

HINTONBURG

COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, INC. • ASSOCIATION COMMUNAUTAIRE INC
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10 April 2012

Councillor Mark Taylor, Chair
Community and Protective Services Committee
City of Ottawa

RE: Termination of Industry Canada funding of the Community Access Program

As you may know, Industry Canada has recently begun making operators of Community Access Program (CAP) sites aware that the Department is withdrawing funding. CAP sites were established by the federal government to bridge the socio-economic digital divide and assist those without access to the Internet. The CAP program provided training, equipment, and Internet connectivity.

As you well know, Internet connectivity is a precondition of democratic and economic participation in this day and age. Being online provides Canadians with better access to government, health information, job searches, banking, and educational opportunities, including for schoolchildren. We note, for instance, that the City has begun to host online-only consultations about development issues such as Community Design Plans.

As a result of this funding cut, Hintonburg will lose three of the 48 (by our count) sites in Ottawa. I am writing because I hope that the City of Ottawa can provide leadership on mitigating the impact of these cuts.

We are concerned that the loss of access will affect some of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable people in our community and in Ottawa generally. There are CAP sites at Bethany Hope Centre, serving young parents, the Rosemount Library, serving residents in our community including immigrant and lower-income households, and the Causeway Work Centre. While the client base at Rosemount library is geographically-defined, we know that clients of Bethany Hope Centre, for instance, come largely from outside our community. We assume the same is true of Causeway.

We have analyzed what we understand are the locations of the CAP sites in Ottawa, and it is clear that they often serve disadvantaged geographic communities and vulnerable citizens of Ottawa. According to our preliminary analysis available online¹, CAP sites serve communities that on average have 75% of median household and family incomes as the greater Ottawa area CMA. This number is artificially high: some CAPs serving special client groups, for example at Neil Squire Foundation, are in areas that otherwise have very high median incomes compared to the whole of the CMA. The median household income in some census tracts served by CAP sites is as low as 36%, 43% and 45% of the median for the CMA.

Some of Ottawa's most vulnerable communities, as shown in our analysis, are served by CAP sites, including Banff-Ledbury, Winthrop Court, Morrison Gardens, Michele Heights, Ramsey, Overbrook-Forbes, Lowertown and Debra Dynes. These are communities that have been specifically targeted by Ottawa's Community Design Framework initiative and the No Community Left Behind project. Many of these communities are at risk from guns, drugs and gangs, which is why they have been identified by the City for particular help.

Where these CAPs are not serving vulnerable communities, they are almost all serving at-risk client groups such as new Canadians, individuals in transition, and street youth/runaways at locations such as the Maison Marie-

¹<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/ccc?key=0AtNZr3KosCHddFJZbFNOUmNyXzNPVGhuQjFsdHffU1E#gid=0>

Louise, Centre507, Operation Come Home, the Somali Centre for Family Services and Causeway Work Centre. These sites focus on employment and education opportunities that allow people to bridge the digital divide.

The City is to be applauded for the significant work it has done in addressing issues of crime as primarily social issues. The No Community Left Behind project and Community Design Frameworks treat neighbourhoods holistically to provide opportunities for at-risk youth and adults to participate in education, the economy and government on the necessary digital ground. The loss of CAP sites in the Community Houses and in health and employment centres in disadvantaged communities risks a reversal in the fortunes of these areas and of the people they serve.

The HCA considers that the City is a key stakeholder in the CAP program. In the wake of cuts to the program, we recommend that there are multiple avenues the City might pursue to mitigate the impact of these cuts:

- call on the federal government to reconsider cutting some or all of the CAP sites;
- provide leadership in working with communications providers, electronics retailers, social advocates and others to replace lost funding through new partnerships; and,
- replace some lost funding as part of the No Community Left Behind initiative

We further recommend that greater research be conducted into the issues of the socio-economic digital divide in Ottawa and Gatineau to understand how civic and economic participation are impacted, including impacts to our city's competitiveness.

The security and prosperity of neighbourhoods such as Hintonburg depend on providing every citizen of Ottawa with an opportunity to participate in the digital economy. Councillor Taylor, as Chair of the Community and Protective Services Committee, of which the Mayor is an *ex officio* member, we know that you will be concerned by cuts to the CAP program. If we are able to be of any assistance as the City considers how to reduce the effects of those cuts, we would be pleased to do so.

Sincerely,

(signed)

Jeff Leiper
President, Hintonburg Community Association