



CATHIE COWARD THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR

From left, Ohgohgoh, Bayan Alsakaff and Yunus Nesibu have some fun after politicians and community leaders cleared the tiny room.

Beasley gets \$1 million

Early childhood development is beneficiary of anonymous gift

BY DANA BORCEA

Children living in Hamilton's poorest neighbourhood are getting a \$1-million boost through an anonymous gift.

The money — donated by a Hamilton couple who want to stay out of the spotlight — is going to the Beasley Community Centre for early childhood programming.

The pair, described at yesterday's funding announcement as local retired educators, approached the Hamilton Community Foundation after reading a Hamilton Spectator article last year about the loss of more than 1,400 planned child-care spaces with the

federal government's cancellation of a national child care plan. They wanted to see the money go to early childhood development and found there was no greater need in the city than Beasley, which has no swimming pool, public library or recreation centre.

The neighbourhood's tiny, one-room community centre is already home to a twice-a-week drop-in parenting program.

The \$1-million funding will help expand the centre's programming to include:

- A clinic to screen for speech, hearing, vision, dental and other childhood development issues.

- A nutrition program where residents will

learn to make nutritious and affordable meals.

- Extended hours of operation which now include two full weekdays and Saturday and Sunday mornings.

- A program to help ready children for kindergarten and improve their literacy, numeracy and social skills.

Hamilton Community Foundation president Carolyn Milne said the money should support programming and outreach for the next three years.

dborcea@thespec.com
905-526-3214

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A meeting place

Centre allows people from different cultures to socialize

BY DANA BORCEA

Talha Siedique sat patiently yesterday morning waiting for the politicians, community leaders and other grown-up types to clear the cramped room.

With legs dangling over his chair, feet swinging in the air, the two-and-a-half year old passed the time with a picture book on his lap, unaware that all the commotion in the room was over him and other kids like him from Hamilton's Beasley neighbourhood.

He just showed up — as he does every Monday — for a drop-in program he's come to love.

Around 100 people piled into the one-room Beasley Community Centre, tucked into the foot of Elgin Street in the heart of Hamilton's poorest inner-city neighbourhood, to hear about a \$1-million donation by an anonymous couple.

The donation, announced by Carolyn Milne, CEO of the Hamilton Community Foundation, will help boost an existing parent-child drop-in program run out of the centre. New services will include early literacy services, nutrition and health care, and referrals to other community resources.



CATHIE COWARD, THE HAMILTON SPECTATOR Carolyn Milne of Hamilton Community Foundation made the announcement.

For Talha's mother Syeda, recently arrived from Bangladesh, the program provides more than just playtime for her son.

The 27-year-old mother of two says she started coming to the centre to make sure her son was interacting with different children and being stimulated with educational toys and books. The centre also provides Syeda with a chance to socialize with parents from different cultures in the neighbourhood.

Paul Johnson, executive director of

Wesley Urban Ministries which oversees the Early Years Centre, said the early childhood program provides a helpful meeting place for neighbourhood parents as well, many of whom suffer painful isolation due to cultural and language barriers. He hopes to see the work done inside the centre's four walls "spill out into the neighbourhood."

While he hopes to stretch the new money over three years, he acknowledges much more investment is needed to help lift the area out of poverty.

Johnson added the new early-childhood services were being scheduled around existing programming at the centre and that he would eventually like to see a dedicated space for an early-learning centre in Beasley.

"Right now, we set our stuff up and have to put it all away when we're done." He also said a new recreation centre would go a long way toward serving Beasley's significant needs.

"The people who need it most have the greatest distance to travel for recreation programming and early learning."

*dborcea@thespec.com
905-526-3214*



HAMILTON SPECTATOR FILE PHOTO

The Beasley centre will include a clinic to screen for childhood development issues, a nutrition program and will help kids improve literacy skills.

Beasley neighbourhood at a glance:

- Spans 42 inner-city blocks, between James and Wellington Street North and from Main Street north to the railway tracks
- More than 5,000 residents from 41 countries
- The poorest neighbourhood in Hamilton with a poverty rate two-and-a-half times greater than the city average
- The 15th poorest neighbourhood in all of Canada
- 45 per cent unemployment rate
- Average household income is less than half the Hamilton average
- 56 per cent of all Beasley residents and 66 per cent of single parent-families in Beasley are living below the poverty line