



Review of Volunteerism in Peel

April 2007



United Way
of Peel Region

Acknowledgements

This review has been undertaken over a four-month period and has been made possible as a result of the positive support and cooperation of a number of individuals and groups. I would like to acknowledge these contributions and express appreciation to those who have made them.

The contributions of volunteers, coordinators of volunteers, managers of volunteer programs, Executive Directors, representatives of businesses and volunteer suppliers to the focus groups and consultations have been significant in the development of the Vision for Volunteer Peel and the proposals for action presented as a result of this review. Their thoughtful and constructive participation has been very helpful.

Each of the leaders of the volunteer centres in other jurisdictions and the key informants (who are listed in Appendices VI and VIII respectively) made valuable contributions to the ideas considered in the context of this review. Their provision of a wider lens and the benefits of their experiences have positively influenced the proposals presented. As well, their passion and enthusiasm for volunteerism were impressive and contagious. These contributions are much appreciated.

Donna Lockhart of The Rethink Group also provided valuable advice about which key informants and other jurisdictions should be contacted. Donna's perspective on the information gathered and the feedback from the focus groups was very useful in formulating the recommended approach to the discussions held in the Consultations and to the structure of the proposals presented. I appreciate Donna's contributions to the review.

The members of the advisory committee who are listed in Appendix XV provided sound and practical advice to me at each stage of the review. Their suggestions improved the quality and extensiveness of the process undertaken and added significant value to the way the focus group discussions were approached and to the ideas presented for discussion in the Consultations. I thank the Advisory Committee members for their ideas and thoughtful suggestions.

Anita Stellinga, Director of Community Investment for United Way of Peel Region, provided on going direction and support. Her immediate response to enquiries and effective communication were very helpful throughout the process of the review as were her advice and guidance. I am grateful for this support and assistance.

Cheryl Jones, the Community Investment Coordinator at United Way, also provided considerable timely administrative supports for the review. Her cooperation and good humour in doing so helped make working on the project a pleasure. Thank you to Cheryl.

Finally, Jeannette Baumann of Huether Services has provided significant administrative support for this project. Jeannette has patiently and painstakingly formatted and edited the reports prepared during this review. She facilitated the communication with the agencies invited to participate in the review and organized the focus groups and consultations. Jeannette was very well organized and thorough. I very much appreciate her support and detailed contributions to this review.

I hope that this review can provide a successful roadmap for the provision of the additional supports for volunteerism and volunteers in Peel Region. The contributions of the many thousands of volunteers in Peel make this community a great place to live.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Huether
Huether Services

April 1, 2007.

Executive Summary

With the support of an advisory committee made up of representatives of community agencies, funders, and managers of volunteer programs, United Way of Peel Region initiated a review of volunteerism in Peel in November 2006. The need for this review recognizes the growing demands for volunteers and supports for volunteers in the community, the apparent decrease in numbers of volunteers and the recent suspension of services by the Volunteer Centre of Peel. The purpose of this review was to determine what community supports for volunteerism, volunteer programs and volunteers would strengthen them and to make recommendations to provide them.

To complete the review, United Way of Peel Region engaged the services of John Huether of Huether Services. The process for the review included: 1) a series of focus groups involving volunteers, coordinators of volunteers and volunteer suppliers and businesses, 2) research including available Peel-based information and interviews with volunteer experts and leaders of successful volunteer centres from other jurisdictions; 3) the development of proposals as a result of the focus groups and research; 4) consultations about these proposals with those involved in the focus groups and Executive Directors of Peel community agencies; 5) enhancement of the proposals based upon the feedback from the consultations and advice from the advisory committee.

Thirteen different focus groups were organized. Forty-two volunteers participated and completed surveys; 59 coordinators of volunteers and 14 volunteer suppliers including representatives of four large corporations. The participants represented a broad spectrum of agencies of different sizes, services and mandates. The volunteers ranged from 16 to 60 - plus years, came from all parts of the Region and performed a broad range of roles from fundraising, one-on-one service, board member and administrative responsibilities.

The focus groups all identified the importance of promoting volunteers and volunteerism using a variety marketing strategies. It was felt that the value of volunteers and their contribution to the community were not widely recognized. It was suggested that much more could be done to let people know about volunteer opportunities and the benefits of volunteering. There was very strong support for the creation of a user-friendly interactive central database on a well-advertised website that could provide information about volunteer opportunities throughout the voluntary sector and in the public service. The focus groups identified the importance of training and consultation for agencies engaging volunteers to ensure their ability to manage risks and potential liabilities, to provide competent supports for volunteers and to assist them in recruitment and recognition. There was good support for the creation of a centralized organization which could perform these roles, facilitate partnerships in support of volunteering and volunteer programs, and provide significant connecting support to businesses and corporations interested in employer supported volunteering on both a group and an individual basis.

