

Poolside party

Officials' offer to resign declined amidst growing Dirty Dozen controversy

Jana G. Pruden

Leader-Post

Monday, March 10, 2008

REGINA -- Inner-city youth in a running program promoting a drug- and alcohol-free lifestyle drank shooters at a resort bar with several chaperones during a recent all-expense-paid trip to Jamaica for a December marathon, in what the program's leaders concede was a serious failure of judgment.

In video footage obtained by the *Leader-Post*, Ivan Amichand, assistant executive director of the North Central Family Centre, is seen drinking alcohol with members of the Dirty Dozen marathon team, while a woman identified as "Sandy" records the scene on video.

Sandy Wankel, executive director of the North Central Family Centre, said she doesn't remember if she was running the camera or present at the scene.

"I must have been there. I don't recall that much being there but I must have been there, you know, and if I was there, I wasn't there very long...," she said.

Amichand and Wankel both offered their resignations at an emergency meeting at the North Central Family Centre Monday night, but the board refused to let them step down, saying that the programs at the centre were "too vital" and would be harmed by the pair's departure.

"We decided that the work that was being done was far too important and we did not accept their resignation," said Vonni Widdis, chairman of the North Central Family Services board, and Wankel's sister.

Widdis said no further disciplinary action will be taken.

After the meeting, Widdis told the *Leader-Post* she didn't believe she was in a conflict of interest, and that everyone in the centre knows of their relationship.

"I have a job as chairman and I take that job very seriously," she said. "There was business to be done."

The Dirty Dozen marathon team is a North Central-based running program that has been widely hailed for its efforts to promote healthy lifestyles for youth.

The five-minute scene opens at a resort bar, and a woman's voice can be heard saying: "OK, there we go." A man in the frame says "You're the director, Sandy."

The video shows several people, including young runners, former runners and chaperones, lined up at the bar with Amichand. Two bartenders pour shots of alcohol, showing those at the bar how to put salt on their hands, and saying there should be lemons.

The woman can be heard saying: "One-two-three, cheers guys. To the Dirty Dozen, right?"



CREDIT:

Members of the Dirty Dozen running group, including chaperone Ivan Amichand, (at the end of the bar), drink what are referred to as tequila shots on the audio track of this home video.

The people at the bar all do a shot.

"You want another one Ivan?" the woman asks.

A couple of minutes later, several of those at the bar, but not Amichand, do another round of shooters.

"God, this is evidence isn't it?" the unseen woman says later on the video's audio track.

Before viewing the footage on Monday, Amichand categorically denied that there had been any drinking on the trip - with the exception of one isolated incident involving two brothers -- and said the team's leadership had a "zero-tolerance policy" for drinking by youth and chaperones.

"There was absolutely no drinking that I was aware of," he said in a telephone interview prior to seeing the video. "And all the chaperones who were there, we talked to them, they were not aware and not participating, and (were) never aware of any drinking or any partying where any kids got out of line."

After viewing the video, Amichand said he was surprised to see himself in that situation.

"I don't remember having been there at all," he said.

Amichand said the bar scene occurred after the marathon, during a "celebration night," and "for a moment there it was a lapse of judgment."

Wankel agreed the situation came out of "excitement after finishing such a hard marathon."

"This is the only time this has happened ... we've had a wonderful success, and the team has gone all over the world," she said, after viewing the tape. "It just doesn't represent what we're about, it really doesn't."

The team's coach, Ben Hernando, previously told the *Leader-Post* that the marathon program is intended to show youth "there's a beautiful world out there besides smoking and drinking and using drugs."

Runners in the program range in age from 14 to their late teens, and had to sign a contract before the Jamaica trip pledging to be alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free.

In a July interview, Hernando said had been some problems when the runners went to Las Vegas for a marathon, and that he would be stricter in Jamaica.

"In Jamaica I have to be really, really strict about my rules," he said. "Las Vegas was my first time and there were some kids that trained half-serious and they still smoked. But this time they have to sign a contract that (says) they have to quit smoking. They have to quit alcohol, no drugs, no crime and no gang activity."

Hernando is out of the country, and could not be reached for comment Monday.

One of the runners who was on the Jamaica trip said it was his understanding that the abstinence contract expired after the marathon was finished.

"After the marathon it was all right because everybody got to drink, pretty much," said the teen, who is not of legal drinking age in Saskatchewan.

