

1

2007 YORKLINK DIRECTORY

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends the adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, January 25, 2007, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Regional Council approve the release of the 2007 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 2007 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.

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 eighth 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 print format or through the York Region web site. In 2006, 4,500 copies of the YorkLink directory were printed. Print copies are distributed to members of the general public on an as-needed basis, while the majority of directories are delivered to local community agencies, libraries, schools, government offices, and information kiosks, which use YorkLink to connect their clients to other community services.

Translation services are available to meet the needs of the Region's culturally diverse population. YorkLink includes translation assistance in the Region's top 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 2006

Marketing Campaign

To promote the online version of the directory and increase awareness about the YorkLink web site, 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 have a longer shelf-life than other ads.
- 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.

The marketing campaign has proven very successful. The average number of visitors to the YorkLink web site jumped from 3,483 people per month during the summer to 4,570 visitors per month during the fall. This represents a 32% increase in traffic to the YorkLink online directory.

Community Outreach

In September, the Community Services and Housing 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.

Focus Group

A focus group was held in July to get feedback from YorkLink users on the directory in general and on the expanded index which was new to the directory for 2006. Feedback was extremely positive and users liked the new index. They were pleased with the fact that finding agencies was now even easier. The group did request that the service category listing be put back in the directory. This list allows people who are looking for an individual agency or a particular service area to scan the list and find it quickly.

4.1.2 Enhancements for 2007

- YorkLink continues to grow – Community Services and Housing Department staff added 21 new organizations to the directory.
- The service category listing has returned to the directory based on feedback received from the focus group held in 2006.
- A redesign of the YorkLink web site is in progress and will improve the overall look of the site, streamline information, and improve site navigation.

4.1.3 Distribution and Promotion of the 2007 YorkLink

In 2006, 4,500 directories were printed and, as in past years, all of the print directories were distributed. In 2007, the same number of YorkLink directories will again be printed due to continuing agency and public need, while additional efforts will be made to promote the online version.

To promote the use of the online version, print ads will again 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:

- Once the YorkLink web site has been redesigned, an email “blast” will be sent to the agencies listed in YorkLink highlighting the new design.
- A paragraph about the 2007 directory will be added to the Community Services and Housing 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 Human Services Planning Coalition (HSPC), the York Region Accessibility Advisory Committee (AAC), Labour Community Services, and the York Region Alliance to End Homelessness. 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.

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 included within the Community Services and Housing Department's budget. The budget for producing and distributing YorkLink is \$54,000. This amount is unchanged from the previous five 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 important community services.

7. CONCLUSION

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

For more information on this report contact Monica Bryce, Manager of Program Funding and Communications, Policy and Program Support Services Branch, Community Services and Housing Department.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.