoods, without healthy outlets for their youthful energy and creativity.

As a Project Manager in my day-to-day life, I too manage budgets and understand the difficulty that lies before you. But being fiscally responsible to me it is not in making financial cuts and slashing a department or program, it's in finding a responsible way to make the budget work. The City Manager's

recommendations regarding community grants funding will inevitably lead to a substantial cut to service to the youth in our community- possibly even closing our afternoon after-school drop-in, because it is equal to the cost of one front-line youth worker, plus the overhead for the programs they would run.

Was that your intention? Is that what we want for our youth?

I don't think it is, and I am looking for your participation in keeping this much needed program open.

Thank you very much for your time....