



Somerset celebrates Buddha's Birthday

On the weekend of May 29, people gathered on Somerset Street in celebration of Buddha's birthday with a parade through the street.

PHOTOS BY AUDREY BREWSTER



Queensway Headstart preschool announces management change to Somerset West

By EMILIE HAYES

The management board of Queensway Social Group (QSAG), composed of representatives from six area Christian churches (Holy Rosary RC, Kitchissippi UC, Parkdale UC, St George's RC, St Matthias Anglican and St. Steven's Presbyterian), is happy to announce the transfer of the management of this 41-year-old Headstart Preschool program to the well established management group at Somerset West Community Health Centre as of July 1, 2010.

QSAG was established in 1969 to assist preschool children from disadvantaged backgrounds to be ready to enter elementary school.

In the early years, it offered a half-day program and the trained teachers were assisted by a large number of volunteers from the participating churches. They transported the children to and from school in their cars, baked muffins for snacks and ran weekly parenting programs as well as managing the program.

In the following years, many changes took place. The volunteer drivers were replaced by a driver employed to operate first a 12-seat van and later a 22-seat bus. The city began to provide funding and the preschool flourished as a morning-only program until 2006. At that time a new government initiative called Best Start was introduced and the school opened an afternoon session to meet the increased demand for the program.

The Queensway Preschool, one of ten Headstart nursery schools in the city, has helped thousands of children over the years. It offers a morning and afternoon program serving 16 children at each session, and provides transportation to those children in its catchment area.

Somerset West Community Health Centre (SWCHC) is a non-profit, community-governed organization that provides primary health care and a wide range of social services, community building activities and advocacy programs designed to meet the specific needs of our community.

SWCHC operates a sister Headstart program called Nanny Goat Hill at 755 Somerset Street West. After the transfer, Queensway Preschool will continue to be housed at Parkdale United Church at 429 Parkdale Avenue and SWCHC is committed to providing the same high-quality care to the children. The transfer will also provide the teaching staff with enhanced employee benefits, and create stronger connections with parents to existing parenting, health and social service programs offered through SWCHC.

We from the old management board are delighted to welcome the new. We are confident this valuable service to our city will continue under SWCHC management.

Two health centres in one Centretown community

By MAIJA KAGIS

There are many policy issues under discussion at the advocacy committees of the Somerset West and Centretown community health centres (SWHC and CCHC). *Buzz* readers are fortunate to be served by two community health centres in Centretown Ottawa.

Community health centres are multiservice centres that include physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers and a variety of other health and social service workers. Like many community agencies, their overall policies are set by an elected board and funded through numerous sources, but primarily through Ministry of Health funding via the local health integration network. Health centres have stretched their funding to provide a broad range of services in the communities they serve.

The mandate of each centre is to provide comprehensive primary health care, including health, social services, and community development, to the geographic community in which they are located. This mandate includes a vital component: to work with communities to help them identify and take action on the issues that are important to them.

This includes tackling some social determinants of health; empowering clients to improve their own lives; and helping caregivers understand what the factors shaping people's health are. Factors like finances, housing, education, transport, jobs and more need to be considered. The health centres are putting into practice recommendations from the 2008 World Health Organization Commission recommendations that insist that improving health requires working on the social determinants of health.

One way of taking action on the determinants of health is to examine and change policies designed at federal, provincial, municipal and institutional levels. Affecting policy also means providing input and client-centred advocacy into the process of policy development. The task is huge and no one person can possibly do it all. Housing, child care, food, security, dental health, play space for children: these are all issues that affect the health and well-being of the clients of the health centres, and for that matter, the well-being of everyone in the community.

Health centres across Ontario have recognized the fundamental importance of public policy in promoting and maintaining health. They have developed a charter that includes a statement from the internationally accepted 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion: health promotion, building healthy com-

munities, involves advocating on issues of public policy and on matters that affect the well-being of individuals and communities. Healthy public policy is a cornerstone for individual and community health.

Both of Centretown's two community health centres have organized advocacy committees. The committees are made up of community volunteers, people who are particularly knowledgeable, passionate about and involved in specific issues. The committees report to the board and do not necessarily take action themselves, but will recommend action to the board.

The very act of advocacy empowers those working on the issues; it involves the communities affected. It helps us to understand what is happening and it leads us to seek ways to make needed changes.

The centres' advocacy committees are non-partisan in the political party sense, but very partisan on behalf of the community and their clients. Thus, given the communities in which they work, housing, child care, food issues, poverty, are all part of the discussion, analysis and most important, advocacy and communications work. The work is not all with elected officials. It can involve meeting with businesses in the community, with the National Capital Commission, with fire departments, and other social service agencies. It involves many people and can be frustrating or exhilarating. Exhilarating when some needed action is taken; frustrating when no one seems to care. And it is work that builds on the strengths of many community groups, and involves coalition building and negotiating.

Probably the most controversial issue undertaken has been the harm reduction strategy for intravenous drug users and crack pipe smokers. Those issues have often divided people in the community. But the centres have been focussed in their defence of harm reduction programs that work.

Recently, Dalhousie Ward lost a large grocery store in the area, and SWCHC organized a food group to examine alternatives, to talk to the other food stores in the area. Healthy affordable food is a major issue in this community and across Canada. CCHC operates the city-wide Good Food Box program, a volunteer-run program that puts affordable fresh fruits and vegetables in the hands of over 350 people each month, who otherwise couldn't afford to buy them for their families.



Community health centres stand up for poverty with their advocacy committees.