

Safety upgrades will help community agencies move forward: Minister



By Brock Weir

A Provincial investment to make living environments safer for some of Aurora and Newmarket's most vulnerable citizens comes as a 'welcome relief' to Community Living Newmarket/Aurora.

Colleen Zakoor, Executive Director of Community Living Newmarket-Aurora welcomed Dr. Helena Jaczek, Ontario's Minister of Community and Social Services, and a host of dignitaries, including MPP Chris Ballard, to their Newmarket headquarters for an announcement which earmarks \$6.5 million to over 40 agencies throughout Ontario.

This money, \$49,000 of which will go to Community Living Newmarket-Aurora, is intended to bring forward upgrades to fire alarm systems, install fire doors and separations, and install sprinkler systems, bringing facilities up to date according to new provisions in the Ontario Fire Code.

Community Living Newmarket-Aurora has 20 'shared living environments' throughout Aurora and Newmarket for individuals living with intellectual challenges, seven of which are in need of sprinkler systems.

'This will ensure those living in our 24-hour shared living environments can evacuate safely and meet the legislative requirements,' said Ms. Zakoor. 'It is the most important thing in people's lives. For their most vulnerable, their families are relying on us to ensure they get out safely and they have time to get out if there is a fire.'

'This is not the end and we're going to keep going at it. [In the environments where there aren't sprinklers] we have added extra staff. We don't have the funding for it, but at the same time that is a priority to make sure they get out safely.'

These extra staff are above their existing provisions, she notes, and this new investment will help Community Living get back within budget.

This is a view shared by Dr. Jaczek who said this investment will help organizations like Community Living allocate their funds for programs enabling those living with intellectual disabilities to get out and involved in the community.

'In terms of the safety of vulnerable people, we are very anxious to ensure that our service workers are as well trained as possible,' she said. 'We know that they are wonderful people who work with these vulnerable individuals on a daily basis. Obviously they are very cognizant of fire safety and the need to evacuate, but we want to free them up to do a lot more interesting work with people with developmental disabilities, trying to ensure there are opportunities for volunteer work in the community.'

?We want to ensure that wherever possible they can have some employment. Some of these people work at Tim Hortons and they're out, and there is a lot going on [on] the development side, and we want our developmental service workers to be more focused on getting the people they care so much about out into the community. All these various aids allow more time for that kind of opportunity.?

Added Mr. Ballard: ?Community Living Newmarket/Aurora District takes great pride in providing support for some of our community's most vulnerable people. With this funding, families can rest easy knowing that the facilities at Community Living Newmarket/Aurora District will continue to be a safe place for their loved ones for years to come.?

Ontario is the first province to make sprinklers mandatory in existing senior care residences and homes. While most of the senior care centres in Aurora are now compliant, there are a few that still need to be brought up to code before a 2025 deadline.