



## STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

### Prevention Intervention Toronto – Final Evaluation

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| <b>Date:</b>             | October 30, 2012   |
| <b>To:</b>               | Economic Development Committee                                   |
| <b>From:</b>             | Executive Director, Social Development, Finance & Administration |
| <b>Wards:</b>            | All  |
| <b>Reference Number:</b> | AFS #16114   |

#### **SUMMARY**

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Prevention Intervention Toronto (PIT) was a Government of Canada funded research project to understand the most effective methods in preventing and reducing youth gang activity. The project began on December 7, 2009 and ended on March 31, 2012. The University of Toronto's Centre for Criminology was contracted by the City to provide an independent evaluation, with the Final Evaluation Report submitted on June 30, 2012.

This report summarizes the Final Evaluation findings and highlights how the City's youth development work can be strengthened based on lessons learned through the research project and the evaluation findings.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

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The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration recommends that:

1. City Council receives this report is for information.

#### **Financial Impact**

The adoption of this report will have no financial impact beyond what has already been approved in the 2013 operating budget.

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed this report and agrees with the financial impact information.

## **DECISION HISTORY**

At its meeting of September 24 and 25, 2008, City Council delegated authority to Social Development, Finance & Administration's (SDFA) Executive Director to negotiate and execute an agreement on behalf of the City with Public Safety Canada for the purposes of funding a new youth gang prevention research project.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2008.CD18.4>

On November 15, 2011, the Executive Director, SDFA made a presentation to the Economic Development Committee summarizing the efforts of the Prevention-Intervention Toronto Research Project's first two program cycles and best practices identified by Project evaluators to date.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2011.ED9.10>

At its June 6, 2012 meeting, City Council delegated authority to Social Development, Finance & Administration's (SDFA) Executive Director to negotiate and execute an agreement on behalf of the City with Public Safety Canada for the purposes of funding an extension to the original agreement.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX20.10>

## **ISSUE BACKGROUND**

Research conducted by Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) in 2008, substantiated by Toronto Police Service, assessed the relative impact of youth gang activity across the City. This research concluded that gang activity at that time was most intense in three North-West Toronto neighbourhoods: Jane-Finch, Weston-Mt. Dennis and Rexdale.

Toronto City Council directed staff to pursue the National Crime Prevention Center's (NCPC) Youth Gang Prevention Funding to design a gang prevention/intervention project to test out effective methodologies for working with youth at-risk of gang attachment. The City and NCPC looked to the research project to determine whether an intensive case management approach to youth with supports to family members and the wider community would prove to be an effective method of preventing and reducing youth gang violence. Consequently, the Centre of Criminology from the University of Toronto was engaged to help design an ethically sound evaluation from which the City and others could learn.

## **COMMENTS**

### **Program Model**

The Prevention Intervention Toronto project provided direct support to over 300 Toronto youth over a three-year period. The PIT project was administered by the City of Toronto and delivered by JVS, an established community service provider that was selected

through a request for proposal process. PIT was designed as a 36-week intervention that consisted of three distinct phases:

1. A Needs Assessment Phase during the first eight weeks of the project where PIT participants met with their assigned case manager to identify specific risk and needs factors that formed the basis of the individualized program plans;
2. A Group Training Phase lasting twenty weeks where participants received one-on-one counselling to discuss topics, including gang violence, victimization, education, employment, anger management, health issues, financial management, family and peer relations, drug and alcohol use, mental health and personal development and participated in eight hours of group training to further discuss these topics; and
3. An Integration Phase during the final eight weeks of the program where participants met with their case managers for further support to access various community resources to facilitate their transition to a pro-social lifestyle.

Three additional program activities were developed to compliment the core case management program:

- a. PIT Parent Support Groups to provide safe spaces for parents of PIT participants to meet, and strengthen their parenting techniques with support from each other, and experts in issue-specific fields.
- b. PIT Youth Policy Groups to involve gang involved or youth who were at high risk of gang involvement in policy by examining community issues and identifying avenues of change and innovation.
- c. Community Information Sessions designed to deliver information related to the prevention and intervention of youth gang involvement.

