

Understanding Our Environment

A strong foundation for determining needs and
setting priorities

Phase 1 Report

Prepared by:



Report Summary

United Way of York Region is setting priorities for the next five years (2004–2009). The first step in the process is to review what we know about the people who live in York Region and what their needs might be – a challenging task in the fastest-growing municipality in Canada.

York Region includes areas of great privilege and areas of great need. Statistics show that York Region residents have the highest median income and the lowest rate of low-income households in Ontario. In other words, on average, people in York Region are financially well-off. We also have many young people – the average age of York Region residents is lower than the average for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) as a whole. Finally, life expectancy is high – York Region residents tend to live longer than residents of other regions in the GTA.

Our research also produced more sobering findings:

- Health care in the Region is chronically under funded.
- While there are 15,240 children with special needs in the Region, there is no children's treatment centre.
- Low-income residents must wait 8 years for a social housing unit and 15 years for a unit designed for people with special needs.
- The fastest-growing type of household is the lone-parent household.
- Access to services and jobs is hampered by the lack of an integrated transit and transportation system.

York Region has a patchwork of government agencies and departments working to address these needs. There are gaps in the patchwork that only not-for-profit, voluntary, and faith-based organizations can fill. Unfortunately, these organizations themselves are struggling with challenges such as under funding, lack of capacity, and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers. Human care agencies are calling on the United Way to help build partnerships, act as an advocate for community issues and re-evaluate how and what is funded.

In 2003 United Way of York Region raised more than \$6 million for member agencies and the communities they serve. But on its own, money is not the answer. We must ensure that the money is used in a way that clearly benefits the residents of York Region. One of our goals in the next five years is to improve the evaluation of the cumulative impact of the allocation of money, so that the community receives the maximum benefits from the funds we raise. United Way must remain diligent in its assessment of agency need and effectiveness in order to ensure that donors trust the organization as their philanthropic steward. Increased community awareness is necessary to ensure that York Region's growing population is connected to United Way.

The next five years will be challenging. We need to focus on identifying and meeting evolving community needs. At the same time, we play a role in ensuring that the social service system remains accessible and equitable. This report is the first step toward those goals.

United Way of York Region (UWYR) is entering a planning cycle to set funding priorities for the next five years (2004 to 2009). This is an opportunity to take stock of past successes and challenges, develop a clear understanding of the community, identify the most pressing needs, and then set funding priorities.

Part I of this report looks at the following questions:

1. How has UWYR helped the community over the last five years?
2. How have York Region communities changed – physically, economically, and socially – since the 1998 Needs Assessment and Funding Priorities Report? What are the major community and organizational trends?
3. What roles do the provincial and federal governments play in delivering human services?
4. How can UWYR use this information to set priorities?

We have used a variety of information sources to answer these questions, including materials from the Regional Municipality of York, the Simcoe-York District Health Council, the Human Services Planning Coalition and Statistics Canada.

Part II contains feedback from consultations with member agencies and donors.

The **Appendices** contain more detail on our findings.

Part I: Diverse Services for a Diverse Population

1. United Way of York Region, 1998 – 2003

Mission

To provide leadership, skills and resources as we unite people to build a more caring, compassionate community.

Vision Statement

United Way of York Region builds caring, supportive communities in partnership with all sectors of our Region. As a trusted and respected organization, United Way undertakes community needs assessment and problem solving, fundraising, funding effective social service delivery models and volunteer leadership development. The expertise and commitment of staff and volunteers optimize the use and impact of community resources, ensuring accountability and exemplary stewardship.

Funding priorities identified in 1998

- Community development focus on community capacity/capability building;
- Prevention of domestic violence;
- Prevention regarding alleviating family stress and subsequent impact on children and youth;
- Diversity – ethno-specific services adequately funded, funded to expand;
- Programs to address domestic violence.¹

Funding priorities for 2004-2005

- Build strong communities, one neighbourhood at a time;
- Reducing stressors on families and subsequent impact on children and youth;
- Preventing and addressing domestic and family violence;
- Supporting ethno-specific initiatives in York Region.²

Campaign Profile 1998-2003

Campaign revenue has increased by approximately \$2.2 million in the last five years. The 2003 campaign results surpassed \$6 million – a milestone for the organization. Impressive as this figure may seem, the reality is that the donation rate in York Region is in the bottom third for all United Way campaigns in Ontario, at \$7.78 per person.

