

The Intelligencer

Printed from www.intelligencer.ca web site Wednesday, November 22, 2006 - © 2006 Belleville Intelligencer

Community living suffers from lack of gov't funding

By Samantha Craggs

Tuesday, November 21, 2006 - 10:00

Local News - Living in the community with a disability is more humane and economical than institutional care, but the government has to be willing to pay for it, says the executive director of Plainfield Community Homes.

Since the early 1990s when the focus shifted from institutional care to the developmentally challenged living in the community, great strides have been made in care and comfort for the men, women and children involved. But the sector itself is woefully underfunded, said John Klassen.

We remain hopeful that the government will address this growing concern, Klassen wrote in the local organizations annual report, calling it a serious financial crisis.

Costs climb each year, while the incremental budget increases granted from the province are minimal, Klassen stressed in an interview with The Intelligencer. Staffing costs regularly increase, as do utilities used at Plainfields 14 homes in and around Belleville. While the organization got one of its more generous funding increases this year in the form of a two per cent boost, a recent employee contract calls for a three per cent wage increase, and the rising utility costs are not under two per cent, you can be sure of that.

A local focus group met with Prince Edward-Hastings MPP Ernie Parsons earlier this year asking him to table a petition requesting better funding. In 2004, a cost containment committee reviewed every inch of Plainfields operations to try to cut costs.

To be honest, we dont have a lot of room to cut costs any more, Klassen said.

While community living receives less air time than health care or education, it is just as beneficial in ways that arent always obvious, Klassen said. In making the disabled part of the community, and assisting them in recreation, sports and volunteer activities, it is shattering the marginalization caused by the days of institutions and large homes that left them with a stereotype that never goes away, he said.

Ive seen firsthand how people have thrived and how theyve enjoyed a full life in the community, he said. When people are exposed to that diversity, they have a much brighter and more enriched lifestyle. And people in the community are just opening their arms and hearts.

With a Smiths Falls regional centre about to close the last of three large facilities in the province people are returning to their home communities. There are about 12 who may return to Hastings and Prince Edward County, Klassen said.

Community Living Ontario will continue to push the funding issue as it did with a provincewide campaign this year, said Keith Powell, the organizations executive director. There is no funding formula or cost of living provision, he said. Most agencies are getting 95 per cent of their funding from the province, so they are restricted by how much the government gives them.

The public isnt as aware of this problem as it would like to be or as it needs to be, he said.

Powell added that about 77 per cent of those with disabilities live in poverty, and that their support workers make as much as 30 per cent less than people in government jobs who have similar positions.