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NEWS THAT HITS HOME

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Rising poverty numbers no surprise to local agencies

By SUSAN O'NEILL
Mirror Staff

News that poverty is on the rise in the city's suburbs was no surprise to Scarborough's community service agencies.

The United Way report Poverty by Postal Code, released Monday, details a dramatic increase in the number of poor neighbourhoods throughout the city; a trend that local service groups have been witnessing for some time.

"I guess as an agency we've been seeing it for many years. It's not news to us," said Koulla Christoforou of West Hill Community Services.

The agency provides a range of services in the eastern area of Scarborough, including meals on wheels, congregate dining, hot lunch program, parenting sessions, access to community health services and food, furniture and job banks.

"We strive every day to help clients in this community reach their full potential," Christoforou said.

HOMELESS NUMBERS RISE

According to the United Way, poverty is no longer concentrated in the downtown core and has spread to communities throughout Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke.

The number of homeless living here is also on the rise.

"Homelessness is an epidemic here," said Tina Garnett, a homeless outreach worker with the Scarborough Homeless Committee during an interview late last year.

"I can go down to Toronto and identify a homeless person. You can't here," she said. "The need is huge, but because it's not screaming at you, it's not identified."

Jane Robson, executive director of the Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA), said the findings of the report weren't surprising.

"No, this isn't news and I don't think it's news to the United Way

either," said Robson, who reported that a major concern in Scarborough is the lack of affordable housing.

"In the Agincourt area we have an awful lot of people living together in houses in many different ways," she said. "Some of them are two families sharing a house and in other cases, it's much more than that, maybe four families."

Robson added, "There's not an awful lot of official rental properties in the Agincourt area."

Christoforou said the lack of affordable housing is a major barrier for many of West Hill's clients as well, including those with jobs.

She said the agency's homeless

outreach worker is an asset in helping people find the best suitable housing.

The demand on the agency's food and furniture banks has also increased over the years, Christoforou said.

"There is always a constant increase (on demand) in these areas," she said, adding, "we are blessed with a community in Scarborough that has given so generously towards the food bank and furniture bank."

"Definitely we support what the United Way stated. We do see it in our community," Christoforou added. "It wasn't anything that was new to us to have heard."