

LIFE SPIN

LOW-INCOME FAMILY EMPOWERMENT
SOLE-SUPPORT PARENTS INFORMATION NETWORK

February 13, 2013

Mayor & City Council
City of London
300 Dufferin Avenue
London, ON N6A 4L9

Dear Mayor Fontana & Members of Council

Thank you for this opportunity to share vital budget issues from a community perspective. For more than 20 years, LIFE*SPIN has provided specialized assistance to ALL Londoners in obtaining supports to which they may be entitled, such as OAS, GIS, EI, Canada Pension Plan, Ontario Works, subsidized housing, and provincial disability supports and benefits. In 2012, more than 6,500 low-income households sought our help. LIFE*SPIN provides critical services to the unemployed, the under-employed, those with limited literacy skills, disabilities and mental health challenges. Most of the money in these households is used to pay for rent and utilities and most had difficulty navigating the "red-tape" to access existing supports in our community, such as disability pensions, assistive devices, home-care supports and the like.

Our advocates meet with each family to determine priority needs and seek the most appropriate and empowering supports, often referring folk to neighbourhood resources or other specialized agencies that can assist specific clientele with some of their support needs. In 2011, LIFE*SPIN generated more than 1.3 million of benefits to low-income families directly.

There are two key budget issues that are critical to the folks we serve, and both relate to our collective responsibility to address homelessness and housing security in London. The London Community Plan on Homelessness states, "The permanent solution to homelessness is housing" and in this, we need to continually strive to maintain a "Housing First" perspective.

We would also like to acknowledge that in December 1999, the City of London provided a capital grant to LIFE*SPIN for \$60,000 towards financing the purchase of our current location where we provide 10 units of permanent residential housing at below market rates, which are **not** subsidized by the city. This was prior to the creation of the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund, when there were no provincial or federal programs in place either. If you consider a minimum subsidy of \$100/mth over the past 12 years for each unit, the savings generated would be \$144,000; more than double your initial investment. If you consider the cost of keeping these low income Londoners in a shelter, the

savings would be exponentially increased. The success of this model of housing development, as a component of Community Economic Development, should continue to be celebrated and explored as a made-in-London solution.

Affordable Housing Reserve Fund

The creation of a 2-million-dollar Affordable Housing Reserve Fund, established by council in October 2001, provided our community with the ability to leverage provincial and federal dollars to create new affordable housing units in our community. In addition to generating the direct monetary investment into London, this fund creates jobs for workers and permanent housing, some of which enables low and moderate income households to build equity and escape the cycle of poverty. This reserve fund is a vital component of economic renewal in our city. Last February, a 1-million-dollar reduction to the Affordable Housing Reserve Fund was made by council in a last-minute attempt to reach the "false 0" budget. This was not a reduction recommended by staff and we trust that you are now considering the loss of the matched funding dollars this would have leveraged (at a 7:1 ratio) into the local economy and the subsequent inability to meet the targeted number of units. Thus, we respectfully request that, not only do you fulfill the commitment to the Reserve Fund, but that you thoughtfully consider restoring the contribution from last year to enable London to meet our commitment to providing essential affordable homes for our residents, thousands of whom languish in shelter beds and unsuitable housing, as evidenced in staff reports regarding wait lists for housing and the costs of temporary emergency housing usage.

Re-Investment of Provincial Uploading of Ontario Works & ODSP

As the province continues to upload the costs of providing Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs, they download the services onto the municipality. For example, last year's download meant London was slated to lose 1.9 million dollars of the cost of providing Community Start-Up benefits to help Londoners obtain permanent housing or prevent them from losing it. London received a one-time grant to help off-set this loss in 2013, largely due to councils, like you, imploring the provincial government to allow you adequate time to plan the implementation of this cut. Regardless, the provincial uploading of OW/ODSP will continue to add millions in cost savings to the income support budget, while we continue to see substantial cuts in social service programs.

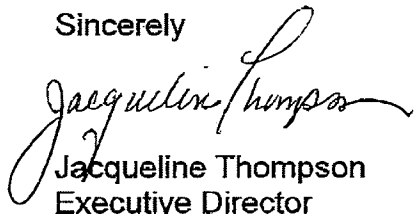
We urge you to reinvest these savings into the programs being downloaded, to meet direct client needs, such as discretionary assistance, last-months' rent and essential household items necessary to leave shelters, abuse, and sub-standard housing conditions and to ensure that an appeals process is established to address the right to appeal to the Social Benefits Tribunal, which is also being

lost in the download of services from the province. The cuts to the social programs disproportionately impact people with disabilities who already face significant barriers to housing and children living in low-income families, who are vulnerable to negative health, learning, and development consequences, directly related to inadequate housing.

In conclusion, in our experience, one of the universal challenges confronted by low income individuals and families is the tremendous difficulty encountered in moving beyond day-to-day crisis and visualizing a future beyond subsistence. Make no mistake, these crises can be initiated here in the council chamber: cuts to transportation impede get a sick child to the doctor or to a job interview. Cuts to libraries impede low income students from completing assignments and the unemployed from finding a job. Neighbourhood resources and family centres provide critical services across the city. Cuts to disability access, further marginalize the disabled and the increasing number of seniors in our community.

Yet, a home is the place we can dream of a future, where we can feel good about ourselves and our ability to provide for our children and from which we are able to participate fully in the life of our community. In one sense, providing security of a home is the critical base of security for many families in our community. We encourage you to keep a "**Housing First**" approach. This approach will enable us to bear in mind that a homeless individual or household's first and primary need is to obtain stable housing. London has an opportunity and a responsibility to ensure that we continue to meet the targeted supply and implement the supports needed to access housing.

Sincerely



Jacqueline Thompson
Executive Director