



## community stories

October 2005

ISBN #1-55382-150-5

### *ANC Begins in Scarborough Village*

*The Action for Neighbourhood Change project (ANC) may be complex but its purpose is clear. The initiative is about real people helping one another to make their neighbourhoods better places to live. Since the project began in February 2005, it has generated optimism and hope among community members. The partners are excited that the program is having the desired results: Citizens are becoming involved in changing their neighbourhoods and government is hearing the feedback it needs to support them effectively. This series of stories presents each of the five ANC neighbourhoods as they existed at the start of the initiative. A second series will be published at the end of the ANC's 14-month run to document the changes and learnings that have resulted from the effort. For more information about ANC, visit: [www.anccommunity.ca](http://www.anccommunity.ca)*

#### *A brief history*

A portion of Scarborough known as Scarborough Village has been selected as the area for involvement in Toronto's Action for Neighbourhood Change (ANC) project. Spreading north from a series of sand bluffs along the coast of Lake Ontario, Scarborough was established as an agricultural settlement in the 1800s by mostly English and Scottish immigrants. During the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Scarborough evolved into a suburban Toronto community. Wave after wave of housing developments, a Golden Mile of strip malls and a well developed road system defined Scarborough as a bedroom community suited to middle-income families. Low-cost high rise apartments were built from the 1960s onward to house new immigrants, but settlement programs and services were not made available.

In the early 1980s, when (then) Metro Toronto began looking for modestly priced tracts



of land on which to site social housing, the Mayor of Scarborough offered several properties for the construction of high rise apartments.<sup>1</sup> Often situated adjacent to industrial areas, railway lines and high speed roadways, these developments were physically isolated and often overlooked by Scarborough residents and politicians. Many of the apartments were occupied by recent immigrants. Partly because their accommodations added to a sense of marginalization and partly because of language and access barriers, these new community members did not push for social programs or better living conditions. Scarborough also lacked a strong network of community agencies that could pursue program funding, unlike the well-established social service agencies in downtown Toronto. Increased levels of immigration throughout the 1990s added more newcomers to an already underserved area.

In the late 1980s, homeless families were a worrisome addition to Toronto's homeless population and no downtown shelters existed to house them. Scarborough's municipal council again offered inexpensive accommodations to fill this gap. A stretch of deteriorating and unused motels along Scarborough's Kingston Road were made available to shelter these families, though the lack of cooking facilities in each unit made food security an issue. Some Scarborough residents began to complain to Toronto City Hall that these accommodations were unsightly and needed to be cleaned up.

When the amalgamated city of Toronto was created in 1998, the people of Scarborough were faced with a new reality. The previously unacknowledged and under serviced low-income accommodations (including the motel family shelters) now were the direct responsibility of Scarborough in its new role as a member of the amalgamated municipality. In 2001, statistics showed that while the former City of Scarborough

continued to see itself as a bedroom community reliant on the automobile, half of its 593,297 residents were recent immigrants and 60 percent were visible minorities.

The new Toronto City Council operates four community councils to address issues of local concern. One of these council areas closely matched the borders of the former City of Scarborough. Over time, the boundaries of the other three community councils were adjusted according to various requirements; those encompassing Scarborough have remained unchanged.

Despite an apparent acceptance of the status quo among Scarborough's political representatives, citizens and service providers were beginning to push for change. In the spring of 2003, a group of about 40 people began to meet regularly to discuss how to communicate Scarborough's multicultural personality and needs to city councillors. The Scarborough Community Action Network (SCAN) was born.

### *The changing face (and place) of poverty in Toronto*

A portion of Scarborough Village was chosen by United Way of Greater Toronto (UWGT) as its focus for ANC partly because the area embodies the types of changes which have affected Toronto neighbourhoods over the last 20 years. Prior to 1981, families living on low incomes were spread fairly evenly throughout the city. After that time, concentrated areas of higher levels of poverty began to emerge and whole neighbourhoods were identified as under financial stress. The former municipalities of Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke have seen particularly dramatic increases in the number of higher poverty neighbourhoods.

