
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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.

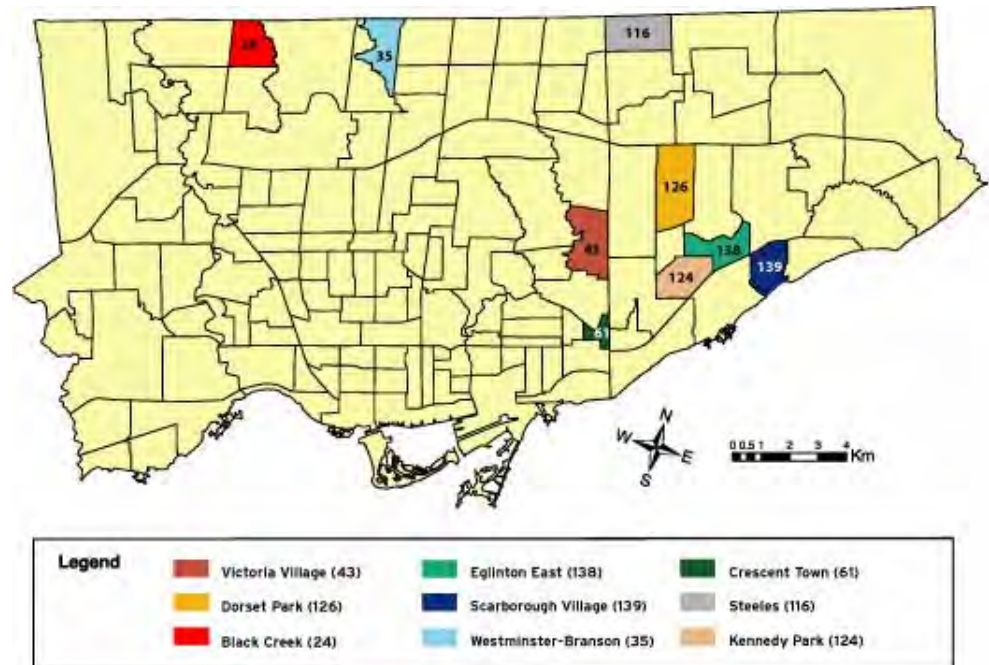
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With poverty moving outwards to inner suburbs like Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke, United Way is now doing even more to help neighbourhoods there. We've partnered with the City of Toronto to develop the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy. We've also made a \$9.5 million commitment to those neighbourhoods facing the greatest challenges.





**United Way
of Greater Toronto**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

UNITED WAY ANNOUNCES \$9.5 MILLION IN INVESTMENTS FOR UNDERSERVED NEIGHBOURHOODS THROUGHOUT TORONTO

Investments include community development programs to identify local issues

TORONTO, June 30, 2005 – United Way of Greater Toronto today announced key investments targeting Toronto’s highest-need inner suburbs. The announcement comes on the heels of the release of the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy – a collaboration between United Way and the City of Toronto – identifying community needs, investment priorities, and a new system for governments to make coordinated investments in neighbourhoods.

The \$9.5 million in investments include \$6.7 million for new and expanding programs to deal with the increasing complexities of Toronto’s inner suburbs, particularly those targeting newcomers and youth, \$1.8 million for ongoing support for new services that began as pilot projects in the inner suburbs, and \$1 million over three years for a community development fund – to be carried out in partnership with the City of Toronto – that will engage residents and community groups in building a vision and action plan for their neighbourhoods. The investments will focus primarily on the nine neighbourhoods identified in the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy where community investments are most urgently needed.

United Way is also launching Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC), a one-year community revitalization initiative funded by the Government of Canada that will bring together residents, local business owners, neighbourhood groups and service providers to find solutions to local neighbourhood issues and challenges. ANC is taking place in five cities across Canada to build local community capacity and inform long-term public policy for strong neighbourhoods. In Toronto, ANC is taking place in the neighbourhood of Scarborough Village, in the Markham and Kingston Road area, which is one of the nine neighbourhoods identified in the Strategy.

“United Way is driven to extend social service networks beyond downtown to the increasingly poor inner suburbs,” said Frances Lankin, President and CEO, United Way of Greater Toronto. “These investments will empower residents to create a vision and action plan for their neighbourhoods, and to influence and shape how their communities evolve.”

