

Abuse survivor thankful for United Way services

BY CHRIS TRABER
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In the midst of well-heeled guests, executives and sleek luxury automobiles at BMW Canada's new Richmond Hill corporate headquarters, Emmy Hendrickx humbly humanized the objective of United Way of York Region's 2010 fundraising campaign.

A newcomer from the Netherlands with a husband and two young children in the 1990s, her life began to unravel.

"My husband never said he would kill me," she told the gathering, which learned the current campaign is \$4.4 million toward a record \$8-million goal. "What he did say

is that he'd like to see me dead. The abuse increased and became more severe. I felt more isolated and alone," she said.

When her spouse began physically abusing their children, she turned to Yellow Brick House, one of 39 York agencies funded by United Way.

In the past decade, Ms Hendrickx said she accessed 10 of the 100 regional programs delivered by United Way partners, including the Women's Centre of York Region.

United Way helps 290,000 people in York Region each year, she said.

"I'm definitely one of them. They changed my life. They made a difference.

"The past six years have been difficult

financially, socially and emotionally. Today, I own my own home, I'm my own woman and I have a business. Now, I want to give back."

Though she's not completely out of the woods, her enterprise takes women into them. Wilderness Wanderings offers transformational camping trips to explore nature, self-discovery and strengthening. Her clients include those at risk and the adventurous.

"After a night of winter camping, the women said if they can survive that, they can survive anything," she said. "I got so much from the community. My dream now is to help others."

With six weeks and a remaining \$3.6 million to raise, Ms Hendrickx brought the importance of individual and corporate benevolence home.

Hosting the mid-term update, BMW announced its first employee fundraising campaign contributed \$12,000. The 150 staff members who only moved into the new building in March had fun, but took the task seriously, human resources director Michelle Lettner said.

York Region staff and York Regional Police also announced they raised \$320,000 in support of the United Way 2010 campaign, exceeding a \$300,000 joint fundraising goal.

This represents the highest amount ever raised by York Region and is an incredible achievement of which employees can be proud," York Region chairperson and CEO Bill Fisch said. "We raised our fundraising goal by \$50,000 over last year's amount and our staff

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► To contact or support Ms Hendrickx and Wilderness Wanderings, call 905-727-0369 or e-mail emmy@wildernesswanderings.ca

came through in such a big way in support of people in need across our region."

The final campaign tally was unveiled Tuesday during a United Way staff campaign closing ceremony at the York Region administrative centre.

Demand for social service support in York Region is growing, United Way campaign director Rickesh Lakhani said.

"In a year when our agencies are experiencing a 40-per-cent increase in people knocking on their doors, your support means someone is there to answer and to provide a helping hand," he said.

"The \$8 million is an ambitious target and we're confident we can and must reach it."

This year's drive is on pace to meet the milestone target, United Way chief executive officer Daniele Zanotti said.

"We're off to a great start and we're on track," he said. "But, we've got to keep our eye on the finish line. We're only half way there. We're going to keep our foot on the gas on behalf of the people who rely on us."

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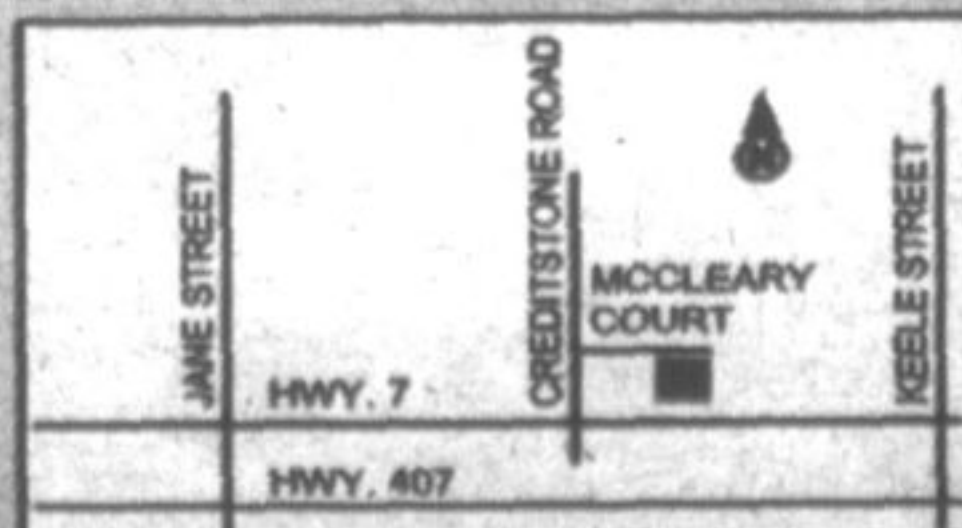