United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development focused attention on this phenomenon of rising poverty levels by neighbourhood in a publication entitled “Poverty by Postal Code” [UWGT and CCSD 2004]. Already a shorthand reference to the problem, the report affirmed UWGT’s directional shift toward supporting community development and neighbourhood revitalization efforts. The ANC project will further this work; in particular, it will support efforts to influence federal and local policy developments which affect neighbourhood vitality.

“Toronto still has areas of concentrated poverty in the downtown core,” says UWGT Research Director Susan MacDonnell, “but the new reality of urban poverty is what is happening in the inner suburbs. Scarborough is a good example of this new reality, where communities originally designed for the automobile and a middle-income population are now home to lower-income populations who don’t have access to a car and who are far more reliant on local shops and services. Yet these communities have few amenities. It is this combination of factors – a growing low-income population and a lack of services and supports – that is creating communities under stress.”

Sean Meagher and a three-member team from Public Interest Strategy have been contracted to conduct the on-the-ground work of ANC – which begins with the identification of as many community players as possible.

### ***The changing mandate of the United Way of Greater Toronto***

The United Way of Greater Toronto’s current approach to community development was influenced by the 1999 report entitled *Taking*

*Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto.*<sup>2</sup> The paper focused on the need to see homelessness as a multi-dimensional problem which must be addressed collaboratively by multiple levels of government, community organizations and citizens. At this time, UWGT and staff at the City of Toronto are working in partnership on the issues of neighbourhood renewal and poverty reduction. Creating stronger relationships among provincial and federal government departments is a priority for both organizations.

Within UWGT, there was a general sense that Toronto’s inner city had received the resources and attention it required to get poverty reduction strategies into place. In 2002, the organization began to test new approaches to strengthen services in Toronto’s suburban neighbourhoods by launching its “Strong Neighbourhoods, Healthy City Strategy.” By 2003, community development work had assumed sufficient importance within UWGT that it needed to be thoroughly integrated into the existing corporate culture. The UWGT’s 2003 strategic plan described new policy and research mechanisms and funding and governance structures which would direct future community development work. UWGT also pledged to assist agencies and other community members in the areas of public policy formulation and capacity building.

Barney Savage, UWGT Senior Policy Advisor with responsibility for community affairs and development, credits another trend with the shift in direction. Says Barney: “Our donor population had become more interested in funding community development work and was asking for more information on our activities and results. We are very pleased to participate in the ANC project to get a better understanding of how the community development approach unfolds at the neighbourhood level – the human and financial resources

required, the possible impacts on federal government policy and the benefits to residents. Ultimately, ANC and the lessons we have learned from our other community development projects will help us to better understand who we need to work with on this type of initiative and the impact we can have as an organization. The project is providing a unique opportunity to test out innovative ideas in a highly diverse neighbourhood, while also helping us to develop policy positions for future discussions with all levels of government.”

The recent shootings in Toronto have focused public attention on the link between areas of concentrated poverty and crime. Citizens’ pleas for improved service and facility delivery have become more urgent, as has the need for a more comprehensive, effective response. Barney continues: “Municipal government amalgamation and funding cutbacks have made the gap between rich and poor neighbourhoods in our city more obvious. Residents and service providers want to right the imbalance, and we are very hopeful that the community building and neighbourhood development work done through ANC will have a significant impact on this situation and on UWGT operations generally.”

### *Neighbourhood selection, Toronto-style*

Faced with the task of selecting one of 140 potential neighbourhoods for the focus of ANC, UWGT staff began to look at parts of the city with high newcomer representation, high levels of poverty, large numbers of visible minorities and those with large children and youth populations. The presence of an anchor organization and community facilities, the receptivity of residents (judged on the basis of a series of questions during telephone interviews) and inclusion on Toronto’s Strong Neighbourhoods Task Force shortlist of

nine neighbourhoods in need of immediate assistance were the next selection criteria applied.<sup>3</sup> Once the number of possible neighbourhoods was narrowed down to five, the selection committee undertook a second review of the criteria and chose Scarborough Village.

Says Susan MacDonnell: “Our reason for choosing this neighbourhood came down to the fact that it best represented the challenges of poverty in the suburbs. Its population is representative of poverty’s new reality – high newcomer numbers, lots of visible minority members, and large children and youth populations.”