"After we ran the marathon we could do whatever. Well, for the older ones, like myself. But the younger ones, they would drink every once in a while, they were mostly gone shopping and shit like that," the youth said.

The runner said "pretty much everyone" was drinking after the marathon.

Other footage obtained by the *Leader-Post* includes several teens alone in what appears to be a hotel room, with a teen boy and girl lying together under a blanket, as others in the room take turns swigging rum and smoking.

Another scene shows Amichand sitting at a pool-side table with bottles of beer and several half-full glasses. A young man sits beside him, smoking.

Pat Pratt, a mother of one of the runners, expressed shock and anger over the behaviour shown on the tape.

"No. 1, I was pissed off with my son for what happened up there, and I was pissed off at Sandy and Ivan and Ben because they knew what was going on," Pratt said.

Another parent contacted by the *Leader-Post* said he continued to support the program, and declined to comment further.

Amichand called the experience "a wonderful trip, all in all, except for some momentary lapses," and said the chaperones took their roles very seriously.

Amichand also said he couldn't recall whether he drank on any other occasions during the Jamaica trip.

"It was a resort, I may have gone back, sitting on the deck, I don't know, I don't recall. I mean, I was in a warm country, it was December ...," he said. "If I was by myself, and having a drink, what's wrong with that?"

Runners and chaperones had their trip paid for through donations.

Wankel, who founded the North Central Family Centre in 2001 and won the YWCA's Women of Distinction community leadership and enhancement award in May, said she recognizes the seriousness of the situation, and the damage it could do to the running program and the family centre.

She said she is committed to taking whatever steps are necessary in response.

"We do take it very seriously. We take the funding that was given to us very seriously, and we take our jobs very seriously, we really do," she said. "I know this is a family setting and I know this doesn't look good, but we did take care of the kids. We really did."

The running team is planning to go to Ottawa in May for a marathon that receives funding from the federal government.

-- With files from Anne Kyle

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Raw emotions over leaked video

Pamela Cowan

Leader-Post

Wednesday, March 12, 2008

Emotions escalated at the North Central Family Centre on Tuesday after a video showing members of the Dirty Dozen marathon team and their chaperones drinking while in Jamaica in December was leaked to media outlets the day before.

Pat Pratt's three children were on the trip. When she saw the tape she said she was appalled so she consulted elders for guidance and then provided the tape to the media. On Tuesday she was blocked from entering the centre and was told by Stew Harrison, vice-president of the centre, that she was smearing the centre's reputation.

"I came forward, Stew, to let the people know what was happening and people should be held accountable for this," she said. "Don't make me look like the bad person because I came forward. I'm doing what's right."

On the steps, Pratt resigned from her position as the centre's cultural co-ordinator -- a position she's held since the beginning of January. She wants Sandy Wankel, the centre's executive director, assistant executive director Ivan Amichand, and Ben Hernando, the team's coach, to resign and a new board of directors put in place.

"Everybody knows that the chairman of the board is Sandy Wankel's sister," Pratt said. "There's people, all kinds of aboriginal people, other people that can run these programs, but healthy lifestyles -- that's what they're supposed to be promoting, healthy lifestyles."

She plans to take the videotape to Saskatoon to show leaders of the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations.

Wankel and Amichand offered their resignations at an emergency meeting at the North Central Family Centre on Monday night but the board refused to let them step down, saying the centre's programs would be harmed by the pair's departure. Wankel and Amichand declined to speak to the media on Tuesday pending the preparation of a statement.

Brian Johnson, a North Central resident, agreed the teens shouldn't have been drinking but said: "Ivan and Sandy had a momentary lapse of judgment ... Everybody makes mistakes."

Outside the centre, Rosalind Caldwell, another North Central resident, vehemently disagreed. She believes that Wankel and Amichand must resign.

"This board needs to accept their resignation," she said. "The mere fact that they did not accept their resignation is a joke."

Myke Agecutay, tribal vice-chairman for the File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council, was upset that the adults who accompanied the teens "failed to keep them safe while in another country."

The File Hills Qu'Appelle Tribal Council provided about \$1,500 to buy equipment such as running shoes and tracks suits for the Dirty Dozen marathon team.

Agecutay believes the board must accept the resignations of Wankel and Amichand.

