



For Immediate Release  
November 6, 2014

## AUTONOMY, RELATEDNESS AND COMPETENCY CRITICAL TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

### YMCA and United Way release new review

**TORONTO – November 6** – Today the YMCA of Greater Toronto, in partnership with United Way Toronto, released findings from “Youth that Thrive”, a literature review focused on the developmental needs of youth 12 to 25 years old.

Findings point to key elements that are essential for our young people to succeed which include:

<i><b>What youth need to thrive</b></i>	<i><b>Examples of support</b></i>
<b>Autonomy</b> - having a voice in determining one’s choices, and acting upon one’s personal interests or values.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Encourage teens to make decisions within the program</li> <li>- Let youth manage projects, providing assistance as needed</li> </ul>
<b>Relatedness</b> – a sense of belonging and connection with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide inclusive programs</li> <li>- Offer consistent, significant adult-youth relationships</li> </ul>
<b>Competence</b> – having the skills to effectively achieve desired goals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Offer skill-building opportunities that include various emotional, social and cultural factors.</li> </ul>

The report was prepared by the Students Commission of Canada and the Social Program Evaluation Group at Queen’s University, and is based on a review of the latest academic research combined with interviews of key YMCA and United Way staff. It builds on the work of both organizations to ensure that their youth programming is informed by the most up-to-date research. The findings will help the YMCA and United Way to improve programs for youth.

In particular, the YMCA will use these findings to further develop their own signature youth programs, including Teen Nights, Youth Leadership Development and Newcomer Youth Leadership Development programs – accessed by over 16,000 young people



across the Greater Toronto Area. Both the YMCA and United Way will lead conversations around community programming for young people by sharing the report's findings with decision makers, program designers and other community partners in the new year.

“This research is one of the ways that the YMCA of Greater Toronto is investing in improving the health of children, teens and young adults,” said Dr. Michael Hall, Vice President, Program Research and Development, YMCA of Greater Toronto. “Our goal is to ensure that our programs have the greatest possible social impact for youth in the GTA.

The report echoes the research of child psychiatrist and adolescent development expert Dr. Jean Clinton, Associate Clinical Professor of psychiatry and behavioural neurosciences at McMaster University, who praises the YMCA and United Way for taking a deeper look into youth services. Clinton says some key brain functions aren't fully developed until youth reach approximately 24 years old, and stresses the need for programming for youth with this development in mind.

“As a teen, life is complicated. A lot of things in your life aren't under your control. You're being pushed and pulled in different directions even as you transition into adulthood, and all that stress, if not buffered, can have a negative effect on the brain,” said Clinton. “But when you enact the key elements of this strategy -- by supporting teens and giving them a chance to make decisions, to build relationships and have access to proper mentors, to learn new skills -- you buffer that stress, build skills and competence which supports youth in their path to success”

United Way will also use this information to support its work with young people and ensure they have the supports they need to succeed in the long-term – a key part of their strategic plan.

“We are proud to partner with the YMCA of Greater Toronto on our shared commitment to investing in the development of our young people,” said Susan McIsaac, President and CEO, United Way Toronto. “We identified a need for a consistent framework and evaluation process for youth programs and we worked together to find some of the most effective best practices that we could share.”

Both the YMCA and United Way plan to promote the findings through videos, case studies and visual aids at future workshops and launch events.



### **About the YMCA of Greater Toronto**

For more than 160 years, the YMCA of Greater Toronto has been providing leadership and working with partners to solve complex social problems to create measurable outcomes that strengthen the social health of our communities. As a charity, the YMCA offers a variety of programs responding to the needs of the community, including education and training, employment and immigrant services, family and youth services, health and fitness programs, child care and camps. Serving the population of the City of Toronto and the regional municipalities of Durham, Peel, York, and Halton plus Dufferin County, last year the YMCA connected with more than 500,000 people across 375 locations. [www.ymcagta.org](http://www.ymcagta.org)

### **About United Way**

United Way Toronto is a charity dedicated to creating opportunities for a better life for everyone. Working in partnership with others, we mobilize people and resources to support a network of agencies that help people when they need it most. United Way also addresses the root causes of social problems, working to change community conditions for the better over the long term. For more information, visit [www.unitedwaytoronto.com](http://www.unitedwaytoronto.com).

-30-

### **Media Contacts:**

#### **Amie Zimon, YMCA Greater Toronto**

Cell: 647-624-4565

Email: [amie.zimon@ymcagta.org](mailto:amie.zimon@ymcagta.org)

#### **Michelle Yao, United Way Toronto**

Cell: 416-557-8508

Email: [myao@uwgt.org](mailto:myao@uwgt.org)