



Essex MPP Bruce Crozier, left, talks with Xavier Noordermeer, executive director of Community Living Windsor about problems faced by those in the developmental services sector. Noordermeer and other representatives of local Community Living agencies and CUPE visited Windsor and Essex County MPPs during the Have-a-Heart campaign on Valentine's Day, asking for a multi-year funding commitment from the province to the cash-strapped sector.

Lengthy wait lists for support

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With thousands of people in southwestern Ontario requiring Community Living services, the need is increasing but provincial funding has flatlined, said Xavier Noordermeer, executive director of the Windsor agency.

Noordermeer told Crozier that although developmental services is the third largest funded sector by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, employees in the field are getting low wages and agencies are experiencing a dangerously high turnover rate of staff.

"The Have-a-Heart campaign is all about not forgetting developmental services," Noordermeer said. "We're looking for an infusion of funds into the sector."

For more than a decade, Community Living agencies have been operating with an initial five per cent base budget cut, receiving no increases in the years following.

Minimal base budget increases in 2004-2005 and again in 2005-2006 failed to offset the pace of inflation, Noordermeer explained.

Suanne Hawkins, president of CUPE Local 3137, told the Essex MPP they intend to make the funding campaign's message "loud and clear."

Crozier said he is aware of troubles in the sector, adding that part of the campaign's focus should be directed toward the public.

"You don't have to tell me; you're preaching to the choir," Crozier said. "You have to convince the people out there."

Crozier said people seem

to think about themselves first before considering those with disabilities.

Nancy Wallace-Gero, executive director of Community Living Essex County wasn't able to meet with Crozier but has made arrangements to meet with Duncan and Papatello to further discuss the issues.

"We want the government to address the longstanding issue of under-funding for services and supports," Wallace-Gero said.

The province-wide campaign, which is an alliance between workers, unions and agencies, began because people started facing lengthy waiting lists for supports.

"Sometimes people have to go through the most severe crisis before they receive some support and often because they are in a crisis they require even

more expensive supports," Wallace-Gero explained.

On top of that, agency staff are being paid lower wages than other workers in the health care sector, she said.

Community Living agencies are funded directly by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, which hand over \$1.1 billion for programs annually.

Wallace-Gero said the campaign is aimed at securing an additional \$253 million to stabilize services.

"That money would establish better wages for workers and help reduce waiting lists," she said.

There are currently more than 300 organizations that offer supports in Ontario.

About 500 people benefit from services offered at Community Living Essex County.

Students stay calm in tense situation

BY DANIEL SCHWAB

The 280 students of Colchester North Public School endured a minor scare Feb. 15 when some staff thought they smelled a natural gas leak inside the building.

Around 9:45 a.m., staff detected a smell coming from the maintenance room and brought the concern to the attention of principal Barbara Chevalier, who called 9-1-1.

Essex fire and rescue services were dispatched, along with police services in case a student evacuation was necessary.

During an evacuation, staff and students would

leave school property and walk down County Road 12 to the Gesto Fire Hall. But no evacuation would be necessary that morning. Outside doors were opened to ventilate the school and students were asked to put on their coats and wait with teachers in their classrooms until further notice.

The Greater Essex County District School Board's facilities department was notified, along with Union Gas, who was asked to respond immediately.

After assessing the situation, the Union Gas employee determined there was no threat to students or staff and school functions

resumed.

The origin of the smell was still undetermined at that time and the school board's facilities department sent a contractor to

the school to further investigate the situation.

The students were debriefed on the incident during an assembly in the gym later that day.

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Annual Membership of Leamington District Memorial Hospital Corporation is effective from April 1 in one year to March 31 in the following year.

According to the Leamington District Memorial Hospital By-Law No. 16, a person is eligible to be an Annual Member when he or she pays to the Corporation the annual membership fee of \$5.00, provided at the time of payment of the fee, the person must:

- (i) be over the age of eighteen (18) years; and
- (ii) have been a resident of the Catchment Area for a continuous period of at least three (3) months immediately prior thereto; or
- (iii) be employed in the said Catchment Area or counties for a continuous period of three (3) months.

Any person who wishes to join membership in the Leamington District Memorial Hospital Corporation for 2007/2008, please contact Linda Harfmann, 519-326-2373, Ext. 4101 for an application. Applications must be received by the Board no later than March 15, 2007 in order to be eligible to vote at this year's Annual Meeting in June.