

Autos Careers Classifieds Homes

## Lemonade stand raises awareness

**CHILDREN'S AID SOCIETY: Workers say provincial funding is inadequate**

By CHIP MARTIN, THE LONDON FREE PRESS

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**Debbie Al-Hamza, a child protection worker for the Children's Aid Society, offers up a glass of lemonade from its stand on Monday. (CRAIG GLOVER, The London Free Press)**

It was lemonade for the Children's Aid in London Monday as social workers drew attention to the needs of vulnerable children.

The fundraising venture by workers at two facilities of the Children's Aid Society of London and Middlesex was also held at other agencies across Ontario in a bid to highlight what they say is inadequate provincial funding.

"All of us are saying to the province 'You have to fix the funding formula,'" said Marnie Dickout, president of Local 116 of the Ontario Public Service Employees Union.

Behind the lemonade stand on Oxford St. East was a mock-up of a cheque made out to Children and Youth Services Minister Laurel Broten for \$21 billed as a "token amount."

The real money raised by the fundraising venture will go to bursaries for young persons and to help them cover fees for sports, Dickout said.

Business was as brisk as the noon-time breeze that saw OPSEU flags snapping smartly around the stand.

The union initiative attracted Ken Heslop, chair of the board of the local CAS, as one of its first customers. He plunked down a toonie for a 25-cent glass of lemonade and said he was fully supportive of the demonstration.

"We have to draw attention to this," he said of the funding shortfall that will be forcing the CAS to close its remaining three group homes. "This all impacts on the young and it is being felt by the employees."

Also dropping by for lemonade and making another toonie donation was Larry Marshall, associate executive director of the agency.

Dickout said the 450 CAS employees are upset the province instituted new requirements in 2006 and despite promising to provide money to help implement them, has withdrawn that promise. For the local CAS with a budget approaching \$70 million, the extra costs have been in the tens of thousands of additional dollars, she said.

Across Ontario, societies face a deficit of \$32.5 million that could triple by early next year, prompting concerns about laying off staff and leaving vulnerable children inadequately protected.

The London society has one of the biggest deficits in Ontario at \$5 million.

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