United Way of Greater Toronto works to create sustainable change in the lives of Torontonians, identifying needs and taking action to support people and develop strong communities through research, partnerships with government, volunteers, labour, and business, and by funding a network of 200 health and social agencies.

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Jul. 1, 2005.

9 communities picked for aid

United Way commits \$9.5M to youth, immigrant services

Three levels of government to form task force, invest cash

CATHERINE PORTER
CITY HALL BUREAU

The United Way is targeting nine challenged neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs for massive social investment.

Each are examples of how low-income families are increasingly moving out of the downtown to areas where rent is more affordable but where important social services, such as youth drop-ins and employment centres, are notably absent, United Way of Greater Toronto president and CEO Frances Lankin said yesterday.

"Investments in the foundation programs and services that are the bedrock of strong neighbourhoods have not kept pace with population growth and demographic shifts," Lankin said, adding that her organization will dedicate \$9.5 million to youth and immigration services in the neighbourhoods over the next three years.

Responding to the call to action, the three levels of government are forming a task force to co-ordinate funding in the nine areas and looking to invest at least \$3 million in each, Mayor David Miller said.

"We have to make sure the people in every neighbourhood are receiving the full benefits of living in Canada's largest urban centre.

"That means access to libraries, to community centres, to parks and public spaces and everything," he said, adding the city plans to form a secretariat to orchestrate investment in each area.

The neighbourhoods are: Crescent Town and Victoria Village in East York; Black Creek and Westminister-Branson in North York; and Steeles, Eglinton East, Kennedy Park, Dorset Park and Scarborough Village in Scarborough.

"These are the nine communities where investment is most needed. Start here, then go elsewhere," Lankin said.

The nine were highlighted after a year of research by the Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force, formed last year by the city and United Way to investigate the strengths and weaknesses of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods.

Researching neighbourhood "vitality," it looked at not just income levels in each but at such things as unemployment, education, proficiency in English, housing quality and teenage pregnancy. The task force —

Crescent Town offers promise amid the struggle

Today is moving day for Sohayna Kabir and her husband Mohammad. The Bangladeshi couple and their two girls will turn in an apartment key in Crescent Town and take a step up in the world, to a house they bought with money from his hard-won job at KPMG Consulting.

But Kabir won't be abandoning the east-end neighbourhood on Canada Day. She'll be back at her desk next week with the local community association, where she plans to keep working with thousands of South Asian immigrants in the area still struggling to find their way in this country.

"I'm connected here," Kabir said yesterday outside her building north of Victoria Park and Danforth Aves., as Crescent Town was designated one of nine city neighbourhoods most in need of social-service investment by the United Way.

It's not hard to see why.

Thousands of South Asians have moved to Crescent Town in recent years, drawn by low-cost rental housing, the convenience of a nearby subway station and the comfort of living among familiar faces.

Sixty-one per cent of the area's 16,200 residents are new Canadians, many of them from Bangladesh, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. But while immigrants have transformed this corner of East York over the past decade, they've had little luck attracting the services that would ease their transition here, and less still finding good work.

"The job market is in the dumps," said Nazmul Choudhuri, executive director of the Bangladeshi Canadian Community Service

comprising corporate, labour, community and government leaders — then investigated corresponding social services, like community centres and food banks.

'These are the nine communities where investment is most needed.'

Frances Lankin, United Way

'We endorse this report and look forward to working with ... government.'

Liberal MPP David Zimmer

The nine neighbourhoods ranked high on each list — facing increasing challenges, while not having the services to address them.

The research also revealed that while residents living downtown can walk to any service they need, they face a long bus ride — perhaps even two or three — for the same services if they live in the inner suburbs.

The city's east end proved the most underserved. Of the 38 neighbourhoods found lacking in general basic services, 23 are in Scarborough or along its border.

"Toronto suburban neighbourhoods have changed and those neighbourhoods require a new approach to neighbourhood investment," Lankin said.

It's important to address the growing gaps, neighbourhood by neighbourhood, to stave off the kind of "urban decline" found in many cities across the border in the United States, she said.

To fully address the problem, the United Way released its road map to action, which includes:

- A five-year commitment by the municipal, provincial and federal governments to set down a broad strategy in each of the nine targeted communities and set up a fund to bankroll investments in the area.
- Another 15-member "investment board" of community members, voluntary agencies, businesses and union members to guide the plan's implementation in each neighbourhood.
- Local investment plans for each neighbourhood to be developed with broad consultation from the community.

