

# ...addressing **OUR STRENGTHS**

**SO WHAT DID WE LEARN ABOUT  
THE PACE, FACE AND PLACES  
OF GROWTH IN YORK REGION?**

The findings gathered from a year of meetings  
in empty fields, community centres and  
town halls across the region may surprise you.



**United Way**  
of York Region

# ...addressing **OUR STRENGTHS**

On September 29th, 2008, in a vast open field in Richmond Hill, United Way of York Region released what the media dubbed "...a most provocative report...", **if addressed**. The report kicked off a year-long dialogue across nine municipalities on the defining issue of our remarkable region: the intersection of pace of growth, the changing face of growth, and the places where said growth is occurring.

One year later, following a Nielsen Company survey of hundreds of York Region residents, and meetings with community members, front-line program staff, business leaders and academics, the learnings from our dialogue are simple and profound.

**We are a region of communities in communities.** In addition to neighbourhood and municipality, people across York Region also identify strongly with their communities of faith, culture, language, interests, to name a few. It is these communities within our neighbourhoods and municipalities that provide individuals and the region with a rich, strong and resilient network of support.

**We are a region proud of and eager to maintain our envied quality of life.** This is why people and families move to York Region. This is what people and families desire to enhance with our growth and diversity.

**We are a region that believes our quality of life going forward is grounded in our ability to invest in our greatest resources:**

- **helping our youth grow up strong**
- **enabling individuals and families to achieve economic independence**
- **improving the wellbeing of individuals and community**

**We are a region that cares about and wants to be involved in building a better life for everyone.**

For United Way of York Region, these learnings will inform our ongoing work: how we will invest the donations we receive, and our role in uniting people to develop solutions for region-wide priorities.

For residents, neighbourhoods, municipalities and communities from across York Region, these learnings act as a reminder that we are, above our differences, united by our similarities and aspirations: to build a better quality of life for ourselves, our families and each other.

For all, these learnings act as a call to action. Maintaining and enhancing our envied quality of life requires each and every one of us.



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“ I am tired of all the York Region myths of suburbia and affluence, of all the luxury cars driving south, of all the social issues stopping at Steeles and the 404.

We know we have poverty, housing problems and lack of supports. We see it. We understand it.

But what we also know is York Region has an unbelievable overall quality of life. That is why over 1 million people choose to call York Region home.

And with all the growth, we have an opportunity to enhance quality of life for all residents.

And we can do it by addressing our strengths. ”

*York Region Resident*

REGIONAL  
MUNICIPALITY OF  
York

## ...addressing **OUR STRENGTHS**

- According to Statistics Canada, 2006 Census, there are 126,475 youth (aged 15-24) living in York Region – accounting for 14% of the total population.
- From 2001 to 2006, youth 15-24 years increased by 24%.
- From 2001 to 2006, the number of children between 0-14 years increased by 14%. This is much higher than the growth in the rest of Ontario in this age group.

## Helping Our Youth Grow Up Strong

“ Helping youth find the means to feel better and engage more fully in society costs no more at minimum and can result in substantial savings. Savings can be achieved because increasing the competencies and opportunities for engagement results in savings in other sectors. Investments in the voluntary recreation sector can achieve substantial savings to the publicly funded health, social and corrections systems while at the same time improving the quality of people’s lives. ”

*The Cost of Excluding Ontario’s Youth from Play, A Call to Action! Dr. Mark Totten, in collaboration with Playworks Partnership*



**In 2009, United Way of York Region invested 55% of its funding in 49 programs across York Region that help youth grow up strong.**

**In 2009, United Way funded programs served over 82,000 youth providing educational and recreational supports, after school programs, homework help, leadership development, counselling, employment training and job placements.**



