

Peel non-profits call for increased Provincial funding

By **ZACHARY ROMAN**

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Peel non-profits are calling for more support from the Provincial government.

The Metamorphosis Network is a group of over 100 Peel non-profits that joined together to advocate for support when the dissolution of Peel was first announced. Even though dissolution has now been cancelled, the network is still working together as it says Peel is in dire need of more funding for community services.

On February 22, in partnership with local labour groups, the Metamorphosis Network held a press conference to share their concerns about funding inequities in Peel's social service and public sectors.

According to the Metamorphosis Network, government reports show that compared to Toronto,

Peel receives as much as 30 to 50 per cent less Provincial funding per capita on items like children's services, housing, seniors' programs, disability supports, healthcare, emergency services and education.

Angela Carter, a strategic advisor at Roots Community Services and a representative of the Metamorphosis Network, said Peel faces crises in mental health, homelessness, youth services, addictions, family violence and seniors' support.

'We have a community services sector that is stretched to the breaking point by COVID-19, poverty and inflation,' said Carter. '...The people we serve deserve services in Peel that adequately and equitably reflect their needs. We will work collaboratively with the Region and other partners to ensure that all sectors get a new, equitable deal for Peel that works for everyone in the community.'

Fred Hahn, President of CUPE Ontario, a union that represents over 290,000 public employees, said he wonders why the Province has given Peel less funding per capita for housing, health care, emergency services and education.

'Why has Queen's Park left Peel, Ontario's most diverse community, to pay the price with less access to services?' said Hahn.

The Metamorphosis Network has been gathering data on program funding in Peel. Some of its findings include that Peel's Children's Aid system is underfunded by \$27 million; Peel has about half the shelter beds per capita of Toronto; Peel has 20 per cent fewer long term care beds per capita than the provincial average; and Peel has 35 per cent less child care funding per capita than the average community.

The Metamorphosis Network held its third general meeting on January 30 and over 60 non-profit leaders attended to discuss plans now that Peel won't be dissolved. At the meeting, it was agreed that the Metamorphosis Network would continue its work with a focus on ending underfunding in Peel.

On February 22, the day of the news conference, two Metamorphosis Network members delegated to Region of Peel Council about the underfunding of community services in Peel.

The first to delegate was Arvind Krishendeholl, who is the Manager of Settlement Programs at Indus Community Services.

He said nothing is more important than ensuring the programs people rely on are funded properly. Krishendeholl said provincial underfunding of community services is bad for Peel taxpayers too, as Peel has to make up the difference.

?The people we serve need to see services in Peel that reflect what everyone else in Ontario enjoys,? he said. ?We are here to let you know the non-profit community services sector is prepared to do some of the heavy lifting to ensure this happens.?

Next to delegate was Ray Applebaum, CEO of Peel Senior Link. He said Peel is a rapidly-growing municipality that is perennially underfunded, and that the impacts of that are significant.

?[There's] significant structural issues driven by a shortage of funding, largely from the provincial programming,? said Applebaum. ?...we're going to work with all of our partners and ensure we get a share of funding from the Province that is equitable and sustainable.?

Regional Councillor (Caledon, Wards 4, 5 and 6) Mario Russo said the work the Metamorphosis Network is doing is imperative. He said by joining together, Peel non-profits have been able to make their voices heard.

?You're going to make our jobs a little bit easier when we reach out to our provincial partners and our federal partners to say this is how important this is in our community,? said Russo.