SDFA staff directly delivered these complementary activities to analyze their efficacy in supporting PIT participant outcomes.

As the administrator of the PIT research project, SDFA staff developed and supported the project using a Positive Youth Development approach. Positive Youth Development (PYD) is emerging as the prevailing theoretical framework to guide programmatic development and delivery within the youth service sector. This year alone, the Ministry of Children and Youth Services released "Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development," and United Way Toronto launched their Youth Impact Plan founded on Positive Youth Development. Other funders like Laidlaw Foundation have long embraced a PYD approach to their work.

PYD is a proven approach that emphasizes the strengths and potential of youth. It also considers the family and environmental context that youth develop in so that effective supports can be provided. As an evidenced-based approach, the PYD program model employs four key success factors:

1. strong relationships between youth and non-family adults;

2. youth engaged in designing programs and decision-making to positively influence themselves and their communities;
3. intentional skill-building in multiple aspects of a young person's life to achieve physical, emotional, intellectual, psychological and social health;
4. high expectations for youth.

These four success factors were embedded in PIT's program model. PIT emphasized case management to build strong youth-adult relationships; included peers, families and community support systems in program activities; engaged youth in decision-making through the youth policy groups; integrated intentional skill development through group training, individualized case management plans, and, the policy and parents groups; and, engaged partners in helping to set high standards for the program. As the delivery agency for the PIT core case management program, JVS received training and coaching to administer PIT within the PYD framework.

### **Program Participants**

A total of 312 youth were accepted into the PIT Research Project's three 36-week program cycles, averaging approximately 104 youth per program cycle. Participants ranged from 13 to 24 years of age. Approximately 60% of participants were 18 years of age or older, with the average age being 19.5 years; 72% were male, 28% were female. The majority of PIT participants were assessed to be at risk of gang-involvement – 35% of PIT participants reported that they were a current or former gang member; an additional 22% reported group involvement that is consistent with the Euro-gang definition of gang membership.

From 2011 to 2012, over 150 PIT parents from the Rexdale and Weston-Mount Dennis neighbourhoods participated in PIT Parent Group sessions; 90% of the participants were women who needed a safe place to discuss the challenges their children and families faced.

From January 2010 to December 2011, 28 young people between ages 16 - 24 participated in the PIT Youth Policy Groups; 15 young men participated in the first policy group, and 13 young women participated in the second group.

Additionally, 430 individuals participated in four different community education sessions, including youth workers, Toronto District School Board's "Safe and Caring schools" staff, youth from other programs, frontline workers, and people working in policy development. The seminars focused on increasing knowledge on outreach and engagement strategies for youth at-risk of gang involvement. The discussions also focused on the lack of gang intervention programs available, and possible strategies for future programs. This approach was designed in collaboration with the 2010 Youth Policy Group; these youth assisted in the delivery of these sessions.

## **EVALUATION FINDINGS**

An evaluation team from the Centre of Criminology and Socio-legal Studies, University of Toronto conducted the PIT research project evaluation. This evaluation was conducted using a comparison group of youth who did not receive PIT program services. The University of Toronto's priority was to ensure that the information generated was unbiased, impartial, accurate, objective and valid. The comparison group was selected from a comparable, high-risk neighbourhood located in North-West Toronto. Both PIT participants and youth from the comparison group received an assessment and a pre-test interview. Youth were interviewed at several intervals using the PIT program timeframe: 9 months into the program; 6 months post-program and 12 months post program. The questions that were asked of all participants were subject to a University of Toronto ethics review.

The PIT evaluation reveals that PIT participants experienced positive improvements as a result of project interventions. There is a difference in the PIT program model as designed, versus the model as delivered. Some of these differences seem to have impacted the ability to effectively attribute some positive outcomes to PIT interventions. City staff have learned several lessons that can strengthen program interventions for youth at high-risk of gang involvement. These findings are described in greater details in the following sections.