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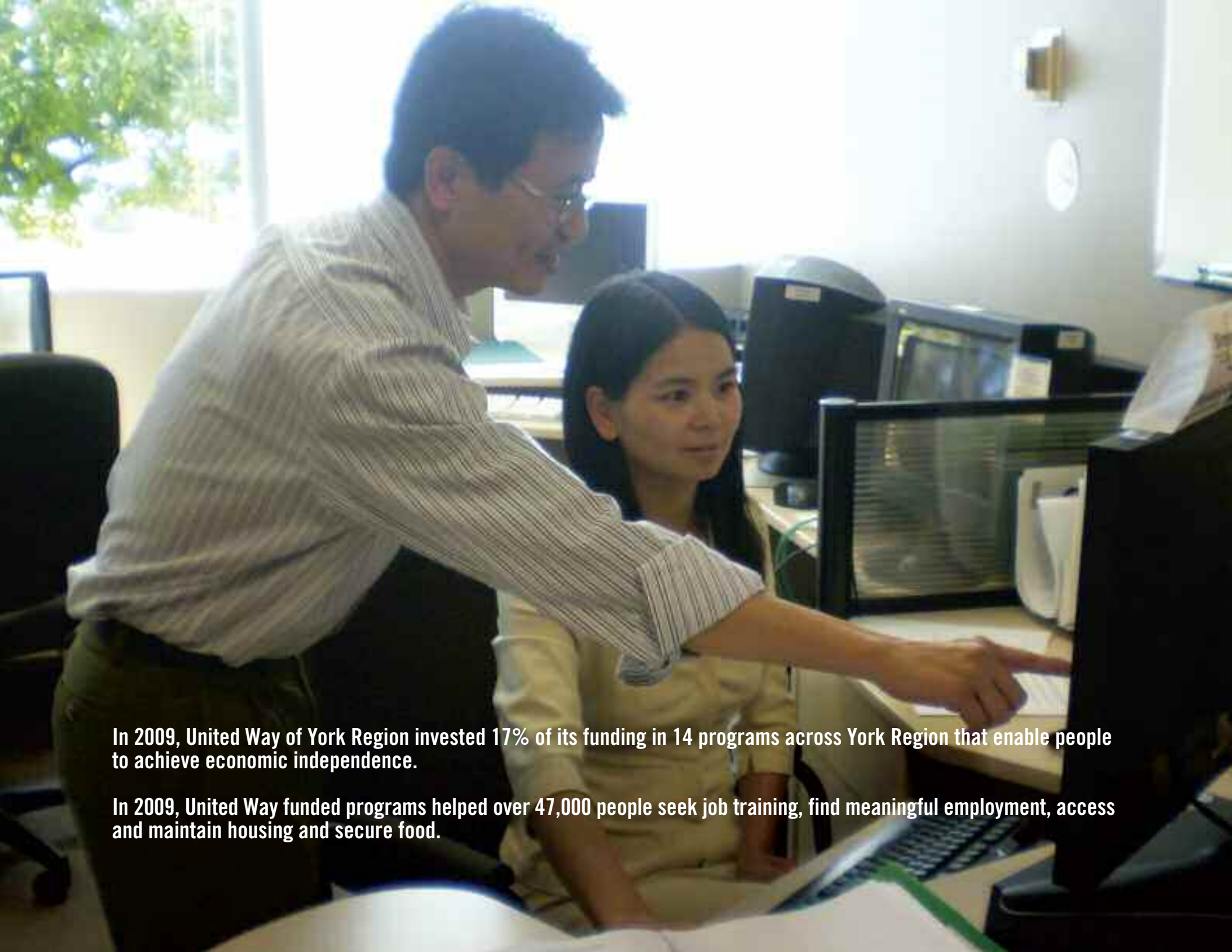
- From 2001 to 2006, there was an increase in low income families, unemployment and housing costs in York Region.
- According to Statistics Canada, 2006 Census, from 2001 to 2006, the number of families in York Region increased by 23%, and the number of lone parent families grew by 37%.
- In 2006, 13% or 112,501 residents lived in low income households – a 55% increase from 2001.
- As of 2006, the unemployment rate in York Region was 5.4% - the second lowest rate in the GTA. However, between 2001 and 2006, unemployment rates increased in all nine municipalities with Markham and Newmarket experiencing the highest increases.
- The Region of York estimates the Ontario Works caseload could reach approximately 6,000 cases by year end 2009, a 26% increase over December 2008.
- Over 4,000 York Region residents use food banks monthly – up 29% in 2009 over the same period in 2008.

