

## So Much More than a Garbage Strike

By Helen Kennedy

For the Mohamed family, the municipal workers strike isn't about garbage at all. They live in the Lawrence Heights community and their garbage is picked up by their landlord - Toronto Community Housing. The strike has forced their local community centre to close - effecting everyone in the Mohamed family and indeed the whole community.

Abdi Mohamed, the former coach of the Somali National Basketball Team, president of the East African Community Association, the Paul Watson Football Club and father of 6 children, has seen his organizations' soccer and basketball permits for the gym at Lawrence Heights CC cancelled. Hundreds of children and youth have been left without the opportunity to play organized sports in the community. Three of Abdi's children, Issa, Haroun and Saida are spending a lot more time watching television this summer. Aside from missing out on soccer and basketball, Haroun and Saida were also supposed to be participating in the youth programs at the Community Centre.

Shukri Mohamed, the eldest of the Mohamed children, would have been working full-time at the Centre, organizing the children's day camp. Instead, Shukri is walking the picket line. "I'm concerned for all the children and youth in the community who have nowhere to go this summer and for our staff, who are all residents in the community. With this strike, I'm not sure if our staff will have enough money to return to college and university in September."

Hodan Jama, Abdi's partner and mother of the six Mohameds, is sad to think of all the vegetables that aren't being eaten from the community garden behind the Lawrence Heights Community Centre. Each Friday, Hodan and several other women from the East African Community Association organize a community market at which they would have been selling their produce.

"Every Friday, we sell fresh, affordable fruits and vegetables. The market is closed because of the strike. For the women that help organize it, they got just a little bit of extra money each week that helped feed their own families. Our Moms and Daughters dinner that we hold every other Friday is cancelled. The women really enjoyed coming together to eat and talk."

Shukri's sister Qamar is also walking the picket line. She was scheduled to work in the Centre's youth program this summer. As a

result, a trip to play in a women's basketball tournament overseas is in jeopardy. Their permits have been cancelled because of the strike, and besides, she hasn't been able to raise the money needed to pay for the airfare.

"The Community Centre is the glue that holds this Community together," says Abdi. "It's where we play together, we eat together and we plan together. I fear for what may happen in our community this summer without this safe place for our youth, our children and our parents to come together."

Abdi's words resonate eerily after a shooting in the community on Wednesday which targeted the brother of community hero Michael (Britz) Lewis who was shot and killed with another hero Paul Watson (whom the football club is named in honour of) in 2005. This shooting is the latest in a territorial battle amongst area youth. The whole community is on edge - waiting for what will happen next and hoping that none of their youth will be killed.

"This strike," says Shukri, "is so much more than a garbage strike."