

SAVE OUR COMMUNITY CEC

March 23, 1996

The Right Honourable Deng Young
Minister, Human Resources Development Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario

FAXED THIS DATE

Mr. Minister,

We are a group of community representatives who have occupied the Canada Employment Centre on Gottingen Street in Halifax, NS, in an effort to stop the planned move of the centre, to the Community YMCA, also located on Gottingen Street. We are members of the CEC/Black Community Work Group, an advisory group that has been working in partnership with CEC over the past number of years, to address the specific needs of the Black Community in Halifax, with respect to programs and services offered by HRDC in North End Halifax.

Over the years we have worked very hard in our partnership, and our work group has been a national model within HRDC, for the community-based work that the Department has carried out. This relationship has recently come under severe strain, over the issue of the closure of the Gottingen Street CEC, specifically, the decision of the Local HRDC authorities to co-locate the office in the building of the Community YMCA.

This decision was taken in the middle of a process initiated by the Work Group, to find a new location for the Centre, within the community. The actions of the HRDC officials in this matter has seriously undermined the integrity of our partnership with HRDC, and placed us in a position of taking dramatic action, which we would much rather have avoided.

On Wednesday, March 26, we began an occupation of the office, in an attempt to halt the move of our centre into the new location, until a resolution could be reached through negotiations with HRDC. Negotiations began yesterday, and continued through today. After our session this morning, we came away feeling very positive about the process, and that a resolution to the occupation would be forthcoming. When we reconvened for negotiations this afternoon, we had reached agreement on all but two issues, as follows:

1. **Finding an alternate alternative location for the CEC - other than the Community YMCA.**
We are prepared to work with CEC to find a location that is suitable to both parties, and

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 21, 1996

HALIFAX - GOVERNMENT CLOSES COMMUNITY EMPLOYMENT CENTRE

On the eve of the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, it has been announced that the Gottingen Street Canada Employment Centre (CEC) will close its doors.

"The timing of the announcement is ironic, given that the community-based CEC in the heart of this diverse North End community serves the highest number of Black clients in Halifax", according to Carolann Wright of the African Canadian Caucus.

"Clients will now have to travel to the Halifax Shopping Centre location, where representation of Black employees on staff is almost non-existent. The announcement that a community service in the Community Y will be established is unacceptable," according to Anne Betts of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. "The service will be seriously downgraded, with some functions such as counselling available on an appointment-only basis. This is not an approach that will improve access to these vital services, in a community that already experiences a higher than average unemployment rate. It simply will not work and will ultimately lead to the demise of what is seen as a stop gap measure with little hope of success."

"It is our understanding that the department (Human Resources Development Canada) has ignored the recommendations of the Black Community Work Group, set up under the auspices of the CEC to actively work on employment issues in the community," stated Betts. "We hear that the group, which has representation from most Black organizations in the city, has unanimously declared that the department's intentions are unacceptable. We understand the group is alleging that the department has bargained in bad faith and totally ignored the Black community in this so called partnership on employment".

"The Gottingen Street CEC has been an important presence in the community for many years," added Rocky Jones of Dalhousie Legal Aid. "The office has been instrumental in forging partnerships with community groups that have resulted in many innovative strategies and programs. Many of the successful ventures found in the community today, such as the African Canadian Business Development Centre, the African Nova Scotian Training Centre, Black Focus Magazine Cooperative and the African Canadian Employment Clinic have resulted from these ventures."

On this day, the government should be making announcements on initiatives designed to eliminate systemic racism, instead of tearing down and downsizing the kind of service delivery to the community provided out of the Gottingen Street CEC.

For more information:

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made the commitment today that we would immediately begin this process, in hopes that we would find such a location. This position was an acceptance on our part, of a proposal put forth by HRDC reps in negotiations.

2. The establishment of a process whereby both partners could do a joint Community Needs Assessment, with the purpose of determining the exact needs of the community with respect to services and programs. While both parties agreed to establishing the Community Needs Assessment process, our negotiations broke down over what issues would be included in the Assessment. Specifically, our difference lies in whether or not the need for a free-standing, independent CEC location is assessed in the Community Needs Assessment. We are willing to allow the community, to determine, by means of this assessment, whether or not an independent, free-standing site is necessary to satisfy its needs.

The HRDC Atlantic Regional Director General, Joanne Toews categorically rejected the inclusion of this issue in the Needs Assessment. This has resulted in the complete breakdown of the negotiations.

In the best interest of all parties concerned, it is desirable that these issues be resolved as quickly as possible. We simply want to have the decision about the need for a free-standing, independent site included in the Community Needs Assessment to be acted upon as a result of the findings of such an assessment. By refusing to include this item in the Needs Assessment, HRDC is placing the integrity of the process in jeopardy. This places HRDC's sincerity and commitment to this community in question.

We feel that this issue is resolvable, and therefore, we are asking for your intervention in this matter. Specifically, we are requesting that you instruct the Atlantic Regional Director General, Joanne Toews to change her position on this issue, so that the occupation situation can be resolved, and the rift in our partnership can begin to heal.

Given the obvious urgency of this situation, we request your reply by return fax or personal visit on Friday, March 29 am. We can be reached by fax at (902)415-7772. Your immediate attention to this matter would be appreciated.

Yours truly,



Carolann Wright
African Canadian Council of Nova Scotia
Black Community/CEC Work Group member

cc Mary Clancy, MP Halifax
Media