

## Dishing out charity cash a challenge

Sep. 15, 2006. 01:00 AM

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STAFF REPORTER

The United Way of Greater Toronto is one of the country's fundraising powerhouses, bringing in a record \$96 million last year alone.

But once the money has been collected — and this year's goal is even higher, at \$100 million — how does the agency ever decide how to divvy up the money among 200 deserving agencies, helping everyone from the homeless to the helpless?

That's the challenge Catharine Fennell faces. And in many ways, her position as allocations volunteer with the United Way can be harder than running her own successful company.

"It's a rigorous process," said Fennell, who has been an allocations volunteer for five years and spends about 150 hours annually poring over applications — some the size of a small phone book — line by line, scrutinizing finances, writing reports and making recommendations.

She uses her business acumen to work for her community, ensuring that the millions of dollars in donations raised by the charity are spent where they're needed most.

"We're responsible to the donor," noted Fennell. "Our job is to raise flags. On the other hand, we're there to highlight the terrific things agencies are doing."

In her day job, 36-year-old Fennell is a mover and shaker, running Market Yourself Smarter, which produces corporate events and helps workers make better career choices.

Dividing up donations is a real balancing act. The \$96.1 million raised in last year's campaign was shared between 148 member health and service organizations, covering core funding and existing programs. Another 50-plus agencies serving the city's poor, youth, disabled, abused women and the homeless also received grants.

Almost \$60 million this year will fund services in Toronto, such as youth violence prevention, job counselling for newcomers, and elder-care programs.

When it comes to directing funds, "the United Way does it better than most," according to Fennell, who said it's why donors dig deep into their pockets to support the cause.

"The United Way is a trusted source, making sure all those millions of dollars that come in every year get funnelled to the right place," said Fennell.

"Donors come to the United Way because they feel they are in good hands."

United Way member agencies can also apply for funding for new programs every two years. It's a detailed eight-month process involving about 80 volunteers working on 16 teams.

Their job includes visits to front-line agencies to see first-hand what services are provided and how well, and to talk



CHARLA JONES/TORONTO STAR

Volunteers like business owner Catharine Fennell are the backbone of the \$100 million United Way of Greater Toronto campaign, which supports 200 agencies.

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with staff and directors.

Volunteers open up the books and make sure programs have a lasting impact on the community they serve.

As part of the performance review, an agency must demonstrate how it deals with changing community needs, that it's open to the whole community, manages human and financial resources well and has a realistic new program budget as well as a practical need for United Way dollars.

This year, \$2.2 million is being distributed to member agencies for new programs across the city, with a focus on the inner suburbs serving the former municipalities of East York, Etobicoke, North York, Scarborough and York to pay for desperately needed youth and newcomers.

Each year, two new agencies get into the United Way club — organizations that fill gaps where services are sorely lacking. They also get an in-depth look before being approved.

Volunteers like Fennell are "the backbone of the allocation process," said Lorraine Duff, director of community resources for United Way, Greater Toronto.

They're chosen for their knowledge of the city's social needs, diverse community experience and come from all walks of life representing labour, business, and a variety of cultures from across Toronto.

It's a labour of love for Fennell, who's a United Way volunteer because doing something good for her community means more than just writing a cheque.

"I think everyone should give of their time as well as money. I feel I'm in touch with my community," she said, noting the opportunity to meet with frontline workers offers a better understanding of the important work that agencies do in the city.

"When I meet with agencies and see first-hand the great work they're doing and how much impact they have on the community — sometimes it reduces me to tears."

Of the remaining funds raised last year, \$8.4 million was distributed through United Way branches in the 905 regions including Ajax-Pickering-Uxbridge, Oakville, Peel and York Region, with \$12 million going to charities designated by donors.

This year, supporting the United Way can be as easy as filling up as a gas bar. Tomorrow is Esso United Way Day. One cent per litre plus \$1 per car wash sold at the company's Toronto stations will be donated by Imperial Oil to United Way of Greater Toronto.



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