

Funding makes learning disabilities programs possible

BY JOAN RANSBERRY
Staff Writer

It's a lifelong condition: A child with a learning disability grows into a youth with a learning disability and then becomes an adult with a learning disability.

Last year, 8,000 people came through the door at the Learning Disability Association of York Region. Some were adults and some were children with learning disabilities.

Some were parents and some were teachers. Every one came for support offered through the United Way agency.

"One in 10 people has a learning disability," Lynn Ziraldo, executive director of the association said. "It can be hard to diagnose because you can't see it."

The non-profit association operates with four part-time staff, two full-timers and many hours donated by volunteers at 11181 Yonge St. in Richmond Hill. Of the association's \$250,000 annual budget, \$74,000 comes from the United Way.

"Without the United Way funding, we wouldn't be able to offer the critical programs that we do," Mrs. Ziraldo said.

Volunteers with the association come from all walks of life, including education and business. Some



are people with learning disabilities.

Pat Craig has been a volunteer for five years. She teaches a 10-week parenting course.

"It involves taking good parenting skills and adjusting them to children with learning disabilities," Mrs. Craig said.

The volunteer service gives Mrs. Craig a chance to share her knowledge and expertise in education. She was a special education teacher in York Region for 30 years before retiring. The last 10 years were spent at Thornhill Secondary School.

"I get as much as I give," Mrs. Craig said. "It is a wonderful experience. I learn from the parents. When taking the course, parents find out that they are not alone. The group really comes together."

Mrs. Craig has also worked with people with learning disabilities.

"I've worked one-on-one with

adults. I helped them understand learning disabilities," she said.

Since learning disabilities can affect how a person interprets, remembers, understands and expresses information, Mrs. Craig's volunteer time is critical.

"It's important to know that people with learning disabilities are intelligent and have abilities to learn despite difficulties in processing information," Ms. Ziraldo said.

Living with a learning disability can have an impact on friendships, school, work, self esteem and daily life, Ms. Ziraldo said. "People with learning disabilities can succeed when solid coping skills and strategies are developed," she said.

Clients are referred by doctors and educators, while some "just walk in on their own," Mrs. Ziraldo said, adding, "We're here to help."

The association provides an interactive environment, offering workshops, courses and support groups to clients or to parents, teachers and doctors.

The United Way of York Region is in the throes of its annual campaign. The United Way has raised \$3.7 million, representing 55 per cent of this year's \$6.75-million goal. To donate, log on to www.uwyr.on.ca or call 905-474-9974 or 1-877-241-4516.



Learning disabilities are difficult to diagnose because they're unseen, Learning Disability Association of York Region director Lynn Ziraldo says.

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