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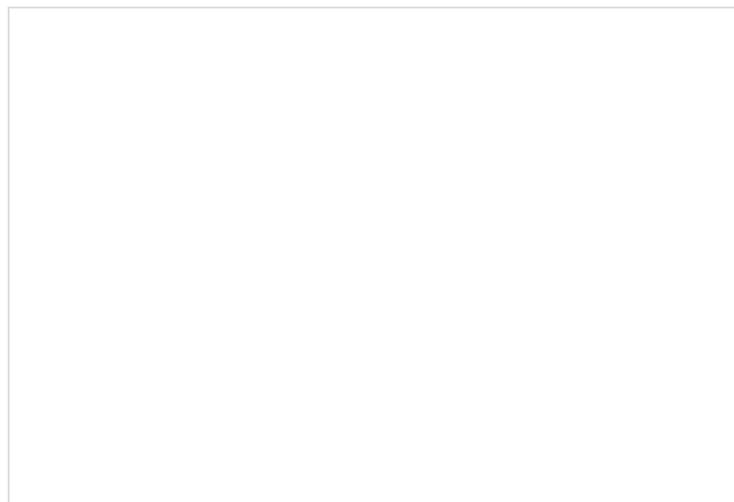
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Youth centres closed in violence-plagued area



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By: CTV.ca News Staff
Date: Wed. Nov. 30 2005 7:21 PM ET

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Three weeks ago, Mayor David Miller and Prime Minister Paul Martin stood together touting the role of community programs in keeping kids away from violence.

Last week, four youth centres in the violence-plagued Keele and Eglinton neighbourhood closed their doors in reaction to the murders of two of their participants, Amon Beckles and Jamal Hemmings.

Toronto Community Housing and Syme-Woolner Neighbourhood and Family Centre, both located in York Square, stopped offering youth programs last week. Two city-run, school-based drop-ins in the area, at George Harvey Collegiate and Rockcliffe Middle School, were also closed.

When Martin was in the city, he visited the troubled Jane and Finch area with Miller to announce a \$50 million anti-violence strategy, with heightened youth services playing a key role.

This week, Miller said the Keele and Eglinton centres were closed because staff members were traumatized by the recent deaths. The York Square location was to be closed this week anyway for renovations, he said.

"The way I look at this, they're closing in a week. Two kids who actually used the services were murdered and it's a sad thing that we have to close it," he said. "But if you were working there and somebody you worked with had been murdered, you'd have difficulty coming to work, at least for a week."

According to Allan Graham, operations support co-ordinator for parks and recreation at the city, the city-run school-based programs were slated to close this week as per the terms of a lease negotiated with the school board. Graham said the participants requested time to grieve for their friends, and the programs are to reopen in January.

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- CTV News: Alicia Kay-Markson on temporary closure of youth centre

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Marjorie Henry's 14-year-old son was a regular at the York Square centre. She is one of many community members who doesn't think the move makes sense. She says it's only been a week, but her son misses having something to do after school.

"It was a good thing... You knew where your kids are. Now where's the kids?" she said. "Now we'll have problems. That's why we're trying to get somewhere to put the kids. This is not right."

Community organizer and video producer Mark Simms agrees. Simms is the executive producer for website jane-finch.com, which seeks to give young local talent a voice in the community. He has also been teaching young people how to create and edit their own films, and believes the only way to get kids away from violence is to replace it with something they find more interesting.

"Community centres are exactly what we need right now," he said. "Closing them and putting people on the streets is just causing the same trouble that makes us need those centres in the first place."

He says his programs have made a visible difference in the people who attend, giving them a sense of belonging and self-esteem, and a marketable skill.

"In these neighbourhoods, self-esteem is really low. A lot of people see their older brothers and sisters in the same spot as their parents, like nothing ever changes. Their perception of the world is pretty small, they can't see past Jane and Finch," he said.

"After school programs give kids a tool to use, whatever way they wish to use it. I've seen it change people. A lot of them used to sell drugs, and now they'd rather shoot video. The last thing we need is to close them down."

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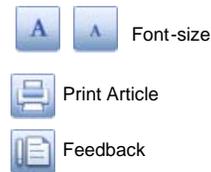
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“ Hmm...There are way to communicate issues like grown adults. Certainly there are improvements that can be made to how we do business in the oilsands, but that doesn't give these fools the right to put others at risk including themselves in a potentially hazardous environment. Looking at the equipment they are sporting, and the vehicles they drive makes me wonder. Do they know that many of the products they use are by products of the process? And do they realize that the vehicles they operate require an energy source? Last I looked, members from South America have their countryside being torn up from clear cutting, members from France should be looking at their country's use of nuclear power, and those from Germany should look at the coal production within their borders. Clean up your own mess before being a safety hazard in mine. You are a miss guided flock that obviously can not communicate at an adult level ”

Dan from McMurray
Greenpeace stages another oilsands protest

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