

MEDIA

The London Free Press
Wednesday, October 11, 2006

“Some homeless agencies still waiting for money”

By Chip Martin

One-quarter of the federal money promised to help London's homeless has started to flow to local agencies, but others remain upset over foot-dragging by bureaucrats in Ottawa.

The Street Outreach London East (SOLE) project has just learned the \$60,000 it sought to help youth and adults find accommodation is about to arrive, saving the small agency that was to close its doors Friday.

The AIDS committee that helps homeless youth is about to receive its nearly \$75,000 and an emergency food program at the London Community Resource Centre can stay in business with a \$24,187 grant.

But six other organizations that help the homeless and those facing homelessness still await word on nearly \$450,000 in funds from Service Canada.

“We're just barely surviving,” said Shelley Milos, executive director of the London Housing Registry, which has asked for \$56,700 with which to find accommodation for desperate Londoners in private housing.

“I'm more than livid,” said Milos. The funding, when it comes, is to end March 31, making it hard to find staff to deliver help to some of London's neediest citizens.

Milos would like to see Ottawa extend the homelessness initiative to go beyond March so organizations like hers, established in 1984, can keep their doors open and respond to crisis situations.

Dick Rastin, chairperson of the London Homeless Coalition, said by delaying its funds, Ottawa will argue money that's not spent by March 31 wasn't really needed. And that's far from the case because the needs of the homeless are acute and ongoing, he said.

“We have asked for an extension of time so we can spend the money appropriately,” Rastin said.

Meanwhile, at the East London street outreach program, worker Ken Adair said the federal funds come just in time to keep him and another staffer employed.

“We're still in business and busy as can be,” Adair said.

London Fanshawe NDP MP Irene Mathysen, who pushed Ottawa to live up to its commitment to the homeless and housing agencies, said there “is still work to be done,” to get the remaining funds to London agencies that have been promised help.

Last week, several agencies predicted that without federal funding, Londoners will see more people begging and living on the street this winter.