The campaign team has improved the donation process by increasing payroll deduction donations and encouraging donations to the community fund rather than designated gifts. The biggest challenge appears to be that York Region residents are not fully aware of the community needs supported by United Way agencies. This lack of awareness translates into a lower donation level.

Funding profile 1998-2003

United Way of York Region distributed more funds each year from 1998 to 2002, and only slightly less in 2003, while the number of agencies being funded has remained relatively stable.

¹ United Way of York Region Needs Planning Initiative; York Region United Way Needs Planning Task Force and Compass Consulting Associates.

² Source: United Way of York Region 2004/2005 funding application.

Year	Dollars	# of Agencies
1998	\$ 2,461,208.00	38
1999	\$ 2,714,280.00	38
2000	\$ 3,441,697.00	37
2001	\$ 3,485,939.00	37
2002	\$ 3,745,843.00	35
2003	\$ 3,722,093.00	40

But we have to ask ourselves and our agencies: How significant of a difference have these dollars made in the community? United Way has evaluation tools and processes in place (Core Competency Inventory, Citizen Review Panel) to monitor the effectiveness of funded programs and to determine their impact in the community. What is missing are mechanisms to measure the overall impact of funded programs according to the stated funding priorities. Developing these tools is an important part of the current Needs Assessment. The next five years will be a testing ground for evaluation models and measuring outcomes in the community.

Community Involvement in York Region

In the last five years, UWYR has supported, and in many cases played a leadership role, in many services and programs in order to better understand the community and strengthen member agencies.

UWYR Initiatives

- Community Leadership Resources
 - On-going consultation and training made available to human care agencies
 - Infrastructure, Support and Sustainability Project
- Leading Ethnoracial Access Dialogue (LEAD), 2003 – an initiative to assess and establish relationships with the South Asian, Chinese and African Caribbean communities
- Kaleidoscopic Organizations, 2001 – a framework for diversity and inclusivity
 - Diversity Inclusivity Project (DIP)
- Women’s Educational Event
- Bell United Wave

Community Collaborative Initiatives

- The Human Services Planning Coalition
 - Co-chair, *Towards a new funding model for social services in York Region*, 2003
 - Youth Strategy, 2002
 - Health Care Funding in York Region: Is it Fair? Fair is Fair, 2002
- *The Hands that Build*, Homelessness Initiative
- 211 Community Information and Volunteer Centre – York Region (CIVC)
- York Region Funders Alliance

The Canada-wide context

United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada (UWC-CC) has identified several goals that are common to communities across Canada, that include helping children and youth succeed, strengthening and supporting families, promoting self-sufficiency, building vital and safe neighbourhoods, and supporting vulnerable and aging populations.

In 2002, United Way of Canada-Centraide Canada (UWC-CC) recommended that its members go beyond simply raising and distributing funds and engage in community building by:

- fostering networks of social service agencies that deal with problems people face;

- preventing problems through community building, identifying strategies, setting targets; and,
- building the necessary resources that will result in change in physical and social environments.

At the same time, United Way organizations across Canada face major challenges³:

- declining market share for United Way in fundraising and increasing competition for charitable funds in the voluntary sector;
- the demographic shifts to an older and poorer Canadian population, which is changing fundraising and community investment priorities;
- technological change that both creates opportunities and widens the gaps between different groups of people;
- changing government roles leading to increased pressure on the voluntary sector;
- rise of corporate responsibility leading to more corporate foundations and more designated philanthropic initiatives.

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

These findings suggest a shift of focus for UWYR towards community capacity building, as well as a need for the organization to be vigilant in monitoring changes in the community so that it remains relevant to the people of York Region.

2. York Region and its communities

A demographic snapshot

York Region is changing and growing very quickly. It is both a place of great privilege and a place of great need. Statistics show that York Region residents have the highest median income and the lowest rate of low-income households in Ontario. In other words, on average, people in York Region are financially well-off. We also have many young people – the average age of York Region residents is slightly lower than the average for the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) as a whole. Finally, life expectancy is high – York Region residents tend to live longer than residents of other regions in the GTA.

