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Export date: Fri Oct 30 21:51:31 2026 / +0000 GMT

Friends of the Sheldon organize effort to save outdoor education centre

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LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE REPORTER

Imagine looking up into the night sky, and for the first time, really seeing the stars.

For kids growing up in downtown Toronto, the night sky never really reveals itself, as the city's light obscures the true darkness above.

The Sheldon Outdoor Education Centre in Adjala-Tosorontio, just outside of Mono, offers a rural setting where city kids can see real stars and explore the outdoors in an environment totally new to them. Many of the kids are amazed by the silence of the countryside, after being used to the steady hum of traffic and sirens.

The Sheldon Outdoor Education Centre is operated by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) and occupies around 200 acres of diverse field, stream, and forest habitat. It has a chalet-style main building, a renovated farmhouse, and a small operating farm.

However, it is in danger of being closed due to maintenance costs and budget limitations. The facility requires around $3 million in maintenance to continue operating.

It has not taken any bookings for the 2025/26 school year.

A group of local educators and residents, known as Friends of Sheldon, has banded together and is urging the TDSB to keep the centre open.

The group held a community engagement event at the centre on Thursday, April 30, to encourage the School Board to keep the facility open.

Guest speakers included Sharon Edmonds, an active member of the community, business owner, and parent; Rosanne Fritzsche, a Friends of Sheldon co-founder and environmental activist and 40-year Adjala resident; and Andy Kennedy, a teacher for 20 years at the centre, volunteer firefighter at Rosemont Fire Department, and a 28-year Mono resident.

The group has penned a letter to Rohit Gupta, TDSB's supervisor, urging the school board to keep the Centre open for students.

The letter suggested ways to help keep the centre open, including renting it to community, Indigenous, and public-interest groups to create a revenue stream, as well as exploring grants or partnerships to help financially sustain the centre.

Friends of Sheldon have a genuine interest in keeping the centre open to benefit city kids so they can experience nature and the outdoors. They are encouraging other local residents to actively take part in voicing their concerns and support.

Former Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynn, herself a former Toronto District School Board Trustee, became involved with the group as she now lives locally, not too far from the centre.

?The Centre is used by kids who come up here from the city who don't have access to a natural environment,? Wynn explained. ?Many people love the centre and how the kids benefit from visiting. There are some kids who come here, who have never even seen stars. The Friends of Sheldon has former educators including those who have worked there as well as many local residents.?

There has not yet been a final decision on what will happen to the centre, but Friends of Sheldon are hoping for a positive outcome

that will keep it open for the next generation of city kids who will arrive to experience nature and the outdoors.