

United Way pools together resources and ramps up efforts

Written By MARK PAVILONS

Helping our fellow men and women knows no boundaries. In the end, it's all about ?us.?

That was the message delivered to King councillors recently, by Daniele Zanutti, president and CEO of the United Way of Greater Toronto.

The agency, three years after the merger of York and Toronto, it has now merged with Peel, to become the United Way Greater Toronto.

Zanutti pointed out the social pressures facing residents in communities ? poverty, struggle to meet basic needs, access to employment.

A recent ?The Opportunity Equation? in GTA validates what experts already knew?.

??Income inequality ? the silent local and global community killer - is spreading.

??Middle income neighbourhoods across the GTA are being replaced by either low or high income neighbourhoods.

While Toronto remains the income inequality capital of Canada, the ?neighbourhood polarization? is spreading into the 905 area.

Zanutti said that back in 1980, no neighbourhoods in York Region were low income. Today ? 16% of neighbourhoods in York Region are low income. And in Peel, most dramatically and drastically, a full 52% (a majority of neighbourhoods)?are low income.

?This is why, together, our regional United Way is better positioned to fight local poverty ? in all its forms.?

A record investment of \$88 million was announced a few months ago for York and Toronto. Zanutti said in York Region alone, the United Way has increased its financial investment by close to 5%.

Now, they're supporting 47 agencies, delivering hundreds of programs across the region including anchor partner agencies like Community Living York South, 360 Kids, Family Services York Region and Carefirst.

They continue to support Big Brothers Big Sisters York Region, Canadian Mental Health Association-York Region, and Yellow Brick House.

Thanks to a record campaign, a multi-year transformational gift from Magna, there's new funding available to support an array of programs for seniors, food banks, Variety Village and more. In addition, almost \$750,000 in funding across the region is earmarked for youth, focussing on supporting multiple barriers to employment.

?We have strengthened our dynamic presence at key local tables like the Human Services Planning Board ? working together on a made in York Region Community Benefits Framework that can benefit local communities where large infrastructure projects are taking place.?

Zanutti noted they just completed ?iCount,? in partnership with the Region of York, with over 200 volunteers from across the region walking the streets, talking to peoples and families, gathering data to inform its work and programs aimed at reducing, preventing and ending homelessness in York Region.

?This is why together our regional United Way is better positioned to fight local poverty in all its forms,? he concluded.