

Centre for social research moving to offices in core

[Final Edition]

The Record - Kitchener, Ont.

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Date: Apr 24, 2002

Section: Local

Text Word Count: 503

Document Text

A research centre that employs poor people to investigate social issues has moved into the heart of downtown Kitchener as the city tries to discourage additional support agencies from locating in the core.

The Centre for Research and Education in Human Services -- a group dedicated to the social well-being of Canadian communities -- has moved its headquarters from an old house at College and Duke streets to new and expanded offices at 73 King St. W. in the heart of the core.

Centre co-ordinator Joanna Ochocka said yesterday she's aware of efforts by the city and some core business people to reduce concentration of social agencies and affordable-housing projects in downtown Kitchener.

"But it makes symbolic sense . . . for us to be located here because so many poor people are downtown," she said.

Ochocka said the centre employs 20 to 40 people who help to improve communication and build bridges between disadvantaged people, government, the corporate sector and those who provide social services.

She said her group could play a part in easing the tension between social agencies, the people they help and downtown business people.

Kitchener council recently asked staff to look into ways the city can control concentration of social agencies and affordable-housing projects in and near the core.

Council and some members of Kitchener's Downtown Business Association want to see agencies and subsidized housing spread more evenly around Waterloo Region.

Asked about the centre's new offices, Mayor Carl Zehr said he knows little about the group but intends to go to the official opening of the its new offices Friday.

Marty Schreiter, the business association's executive director, also declined comment on the centre's relocation.

Schreiter, who is unfamiliar with work done by the centre, said he is trying to find a local group willing to facilitate discussions between downtown agencies and businesses about the "sensitive" concentration issue.

Financed by federal, provincial and local governments, the centre is a non-profit organization that, without fanfare, has quietly done innovative, community-based research on social issues during the past 20 years.

Researchers have worked on projects that benefit a wide variety of groups including seniors, the disabled, immigrant families and foreign-trained workers.

The centre has prepared reports and studies to combat racism and hate crimes while promoting social change in areas of housing, health, and psychiatric care for those returning to communities after receiving treatment.

The group has researched many local projects, including a rent bank to help homeless people and those at risk of being evicted.

The independent centre -- founded in 1982 by social-research consultant John Lord -- employs four, full-time researchers and has a board of directors who are local people active on social issues.

A ceremony to celebrate the 20th anniversary and official opening of the downtown offices will be held Friday between 1 and 5 p.m. on the second floor of 73 King St. W., near King and Ontario streets.

[Illustration]

Caption: Photo: Joanna Ochocka is co-ordinator of the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services.

Credit: RECORD STAFF