

Community Discussion on Health

UTM Campus – November 12, 2005

EVENT SYNOPSIS

The Healthy City Stewardship Centre (HCSC) held a one-day forum with representatives who are working toward the betterment of health in the community. The event was held at the University of Toronto at Mississauga (UTM) campus and was the first public meeting the Stewardship Centre had organized to date. The objectives for the day were to:

- introduce the HCSC to the public,
- get feedback on the concept, vision and goals of the HCSC,
- develop an understanding of the local community's views, objectives and on-going work on local health issues,
- develop a list of the priority health issues for the five HCSC goals, including potential areas of needed research.

Invitations were sent out to approximately 50 community groups. Representatives from the participating groups were challenged to bring a young member of their organization and/or local neighbourhood to the forum to gain a youth perspective in the discussions. The faculty and students from the UTM campus were also well represented. In total, 80 participants attended the day.

The event was opened by welcoming words from Mayor McCallion and Michael Bator. The President of the University of Toronto, Dr. David Naylor, was the morning's keynote speaker. Many audience members indicated that Dr. Naylor's address was a wonderful start to the day's discussions. The keynote speaker for the afternoon was Peter Fonseca, MPP Mississauga East and Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Health Promotion. Mr. Fonseca outlined some of the key issues and priorities of the newly created Ministry of Health Promotion over the next few years. Many of the issues presented were echoed by the participants during the break-out sessions throughout the day.

At the break-out sessions, participants were divided into groups organized around each of the five goal statements of the Health City Stewardship Centre. The size of the groups ranged from 6 – 19 participants and the sessions were run by volunteer facilitators arranged through the United Way of Peel.

FINDINGS

(Note: A detailed compendium of all of the comments made in each break-out session is also available.)

To begin the discussion, participants were asked their opinion on the concept, vision and goals of the Healthy City Stewardship Centre. The general consensus was that the HCSC was needed and timely, however, many participants made the point that the work of the HCSC is also very complex. There was a collective agreement that the five goals hit the mark. The idea that the HCSC should not become another bureaucracy was applauded, however some voiced the opinion that there would have to be a basic organizational structure established for the HCSC to really achieve its vision and goals.

The discussion groups then focussed in on the five goals – one for each of the five break-out sessions. Below are the top priorities / issues that the participants concluded upon:

GOALS:

All people in Mississauga will value and strive for optimal health.

- get people more active (the use of incentives should be explored),
- make people aware of the HCSC (a full-time coordinator position should be established),
- advocate to other levels of government and agencies for resources (research and apply for funding),
- set achievable targets and be aware of the differing needs in various neighbourhoods.

All people in Mississauga will feel safe in their communities.

- personal safety / crime (violent, unreported, gangs),
- traffic safety (driving behaviours, drunkenness, bicycle safety),
- health (smoking, sexual health (safety aspect)).

All people in Mississauga will have equal access to information and services.

- information must be given to various communities in a way that is understandable and comfortable to the audience,
- engage the community in the conversation from ground up, including having local leaders/champions/advocates to help initiate ideas, relate important health information, etc.,
- align the messages that the community hears (make the messages the same and memorable).

All people in Mississauga will live in and contribute to a clean and sustainable environment.

- clean air, clean water and clean land (ensure the focus is specific),
- the HCSC should have a member organization representing the environment,
- pilot projects should be started and then expanded across the municipality,
- the benefits of a healthy environment must be taught (such as economic benefits through energy conservation, etc.).

All people in Mississauga will feel part of a larger community and will know that they will be cared for in times of need.

- the nurturing of our youth is needed to develop healthy ideas that will carry through to adulthood,
- services and information for newcomers to Mississauga must be better (timely, understandable, friendly).

CONCLUSION

The clear message that came out in the Community Discussion on Health, was that in going forward with initiatives to the people of Mississauga, the HCSC must strive to approach the different communities in a way that is both appealing and comfortable for that particular segment of the population. There was often the comment that the information is not the issue, it is the communication process that is more important.

Overall, there was positive feedback from many who attended. Participants found the discussion worthwhile and enjoyed spending time networking with their colleagues and visiting the beautiful UTM campus. A majority of the participants suggested that they would like to continue with an annual 'Community Discussion on Health' and were looking forward to reading the Healthy Mississauga 2010 Plan when it is available.

Special thanks is extended to the corporate sponsors and staff who contributed greatly to the success of the Community Discussion on Health, including:

- COMPASS Group / Chartwells
- Western GTA Convergence Centre
- University of Toronto at Mississauga
- United Way of Peel and volunteer facilitators
- City of Mississauga
- Office of Peter Fonseca, MPP Mississauga East