Prior to making a final decision about the neighbourhood being considered for selection, the project team met with individuals from agencies and local institutions (e.g., schools, places of worship, community services) and groups of residents to determine their interest in participating in this type of project. It was important not only for the neighbourhood to be a good match to the selection criteria but also that residents express a level of interest and commitment to the initiative. While canvassing levels of interest, valuable information was gathered on what people considered each area’s strengths and challenges.

### *Neighbourhood description*

The portion of Scarborough Village selected as the ANC neighbourhood is bounded by the CN railroad to the north, Bellamy Road to the west, Scarborough Golf Club Road to the east and Kingston Road to the South. At last count there were 13,725 people living in the ANC project area.

A walk along Eglinton Avenue – Scarborough Village’s wide, treeless main street – shows a collection of strip malls set back behind

cracked parking lots, high rise social housing and low-income apartments, a railway bridge, a car dealership and a social housing apartment development that wraps around the corner of Eglinton and Markham streets. The most densely-populated concentration of low-income housing within the neighbourhood is Cougar Court – a cluster of high rise apartments built in the 1960s that have acted as receiver housing for successive groups of immigrants, including Germans, Ukrainians, Poles and, most recently, South Asians.

Village residents who rely on mass transit are often faced with disconnected service. Eglinton is a transit juncture, which makes it difficult to get quickly from one part of Scarborough to another. No subway trains serve this part of Scarborough and, though rush hour bus service is regular, buses are tightly packed. Once rush hour is over, service becomes infrequent, particularly on the routes that branch off from Eglinton Avenue – not a good situation for low-income workers who often must work shifts, nights and weekends.

Scarborough Village has a large mall, but its department and grocery stores are out of the price range of most residents. The local strip malls provide many affordably-priced ethnic food, clothing and entertainment options – all within walking distance for village residents.

Three elementary schools educate Scarborough Village's children. Cedar Drive Public School, which serves children from Cougar Court, has a very large English as a Second Language population and a 50 percent annual student turnover rate. Mason Road Public School, a little further west near Eglinton Avenue, takes in children from Toronto Community Housing developments as well as modest, single family homes. St. Boniface Catholic School is still further south on Markham – a part of the neighbourhood

where trees begin to appear. All three school staffs work hard to deliver the services their students and families need.

Westhill Neighbourhood Services, which includes a community health centre as well as a range of community services, is newly relocated to Scarborough Village from further east on Kingston Road. Westhill is the anchor organization identified by United Way of Greater Toronto. Though currently undergoing a transition to its new location and population, the centre has a history of housing valuable community and social services. It is located on the south side of Kingston Road at Markham.

Scarborough Village has a modern recreation centre and community theatre facility near Mason Road Public School, but the neighbourhood lacks a proper gym or swimming pool. Though its programs have catered primarily to white seniors, city staff have been looking for ways to better serve all members of the neighbourhood and have been early supporters of ANC.

### *The people of Scarborough Village*

Sixty-one percent of Scarborough Village's 13,725 residents were born outside of Canada, 72 percent are members of a visible minority and 49 percent have a home language other than English. Of the 8,372 Villagers who were born outside of Canada, 64 percent arrived between 1991 and 2001. More than 26 languages are spoken in Scarborough Village. After English, Tamil and Urdu are most commonly spoken; 31 and 10 percent of residents claim these as home languages, respectively.

Says ANC Local Manager Sean Meagher: "The Urdu-speaking population is continuing to climb [from 10 percent] as the area sees continued

immigration from Pakistan. There is also a new subset of Urdu-speaking immigrants made up of Pakistani-born immigrants who have come north from the US since 9/11. What we are beginning to understand are the many layers of sub-communities that exist within each ethnic group. We have also seen a geographic flow pattern that has emerged as different groups have entered, prospered and moved into the more southerly and greener parts of Scarborough Village. Though many leave the area when their economic circumstances improve, vestige members of different ethnic groups stay behind and add to the flavour of the community.”