"The organization has put itself in a position to lose all of its integrity and its respect," he said. "I know a lot of First Nations community members are outraged that our youth would be exposed to the same types of activity

that would normally be in our backyard. But now being exposed to it by organizers who are meant to provide them a better opportunity, I think that they failed in providing that once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

Other service organizations that work with high-risk youth are worried that the controversy will taint the work being done in North Central, Agecutay said.

"It gives this image that we're not doing our job and we're not effectively providing quality programming to our clientele," he said.

"I don't think that's fair. We have one organization who has failed to live up to its mandate and now the rest of the community has to deal with funders at taking a second look at our proposals and the integrity of the community is lost."

He's angry the board did not accept Wankel and Amichand's resignation.

"That's not how corporate Canada works and I think that they need a real serious wakeup call," Agecutay said.

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Inquiry launched

North Central Family Centre launches independent inquiry into the Dirty Dozen trip

Anne Kyle

Leader-Post

Thursday, March 13, 2008

REGINA -- The North Central Family Centre board of directors has launched an independent inquiry into the Dirty Dozen Marathon Team's roadtrip to Jamaica which has turned into a public relations nightmare.

A retired Regina police officer volunteered to conduct inquiries into the circumstances surrounding the marathon team's activities in December at the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon.

"From my understanding the board just wants to know what occurred and to get a more objective opinion of what actually happened in speaking directly to the individuals involved through a person who is at arms-length," said board spokesman Regina lawyer Gary Johnson.

Earlier this week a damning videotape emerged showing NCFC assistant executive director Ivan Amichand drinking a tequila shooter with participants of the running program which promotes an alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth and some of their chaperones.

The five-minute segment of bar-side video footage appears to be shot by a woman named Sandy. But Sandy Wankel, the centre's executive director, said that she doesn't remember whether she was filming the scene.

An emotional Wankel told the *Leader-Post* following Monday's emergency board meeting that she had tendered her resignation because "the buck stops with the boss."

"I just felt that I really let down some people. I felt the buck stops with the boss. If I overlooked it in the excitement of the marathon and overseeing the kids than I was responsible," she said.

"How do I teach the kids responsibility if I don't take it myself. And I just felt it was something my conscience told me to do," Wankel said.

Amichand also handed in his resignation, but the board declined both their resignations, with board chair Vonni Widdis saying their departure would jeopardize the centre's programs.

Wankel and Amichand will remain at their normal duties pending the results of the investigation.

While no one was publicly speaking, the board issued a prepared statement Thursday identifying the people in a photograph that appeared on the front page of Tuesday's *Leader-Post* as adults, ranging in age from 18 to 60.

"The two 18-year-old males had been members of the marathon team but had been suspended by the coach for alleged substance and alcohol abuse almost immediately upon arrival in Jamaica," the statement said.



CREDIT: Don Healy, Leader-Post
Sandy Wankel and Ivan Amichand in Wankel's office earlier this week.

"Efforts had been made to send them home immediately but this was not feasible. They were therefore placed under the direct supervision of a 28-year-old male who was associated with one of the supporting organizations but not the North Central Family Centre," the board said, adding this individual was the brother of one of the suspended runners.

The board goes on to say that the video was taken after the race was completed and that the centre staff had no authority over the adults in the group.

"There are so many good things that (the centre) does. This has become a distraction and it would be nice to have some real, accurate information about what went on," Johnson said.

The board will have to make some decisions about the program and future policies on things like this, he added.

In its statement the board says it will make further comments once the review is completed and it has seen the report.

-- With files from Jana Pruden

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Investigator's aim is 'finding out the truth'

Barb Pacholik

Leader-Post

Saturday, March 15, 2008

A retired Regina police officer says he is simply after the truth in conducting an inquiry into a Jamaican trip by a North Central Family Centre's youth group.

"I'm operating under no assumptions," Bob Hinchcliffe said in an interview Friday. Hinchcliffe retired in December as a detective-sergeant with the Regina Police Service.

On Thursday the North Central Family Centre (NCFC) announced it had launched an inquiry into "circumstances surrounding the activities of the Dirty Dozen Marathon Team at the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon in December."

