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United Way study lists community's critical needs

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DOWNTOWN - Fewer minors in Greater Cincinnati and Northern Kentucky are abusing drugs and alcohol, and enrollment at local colleges and universities is growing.

But more people are uninsured or don't have regular access to health care, and juvenile crime is on the increase.

Those are just a few of the challenges and opportunities presented by the United Way of Greater Cincinnati Tuesday in its second State of the Community report, available at www.uwgc.org.

United Way leaders presented the report Tuesday. At the same time, business and civic leaders announced plans to write a "shared regional civic agenda." Chamber president Ellen van der Horst said she hoped it would unify all sectors of the community and allow them to address the region's critical issues.

The agenda plan would follow the six focus areas of Northern Kentucky's Vision 2015 plan adopted earlier this year: Competitive economy, educational excellence, livable communities, urban renaissance, effective governance and regional stewardship. That effort took months and hundreds of volunteers and produced a report that can be found at www.vision2015.org.

Organizations including the United Way, the chamber, the Greater Cincinnati Foundation, the Urban League of Greater Cincinnati and Vision 2015 will collaborate on the new plan.

Ron Wright, president of Cincinnati State Technical and Community College, pointed out that no elected officials were at the press conference to endorse the idea, although the idea would certainly need their support, if not funding.

The State of the Community Report, which the United Way first issued two years ago, will provide fodder for the study. Leaders said nine of the 22 indicators with comparable local and national data are worse than the national average. Those categories include infant mortality rate, the percent of adults smoking, the percent of the work force age 20 to 35, and non-violent crime.

Half of the 22 indicators see Greater Cincinnati at or above national averages, including per capita income, the percent of population in poverty, commuting time and violent crime.

In 2004, Greater Cincinnati was at or above national averages in two-thirds of the categories, with many of the same trends.

Local data is spotty for some of the indicators, particularly those measuring quality of life. For example, in race relations, Greater Cincinnati is more racially segregated than the U.S. as a whole, but housing segregation is declining in many parts of the region, the report said.

"We continue to be held back by the lack of a valid, reliable and commonly agreed-upon measure of race relations in our community," the report concluded.

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