Our research also produced more sobering findings:

- Health care in the Region is chronically under funded.
- There are 15,240 children with special needs in the Region, but no children’s treatment centre.
- Low-income residents must wait 8 years for a social housing unit, and 15 years for a unit designed for people with special needs.
- The proportion of people who spend 30% or more of their income on housing is the highest in the GTA.
- The fastest-growing type of household is the lone-parent household.
- Access to services and jobs is hampered by the lack of an integrated transit and transportation system.
- In a recent survey, 69% of York Region residents reported that they experienced some or extreme stress in their lives.

³ United Way of Canada, July 22, 2002

North-South differences

Within York Region, there is considerable demographic and economic variation. The most populous and wealthiest municipalities are in the southern part of the Region. Vaughan, Markham, and Richmond Hill – the three southern municipalities – also have significant immigrant populations of 42%, 53% and 48% respectively. Yet research for the Leading Ethnoracial Access Dialogue (LEAD) Project, conducted in 2003 shows that most agencies are situated north of Major Mackenzie Drive, and may not have southern satellite offices.

Municipal Transit System - Insufficient

The congestion emerging along many of the Region's major roads and highway corridors is primarily due to the heavy reliance on private automobiles. Today, only 8 per cent of all rush hour trips are made by public transit in York Region.⁴ The municipal transit system has been identified as insufficient, making it difficult for those without cars to get to the services they need. This is particularly true outside of Richmond Hill, Markham and Vaughan.

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

York Region is not a "community in need" in the conventional sense. There are areas of great need, and gaps in the system that exist to respond to those needs. The table below provides an overview of the 'indicators' that suggest areas of priority for UWYR. The sections that follow offer a more detailed discussion of this information.

Relevant Human Services Indicators at a Glance

Indicator		The numbers
Total population (2002)	Ontario	12,156,595*
	York Region	826,000** (6.79%)
Median age in years	Ontario	37.2
	York Region	35.9
Children's population (Ages 0-19) (% of 2002 total population)	Ontario	3,002,170 (24.6%)
	York Region	210,495 (25.4%)
Seniors population (Ages 65-74) (% of 2002 total population)	Ontario	818,165 (6.7%)
	York Region	40,410 (4.8%)
Seniors population (Age 75+) (% of 2002 total population)	Ontario	654,015 (5.3%)
	York Region	25,885 (3.1%)
% Foreign born	Ontario	27%
	York Region	39%
% Population with postsecondary education	Ontario	35%
	York Region	39%
Life expectancy	Ontario	79.32
	York Region	81.83
Median income	Ontario	\$53,626
	York Region	\$75,719
Child poverty rates (1999)	Ontario	n/a
	York Region	13.8%***
% of households with income below \$30,000 in 2000	Ontario	26%
	York Region	14%
% households spending more than 30% of income on housing	Ontario	25%
	York Region	25%*
Unemployment rate	Ontario	5%
	York Region	5%

⁴ *On the Move...Overview Report, York Region Transportation Master Plan, 2002*

Indicator		The numbers
Teen mother birth rate (ages 15 – 19)	Ontario York Region	15.9 per 1,000**** 3.8 births per 1,000****

* Source: Statistics Canada, Quarterly Demographic Services Department, January 2003.

** Source: York Region Planning and Development Services Department, December 2002, confirmed in March 2004.

*** Source: Toronto Children's Services, Child Care Services Plan. (Information from Human Services Indicators draft report, November 18, 2003, by York Region, Human Services Planning Coalition.)

**** Source: York Region Health Status Report 2002.

Local government: new responsibilities

York Region is one of five regional governments in the Greater Toronto Area. The regional government has assumed many new responsibilities since 1999, such as transit, social assistance, family and children's services, social housing and residential services, long term care, public health, strategic planning, police and emergency medical services, and human services planning. The regional budget has grown from \$429 million in 1993 to \$1.2 billion in 2002 to reflect these new responsibilities.⁵

In 2002, residents of York Region were asked to identify priorities for the municipal government for 2003. Quality of drinking water, crime prevention, and child poverty were cited as their highest priorities. Of the remaining nine top priorities, homelessness and public transit were related to the delivery of human services.⁶

