

# Clients shocked CHATS lost seniors care contract

BY CHRIS TRABER  
Staff Writer

Shirley Bohme is one of the lucky ones.

The veteran Community Home Assistance to Seniors personal support worker is one of 120 employees who will keep their jobs after the non-profit agency lost its contract to provide home care services in York Region.

The lost contract translates into more than 300 job losses, \$500,000 in immediate severance payouts and \$21 million in unrecoverable revenue, CHATS executive director Deborah Egan said.

But for people such as Ms Bohme, it means more.

"I will miss my colleagues and those I took care of," she said, crying. "Some of my clients have been with me for 11 years. One 90-year-old client said that I can read her mind and it's so wonderful that she's used to me. I heard from her family. They're very sad."

The non-profit Aurora agency provided more than 5,000 York clients with home care, home-making, personal support and caregiver relief services, but learned last month it was not selected to provide in-home services through the region's the Community Care Access Centre.

Five private businesses were awarded 39-month contracts to provide services in a request for service process conducted by the CCAC on behalf of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

"The effect, after a 25-year performance record of continuous quality service in the region, is unbelievable," Ms Egan said. "This impacts beyond staff. Our clients, their family care givers and our volunteers are in complete shock. When we had to hand out layoff notices, we had to hand out boxes of tissues. We are all devastated."

That includes client Brita Mickleburgh, a retired teacher in Newmarket.

"Many of the other seniors will be desperate," she said. "Instead of the trusted and familiar person who provided the services we need, there'll be a stranger."

Clients have heard nothing from the CCAC about how home care services will be provided once the changes are made.

"All I can say is, if it isn't broken, why fix it? The new services are all profit companies. CHATS was non-profit. I think the government is being penny wise and dollar foolish," Ms Mickleburgh said.

Peggy McGibbon is one of



STAFF PHOTO/CHRIS TRABER

CHATS executive director Deborah Egan (from left) with staffers Shirley Bohme, Peggy McGibbon, Maria Orzolek and Lisa Wauchope. "This is no consideration of performance track record. It's subjective," Ms Egan said.

CHATS laid-off service supervisors. A week before the holidays, she is looking for a job.

"I'm devastated," she said. "The concern isn't just for me. It's for my fellow workers and the clients we supervise seven days a week. Many families are very upset."

Maria Orzolek, a support

worker, will remain with CHATS. The agency will provide home care outside the CCAC system at an unsubsidized hourly rate of \$22.50. Existing services such as meals on wheels and transportation will also continue.

"My concern is for the clients," Ms Orzolek said. "They are elderly. They don't understand. We are a big part of their lives and most of them are very upset. They're frail and each would speak up if they could."

Training and development co-ordinator Lisa Wauchope, a CHATS employee since 1998, will also stay.

"It's an absolute shock," she said, battling tears. "We understand we can't go back and change the decision. But thousands of individuals have had the rug pulled out from underneath them. It impacts not only clients."

CHATS was prepared to lose some of its work with the CCAC in the bidding process, Ms Egan said.

"The issue is that there had been no indication that we were not meeting standards. We were recognized as being a leader in our sector and the question that arises across the province is whether, in fact, the proposal process reflects your ability to write a proposal or your ability to deliver care," she

said. "This is no consideration of performance track record. It's subjective. You are evaluated on what you put on paper, what you say in an interview and your price."

CHATS received an evaluation score of 85.7 per cent, Ms Egan said.

"That wasn't good enough for us to get a contract," she said. "Of all the bidders, we were the largest organization and provided approximately 40 per cent of all the personal support and home-making services in the region."

**'Many families are very upset'**

Peggy McGibbon laid off CHATS supervisor

Due to confidentiality agreements, CCAC executive director Bill Innes would not discuss the CHATS bid specifically.

The proposal process followed a format developed by the Health Ministry, the 42 Ontario centres and legal counsel, he said. The template was designed "to treat all qualified respondents equally and fairly" and there were no rules specific to existing providers.

Although this process is currently under review, the CCAC decided to go forward with selecting its

service providers, Mr. Innes said.

Former MP Elinor Caplan is expected to table her review of the process next April. Health Minister George Smith-erman announced the competitive process would continue during her review. Ms Caplan was present during the early stages of the evaluation process at the CCAC, Mr. Innes said.

"Ms Caplan stated at the (November 2004) board meeting that, in her opinion, the CCAC of York Region completed the process according to ministry policy and with great integrity," he said.

"It is our hope that the CHATS organization will continue to be a service provider to residents of York Region and that all efforts of both organizations will be directed toward a successful and positive transition and ongoing working relationship," Mr. Innes said in a statement.

Ms Egan is asking residents to express their concerns to provincial politicians.

"We'd like the community to spend just three minutes at this busy time of year and call their MPP. If we don't have the community's support, our voice is hollow."

CHATS hotline is 905-713-6596.

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## Market 'gives town character'

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said. "It's not coming from California."

As well, vendors often refer shoppers to businesses and restaurants in town.

"This is traditionally a farming community," Ms Hilton said, "and the market brings the farming character into Stouffville."

The market was originally on the Brown farm. The Brown House is now at the Whitchurch-Stouffville Museum in Vandonr.

Mr. Clements bought the market in the mid-1980s.

Through the years, there have been livestock auctions in the old building constructed in 1952. It was torn down about two years ago. A new building was erected about 10 years ago.