The United Way will begin in Scarborough Village, located near Eglinton Ave. E. and Markham Rd., spending \$1 million to work with the community and develop a local action plan, Lankin said. "The strategies need to be locally led and community driven," she said. "Top-down, cookie-cutter just doesn't work."

Miller said his office is already negotiating with its federal and provincial counterparts, and that a formal commitment to

Association. The former lawyer gets two or three calls a day from Bangladeshis looking for help with renewing work visas or understanding medical prescriptions.

Choudhuri serves as an interpreter for new arrivals who haven't found a place in one of three English-as-a-second-language classes run each week in the local community centre. It's attached to the six-building complex, where roughly 12,000 of the neighbourhood's residents live.

The complex is connected by a pedestrian overpass to Victoria Park subway station, only a 20-minute ride from the city core. It has a school and built-in commercial space where people can shop, visit a doctor and wire money home to relatives. And its mix of rental and condo units — where Choudhuri bought a two-bedroom apartment in 2000 — hold out the promise of upward social mobility.

But the 30-year-old concrete structure is on the verge of collapse. Common areas are crumbling and susceptible to floods. Elevators in the 29-storey towers are often out of service. Worst of all, the privately run Crescent Town Club — which hosts the weekly English classes — can't keep up with the community's needs and gets meagre public funding.

"You've got a town here," said Thomas Kilburn, the club's manager. "Go to Port Hope and they have a police force, a fire department and social services. You have as many people here with none of the service."

The club does what it can. There's a daycare centre, and a summer day camp costs \$60 per week. The club also has a job-posting service aimed at 15- to 29-year-olds. Kabir said none of that's enough.

Still, she was hopeful that yesterday's announcement could help Crescent Town, especially if the United Way is serious about engaging area residents.

"Come with ideas and we can work together," she said.

follow the road map should come soon.

"We endorse this report and look forward to working with all levels of government to see real action taken," agreed David Zimmer, Liberal MPP for Willowdale and the chair of the provincial Toronto caucus.

Report finds shortchanged neighbourhoods

Nine areas with many new immigrants and the very poor lack social services

BY JEFF GRAY

FRIDAY, JULY 1, 2005 PAGE A9 The Globe and Mail

Toronto's inner suburbs are increasingly home to recent immigrants and the very poor, but lack the social services these groups need to get a leg up, a new report says.

The city's Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force -- a joint effort by the city, the provincial and federal governments, the United Way and community groups -- names nine neighbourhoods in Scarborough, East York and North York as places that need injections of government money soon to keep them from deteriorating.

They are:

Victoria Village: East of Victoria Park Avenue and Eglinton Avenue East;

Eglinton East: Along Eglinton Avenue East, from Midland Avenue to Bellamy Road North, north to West Highland Creek and south to the CN rail tracks;

Crescent Town: Northwest of Victoria Park Avenue and Danforth Avenue;

Dorset Park: Birchmount Road to Midland Avenue, south of Highway 401

Scarborough Village: Centred on Markham and Kingston Roads;

Steeles: Between Victoria Park Avenue and Kennedy Road, from Steeles Avenue East in the north to McNicoll Avenue in the south;

Westminster-Branson: From Bathurst Street west to the Don River West Branch rail tracks, south of Steeles Avenue West;

Black Creek: North from Jane Street and Finch Avenue West to Steeles Avenue West;

Kennedy Park: From Birchmount Road to Brimley Road, north to Eglinton Avenue East, south to St. Clair Avenue East.

"Nobody in Toronto should be disadvantaged by where they live," said Frances Lankin, head of the United Way of Greater Toronto and a former Ontario cabinet minister under Bob Rae's NDP government.

Mayor David Miller said the report is not meant to stigmatize the neighbourhoods labelled as needing help: "This doesn't say that a particular neighbourhood is a problem. What it says is that services don't meet the needs."

All three levels of government say they supported the report's goals and have agreed to concentrate efforts on the inner suburbs, setting up an "intergovernmental table" that will co-ordinate the work. But there was little in the way of cash commitments yesterday.

Mr. Miller said each of the neighbourhoods, as a start, needs at least \$3-million.

