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'Shock' after region ends help centre funding

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A senior citizen who never had a chance to go far in school, Norma Smith has turned many times to the Identification Clinic at York Region's Housing Help Centre to help her understand government forms and to assist her filling out paperwork for needed documentation.

"They are so handy and helpful to the community," she said.

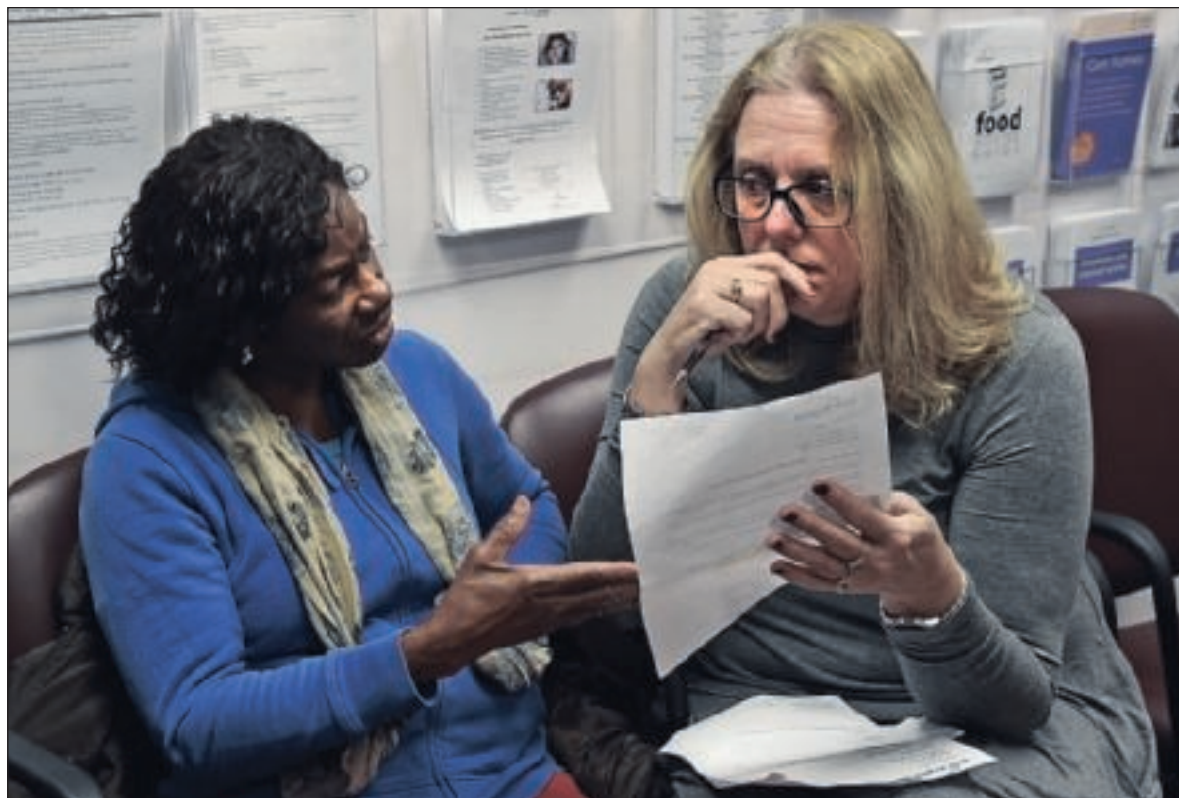
The former nanny and personal care worker is devastated to learn regional government will end its funding next month to the Richmond Hill centre, which helps more than 2,000 low- and moderate-income York Region residents a year.

"Oh my God, I don't have the words to say," said Smith, a native of Jamaica, who said staff at the centre have encouraged her to take adult learning classes.

"I am very, very sad, deeply sad. They are like a family to me. It's going to be very difficult for the community."

The region is cutting off the \$204,230 it provides annually for the ID clinic and the \$136,310 it gives for the housing help centre, executive director Mary Ann Proulx said.

The region is the sole source of funding for the programs, other than a small amount the facility gets from PowerStream to help low-income residents struggling to pay their hydro bills.



Steve Somerville/Metroland

Mary Ann Proulx (right), executive director of the Housing Help Centre, confers with client Norma Smith of Richmond Hill, who is upset to hear York Region will cut funding to the centre next month.

gling to pay their hydro bills.

"I was in shock," said Proulx, adding the centre and clinic are the only services of their kind in the region.

"We don't have operating funds to continue. It brings me to tears. I feel really bad for them (clients).

They're going to struggle, they're going to struggle even more so."

Agencies are aware they must apply annually for funding under the Community Investment Strategy, the region's commissioner of community and health services, Adelina Urbanski, said.

"Annually, York Region provides targeted funding to not-for-profit agencies to help deliver projects to low- and moderate-income residents that address service gaps in the community,"

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