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Did you know?

Flemingdon Community Legal Services is accessible by TTC Buses From:

- Pape Subway Station bus # 25, 81
- St. Clair Subway Station bus # 100, 100A and 100D
- Broadview Subway Station bus # 88 and 88A
- Donlands Subway Station bus # 56

For more info please go to: www.ttc.ca

PRESIDENT and EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Greetings,

This is our first Newsletter since moving to our new premises at 1 Leaside Park Drive, unit #1 in Thorncliffe Park, last September. Although the move wasn't without its problems, it didn't take too long before we were up and running and fully functional. Being next door to the Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office (TNO) has been a nice asset particularly since we have an open partition door which provides easy access to both of our offices. This also allows for simplicity when referring clients who require both the services of FCLS and those of the TNO.

Our clinic has been extremely busy taking part in the GTA Legal Clinics' Transformation Project. It is hoped that this project will bring about a redesign and restructuring of the legal clinic system with the purpose of enhancing service delivery and providing greater access to legal services for low income people. It is also expected that this will result in a greater ability for legal clinics to increase and carry out the amount of community development, law reform and public legal education that is currently being done with and for our low income communities.

This Project is about to begin the drafting of an Interim Report which will set out a proposal as to how the legal clinic system can be restructured to achieve its desired goals. We will provide you with an update on this in our next Newsletter.

Shamsh Kara

President

Marjorie Hiley

Executive Director

COMMUNITY HUB FOR FLEMINGDON PARK

The concept of a community hub for Flemingdon Park has been tossed around for a number of years. A number of agencies have expressed an interest in developing a hub and ultimately that led to a partnership of seven agencies who drafted a proposal for funding to the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The agencies, FCLS, FNS, Better Living, Flemingdon Health Centre, New Circles, Anglican Ministry in Flemingdon Park and the Flemingdon Community Food Bank, submitted the application to Trillium for a feasibility study.

The application was approved and for approximately 12 months from the summer of 2012 until June 2013 a consultant was hired to engage the community in the discussion of the components of a community hub.

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Focus groups were held; individual interviews were conducted and two Town Hall meetings were organized in April, 2013.

The results of all of this work were compiled into a report that was sent to the Ontario Trillium Foundation in the early summer of 2013.

Since that time a Public Meeting was held at the Dennis Timbrell Recreation Centre on November 26th. Speakers included Dennis Timbrell, Denzil Minnan Wong, Marjorie Hiley, Steve Shallhorn (Labour Education Centre) and a representative from Civic Action. In attendance were local residents, representatives from community agencies and staff from Kathleen Wynne's constituency office and John Carmichael's constituency office as well as the local councillor, John Parker, and a representative from the United Way and from Metrolinx and John Smith from the City of Toronto just to name a few.

There was considerable discussion about the community hub, the plans for a new two pad hockey arena and the transportation plans for Eglinton Avenue.

Since then there has been a further meeting of the Community Hub Steering Committee and plans are under way to continue meeting with interested agencies to plan our next steps in this process.

This is a project that will take a number of years and a great deal of hard work and political will to come to a successful completion. But the Flemingdon Park community has shown its desire for this project to proceed and the need for space for agency and community programming is critical. FCLS will continue to play an active role in this project now and in the future.

GTA TRANSFORMATION PROJECT

FCLS has taken a lead role in the GTA Transformation project. This is a new project, funded by Legal Aid Ontario (LAO), involving 16 general service clinics in the GTA region. Previously we had been involved with 5 other general service clinics that were located east of Yonge Street in the Innovation Project. The report from the Innovation Project sparked the creation of this new and more challenging project.

It is the fundamental goal of the Project to improve services to our clients. We have found that having a small staff, however dedicated and hard working,

can have limitations to our ability to provide high quality legal services to all those who require them. It just takes one family illness/tragedy or having a staff member fall ill or be injured and the clinic is unable to provide all essential services in one of its core areas of law.

We have hired consultants called Public Interest to assist us to determine how many community legal clinics should be in existence in the GTA, what should be their catchment area and how should the human resources be allocated in these new entities. In so doing we are committed to

the fundamental principles of the community legal clinic system and the desire to maintain the community relationships so essential to our understanding of the legal needs of our clients.

This is a very challenging project. Recently we did reach an agreement with LAO that allows us to have stability in our funding for the next couple of years and allows us to reinvest any administrative cost savings back into service delivery for our clients. It is our hope to have an interim report by late spring and a final report which also outlines our transitional plan by the early Fall of 2014.

2013 Changes to OW and ODSP, by Catherine Manson

As a result of the recent spring Provincial Budget (2013) several changes were introduced to the Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program Acts (O.D.S.P.) Regulations and Policy Directives.

The basic needs rate was increased by 1% with a top up for priority groups OW, Boarders, Lodgers, sponsored immigrants. A single person on OW is now entitled to a maximum \$626 a month (if in market rent accommodation) and for O.D.S.P. \$1086. For families, the increase was approx. \$9 as there was a separate increase to the Ontario Child Benefit.

This rate increase also affected the special benefits such as the Guide Dog Benefits, personal needs allowances and hostel services.

