

# 'MORE PEOPLE ON THE EDGE OF CRISIS'

## UNITED WAY HALTON HAMILTON REVIEWS MYRIAD OF COMMUNITY PROBLEMS FROM THE PAST YEAR

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Over the past year, the United Way Halton & Hamilton has addressed multiple crucial problems in its community, from domestic violence and mental illness, to unemployment, homelessness, poverty and hunger.

"Next to the government, United Ways across Canada are the largest funders of social services in the country," said UWHH president and CEO Brad Park, in a virtual presentation of the UWHH impact report for 2019-20.

Through the efforts of community partners, supporters and donors, vital funding was provided to 64 agencies offering 128 programs, said Park.

"These programs are the critical components of the social safety net necessary in order for our community to be a place where no one gets left behind ... the number of people we support is staggering and is very telling of our reality."

More than 209,195 people "facing unimaginable barriers" were helped by the UWHH in the past 12 months, 26,018 of those being seniors, and 23,365 children and youth.

"We know that seniors are the fastest growing demographic in society and they're among some of the most vulnerable, confronting isolation, loneliness and often require specialized vital supports."



Brad Park

Investing in youth is one of the best strategies to break the cycle of intergenerational poverty, increase high school graduation rates, improve a sense of belonging, reduce crime rates and drive our economic future, he said.

In Ontario, 12 per cent of households are food insecure, meaning that approximately one in every 10 kids or seniors won't know where their next meal is

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– United Way Halton & Hamilton president and CEO Brad Park

coming from, said Park.

"When people are hungry, it's difficult to maintain employment, look for work, it impacts cognitive function and lack of food prevents children from being able to focus and learn in school ... food is often one of those items households will sacrifice when it comes to paying for heat, hydro and rent."

To combat rising mental illness, "we must continue to offer programs that help people feel a sense of belonging, a sense of re-

lief and the ability to better handle life's challenges."

The pandemic uncovered cracks in the social service system and United Ways have been on the front lines raising vital dollars, supporting front-line workers and advocating for federal relief funds to lift up the most vulnerable, he said.

"There are now more people on the edge of crisis, facing immense barriers such as poverty, mental illness and isolation. The stress on individuals, families and seniors is high. People, family and neighbourhoods have been pushed to their limits and the social sector is being stretched beyond its limits to serve them."

As emergency needs and priorities continue to evolve, it will take months, more likely years, to recover and rebuild, said Park.

UWHH emergency funds used to respond to the pandemic are a short-term, temporary solution; stable, long-term funding is needed, he said.

"This year's annual fundraising campaign will be more critical than any year in the past. We will raise every dollar we can to support our community's most vulnerable."

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