The United Way yesterday announced \$9.5-million in funding over three years for community agencies in Toronto's inner suburbs, mostly in the targeted neighbourhoods.

The bulk of the money, the charity says, will pay for programs to help new immigrants and young people.

The targeted neighbourhoods are by no means uniformly poor. For instance, Scarborough Village includes massive, million-dollar homes along the lakefront. But just minutes north, there are large public housing complexes.

Community workers complain that historically, money for services to help immigrants learn English or to keep young people off the streets has gone to established downtown agencies, even as the city's demographics shifted.

The city's inner suburbs, built in decades past for middle-income families with cars, are now home to growing populations of new immigrants and poor people, many of whom are forced to take infrequent buses to get to the scant number of clinics or community centres on offer.

For example, despite Scarborough's population of immigrants, only two clinics in the whole sprawling former city offer services to recent arrivals still ineligible for provincial health insurance.

Scarborough Village will also be part of a federally funded program to organize and consult with local community groups, in an effort to determine what the area needs.

All of the other communities are to be consulted on how any new money that is to flow to them is to be spent, the mayor said.

John Elliott, a senior staffer with West Hill Community Services, which operates Scarborough's only community health centre in Scarborough Village, welcomed the report and said the area desperately needs more funding.

But he pointed out that the target neighbourhoods in Scarborough do not include the so-called Triangle, bounded by Lawrence Avenue East, Kingston Road and Galloway Road, well-known for its high concentration of public housing.

And, even as governments are talking about investing in Scarborough, bureaucratic changes at the federal Human Resources and Skills Development Canada ministry have meant the cancellation of funding for the nearby East Scarborough Storefront, a successful drop-in community centre launched in 2001.

"It is bizarre. Now we are finally talking about funding for Scarborough, and here's something we are going to lose," Mr. Elliott said.

Sean Meagher, a community organizer with the Scarborough Civic Action Network, a volunteer group taking part in the federal program in Scarborough Village, said Scarborough immigrants are starved for "settlement services," which help people whose English may be shaky to do things such as register their children for school.

Jun. 30, 2005

'It keeps me out of trouble'

Lacking services, residents create own programs Teen compensates for hall damage

with dance lessons

CATHERINE PORTER
CITY HALL BUREAU

Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods, but not all of them are created equal. Today, the United Way releases a study of poverty and social services in Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. This week, the Star takes a closer look at some of the most interesting cases.

Boredom drove Jordan Davis to distraction one night last year. The kind of quiet, still boredom that lands like a down blanket in June on the body of a restless 17-year-old.

There was nothing to do around his Scarborough building, which rises from an asphalt desert off Eglinton Ave. E., with no trees, few parks, no recreation centre nearby, no youth drop-ins.

So he took his energy into the halls and smashed the long fluorescent lights lining the ceiling.

What he didn't smash was the video camera taping it all.

Instead of calling the cops, the building's administrator, Raymond Tait, let Davis pay back in another way — by treating the source of the problem, and giving him and his friends something to do twice a week.

You can find them on Friday evenings, in a small, concrete room in the building's basement. Just listen for the beat.

"Watch my feet," says Davis, going through four steps slowly, for the seven young men behind him. Their bodies glisten through damp T-shirts. Gusts of hot air blow through the room's two small windows. It's 33 degrees outside.

Davis's breakdancing troupe is called School of Mayhem. Most of them started dancing as kids, slowing down Michael Jackson videos to memorize the moves and then pushing aside furniture in their living rooms to practise them. But this is the first time they've had space to practise together.

Their landlord, Toronto Community Housing Corp., painted the room, lined one wall with mirrors, provided lights and a stereo. Davis designed and posted flyers, advertising free lessons. The first day, 25 people showed up, some as young as 7-year-old Isaiah Irish, who is part of Davis's younger troupe, the Young Assassins. "It keeps me out of trouble. It keeps me off the streets," says 18-year-old Nathan Elliot, wiping the sweat from his forehead with a paper towel. "We needed more things to do around here."

It's just the solution to a local problem that Frances Lankin is looking for. She's the co-chair of the city's Strong Neighbourhood task force, which is releasing its report today on the growing number of poor neighbourhoods in Toronto's inner suburbs and the lack of social services in each of them.

