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Communities at risk as non-profit sector is starved of funds, new reports reveal

TORONTO, July 17, 2006 – Toronto’s community service sector is facing a crisis of growing demand, inadequate funding and persistently low wages. As community organizations struggle to provide such critical services as employment and training, in-home elderly care, shelters for abused women, immigrant settlement, and early learning and child care, the consequences of these pressures extend beyond their workforces to the health and well-being of Toronto residents, particularly vulnerable and at-risk populations.

“Toronto is a diverse and rapidly changing city with significant, complex social needs. The community sector has been doing an extraordinary job but they are doing it on a shoestring. It’s impossible to keep services accessible, accountable and reactive to the multitude of needs if agencies are struggling just to keep the lights on. It is not a model that can be sustained,” says John Campey, Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto.

On the Front Lines of Toronto’s Community Service Sector, a report released today by Family Service Association of Toronto and the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, reveals that Toronto’s community service sector is being starved of funding while demand for services has grown following major funding cuts to welfare, social housing, child care, health and education programs. At the same time, Canada’s non-profit sector is a major economic contributor worth \$62 billion.

“The non-profit community service sector is like the elephant in the room. It’s a sector that everyone relies on, that is huge in comparison to the economy and that has been punching above its weight for more than a decade. Yet, the woefully inadequate level of funding does not recognize the sector’s critical role in our economic and social well-being,” says Laurel Rothman, Director of Social Reform at Family Service Association of Toronto. “Agencies are struggling now in our booming economic times. If we continue along this path of chronic underfunding and hit a downturn in the economy, community needs will escalate. Yet the sector will not be in a strong position to respond. Inevitably there will be serious consequences for the safety and well-being of many people.”

Over the last decade, numerous government services have been downloaded to Toronto’s non-profit organizations without the funding to support them. Funders have also shifted from providing core funding to short-term project funding, which creates instability and contributes to deteriorating working conditions. As stress grows among agencies to find funds to cover ongoing operational costs, qualified workers are exiting the sector in search of better wages, benefits and job security.

An accompanying report entitled *On the Front Lines of Toronto's Immigrant- and Refugee-Serving Sector* highlights the effect of sector instability on newcomer communities. Toronto's community service sector is often the only line of support for newcomers, who face disproportionately high rates of poverty, unemployment/underemployment, and barriers to housing in the country's largest immigrant reception centre.

This report notes that the already crucial role that Toronto's immigrant- and refugee-serving sector plays will only grow in importance as Canada's immigrant population increases significantly over the next decade.

The *Front Lines* project conducted surveys, focus groups and roundtable discussions with front-line staff from a variety of agencies in Toronto. Among the reports' seven recommendations, the authors are calling for:

- all levels of government to increase funding levels;
- a shift from project funding to sustainable funding models;
- funding practices that are more consistent with funders' stated goals; and
- better recognition of the work and value of the sector.

Funding support for the *On the Front Lines* project was provided by the United Way of Greater Toronto's Social Research Grants.

Both reports can be found at: www.fsatoronto.com and www.socialplanningtoronto.org

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Family Service Association of Toronto (www.fsatoronto.com) is a non-profit, social service agency offering a wide range of multilingual counselling and support programs that reflect the needs of Toronto's diverse communities. FSA Toronto is a United Way member agency.

The Community Social Planning Council of Toronto (www.socialplanningtoronto.org) promotes independent social planning at the local and city-wide levels in order to improve the quality of life for all people in Toronto. CSPC is a United Way member agency.

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