The move is in response to the release of a videotape to the media earlier in the week. The tape shows members of the Dirty Dozen, NCFC assistant director Ivan Amichand and chaperones drinking tequila shooters at a bar in Jamaica after the marathon. During the footage, the videographer is identified off-camera as "Sandy." Although it sounds like NCFC executive director Sandy Wankel's distinctive voice, she has told the Leader-Post she doesn't recall filming the scene. After the tape surfaced, Wankel and Amichand offered their resignations to the NCFC board, but the offers were declined.

Controversy erupted over the scenes captured on the videotape because the Dirty Dozen team was created to promote an alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth. In addition, the trip was largely funded through public and corporate donations.

In its statement issued Thursday, the NCFC board said, "the marathon was completed and the NCFC staff had no authority over the adults in the group."

According to the statement, the group consisted of seven people aged 60 (presumably Amichand), 28, 27, 23, 20, as well as two 18-year-old marathon members who were suspended before the run for alleged substance and alcohol abuse. It adds that the teens were put under the supervision of the 28-year-old (a brother to one of the teens) who was associated with an unidentified "supporting organization" and not the NCFC.

Hinchcliffe said the board asked him to investigate, and he agreed to volunteer his services.

"My fee is exactly zero."

Asked about the nature of his inquiry, Hinchcliffe replied, "finding out the truth." He intends to focus specifically on the events in Jamaica, and not the whole of the family centre's operations.

In interviewing people, Hinchcliffe said he's seeking to prove or disprove statements that have been made about the incident. "All I'm doing is fact-finding."

The retired officer noted those inquiries will "depend on the willingness of people to co-operate." Hinchcliffe was clear that he's operating as a private citizen, and without the authority he had as a police officer.

He said he has no involvement in the family centre, and was asked to look into the matter due to his experience as an investigator and because he's known in the north-central community.

In 2003, he was the sergeant in charge of the north-central community service centre (a satellite police office),

has previously worked in the area as an officer on patrol, and was formerly an investigator in the Children's Justice Centre. He currently sits on the board of Mobile Crisis Services.

He said his inquiries, which he began Wednesday, will include speaking to members of the team, but he will not interview anyone under age 18 without their parent's consent.

He's been given no timeline in which to complete his inquiries. When he's done, he intends to present his findings to the NCFC board. Asked if that report will include recommendations, Hinchcliffe said it's simply too early in the process to say.

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Retired cop investigates running team trip

Regina Leader-Post

Saturday, March 15, 2008

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The move is in response to the release of a videotape to the media earlier in the week. The tape shows members of the Dirty Dozen, NCFC assistant director Ivan Amichand and chaperones drinking tequila shooters at a bar in Jamaica after the marathon. During the footage, the videographer is identified off-camera as "Sandy." NCFC executive director Sandy Wankel has said she doesn't recall filming the scene.

After the tape surfaced, Wankel and Amichand offered their resignations to the NCFC board, but the offers were declined.

Controversy erupted over the scenes captured on the videotape because the Dirty Dozen team was created to promote an alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth. In addition, the trip was largely funded through public and corporate donations.

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Posted March 11, 2008 - 5:26pm by Michelle Hugli

I am disgusted, angry and completely devastated over the video showing members of the Dirty Dozen running group drinking in Jamaica with an adult chaperone. The adults involved should be ashamed of themselves and so should anyone who thinks this is okay or "just a mistake" or a "lapse of judgment."

When you promote a group of young, inner-city runners as drug- and alcohol-free and then allow them to slam back tequila shots under your watch, you have demonstrated a complete lack of respect for the youth, their parents and the communities that supported them on this trip. This kind of action is not simply a "lapse in judgment" it's a mark of character. You can say anything you want, but it's what you do that matters. Your principles and values mean nothing if your actions don't support and uphold them. Principles only matter when it's difficult or inconvenient to adhere to them.

Executive Director Sandy Wankel and Assistant Director Ivan Amichand rightfully submitted their resignations but the board of the North Central Family Centre refused to accept it.

What I refuse to accept are all the excuses being made here.

The seriousness of this incident demands a termination or an accepted resignation. And that's why I feel completely devastated over this. Sandy and Ivan have done incredible work in the community and are highly respected by many people who want to see them and their work succeed. I truly believe that what they've done in the community is highly commendable and there is a dire need for the programs and services delivered by the centre.

But this incident is far too serious to overlook. My values and beliefs do not allow me to look the other way or justify a lack of accountability and consequence because of all that hard work.

What happened is completely unacceptable, shameful and a huge disappointment to say the least. This has been a dark day for everyone at the North Central Family Centre, those who use its services and those who support the work that's done there.

