

# CHARITY AWARDS

A JOINT VENTURE WITH THE VOLUNTARY SECTOR REPORTING AWARDS



Clockwise, from top left: Deryck Williams, left, a partner and national leader for charity and not-for-profit organizations at Grant Thornton, presents the VSRA Total Revenues over \$10-million award to Vita Community Living Services; George Boland, left, associate director of the CPA-Queen's Centre for Governance, presents Hospice King Aurora with the VSRA Ontario Total Revenues up to \$1-million prize; Dr. David Saunders, right, dean of the Queen's School of Business, presents the VSRA National Organizations award to YOU CAN; Rod Barr, left, president and CEO of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Ontario, presents the VSRA Internal Organization award to Canadian Feed The Children; Deryck Williams of Grant Thornton, left, presents the VSRA Ontario Total Revenues from over \$1-million to \$10-million award to United Way Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox & Addington.

## Honouring transparency

Queen's School of Business and CPA-Ontario announce the Voluntary Sector Reporting Awards winners

With charitable donors asking more questions than ever about how their dollars are spent, it's vital that non-profit organizations be able to provide simple yet comprehensive answers.

For the past six years, the Voluntary Sector Reporting Awards (VSRAs) have helped more than 400 non-profits, most of them in Ontario, get better at telling the public what they do and exactly how much it costs to go about their jobs.

The awards, organized by the CPA-Queen's Centre for Governance, were conceived as "an educational program more than a competition," says director Steve Salterio. Less than a decade ago, most non-profits didn't disclose financials except on request or would send interested parties to the Canada Revenue Agency website, he says. Today, however, it is rare to see a

group that doesn't have an accountability statement. "We've tried to lead by the power of positive example."

One organization that has participated in the VSRAs since the beginning and is being honoured this year, not just as a winner but as an exemplar, is Hospice King-Aurora, which has just three employees and receives 75% of its funding from donations. It is located in Aurora, Ont., just north of Toronto.

"We received amazing feedback, which is why we kept going," says director of programs Heidi Bonner, who notes the in-depth critiques from the judges allowed the hospice to improve its annual report year after year. "It shows to those raising money on our behalf that we are well-run and transparent, which is a huge thing. With so many charities and good causes, it does give us a bit of an edge."

When the VSRAs opened up in 2013 to include not just organizations headquartered in Ontario but national and international charities with a presence in Ontario, Edmonton-based YouCan became eligible to enter for the first time. Its mission is to equip youth to engage and inspire others to peacefully resolve conflicts

and develop healthy relationships in their communities. Almost all the YouCan staff is under 30. They wanted to make a "pre-emptive move" to show funders and donors that they were as serious about accountability and transparency as organizations that might

have more seasoned staff and boards, says chief executive officer Dave Farthing. "Youth is not always given the same credibility," he says. "We felt we'd been making a lot of progress with auditors and annual reports so we thought we'd take the challenge." Thanks to these efforts, YouCan won.

For Canadian Feed The Children, winner in the international category, entering the VSRAs is part of the organization's commitment to best practices. "We wanted to put our annual report under a microscope," says Toronto-based executive director Debra Kerby.

Canadian Feed The Children has come a long way from the days when its annual report was more like a pamphlet, she says. "It's a thrill to receive the award because the board and staff work so hard. And it also means a lot to our donors. If you want to make a difference for children that lasts, this reports helps (our organization's) thinking come to life."

While putting together the comprehensive financial statements and accessible information the VSRAs requires demands considerable effort, participants say it is worth the effort. "We work on it as a team, spend a lot of time and include lots of pictures that really reflect who we are and the heart of our business," says Kim Lenihan, CEO of Vita Community Living Services, an Ontario winner that operates in Toronto and York Region.

She says one of the VSRA sponsors said to her at the awards luncheon that Vita's annual report was "so transparent that anyone reading it would feel comfortable giving because you can tell who you are, what you do."

Lenihan understands donors and funders want to know where their money has been put to work. "Did we open new homes? Did we appraise our staff? The public wants to know what's happening with their money."

George Boland, associate director of the CPA-Queen's Centre for Governance, says the best annual reports don't just explain financials, including how much is spent on fundraising versus programs. They also create a "sense of community with stakeholders. They very much explain, 'This is who we are and this is where we work in the community.'"

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