

## **Access to Recreation - Everybody Gets to Play Report**

As some of you may be aware, the City of Toronto Parks Forestry and Recreation Dept (PF&R) released a new strategy for access to recreation programs entitled "Everybody Gets to Play". This report includes an increase in recreation fees which has been extensively covered by the media.

This is a contradiction and huge step backwards in our efforts move towards universally free access to recreation. We cannot take away free access that currently exists. A key concern that is arising with respect to this strategy is the elimination of the 21 priority centres in high needs neighbourhoods (i.e Regent Park, South Parkdale, Rexdale, Flemingdon, Jane and Finch etc). These priority centres currently provide free programming with no documentation of income required. The new plan does not directly state this, but over the next 7 years, these centres that currently have free, universal programming in neighbourhoods with large concentrations of immigrant, refugees and people of colour will be phased out, and they will move to *income testing* for all low income individuals.

A bit of background. PF&R has a program in **non** priority centres called the "Welcome Policy". Low income people that do not reside near a priority centre currently need to provide documentation of income to receive access to free programming. PF&R would like to extend their Welcome Policy across the city, and see this new strategy as a way in *increase* access for low income individuals by investing more money into the policy and creating "equal access to programming" across the board. This extension also means that everyone will have to provide proof of income for free programming, including those in high needs areas who currently do not.

The strategy allows for free access to skate, swim and "youth leadership", and each of the 21 former priority centres can hold local consultation to choose a portion of their programming that they would like to be free. This consultation method has its own problems - the issue becomes who will attend these consultations to advise the city, and who essentially will be picking these programmes.

A list of dates that the City has selected for community consultations is below.

### **Wednesday, January 16, 2008 from 7 to 9 p.m.**

Elmbank Community Centre (10 Rampart Rd.)

Wellesley Community Centre (495 Sherbourne St.)

### **Thursday, January 17, 2008 from 7 to 9 p.m.**

North York Civic Centre Council Chambers (5100 Yonge St.)

Scarborough Civic Centre Committee Rooms 1 and 2 (150 Borough Dr.)

You can also **depute at a special meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee** to discuss this item which will most likely be on the evening of the 23rd of January. The final report will be going forward to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on February 21st, 2008. You can depute by contacting the committee administrator, Candy Davidovits at 416-392-8032 or by email at [cdrc@toronto.ca](mailto:cdrc@toronto.ca)