

Making charities more effective

[Final Edition]

The Brampton Guardian - Brampton, Ont.

Author: KATHARINE SEALEY

Date: Dec 10, 2003

Text Word Count: 651

Document Text

The United Way knows the non-profit sector is working hard, and now they want to help them prove it.

With the aid of a \$179,000 grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation, the United Way is offering access to an outcomes measurement training program, which will help Peel's non-profit agencies evaluate their results, impact and successes in the community.

The program has been devised by Kitchener's Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, under the banner Measure Improve Impact.

Designed to be spread out over three years, the program will include workshops and individual consultation to help non-profit groups assess their needs, gather information and then use it to promote and improve their work.

Dan Labrecque, chair of the United Way of Peel's board of directors, said he is excited about being part of a new program that can reach beyond the Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon area through group services.

"Once we get under way, this is a model that can be used across the country," he said. "It may even be implemented internationally, through the United Way."

The non-profit sector is facing an increasing number of challenges, from staff burnout to funding cuts, and they need to find ways to stay alive, said Al Hatton, president of the United Way of Canada-Centraide.

"The catch phrase of the moment is 'do more with less', but we all know you can't do more with less, you can only do more with more," said Hatton. "To get more, you have to demonstrate results to the public, to the donors. The public has become pretty cynical about investments and they want you to prove that their investment is making an impact in their community."

Andrew Taylor, of the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services, who'll be heading up the project with his partner Rob Case, said many groups don't even realize that they have already been gathering much of the information they need.

"Evaluation is already going on, informally, in any healthy organization and can be harnessed," he said. "It is a natural and necessary part of organization development, not an add-on, or something we get the summer student to do to keep the donors

happy. It is an important way to ask yourself 'what do we do?' and 'why does it matter?'. "

He said the main problem most organizations have is that they end their evaluation process by determining whether or not the participants were satisfied, instead of moving further to see what impact it had, whether there was a measurable difference and whether the outcomes made economic sense.

"It's kind of like going on a protest march, and people are just happy because they marched," he said. "They don't care if their march made a change in policy, which was supposed to be their goal."

To help set the pace, in addition to hosting the project, the United Way of Peel Region will also be a participant.

"We want to measure and demonstrate our own impact," said Shelly White, United Way of Peel Region's Executive Director. "Participating in the project ourselves will help us educate the community about the value of the non-profit sector and its impact on building healthy communities. We also want to clearly demonstrate that we are walking the talk."

In the past 46 years, the United Way of Peel has raised more than \$145-million for community programs.

The Measure Improve Impact project will get under way in January with an assessment of local needs. Based on that, the centre will begin holding introductory workshops in April, followed by individual consultations in the fall of 2004.

The program is free to all non-profit group in Peel region, not just those who operate under the United Way umbrella. To register, go to the United Way's Web site at www.unitedwaypeel.org.

[Illustration]

: Andrew Taylor will head up the United Way of Peel Region's measurement training program.