Most of the working age population (those over 20 years) of Scarborough Village attained a high school education or better (89 percent), though fewer received university training compared with the rest of the city (23 versus 36 percent).

Two-thirds of residents between ages 15 and 24 are attending school; 90 percent of those are attending are full-time students. However, the one-third who are not attending school represent a large pool of undereducated youth whose job prospects are limited. Scarborough Village’s and nearby Galloway Road’s inclusion in the Mayor’s youth crime reduction initiative speaks to the need for more work to be done in the areas of education and job training for youth.

The average annual income of residents is \$17,216 (Toronto averages \$23,491) and 18.6 percent rely on some form of government transfer – a figure which is double that of other Torontonians.

Village residents live mainly in apartments of more than five stories. Some 83 percent live in this type of dwelling (compared with 38 percent

in the rest of the city) and 72 percent rent their homes (49 percent of Torontonians do so). Overall, the neighbourhood’s children (those aged 5 to 14) and young adults (24 to 44) are the largest demographic cohorts, representing 18 and 31 percent of the population, respectively. Fewer neighbourhood residents own cars and more rely on public transit when compared to the rest of the City.

Statistics provide a starting point for learning the broad strokes of the neighbourhood issues. As the community (with the help of ANC) comes to better understand each of its sub-populations, the specific needs of each group will become more evident and the path forward will become clearer.

### *Community assets*

Scarborough Village residents are appreciative of a number of city services to which they have ready access. Westhill Community Health Centre, along with Toronto’s 211 social services help line, the translation phone lines available from the Toronto Public Library and the two community forums operated by the Scarborough Civic Action Network (SCAN) were identified as important community assets during the United Way’s telephone interview process to gauge receptivity to ANC.

SCAN operated its first community forum in September 2003, and Sean Meagher’s firm was hired to help conduct the second forum, called the Scarborough Community Summit, in November 2004. At that time, 1,100 participants attended and preparatory work was conducted with more than 900 two- and three-person groups over a two-month period. That experience was excellent training for the ANC project.<sup>4</sup>

Since joining ANC in May, Sean and his co-workers have spoken with hundreds of people and posted many fliers around the neighbourhood to inform residents about the program's goals and encourage them to attend the project launch at the community centre on June 28. Says Sean: "Having the event at the recreation centre had the effect of opening up the facility to a new, wider audience. Every chair was filled. The 40 people who attended the meeting were introduced to the program and told that its direction and accomplishments were up to them. People were broken into small groups and were asked to list what was working in the community and what was not and to talk about what their dreams were. We began with a group of enthusiasts and skeptics, but everyone left the meeting excited by the prospect of expanding their community's assets. We asked them to help us identify the people and issues that we'd missed, and we are continuing to follow the leads they have provided."

So far, the only negative reaction to Action for Neighbourhood Change came from a recent HRSDC (Human Resources and Skills Development Canada) decision to remove funding from a well-regarded community agency in the neighbourhood next door to Scarborough Village. The East Scarborough Storefront had set up space in a local mall and established a rotating schedule for organizations to provide residents with services like ESL and job training. "It was a question of dispelling that notion that the same department was taking money away from one program and giving it to another," says Sean. The situation also focused attention on the importance of ANC's parallel process – the identification and dismantling of municipal, provincial and federal government barriers which impede community revitalization.

The positive response to ANC from residents, the community centre staff, city health workers, faith groups, schools, housing tenants

associations, settlement workers, business owners and community service providers has convinced Sean that Scarborough Village was an excellent choice of neighbourhood. "People here were really ready to do something, to get things started, but they needed something to organize around," says Sean. "ANC will be that something. We will help coordinate efforts and provide people with the tools, contacts and skills they need so that they can make things happen."

Over the summer of 2005, safety and security problems became a greater focus in the Village as a result of weapons incidents that have had a serious impact upon the broader community. The organizational skills of Sean's team and the ability of UWGT and ANC to access many levels of policy- and decision-makers may play an important role in shaping Scarborough Village's response to these events.

Despite these very real security concerns, there is much to celebrate in the work people have already undertaken to address issues of poverty in Scarborough Village. Even though the neighbourhood has little community space to offer service agencies, individuals and organizations have managed to carve out programs with very few resources.

