

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

April 10, 2003

To: Community Services Committee
From: Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services
Subject: Final Report for Toronto Response for Youth (TRY)

Purpose:

The purpose of this report is to update members of City Council on the successful completion of the Toronto Response for Youth (TRY) project.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial impacts emerging from this report. The Toronto Response for Youth project was funded by Human Resources Development Canada.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that:

- (1) the City provide advice and technical support to MENTORS (Muslim Educators Network and Outreach Services) in the development of future TRY projects;
- (2) this report to be forwarded to the Ministry of Human Resources Development Canada; and
- (3) the appropriate City Officials be authorized and directed to take the necessary action to give effect thereto.

Background:

At its meeting of October 2, 3, and 4, 2001, City Council adopted a motion authorizing the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to enter into an agreement with Human Resources Development Canada for “the provision of a youth peer program to mitigate hate related activities.” The motion came in response to concerns about an significant increase in

the number of incidents of hate and racism directed against members of Toronto's Muslim communities following the events in the United States on September 11, 2001.

Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) approved a project proposal prepared by City staff and a reference team comprised of community representatives, staff from the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board, Muslim Educational Network Training and Outreach Services (MENTORS) and members of the Toronto Youth Cabinet in January 2002. Funding of \$291,600.00 was authorized for the project named Toronto Response for Youth (TRY). It was proposed that the project use a peer leader model to prepare a group of Muslim and non-Muslim youth to assist other young people deal with issues associated with Islamophobia—the fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents. As well as building youth leadership, employment and life-skills, the project was intended to serve as a model that other communities could adopt.

The format and content of the project were developed during the winter by staff from the Social Development and Administration Division and the CAO's office in partnership with Muslim Educational Network Training and Outreach Services (MENTORS) and Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA) 'Say No To Hate Program'. Their work was guided by a project reference group composed of representatives from the Toronto District School Board, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, Afghan Women's Organization, Jaffari Youth, Canadian Arab Youth Association and the Toronto Youth Cabinet as well as City staff. Working groups to deal with curriculum development and project evaluation were also established. The project goals were identified as:

- (1) providing at-risk Muslim and non-Muslim youth with employment and life-skills;
- (2) reducing the number of hate motivated incidents; and
- (3) to create a template for program replication.

Comments:

The need for TRY was borne out by crime statistics released in the spring of 2002 by the Toronto Police Service which revealed that hate crimes in Toronto had more than doubled after the attacks of September 11. The largest rise was in hate crimes against Muslims, which increased from one incident reported in 2000 to 57 incidents reported in 2001.

A Project Co-ordinator and Life Skills Counselor were hired to develop and deliver the TRY project. Both project and other city staff established contacts with community networks and ethno-racial organizations MENTORS, Arab Canadian Association, Jaffari Islamic Youth, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, Somalian Women's Immigrant Association, Somali Youth Association of Toronto, Cross Edge Community Network, Midaynta, Afghan Women's Association, Islamic Chaplaincy Services as well as facilitated public information meetings to recruit at-risk youth for the 17 peer leader positions in the project. The eligibility criteria for the TRY peer leaders included the following: must be between the ages of 16 and 24, unemployed and out of school and representative of the cultural diversity of youth in communities facing hate and hate related incidents (with an emphasis on Muslim youth in response to the backlash of 9-11).

On April 15, 2002, 17 Muslim and non-Muslim youth started as peer leaders in the TRY project. Peer leaders were paid a weekly stipend and received a completion bonus at the end of the project.

The first phase of the TRY project was devoted to supporting the peer leaders in learning about the issues related to Islamophobia and racism and developing the requisite facilitation skills to deliver public awareness workshops on these issues. In addition to this, the peer leaders were provided with employment assessment and assisted with their personal vocational plan through a partnership with the Youth Employment Toronto program, also delivered by the city.

During the first phase of the program a variety of educators and facilitators from community-based organizations worked with TRY staff to develop and deliver a well-rounded curriculum to train and support the peer leaders. In the second phase of the project, peer leaders worked on developing the content for workshops sessions on identifying and countering Islamophobia and other forms of racism.

Between June 17 and October 28, TRY presented workshops to various community groups and young people throughout the city. Working in teams, the peer leaders led discussion sessions with young people at Toronto District Schools, Community centres, Parks and Recreation facilities, Youth Skills Zone, Toronto Youth Job Corp sites and other venues. Peer leaders presented over 50 workshops, and engaged over 600 participants, including World Youth Day pilgrims.