## Enabling individuals and families to achieve economic independence

“ While the socio-economic status of York Region residents continued to improve, food bank utilization continued to grow. We witnessed that over the past decade, socio-economic status of food bank clients also improved but that the costs of shelter in the region continued to pose a barrier to food access. ”

*Hunger in the Midst of Prosperity. The Need  
for Food Banks in York Region: 2008*





**In 2009, United Way of York Region invested 17% of its funding in 14 programs across York Region that enable people to achieve economic independence.**

**In 2009, United Way funded programs helped over 47,000 people seek job training, find meaningful employment, access and maintain housing and secure food.**

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- In 2006, 13% or 112,501 York Region residents lived in low income households – 55% more than in 2001.
- The number of people with disabilities increased by an estimated 49,700 or 55% between 2001 and 2006.
- York Region is home to 380,000 immigrants - 43% of the population in 2006. This is an increase from 40% in 2001.
- York Region ranks lower than other municipalities in volunteerism and voter participation, according to the Quality of Life Reporting System comparing 20 municipalities in seven provinces across Canada.

## Improving the wellbeing of individuals and community

“ Vital communities are characterized by strong, active and inclusive relationships between residents, private sector, public sector and civil society organizations that work and foster individual and collective wellbeing. Indicators of wellbeing include social, civic and economic participation, as well as size of social networks, sense of belonging, altruism and respect for diversity. Vital communities are those that are able to cultivate and marshal relationships in order to create, adapt and thrive in the changing world and thus improve wellbeing of citizens. ”

*Institute of Wellbeing, Community Vitality, 2009*





**In 2009, United Way of York Region invested 28% of its funding in 27 programs across York Region that improved individual and community wellbeing.**

**In 2009, United Way funded agencies helped over 20,000 people improve their self esteem, increase life and coping skills, foster sense of belonging, access local programs and supports, and participate in community and civic activities.**

“ I read United Way of York Region’s report, ...if addressed., and I stopped at the question “Who Will Support York Region’s Growth?”

It said that people and families are often lost in the growth equation.

