

# Letter to our Community

“Without a sense of caring, there can be no sense of community.”

— Anthony D’Angelo, author

What makes a community great? At United Way of Peel Region, we believe the answer lies in our collective ability to ensure that people in our community are cared for, connected, and included. Simply put, a great community is great for everyone who lives in it.

We have captured this belief in our new strategic plan, *Building Vibrant Communities Together*. In fact, it’s in our new mission statement! In addition to outlining our new mission, the strategic plan explains our vision, values and strategic directions for the next five years.

The development of *Building Vibrant Communities Together* was solidly rooted in our ongoing organizational transformation. We are focused on becoming a United Way that creates measurable, cumulative, lasting change that improves lives and builds resilient communities.

Our work of community building focuses on addressing the following important social priorities:

- Strengthening families and children;
- Reducing hunger, homelessness and poverty;
- Helping newcomers settle and integrate;
- Supporting seniors to live healthy and independent lives;
- Helping abused women and children.

While we continue to invest in a network of services and programs that meet the immediate human service needs of people in our community, we are growing our investment in initiatives that tackle the root causes of these needs. Complex issues such as poverty, domestic violence, discrimination, social isolation and homelessness require a comprehensive approach. We are committed to working in partnership with organizations and individuals in all sectors who share our goals and are experienced in these issues. This work is both challenging and exciting as we are beginning to see the impact of our transformation.

For example, Success By 6 Peel, a collaborative of United Way and more than 40 community partners dedicated to helping young children thrive, undertook

several initiatives to advance this important objective. With the release of the first-ever *Community Report Card* last spring, public attention was drawn to the many challenges children and their families face. Peel received a grade of just C-minus, sparking deep concern. Read more about Success By 6 Peel on page 16 of this report.

Peel has the second highest immigration rate in the country after Toronto. The success of our newcomers is pivotal to our success as a community. But a large percentage of newcomers experience significant difficulties in starting their new lives in Canada and we are missing out on their energy, skills and experience. That’s why we’ve brought together several community organizations, four layers of government, University of Toronto at Mississauga and new immigrants themselves to form the Peel Newcomer Strategy Group. Our vision is to create a community-wide strategic plan to improve our capacity to successfully integrate newcomers into our community. Our approach is being lauded as progressive and a model that government would like to see replicated in other communities across the country.

Creating the kind of social change our community needs requires a creative and multi-faceted approach. We’ve moved well beyond simply investing in a network of human care services and programs. While this investment remains a vital part of our community building work, we’ve expanded our work to include initiatives that help build strong agencies.

Additionally, our community has asked us to advocate on its behalf to address the funding inequity that has this network stretched beyond capacity. We’ve embraced this role wholeheartedly. For United Way, it’s another way to tackle root causes.

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In 2005 we joined with the United Ways in York, Oakville and Durham as well as the GTA/905 Health Care Alliance to form the Strong Communities Coalition. Our purpose is to speak out about the need to improve local and timely access to health and social services for the three million residents living in the 905 area code region of the GTA.

In the fall of 2006 the Strong Communities Coalition released two important reports, both available on our website. The first is *Assessing the Gap in Health and Social Service Funding Between the GTA/905 and the Rest of Ontario*. It provides an analysis prepared by PricewaterhouseCoopers that demonstrates there is a \$1.5-billion gap in annual provincial funding for social services and health care services between the GTA/905 and the rest of Ontario. The gap results from a \$181 less in per capita funding for social services and a \$246 less in per capita funding for health care services. The second report, *Growing Pains: An Urgent Message from the Strong Communities Coalition*, gives three recommendations for government action: provide an immediate infusion of growth funding; base funding allocations on population size, growth and characteristics; and develop a comprehensive health and social services strategy for Ontario’s high-growth regions. The reports were well received by government and we are beginning to see hopeful signs that these issues will be addressed.

Finally, we want to emphasize that our success in 2006 would not have been possible without the extraordinary skills, hard work, generosity and dedication of the United Way Board of Directors, volunteers, donors, community partners and staff. It is all of us, working together, who are building a great community.

Harry Mann  
Chair, Board of Directors

Shelley White  
Chief Executive Officer

P.S. If you are interested in reading more, please visit our website at [www.unitedwaypeel.org](http://www.unitedwaypeel.org). We redeveloped the website this year to improve navigation, make it easier to find information, and enhance its visual appeal. We hope you like the results!