Report on trip to Jamaica by Dirty Dozen to be released

Drinking during marathon team's trip investigated by retired police officer

Pamela Cowan

Leader-Post

Monday, March 31, 2008

A news conference is to be held Tuesday morning at the North Central Family Centre to release the findings of an inquiry into the Dirty Dozen marathon team's road trip to Jamaica.

At 10 a.m. board spokesman Hal Wellsch is to announce the results of an investigation conducted by Bob Hinchcliffe, a retired detective-sergeant with the Regina Police Service, followed by the board's recommendations.

"There's going to be a statement that we will give on behalf of the board," Wellsch said. "Bob will be there to answer questions with respect to the processes that he went through regarding the investigation. I don't think that we're going to get into any issues related to slinging mud at anybody or blaming other people or anything of that nature."

Copies of Hinchcliffe's report will not be available to the media.

The retired police officer volunteered to investigate the circumstances surrounding the activities of the North Central Family Centre's youth group at the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon in December.

Hinchcliffe's completed report was handed over to the board of directors, which met on Sunday to study it.

The investigation was in response to the release of a videotape to the media during the first week of March. The tape shows members of the Dirty Dozen, NCFC assistant director Ivan Amichand and chaperones drinking tequila shooters at a bar in Jamaica after the marathon.

The videographer of the footage is identified off camera as "Sandy." Although it sounds like NCFC executive director Sandy Wankel's voice, she told the Leader-Post she doesn't recall filming the scene. After the tape surfaced, Wankel and Amichand offered their resignations to the NCFC board, but the offers were declined.

The scenes captured on the videotape sparked controversy because the Dirty Dozen team was created to promote an alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth. In addition, the trip was largely funded through public and corporate donations.

Hinchcliffe planned to speak to members of the team, but he said in an earlier interview with the Leader-Post that he would not interview anyone under age 18 without their parent's consent.

On Monday, the centre was quiet. Amichand declined an interview but did note that no programs have been discontinued since the controversy began.

Findings of inquiry into 'Dirty Dozen' marathon trip released

leaderpost.com

Tuesday, April 01, 2008

REGINA -- While the board spokesman of the North Central Family Centre was releasing recommendations based on an investigation into Dirty Dozen marathon team's controversial road trip to Jamaica, police were on their way to the scene to deal with a crowd that was apparently barred from the meeting.

Among the recommendations released Tuesday at the media conference were: a more rigorous screening of chaperones and not allowing those not associated with the team to travel with the team to the marathons. NCFC executive director Sandy Wankel, NCFC assistant director Ivan Amichand and coach Ben Hernando will face no disciplinary action.

The investigation was completed by Bob Hinchcliffe, a retired detective-sergeant with the Regina Police Service.

The retired police officer volunteered to investigate the circumstances surrounding the activities of the NCFC's youth group at the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon in December.

Hinchcliffe's completed report was handed over to the board of directors, which met on Sunday to study it.

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The videographer of the footage is identified off camera as "Sandy." Although it sounds like Wankel's voice, she told the Leader-Post she doesn't recall filming the scene. After the tape surfaced, Wankel and Amichand offered their resignations to the NCFC board, but the offers were declined.

The scenes captured on the videotape sparked controversy because the Dirty Dozen team was created to promote an alcohol-, drug-, and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth. In addition, the trip was largely funded through public and corporate donations.

Pat Pratt, a concerned mother of one of the marathon team members, provided the controversial video to the media. She said she did not participate in the investigation because she said it was biased.

Hinchcliffe said he planned to speak to members of the team, but said in an earlier interview with the Leader-Post that he would not interview anyone under age 18 without their parent's consent.

After making the recommendations public, Hal Wellsch, spokseman for the centre's board and its lawyer, and Hinchcliffe met with a group gathered outside the centre following the press conference.

Check back later for updates ...

Centre staff won't face discipline

Report released into team's actions during Jamaica trip

Veronica Rhodes

Saskatchewan News Network; Regina Leader-Post

Wednesday, April 02, 2008

REGINA -- A report into a youth marathon team's visit to Jamaica -- during which members were videotaped drinking tequila shooters at a bar -- is calling for more supervision on such trips.

But concerned community members were locked out Tuesday as former Regina police detective Bob Hinchcliffe released his report into the Dirty Dozen's trip to the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon.