Davis's neighbourhood, Eglinton East, ranks high in both categories. Straddling Eglinton Ave. from Midland Ave. to



RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

Jordan Davis, front, gives free breakdancing lessons in the basement of his Scarborough apartment. Toronto Community Housing set up the room with mirrors and a stereo to give local young people something to do.

Bellamy Rd., just under one-quarter of its residents are poor, spending more than 30 per cent of their money each month on housing. The area's unemployment rate — 8.2 per cent — is one of the highest in the city, yet there isn't an employment centre within its boundaries.

And for more than half of the area's 2,840 youth, there aren't any services nearby. The nearest recreation centre is the Mid-Scarborough Community Centre, a healthy 30-minute walk from Davis's building.

"It was designed as a suburban community, for people to drive their kids to programs," says Ron Rock, executive director of the Scarborough Boys and Girls Club. "In Scarborough, we have more and more pockets of communities with no service. People have to travel great distances to get services, and many don't have the resources to do it."

To address the growing "pockets" like Eglinton East, Lankin is calling for targeted government spending. But the community itself is also part of the solution, she says. "People find a way to make good things happen, if they are enabled and supported," says Lankin, who is also president of the United Way of Greater Toronto.

Davis's program is a case in point. It's been so successful, in fact, that Tait has made a habit of renovating old basement rooms into community spaces.

"It's looking at your resources and putting them to good use, and taking a chance on people," says Tait, the area manager for Toronto Community Housing.

"They seem to take more ownership of the property."

Another resident opened a monthly food bank from another basement room in April, serving 67 local families that month.

And next month, two other former storage rooms will open as classrooms for aspiring fashion designers and computer connoisseurs. The \$50,000 renovations were raised by the tenant council of the building, and of nine others around Scarborough. The free courses will be provided by the Heritage Skills Development Centre, a non-profit agency.

Combined, the new courses will train 300 people each year, helping them start up their own sewing businesses or upgrading their computer skills.

Tomorrow: The Strong Neighbourhood report in depth



Jul. 4, 2005.

High time to repair neglected districts

[ROYSON JAMES](#)

Citizens in nine Toronto neighbourhoods — call them the Neglected Nine — now have data showing they have a crippling combination of crushing social needs and huge service gaps.

Not surprisingly, the neighbourhoods are a good ways from downtown — mostly in Scarborough and North York — a pattern first detected some 26 years ago in *Suburbs in Transition*, a Metro Social Planning Council report.

This time, it's the United Way that has teamed up with the city, province, federal government, business and the city summit alliance to sound the warning. Same message.

The new report, *Strong Neighbourhoods*, promises immediate redress. People are listening. All the forces are aligned. Will they act this time?

In the quarter century since the *Suburbs in Transition* report shook up the city, we've built community centres, hired social development officers, and expanded the downtown model of integrated community services into the suburbs. Partially. Haphazardly. Here and there. With mixed results.

Toronto's suburbs are still the city's worst-served areas, 26 years later. Despite the best of intentions, millions tossed at the subject, and a multitude of effort and study the problem persists for many reasons.

Among them are changing demographics, poor planning, and above all, poor political representation.

The Needy Nine, identified by the city's own neighbourhoods designation, are: **Black Creek** (Jane-Finch and north), **Crescent Town**, (around the Victoria Park subway station), **Eglinton East** (Midland to Bellamy), **Scarborough Village** (Eglinton to the lake, east of Bellamy), **Victoria Village** (Don River to Victoria Park, Lawrence to Sunrise), **Dorset Park** (401 to Lawrence, Birchmount to Midland), **Steeles** (Victoria Park to Kennedy, McNicoll to Steeles), **Westminster-Branson** (Steeles to Finch, around Bathurst and west) and **Kennedy Park** (Birchmount to Brimley, Eglinton south to CNR tracks).

When the authors of the reports combined the traditional needs of a neighbourhood (recreation, food, housing, jobs, schools, income levels, settlement of new immigrants, language acquisition, etc.) with how well the needs are being met (proximity to service, availability, capacity), they concluded the nine neighbourhoods were the most "distressed" and needed immediate investment.

"For some, it's the legacy of not having investment for a long time," admitted Mayor David Miller as the latest report was released. He promised to fix that, with immediate targeted assistance of about \$3 million start-up funding for each of the nine neighbourhoods.