### **PIT Achieved Positive Outcomes**

The PIT evaluation examined 16 outcome variables across three categories and determined that in almost all cases, PIT participants experienced positive improvements in their attitudes and beliefs, risk and protection factors, and their behaviours.

As summarized in Table 1: Participant Outcomes, PIT participant outcomes are classified as a short-term impact, long-term impact or no impact when compared to the comparison group. Short-term impacts are changes in PIT participants measurable 9 months into the PIT research project. Long-term impacts are changes in PIT participants measurable 6 month and 12 month following program completion. Table 1 also notes No Impact where there is no discernable difference between PIT participants and the comparison group, even though individuals in PIT may have experienced positive changes.

Table 1 outlines participant outcome findings classified as short-term impact, long-term impact or no impact. These classifications are expressed as a comparison between PIT participants and the comparison group. Where "no impact" has been determined, it reflects no discernable difference between the impact of that particular variable for the PIT participants and the comparison group, meaning both could have achieved positive impacts or, conversely, negative impacts, with respect to the same outcome variable. Where short-term impacts have been determined, these reflect changes in PIT participants measured 9 months into the project, with continuing participation in PIT. Long-term impacts reflect changes in PIT participants, measured either six months or 12 months after completing the research project.

**Table 1: Participant Outcome Findings**

| #                                  | Outcome Variables  | Evaluation Results                                  | Impact Timeframe  | Contributing Program Elements  | Learnings  |
|------------------------------------|--|---|-------------------|--|--|
| <b>Attitudes And Beliefs</b>       |  |   |                   |  |  |
| 1.                                 | Attitudes towards Crime, Violence and Gangs                        | Improvement.  | Short-term Impact | Case Management Group Training   | Continue development of the Group Training curriculum to contribute to longer term improvements.   |
| 2.                                 | Attitudes towards the Criminal Justice System                      | Significant improvement.                            | Short-term Impact | Case Management Group Training   | Increase partnerships with social justice agencies such as Ontario Justice Youth Network to positively impact on these attitudes.  |
| 3.                                 | Attitudes towards Education  | Significant improvement. Same for comparison group. | No Impact         | Case Management Group Training   | Engage a delivery agency who can balance a focus on employment outcomes with a focus on education outcomes, as well as the other content areas of the program (i.e. mental health, legal, housing, etc.) |
| 4.                                 | Attitudes towards Employment                                       | Significant improvement.                            | Short-term Impact | Case Management] Group Training (20% of curriculum was dedicated to employment)<br>Delivery agency was an employment-focused agency. |  |
| <b>Risk And Protective Factors</b> |  |   |                   |  |  |
| 5.                                 | Association with Gang-Involved Peers                               | Improvement. Same for comparison group.             | No Impact         | Group Training<br>Case Management emphasized creating new positive relationships   | Ensure consistent high-levels of anti-crime programming occur in a variety of settings.  |
| 6.                                 | Association with Pro-Social Peers                                  | Significant Improvement. Same for comparison group. | Long-term Impact  | Case Management Group Training<br>Out-of-office activities geared towards creating new relationships                                 | Embed a case management role and continue positive peer-building opportunities in more youth programs.   |
| 7.                                 | School Attendance, Disciplinary Problems, and Academic Performance | Improvement.  | Short-term Impact | Case Management Group Training   | Add a homework club, mentorship process, and stronger connection to parent support groups to lead to greater improvement on academic performance for youth.  |
| 8.                                 | Self-esteem  | Significant Improvement.                            | Short-term Impact | Case Management Group Training   | Embed case management roles and continue positive peer-building opportunities in more youth programs.  |
| 9.                                 | Family Relationships   | Significant Improvement. Same for comparison group. | No Impact         | Group training<br>Case Management  | Enhance connections with parent support groups to further develop family-youth relationship.   |
| 10.                                | Participation in Pro-Social Activities                             | Improvement.  | Long-term Impact  | Community Time, the volunteer component of the project   | Provide places for youth to contribute to their communities once programs are complete to ensure a long-term commitment to their new outlook on life.  |

