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■ United Way report documents change from wealthy suburb to challenged community over 20-year period

Poverty levels boom in Scarborough

By DAVID NICKLE
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Scarborough saw massive intensification of poorer neighbourhoods over the past two decades, declining from one of the wealthier municipalities in 1981 to one of the poorest 20 years later.

That's the word from Poverty by Postal Code, a new report from the United Way of Greater Toronto charting urban poverty on a neighbourhood-by-neighbourhood basis from 1981 to 2001.

Most of Scarborough's housing, according to the report, was constructed in the 1960s and 1970s as a mix of single family homes and highrise rental buildings.

While in 1981 Scarborough was second only to Etobicoke for communities with low levels of poverty, by 2001 Scarborough's population of families grew by 30.8 per cent, while its population of poor families grew by 136.6 per cent.

According to United Way president Frances Lankin, however, the

trend is similarly dramatic across the city – particularly in the so-called “inner suburbs” of Scarborough, North York and

Etobicoke.

“In the old downtown in 1981, that was where the vast majority of challenged communities were,” she

said. “You didn't see it there then. But over the past 20 years, it's grown in Scarborough and Etobicoke and North York. That's where the chal-

lenges are now.”

The United Way report charts a disturbing trend over the past two
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Scarborough has seen massive social change over the past 20 years

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decades across the city. The study examined neighbourhoods by postal code and using Statistics Canada data, charted changes in the level of poverty in those communities.

Overall, poverty has risen in Toronto well above the national average – with an increase from 13.3 per cent to 19.4 per cent over those 20 years, while the national poverty rate actually declined marginally, from 13 per cent then to 12.8 per cent in 2001.

Toronto overall charts with 120 high-poverty neighbourhoods – up from 30 in 1981 – while the five suburban municipalities, which also include the former city of York and East York, climbed from 15 in 1981

to 92 in 2001.

In Scarborough in 1981, poorer neighbourhoods only numbered four with high poverty. Twenty years later, the former city has 21 areas with high poverty and five charted as having 'very high poverty' meaning that more than 40 per cent of families there are considered poor.

Two neighbourhoods singled out in the report for particularly high levels of poverty are the Oakridge community, located on Warden Avenue between St. Clair and Danforth avenues, where 57.1 per cent, and the Morningside area, where 50.9 per cent of families are poor.

Lankin said the levels of pover-

ty in Scarborough and the other major municipalities are not, however, carried outside the borders of Toronto to the 905 region.

"In the area outside Toronto we found only one neighbourhood of higher poverty," Lankin said.

The trends are also not matched in other large jurisdictions like Winnipeg and Vancouver, she said.

The report is recommending a dramatic change in the way that governments and business deal with urban poverty – first in Toronto, but then elsewhere.

"We cannot have a strong and vibrant economy if we don't have a strong and vibrant city," she said.

"Toronto is a city of neighbourhoods and many of these neigh-

bourhoods have made Toronto strong, with their diversity, relative safety and participation. Our long-term viability and vitality will be determined by the ability of neighbourhoods to welcome newcomers."

Lankin said that the United Way will be funneling more dollars into the older suburban communities in Toronto and will be increasing its advocacy for them.

And she called on governments to build more affordable housing, increase social infrastructure such as community centres and recreation programs and increase income security measures such as minimum wage.

As well, she said that all levels of government need to work harder to

address the needs of Toronto's large immigrant population.

The study found that newcomers to Canada were disproportionately represented among the city's poor.

Thirty per cent of all of Toronto's immigrant population lives in higher poverty neighbourhoods. And one-third of the city's visible minority family population lives in higher poverty neighbourhoods.

The report is recommending greater integration of skilled newcomers into the economy.

"Right now only people who have a recent connection to the labour force have access to job training," she said. "When you look at letting in new Canadians, the programs aren't there to help them."