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A SUBMISSION TO THE UNITED WAY TASK FORCE
REGARDING FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR THE UNITED WAY OF EDMONTON AND AREA

From: The Edmonton Social Planning Council

INTRODUCTION

The United Way of Edmonton and Area has traditionally made valuable contributions to planning and provision of services in the voluntary sector. This role has concentrated on identification of unmet needs, and program planning to meet existing or emerging needs. Secondly, the United Way funding of affiliated agencies has resulted in the maintenance and development of many community services.

Given the increasing cost of operating agencies however, and a rapidly expanding population base to be served, it stands to reason that United Way funding will increasingly be inadequate in providing sufficient funding for necessary expansion in the quantity and quality of some services. This is particularly true in relation to those direct service agencies which cater to large populations, and require considerable resources, including professional expertise, transportation methods and equipment. In view of this, large costly agencies might be encouraged to seek governmental support to assume most of their cost burden. This kind of trend has been evident traditionally in voluntary sector service development, where programming is established to focus on unmet needs and later those services are taken over by a government which can afford them.

AN ALTERNATIVE: LOCAL SELF-HELP PLANNING

As an alternative, more United Way funds might be channeled into local self-help planning organizations. These agencies, which include some social planning councils and urban planning organizations, are less costly to operate as compared to large direct service agencies, and in terms of dollars invested, provide considerable service to the community.

Increasingly, these agencies encourage citizens to participate in planning and operating activities aimed at improving social and economic conditions in their community. The idea here is that policies cannot be formulated in a vacuum if they are to be responsive to actual community needs. Local self-help planning organizations in relation to citizens can function to facilitate knowledge of planning alternatives, provide required knowledge and ability to analyze policies and ability to plan. These activities are designed to foster co-operation between public and government in policy planning directed to citizens' physical and social environment. Data received from public input in social planning can help to prevent conditions, or at least provide early identification of conditions which may result in social problems. Effective citizen participation can also help to enhance commitment to policies developed on a joint decision making basis, thereby reducing long term conflict. In this manner, a long range cost saving can be ensured. Within a framework of participatory democracy, more funding of local planning organizations in the voluntary sector can play an important role in ensuring opportunities for citizens to participate in policy developments which affect their social, physical and economic environment.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT - MONITORING

In addition to supporting local self-help planning organizations, the United Way of Edmonton may have an important role to play in social policy formation that meets the needs of the people for whom it is being developed. Significantly the United Way of Edmonton, as a co-ordinating unit for services in the voluntary sector, can function to facilitate grass roots input through voluntary agencies to governmental planning for community and social needs. This may foster input from those people directly involved in community based delivery of services. In this manner, the United Way of Edmonton may facilitate co-operation and communication between the public and voluntary sector, towards a common end.

In conjunction with a social policy development role, the United Way may carry on a continuing monitoring role in relation to existing governmental policy and programming designed for intervention in community and social needs. This includes a stronger social advocacy role in relation to social development.

SUMMARY

The Edmonton Social Planning Council recognizes the valuable contributions of the United Way of Edmonton to Edmonton and area in relation to its funding and service development role. In light of rapidly changing social conditions, however, the Edmonton Social Planning Council makes the following recommendations.

- (a) More United Way funding be channeled into local self-help planning organizations.
- (b) The United Way of Edmonton assume a greater role in facilitating public-voluntary co-operation in development of comprehensive social policy.
- (c) The United Way assume continuing policy-program monitoring, and policy advocacy role.