| #                 | Outcome Variables  | Evaluation Results                                  | Impact Timeframe                     | Contributing Program Elements   | Learnings   |
|-------------------|--|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| 11.               | Self- Control, Anger Management and Conflict Resolution Skills | Significant improvement. Same for comparison group. | No Impact                            | Case Management Group Training  | Continue life skills development programming as a crucial program element to support positive improvement on self- control, anger management and conflict resolution.                                   |
| 12.               | Drug and Alcohol Use   | Improvement. Same for comparison group.             | No Impact                            | Case Management Group Training<br>Marijuana use cessation was emphasized. | Increase harm-reduction education about alcohol use as a gateway drug into marijuana use and education about harder drugs may yield better outcomes on alcohol use.                                     |
| <b>Behaviours</b> |  |   |                                      |   |   |
| 13.               | Criminal Victimization   | Significant Improvement.                            | Short-term Impact                    | Case Management   | Recognize the level of victimization of gang-involved youth and structure program activity to support healing and recovery. Employ case managers as caring adults to support victim recovery.           |
| 14.               | Criminal Offending   | Significant Improvement.                            | Short-term Impact & Long-term Impact | Case Management Group Training  | Provide high-risk youth with pro-social activities as alternative outlets to cope with negative feelings.   |
| 15.               | Contact with the Justice System                                | Significant improvement. Same for comparison group. | No Impact                            | Case Management Group Training  | Update and discuss with law enforcement partners about the success of these types of projects within the community and their ability to seek non-judicial ways to interact with youth in the community. |
| 16.               | Gang Involvement   | Significant improvement. Same for comparison group. | Short-Term Impact                    | Case Management Group Training  | Ensure that program design elements are included around needs assessments and pre-test evaluations to help identify and therefore minimize exaggerated stories of risk.                                 |

The evaluation examined 16 outcome variables and identified that, compared to the comparison group PIT participants had short-term positive differences on 7 variables, long-term positive differences on 2 variables, no discernable difference on 6 variables; and one variable that has both short and long-term impact. The most significant positive outcomes for PIT participants were their improvement on criminal offending and decline in gang involvement. Participants experienced a short-term and long-term decline in violent offending, with a rate of decline significantly greater than the rate of decline observed among the comparison group. Participants also experienced a significant decline in gang membership – from 33% at the start of the research project to only 8% after the program.

The evaluation also considered the effects of program dosage – how much program content PIT participants received on a particular outcome variable. The PIT program design assumed that the greater the content, the more significant the outcome for the individual in that particular variable. The evaluation confirmed this assumption in

relation to "association with gang involved peers" and "school attendance". However, program dosage was noted as having no discernable impact on "academic performance," "self esteem," "self-control, anger management, and conflict resolution," and "criminal offending," when compared to the outcomes of the comparison group. The National Crime Prevention Centre's Senior Evaluation Advisor noted that "being in the program matters but how much program you receive does not."

Clarifying the issue of dosage is particularly important for the most significant finding from the PIT research – that PIT participants experienced a significant decline in gang membership. In their review of the evaluation, NCPC noted that "an examination of the PIT youth in isolation indicates that those who received extensive PIT program services were less likely to desist from gangs than those who received relatively few services," giving the impression that more program dosages prevented youth from exiting gangs. However, Dr. Scot Wortley, the lead researcher for the evaluation, clarified that "the surprising negative relationship between program dosage and gang resistance could be explained" by the following issues:

1. Where PIT helped participants find jobs or re-enrol in school, these youth would experience a decline in their participation in PIT activities that only ran during the hours of 9 to 5. In other words, youth who did not secure jobs or return to school would have more time to heavily invest in PIT activities.
2. If a youth was not a gang member at the start of the program – and remained out of gangs – they would still be coded as "no change", despite this type of "no change" being the desired outcome. It is possible that these non-gang members were heavily involved in PIT activities as well. The dependent variable in this analysis is a positive change – going from gang member to non-gang member –, therefore, "no change" is not assessed as a positive outcome.

