

Gov't axes school

by Brent Melanson

Funding for New Options, an alternative education program in north-end Halifax, will be curtailed next month according to the Nova Scotia government. In a letter to New Options, F.R. MacKinnon, Deputy Minister of Social Services, said "it is most unlikely that this department will be funding the program further in the 1978 / 79 fiscal year." The current fiscal year ends March 31, '79.

New Options, which has been in operation for eight and a half years, was founded in 1970. Originally, it based its actions on the 'free school' concept, but the program has been developed and is now a widespread community oriented agency. Its academic program for young people who don't integrate well within regular school programs has been most successful.

Bev Greenlaw, director of New Options, said that "despite the widespread community and agency use of and support for the project, and despite what we understand to have been very positive results of program evaluations by the provincial Departments of Social Services and Education, the government seems to be prepared to see New Options close as of the end of March."

He said "Perhaps since our development over the past few years into a diverse and more strongly community based project has been a relatively low key process, that the provincial government is not fully aware of the extent of New Options' impact on this community." "It is possible that the province is aware of the project's value but believes strongly that the City should be paying for the service."

MacKinnon also said it was "a mistake to put this particular program under the department of Social Services. We are not competent to monitor such a program."

"It is our understanding that the City of Halifax is prepared to provide this type of program. If there is counselling in connection with it, that too should be a City of Halifax responsibility," he said.

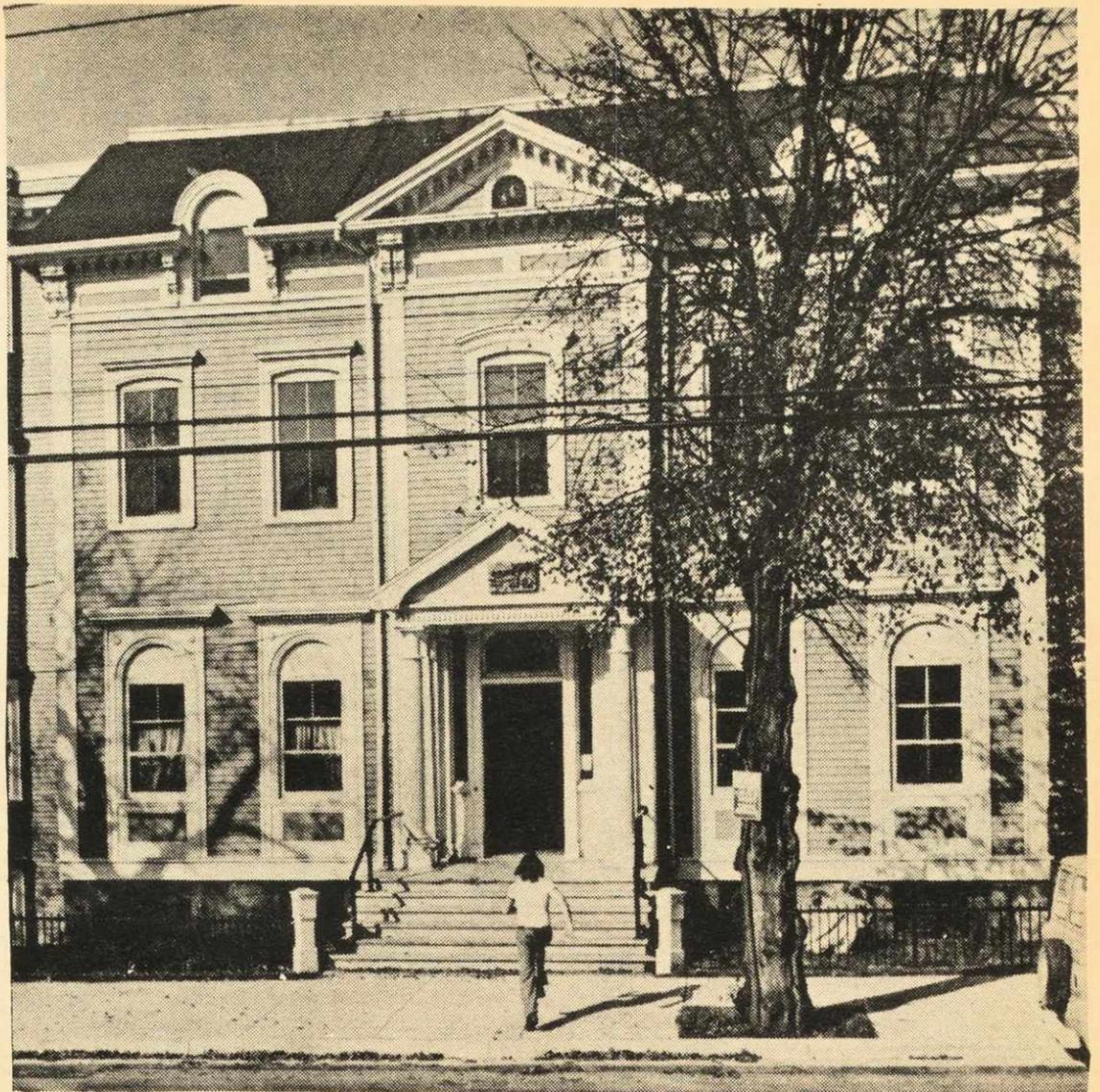
Karl Perry, Director of Education for the City School board, said it has not been requested for his department to finance this program. "Why should we?" he asked. "Students in a program of this type could not hack the regular school system. New Options is a viable school system in itself but in light of fiscal restrictions we do not have the funds to take it over."

Director of Halifax's Social Planning Department, Harold Crowell, said his department also "has no plans to fund New Options". He added that "The budget just does not allow for it". When questioned if the provincial government was trying to shift the burden of the funding for New Options from the province to the city, he replied, "There has always been a high degree of co-operation between the city and province in the field of social services."

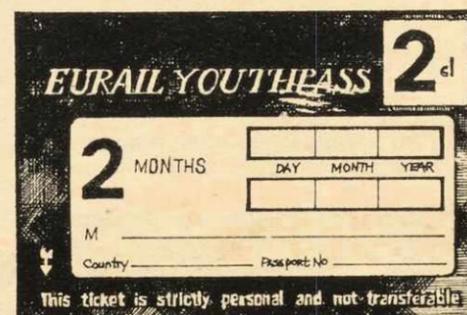
Roger Davis, a teacher at New Options, expressed anger that the present budget of \$145,000 had been frozen for three years. He added "The community has a right to the service. This seems to be part of a trend in social service cutbacks."

Presently, the aims of New Options is to have the decision reversed and to have their funding re-established. A meeting for next week has been called with the Minister of Social Services in order to arrive at some sort of arrangement.

But the dilemma of New Options can best be summed up in the words of Karen Moring who said "It's just not fair. We are just asking for an education."



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