

# Where's the money? Asks Rockhill tenant



*Two months after fire, victim questions how donations are getting distributed; YWCA says it's not allowed to give out funds directly*

by Meaghan Richens  
Northern News Services

People donated \$238,103 to the YWCA NWT after its main transitional housing facility and offices were destroyed in a fire in October. In the aftermath of a fire that displaced 87 people, some of the former residents say they still haven't seen any of that money.

The YWCA has publicly stated that the money is intended to buy beds, furniture and other household essentials lost in the fire, along with groceries, clothing and other supplies. Former Rockhill resident Brenda Kowana said she wanted money to buy some beadwork supplies but YWCA support workers told her she would have to be escorted and taken shopping to buy beads and anything else she needed for her new place. "I said, 'take me shopping,' are you serious? I'm not a kid," said Kowana. "I felt so humiliated, I felt victimized all over. Like, 'oh my god. I just lost my place and I need this and I need that. I don't need somebody to stand with me."

Kowana said she was confused when she heard the donated funds were being used to help people out with rent. After the fire, residents on income support were each given \$500 and a food allowance. Kowana said she had to use that \$500 to pay insurance and when she asked for help to pay that insurance she was denied, meaning she couldn't

pay to fill her new apartment with necessary items.

"The only thing I got from YWCA is gift cards, a bed, sheets and blankets," Kowana said.

Others have taken to Facebook to voice similar complaints. *Yellowknifer* also received a letter last week complaining that many former Rockhill tenants were forced in to apartments with higher rents and little other financial assistance although the handwritten note was anonymous and could not be verified.

#### **\$67,000 on furniture last week: SPCA**

Lyda Fuller, executive director of the YWCA, said as of Nov. 21 the organization had spent close to \$90,000 to support former Rockhill residents and in the last week alone it spent another \$67,000 on furniture.

"It seems like the complaints are coming from a small group of people and I think they are the people that have had the hardest time with some of the changes and maybe they started with an expectation that was unrealistic," said Fuller.

"It was surprising to me that people thought they would get a chunk of change from the donation and as a charity we aren't allowed to do that."

Julie Green, MLA for Yellowknife Centre, said Kowana came to her asking questions about whether receiving donations would

have an impact on her income support. Green in turn asked Caroline Cochran, minister of Education, Culture and Employment (ECE), the department that administers income support. "Our office was advised that the department issued approval to exempt any monetary donations that income assistance recipients receive . . . and issued emergency allowances to 15 income assistance recipients," stated an email from ECE to Julie Green. In other words, the department would not count donations as income support for the month of October. ECE stated in an email to *Yellowknifer* they could not speak to individual cases because of confidentiality issues but exemptions were being applied on a case-by-case basis.

"The only connection ECE has to the donations are through the exemptions we made in October for our Income Assistance clients that lived at the Rockhill Apartments and this continues on a case by case basis," stated Jacqueline McKinnon, a spokesperson for ECE. "Donations for the Rockhill fire victims have been exclusively managed by the YWCA." Kowana said she no longer trusts those in charge of distributing the funds.

"I don't trust them at all," said Kowana. "Any other fundraisers they have, I hope there's no turnout, I hope people don't go there. Because it's sure not coming to us."

— with files from Dylan Short

*The aftermath of the Rockhill fire earlier this year. Residents of the destroyed building are now questioning where money raised to help them has gone.*

NNSL file photo

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