It's fair to say that a combination of strident, effective advocacy from residents and downtown city councillors, most often of the left-wing persuasion, has insulated poor downtown areas against social isolation, exclusion, despair and rot.

The report shows that many poor areas are strong, precisely because they have the social supports. Conversely, some wealthier suburban neighbourhoods are languishing.

Moss Park, for example, has Toronto's lowest median household income of \$15,357. It has the second highest rate of unemployment and the second highest teen birth rate of Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. But it was not found to be wanting for too many services. And when the list of neighbourhoods with a service deficit is compiled, Moss Park is missing.

Steeles, though, with a median household income of \$60,716, compared to the city average of \$49,345, and where only one in five residents rents, is desperately in need of services.

Why? They were never developed. What, no one expected the immigrants to move in? No one bothered to provide the settlement services. No one raised enough of a stink at city hall to get the recreation centres built, no one mastered the art the way the downtown councillors did. And why? Because there was no political price to pay. Now, there is a social one.

Seven in 10 people in the Steeles neighbourhood are recent immigrants, eight in 10 are visible minorities, and there is a slightly higher unemployment rate and more people than average with less than a high school education.

Obviously, there are huge needs for settlement services, job counselling, language training and public transit. It is also one of only eight neighbourhoods with poor access to recreation and community centres, as between 21 per cent and 40 per cent of residents are living within a one-kilometre walk to a community centre.

"Suburban municipalities failed to recognize the range of needs of the new residents, including recent immigrants, singles, poor, troubled youth, people with low income and the elderly," the 1979 report read in a comprehensive indictment.

The governments spent more time building roads and sewers and watermains, and too little time on social infrastructure, leaving that to the inner city of the old Toronto.

That did change. Shortly after the report, the Metro government hired Shirley Hoy, now the city's top bureaucrat, to help develop community and social programs for the suburbs.

Communities like Rexdale and Thistletown in Etobicoke, and Malvern and Driftwood got community centres. Metro helped launch some community organizations to help provide employment and settlement counselling, sports and recreation. Ultimately, it's been too little, too late.

With all that experience, one would have thought most of the nine communities on the list would have received Moss Park-like service levels.

Who can claim not to know that Black Creek (essentially, Jane-Finch) is a high-needs area that should be cushioned with services? Yet, there it is on the list of neighbourhoods in need. Black Creek, Eglinton East, Crescent Town, Scarborough Village and Victoria Village wave red flags for virtually every indicator of social need. They're known "hot spots."

City councillors, political representatives of all stripes, should be ashamed of themselves. They have no excuses here, in neighbourhoods of classic poverty and distress.

Hoy says she agrees with city councillors who want city funds directed to the suburbs, where there are huge gaps in services. New spending should go to those priority areas, she says.

"There've been some improvements; it's just taken a long time. At times, it's a bit discouraging."

A flurry of activity from federal and provincial governments followed the 1979 report. Says Hoy: "Slowly and incrementally the city started closing the gaps. But the mid-1990s brought a recession and the Mike Harris government, which tore away many of the safety nets constructed, and poor families in the suburbs lost even more ground.

"Both bureaucrats and politicians have been very short-sighted in the way we've invested," she says. "We only deal with immediate issues.

"If we'd done what the report said 25 years ago and put in the transit and community centres we'd be much better off. But for governments, to plan that way is almost a luxury."

Luxury? Try scandalous.

Royson James usually appears Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Email: rjames@thestar.ca

Jun. 28, 2005. 06:27 AM

Scarborough area lacks basic services

CATHERINE PORTER
CITY HALL BUREAU

Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods, but not all of them are created equal. On Thursday, the United Way will release a study of poverty and social services in Toronto's 140 neighbourhoods. This week, the Star takes a closer look at some of the most interesting cases.



HARRISON SMITH/TORONTO STAR
Councillor Mike Del Grande, near the Good Shepherd Community Church at Warden and Steeles Aves., says the Steeles neighbourhood has been "forgotten."

From the outside, this pocket of north Scarborough is the picture-perfect suburban neighbourhood.

Neat red brick homes with double garages and manicured lawns sit side-by-side on winding streets named Silver Springs and Ivy Bush .

Bounded by Steeles Ave. E., Victoria Park Ave., McNicoll Ave. and Kennedy Rd. it's an idyllic escape from the big city's problems.

