

The Hour

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United Way focuses on expanding

◆ **REGION** — National consultants will work with the local United Way over the next 14 months on further developing its role in the community.

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The United Way of Norwalk & Wilton has been selected to participate in a community development initiative called Impact Transformation Process, a pilot program in collaboration with the United Way of America.

One of 10 United Ways in the country to be selected for the program, the United Way of Norwalk & Wilton will be working with the national organization to become more effective in the community.

"In effect, we're working to transform United Way of Norwalk & Wilton to an organization that will have an expanded community role over and above its traditional role as a fund-raiser," Betty A. Karkut, chairwoman of United Way's board of directors, said in a recent press release.

A four-day workshop designed to eval-

uate the current status of the local organization is scheduled for July 28-31 at the Norwalk United Way office.

National consultants will continue to work with the United Way of Norwalk & Wilton over the next 14 months to develop goals and strategies for moving beyond the role they currently fill as a community fund-raising organization.

David R. Kennedy, president and CEO of the local United Way, explains that being chosen to participate in the program is the first step in the process of reworking the focus of the Norwalk & Wilton United Way.

Currently the local United Way provides some funding for 65 agencies and programs. But because each agency or program only receives a small percentage of their total funding from United Way, it is difficult to identify what impact the United Way really has.

"We're only funding 3 percent of the total dollar amount, so it is difficult to assess our impact," said Kennedy. "Our sense is that we could be doing more."

According to Kennedy, one of the Norwalk & Wilton United Way's goals is to develop a strong business plan that will allow them to move from fund raising to making an impact on specific community issues. Some of the issues the

organization may focus on include preparing young children to be successful in school, assisting older adults to remain safe and secure in their homes, and helping the homeless and hungry have productive lives.

"We're reworking ourselves to bring about greater change in the community," said Kennedy. "How we're going to do that, I'm not sure yet."

Rich Johnson, director of Community Impact at the United Way in Norwalk & Wilton, agreed that the process of identifying key community issues is just beginning.

The United Way has scheduled meetings with many of the agencies they currently fund, to discuss what issues the agencies deem relevant. They also want to explore how these agencies might provide in-depth input later on, said Johnson.

During the first workshop later this month, United Way of America consultants will help the Norwalk & Wilton United Way identify approaches that worked for the first United Ways to pilot ITP in 2002, said Johnson. Ultimately, the goal of United Way in Norwalk & Wilton is to restructure its focus to meet the national organization's objective of "making measurable impact in every

community."

"The United Way of Norwalk & Wilton is doing the United Way movement and the nation a great service by stepping up to help lead the way in our transformation," said Brian Gallagher, president and CEO of United Way of America, in a press release.

"United Way of Norwalk & Wilton's work on ITP will help change how communities work together when addressing their needs. Bringing community stakeholders together — businesses, neighborhoods, governments, nonprofits — and having them look at key issues, develop strategies to address those issues and move forward to make the changes that will improve lives. That's what United Way is about."

The United Way has been actively involved in supporting communities for more than 100 years. According to United Way of America, there are 1,400 community-based United Way organizations, and each is independent, separately incorporated, and governed by local volunteers. Because each United Way is locally governed, the 10 agencies chosen for the pilot program dealt with the restructuring process differently, focusing on issues unique to their communities.