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Pushing The Limits

Labour Force Study Shows Nonprofit Human Services in Distress

Burlington, March 1, 2007: Community Development Halton (CDH) has released ***Pushing the Limits: Challenges of Halton's Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Labour Force.***

CDH Executive Director Joey Edwardh comments:

"As a community, we ask much of the nonprofit and voluntary sector and have high expectations: that it provide us with much-needed social supports, act as an engine for citizen engagement, represent and articulate the interests of citizens, and continue to make an important contribution to the economic prosperity of Halton."

She warns us, *"Pushing the Limits finds that the pulse of the sector is erratic and weakening and that our nonprofit human services are in distress, threatened and unstable."*

In 2006, Community Development Halton researched the economic contribution and human resource base of Halton's nonprofit human services sector. Conducted in conjunction with the Regional Chairman's Roundtable on the Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector, the study examined nonprofit organizations in areas such as children, youth, family and women's services; support for seniors and people living with disabilities; shelter and housing; immigrant settlement and refugee assistance; and aid to people on low incomes.

Pushing the Limits highlights a dedicated, skilled and vital component of our local communities, which also adds \$188 million annually to the regional economy plus volunteer

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time valued at an additional \$52 million, employing about 5,000 people and engaging over 20,000 volunteers.

However, Peter Clutterbuck, Principal Investigator for the study, says:

“The sector’s human capital is the basis for this economic contribution; the stability and quality of its human resource base are critical to the sector’s capacity to continue performing both its social and economic roles effectively. Alarming, the study shows that the sector is pushed to the limits of its human resource capacity, and precariously balanced between sustainability and disaster.”

Pushing the Limits identifies five challenges to the strength and vitality of the sector’s paid and volunteer labour force, including: gender equity; competing in a tighter labour market; planning for the workforce of the future; supporting volunteers; and assuring a diverse base of organizations to provide a wide mix of essential social supports.

The report also suggests innovative and cooperative strategies within the sector to address these challenges, including: improved salaries and benefits and family and education leave programs; a region-wide human resources development strategy; support for employee training and innovation; proactive strategies to attract young graduates and newcomers, such as student debt relief in exchange for a commitment to work in the sector; and volunteer support.

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Copies of the report and accompanying documents can be found at www.cdhalton.ca

Key Findings: Challenges to the Halton Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector

Gender Equity and Balance

Women constitute 90% of employees and 73% of volunteers in the sector, but are not proportionately represented at executive leadership positions. Low wages and poor benefits in the sector may reflect an undervaluing of the caring functions, performed by a predominantly female labour force, in the nonprofit human services sector.

Capacity to Compete for the Best

According to the most recent available Census data on income (2000), the annual average income for Halton residents was \$46,200. However, the average income of nonprofit human services employees fell far below at \$26,400. Halton human services agencies of all sizes indicate that low salary and benefits levels and a lack of permanent full-time jobs hinder recruitment and retention of a stable workforce.

Engaging the Workforce of the Future

The engagement of young people and more racially and culturally diverse populations within Halton is critical to the vitality of the sector's human resource base. However, in Halton's nonprofit human services labour force, young workers under 25 are represented at less than half the rate (7.1%) than is found in the Halton workforce as a whole (15.8%). This suggests that the sector may need to make a concerted effort to rejuvenate its employee base.

Nurturing Volunteers as a Valuable Asset

Volunteers bring added value to the work of the nonprofit human service sector, but volunteer recruitment and retention are often taken for granted rather than strategically addressed in human resource development planning for the sector.

The Risk of Concentration and Consolidation

The diverse base of nonprofit human services plays an important complementary role to the public sector in providing a wider mix of essential social supports. Yet small and medium sized agencies must compete with each other and with larger agencies for government funding. Large agencies with revenue of \$2 million and more comprised only 13% of the survey sample, but receive half of the total government funding available to the sector. Consequently, smaller agencies are at a distinct competitive disadvantage in the labour market.