

Column: Richmond's social services are too dependent on charity

[Eve Edmonds](#) / Richmond News

October 7, 2016 01:41 PM



Pathways executive director Dave MacDonald has depended on charitable donations to run many important services

I admit, it's bizarre that I should feel so uplifted from an evening marked by depression and mental illness. Call me perverse, but such was the case, following the annual Pathways Clubhouse fundraiser Tuesday.

This year, the blow-me-out-of-the-water moment came when a young woman took the podium to read a poem she'd written about depression. It left me wondering what else was left to say.

We don't usually print poetry in the Richmond News, but sometimes a voice just needs to be heard and this, I believe, is one of them. (See page 4.) It's the voice, not just of one poet, but that of the many young people struggling with mental illness. And it's a voice we'd better listen to if we want to curb the terrifying rate of teen suicides and suffering.

While the subject is dark, the telling (as Mashood Kamal also had the courage to do) always brings light. And certainly that light and compassion is what flooded the room and left me moved and inspired.

The poem was followed by an upbeat video presentation put together by Pathway's youth group that looks at what can be done to stay mentally healthy.

...now here comes the critic. (She can never leave well enough alone.)

As the two young women introduced the video, Chelsea Tang explained that they were very grateful for a donation, which means the group can continue for another year.

Really?

With all we know about the devastating effects of youth mental illness, the importance of early intervention and the healing power of peer support, this group only exists year to year, thanks to a single donor.

“That’s right,” said Dave MacDonald, executive director of Pathways, when I asked him later. “We get no government funding for that program. And, yeah, I’m really angry about that.” (If you know MacDonald...well, he’s not exactly known for his temper.)

And this is why I have a problem with the proliferation of fundraisers in general. And I stress proliferation. I’m happy to buy cookies from the Girl Guides and raffle tickets from a hockey team. But it concerns me so many agencies that provide essential services have to go cap in hand, collecting money because of chronic under-funding.

Yes, people are generous and corporations give plenty for the cause (and name recognition). But fundraising is a fickle business and should, I believe, just be used for the extras.

The gala was a wonderful evening of coming together, sharing stories and celebrating the struggle of being human. But I’d feel better if I knew the money raised wasn’t needed for core services, because it’s also a question of dignity. Availing oneself of services has a very different feel than depending on charity.

- *Eve Edmonds is editor at the Richmond News*

© 2016 Richmond News