During the final phase of the TRY project, which concluded on November 26, 2002, the peer leaders finalized their plans to reach their educational and employment goals with the support of the YET (Youth Employment Workers).

The post-program placement outcome met the target set by the HRDC Agreement with 80 percent of the peer leaders employed or engaged in further education within three months after the project's completion. (See attached report).

One of the initial goals of the TRY project was to create a template for program replication. The lead community partner in the development of the TRY project, MENTORS has initiated the development of a project proposal for a second TRY program. Given the success of the TRY project it is recommended that the City of Toronto endorse community initiatives to replicate the TRY model. City staff will provide advice and technical support to the MENTORS project initiative with the goal of accessing Human Resources Development Canada support for a community delivered TRY project.

Conclusions:

The Toronto Response for Youth has proven to be a successful peer leader model, accomplishing all goals and objectives established in the Agreement with HRDC.

Built on a foundation of city-community partnerships, TRY was a unique city-run project. It proved to be an effective tool for developing awareness about Islamophobia and other forms of racism among both the peer leaders and the young people who participated in the workshops they led. The peer leader model demonstrated the positive impact that youth can have on their communities. In addition, TRY provided a group of at-risk youth with important leadership, employment and life-skills, which led to impressive post-program outcomes for the peer leaders. TRY has proven to be a innovative peer leadership model that can be adapted by other communities in dealing with issues of racism and discrimination.

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Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services

List of Attachments:

Report on Project Outcomes



Report on Project Outcomes

Prepared by the
TRY Evaluation Committee

March 2003

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Appendix A

1. Introduction

In October 2001, City Council adopted a motion authorizing the Commissioner of Community and Neighbourhood Services to enter into an agreement with Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) for the provision of a youth peer program to mitigate hate related activities. The motion came in response to concerns about a significant increase in the number of incidents of hate and racism directed against members of Toronto's Muslim communities following the events of September 11, 2001.

A project proposal prepared by City staff and a reference team comprised of community representatives was approved by HRDC in January 2002. Funding of \$291,600 was authorized for the project, which was named Toronto Response for Youth (TRY). The project proposed to use a peer leader model to prepare a group of Muslim and non-Muslim youth to assist other young people deal with issues associated with Islamophobia—the fear or hatred of Islam and its adherents. As well as building youth leadership, employment and life-skills, the project was intended to serve as a model that other communities could adopt.

The project goals included:

- (1) providing at-risk Muslim and non-Muslim youth with employment and life-skills
- (2) providing Toronto youth with strategies and tools to address hate motivated incidents
- (3) developing a program model that can be applied to future programs

The need for TRY was reinforced by crime statistics released in the spring of 2002 by the Toronto Police Service, which reported that hate crimes in Toronto had more than doubled since the events of September 11. The largest rise was in hate crimes against Muslims, which increased from one reported incident in 2000 to 57 incidents in 2001.

Two staff were hired to run TRY—a coordinator and a life skills counselor. Participants were recruited to the project by Youth Employment Toronto workers and through community networks, ethno-racial organizations and public information meetings. To be eligible, youth had to be between the ages of 16 and 24, unemployed and out of school. On April 15, 2002, the thirty-week project commenced with eighteen participants.

The following report examines the project's success in achieving its goals and identifies some issues that impacted on its performance. The evaluation was undertaken by a committee comprised of TRY project staff and staff from the Social Development and Administration Division of the Community and Neighborhood Services Department. The committee met over the course of the project to review performance and provide feedback.

The evaluation committee identified four distinct project components for review: (1) project organization and governance; (2) participant development; (3) curriculum, peer leader training and workshop development; and (4) delivery of anti-Islamophobia workshops. In each area, the committee identified a number of key outcomes and suggested appropriate evaluation tools.

Evaluation of the TRY project was as inclusive as possible. Efforts were made to ensure all stakeholders an opportunity for input, either through focus groups, individual interviews and, in the case of workshop participants, an evaluation questionnaire. Key stakeholder groups included: peer leaders, project staff, community agencies concerned with Islamic issues and anti-racism, and workshop attendees.

2. Project Organization and Governance

A. Overview

From its inception, TRY relied on building partnerships with community agencies and City departments concerned with youth, diversity, and racism. The range of productive partnerships that emerged was key to the project's success -- from the preliminary proposal writing through implementation and program wrap-up.

