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So, who gets the money?

By SUE-ANN LEVY

Sitting on my desk here at City Hall is a nice little 2007 calendar produced -- for the fifth year in a row -- by the city's homeless department and paid for out of your tax dollars.

The calendar features the pictures of 12 kids together with their thoughts on what they'd like to be when they grow up. On the back is a list of phone numbers and websites to access for emergency, social and rental housing.

Pat Anderson, manager of partnership development in the Shelter, Housing and Support division, told me 5,000 calendars were created at \$1.60 per copy or \$8,200 in total.

She said their intent is to send the calendar out to shelters and agencies that "interact with homeless people.

"It is not a fridge magnet ... it has really important numbers to refer to," Anderson said.

A contact who received the calendar "unsolicited" in the mail said the postage was \$1.78 -- a cost not

included in the \$8,200. My contact wondered, obviously tongue in cheek, whether the homeless would be using the calendar to shelter their heads from the rain (and snow.)

While the dollars to produce this year's version came out of the homeless division's general budget, this is the kind of thing that sticks in my craw after hearing a long list of city officials and homeless advocates moan last fall about the need for more funding from the federal government.

They were upset about being left on tenterhooks as to whether the seven-year-long Supporting Community Partnership Initiative (SCPI) would be renewed by the Stephen Harper government.

Over seven years, the SCPI gravy train gave \$123.4-million to the city for 500 assorted homeless projects. It helped keep the industry thriving.

According to shelter housing general manager Phil Brown, SCPI has funded some 85% of Mayor David Miller's \$18-million Streets to Homes strategy including the shelter and the assessment and referral centre at 110 Edward St.

Not once over the past seven years have we ever seen targets as to whom the money is directed toward or reports on the results. But accountability has never been the homeless industry's forte.

Free money with no strings attached. No wonder the advocates were worried the gravy train might stop.

As it turned out, they need not have been concerned. Santa Harper -- likely facing a re-election bid sometime this year and desperately in need of support in major cities -- came through on Dec. 19 with \$270 million for two more years.

The program has been renamed the Homelessness Partnering Strategy and seems to have a new focus on services, says Brown. They also don't know how much the city will get exactly but he says he's "happy." So is advocate Michael Shapcott.

"It's a real victory for organizations here in Toronto who made the case this program has delivered good results," he said.

Brown added that the Streets to Homes strategy -- which city officials claim has taken 800 people off the streets and put them into homes in just under two years -- proves that SCPI had "results and a momentum."

Funny thing. Yesterday when I took a noon-time walk, I stumbled upon no less than three homeless men perched in their sleeping bags at the corner of Queen and Bay Sts. -- mere steps from Nathan Phillips Square.

Yes the mayor's Streets to Homes strategy certainly does seem to have a certain momentum. Move 'em off the street and no sooner do they come back.

PURSUIT OF HAPPYNESS: I took the opportunity to see this wonderful movie last weekend. Based on the true story of Chris Gardner, who was forced to live on the streets of San Francisco with his son for a year, I thought it quite an accurate portrayal of how each of us are just a few missteps away from slipping into homelessness. It also showed how the homeless are forced to line up each afternoon on the streets to fight for a shelter bed -- an inhumane practice, as far as I'm concerned.