

# MEDIA RELEASE



## \$2.4 Million in new funds to support vulnerable youth

**November 22, 2011 – Calgary, AB-** It's a sobering statistic that more than 25,000 youth in Calgary are considered vulnerable or at risk of experiencing vulnerability, and United Way of Calgary and Area along with its community partners are responding to the need to provide better supports to this group.

Since the release of United Way's report *Towards Resiliency of Vulnerable Youth*, many actions have been taken, including a new strategy that was launched in September 2011. The new Vulnerable Youth Strategy allocates an additional \$2.4 M, over and above existing supports, into programs which will strengthen positive non-professional relationships among youth.

"Youth in our city are facing significant and complex challenges as they transition into adulthood," shares Ruth Ramsden-Wood, President of United Way of Calgary and Area. "The goal of this new strategy is to build better social capital among youth. We believe if they have stronger relationships with family and friends it will prevent them from slipping through the cracks into a life of crime and/or poverty."

The first phase of the strategy focuses on family connections and reconnections while the second phase is on key mentoring relationships outside the social circles of vulnerable youths. "Research in this area has been sparse. United Way is taking innovative ideas and working with local community agencies and stakeholders, to enhance and strengthen the positive social networks of vulnerable youth," adds Ramsden-Wood. "With the right supports and a coordinated response, we believe that vulnerable youth can successfully transition into adulthood."

Also on hand was Bruce Sawdon, Principal of Discovering Choices, who reflected on the value of community-based solutions and the role Discovering Choices plays in providing personal and career counseling to re-engage youth in education. "We are pleased to support the efforts of United Way. Together we are strengthening children and families and helping youth to make healthy choices, maintain positive behaviours and achieve success in their lives."

Tessa Steadman shared her inspirational story at this morning's event about how, with help from Burns Memorial Fund, a foundation supported by United Way, she was able to turn her life around, become re-engaged in school and graduate high school. Having lived a turbulent childhood, Steadman recalls being bounced around from school to school, days where she went hungry and times where she never thought she would graduate. "It was because of the supports I received from the community that, for the first time, I believed I could go to college and actually live a better life."

United Way is currently working with Alberta Education and Immigration (now Human Services) towards the development of a Youth Employment Strategy. United Way will also be conducting further research around low-income families to inform future strategies on the impact of familial situations on youth.

For stories and additional information, please visit [www.calgaryunitedway.org/vulnerableyouth](http://www.calgaryunitedway.org/vulnerableyouth)

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