TRY had especially strong links with various Muslim community in Toronto and a number of groups from this community were involved from the outset in planning and designing the project. An advisory committee including the Toronto Catholic and Toronto District School Boards, Toronto Youth Cabinet, Afghan Women's Organization, Muslim Education Network of Outreach Services (MENTORS), the Canadian Arab Youth Organization and City staff developed the final project model. As TRY became operational, they were joined by representatives of other groups to comprise a Project Reference Group (PRG), which met monthly to discuss issues related to the performance and provide ongoing advice concerning project implementation.

The PRG ensured that the project both supported and was accountable to a larger community and played a critical role in outreach to the Muslim communities, developing suitable curriculum and providing ongoing support to peers throughout the project. PRG membership included representation from the following groups:

- Toronto District School Board
- Toronto Catholic School Board
- Jaffari Islamic Youth
- Canadian Youth Arab Foundation
- City of Toronto Diversity Management and Civic Engagement Division
- City of Toronto Public Health
- City of Toronto Parks and Recreation
- MENTORS
- City of Toronto Social Development and Administration Division
- Toronto Youth Cabinet
- City of Toronto Social Services

In their evaluation, PRG members were positive about their participation in the project and unanimous in their observation that TRY had succeeded in meeting its intended goals. PRG members felt that they had sufficient opportunity to contribute to the shaping and direction of the project although some felt that their concerns were sometimes not heard or acted upon.

PRG members recommended that more resources and staff be allocated for future projects. They also suggest changes including increased lead-time for community outreach, better integration of community partnerships and a closer working relationship with the TDSB.

Overall management of the project was the responsibility of staff from the Social Development and Administration Division Community Resources Unit. While responsible for the oversight of project staff, administration and coordination of partnerships, other City departments played significant roles in making the project work. Interdepartmental participation increased the depth of understanding about the issues of youth, anti-racism and Islamophobia and enabled TRY to

benefit from a deep pool of expertise and experience. City Departments contributing to TRY included:

- Public Health, which provided expertise and staff support to the pre-project advisory process and the PRG;
- Parks and Recreation, whose involvement extended from the pre-project advisory process to hosting workshops and providing Peers with valuable entry-level jobs;
- Diversity Management and Civic Engagement, which was instrumental in the pre-project advisory process that helped to develop the model and the training curriculum;
- Toronto Social Services, which provided valuable insight and opportunities for practice workshops.
- Youth Employment Toronto, which played a role in all phases of the program from referral to post program follow-up Their participant extended TRY's ability to provide comprehensive support to the peers;
- Social Policy Analysis and Research section of CNS, which provided support in project evaluation.

B. Organizational and Governance Outcomes

TRY succeeded in building constructive partnerships and community networks that will be instrumental in future initiatives as follows:

- Development of constructive partnerships with Muslim communities in Toronto
- Development of a network of agencies concerned with Anti-Islamophobia action
- Development of coordinated approach for City departments
- Development of effective liaison with TDSB

3. Participant Development

A. Overview

The TRY project approach was based on a program model that HRDC and the City has utilized for addressing the employment, life skills and educational development of at-risk youth in general. HRDC defines at-risk youth as those with limited education and employment skills, as well as those from communities vulnerable to racism, economic deprivation and institutional barriers.

The model recognizes the importance of providing youth with supports to enable them to resolve personal issues and to develop realistic employment/education strategies. It also seeks to provide them with a set of skills and experiences that will enhance their ability to achieve personal and work related goals. Over the years, the city has used this approach with a variety of "at-risk youth" groups in its Toronto Youth Job Corp and in Youth Employment Toronto (YET) programs. It has also undertaken more targeted programs with special needs groups including youth living rough and engaging in squeegee activity.

The TRY project represents a new and innovative application of the program design. Conceived as a response to hate incidents and anti-Islamic attitudes in Toronto in the aftermath of the of September 11. The TRY model addresses personal and employment development as well as providing public, anti-racism education of youth in the broader Toronto community.

Consistent with this focus, youth were recruited to participate in the program from Toronto's Muslim communities. Interested youth were interviewed by YET workers at agencies, institutions and community locales where they were likely to congregate. In addition, MENTORS and other agencies serving Muslim youth in Toronto referred a number of youth to the project.

At commencement, 18 youth were enrolled in the project. Of these, 16 ultimately completed the program, including 7 females and 9 males. Participants were predominantly Muslim, and were out of school and unemployed. All participants brought to the project personal experiences of discrimination in general and a strong sensitivity about the concerns of Toronto Muslims in particular. While the large representation of Muslim participants worked to the benefit of the project, some evaluation participants suggested that future programs include broader, more culturally diverse youth participation.

Assessing the individual development of participants was an ongoing activity of the project. The project staff oversaw this with the assistance of YET workers. Staff used a case management approach to evaluate individual progress in setting goals and developing effective work-related skills.

