



Down school official raps Ottawa

By John Miner, Sun Media reporter, The London Free Press, May 21, 2007.

The organizer of a London summer school for kids with Down syndrome is dismayed after being told Ottawa will no longer help pay the salaries for student helpers.

“It is quite a letdown. It’s very disappointing,” said Andy Loebus, who started the Down Syndrome Research Institute three years ago.

“If the prime minister can afford someone to make sure his hair is in proper place, he should be able afford to help non-profit organization.”

Loebus applied to the federal government for financial support to pay for three students to help with the summer school that is in its third year.

In a letter rejecting his application, Loebus was told the project scored only 38 points on a scale of 70.

“We didn’t even know what the scale is. In the past I was able to send my application in and actually talk to someone. Now, I wasn’t even able to talk to someone,” he said.

Loebus has heard hundreds of other non-profit organizations also have been turned down this year for job support by the federal government.

The issue was raised in Parliament on Friday, but Human Resources Minister Monte Solberg defended his government’s shakeup of the summer jobs program.

“The applications are ranked on the ability of the applicant to ensure that students get the best jobs they can get,” Solberg said.

Loebus said the students employed with the summer school in the past have gained valuable experience working with professionals such as speech pathologists, occupational therapists and teachers.

The institute rents facilities at Sir George Ross secondary school from the Thames Valley District school board.

Three years ago it started with eight students and grew to 28 last year with the addition of elementary classes to the secondary program.

This year it plans to introduce a preschool program and expects to have between 40 and 50 students.

Loebus said he volunteers his time, but pays the professionals the rates they would normally receive for their work. The institute is supported by donations from service organizations and businesses.

“My budget can only go so far,” he said.