

# **Philanthropy and the “New Canada”: The Response of the United Way of Greater Toronto\***

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In this article I want to examine the new world of Canadian philanthropy through the manner in which the United Way of Greater Toronto has responded to it. I will look at it from four points of view: the organizational response; the outreach to the Chinese community (the one I know best); the approaches to other communities; and the ways in which organizations have to analyze themselves and their programs to adapt to the new realities.

I do not need to dwell on the new world in which Canadian philanthropy must now operate. Immigration to Canada over the past couple of decades has literally changed the face of the country. Both the absolute numbers of immigrants and the number from non-traditional sources, notably non-white countries, have made much of Canada very different from what it was. The greater Toronto area shows this as much as anywhere: one of three residents identifies a mother tongue other than English or French, and nearly two-thirds of its residents boast national origins other than British.

But what I call the “new Canada” is not just a product of these new Canadians. In addition, those who have been here longer without finding their way into the social mainstream are not content to remain on the outside and are insisting on being recognized. This category includes such groups as Chinese Canadians, many of whom have been here for four or five generations, Blacks, some of whom trace their Canadian roots back still further, and the people of the first nations, who were, so to speak, standing on the shore when the “mainstream” got here.

In these circumstances the traditional ways of charity have been exposed to a good deal of criticism.

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\*This article was developed from a speech by Dr. Wong.

## **Changing the Organization**

Responding to multicultural realities was not the only challenge facing the United Way in Toronto at the beginning of the last decade. It is fair to say that the United Way in the early 1980s was half asleep. It had difficulty raising enough money just to keep up with inflation, reserves were almost gone, and no client groups had been added since 1978. Fortunately, the Board of Trustees recognized the challenge and responded to it. Leadership came from the Chairman, David Lewis, and volunteers like Janet McInnis, David McCamus and Randy Billings. New staff, led by Gordon Cressy and Anne Golden, were hired, new board members were recruited, and volunteers and staff alike threw themselves into strategic planning programs.

Out of this came four “strategic directions”: broadening the base, becoming more responsive to changing needs, increasing financial flexibility, and positioning the organization as a “winner”. While all had implications for the United Way’s response to multiculturalism, the first, broadening the base, was the key. The broadening had to encompass volunteers, fund raisers, donors, staff and beneficiaries of the United Way.

The allocation procedure for our grants was amended so that it depended more heavily on review by community volunteers, who examine the applications of each prospective recipient of funds. Funding criteria were also changed to include the applicant’s responsiveness to changing demographics. We gave priority to finding and funding agencies serving particular ethnocultural groups. Finally, we put special effort into recruiting minorities, those previously unrepresented, to our funding panels and to our staff.

As a result, we now fund about 20 new agencies whose primary target population and whose leaders represent a minority cultural or racial group. We have as well a development fund—three percent of all money raised—dedicated to new agencies or new projects.

## **A Case in Point: The Chinese Community**

As one of the early steps in its new mandate, the Board approached me in 1982 to help expand the United Way’s base among Canadians of Chinese origin. Two barriers to real change made me sceptical: deep-rooted attitudes about the “right” way to do things, and fear of change. However, I was impressed by the evidence of the United Way’s commitment, especially the new processes for allocation of grants and citizen review of it.

Persuading me did not persuade the people in my community. For too long a time they had not been accepted into the broader society. They had met prejudice, discrimination, and outright racism ever since Chinese workers had arrived to build the railways in the 1880s. The head tax from 1887 to 1923 and the total exclusion of immigration from that time until 1947 showed the official acceptance of discrimination. We did not even have the right to vote until 1948!

Understandably, many Chinese Canadians were even more sceptical than I when approached by the United Way. Chinese social workers in particular were fed up with the existing formulas for allocating grants. The community could tell the difference between genuine efforts for change and mere lip service. In this case both sides had a real desire for change and the ability to benefit from it. The problem was how to remove the scepticism and realize the benefits.

I organized a meeting between the United Way, Chinese social workers, and leaders of different Chinese organizations to exchange information. The United Way explained its new mission and learned about the unfulfilled or inadequately served needs of the community. We met in a Chinese restaurant, with an interpreter for people who did not understand English. To show its seriousness, the United Way sent the chairman of the Board, the president and the General Campaign chairman. This helped to establish good will, and ensured that difficulties were appreciated at the highest level.

