

The Record

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I just want to say



Some of our readers may be wondering where our quarterly newsletter disappeared. The short answer is our resources have been tight and time never seems to be on our side. That said, we are being productive on the investigations front having completed and reported on two systemic files, one about water metering and the second on the after care of evacuated residents at the 200 Wellesley Street fire in 2010.

While we address individual complaints, the office is focused on systemic solutions as a means of getting fixes for many residents in a single investigation. We are currently conducting five other systemic investigations across an array of City services. Addressing problems in this way is also cost effective.

We recently filled our Access & Education position to help get the word out about our services. I am committed to ensuring that they are accessible to all residents, particularly those who may be marginalized or vulnerable and as a consequence either have more contact with government and/or have less knowledge about the Ombudsman.

Everyone in Toronto comes into contact with city services at some time or another – transportation, parks, recreation, water, public health, emergency services, inspections - and everyone runs the potential risk of receiving poor service, experiencing a misunderstanding or maladministration. And so everyone should be aware that the Office of the Ombudsman is the place of last resort for complaints about city public services.

The public education program is carried out within the following framework.

First, the office publishes an annual report, provides investigation reports to City Council and uses a variety of other communications through the office's website, media interviews, a newsletter, twitter and related publications.

Second, there is broad messaging to Councillors and their staff; the Toronto Public Service; umbrella organizations across the city; community, philanthropic, business, academia and media. I also regularly speak to a wide range of audiences and meet with community stakeholders and other leaders.

Third, targeted outreach to specific communities is now being planned for. It is based on several assumptions: that residents and community service providers do not know about Ombudsman services; that when they do know, they are unsure about the process; that residents may not be able to complain; and that service providers are under-resourced and therefore unable to assist residents in filing their complaints.

The neighbourhoods of L'Amoreaux, Woburn, Malvern and Rouge will be the subject of the office's first efforts in this regard over the coming months. These neighbourhoods, among others, are comprised of larger households, higher percentages of foreign-born recent immigrant and racialized residents, and a population with lower economic status and a higher prevalence of blue-collar jobs and low household incomes.

I met with the National Ethnic Press and Media Council of Canada recently and with its assistance, we are beginning to spread the word about upcoming events and workshops in those communities.

Our office has held a number of training workshops, including investigative skills development to the Trinidad and Tobago Ombudsman office. We are preparing another workshop on serving members of the public with mental health challenges.

We will try hard to produce this newsletter more frequently! Hoping you are all enjoying a warm and safe summer.

Fiona Crean
Ombudsman

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Water Works: an Investigation into Water Billing, Metering and Customer Service



The Ombudsman's investigation found that Toronto's system for metering, recording and billing for water usage generally works well. There were however, a small number of serious billing problems that, as the Ombudsman put it, "become impossible to solve."

The investigation began following a steady stream of complaints about skyrocketing bills due to sudden, baffling increases in consumption. The investigation revealed that public servants could not resolve these problems because of restrictions in the Toronto Municipal Code. Section of 849-28 of the Code says the City can only give a refund when the water meter is defective, or when there is an error by the City.

The Ombudsman made 7 recommendations. The most significant one called on City Council to amend the Municipal Code, giving staff the authority, with associated criteria, to adjust water bills when there is an unexplained increase in water usage.

Full report see www.ombudstoronto.ca/investigations

An Investigation into the Provision of Emergency Human Services Following the 200 Wellesley Street Fire



More than 1,700 residents were evacuated from their apartments on September 24th, 2010 after a fire broke out in a high rise tower at 200 Wellesley Street. The buildings at 200 Wellesley are owned by Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC), and make up Canada's largest social housing complex.

The investigation was about the provision of assistance by the City's Emergency Planning Unit (EPU), and not about how Fire and EMS personnel handled the fire.

The EPU was responsible for providing temporary shelter, food and other services for the residents.

The Ombudsman found that there was:

- Poor communication at all levels causing significant confusion.
- Differences about who was in charge.
- Decisions made without the involvement of the EPU Incident Commander, who headed up the City's response.
- Confusion and rumours about a non-existent problem with bedbugs.
- Despite a policy of not accepting in-kind donations, a donations centre was set up, diverting staff away from meeting residents' immediate needs.
- The City's Office of Emergency Management, which is in charge of major emergencies, declined to get involved during the early stages of the fire. During an earlier and smaller emergency it had assisted on site.

The Ombudsman made 15 recommendations to fix the systemic problems, all of which the City Manager agreed with. Full report see www.ombudstoronto.ca/investigations.

out and about

Here is a range of activities and events the office has attended or been involved with: Asian Heritage Month Family Cricket Day; Council of Agencies Serving South Asians; the Agincourt Community Services' AGM; Pride; the Association of Black Law Enforcers' Gala; and a Scarborough graduation ceremony of the Civic Awareness Project.

The Ombudsman has spoken to a number of groups, including the Toronto Board of Trade, Bangladeshi youth, CBC retirees, a town hall of Councillor Ainslie's Scarborough constituents, school trustees of the Toronto Catholic School Board and the TCHC Board of Directors.

On the public service front, the Ombudsman made more than a dozen presentations across the city to Toronto Employment & Social Service employees. The Ombudsman and Director Kwame Addo also met with public servants of Revenue Services.

The Ombudsman, through the Institute of Public Administration Canada spoke to a visiting study tour of senior civil servants from India & Sri Lanka about the role of the office in supporting government accountability.

Further afield, the Ombudsman was invited by the Ombudsman of Trinidad & Tobago to run a three day investigators' training course for her investigators. The Ombudsman was also the keynote speaker at the international Eurasia Ombudsman conference in Azerbaijan.



Jorge Kaneshalingham joined us in March as the Access & Education Assistant. Most recently, Jorge worked for the City doing community and youth engagement along with recreational program development. Jorge has worked as a Community Relations Officer with Elections Canada. He also has a lot of radio experience working with diverse youth to share information on social, educational, and employment opportunities with residents in the city.

ombudsman's award



Nominees' Ceremony, June 1, 2012.

Congratulations !

The first City of Toronto Ombudsman Awards have been established in 2012 to recognize outstanding public service in resolving claims of unfairness in the delivery of service. Nominations were accepted from residents, the public service and Ombudsman staff. They were then matched against the following criteria:

- demonstrating leadership in problem solving and good customer service
- initiating innovative approaches to dispute resolution
- encouraging the application of problem solving at a systems level
- providing exceptional responsiveness and cooperative service during a complaint inquiry or investigation

Sixteen nominees were selected from across the public service and the winners will be announced and honoured at a ceremony on September 7.



out and about cont'd



Agincourt Community Services Association Civic Awareness Project's Graduation Ceremony - July 23, 2012.

talk to us

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about Toronto's Ombudsman

1. We are impartial investigators.
2. We are independent from the Toronto Public Service.
3. We advocate for fairness.
4. We are an office of "last resort."
5. We offer information sessions.
6. Our services are confidential and at no cost.