A second significant change was to the OW asset levels. The new allowable asset level for a single person is \$2500; a couple \$5000; and \$500 for each dependent. An increase is also applied to gifts and voluntary payments to a \$6000 level in a 12 month period.

There is no cap on the family primary vehicle and a secondary vehicle's value if less than \$15,000. The family must still be able to afford insurance, vehicle loan payments, gas and repairs on their normal monthly income and not rely on other family members to provide this service.

The most significant change applies to Employment Earnings. Before the 50% exemption is calculated, the first \$200 from the Net earnings will be exempt for employment, training programs and net business income for both OW and O.D.S.P.

If one is absent from the Province for more than the prescribed time allowed (OW is 7 days; O.D.S.P. is 30 days), the absence must be approved before leaving by the case-worker for "reasons of health" and one must provide a prescription from the doctor and or OHIP for medical treatment outside of the province and insured under OHIP. Exceptional circumstances such as death of an immediate family member may be approved but the expectation is that the return date be set within the 7 or 30 day timeframe.

The final change is a change to the Internal Review process for appealing any negative decision. One has 30 days to file a written Request for Internal Review. Now the administrator has 30 days (not 10 days) to answer this request. This will delay the process for filing an appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal and may place persons in jeopardy if they have no other financial support.

Overall, most of the changes were positive. Flemington Community Legal Services encourages everyone to be actively involved in advocating for positive changes.

MISSION STATEMENT

Flemington Community Legal Services is an accessible, non-profit, community based, poverty law clinic governed by a volunteer Board of Directors.

The purpose of our organization is to provide professional services of:

Law reform — Legal education — Advocacy—Legal advice and Legal representation

To individuals and groups within our catchment area

We are committed to working collaboratively with other legal clinics, community agencies and community groups in ways that will empower our clientele and serve the legal welfare of the low income community.

Social Assistance Benefits

People on government social assistance (Ontario Works-also known as Welfare- and Ontario Disability Support Program-ODSP) sometimes have to depend on the “additional” benefits of the programs. One of the most important has been the Community Start-Up and Maintenance Benefit (CSUMB). Traditionally, it has been used for paying first and last month rent deposit if someone has to move urgently and unexpectedly and/or to assist to prevent someone from being evicted from housing that is affordable. It has also been used for paying utilities arrears and other housing-related expenses. At the end of December 2012, the CSUMB was eliminated from social assistance in Ontario. Fortunately, as a result of pressure from clients, social assistance staff and agencies such as FCLS, the provincial government provided \$42 million one-time “transition funding” to help municipalities deal with the loss of the CSUMB and to move to locally-run programs.

These funds will run out in March 2014. We, as a legal clinic, know how important the CSUMB program has been for our clients. We are concerned about the many people who will need to rely on this program in the future. We, as do other legal clinics and community groups, think the province should make this “transition funding” permanently available to municipalities for housing and homelessness supports to low-income Ontarians. On November 26, 2013, a coalition of 27 concerned organizations from across Ontario sent a letter to the provincial government making this urgent request. You can get more information from the Income Security Advocacy Centre, the specialty legal clinic, at www.incomesecurity.org.

Is Costco coming to Thorncliffe Park?

Community leaders in Thorncliffe Park have welcomed the possibility of warehouse store giant Costco coming to the 13 acre site of the former Coca Cola Canada headquarters (HQ) building and bottling plant on Overlea Boulevard. While respecting their genuine desire for jobs close at hand to replace either joblessness or long commutes to jobs elsewhere in the GTA, some reservations/concerns have been expressed by residents in the neighbouring community about what this would mean to the Thorncliffe community.

The jobs issue was addressed by Costco at the community meeting on November 7, 2013. Costco stated that it is an equal opportunity employer so they cannot guarantee jobs for any particular community or any particular group.

As there are land use planning requirements that need to be met, Costco has to make an application to have the site rezoned. The two key planning issues that must be addressed are traffic and marke impact. They have to satisfy the City that there are no adverse effects on other commercial areas, and no adverse traffic implications, or that they can be mitigated. In addition, they need to address the heritage status of the former Coca Cola HQ building.

As Costco is a destination store, it could attract customers from the area bounded by Bathurst,

Queen St., Victoria Park and York Mills, including the whole of the Yonge St. corridor. How might this impact on the East York Town Centre, Target and Iqbal's, to name a few, and what net impact could this have on jobs in the community? Would it have a positive or negative effect?

Costco is a warehouse store that its customers travel to by car and will be attracted by its discount gas bar. This could affect the existing gas bars and will impact traffic. Those who are travelling through Thorncliffe Park on Overlea Blvd. could find up to an additional delay of 30 seconds at each traffic light on Overlea.

If the Coca Cola HQ site is designated as a heritage building and ultimately saved, is there an alternative vision for it other than as part of a Costco development? Some have proposed that the building be used for space for people to develop their ideas and start a business — a “business incubator”. There are examples of this form of social innovation elsewhere in the city — 215 Spadina, 720 Bathurst, and the new Regent Park facility. Perhaps the next one could be in Thorncliffe Park.

The proposed Costco development is a significant proposal for the Thorncliffe Park community. It is important that its residents get engaged in the process, whether they support the proposal or not.

(adapted from an article written by Geoff Kettel)