Controversy erupted several months after the December trip when a videotape of marathon participants and chaperones drinking at a bar was released to the media in early March.

The Dirty Dozen group was created to promote an alcohol-, drug- and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth.

But the North Central Family Centre board's lawyer, Hal Wellsch, stated no disciplinary action will be taken against coach Ben Hernando, executive director Sandy Wankel and assistant director Ivan Amichand.

The family centre runs the program.

After the videotape was released, Wankel and Amichand voluntarily offered their resignations to the board, which weren't accepted.

"The board is acknowledging, quite frankly, that we wouldn't be here if mistakes weren't made. They were, obviously, and you learn from those mistakes," Wellsch said, adding the board will make the necessary changes to better protect minors on any future trips.

The report found Hernando gave the marathon participants who were 18 -- legal drinking age in Jamaica -- permission to have a celebratory drink after completing the race.

Wellsch contends all the people who were doing the tequila shots at the bar in the video footage were 18.

The board will be considering an absolute ban on alcohol for all people participating in future trips, as well as for other community fundraising events for the group that served alcohol to adult attendees, said Wellsch.

While Hinchcliffe and Wellsch spoke to the media inside the centre's boardroom, several parents and community members who wished to hear the results of the report were greeted with locked doors when trying to enter the centre.

Connie Deiter, who explained she is part of a group called Friends of North Central, said their frustration at being locked out led them to call the police.

She expressed disgust and disappointment at the findings of the investigator's report and the handling of the situation.

"This just goes to show there is no accountability, there is no transparency, there is no responsibility back to

the people they serve," Deiter said.

Pat Pratt, the parent who initially released the video to the media, said she did not trust the findings of the report and wants another independent review of the Jamaica trip completed.

"I just got off the phone with (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) Chief Lawrence Joseph so we're going to do our own investigation," said Pratt.

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'Dirty Dozen' report fails to end dissent

Veronica Rhodes

Leader-Post

Wednesday, April 02, 2008

With some concerned community members locked outside and police officers en route, a retired police detective's report on a youth marathon team's trek to Jamaica was released to the media on Tuesday.

Former Regina Police Service detective-sergeant Bob Hinchcliffe's report on the Dirty Dozen's journey to the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon in December detailed the activities of the trip and included several recommendations for tightening supervision of the teenaged participants.

But the North Central Family Centre board's lawyer, Hal Wellsch, stated that no disciplinary action will be taken against coach Ben Hernando, executive director Sandy Wankel and assistant director Ivan Amichand. After a videotape of marathon participants and chaperones drinking at a bar was released to the media in early March, Wankel and Amichand voluntarily offered their resignations to the board, which weren't accepted.

"The board is acknowledging, quite frankly, that we wouldn't be here if mistakes weren't made. They were obviously and you learn from those mistakes," Wellsch said, adding the board will make the necessary changes to better protect minors on any future trips.

The investigation stems from a videotape from the Jamaica trip that shows members of the Dirty Dozen team, Amichand and chaperones drinking tequila shooters at a bar at the resort where the group was staying.

The footage sparked controversy since the Dirty Dozen group was created to promote an alcohol-, drug- and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth.

The report found that Hernando gave the marathon participants who were 18 -- legal drinking age in Jamaica -- permission to have a celebratory drink after completing the race.

While Wankel couldn't recall filming the scene when previously asked about it by the Leader-Post, the report found she was operating the camera when the tequila shots



CREDIT: Roy Antal, Leader-Post
Rosalind Caldwell, a member of a group calling itself Friends of North Central, makes her thoughts clear to report author Bob Hinchcliffe (second from right) and lawyer Hal Wellsch (right).

were enjoyed at the bar by some of the participants, chaperones and Amichand.

Wellsch contends all the people who were doing the tequila shots at the bar in the video footage were 18.

The board will be considering an absolute ban on alcohol for all people participating in future trips, as well as for other community fundraising events for the group that served alcohol to adult attendees, said Wellsch.

He admitted another problem of the trip was the large number of people who tagged along with the group to Jamaica and who could not be restricted from partying.

"They weren't funded by the North Central Family Centre, they paid their own way to go to Jamaica ... Some of them were obviously relatives of the people who were running ... But in the future, as I say, one of the recommendations is that not occur, that it be the team only and the chaperones," Wellsch explained.

