

THE REGIONAL MUNICIPALITY OF YORK

**REPORT NO. 1
OF THE REGIONAL COMMISSIONER OF COMMUNITY SERVICES AND HOUSING**

**For Consideration by
The Council of The Regional Municipality of York
on February 16, 2006**

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2006 YORKLINK DIRECTORY**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the release of the 2006 YorkLink Directory.

2. PURPOSE

The YorkLink Directory and web page are well-used, effective, and appreciated community resources serving the Region's residents and community service providers. This report will provide an update on the 2006 edition.

3. BACKGROUND

In December 1998, Regional Council approved the development of an annual community services directory to inform residents of services available in the Region and to help agencies deliver these services to the people of York Region by offering a centralized source of information.

The Community Services and Housing Department developed an electronic database to store the data and supplemented the print directory with a searchable, online directory. In 2000, the YorkLink online directory was launched and 1,000 copies of the print version were distributed to community agencies.

Now in its seventh year, YorkLink continues to provide residents with up-to-date, comprehensive information about local community services. Directory listings contain descriptions of the services each agency provides as well as contact information. Where applicable, listings also cite the availability of accessibility supports such as elevators, barrier-free washrooms and parking spaces for people with disabilities.

The directory of over 700 community agencies and organizations is available in print format or through the York Region web site.

The feedback that staff received while doing community outreach in 2005 regarding YorkLink was positive. The majority of people encountered are already familiar with YorkLink and are anxious to know when the next version is coming out. People say that they find it a valuable resource to help them do their jobs and they often use it on a daily basis. The following are two examples of recent outreach activities.

In October 2005, Community Services and Housing was invited by Labour Community Services, a Project of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, to train students in the Union Counsellor Program on the use of the YorkLink directory. Labour Community Services has identified YorkLink as the key source of community information for Union Counsellors working in York Region.

In November 2005, Community Services and Housing was invited to the York Region District School Board's Quest Pre Conference – *The Quest for Communities That Work: Sustaining Student Achievement*. Our role was to help case study teams use YorkLink to search for information about community agencies and to provide these teams with information about the programs that Community Services and Housing provides to the public. The goal of the conference was to identify issues, gaps and challenges that face families in York Region.

Community outreach will continue in 2006 and is outlined in this report.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Highlights of 2006 Enhancements

YorkLink has been enhanced to better serve the residents of York Region. Some of the key improvements made for the 2006 version of YorkLink are:

4.1.1 Expanded Listings

For the 2006 edition of YorkLink, Community Services and Housing Department staff added over 25 new organizations to the directory.

4.1.2 Enhanced Search Features – Print and Web-based

In March 2005, Community Services and Housing Department staff created a new and improved index for the printed directory. In previous editions, YorkLink had two indexes. YorkLink now has one comprehensive index that has been greatly expanded to include more subject entries. This new index was generated in response to the need users expressed for easier ways to find the particular service that they were looking for. The expanded and comprehensive index addresses the expressed need and will make it easier for users.

The search function on the YorkLink web page has also been enhanced. Users can now look for community agencies on the YorkLink web page using a new search function. Users can use the improved search function to look for organizations by keyword, agency location, preferred language, or service type.

4.1.3 Expanded Translation Services

In order to promote effective service accessibility, YorkLink supports residents in a range of languages through a readily available translation service. This is an important feature of YorkLink and is intended to reflect the languages most widely used in the Region. As a result of a recent review, three additional languages - Arabic, Tamil and Vietnamese have been added for 2006 to the nine languages previously available. As a result, for the 2006 Directory, translation services will now be provided for the following 12 languages: French, Korean, Hindi, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Spanish, Russian, Italian, Farsi, Urdu, Tamil, Arabic, and Vietnamese.

4.1.4 Creation of an Accessible Version

An accessible version of the YorkLink Directory is now available for people with visual disabilities. The accessible version is in PDF format and available on CD. Users with low vision can use screen reading software to read the PDF file or magnify the text to the size that they need.

4.1.5 Distribution and Promotion of the 2006 YorkLink

In 2005, 4,500 directories were printed and as in past years the total amount was distributed. In 2006, the same number of YorkLink directories will again be printed due to continuing agency and public demand, while additional efforts are made to promote the online version.

In 2005, the YorkLink web page received 42,872 hits. To promote the use of the online version, print ads will be placed to specifically promote the online version of YorkLink in York Region Transit buses and in area municipality recreation guides.

In addition to advertising, the following initiatives are also planned:

- Sending an email “blast” to the agencies listed in YorkLink highlighting the new enhancements for 2006.

- Adding a paragraph about the 2006 directory to the Community Services and Housing web page and to the News and Information section on the main York Region web page.
- Giving presentations to groups with links to the broader community, including the Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC), the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), Labour Community Services and the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness.

4.2 Relationship to Vision 2026

YorkLink supports Vision 2026 by responding to the information needs of the residents of York Region. YorkLink's mandate is to provide easily accessible and current community services information.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of YorkLink is accommodated within the Community Services and Housing Department's 2006 Budget. The annual budget for producing and distributing YorkLink is \$54,000. This amount is unchanged from the previous four years' budgets. Through continued marketing, community outreach and an increased web presence, the Department has been able to meet the increased demand of residents and community service agencies for access to YorkLink information without an increase in printing or distribution costs.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

All area municipalities are represented in the YorkLink directory. Residents, community agencies, school boards, and government agencies from every municipality benefit from the information contained in the directory, as do the municipal governments which are listed in YorkLink.

Print copies are distributed to members of the general public on an as-needed basis. The majority of printed directories are delivered to local community agencies, libraries, schools, government offices, and information kiosks, which use YorkLink to connect their clients with other community services.

7. CONCLUSION

YorkLink is an effective, highly-regarded community resource. Now in its seventh year, YorkLink continues to provide residents, school boards, government offices, and community agencies with up-to-date, comprehensive information about local community services.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.

Respectfully submitted,

**February 7, 2006
Newmarket, Ontario**

**J. Simmons
Commissioner of
Community Services**

(Report No. 1 of the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing was adopted, without amendment, by Regional Council at its meeting held on February 16, 2006.)