

Women's Centre loses funding



The Women's Centre in Nelson has lost its provincial funding, effective in 2004.

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Advocacy groups in Nelson are concerned that, in light of recent government cuts, the number of people in need of their services is likely to grow. But they are fighting for their own survival.

Funding for Women's Centres across the province will be eliminated by March 2004, which will likely mean closures or reduction of services for most facilities — including the one in Nelson.

Theresa Trussler, local Women's Centre coordinator said the \$2 million spent province-wide was "junk drawer change" and should have been maintained.

"Nelson has been hardest hit

with the hundreds of jobs lost," she said. "It's going to affect everyone in this community but once again, hardest hit are women and children. Between that and the cuts and changes to welfare, it means that women will be coming to us and we're only one small organization."

Welfare will be harder to get and benefits will be lower as the government aims to chop almost 30 per cent from the budget for the human resources ministry.

Funding for community service and violence in relationship programs will also be cut. Legal aid, family law and poverty law programs will be tougher to access and some community legal aid offices will likely close all together.

Victims' services — which helps victims through the court system — are also facing cuts.

"Who is going to deliver those services?" Trussler asked. "Already the day after the cuts, I heard from a woman that was dealing with a court issue. She said there aren't enough services for her right now. 'They've left me flying out there in the wind. Who am I going to go to? Can I come to you?'"

Advocacy Centre director Carol Ross is feeling an overwhelming sense of anger because of the sweeping cuts and changes made Thursday. She said the Liberal directive targets the most vulnerable.

• continued on page 3

Women's Centre

• continued from page 1

"It seems there's this expectation that somehow magically communities and families that already can't cope will be coping better when they're under siege and demoralized," she said. "That won't work."

The Nelson and District Women's Centre has been around for 30 years and they aren't completely reliant on provincial dollars, said Trussler, but the funding cut will still leave them scrambling.

The province provides core funding and all other money is program and project-based so couldn't stand alone. Fundraising is also becoming more difficult as potential donors watch their spending and grants are harder to secure as competition for them grows, said Trussler.

The local centre now serves 10 per cent of Nelson and area's population and has already seen its user-ship rising over the past couple years.

"As it is, we have women showing up at our door hungry. They haven't eaten in days so they could feed their children," said Trussler. "To be facing cuts to our funding, how can we continue to provide the services that are going to be even more needed in this region."

Ross said those who are feeling lost and angry can come to the Advocacy Centre where everything one may need to write a letter to government are sitting out.

"That may help," she said. "People need to do something because the anger and disillusionment is going to turn somewhere unhealthy if we don't find a constructive outlet."