

Street children's shelter threatened with closure

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WHILE there has been an influx of homeless street children flocking to the Pietermaritzburg city centre, one of only two shelters catering for them is on the verge of being closed.

The possible closure is alleged to follow the removal the Khayaletu Project run by Youth for Christ (YfC) KZN from Msunduzi Municipality's list of priorities in its Integrated Development Plan (IDP) in July.

Now, about 40 boys and girls might have to be removed from the shelter in Pine Street because of the dilapidated condition of the buildings, which are posing a danger to their lives.

This, three months after roleplayers met at the city hall to discuss ways to get street children out of the CBD.

These children are often to be found near the KZN legislature, city hall, the Premier's office and the tourism hub.

Executive director of Built Environment Support Group (BESG), which assists YfC, Cameron Brisbane, said yesterday that in 2005 when they were approached by YfC for assistance, the buildings were already in a dilapidated state.

"YfC receives assistance in part from the Department of Social Development to manage the facilities, but the cost of renovating the buildings runs to several million rands," he said.

Brisbane was frustrated that the project was removed from the municipality's IDP as a priority project for the CBD.

"Then bureaucracy took its toll," he said.

He said council dropped the project from its list of prioritised projects published in its latest IDP in July, even though the municipality has not been asked for a cent toward the cost of the project.

"A meeting with the municipal manager on August 7 yielded an assurance that a report would be fast-tracked to full council to rectify the error.

"To date the report has not been tabled," said Brisbane.

He said in the meantime, the emergency roof repairs carried out in 2005 have long passed their natural life.

"YfC has been forced to close one section of the Pine Street property due to the risk of the rear elevation collapsing and causing injury or worse — just as the summer rains are upon us," he said.

KZN Department of Social Development spokesperson Ncumisa Fandesi said the department was not aware that the condition of the building had deteriorated to this extent.

Fandesi said they would engage with YfC because the department already had a working relationship with the organisation.

Attempts to get a comment from Msunduzi Municipality were unsuccessful at the time of going to print.

For information or if you would like to help, contact James Gordon or Nkuli Ndlovu at BESG on 033 394 4980.

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This might become a memory if Youth for Christ does not find help to repair the old Victorian house used as a shelter for street children.

PHOTO: FILE