Except if you are a new immigrant, a youth, unemployed or poor — which increasingly, people in this community are.

Then, you are in the worst spot in the entire city, according to a Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force report to be released this week.

"This is a forgotten community," says Councillor Mike Del Grande, driving around the neighbourhood on one of his regular patrols for potholes and derelict properties. "For everything from street cleaning to litter pick up, we've been forgotten."

But it's more than that. According to a United Way report, which examines poverty in the city's 140 neighbourhoods, the Steeles neighbourhood is a black hole for basic community services.

Services like employment centres and youth drop-ins, which can be found across downtown Toronto, are nowhere in sight.

There are no regular food banks, no community garden and only one recreation centre , which for most residents is a car ride away.

"When I moved here 12 years ago, there were no services," says Danny Mui, executive director of CICS, a settlement centre for new immigrants located south of the area on Finch Ave. E. "Now there are no services or facilities."

But the need has grown. Since Mui settled in the Steeles area, his neighbours have changed. Once mostly white and Hong Kong immigrants, the area is increasingly home to immigrants from mainland China, Armenians, Sri Lankans and Somalis, Del Grande says. And most don't have the money to buy \$300,000 homes.

"There are three or four families living in a house," says Del Grande (Ward 39, Scarborough-Agincourt).

"On the outside, it all looks good. What happens on the inside is a whole different story."

Earlier this month, he stopped by a home to ask about its unkempt lawn, and found a tenant living in a closet-sized single room apartment at the back of the house, Del Grande says. He was an Iranian immigrant, who had just moved to Toronto, and was paying \$430 a month for the room.

"He doesn't know his rights," says Del Grande. "He said, 'I don't know where to go, what to do.'"

To service the area's 3,425 new immigrants — roughly one of every six people — there are only two English-as-a-second-language classes, both held in the basement of a local church.

'In Scarborough, you'd have to take three buses (to a hot meal)'

Heather Urbansky, West Hill Community Services

For Cathy Yu, that's meant only two half-day classes a week — not enough to boost her confidence when speaking English on the phone.

"I don't know how to find more ESL classes," says Yu, who came to Canada with her husband and daughter from China two years ago.

"I want to do exercise but I don't know where. I want to have some activity, I don't know where to find this place."

The truth is, there is no place.

"There is no social infrastructure," Mui says. "Even if we want to deliver services, we have no space to do it from."

The Strong Neighbourhood Task Force formed last year, in response to a United Way report that showed poverty was moving to Toronto's former suburbs. Called "Poverty by Postal Code," the report revealed that the number of neighbourhoods where more than one-quarter of families live in poverty has doubled each decade since 1981, comprising 23 per cent of the city's neighbourhoods by 2001.

Over the past year, the 23-member task force tried to flesh out that picture, examining the city's 140 neighbourhoods with a broader lens of "poverty," including not just income levels but unemployment rates, teenage pregnancy rates, education levels, competency in English, and housing conditions, among other things.

Funded by the provincial and federal governments, the task force also examined what services were available in each neighbourhood to alleviate poverty — things like community centres, food banks and settlement services.

It found that the city's former suburbs are increasingly home to poorer and poorer neighbourhoods. And, once intended as middle-class communities, they don't have the resources to deal with the increasing problems.

"There's been a huge influx of people into communities without a change in the way services or infrastructure are provided," said Frances Lankin, president of the United Way of Greater Toronto, and the task force's co-chair.

So, while you can walk to a boys' and girls' club, a seniors' residence, or an employment centre if you are dropped anywhere in downtown Toronto, it will mean bus rides — expensive for people barely scraping by — in Scarborough.

"If you're downtown and you're homeless, I could guarantee we could get you a hot meal every day somewhere within walking distances. In Scarborough, you'd have to take three buses to one. There is nothing within walking distance," says Heather Urbansky, the manager of social support with West Hill Community Services, one of the few service providers in Scarborough. The food bank it runs serves 170 families a week.

The city's east end proved the most underserved, the report found. Of the city's 38 neighbourhoods found lacking in general basic services, 23 are in Scarborough or along its border.

Downtown Toronto has 17 community health centres; Scarborough has one.

And of them all, the neighbourhood of Steeles has received the shortest stick.

Del Grande hopes the task force's report will change that.

"We're not getting our fair share," he says.

Tomorrow: Moss Park