Population: young, and living longer

In the 1996-2001 period, York Region was the fastest-growing census division in Canada (population growth rate of 23% or 137,000 people over 5 years). According to recent forecasts by the Region of York, by 2026 York Region will be home to nearly 1.3 million people. That is an increase of half a million people over 2001, representing an annual growth rate of 2.1%.⁷

York Region residents enjoy the highest life expectancy (81.83 years) of any of the GTA municipalities and the province.⁸ The leading causes of death are:

- Injuries, for those under 35
- Cancer, for those between 35 and 69
- Cardiovascular disease, for those over 70.⁹

Households: more lone-parent families

In the 1996-2001 period, the fastest-growing household types were lone-parent families (44%) and single-person households (33%). The growth rates were lower for couple families (25%) and multiple person households (25%).¹⁰

Religion: part of the human service network

The most prevalent religions in York Region are: Roman Catholic (35%), no religion (17%), Jewish (8%), United Church (7%), Anglican (6%), and Muslim (4%).¹¹ The faith-based sector provides valuable human services to York Region residents. Weekly religious services,

⁵ York Region, 2002

⁶ First Annual Report on Indicators of Progress, York Region, 2003

⁷ ibid

⁸ Provincial Health Planning Database, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, 2002.

⁹ York Region Health Status Report 2002.

¹⁰ Region of York, October 2003.

¹¹ Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

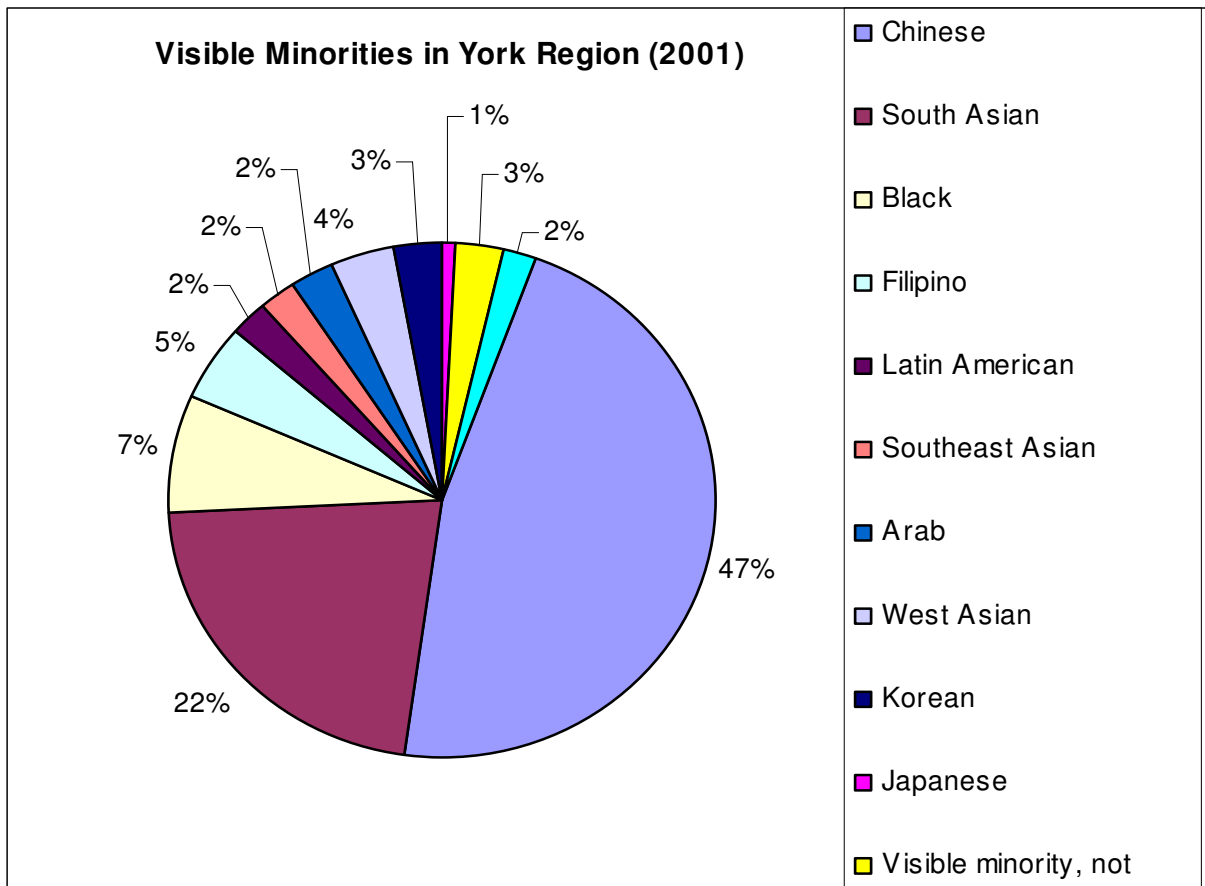
marriage preparation, counseling, and providing free space for meetings of community groups were identified as among these contributions. Many services depend on volunteers and are constrained by funding limits and lack of physical infrastructure.¹²

