

Tuesday March 6, 2007

Dear Regional Council,

I am writing to you on behalf of the Character Foundation of York Region. As Chair of this organization, I wish to take this opportunity to thank you for your on-going support of the Character movement. York Region is the first Region in Canada to declare a Character Community and the Province of Ontario has followed suit. We have developed a grassroots model that is currently being shared with other municipalities throughout the Province. We have also developed many relationships with our community partners as we work together to help make York Region a vibrant, harmonious and prosperous community.

York Regional Council has supported the Foundation since its inception, by offering many in-kind services and funding \$100,000. This money covers the annual salary and benefits of an Executive Director to manage the day- to- day operations of the organization as well as legal costs.

The Council applied for charitable status with Revenue Canada in 2004 and is anxiously awaiting approval. This status will enable us to further develop and sustain the high quality programs and services that we have offered in the past. The process has taken far longer than expected. When charitable status is achieved, we are confident that major foundations in Canada will contribute to the program. It could be then possible to entirely waive future financial assistance from the Region.

In the interim, we have been able to sustain our programs through nominal memberships and corporate donations. We have successfully solicited sponsors such as RBC, Powerstream and Bell Canada. In addition, Character Council was able sustain itself through Conference profits from the past three years. The York Region District School Boards were the major contributors to the conference and have withdrawn their support because of funding and training offered from the Ministry of Education.

The Character Foundation of York Region is requesting that during the upcoming budget deliberations, Regional Council consider additional funds in the amount of \$75,000 for the 2007 Operating Budget. This money will enable us to continue creating awareness of the Character Community Initiative and build Character capacity in York Region's families, schools, government offices and businesses. Further program development in the areas of sports, service to businesses and families are planned for 2007. The Foundation is committed to continue offering public sessions, workshops and recognition events like the upcoming Character Community Awards.

In 2005, we published a book entitled Building Character: A Community Success Story. The Region of York originally funded \$20,000 towards the project and I am pleased to report that as of today, this publication has sold 3500 copies and has generated surplus revenue of \$9,000. Plans for 2007 include the revision and printing of this publication.

A detailed Marketing and Communications Plan and Budget have been attached for your perusal.

If you have any questions about this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Looking forward to your reply,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Don Cousens". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Don" and last name "Cousens" clearly legible.

Donald Cousens
Chair – Character Foundation of York Region

Office: (905) 513-3646
Mobile: (416) 818-1612
don.cousens@gmail.com

Character Community Initiative – York Region Background

What is a Character Community?

A Character Community is one in which members of the community work together to nurture positive character attributes.

The vision of a Character Community is a healthy, harmonious and vibrant community where people recognize and promote the importance of good character. They treat others as they would like to be treated, show respect, are accountable, fair, honest and courageous, have empathy, persevere, show initiative and act with integrity.

The Character Community initiative is secular; it is not linked to any one specific set of religious teachings and has received support from faith groups in York Region such as the Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities.

History

The Character Community initiative began in York Region in June 2001. With the support of Donald Cousens and senior staff from YRDSB, a proposal for developing a Character Community in York Region was approved. A steering committee was established and represented a diverse spectrum of people from area municipalities, business, education, police, community organizations, and residents.

On January 24, 2002, York Regional Council approved a resolution declaring York Region a *Character Community* – the first regional municipality to do so in Canada.

On February 12, 2002, the official launch of the York Region Character Community initiative took place with the unveiling of a logo, mission statement, vision statement and website. Within a few months, the 11 attributes were decided upon and Wendel Clark agreed to be the Character Champion.

In 2002, all of York Region's nine area municipalities passed Resolutions supporting the Character Community initiative. See sample attached.

November 2002 – The Character Foundation of York Region was incorporated.

In 2003, the Region of York hired an Executive Director to oversee the day-to-day operations of the initiative in York Region. The Executive Director works very closely with the Council and promotes the initiative throughout the Region.

In June 2006, Ontario became a Character Province through an independent member's resolution, brought forward by Markham MPP Tony Wong.

In October 2006, Premier McGuinty and the Ministry of Education launched the Character Development initiative to support character building in schools and inspire students to become caring and contributing citizens.

Who We Are?

The Character Community Council of York Region represents a group of committed volunteers. They meet on a monthly basis to promote the movement throughout the Region of York.

