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Lemonade for children's aid in Waterloo Region

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David Bebee, Record staff

Heidi Slessor (left), Tom Howard and Wanda Vey-Formica set ...



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June 08, 2010

By Sarah Anderson, Record staff

KITCHENER — \$21 down, 2,599,958 cups of lemonade to go before Family and Children's Services of the Waterloo Region can say it's out of debt.

Facing a deficit of \$1.3 million, the local agency has had to resort to old-school fundraising.

To focus on the need for sustainable funding to Children's Aid Services, the Ontario Public Service Employees' Union, representing workers in Waterloo Region and five other communities across Ontario, set up lemonade stands and barbecues Monday to raise funds and awareness.

"Every year, except 2008/2009, the government has paid the deficit" of Children's Aid Societies in Ontario, said Tom Howard, a representative for the Local 258, who helped organize the fundraiser in Victoria Park.

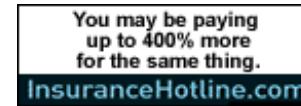
He said the union has lobbied the provincial government to fund the most recent deficits but the government refused. It was suggested they turn to fundraising to cover the deficit.

"So we're giving it the old college try," said Howard. The event raised \$21, and a cheque was made out to the minister of Children and Youth Services to apply against the \$1.3 million deficit.

He said that while the government has provided some funding, the goal of Children's Aid Services agencies in Ontario is long-term sustainability funding.

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Back in 2006, the government introduced new regulations aimed at keeping children living at home with their families and finding permanent situations for them. Howard said these regulations were welcome, but there was not enough funding allotted to properly implement the changes.

Indira Singh, a member of the domestic violence team in Waterloo Region said the legislation change included domestic violence as part of the jurisdiction of children's aid workers in Ontario. But adapting to this change requires additional meetings and time spent with each family, she said, and that requires more funding.

"I really believe it was rightly included, but we simply can't carry out our work without adequate funding," said Singh.

While historically it was normal for a few agencies to run a deficit, Howard said, 92 per cent have run deficits this year. Some have even approached bankruptcy, Howard said.

In February, a \$27 million bailout helped 26 of the 53 agencies in Ontario that were in the worst financial positions because of provincial rule changes, but the measure was only temporary, intended to tide things over until a solution for long-term sustainability funding could be reached.

He said "we shouldn't have to borrow money to operate. These are services mandated by law, tasks we have to perform. We can't just put up a closed sign when the money runs out."

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