Ethnic/cultural profile: many newcomers and visible minorities

In York Region, the proportion of foreign-born individuals increased from 36% in 1996 to 39% in 2001.¹³ About 6% of York Region’s population (43,405 people) immigrated to Canada in the 1996-2001 period.¹⁴

In 2001, 30% of York Region’s population identified themselves as “visible minorities,” up from 24% in 1996.¹⁵ In the total population:

- Chinese people make up 13.8%
- South Asian people 6.5%
- Black people 2.2%.



¹² Human Services Planning Coalition, September 2003.

¹³ Region of York, October 2003.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

Languages: increasing diversity

In the 2001 census, 83% of York Region residents reported that the language they speak most often at home was English, while 8% reported Chinese, and 2% identified Italian.¹⁶

Just over 3% of the population (24,000 people), reported that they can speak neither English nor French. Most of these people live in Markham, Richmond Hill, and Vaughan.

Income levels: the highest median in Ontario, but some households are left behind

York Region has the highest median income for private households in Ontario.¹⁷ In 2000, the median income for private households in York Region was \$75,719, an increase of 9.9% over the median income of \$68,905 (inflation adjusted) recorded in 1995.¹⁸

Families and unattached individuals are considered to have a low income if they spend 20% more than the average on food, shelter and clothing. In York Region, 31% of individuals and 9% of families were considered low income in 2000. The incidence of low-income individuals remained constant between 1995 and 2000, while the rate for families decreased by 2.5%. These rates are slightly below provincial averages.¹⁹

A related statistic focuses on a defined income threshold. Between 1995 and 2000, the number of households with total income below \$30,000 decreased from 33,695 to 31,740. When adjusted for inflation to reflect 2000 dollars, the number of households with total income below \$30,000 is currently 35,794, or 16% of the total number of households.²⁰

Housing: questions of affordability, social housing, and homelessness

In 2000, 43,440 home-owning households in York Region were spending 30% or more of the total household income on housing. This represents 22.6% of all household owners in the Region, the highest proportion in the GTA.²¹ Between 1995 and 2000, the proportion of owner and tenant households spending 30% or more of the total income on housing increased from 21% to 25%.²²

As of July 2000, the waiting list for social housing had 4,557 applicants – an average eight-year wait. The wait is over 15 years for a special needs unit. Senior levels of government have withdrawn funding support in this area.²³

Low incomes, barriers to affordable housing such as, rapid urbanization are some of the stated risk factors for homelessness in York Region. The use of the four shelters in York Region has risen steadily between 1996 and 1999, growing by 7,248 shelter-days or 38%.²⁴

Children with special needs: a critical lack of services

There are 15,240 children in York Region with special needs.²⁵ Currently, there is no children's treatment centre in the Region to serve these children and their families.

¹⁶ Simcoe-York District Health Council, 2003

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Region of York, October 2003.

¹⁹ Simcoe-York District Health Council, 2003.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ York Region Housing Directions Study 2000

²⁴ York Region Health Status Report 2002

Seniors in York Region: growing numbers, not enough services

Home Care

The Community Care Access Centre (CCAC) of York Region is part of the publicly funded health care system. The CCAC provides in-home services, placement services, information and referral services and adult day services. The CCAC served 22,893 between April, 2001 and March 2002. 53% of these people were seniors over the age of 65.²⁶

Long-term care programs and services

There are currently 78 long-term care facilities, homes for special care, retirement homes and lodging homes in York Region. The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recently awarded 1,480 additional long-term care beds to York Region, for a total of 3,365.²⁷ Many of the people who use these services are seniors.