Members of the 2006-2007 Council

Donald Cousens (Co-chair)	Tim Jones, (Co-chair)
Christine deHaas Executive Director	
Norair Bonyodi-Rodriguez, YCDSB Student Rep	Ghislaine Boulianne York Region
Becky Cameron, Youthspeak	Chris Catania Town of Aurora
Adrianna DeCastro, YCDSB Student Rep	Olga Ferro, YCDSB
Darren Greenspoon, Green Acres	John Havercroft, YRDSB
Jenna Jones, YRDSB student rep	Debra Kelly, YRNG
Michelle Lynch, Rogers	Bob McCulloch, CAYRE
Marcela Krajny, Magna	Marlena Oliveira, Richland Academy
Gunter Meyer, YRDSB	Kathleen Redmond, K. Redmond & Assoc.
Mary Pan, Community Member	Deb Shoniker, York Regional Police
Stephen Rensink, YRDSB	John Webster, Town of Markham
Lois Tori, Chair – Business Committee	Simon Cheng, Region of York
Una Wright, Youthspeak	Mayor Phyllis Morris
Mayor David Barrow	Regional Councilor Tony Wong
Regional Councilor John Taylor	

What We Do?

Character in Education –

Schools across York Region have embraced the Character movement. In YRDSB, the Character Matters program is infused in all aspects of the culture of schools. In YCDSB, York Catholic Character Communities of Faith have aligned the attributes with gospel values. Several private schools have developed Character programs to foster the universal qualities that global citizens require. All schools in York Region are working towards the common vision of developing quality education programs that focus on the development of the whole person.

Character in Business –

The Character in Business program was launched in November 2004. This program provides practical tools and resources for developing a positive culture at work. An organization that values positive character attributes benefits by having greater sustainability and success.

To-date over 100 businesses in York Region have joined the Character movement. They have pledged to operate with Character and the committee continues to develop quality workshops and materials to support the membership.

Character in Municipal Government –

Several municipalities have developed Character Committees within their organization. The committees work to promote the initiative to public.

Some examples of this work includes:

- Logo promotion on garbage / recycling receptacles, operation vehicles, ice rinks, website, marquees, municipal bills
- Library book displays focusing on Character attribute of the month
- Newsletters highlighting initiative and examples of Character in Action stories (see attached)
- Events honoring residents and organizations that have demonstrated the attributes
- Support to communities beyond York Region

Some committees have worked to infuse the Character attributes with their Mission/Vision statements and work with internal departments to align their practices with a Culture of Character. Some activities include:

- Examining Hiring and Recruitment Practices
- Staff Training and Development
- Recognition Programs
- Teamwork Days
- Communication strategies
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys

Staff from each of the municipalities meet quarterly to share successful practices.

Character in Community

Several municipalities have launched a Character Community Organization program. This program is for non-profit community clubs, associations and organizations that want to be part of the character initiative. These organizations are committed to developing positive character in their community. Currently, over 65 groups are members.

Character in Family

Developing character within families is an important part of a healthy community. The Character Council of York Region has developed workshops to support families. These workshops are run in partnerships with faith, cultural or educational organizations.

Character in Sports

A Character in Sport Committee has been established. Representatives from York Region Public Health, YRDSB, YCDSB, York Region Athletic Association, Markham, Aurora and Richmond Hill Sport Councils, Aurora Soccer Club, Maple Leaf Sport and Entertainment and Green Acres Day Camp are at the table to discuss embedding the attributes into the world of sports.

Successes

Over the last five years, this grassroots initiative has become a part of the culture of York Region.

Three successful conferences have occurred to support all facets of the community with their character development.

Several workshops have been delivered in the family, business, education and community sectors.

Quarterly newsletters are published and distributed to the public highlighting events and successful stories.

A book entitled A Community Success Story was published in 2005. This practical tool chronicles the journey that York Region embarked upon in becoming a Character Community. Twelve community authors shared a “how to” model.

The Character Community Council worked with IPSOS REID to survey residents across Ontario to measure their attitudes towards the character in their community. Survey results are available at www.charactercommunity.com

Plans for 2007

We continue to work towards promoting the attributes throughout York Region. Some of the planned activities include:

- In partnership with Powerstream Inc., RBC and YRNG, the 2007 Character Community Awards will take place on March 29, 2007 at the Markham Theatre for the Performing Arts.
- Hosting Mayor’s Character Breakfasts with Chambers of Commerce and Boards of Trade
- Offering Family Forums throughout the Region of York
- Offering Character in Business workshops partnering with Economic Development Departments and Small Business Enterprise Centers
- Reviewing and revising all promotional materials including pamphlets and website.
- Promotion of the Character Community on public roads and transportation vehicles.
- Reprinting revised edition of Building Character, A Community Success Story
- Working with sporting organizations and Sport Councils to develop Character in Sports programs. Funding requested through Trillium Foundation of Ontario
- Supporting and networking with other Character Communities across Ontario

2007 Character Community Communications and Marketing Plan

Prepared by Christine DeHaas in coordination with York Region Corporate Communications

Rationale:

The Region of York became a Character Community in 2002. The Character initiative is one that encompasses all sectors of our community. Since that time, a variety of events promoting this initiative have taken place. In order to continue to promote living with Character in York Region in a systematic process, a Strategic Communications and Marketing Plan for 2007 is required.