Six interviews with persons with expertise in volunteerism and volunteer management and 14 volunteer centre programs were contacted to obtain information about their programs, structures, services and successes as well as the challenges they are facing. Based upon these discussions it would appear that there are more advantages for the Peel community to consider a centre that has a primary focus or sole mandate on the provision of volunteer supports to the community in line with the four competencies for centres identified by Volunteer Canada: promotion, connecting, strengthening capacity and leadership.

While a number of centres in Ontario are continually facing challenges of obtaining core sustaining funding, all of them expressed confidence about their future ability to broaden and strengthen their funding bases and to serve their communities through their promoting, connecting and strengthening roles. Most of the volunteer centres contacted were using very successful, user-friendly interactive database programs which performed the core of their matching role by informing potential volunteers about volunteer opportunities. In addition, the centres engaged in proactive connecting activities to strengthen the awareness of volunteering opportunities. These included outreach to new immigrant or special needs communities or targeted recruiting of highly skilled recently retired seniors, or youth. These centres provided training and consultation for voluntary agencies, coordinators of volunteers, senior managers and members of Boards of Directors in order to strengthen their capacity to support volunteers and fulfill their mandate. There were differences in emphasis with concentrated support for small volunteer-intensive organizations, for staff supporting volunteers or for senior managers. Volunteer centres demonstrated a great awareness of the changing needs and preferences of volunteers in the community. They saw it as their role to sensitize community agencies about these.

Almost all of the volunteer centres received funding from United Ways in their communities and about half of those contacted received funding from municipal or regional government. All had fundraising strategies and were the recipients of various kinds of foundation and project-based grants. The larger centres talked about the need for an entrepreneurial approach to securing funding by selling services provided by the centre and by the manner in which they approached funding from the corporate sector.

As a result of the focus groups and the research undertaken, a vision for a centralized organization providing concentrated support for volunteers and volunteerism in Peel was developed. Key success factors were identified. A tentative plan to create this organization using a building-block approach is presented. It is rooted in obtaining community support, diverse funding and collaborative partnerships and was developed to create a new organization providing supports to volunteers and volunteer programs using a phased-in building-block approach. The vision, key elements of success and the plan were presented for feedback to a series of consultations. A number of participants in the focus groups and Executive Directors from a variety of voluntary sector organizations (58 persons in total) participated in the consultations and provided positive feedback.

All of these steps have resulted in an ambitious but achievable vision of a non-profit charitable organization with a volunteer Board of Directors and a diverse and sustainable funding base. This organization will provide strong support to volunteerism in Peel, volunteers, volunteer programs and voluntary organizations across a wide variety of sectors: recreation, sports, culture, environment, social, health and education. Its main roles will be promotion, connecting, strengthening capacity and developing partnerships. It will create a high visibility for volunteers and their contributions to the community and the opportunities people have to volunteer. It will introduce an effective and highly successful user-friendly interactive database to promote volunteer opportunities in member community organizations, which will post these volunteer positions on the site. This new organization will introduce, according to community needs, specific connecting strategies to increase the availability of volunteers for specific roles and purposes. It will provide training and consultation for staff at all levels in community agencies related to the management of volunteers and volunteer programs, including risk management and liability, recruitment, screening, support, retention and recognition of volunteers. In addition, it will develop effective and appropriate partnerships with other capacity- building organizations to ensure coordination of effort and to strengthen approaches to the engagement of volunteers to address various community challenges. This new organization will undertake a proactive approach to engaging the business community and providing support to enhance its interest in employer-supported volunteering.

The proposed plan suggests a step-by-step approach that can generate community support, a diverse core funding base and a strategic initial emphasis upon the promotion and connecting roles. The plan suggests that a sponsoring organization provide oversight and support for a steering committee with broad representation from the community, which will assume the responsibility to create the new organization with a mandate to fulfill the vision outlined in this review. The steering committee will choose a name for the organization, develop a plan and budget and hire a Director with communication and fund development staff to focus on the promoting and connecting roles. It will develop a diverse funding base, a strategic plan and a set of partnerships that will strengthen its ability to support volunteerism and volunteers in the community. The steering committee will conduct its work over a 15-to-24 month period.

This review of volunteerism in Peel has provided the opportunity to examine the needs for additional community supports for volunteerism, volunteers, volunteer programs and voluntary organizations. It is clear that the Region of Peel could be well served by an effective organization focused upon promoting volunteerism, volunteers and volunteer opportunities, providing connecting roles and strengthening the capacity of community agencies to recruit, engage and support volunteers while developing a variety of partnerships to promote civic engagement and volunteerism.



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