The contribution of YET to the project's success cannot be overstated. Their involvement began with the initial screening interview for youth applying to participate in TRY and continued throughout. YET staff provided ongoing vocational assessment, assisted participants in developing their employment/education action plans and provided them with links to resources needed in achieving their individual plans.

The first six weeks of the project were devoted to skill building, employment assessment and identifying individual needs and issues for each peer leader trainee. Their training and development was aided by the participation of a number of educators/facilitators from the community, who delivered training modules on the themes of conflict resolution, workshop organization, group facilitation and presentation skills, among others.

In the final month, project participants finalized their personal action plans regarding future employment/educational goals. Activities included employment research, resume preparation, registration with various youth employment services, as well as completing applications to secondary and post-secondary educational programs. Progress in implementing these action plans formed the basis for follow-up undertaken by YET workers three months after the project ended.

B. Participant Development Outcomes

From the point of view of individual development TRY succeeded in meeting all targets identified in its contract with HRDC. Key outcomes related to individual participant development included:

Sixteen of Eighteen peer leaders completed the program exceeding the target number of 15:

- 6 youth enrolled in a post-secondary program after program completion. Three of these youth were also employed part-time.
- 2 youth returned to school to obtain their high school diploma
- 4 youth found employment
- 2 youth are actively involved in a job search and receiving support from the YET worker.

- 1 youth is pursuing personal goals rather than vocational goals at this time
- 1 youth moved out of the country and no follow-up information is available.

4. Curriculum, Peer Leader Training and Workshop Development

A. Overview:

Workshop development and peer leader training took place over a period of five weeks. This phase of the project focused on developing content for the anti-Islamophobia workshops and leadership and communication skills for project participants

The curriculum committee of the Project Reference Group took a leading role in planning the training and overseeing its implementation. Project staff and representatives from two community agencies, MENTORS and Say No to Hate (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians), comprised the committee. The training curriculum focused on conceptual knowledge concerning racism and Islamophobic behaviour as well as techniques for designing and presenting workshops. While the curriculum was generally considered to be effective, feedback from staff and curriculum committee members suggested that the program would benefit from more content related to building peer leader facilitation skills.

A variety of individuals from the wider community worked with project staff to train and support participants. Training included a series of seminar discussions on such topics as:

- building inclusive societies
- anti-bias/anti-oppression techniques
- being a role model and mentoring.

This was an intensive period for participants, who profited from the opportunity to expand their knowledge and develop new perspectives.

In their evaluation, participants indicated a general satisfaction with the curriculum. However, some felt that more time should have been devoted to improving research skills and to discussion of a number of contentious but important issues. They suggested that future programs allow participants a larger role in defining training themes and that facilitators be more diverse and reflective of the community at large.

Originally, the project proposed to develop a single workshop presentation. Participants, however, felt strongly that the complexity of the issue called for a series of presentations, each examining a different aspect of Muslim experience and Islamophobic behaviour. Agencies and sites in the community that hosted workshops were able to choose one or more presentations suited to their particular group. Each of the presentations included content about strategies and techniques for dealing with hate incidents in the community.

Defining presentation themes was the result of group discussions among participants. These were impassioned and engaging. The strong personal identification that peer leaders had with the content sparked many heated and contentious discussions as they tried to define the scope of the issue and agree on common messages. In the process, participants had the opportunity to articulate their experiences and hear those of others. Project staff that facilitated these discussions reported that participants broadened their knowledge and skills, growing

significantly through the process. Many participants showed marked improvement in their ability to communicate effectively and learned to take leadership roles.

Peer leaders ultimately agreed on a range of themes and key messages for workshop presentations. Working in smaller groups, participants developed six distinct presentations. During their development, presentations were pre-tested with City staff and individuals from various community groups, who provided constructive feedback that led to appropriate revisions. Peer leaders also met with the project evaluation committee, who worked with them to ensure that the final content optimally addressed all of TRY's intended public education goals.

Development of final workshop presentations was a challenging phase for the project. More time was spent reaching consensus on format and content than was originally anticipated. This was due in part to the desire of peer leaders to create a larger number of workshops reflecting the diversity of Islamic culture and history. While this resulted in more engaging presentations and a richer experience for participants, accommodating these changes created new issues for the project. The process of content development would have been more focused and straightforward if the agreed upon workshop format and outcomes in the program design had been more effectively communicated to participants.