For example, settlement and parenting programs offered by Aisling Discoveries Child and Family Centre – a mental health and support service agency – operate from St. Boniface School. (This initiative resulted in St. Boniface being awarded school board recognition for innovative programming.) A breakfast program is organized and operated by residents in a public housing development. An employment service located in the second floor of a Village mall takes used computers from Centennial College and offers treatment options and computer training to drug- and alcohol-addicted people. Volunteer

tenant associations and school parent councils exist. Settlement workers have attached themselves to every local school to help new-comers navigate the system. Despite a lack of communication and coordination, these activities demonstrate a community spirit that thrives beneath the surface of what outsiders see as a distressed neighbourhood.

Says Sean: “It’s exciting to meet with people who are taking on challenges. The residents and community organizations in Scarborough Village have been building good things with their bare hands. Through ANC, we will give them the tools to build great things.”

*Anne Makhoul*

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### Endnotes

1. Prior to January 1, 1998, seven separate municipalities existed in what is now the City of Toronto. They were: Metro Toronto, Etobicoke, City of York, North York, East York, Toronto and Scarborough.

2. In 1998, (then) UWGT President Anne Golden was appointed chair of the Homelessness Action Task Force. The task force’s final report, *Taking Responsibility for Homelessness: An Action Plan for Toronto*, was released in January 1999. It made 105 recommendations to all three levels of government and set forth an action plan to solve homelessness. For more details on the report and its recommendations, visit: [http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/who\\_we\\_help/pdfs/homeless\\_action.pdf](http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/who_we_help/pdfs/homeless_action.pdf)

3. In May 2004, United Way of Greater Toronto and the City of Toronto, with the support of the federal and provincial governments, launched a year-long task force to build long-term, multi-pronged solutions for stronger neighbourhoods in Toronto. The Task Force was a

response to the Toronto City Summit Alliance’s *Enough Talk* report which identified the critical importance of strong, healthy neighbourhoods, and to UWGT’s *Poverty by Postal Code* report. The Task Force issued its report and recommendations in its June 2005 report entitled “A Call to Action: A Report of the Strong Neighbourhood Task Force.” It is available at: [http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/who\\_we\\_help/pdfs/SNTF-web\\_report.pdf](http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com/who_we_help/pdfs/SNTF-web_report.pdf)

4. Many issues were identified at the SCAN Community Summits. In September 2003, these included:

- Access to services – there are too few, existing ones are strained, there is an almost complete absence of community health services, there are not enough culturally appropriate services, Scarborough’s widespread area makes location an issue, user fees for some services make them out-of-reach for low-income earners, problems with access to information – communities have lost access to public spaces in schools and community centres.
- Employment and economy – accreditation issues for immigrant professionals.
- Housing – seven-year waiting list for affordable housing. Social Housing Reform Act 2000 (SHRA) puts more people at risk for eviction. Requests for rent controls, more affordable rental housing units (focus on youth and seniors), access to information on affordable housing and study of guaranteed annual income.
- Youth (employment) and political representation (infrequent contact, barriers exist between representatives and newcomer communities). Expensive housing means homeless youth – only one youth shelter. Request for a Youth council, greater accountability from political representatives.
- Decrease in street cleaning and maintenance of public spaces makes the area look worse, media representation of Scarborough is often negative, businesses are thus less likely to invest.

Issues identified at the November 2004 Summit included:

- Access to services – “unmanageable” phone systems, language barriers with written materials (e.g., community directory).
- Youth – newcomers especially vulnerable to peer pressure – cut off from traditional culture, need for clear and effective points of contact for troubled youth.
- Health care – finding a doctor, access to home language.



- Toronto Transit Commission services – poor service, expensive fares.
- Need for newcomer services (adults) – transitional and settlement services, access to training and employment (ESL, orientation/transition, housing, after-school programs, recreation programs, child care, supports for persons with a disability), shortage of translation and legal services.
- Housing, community safety, cleanliness – street sweeping, road and sidewalk maintenance, building restoration, litter reduction, lighting, police engagement, youth programs.

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