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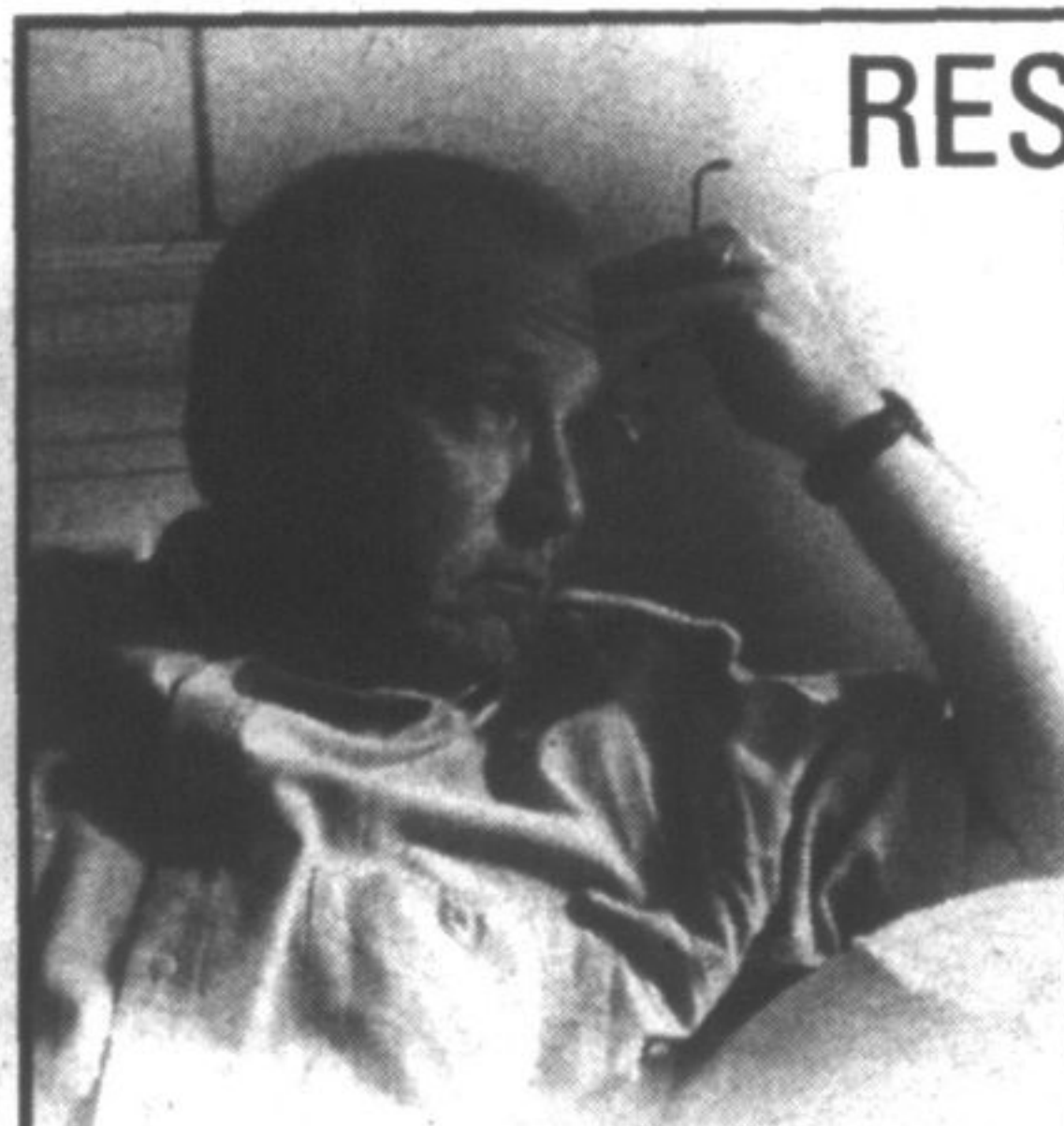
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