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UNITED WAY, CITY OF TORONTO TARGET INNER SUBURBS WITH MAJOR NEIGHBOURHOOD INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Plan calls on governments to coordinate resources to invest in neighbourhoods

TORONTO, June 30, 2005 – United Way and the City of Toronto today unveiled a plan to strengthen social services in neighbourhoods facing the greatest need throughout Toronto, particularly in the city’s inner suburbs. The plan identifies nine Toronto neighbourhoods where social services are most out-of-step with growing need.

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy* was released today after a year-long City of Toronto-United Way task force began looking for ways to strengthen the social infrastructure of Toronto neighbourhoods, identify community investment models, and advocate for change. The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force is unveiling the strategy after commissioning six research studies over the past year to assess specific needs in neighbourhoods across Toronto, where investments most need to be made, and how residents, neighbourhood groups and governments can find solutions to neighbourhood issues and challenges.

“Toronto has an impressive network of neighbourhood services and facilities,” said Toronto Mayor David Miller. “But these services have not kept pace with our changing city. Now we have a plan to better align government funding with our city’s needs.”

In April 2003, the Toronto City Summit Alliance released a report calling on governments to enter into an agreement to improve social services in neighbourhoods with growing needs. The Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force was struck by the City and United Way in May 2004 to develop a blueprint for an agreement among all levels of government to coordinate new investments in neighbourhood-based social services and facilities.

“Toronto’s identity is built on a tradition of great neighbourhoods,” said Frances Lankin, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Toronto. “Now poverty has moved outwards, to the inner suburbs, to places once seen as havens from inner-city problems. Our social services simply have not kept up and this means that – more than ever – people are disadvantaged by the neighbourhood where they live.”

The *Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy* recommends that a new neighbourhood structure be established to evaluate and reshape government policies, programs and funding mechanisms to better respond to the changing face of Toronto neighbourhoods. This structure includes a neighbourhood-based partnership to engage local residents and an investment board that brings together the resources of the private, public and voluntary sectors.

Access to community space and community hubs figure prominently in the strategy as key prerequisites to building strong neighbourhoods. The strategy recommends a system to take all publicly owned facilities and real estate into consideration for strengthening the social service infrastructure of investment neighbourhoods, including common public assets like school buildings for after-hour programs.

“Toronto’s most distressed neighbourhoods all lack access to public space and community hubs where residents can come together to access programs, link to neighbourhood resources and have the opportunity to influence and shape how their communities evolve,” said Lankin. “This is why establishing community hubs is a critical first step in revitalizing these neighbourhoods.”

To identify neighbourhoods where community services and facilities have not kept pace with demographic changes, the Task Force analyzed whether neighbourhoods have such assets as recreation and community centres, schools, community health centres and hospitals, children and youth services, community kitchens and food banks. For each of these services, the Task Force analysed whether they were near the residents needed them most.

“We have prioritized nine neighbourhoods where community investments are most urgently needed – but they are only meant to provide governments and other funders with a starting point,” said Lankin.

The neighbourhoods identified for investments where social services are most out-of-step with growing need are:

- Victoria Village (43)
- Dorset Park (126)
- Eglinton East (138)
- Scarborough Village (139)
- Black Creek (24)
- Westminster-Branson (35)
- Crescent Town (61)
- Steeles (116)
- Kennedy Park (124)

** Bracketed numbers correspond to City of Toronto neighbourhood legend.*

The Task Force recommends the three orders of government implement the Toronto Strong Neighbourhood Strategy with a five-year, renewable agreement starting December 2005.

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