At that time, over 95 per cent of the people in the Chinese community did not know about the United Way or its work. I attacked at the grass roots, spreading the message through flyers in community centres, through Chinese media and through special events to attract attention. One such event, which later became enormously successful, was the Walk-a-thon. In 1983 it began with some 500 walkers from the Chinese community and raised a total of \$18,000 for the United Way. It became a multicultural community project in 1984, with over 2000 walkers, and it raised \$55,000. It became a Metro-wide event the next year and assumed its present place as the kickoff event for the annual campaign. Over 5000 people took part, raising \$85,000. In 1989 the Walk-a-thon had some 10,000 walkers and raised about \$300,000, close to 20 times as much as was raised in the first year.

The Walk-a-thon is not only a special event for the United Way, it is very important to the Chinese community and to the broader society. Photos and news about the event usually occupy the front page of the *Toronto Star*, the largest English daily in Canada. Publicity about the

Walk-a-thon often runs non-stop for six weeks in the Chinese media, both print and broadcast. Though hardly anyone in the Chinese community had heard of it in 1982, the United Way has now become a household word.

The Chinese community no doubt benefits a lot from its close association with the United Way. Its community and social services are being funded. In addition, the affiliation helps to develop voluntarism in the community and to train leaders. It injects pride in the community and broadens our vision. This is a side benefit not originally anticipated. Many elderly Chinese people participated in the annual Walk-a-thon. Many of them have told me that they felt proud to be able to help out the broader community and to be recognized as doing so. Through participation they have developed a sense of belonging, a feeling of integration into and of closeness to the broader community. It is this sense of belonging that has helped the United Way to collect almost 100 per cent of our pledges. In two years we even collected more than was pledged!

### **Reaching Out to Other Communities**

The United Way has reached out to other ethnocultural communities as well. The Ethnocultural Development Committee established in 1984 gave rise to specific committees from the Black, Chinese, Greek, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish speaking and South Asian communities. Committees not only raise funds, they raise the consciousness of their communities about the United Way itself. They have helped diversify the volunteer structure, and the Board of Trustees and general committees show an increasing number of members from these backgrounds. Our ethnocultural committees are not accountable to the Board but rather are encouraged to advocate changes in the United Way itself. We think of them as committees "to" rather than "of" the United Way. As well, we created in 1987 a Community Division in our Campaign Cabinet, the strategic centre of our fund-raising efforts.

The United Way now turns its attention to small businesses as a growth area for fund-raising and the ethnocultural communities are natural targets. In Metro Toronto, over 90 per cent of corner stores are owned by Koreans. Many firms in the Chinese community employ 20 to 100 people. Small business and new employee campaigns are now under way. A less apparent benefit of these initiatives is the potential increase in deductions from the pay of employees of traditional corporations, thanks to the better promotion of the United Way among the communities from which many of them come.

We have used special events as a means of organizing communities. For example, the Lata Mangeshkar concert in Maple Leaf Gardens in 1985 attracted 12,000 people, largely of South Asian origin, and raised over \$100,000. The Arts Against Apartheid rally helped establish our credibility in the Black community, for which this issue, while not a local one, was the most important social cause of the day. Other events have included a brunch for Black leaders, a Chinese gala, a Japanese reception, a Portuguese dinner, and a luncheon for Chinese realtors. More recently, the massive success of the cricket matches at the SkyDome has helped persuade tens of thousands that the United Way can speak to and for them.

While we approach various communities to raise money for us, money is the secondary objective. Broadening the base also enables us to identify and serve new and changing needs. It also gives us a new source of volunteers for all levels of the organization. Fund raising success is a practical test of our aim, which is to both benefit and depend on the support of everyone in our area, without economic or ethnic restrictions.

To accomplish this, both staff and volunteers have to be able to accept risks. Many of our events have not had a guarantee of success. Large-scale cricket had never been tried in Toronto, for example. It was a high profile and high cost event, which careful planning helped to succeed. Even making the apparently humble Walk-a-thon the lead-off event for the campaign involved a change in thinking. Changing the traditional weekday opening to Sunday attracted many key volunteers and their families and helped increase further the publicity value of the occasion. The continuing growth of the event has already been mentioned.

Risks also arise because of the different cultural and social traditions of the participating groups. Views on personal or political questions such as the position of women, abortion, and the like, can create barriers to understanding even if there is good will on all sides.