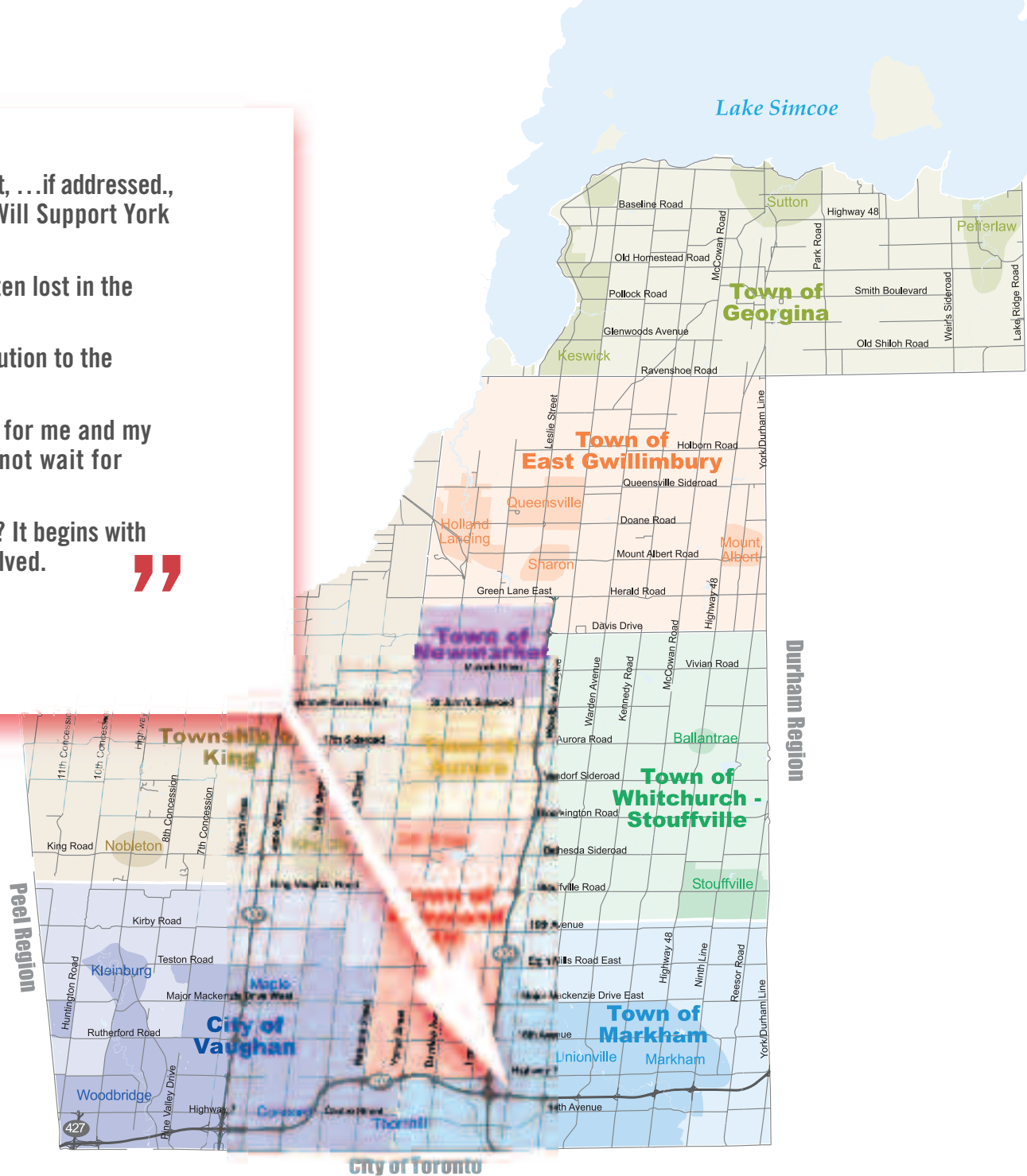
I think people and families are the solution to the growth equation.

If I want my quality of life to improve, for me and my family and my neighbourhood, I cannot wait for anyone else to step up.

Who will support York Region’s growth? It begins with me. That is why I am here. To get involved.

”

*York Region Resident*



After a year long dialogue on the pace, face and places of growth across York Region, you have spoken loud and clear. Residents, service providers and donors would like United Way to focus effort and activities on our region's greatest resources.

**1. Creating opportunities for people, community and stakeholders to get involved and invest in:**

- **Helping our youth grow up strong**
- **Enabling individuals and families to achieve economic independence**
- **Improving the wellbeing of individuals and community**

**2. Uniting with and across our region of communities in communities.**

In addition to neighbourhood and municipality, people across York Region also identify strongly with their communities of faith, culture, language, interests, to name a few. Focusing on the issues that connect us across communities will ensure a better life for everyone.

**3. And in community centres, town halls, basements and boardrooms, voices from across the region shared the same resolve: united, there is a way to build a better life for everyone – and it involves helping one person at a time AND changing systems that help all of us.**

We all win when a youth succeeds in school, when a mom and dad achieve economic independence with access to affordable housing and food security, when an isolated family participates in community activities and feels a sense of connection and belonging.

**Join us. Get involved in ...addressing OUR STRENGTHS:**

- Learn more about United Way, our impact and findings from our year of dialogues at [www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/addressingourstrengths](http://www.unitedwayyorkregion.com/addressingourstrengths)
- Invite United Way to speak to your community group on findings and volunteer opportunities
- Volunteer with and through United Way
- Give to United Way

*Our quality of life depends on each and every one of us...*

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OUR STRENGTHS**

**Photo Credits:**

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Job Skills

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