For his investigation, Hinchcliffe spoke to 45 people and conducted 18 written interviews and three phone interviews. However, he admitted seven people declined interviews including Pat Pratt, the parent who initially released the video to the media.

Hinchcliffe also explained Pratt would not release the entire video to him for the investigation so he relied on the Leader-Post story describing the video and the snippets he could obtain on the Internet.

After completing his investigation, he secured the services of retired RCMP officer Bob Mills, former commanding officer of 'F' Division, whom Hinchcliffe said reviewed his investigation report.

"One could always investigate further. I'm satisfied I know what happened," said Hinchcliffe, adding it would have been preferable to have the video that had been provided to the media.

While Hinchcliffe and Wellsch spoke to the media inside the centre's boardroom, several parents and community members who wished to hear the results of the report were greeted with locked doors when trying to enter the centre.

Connie Deiter, who explained she is part of a group called Friends of North Central, said their frustration at being locked out led them to call the police. She expressed disgust and disappointment at the findings of the investigator's report and the handling of the situation.

"This just goes to show there is no accountability. There is no transparency. There is no responsibility back to the people they serve," Deiter told reporters as five Regina police units pulled up outside the centre to oversee the situation.

Pratt, who stood with Deiter and others on the sidewalk outside the centre, said she did not trust the findings of the report and wants another independent review of the Jamaica trip completed.

"I just got off the phone with (Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations) Chief Lawrence Joseph, so we're going to do our own investigation," said Pratt.

She also questioned the objectivity of the investigation, claiming Hinchcliffe's wife -- Saskatchewan cabinet minister Christine Tell -- is close friends with Wankel.

"Everything is about political power here and all I'm worried about is the safety of our children," Pratt said.

When asked about Pratt's comments, Tell said she has dealt with the centre in her previous position as president of the Regina Police Association, but would not characterize Wankel as a friend.

"We had a significant relationship with the North Central Family Centre and were often involved in a lot of their activities as a police association. That's where my relationship stems from with Sandy Wankel," said Tell, adding that Hinchcliffe met Wankel 10 to 15 years ago when the two were both part of a bagpiping group.

Amichand denied comment following the report's release. Calls to the FSIN were not returned on Tuesday.

THE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Tighter controls and restrictions on who takes part in the trips;
- Record checks for all chaperones;
- Allowing only people personally involved in the activity and chaperones to take part in the trips;
- Requiring that a contract be signed by all who attend, including not only race participants, but also chaperones. The contract states that, for the extent of the training and participation in the marathon, participants will be free of drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, crime and any sexual contact. Participants must be willing and able to submit to a drug test prior to the marathon;
- Proper funding and insurance are to be in place before departure so that, should anyone need to be sent home due to a breach of contract, the necessary funds are available.

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More turmoil for the North Central Family Centre

Pamela Cowan

Leader-Post

Monday, April 21, 2008

A marathon power struggle is continuing at the North Central Family Centre.

Controversy started dogging the centre in March after a video was released to the media that showed assistant director Ivan Amichand and chaperones drinking tequila shooters in Jamaica with members of the Dirty Dozen marathon team -- a group that was created to promote an alcohol-, drug- and tobacco-free lifestyle for at-risk youth.

Former Regina Police Service detective-sergeant Bob Hinchcliffe investigated the incident. While the centre's executive director Sandy Wankel couldn't recall filming the scene when previously asked by the Leader-Post, Hinchcliffe determined that she was operating the camera while the tequila shots were enjoyed at the bar by some of the participants, chaperones and Amichand.

On April 1 board spokesman Hal Wellsch released the results of Hinchcliffe's investigation to the media, followed by the board's recommendations. Wellsch said the board would make changes to protect minors on any future trips but stated that no disciplinary action would be taken against coach Ben Hernando, Wankel or Amichand.

The decision enraged many North Central residents who questioned the centre's leadership.

The controversy continued on Saturday. About 60 people met at the Lighthouse Tabernacle of Regina and unanimously elected a new board of directors for the NCFC.

Following the election, it was unanimously approved that the new board accept the resignation of Wankel and Amichand. Both had offered their resignations to the NCFC board in March after the tape of the Dirty Dozen marathon team at the Jamaican International Reggae Marathon in December was released. The board declined the resignations.