Taking these risks, I should mention, has succeeded for the United Way in the Toronto area. The growth in fund raising has been phenomenal. Receipts have more than doubled in less than a decade and we have more than doubled the inflation rate in our growth almost every year for the past five or six. The enthusiasm of the media has played a large part in this success. The organization itself feels a renewed vitality.

### **Working With the Agencies**

A basic question we had to ask ourselves was whether we should support mainstream agencies in their efforts to respond to the new demands or

instead fund ethno-specific agencies. As a broad-based community organization, we decided to do both. This has worked, but it has not been easy for any of us.

In 1986 the federal Secretary of State's Office for Multiculturalism established the Social Services Multiculturalism Project, which was aimed at promoting change among the agencies themselves. Six agencies were chosen to engage in self-evaluation and planning, the United Way of Greater Toronto among them. The others were the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Huntley Youth Services/Big Sisters Association, Ontario March of Dimes, West Scarborough Community Centre and WoodGreen Community Centre in downtown Toronto. Each agency set up a multicultural committee made up of staff and volunteers from different levels. The agencies met with each other to share results and reinforce each others' enthusiasm.

The Project was divided into three stages: self-assessment, developing strategies for change and implementing changes. Self-assessment included a focus on demographics, representation of target groups in the agency itself at all levels, communications programs, and delivery of services or programs.

Demographics form the basis of the operation. The ethno-racial composition of the service area must be appreciated, not just by head count, but through assessment and understanding of English language abilities, family structures, dominant values, levels of education, principal occupations, existing community organizations. Care must be taken not to stereotype the community as a result, since major cultural differences can exist within any cultural-racial group.

Finding out the ethnoracial composition of staff and volunteers of the agency itself is crucial as well. Recruitment techniques may present barriers to people from certain backgrounds. Staff members may need multicultural training to work effectively with the population they serve.

Communication is the basis of trust. Effective communication may require translation of materials and staff training or recruitment. All communications materials need to be checked to ensure they are not biased or insensitive to the perceptions of those they are intended to reach.

Discrepancies between the composition of the target service population and the people actually served must be appreciated and analyzed properly before appropriate changes can be suggested.

After the results of this self-assessment are communicated to those involved in the agency, strategies must be developed to take the next steps. All of this requires time and sensitivity on the part of the participants. Agencies may need help to come to terms with the new roles and to know how to carry out the steps they acknowledge to be needed. Fortunately, funding for the original Project has been extended, and the original six agencies are acting as leaders for other clusters of organizations undergoing similar exercises. The United Way benefitted greatly from being one of the pioneers.

From our participation in the Project we learned that strong volunteer commitment is essential to keep up the effort. Even the need for all the work may have to be repeatedly emphasized. Staff also must be sensitively handled. Affirmative action plans can cause resentment if morale is not generally good or if communication is not sensitive.

As mentioned earlier, organizations must be prepared to take risks, financial and social, to reach out to groups that may be suspicious or otherwise hard to involve. On the other hand, we must have realistic expectations about what we can accomplish in a given time. Leaders recruited cannot necessarily speak for their entire communities. Their influence and their fund raising may not always meet expectations. In this of course they are no different from leaders drawn from the mainstream.

Finally, enormous energy is required to maintain the effort, which is necessarily long-term, since we are talking about catching up with, and keeping up with, a fast changing society.

### **Why Do It?**

Despite the demands on time and energy, despite the risks, efforts by mainstream agencies to reach other communities must be made, if for no other reason than that such efforts are the key to the agencies' survival. Charities such as the United Way must represent the present reality in our society if they are to have a future in it.

Moreover, enhancement of voluntarism in the community and the recruitment and advancement of leaders from all groups contributes to an integrated and more harmonious society and thus a better functioning democracy. Participation in social activities bring members of minority communities into the broader society and gives them a sense of belonging, pride, personal empowerment, and citizenship. In short, the community is a better place for all its members to live because of it.

minority communities into the broader society and gives them a sense of belonging, pride, personal empowerment, and citizenship. In short, the community is a better place for all its members to live because of it.

Finally, fairness and social justice require us all to strive to include everyone in the benefits of our society. The United Way is big and visible and has become to some extent a standard bearer of these values. I think we have made a successful start.