Over the next 15 years, the fastest growing age groups in York Region will be the 65-69 and 85+ cohorts, increasing by 154% and 164% respectively between 2001 and 2016.²⁸

The Region of York owns 6 supportive housing buildings, which serve 114 clients. Some of these clients are seniors. There are currently 260 names on the waiting list.²⁹ This example seems to be indicative of the overall situation for seniors' services in the Region. Services are expanding, but not at a rate that can meet current demands, and certainly not at a rate that will meet future demands of the fastest growing segment of the population.

Mental health: the weight of stress in modern life

In 2000-2001, 69% of York Region residents reported some or extreme levels of stress in their lives, although 75% reported being happy.³⁰

Major initiatives in York Region

Hundreds of initiatives are being planned and undertaken in York Region that will have an impact on the human services sector including:

- The Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC), formed in 2001, "is a partnership between representatives of government, service provider agencies and corporations, the non-profit sector, and consumers of human services."³¹ Five priority areas have been identified, including leadership, funding, communication, data collection/information management, and long-term planning.
- "Fair is Fair," an ongoing initiative of the HSPC that identifies the gap in health care funding between York Region and the rest of the province. The group has recommended that the province provide health care funding that more closely approaches the provincial average and recognizes the rapid growth and change in York Region.
- Vision 2026, the Region Municipality of York's Strategic Plan, includes the following goals: quality communities for a diverse population; enhanced environment, heritage and culture; a vibrant economy; responding to the needs of residents; housing choices for residents;

²⁵ Simcoe-York District Health Council, 2003.

²⁶ York Region, 2002.

²⁷ *ibid*

²⁸ Simcoe-York District Health Council, 2003

²⁹ York Region, 2004

³⁰ York Region Health Status Report 2002

³¹ HSPC, 2002

managed and balanced growth; infrastructure for a growing Region; engaged communities and a responsive Region.

- By 2005, York Region Transit will be introducing a new rapid transit system that will include new vehicles, stations and routes.

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

Statistics show medians and averages, they do not show the extremes, which include those who fall far below the medians and averages. For example, although on average York Region's population is young, there are still 66,000 people over the age of 65. It is important to look at the complete spectrum of those who live in the Region in planning appropriate services.

3. What is happening across the Province and the Country?

The trend for senior levels of government to divest responsibility for many services to municipalities has left municipal governments scrambling to deliver some services, reduce or cut others, and search for funding. Infrastructure, transit, education and health care are some of the controversial areas in terms of funding and priorities.

The Province of Ontario

According to the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC), there are great inequities in health care funding for York Region. The following chart makes this case.

York Region's Health Care Under Funding

	Per capita provincial	Per capita for other GTA* municipalities	Per capita for York Region
Community Mental Health	\$17.50	\$18.00	\$6.60
Hospitals	\$657.50	\$713.20	\$261.80
Public Health**	\$29.40	\$29.67	\$23.18
CCAC	\$92.70	\$77.70	\$64.30
Long Term Care Facilities***	\$2229.60	\$1965.70	\$1782.60
LTC Community Programs	\$31.10	\$33.40	\$19.00

Source: Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, Simcoe-York District Health Council, Regional Municipality of York, Human Services Planning Coalition

* Other GTA means Durham, Halton, Peel and City of Toronto

** Revised from *Fair is Fair* Brochure

*** Calculated on population aged 75 and over. All other per capita based on total population.

York Region's challenges are further compounded by the system of sharing the cost of social services and social housing introduced in the Greater Toronto Area at the same time. Pooling is intended to offset a supposed draw to Toronto's city centre and the associated costs borne by the municipality. However, the reality has been the opposite, with more people from Toronto on York Region's wait list than the original scenario anticipated.

The HSPC acknowledges that the Province, over the past few years, took some steps to improve this situation by providing funds to redevelop hospitals, increase the number of beds, and increase budgets for hospital and community-based services.

