

QUALITY OF LIFE REPORT



By Sara Woodruff

10/19/2011

The report includes data from the Quality of Life Network consultations that took place between April-July 2011. Information regarding the key quality of life issues identified is included along with recommendations to address these issues

All comments made in the report are the opinions of the individuals who participated in the focus groups and written questionnaires. Some of the comments have been summarized to protect confidentiality.



MEMBERS 2011

Big Brother and Big Sister Association
Boys and Girls Clubs of Thunder Bay
Canadian Hearing Society
Canadian Mental Health Association
Canadian Red Cross Society
Catholic Family Development Centre
Children's Centre Thunder Bay
Clothing Assistance Mission
CNIB
Community Living Thunder Bay
Elizabeth Fry of Northwestern Ontario
Faye Peterson Transition House
Hospice Northwest
Independent Living Resource Centre

John Howard Society of Thunder Bay
Lakehead Social Planning Council
Northwestern Ontario Women's Centre
Ontario March of Dimes
Our Kids Count
Regional Food Distribution Association
St. John Ambulance
Shkoday Abinojiiwak Obimiwedoan
Thunder Bay & Area Victim Services
Thunder Bay Counselling Centre
Thunder Bay Food Bank
Thunder Bay Literacy Group
United Way of Thunder Bay
Volunteer Thunder Bay!

Acknowledgements

This study could not have been completed without the assistance of Nancy Chamberlain (Thunder Bay Counselling Centre), Joan Williams (Hospice Northwest), Gladys Berringer (Our Kids Count) and Nancy Frost (Canadian Hearing Society). Their commitment to the project has been evident throughout the past year and their guidance ensured that the project remained on track. I would also like to thank Nancy Chamberlain for housing the project at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre and the support she has provided me with during the last year.

I would like to thank all the members of the Quality of Life Network for welcoming me into their agencies and providing input into the project. I would also like to thank the United Way for their support and enthusiasm for the study.

A huge thank you to everyone who participated in the focus groups or written questionnaires, your willingness to share your experiences and opinions has been invaluable to the project.

The Northern Ontario Heritage Fund has made my position as Project Coordinator possible through their Youth Internship and Co-Op program. Thank you for providing me with the opportunities I have gained over the past year.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the design, implementation and analysis of the consultations, I have learned so much from all of you.

Thank you to all of the volunteers, your detailed notes were very helpful during the analysis of the focus groups.

I would also like to thank the staff at Thunder Bay Counselling Centre for making the past year so enjoyable. I am very grateful for all of the help I have been provided with during my time at the agency.

Sara Woodruff

Executive Summary

Quality of Life Network Background

The Quality of Life Network (QOLN) consists of twenty-seven non-profit organizations, funded by the United Way of Thunder Bay's Community Fund. These organizations support children, youth, adults, seniors, families and couples in Thunder Bay in multiple ways, addressing the concerns of food, clothing, housing, mental health and addictions, palliative care, social justice, abuse, trauma, violence against women, financial concerns, Aboriginal issues, etc. The purpose of the Network is to work together to improve the quality of life for people in Thunder Bay by collaborating to provide services, share assets, educate the community and engage the community to finding positive solutions. The QOLN believes in helping to create a community where no one is forgotten, that all individuals need opportunities to attain their chosen quality of life and everyone has the right to develop their full potential. By respecting differences and celebrating diversity there should be equal access to community resources and reliable information. The Network believes it will be more effective through positive collaboration and partnerships, as each agency has something to contribute to the mission.

Project Summary

In the development of the QOLN's strategic path, the identification of key issues affecting the quality of life of consumers of the Network's agencies was set as one of the goals. Through the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation, the Quality of Life Network initiated consultations to determine these issues. The study provided the Network with the opportunity to obtain direction from their consumers as to where to focus their efforts. The Network hired an intern to conduct the consultations and report on the findings. The Network plans to use their collective knowledge and strengths to make a difference in the issues identified through the consultations and use the information obtained through the study to be strategic in their direction as a network of agencies.

Process

A total of 213 participants provided feedback on their quality of life by attending a focus group or by completing a written questionnaire. The participants were from diverse backgrounds and represented a broad range of cultural diversity, income level, age and education. Participants were asked what they like about living in Thunder Bay, what they believe contributes to a high quality of life and the challenges they face in achieving a high quality of life.

Results

An observation of the focus groups and questionnaires is that participants believe overall Thunder Bay is a great place to live. Numerous participants expressed their satisfaction with the pace of life in the community and the opportunities to enjoy the natural environment. Thunder Bay was often described as being a supportive community with friendly, helpful people. Participants also expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the services provided by the agencies in the Network.

Participants also acknowledged a number of areas where improvements could be made to enhance their quality of life. Many participants identified having a low income which made it difficult to provide the necessities of life. The stress of providing for basic needs on a limited income causes much hardship and prevents an individual from participating in activities that could potentially contribute to a higher quality of life. Participants also identified barriers in the community that prevent equal access to services and opportunities. People reported facing discrimination and stigma due to poverty, mental illness, race, criminal background, having a disability and physical appearance. For these reasons, the issues most identified as negatively impacting someone's quality of life in our community are:

- a) Poverty
- b) Limitations to access based upon personal circumstances

Recommendations

Participants provided 130 suggestions they believe would help improve their quality of life. The recommendations stress the importance of providing resources to help people maintain independent lives and also the importance of respecting individual differences and needs. Considering the suggestions put forward by participants and the identified issues, the following recommendations are being proposed to the Network:

1. The consultation participants generated over 100 possible solutions to the identified top issues. It is recommended that the Quality of Life Network take these suggestions into consideration when moving forward and developing a plan for collaboration and partnerships.
2. The Quality of Life Network held a strategic planning session on August 31st to move forward its work and discuss preliminary findings. It would be beneficial for the Quality of Life Network to continue the work begun during this meeting on promoting respect and demonstrating respectful service.
3. The Quality of Life Network should embrace opportunities for dialogue and discussion with community partners regarding barriers to inclusion that go

beyond physical barriers. It is recommended that the Network inventory strategies that address accessibility accommodations that goes beyond the requirements of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act. This report could include service accommodations in areas including hours of operation, wait times, eligibility requirements, volunteer restrictions, food, language, communication, culture, interpreting services and subsidies for transportation and child care, together with values and the meaning behind organizations mission, creating welcoming environments.

4. There are many initiatives in our community that could provide opportunities for collaboration. It is recommended that the Network work with other community alliances/coalitions/networks and look for opportunities to advocate for improvements in the identified quality of life issues. Together the work can be focussed and successful. The Network should consider the recommendations of other community studies when addressing the identified issues.
5. Barriers to employment can create both financial struggles and feelings of low self-worth. It is recommended that the Network communicate success stories of individuals who have overcome barriers or stigma to potential employers. Education to employers may assist them in challenging their own philosophies regarding hiring practices, volunteer policies and inclusion.
6. Needed services may not be utilized due to a lack of public awareness. It is recommended that the Network look into the barriers that prevent access to this information and look for opportunities to provide education and promote the available resources that provide information on services.
7. It is recommended that the Network develop a communication strategy that broadly communicates findings to appropriate service providers and systems such as, LHIN, Ontario Works, ODSP, Housing, justice system.