Furthermore, in Toronto, the gang situation is neighbourhood-based, meaning that youth who live in an area may claim to be a member of a gang mainly out of community association. If a high-risk youth participated in extensive PIT services and was successful in finding employment they may still identify with being a gang member even though they no longer participate in gang-related activities.

### **Gap between Program Design and Program Implementation**

The PIT evaluation findings confirmed that PIT was effectively designed but inconsistently delivered to best achieve positive, evidence-based, youth outcomes. According to NCPC's evaluation summary report, "the findings suggest that there were challenges implementing the program as planned." Below, Table 2 describes the differences between the PIT design model submitted to NCPC and the delivery model implemented during the project from December 2009 to February 2012.

**Table 2: Comparison of Program Design and Delivery Models**

| # of Weeks                             | Program Design Model  | Program Delivery Model  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Needs Assessment Phase: 8 weeks</b> | A Needs Assessment Phase during the first 8 weeks of the project where PIT participants meet with their assigned case manager to identify specific risk and needs factors that form the basis of the individualized program plans.  | The high-risk population that PIT engaged needed more time to develop relationships with case managers than anticipated. PIT staff typically used this initial 8-week phase for outreach and recruitment. They only initiated needs assessments where possible. Typically needs assessments were completed after the group training had begun.            |
| <b>Group Training Phase: 20 weeks</b>  | A Group Training Phase lasting 20 weeks where participants receive one-on-one counselling via the case managers to discuss topics including gang violence, victimization, education, employment needs, anger management, health issues, financial management, family and peer relations, drug and alcohol use, mental health and personal development. Participants also attend 8 hours per week of group training that reinforces the key themes of the program. | PIT staff initially found it difficult to keep the PIT participants engaged in the 8 hours per week of group training curriculum. The case management portion of this phase grew in importance and took the focus off of the group training sessions. In post-tests, youth confirmed their greater interest in one-to-one engagement over group training. |
| <b>Integration Phase: 8 weeks</b>      | An Integration Phase during the final 8 weeks of the program where participants meet with their case managers for further support in accessing various community resources that can facilitate their transition to a pro-social lifestyle.  | The integration phase was used to complete transition plans for youth who had not successfully attained education or employment success by week 29. The PIT staff met with those youth that were still disengaged over the last 8-week period, ultimately leading to lower hourly dosages of case management.   |

The delivery agency made several adjustments to the program design during its delivery stage. Based on a review of project documentation, for example, in the Needs Assessment phase, participants received significantly less one-on-one case management hours than designed (2.4 hours versus 12 hours; 32.5% did not appear to receive any). During the Integration Phase, participants received 5.4 hours of case management versus the prescribed 12 hours. City staff believe that this variance occurred during the first and second cycles of the research project where a number of individualized case management plans were either not developed, or written down. It appears that participants also received less group training than originally designed (29.2 hours versus 160 hours). PIT participants may have received the correct amount of program dosage in these areas; however, there were not proper documentation to verify this for evaluators.

The University of Toronto identified program documentation, a critical administrative feature of the Prevention Intervention Toronto research project, as a challenge to analyzing some participant outcomes. Attribution of program impact was difficult to determine in several cases due to poor documentation of program intervention.

Increasingly, the youth service sector is embracing evidence-informed youth development practices to ensure the effectiveness of program interventions with the young people they support. Program documentation is important to tracking and monitoring program activity and participant progress. The PIT evaluation identified the need for standardized forms to capture individualized case management plans for youth participants and clear and consistent documentation using such tools. Consistent, accurate and ongoing monitoring and tracking of program interventions is critical to employing effective evidence-based approaches to achieving positive youth outcomes.

### **PIT Policy Results**

Of the 15 young men who participated in the 2010 Policy Group, 12 went on to find employment. One participant secured employment as a heavy duty cleaner for the City of Toronto. Together, these participants also initiated a basketball camp where they trained and mentored youth, encouraging them to stay away from gangs.