Since April 1999, the Ontario Trillium Foundation has invested \$356 million in nearly 5,600 grants across the province. Human and social services received \$181 million in grants for initiatives that increase the capacity and effectiveness of community organizations, encourage

the continued growth of volunteerism, promote partnerships, and support access to services.³² Trillium grants in the human and social services sector, in York Region, totaled over \$13,600,000 since 1999.

The Liberal party, which formed the Provincial government in 2003, was elected on a platform that promised to build a stronger social safety net. To date, the Liberal government has eliminated the lifetime ban on welfare, invested \$3.5 million to help homeless people, and put in place supportive programs for disabled people and those caring for ailing relatives. Many policy changes, directions and initiatives are still being developed.

Canada

In Canada, the non-profit and voluntary sector employs 1.3 million people, has annual revenues exceeding \$90 billion, and controls \$109 billion in assets. Each year, the sector engages over 22 million Canadians as donors and 6.5 million Canadians as volunteers, who collectively contribute more than 1 billion hours of time.³³

According to the Canadian Council on Social Development, this sector's sustainability has been under siege since government funding cutbacks in the 1990s. Specifically, changing the Canada Assistance Plan to Canada Health and Social Transfer substituted a block grant for provinces for a cost sharing formula. This has the result of reducing funding available for provinces, and in turn to municipalities.³⁴

Organizations devote great amounts of time to chasing short-term funding at the expense of their core activities. Some have to charge service fees, which excludes some users.

The overall picture is of a sector struggling to meet the needs of the community. Some agencies lose the ability to maintain or update infrastructure when funded dollars are tied to specific programs. Many are bogged down with excessive reporting requirements. Funding from year to year is inconsistent, making organizations unstable. Some avoid advocating certain positions for fear of losing funding opportunities. Staff and volunteers are often exhausted by the demands in this sector.

With a new Prime Minister, and a federal election looming, there may be opportunities for policy changes and the development of alternative funding models.

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

United Way of York Region must balance these organizational realities and the need to be accountable to donors with its mission to build caring communities. Given the current environment and evolving community initiatives intended to address the needs of an increasingly diverse population, the time may have come to change the relationship between funder and agency. How that relationship should and can change must be explored through ongoing consultation with stakeholders.

³² Ontario Trillium Foundation (<http://www.trilliumfoundation.org/OTF-English/new/index.htm>)

³³ United Way of Canada, 2002

³⁴ United Way of Peel Region, April 2002.

4. What does it all mean for York Region?

The statistical information for York Region has many clear messages. From most vantage points, York Region is a place of privilege. It is rich in ethnic and cultural diversity.

Yet not all the news is positive. Chronic under funding of the formal health care sector and the divestment of responsibility by senior levels of government have created a critical gap for thousands in need. Not-for-profit, voluntary, and faith-based groups report challenges such as under funding, lack of capacity, and difficulties recruiting and retaining staff and volunteers.

United Way of York Region has raised increasing amounts of funding over the last five years and member agencies and the communities they serve have benefited. More money is needed, but money is not the only answer. We must ensure that the money is used in a way that clearly benefits the residents of York Region. One of our goals in the next five years is to improve the evaluation of the cumulative impact of the way we spend money, so we receive the maximum benefit of the funds we raise.

The data in this report will form the basis for our consultations with stakeholders. These consultations will help us to identify where United Way of York Region should place its priorities for the next five years.

Part II: Talking to member agencies and donors

Member agencies

In November 2003, UWYR carried out a consultation with 37 Executive Directors of 40 member agencies. In these informal interviews, agencies expressed their view of current community needs, the challenges they face, and the role United Way of York Region should have in the community. The full report is attached as Appendix 2.

The interviews revealed some important trends:

- The needs most often identified were programs appropriate to an increasingly culturally diverse population, and the need for an improved and integrated transportation system.
- Many participants spoke of the lack of continuous, core funding as their greatest issue.
- The agencies called on United Way of York Region to act as advocate and organizational developer.

Community needs

Member agencies identified the following priorities:

- Counseling services – responses related to the need for counseling services for individuals/groups coping with different issues/problems.
- Preventative services – responses related to the need for upstream/preventative programs targeting at-risk individuals/groups before problem escalates to crisis.
- Support services – responses related to the need for support services to enhance the quality of life for individuals/groups in different situations.
- Crisis and intervention services – responses related to the need for immediate crisis support and intervention for critical problems.