B. Curriculum, Training and Workshop Development Outcomes

The workshop development phase of the project achieved the following:

- Development of training curriculum
- Development of a peer leader training manual
- Development of 6 workshop presentations
- Development of effective organization and facilitation skills for peer leaders

5. Delivery of Anti-Islamophobia Workshops

A. Overview

The delivery of anti-Islamophobia workshops was conceived as an effective way to directly engage large numbers of youth around this issue. Workshop content was designed with the explicit intent of facilitating greater sensitivity to the experience of Muslim communities in Toronto and helping participants develop better approaches to deal with hate behavior in their own communities.

TRY offered a series of six different workshops. All included components relating to conflict resolution and techniques for responding to hate crimes. Community agencies were free to choose the presentation most suitable to their particular membership or clientele. Workshop presentations included the following:

- Media Coverage: Representations of Islam and Muslims before and after September 11
- September 11 Debriefing: Muslim people speak out about their experiences and thoughts on September 11
- History of Islamophobia: How Islam has been created as 'Savage Other'.
- Linking/exploring Racism to other 'isms'

- Islamic Contribution to Western Civilization
- Stories of Youth Activism: Youth of colour responding to Islamophobia, racism, sexism and human rights locally and globally.

Workshops were presented at schools, community agencies and other institutions. Workshops were scheduled at the request of individual's or agencies. As well, TRY attempted to develop appropriate locations through outreach with various groups, including the Toronto District School Board. In total, more than 50 workshops were held and more than 600 individuals participated.

B. Anti-Islamophia Workshop Outcomes

Evaluation of workshop presentations was based on a questionnaire completed by the audience at the end of each session. The questionnaire asked individuals about their personal characteristics, experience with hate crimes and the impact of the presentation on their attitudes and perceptions. 529 attendees completed a questionnaire. Based on the feedback, it is evident that TRY succeeded in delivering its message.

Who Attended TRY Workshops?

- 61% were female and 39% male
- 70% were age 19 and under
- 19% were age 25 and above
- 46% identified themselves as visible minority groups
- 40% were born outside Canada
- The largest number of foreign born were from the Caribbean, South Asia and China
- 65% were in High School and 19% had post-secondary education
- 40% perceived an increase in the number of hate incidents over the past year
- 50% had witnessed an incident

How Did They Evaluate their Experience?

- Over 2/3 found the workshop they attended informative and interesting
- 52% said that the workshop changed their way of thinking about hate incidents
- 45% acquired useful information for dealing with hate incidents in the future
- 60% said that their understanding of Muslim communities improved
- 40% reported a more favourable attitude toward Islam
- On a scale of 1 to 10, the workshops received an overall score of 8.1

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

TRY has succeeded in meeting its goals both in terms of the development of relevant employment and soft skills of participants and in delivering an interesting and effective program on Islamophobia, for youth by youth, in the wider community. The TRY program model, built on partnership with community and coordinated action among City departments, ensured inclusiveness and access to a broad and rich spectrum of knowledge and skills.

The peer leaders who completed the project demonstrated an enhanced level of self-esteem, communication and leadership skills. Most importantly, they learned that they can have a

positive impact on other youth and on their own communities. Individuals who attended workshops were exposed to a unique experience where youth spoke to youth about racism, hate and cross-cultural understanding. The evaluation from workshop participants indicated that many appreciated the experience and were stimulated to think differently.

The project can be proud of its achievements. The lessons learned create a basis for better efforts in the future. The following are some recommendations that emerged during the project evaluation process.

- Ideally, the program should have been increased by an additional 6-8 weeks to accommodate extra training and practice time for the Peer Leaders and increased time available for Workshop provision to the community;
- Increased staffing to support the Peer Leaders with training and personal/vocational counseling needs;
- The project would be better served with increased partnerships with other youth serving organizations; specifically youth employment related services and other youth peer leader programs;
- That future projects strive to align the schedule of training and workshop provision with the school year;
- Earlier planning and pre-arranged schedule of contact with prospective host sites would have improved the site location process and increased prospective number of workshop engagements;
- Engage school board personnel in the development phase of the curriculum;
- Better utilize the Project Reference Group and more fully engage members as decision makers as well as advisors;
- Expand the role of Training Facilitators to ensure that future projects incorporate their vast expertise more fully. Some suggestions include: more involvement in vetting the curriculum before implementation; participation as workshop development advisors; and more interaction among trainers regarding concepts and learning materials to reduce overlap and redundancy;
- TRY provides an excellent model that has the capacity to transform the lives of young people engaged as Peers and the audiences that they interact with. The model should be replicated in other communities experiencing hate crimes.