



Rent race: Ally Clelland, of Parkinsons New Zealand, says it will face higher rent.

Picture: KENT BLECHYNDEN

Door to shut on rental safety net

COLIN PATTERSON

SOME welfare and volunteer groups face an uncertain future after Wellington City Council decided not to renew its lease on an inner-city building.

The Betty Campbell Centre was set up in 1988 above the James Smith Car Park to provide subsidised office space to social service and volunteer groups. The centre moved to Lambton Quay's Harbour City Centre in 1998.

But with the council's decision not to renew its lease when it expires in May 2007, more than 20 groups face an uncertain future, having to find space in a tight rental market.

Peggy Bhana, of Diabetes Wellington, said the council's decision was a slap in the face for Betty Campbell, a long-time city councillor who fought hard to get a better deal for non-profit groups and who campaigned to set up the centre.

Rents at the centre were so cheap that groups could get on with providing services, rather raising money to pay the rent.

That was important for organisations — such as Diabetes Wellington — that received no government funding.

But Raewyn Fox, of the Federation of Family Budgeting Services, said her group was "fairly comfortable" with the news. "We've been given a long time. It

gives us breathing space to consider our options."

Betty Campbell Tenants Association past chairwoman Valerie Norton said the council had worked hard to help tenants. There had been regular monthly meetings and the council had employed an adviser to help tenants to relocate.

The centre was not "a good office space". Many offices had no external light. "The air conditioning is bad."

Council community services director Wendy Walker said it had increased its accommodation assistance fund by more than \$100,000 to help groups meet higher rental costs.