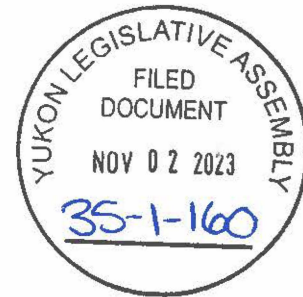


November 2, 2023

Hon. Ranj Pillai – Premier
Box 2703
Whitehorse, Yukon
Y1A 2C6



Dear Premier Pillai

Re: Urgent Increases to Program Funding

As Board Chair and Executive Director of Opportunities Yukon, we commend recent actions taken in our community, bringing to light the challenges and issues that organizations and businesses are experiencing in the downtown core.

Many organizations in Whitehorse work with vulnerable Yukoners to ensure they have secure housing and independent living supports. As an organization that has served this community for over three decades, our inability now to compete with other YG-funded organizations and the Yukon government itself in delivering the same or similar support services threatens the housing and daily living support that we provide.

Key issue: Opportunities Yukon has received no increase in direct program funding for many years despite submitting numerous requests through the established annual budget review process set out by your government.

These requests have not been for core or organizational operating expenses. Increase requests have been for staff wage parity with other NGOs delivering the same or similar support (such as Connective) and for cost-of-living increases. In the summer of 2022, we were advised by department officials that a small 2% cost-of-living adjustment would be applied to our agreements. This did not occur.

Opportunities Yukon client support staff are already paid less than other YG-funded NGOs, and our inability to provide staff with a nominal 2% increase that was promised further exasperates our ability to recruit and retain staff. Significant increases in other operating costs, such as heat, electricity and transportation, have been absorbed from within for the last several years. This can no longer continue.

Premier Pillai, we have reached a critical point where we can not continue to provide quality and safe programming support without guaranteeing minimum funding increases in line with

Opportunities Yukon

Unit 201, 704 Main Street
Whitehorse, Yukon Y1A 0T5

T (867) 668-4421
F (867) 667-4337

cost-of-living adjustments and an immediate increase to achieve wage parity with other YG-funded organizations.

Our dedicated employees are loyal and have weathered these recent years with us because of their commitment to serving others. They know that as non-profit employees, they can not expect to receive public service wages, and yet they can no longer support their own families with rising costs. Most of our employees must work multiple jobs to make ends meet. When given the choice of \$25 per hour with OY, or with another NGO for \$33 per hour, or YG at \$36 per hour - the decision is obvious.

Opportunities Yukon's relationship with our Health and Social Services partners in recent years is built on a mutual commitment to supporting those who need it, one of true partnership and collaboration. The dedicated public servants in this department should be commended for their work and efforts to help organizations like ours deliver quality programs on behalf of your government.

Premier Pillai, you have publicly stated that supporting our most vulnerable citizens is fundamental in any society. You have used our Cornerstone Community Residence as an example of success many times in the last year. We are proud of our work in this area. Now, without proper funding, specifically fair and equitable wages, we face the very real possibility that we can not continue our important work.

We ask that you give serious consideration to our numerous requests for additional funding to enable us to do that.

Regards,



Cynthia Rudell-Lyslo, MBA
Executive Director/CEO
Opportunities Yukon/Career Industries



Tim Brady
Board Chair
Opportunities Yukon/Career Industries

cc. Leader of the Official Opposition – Currie Dixon
Leader of the Third Party – Kate White

Background Information:

- Opportunities Yukon was a signatory on several letters sent over the last six months requesting a meeting to discuss both the lack of cost of living increases to NGO funding agreements and the significant disparity and inequity of government funding across the NGO sector;
 - Two letters were received in return but were non-responsive to the issues raised.
 - There is currently no consistency in how and to what level the Yukon government funds NGOs.
 - Direct-service delivery NGOs such as Opportunities Yukon currently experience a significant disparity in funding, especially with respect to staff wages.
- Opportunities Yukon is the largest Yukon-based NGO delivering services on behalf of the Yukon government;
- Opportunities Yukon (OY) has two transfer payment agreements (TPA) with the Department of Health & Social Services to provide residential supported living (SIL) programs.
 - The first is a three-year agreement to operate three residential programs: Max's Place, Granger Haven and the Mental Health Transitional Treatment Residence.
 - The second is for SIL support programming for 21 clients in the Cornerstone Community Residence that opened last spring, 2022.
- When OY signed both these agreements in May of 2022, we were advised by department officials that a COLA increase of 2% would be coming in the fall supplementary budget. When it did not, department officials again advised that it would hopefully be in the spring but certainly would be reflected in any renewal or as part of the 2023-24 Main Estimates;
- We have had numerous email exchanges and meetings with department officials, but they have not been able to provide any additional information as to why OY or other NGOs were not provided the increase by Management Board;
- The new Public Service Collective Agreement gave public servants a 10.5% increase in wages over three years;
- The Premier and Ministers have automatic increases to their salaries linked to CPI increases; however, this is not built into agreements that provide services on behalf of YG for program staffing costs.