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## **Community Progress Report United Way Community Matters Initiative**

### **Introduction**

The United Way / Centraide of the Upper Ottawa Valley Inc. (UWUOV) has been serving communities in Renfrew County for many years<sup>1</sup>. Its main focus has been to raise funds<sup>2</sup> on behalf of a number of not-for-profit agencies that provide important health and social services to citizens in need.

Over the past couple of years, societal changes on a global scale have been creating challenges to the way communities and organizations, like the United Way, have traditionally conducted business. In order to meet these challenges successfully, communities and organizations have had to review the relevancy, effectiveness, and efficiency of their operations. For United Way's, this has meant changing from a federated fundraiser to building community capacity to ensure that the dollars raised achieve maximum impact.

The road to change for most United Ways has involved some form of strategic planning process leading to the preparation of a business plan. In preparing our business plans over the years, the UWUOV has been handicapped for lack of an adequate needs analysis that demonstrates how it can best support people in the region. This became possible in 2005, with the introduction of a public consultation process called *Community Matters: Engaging Communities, Building Communities*.

This "Report to the Community" fulfills a promise we made to our communities to report progress in moving forward with the Community Matters, Phase 1 results.

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<sup>1</sup> The United Way / Centraide of the Upper Ottawa Valley began serving communities in the northern part of the region (Cobden, Eganville, Killaloe, Barry's Bay, Whitney, Pembroke and Petawawa and adjacent municipalities) with its incorporation in 1971. United Way service to communities in the southern part of the region (Arnprior, Renfrew and adjacent municipalities) began in 1997 when UWUOV was invited by major industrial donors to administer their United Way employee and corporate contributions.

<sup>2</sup> Since 1971, the United Way / Centraide of the Upper Ottawa Valley has raised over \$10 million.

## **Community Matters, Phase 1**

Over a two and one-half year period ending in May, 2007, seventeen rural-based United Ways in Ontario conducted a series of public consultation activities within their respective regions to identify high priority community needs and issues. The process was funded through a generous grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

These activities included meetings with key community leaders, a public survey, and town hall meetings, culminating in published reports of the consultation results. In the UWUOV region, this program showed us that the top five needs/issues in our communities were: lack of medical personnel; transportation difficulties; youth issues; safe and affordable housing; and poverty.

### **Moving Forward with Community Matters: Update**

Strategic planning, using the Community Matters results as a guide, began in the late spring of 2007. Our strategic plan was targeted for completion the first of January, 2008, but mid-year came the request to examine amalgamation with the Deep River District United Way (DRDUW). This will take some time and clearly strategic planning has to await resolution of the amalgamation discussions in order that planning takes account of any joint entity that might result. Plan completion is now postponed to January 01, 2009.

The delay in developing a strategic plan will not negatively impact momentum in moving forward with Community Matters. At the request of the DRDUW, we conducted the Community Matters needs assessment in the four municipalities served by the District between May and December, 2007. Thus, if amalgamation with DRDUW does materialize, the four municipalities served by the District will be on an equal footing with the sixteen municipalities served by UWUOV once formal strategic planning resumes.

Progress in addressing the Community Matters results has been made in other ways. I am pleased to report that we are now participating on Renfrew County-wide committees that are examining three of the top needs identified during our Community Matters assessment: transportation, housing and poverty.

As an interim step in our strategic planning process, we made a decision a few years ago to establish funding for special community projects – one-of-a-kind expenditures designed to create change. We put 10 percent of our discretionary funds to such projects, and we have had some good success, for example, we provided seed funding for Frozen Meals on Wheels, New Places to Live and the Petawawa Centennial Family Health Centre.

However, this has not been enough. We have not managed to spend all 10 percent of each year's allocation to projects. We have learned that waiting for member agencies to bring projects to us doesn't work. Thus, for 2008, we have determined to raise the allocation to projects to 20 percent and to aggressively seek out suitable projects. I am pleased to report that the first project for 2008 will be with the Child Poverty Action Network for a project on social inclusion. This project will fit in nicely with the Community Matters results that saw poverty as one of the five key issues.

We have also developed a standardized application form so that potential applicants need no longer wonder what information we are seeking for decision-making.

Finally UWUOV, in concert with thirteen Ontario Community Matters collaborative partners, is taking steps to secure funding for Phase 2 to follow-up, in a more formal and systematic way, the needs/issues identified in Community Matters Phase 1. A funding application is in preparation and will be submitted by March, 2008. If successful, the focus will be on issues relating to youth, one of the top five needs our communities have identified as important.

We are committed to continuing consultation with our communities as our strategic planning process unfolds.

***Article submitted by: Mike Wright, Past Chair, United Way / Centraide of the Upper Ottawa Valley***