

# United Way of York Region

## Needs Assessment & Funding Priorities Review

2004

Summary



**United Way**  
of York Region

Aurora • East Gwillimbury • Georgina • King  
Markham • Newmarket • Richmond Hill  
Vaughan • Whitchurch-Stouffville

# Needs Assessment & Funding Priorities Review 2004

## Summary

### **Introduction**

In light of the changing human care environment, United Way of York Region (UWYR) reviews its funding priorities every five years. This ensures that UWYR resources are strategically allocated to those who need help the most.

The Needs Assessment and Funding Priorities Review undertaken in 2004 set the stage for an important reassessment of the role UWYR plays in our community. Over its 29 year history in York Region, UWYR has maintained a strong commitment to remain accountable to donors, relevant to people in need, and reflective of the environment that exists in our nine municipalities.

The review helped to develop a clearer understanding of the community, identified the most pressing needs, and set a framework for funding priorities. The review was based on demographic research and input from a wide cross section of community stakeholders.

### **Environmental Scan**

York Region is changing and growing very quickly. 300,000 new residents moved into York Region in the last decade and 500,000 more will arrive in the next two decades.<sup>1</sup> Foreign-born individuals represent 39.1% of the Region's population – a proportion that has increased steadily over the last decades.

The average age of York Region residents is slightly lower than that of residents of the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). People between the ages of 35 and 54 make up 34% of the population.<sup>2</sup> However, like other areas in the GTA, seniors are making up an increasingly higher percentage of the population.

York Region residents have the highest median income and the lowest rate of low-income households in Ontario.

In terms of social need, our research produced sobering findings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Towards a New Funding Model for Social Services Funding in York Region, Human Services Planning Coalition, 2004.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid

### **Snap Shot of Social Need in York Region**

- 14% of households spend more than 30% of their income on housing.
- There are 15,240 children with special needs in York Region.
- Low-income residents wait 8 years for a social housing unit and 15 years for a unit designed for people with special needs.
- Access to services and jobs is hampered by the lack of an integrated transit and transportation system.
- Health care in the Region is chronically under funded.
- Not-for-profit, voluntary, and faith-based agencies are struggling to fill service gaps while facing challenges such as lack of capacity, difficulties recruiting/retaining staff/volunteers, and funding cutbacks.

### **Common Themes**

The review sought input from UWYR stakeholders and the community at large. Interviews were held with representatives of United Way member agencies. Input was also sought from UWYR donors, senior volunteers and staff. Public input was sought through public meetings and a web-based survey.

Throughout this process, some common themes emerged:

- Many areas of York Region are prosperous, yet the list of pressing community needs is long. There is increasing awareness of the complex web of community needs. A person who is in need in one area of life is also likely in need in another. The mechanisms used to address specific community needs must also address the interconnectedness of issues.
- Some community needs are too generic to be addressed in a meaningful way by UWYR.
- Given that UWYR has finite resources, it is necessary to refine the list of issues it plans to address. The community needs that echo clearly across all input streams focus on services and programs that help vulnerable people. The need to build strong communities in order to address interconnected community needs has evolved to become an overarching principle.

The emerging consensus is that UWYR should broaden and deepen its role in the community, beyond fundraising to:

- Increase its own profile and generate excitement about that role in the community;
- Raise awareness on the perceived 'hidden' social issues through the Region;
- Be a visible advocate for issues such as infrastructure challenges and human service sector funding efforts;
- Be a leader and rally partners to address existing and emerging service needs.

### **The Response**

Based on the review's findings, the UWYR Board of Directors has approved new funding priorities. In some cases, the 2004 priorities are closely related to those identified in the 1998 review, although two new issues have also been identified: affordable housing/homelessness and literacy.

The priorities are not ranked, but rather “clustered” according to the frequency and content of the input received. Building strong communities emerged as a clear principle for all funding activities. Mental health, affordable housing and homelessness, and newcomer services had similar rankings. Literacy and domestic violence were also at the top of the list.

#### **2004 Funding Priorities**

Assist vulnerable people by building strong, vibrant, healthy communities by:

- Supporting people with mental health challenges
- Providing services geared toward newcomers and immigrants
- Addressing issues of affordable housing and homelessness
- Preventing domestic violence and abuse
- Promoting literacy

#### **1998 Funding Priorities**

- Community development focus on community capacity/capability building
- Prevention regarding alleviating family stress and subsequent impact on children and youth
- Diversity – ethno-specific services adequately funded, funded to expand
- Prevention of domestic violence
- Programs to address domestic violence

#### **Conclusion**

Given today’s environment, UWYR faces two primary challenges:

- To maintain a clear understanding of emerging social trends in the community so that United Way funded programs remain relevant and the community receives the maximum benefits from the funds raised; and
- To increase the annual fundraising campaign to close the growing gap between need and available funding.

The Needs Assessment and Funding Priorities Review set the stage for an important strategic review of how UWYR responds to those challenges. The Fund Distribution Committee of UWYR is studying the newly identified funding priorities and developing new criteria for distribution of funds. In addition, the UWYR Board of Directors has initiated a review of its Fund Distribution process and an overall review of the organization’s Mission and Vision.

UWYR celebrates its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2006. We are poised to enter our next decade with renewed vision, commitment and energy.