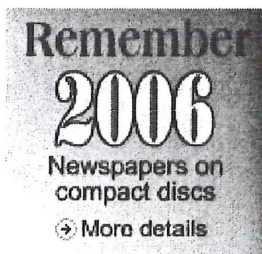




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The lure of government salaries

Christine Grimard
Northern News Services
Wednesday, August 1, 2007

YELLOWKNIFE - Not-for-profit agencies are struggling to retain employees because they can't compete with government salaries, a recent study concluded.

YWCA Yellowknife, who spearheaded the study, found their salaries and benefits were only 59 percent of comparable GNWT positions.

"If we don't get some help with this, we won't be able to keep doing the work," said Lyda Fuller, executive director of the YWCA Yellowknife.

Fuller said they have 20 vacant front-line positions to fill at places such as the Alison McAteer House, and other programs run by the YWCA. It's getting to the point she's not sure how much longer they'll be able to provide these services.

"These kinds of services are for the most vulnerable people we see," said Fuller. "We're not talking about fluff."

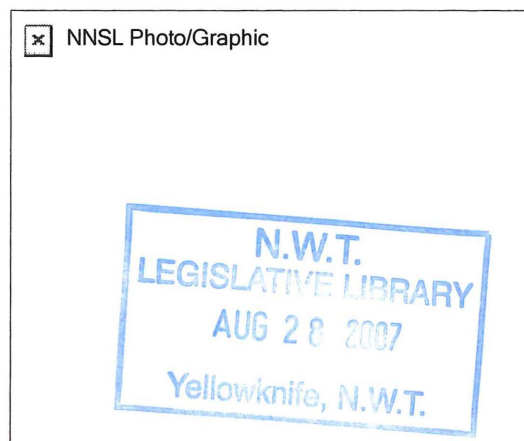
The study was conducted on behalf of five not-for-profit agencies, including the Tree of Peace, the Salvation Army, the NWT Council for Persons with Disabilities, the Yellowknife Association for Community Living, and led by the YWCA.

"Nobody's getting the bigger picture here," said Fuller.

She said that while governments offer regular increases to their own staff, they're holding back on these agencies.

Arlene Hache, of the Centre for Northern Families, said she has a serious problem with losing employees to the government.

"You can't live on the salaries we pay in Yellowknife," said Hache. "The staff I do have know they're underpaid. They're here purely because of their dedication to working with families."



Lyda Fuller, executive director of the YWCA Yellowknife, says her staff is exhausted going through resumes, with 20 vacant front-line positions. She says turnover is a serious problem for community groups that can only offer a fraction of government salaries and benefits. - Christine Grimard/NNSL photo

Hache says there is a trend by government to make similar positions to those created initially by community groups, then offer a much higher salary. She said the Centre for Northern Families created the family support worker position in 1995. Three to four years ago the government created a similar position, paying their employees \$30,000 more than she was allotted.

"We're at the bottom of the pecking order. The GNWT is at the top of the order because they hold all the resources. They get to be on top," said Hache.

Finance Minister Floyd Roland said that those salaries increase because of the government union contracts in place.

He acknowledged that community group employees make less money because these groups approached the government offering their services at a lower price.

"We were told as a government they could do the job cheaper and better," said Roland. "If we match GNWT salaries and benefits, should the government not just be doing it ourselves?"

The study is asking the government to increase salaries with these agencies up to 80 percent of comparable GNWT positions.

The groups applied for forced growth funding through the local health authorities, and the Department of Health and Social Services.

Roland would not comment on whether those requests would be approved, saying it's up to GNWT business planners.