Objectives:

This plan attempts to outline the work of the Character Council of York Region for 2007. Our primary objectives include:

1. To create greater awareness of Character Community Initiative and the attributes in York Region families, schools, government offices, businesses and community organizations.
2. To build Character capacity throughout the Region of York
3. To attract new volunteers and increasing public outreach while maintaining Character Community existing volunteer / member base

Stakeholder Groups:

Internal	External
• Members of the Character Foundation of York Region • York Region District School Board • York Catholic District School Board • York Region Newspaper Group • Rogers Television • Region of York • York Regional Police • All York Region Municipalities • Members of the Character in Business Program • Members of the Character Community Organization Program	• York Region residents • School aged children • Educators • Business owners • Community organizations • Potential volunteers • Regional and municipal staff • Faith and Cultural representatives • Parents • Public • Municipalities in Ontario • Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture and Citizenship

Key Messages:

- We are responsible for developing our own character
- Good character will make a positive difference in our families, schools, businesses and community
- Good character begets good character
- The attributes are universal and secular
- Our character is defined by our behaviour

Strategic Communications and Marketing Working Group:

The Communications Working group will be responsible for overseeing the Communications and Marketing of the Major Initiatives for 2007. They will assist the Executive Director by:

- Developing and Implementing the Strategic Marketing Plan
- Recruiting and training volunteers to monitor the displays at the Summer / Fall and Winter Promotion Events

Major Initiatives for 2007:

- Character in Business Workshops – bi-monthly workshops to promote attributes at work
- Character Information Session – January 19, 2007 – information session for new Municipal Council members in York Region
- Municipal Implementation Workshop – February 23, 2007 – Information session for municipalities – Implementing a Character Community
- First Annual Character Awards – March 29, 2007 – Markham Theatre for Performing Arts
- April 11, 2007 – Richmond Hill Mayor's Character Breakfast
- April 19, 2007 – Markham Mayor's Character Breakfast
- April/ May – Annual General Meeting for all Members
- April / May – Character in Family Workshop
- Summer / Fall / Winter promotion events – Aurora Street Festival, Richmond Hill Canada Day, Markham Fair, Newmarket Santa Claus Parade,
- Character Community Week – October 15 –21st, 2007 (Mall events, Character Community Day Breakfast, York Region Newspaper Contest)
- Partner with Economic Development – Tourism Advisory Board and offer workshops based around the Character Attributes on Customer Service for Tourist businesses in York Region (January – May 2007)
- Assemble a Character in Sports committee to review resources, program development and implementation.
- Re-write, revise and edit Building Character: A Community Success Story – 2nd Edition
- Review and revise all print material – 2007

Communication and Marketing Tools to deliver key messages and promote Major initiatives:

- Media Releases / Advisories
- Media Appearances – CP24, Rogers
- Media Partnerships/Free Ads – YRNG, Rogers
- Branding and Graphic Design – Branded Display Materials, Folders, and brochures (Nimlock Pop-up Displays and Caravan Canada Tent)
- Traveling School Displays
- Newsletters x 4
- Website
- Branded giveaways for home shows and street festivals – key chains, etc
- Branded Character gear/wear for volunteers – golf shirts, etc

Budget (In-kind donations/Work noted):

Activity	Particulars	Anticipated Cost
Character in Business Series of bi-monthly workshops to promote attributes at work	Printing and distribution In-kind advertising YRNG – Business Times Chamber of Commerce Email - Blitz	10,000.
Character in Business Micro-website development (Password protected site for members – will house resources and information for members)	Website Development – outsourced In-kind support – Corporate Communications – Region of York	\$5000.
Provincial Municipal Information Sessions	Flyer printing and distribution	\$5000.
Internal Information Session – Region of York Municipalities members of Council and staff	Email Distribution	No cost
First Annual Character Community Awards Markham Theatre for the Performing Arts	Printing and distributing posters, award brochures In-kind support – Corporate Communications – Region of York – on-line nominations, web design York Region Newspaper Group – in-kind advertising	\$5000.
Mayor's Character Breakfasts	Printing and design costs Distribution through Chambers	\$2500 \$2500.
Character Foundation of York Region – Annual General Meeting	Email distribution	1000
Character in the Family – Public Workshop	Printing Costs In-kind advertising – YRDSB, YCDSB, York Region Newspaper Group	\$3000
Summer/ Fall / Winter Promotion Events List them here	Branding and graphic design Nimlock pop up displays and caravan tent Branded giveaways	\$6000
2007 Character Community Week	Posters design, printing and distribution Mall Events	\$5000

	Nimlock displays Branded giveaways	
Program Development	Character in Sport Customer Service Program Development	In process of developing work plan and budgets
Material Revisions		\$5000.00
Brochures		\$5000.00
Newsletters	Graphics Printing Distribution	\$15,000
Building Character Book Costs	Editing Publishing	10,000
TOTAL		75,000