

5

2008 YORKLINK DIRECTORY

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 24, 2008, from the Commissioner of Community and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the release of the 2008 YorkLink Directory.

2. PURPOSE

The YorkLink Directory and web site are well-used, effective, and appreciated community resources serving York Region residents and community service providers. This report will provide an update on the 2008 edition, and seeks Council approval for the Directory's release.

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.

An electronic database was developed 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 ninth year, YorkLink continues to provide residents and community agencies 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 features such as elevators, barrier-free washrooms and parking spaces for people with disabilities.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Highlights

YorkLink continues to be a highly regarded and effective tool that helps people find the supports and assistance they need. YorkLink is used by people and agencies across the Region including community agencies, settlement agencies for new immigrants, child care centres, school staff and others.

The Directory of over 700 community agencies and organizations is available in a printed format or through the York Region website. Print copies are distributed to local community agencies, libraries, schools, government offices, and information kiosks, which use YorkLink to connect their clients to other community services. Copies are also available to the general public upon request.

Translation services are available to meet the needs of the Region's culturally diverse population. YorkLink includes translation assistance in the Region's top spoken languages to assist residents who do not read English. Translation assistance is provided in Arabic, Cantonese/Mandarin, Farsi, French, Hindi, Italian, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tamil, Urdu and Vietnamese.

4.1.1 Activities in 2007

Marketing Campaign

As in previous years, to promote the online version of the directory and increase awareness about the YorkLink website, print ads promoting the online directory were placed, using two highly-visible approaches, across York Region:

- A black and white ad was placed in each of the nine local municipalities' fall parks and recreation guides, which were distributed to York Region residents. These publications are widely distributed and give the ads a longer shelf-life than placing the ads in other publications.
- Full-colour ads were placed in YRT buses that travelled in each municipality. The ads ran for eight weeks, from the beginning of September to the end of October.

Community Outreach

In March and October, the Community and Health Services Department 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 a key source of community information for Union Counsellors working in York Region.

4.1.2 Enhancements for 2008

- YorkLink continues to grow – new organizations have been added to the 2008 directory bringing the total number of listings to over 700.
- A redesign of the YorkLink web site has been completed. The redesign improved the overall look of the site, streamlined information, and improved site navigation. The

search page now has a cleaner design and has a Browse A-Z feature so users can browse or search the entire directory alphabetically. There is a prominent link to Translation Assistance which lists how to get help in finding an agency in 12 languages. An interactive map of York Region has been added. You can use this map to search for any York Region address. The links to Add or Update a Listing and Contact Us are now more prominent and easier to find.

4.1.3 Distribution and Promotion of the 2008 YorkLink

In 2008, 4,000 copies of the directory will be printed to meet the continued demand from front-line staff and community agencies for the printed directory.

To promote the use of the online version, print ads will again be placed in York Region Transit buses and in area municipality recreation guides. In addition to advertising, the following initiatives are also planned:

- An email blast will be sent to all agencies listed in YorkLink featuring the enhancements to the redesigned YorkLink web site.
- A paragraph about the 2008 directory will be added to the Community and Health Services web page and to the News and Information section on the main York Region web page.
- Presentations will be given to groups with links to the broader community, including the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee, Labour Community Services, and other community groups upon request. These presentations will promote YorkLink to representatives from organizations across the Region, provide a valuable opportunity to highlight the enhancements made to the online version and printed directory as well as provide an opportunity to receive feedback that can be used to enhance future editions of YorkLink.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of the YorkLink Directory is included within the Community and Health Services Department's budget. 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 budget.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Community service agencies and organizations from every area municipality are included 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 also listed in YorkLink.

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 important community services. Printed copies are distributed to members of the general public upon request.

7. CONCLUSION

YorkLink is an effective, highly-regarded community resource. Now in its ninth year, YorkLink continues to provide residents, school boards, other levels of government, and community agencies with up-to-date, comprehensive information about important community services.

For more information on this report please contact Cordelia Abankwa-Harris, extension 2150, Director, Policy and Program Support Services Branch, Community and Health Services Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.