

Protesters march along Lawrence Avenue Monday to protest the lack of funding for East Scarborough Storefront which is located in Morningside Mall.

Mirror photo/DAN PEARCE

www.insidetoronto.com



'Vulnerable' community needs Storefront services

From page 1

cies or community groups can come in and use the space," she said.

Some of the programs include the Horn of Africa Homework Club, which uses the space two afternoons a week to help Somali students, a Tamil Seniors' Group and a police chat group held every Thursday afternoon to answer any questions that residents might have when it comes to policing.

"It's so neat because they're all so different," Metcalfe said. "It's totally unique."

The closure of Morningside Mall is not an issue. If the new owners won't rent out space to the Storefront, they have other options.

"We've got our fingers in other possibilities," Metcalfe said, adding they are looking into moving to a nearby location. "It's got to be within that Kingston Road/Morningside/Lawrence area. We might move a couple of blocks away. We can't lose the resources."

The area is going to continue to be vulnerable, she said. "The social housing is not going to be leaving the area. It's always going to be there and other high risk housing is there as well."

But there are options for the Storefront, she said. "I see the solution of the city stepping up. It's too late to apply for grants this year, but they could step up next year. I see other groups like the United Way stepping into it. It's such a valuable resource and everybody has a part to play in keeping it open. It's really just an issue of awareness. This is great. It's working. It's successful. It's cheap. I'd like to see it replicated in other parts of Toronto."

City, federal and provincial politicians are all looking to each other for solutions.

Ward 44 Councillor Gay Cowbourne (Scarborough East) said it's a federally funded program and everybody should put pressure on that level of government.

"Together everybody needs to keep lobbying the federal government to re-instate the money," she said. "Although the HRDC grants are geared toward employment there are many things that allow people to become employed. There's a whole social makeup of one's life. That's so important in finding and keeping a job. I think HRDC is not taking that into account on this funding calculation here."

She said she is looking into finding a city-owned building for the Storefront to use. There are city grants available but they have already been decided for this year, Cowbourne said. "The applications for the 2006 grants are due in October," she said, adding the Storefront should apply. "I think there is a high number of new immigrants in the area. There is a social need for the programs that are offered there. If the Storefront closes, it

will be to the detriment of the community."

Scarborough-Guildwood MP John McKay said funding was pulled because the initial funding was slated exclusively for employment services. The Storefront provides other services as well. There have been changes to the definition of employment services, McKay said.

"They changed the definition in what is and isn't employment related," he said. "That's fine if you're just starting up, but we're in the middle now."

McKay said he's reasonably optimistic that the East Scarborough Storefront will continue to exist - partially. "The employment is the secure part of the funding."

McKay added he'll continue to pressure Belinda Stronach, who heads the Human Resources and Social Development Ministry.

"My job here is to harass people," he said. "The minister knows I'm a major harasser. I'm happy to apply that pressure."

He also said he'd be willing to work with the province to come up with funding options. "If (Scarborough East MPP) Mary Ann (Chambers) has got any brilliant ideas I'm all ears."

But Chambers is looking to the federal government for funding and said they need to make a labour market development deal with Ontario. "When we say Ontario needs a fair share we're not talking about money going into the provincial government treasury," she said.

"We're talking about money that would be turned around and put into agencies such as the kind that are delivering employment services to the communities that need them. This is a perfect example of that."

The East Scarborough Storefront has applied for a Trillium grant from the province, which would cover the volunteer co-ordination services.

The employment services area that has in the past been sponsored by HRSDC is an example of the type of service that would benefit from the labour market development agreement, Chambers said.

"With the proposed agreement with the federal government we could support more services."

She said Ontario isn't getting a fair shake from the federal government because it's the only province without a labour market agreement and an immigration agreement with the federal government. "It's frustrating. We're asking the feds to give us additional funding so we could do this kind of work."

She said she hopes the Trillium grant application will be successful. "I want to make it very, very clear that the East Scarborough Storefront is absolutely critical to this area."