

Community Based Social Services

The provincial budget took steps to address poverty by accelerating the increases to the Child Tax Benefit and by increasing, by two per cent, ODSP and Ontario Works allowances in the next year. There were also some positive steps to increase affordable housing.

Otherwise, the budget was a big disappointment to those working in the community-based social service sector. Despite Sectors submitting pre-budget submissions to the Minister that called for an immediate three per cent adjustment to core budgets, there was nothing in the budget to give any indication that the government was listening to this request.

For many Sectors, this non-commitment is consistent with a pattern over the past 15 years. Core budgets have been flat-lined for 13 of those years, despite the fact there has been a 31 per cent increase in the cost of living over that period.

At a minimum, a funding increase to accommodate rising core costs is essential if the government is to honour assertions made on budget day by the Minister of Finance, that: "the current global economic crisis should not prevent society from helping its most vulnerable members. The Premier has stated 'now is not the time to cut services such as health and education'".

Where is the government's commitment to community-based services that it will not cut support to our most vulnerable citizens?

The failure of the budget to meet the crisis can be called "death by a 1,000 cuts." Childrens' mental health centres report a 34 per cent to 50 per cent increase in referrals over the past 12 months, but there was no additional funding to meet this steep increase in demand, thereby increasing waitlists for service.

Elsewhere, layoffs have been reported. A childrens' treatment centre represented by members of Local 258, for example, has already lost eight positions in the past 12 months with more layoffs forecasted this year. Local 666 in Sudbury lost 22 positions in December 2008 as a result of a group home closure which was originally created to address the travesty of housing children in the care of the Children's Aid Society in hotels due to lack of available placements. As a result of this closure, children and youth can expect to be placed further away from their homes if they require residential treatment.

Children's Aid Societies are a mandated service and as the number of child protection caseloads increase at a rate of 45 per cent agencies face deficits and find themselves turning to layoffs to balance their budgets as was the case in Kawartha-Haliburton.

The premier has been asked to keep his promises to persons with developmental disabilities. In the 2007 provincial budget, the Ontario government made a four-year commitment to fund developmental services in a way that would help the thousands of people on waiting lists for support. The new funding would also help individuals and families who were experiencing the stress and setbacks that came with high turnover among the developmental service workers providing support.

It is predicted in Toronto alone that 8,000 daycare spaces will be lost. Some day care centres may have to close permanently due to the loss in government revenue to subsidized spaces that is a substantial percentage of their operating budget.

The Community Services Division of OPSEU represents more than 11,500 members who work in day care programs, developmental services, Children's Aid Societies, children's mental health centres, children's treatment centres, youth corrections, women's shelters and Child and Family Services.