- *Transport services – responses related to the need for an adequate and integrated transport system in areas that are not yet served or under-served by public transit.
- *Cultural competency – responses related to the need to develop/enhance agency capacity in order to deliver culturally appropriate services.
- Public education – responses related to the need to raise community awareness about specific issues or special needs of disadvantaged groups in the population.

Challenges for Agencies

Member agencies identified the following challenges:

- *Funding – responses related to a lack of funding, competition for funding, funding cuts or funding restrictions.
- Human Resources (HR) – responses related to the inability to attract/retain staff and volunteers.
- *Infrastructure – responses related to challenges in managing administrative overheads and other business costs.
- Organizational capacity – responses related to the development/enhancement of organizational and programming capacities to deal with new needs and service demands.
- Partnership – responses related to challenges in collaborations and partnerships with other agencies or community groups.
- Demand for services – responses related to rise in demand for services despite lack of resources to increase service provision.

Roles for United Way of York Region

Member agencies identified the following roles for UWYR:

- Public educator – responses related to the role of raising community awareness about specific issues or needs of other groups in the population.
- *Advocate – responses related to the role of representing interests of agencies and community groups at various levels of planning and funding structures.
- Fundraiser – responses related to the role of fundraiser.
- Fund distributor – responses related to the role establishing clear guidelines and direction for support of better agency practices and programs.
- Link to public and private sector – responses related to the role of promoting partnership and understanding between the public, private and community sector.
- *Organizational developer – responses related to the role of providing resources to enhance organizational capacity of agencies and promoting innovative methods and models of programming and service delivery.
- Diversity and inclusivity promoter – responses related to the role of cultivating an environment for greater inclusivity of diversity.
- Facilitator of partnerships – responses related to the role of facilitating partnerships among agencies and between agencies and other community interest groups.
- Research and publication – responses related to the role of conducting research on social trends and quality of life in York Region.
- Other community developments – responses related to other ongoing community developments/local initiatives that United Way should recognize/support.
- Other concerns.

*** denotes the most common response**

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

The interviews send a strong message that member agencies encourage UWYR to:

- develop proactive and aggressive strategy to promote cultural diversity;
- continue to build partnerships;
- continue to evolve from role of funder to expand its role as an active member of the human service sector.

Donors

Nine United Way of York Region donors were interviewed in January 2004. They were asked to comment on community need(s) in York Region and United Way's role in addressing these needs. The Summary of Donor Interviews is attached as Appendix 3.

Community Need

The interviews suggest that:

- community needs encompass many diverse social and health issues;
- youth programs, health care, domestic abuse, education, and immigrant services are at the top of the list;
- community needs in York Region remain hidden even to those who already support United Way;
- transportation is an important community need, although it is largely outside of United Way's mandate.

United Way's Role

The interviews suggest that although United Way of York Region is respected by donors – especially in the area of “due diligence” and “accountability to donors” – the general public is largely unaware of what the organization does throughout the year.

Funding Priorities

The needs assessment process leading to the establishment of funding priorities is not well understood by donors. They are generally aware of United Way agencies, but they do not know how the work of these agencies relates to the stated funding priorities.

What does this mean for United Way of York Region?

Increased year-round awareness of United Way's involvement in the community can improve the annual fundraising campaign. It remains unclear whether increased knowledge of funding priorities will affect the level of donations. To remain accountable to donors, most of the donors suggest that United Way focus on:

- support of agency programs;
- administrative issues;
- community awareness.

Conclusions

Based on the analysis of existing information and input from agencies and donors, it appears that United Way of York Region has a critical role to play in addressing community needs throughout the Region. Providing funds is one component of that role – other components include community education, advocacy, relationship building, research, and training.

United Way of York Region must remain diligent in its assessment of community need and agency effectiveness in order to ensure that donors trust the organization. Ensuring that resources reach those most in need should be the primary focus for the United Way. At the same time, the organization must keep administrative costs low and maintain efficient operations. Increased community awareness is necessary to ensure that York Region's growing population is connected to United Way.