

OPINION



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EDITORIAL

United Way plan could bring services home to you

ISSUE: 3-year plan won't end growing social service needs, but will attempt to close gaps and bring services closer to your home

It's undeniable York Region has a social services funding crisis on its hands.

The sobering statistics speak for themselves.

- More than 15,000 people are on a waiting list for social housing. Nearly half of those are senior citizens.

- About 9,500 families seek rent geared to income housing, with an astonishing 10-year wait.

- While York Region had the fifth highest median family income in Canada in 2006, about one in eight of its residents lived in low-income households.

- The York Region branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association treats 1,500 clients annually. More than 10,000 residents would benefit from care if more funding was available.

- Food bank visits have increased 27 per cent since 2008 and continue to rise.

Yet, York Region has among the healthiest, wealthiest and most vibrant communities in the country.

But within our neat and tidy neighbourhoods are widening pockets of poverty — a hidden social issue that will continue to fester if more funding doesn't become available.

For its part, The United Way of York Region is taking preventive action on this burgeoning social issues plight with its announcement last week of a groundbreaking, three-year, \$30-million fundraising campaign.

The organization is attempting to hone in on each community's biggest needs and provide those services closer to home.

If you live in King, for example, there is no one place to quickly access social service information and residents are driving to more urban neighbouring communities to get services.

Georgina, with one of the few youth shelters in the GTA, has

troubled young people coming from other regions, which puts further strain on what little funding it receives.

Language barrier issues might be accommodated in the south, but what about farther north where diversity issues are becoming more prevalent?

Needs are different across the region and the United Way's innovative blueprint envisions a "human capital campaign" that will connect each community to its wide-ranging network of accessible services.

The reality is cookie-cutter plans don't engage everyone in the same way, so the United Way is attempting to target social service gaps in all York Region's neighbourhoods.

It's a strong first step in zeroing in on problem areas and dealing with issues before they get out of hand.

Whether it's your subsidized housing, mental health services, youth or senior assistance, this plan hopes to assist you in your neighbourhood.

With that being said, we'd have to have our heads in the sand to think \$30 million in three years will solve the chronic underfunding crisis in our communities.

Social service gaps will always exist, but if we create the resources where residents can get more engaged and see the relevance of what this organization is all about, perhaps we can stop the problems from spiralling.

Isn't that what healthy communities are all about?

This initiative is offering a "helping hand in every neighbourhood" and, if executed properly, will help people find the help they need.

LETTER OF THE WEEK

Don't answer hate with more hate

Last week, a family caring at-home for their teenaged son with autism received a letter from an angry mother. The blunt and anonymous letter viciously attacked the family for imposing a "wild" child on her community, frightening her children and expecting special consideration.

The intolerance of this self-labelled "pissed-off mother" reached its lowest point in suggesting the parents euthanize their good-for-nothing, unlovable and unemployable son, then donate his "unretarded body parts" to science.

Traumatized by this hateful letter, the family publicized it and it soon went viral. Toronto newspapers received a flood of letters that were often as brutal as the letter itself.

However understandable might be the expression of disgust and outrage toward her intolerance, it is neither appropriate nor helpful to answer in kind.

While it is hard to believe a mother would feel this way, dismissing her attitude as sick, extreme and unrepresentative of our society is not enough — a tempered response is in order.

Even if the letter writer only expresses the views of a fringe element in our society, outrage alone does not address her allegation that others feel the same as she does but just "don't have the guts" to say so.

These folks, our neighbours, need to be

Letters to dead people disgusting waste of money

Service Ontario sent a letter to my father, who died in 2003, requesting "re-registration" of his Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) card.

My mother tried to contact them by telephone, but, as a senior citizen, she was unable to navigate

their labyrinthine phone system.

So, she sent back the form, with "deceased Aug. 4, 2003" written across it.

We thought that would be the end of it.

The idiots sent it back.

I just left them a strongly worded e-mail, informing them, yet again, that my dead father doesn't much feel like filling in the form they have sent us twice now, so could they please stop wasting our taxes and

told that since Canada signed on to UN declarations on the rights of children and persons with disabilities, they have rights to education and social inclusion; "wild" children must not to be expelled into the "woods".

Indeed, these people need to hear that when parents choose to live in the community with their children, this is good not just for them, but also for all of us as we learn to be our "brother's keeper".

All persons have dignity, including those with disabilities, and so are entitled to freedom from abuse as well as freedom to reach their potential.

They need to recognize we are born utterly dependent on others, live a heart-beat away from catastrophic accident or illness and, if lucky, die in loving arms.

Like many parents, this mother thinks her children are "normal", but life's lessons may yet change her heart, so they must not forget their family is spared only by God or fate from what they consider "defects".

Yes, they are responsible for their own children, but our regard for future generations makes this a collective responsibility too.

So, we need to convince this woman, and anyone who shares her sentiments, that we accept people who are "different" and that we support their caregivers. Only then can we celebrate the uniqueness so essential to the diversity that enriches Canada.

SALVATORE (SAL) AMENTA
STOUFFVILLE

upsetting my mother.

Hopefully, the message will penetrate their thick skulls this time, but, just in case, I'm going to make my online journal entry as available to Ontario government types as I can.

Any help you can give me, dear reader, would be eternally appreciated.

What a disgusting waste of money.

CRAIG WILKINS
KESWICK

**Is there an issue about which you are passionate?
You could be a Saturday Forum contributor and get the chance to have your piece published along with your name and headshot. E-mail your 450-word submission to jmason@yrmg.com**

BOTTOM LINE: Innovation exactly what is needed to prevent disconnect and assist neighbourhoods in finding help.