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Wamback: Keep victim cash away from bureaucracy

Mixed reaction to provincial grant

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

Local victims of crime advocacy groups had mixed reactions to this week's announcement $14.3 million may be headed their way.

While Victim Services of York Region executive director Jillian Freeman applauded the provincial grant, Canadian Crime Victim Foundation founder Joe Wamback wondered if the money will go where it's needed most.

"My major concern is that the money goes to the victims of crime who desperately need it and not just more administration and bureaucracy," said Mr. Wamback, whose son Jonathan was viciously beaten by a gang of teenagers in Newmarket five years ago.

The government has earmarked the money to fund community-based projects that will improve the lives of victims of crime and ensure they receive the supports and services they need.

The $14.3 million, through the victim surcharge on provincial fines, will go to projects that assist victims of domestic violence and sexual assault, sexually abused and exploited children and under-funded or unfunded victims.

JOE WAMBACK: Money should be shared by victims of all crimes, victim lobby group founder says.

Also, for the first time, applications are being solicited from organizations that support victims of hate crimes.

But it's unfair to fund only specific segments, Mr. Wamback said.

The money should be shared by victims of all crimes, he said.

Noting the Victim's Justice Fund contains an estimated $80 million, Mr. Wamback asked when the rest will be doled out.

"This is just a drop in the bucket," he said. "It's typical of politicians to make announcements and grab people's attention when it's all just smoke and mirrors.

"It looks good on the surface, but we'll have to wait and see."

Thornhill MPP Mario Racco is promising this money will do some good.

"We are doing what's necessary to help victims of crime begin putting their lives back together," he said.

"We are taking action to improve services for victims and making sure the money goes where it does the most good."

Victim Services of York Region will be reviewing the application criteria to see if it can get a piece of the pie and Ms Freeman said any money for victims of crime is a good start.

"I think it's great that the ministry is looking at the issue," she said.

"In York Region, the population is growing and the crime rate is going up naturally because of that growth. Funding for victims of crime is an issue that needs to be addressed."

For information on how organizations can apply for funding, see the Ministry of the Attorney General website at www.attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca

Increasing anti-Semitic acts include unsolved York crimes

BY MARTIN DERBYSHIRE
Staff Writer

The record number of anti-Semitic incidents reported in Canada last year comes as no surprise to people in York Region.

B'nai Brith Canada's League for Human Rights released a report this week listing 857 anti-Semitic incidents across the country, up 47 per cent from 2003 and the highest number since the group started collecting the data more than 20 years ago.

Open expressions of anti-Semitism are increasingly being tolerated, said Harold Davis, national president of B'nai Brith Canada.

"A climate is being created where acts of anti-Semitism have simply become so commonplace that the perpetrators of these crimes are often showed lenience, with their acts brushed aside or labeled as mere pranks," he said.

York Region's estimated 60,000 Jews — Canada's third largest Jewish population — are no stranger to acts of anti-Semitism.

A rash of anti-Semitic vandalism in a Vaughan neighbourhood last April remains an unsolved crime.

Vandals painted graffiti on 13 cars and houses in the Beverley Glen Boulevard area of Thornhill, including the words "Jewz Suck" and a swastika on the front door of the home of an elderly Holocaust survivor.

> *'A climate is being created where acts of anti-Semitism have simply become so commonplace that the perpetrators of these crimes are often showed lenience ...'*

The York Police Services Board is offering a $10,000 reward in the case.

An arrest was made in a similar incident in Markham in June.

An 18-year-old Markham resident was charged after more than 25 anti-Semitic and anti-black messages, including swastikas, were spray-painted on Unionville businesses, homes, vehicles, fences, roadways and railway property.

In addition to mischief charges, police are still consulting with the Crown Attorney's office about laying specific hate crimes charges.

And just last month, two swastikas were painted on the outside wall of a bathroom and a no parking sign in Markham's Milne Park.

No arrests have been made.

Particularly in Vaughan, the number of hate and anti-Semitic crimes have gone up significantly over the past year, B'nai Brith human rights co-ordinator Anita Bromberg said.

But anti-Semitism has always been here, according to Rabbi Aaron Grossbaum, head of Chabad Lubavitch of Ontario in Thornhill.

"The fact is there has always been some degree of anti-Semitism and some acts of vandalism," he said.

"In the past, it may have gone unnoticed. Now we're paying more attention."

Perhaps by shedding light on acts of intolerance and hate, a greater tolerance and acceptance will rise, Rabbi Grossbaum said.

"The silent majority does not accept this," he said.