Eddy Fisher, who organized Saturday's meeting, said that decision brought into question the board's accountability. He requested from the board the annual general meeting minutes for the past three years, a list of the registered members as well as copies of the constitution and bylaws to determine how many board members were elected and how many had been appointed.

"None of those documents were brought to us as of April 17," said Kevin Daniels, one of the 10 new board members elected Saturday. "In accordance with the Non-Profits Corporations Act, we gave 15 day' notice to the old board and executive of the North Central Family Centre that this membership meeting was going to go ahead."

He said NCFC board members and the executive could have attended the public meeting but no one did.

A notice placed in the Leader-Post stated that Saturday's meeting was convened by members of the NCFC Inc., under the Non-Profit and Corporations Act to elect new board members and that 12 positions were open for election.



CREDIT: Joshua Sawka, Leader-Post

About 60 people met at the Lighthouse Tabernacle of Regina and unanimously elected a new board of directors for the North Central Family Centre.

However, according to a media advisory authorized by the NCFC board and released on April 7, the meeting was not called by a NCFC member nor does the group have any lawful authority to hold a meeting or to speak on behalf of the NCFC Inc.

Daniels dismissed the board's position.

"Of course they're going to say that they're not going to recognize it but it's not in their hands. It's in the hands of the law, which is the provincial government," he said. "The Ministry of Justice and the Non-profits Corporations branch will determine which board will succeed in continuing operations ..."

"The next step is that we're going to follow the provincial laws of the Non-profit Corporations Act and we will be meeting with them come Monday morning to let them know what has taken place here."

Elected on Saturday were Ken Gaddie, Doug McNab, Bob Hughes (not the Leader-Post columnist), Eddy Fisher, Brian Wesaquate, Viola Gordon, Connie Dieter, Elizabeth Ippiak, Kevin Daniels and Robert Malbeuf.

Daniels said the new board would ensure that thorough investigations were made of the Jamaica and the Las Vegas marathons that the Dirty Dozen participated in.

Outside the North Central Family Centre on Saturday, Hinchcliffe told reporters that the election results were invalid.

"There were maybe 10 people who were elected to something but they weren't elected to the board," he said.

He said that the lawfully constituted board of the North Central Family Centre will continue to deliver all regular services and programs.

By Nigel Maxwell

Updated April 20, 2008 - 2:47pm

Leadership at Regina's North Central Family Centre is being tested.

This follows the release of a controversial videotape showing members of the famed Dirty Dozen drinking while on a run in Jamaica. An investigation determined no known should be blamed nor face disciplinary action.

Claiming they want to hold a new investigation, a group calling themselves the friends of the north central committee organized a membership meeting this past weekend complete with new elections.

Chair Kevin Daniels felt they had ample cause, claiming the current board has not held a membership meeting for three years.

Retired police officer Bob Hinchcliffe conducted the video investigation. He says the meeting carries no legal standing, as none of the people who attended are actual members of the north central family centre.

He adds this is merely a takeover bid, explaining the success of the centre has risen its property value, making it a target.

Representatives from the group plan to present the minutes from their meeting to the non - profit corporations branch on Monday.

Fisher apologizes to family centre

Jana G. Pruden

Leader-Post

Thursday, May 15, 2008

One of the instigators of a move to take over the North Central Family Centre has ceased his attempts to oust current leadership, and is instead issuing a public apology.

Eddy Fisher, who was one the founding members of the Friends of North Central, says he is now sorry for "meddling in the affairs of North Central" and "for being critical, harsh and judgmental" of centre leadership and board members.

The Friends of North Central had attempted to form their own board, on which Fisher held the position of vice-president.

After reviewing documents related to the matter, the provincial government's Corporations Branch decided not to recognize the new group's board, rendering it essentially powerless.

The governance dispute arose after the public release of a controversial videotape showing people associated with the centre's "Dirty Dozen" marathon team, which advocates an alcohol- and drug-free lifestyle, celebrating with tequila shooters after a marathon in Jamaica.

In the wake of the controversial tape, Fisher said he has done some soul-searching, and realized he shouldn't have gotten involved in the centre's affairs.

Fisher -- who is currently banned from attending the North Central Family Centre -- said things got "a little bit carried away," and he's hoping people in the community can move forward together to help disadvantaged youth in the troubled neighbourhood.

"I just want to mend the fences," he said. "You know, heal the broken hearts."

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