Of the 13 young women who participated in the 2011 Policy Group, 100% re-entered into formal post-secondary education. Upon learning about North Etobicoke's voter turnout during the past municipal election, the young women created a voter campaign entitled 'ETOV' as a way to encourage young people like themselves to get out and participate in the electoral process. Feeling empowered by their efforts, these PIT participants attributed the 1% increase in voter turnout locally largely due to their efforts.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR CITY YOUTH DEVELOPMENT WORK**

The Prevention Intervention Toronto research project enabled the City of Toronto to do two things – support 312 high-risk youth to achieve positive outcomes, and learn through the delivery of the project the most effective methods in preventing and reducing youth gang activity by supporting high-risk youth and their families. The project evaluation is timely in order support City staff in critically analyzing Toronto's youth development system to:

- determine the existing range of supports available to youth
- assess their effectiveness in supporting youth, particularly those most vulnerable, to positive, healthy, safe development,
- identify institutional barriers to achievement; and,
- make program improvements that build on the lessons from the PIT evaluations and other evidence-based programs and approaches.

To this end, SDEA has initiated an Interdivisional Team with Parks, Forestry and Recreation, Toronto Employment and Social Services, and other City divisions and agencies to develop a Youth Outcomes Framework informed by evidence-based positive youth development. This Interdivisional Team creates an opportunity for City programs to harmonize approaches to setting and monitoring youth outcomes. It will also facilitate

greater integrated service planning and delivery among youth workers and corresponding youth programs.

### **Program Recommendations**

The following recommendations have emerged out of the findings from the PIT evaluation and should be considered by City staff in creating and administering youth development programs:

#### *Staffing and Administration*

1. Negotiate and align the common products and services high-risk youth will need before the program begins to enable efficient matches between a youth's needs and the appropriate response.
2. Secure appropriate, dedicated space for high-risk participants. Shared spaces may not work for high-risk youth who have challenges with trust, anger, and self-control.
3. Embed a case management approach in programs in order to support positive outcomes for high-risk young people. Case managers focus on providing a client-centred approach to changing the life situations that youth face without being confined by only one line of business or issue area.
4. Hire experienced case managers with social worker skills. Effective case management requires specialized skills and experience that goes beyond average youth work.
5. The program should include case managers and group trainers, who can identify mental health challenges in youth, and create interventions that work from a trauma-informed framework.
6. Effective case management requires experience and skill to support youth in over 11 issues areas such as mental health, employment, housing, education, etc. Effective program delivery for this type of model requires ability to focus on all 11 issue areas.
7. Ensure central supervision and support to case managers.
8. An effective program for high-risk youth requires dedicated project staff – a dedicated project manager supervising seconded agency staff (where a community deliver model is pursued) in order to avoid divided reporting relationships.

#### *Evaluation*

9. Test-run a new program model to fine-tune interventions before beginning a formal outcome evaluation.

10. Build in “reflect and restore time” between program cycles to enable program analysis and planning, staff vacation and renewal, staff training and participant outreach.

#### *Training*

11. Enhance the training component with more structured curriculum – balanced with customizable time based on youth needs.
12. Have a dedicated group trainer – do not encourage case managers to also do training. The trainers should either do site specific training or one trainer should do overall curriculum coordination and quality control. Case Managers and Program management should be in 80% of all training sessions to encourage relationship/curriculum development.
13. Integrate weekly certificates through program delivery to reinforce positive development and enable participants to recognize their progress.

#### *Integration Phase*

14. Ensure that programs incorporate an integration phase that effectively builds a personal support system for participants and connects them to that system. Doing so will support their long-term progress beyond a case manager's interventions.
15. Incorporate a focus on parents and policy such as the PIT Parent Groups and the PIT Policy Groups to effectively complementary other program components.

### **CONCLUSION:**

The PIT evaluation reaffirmed the importance of a case management approach to supporting positive outcomes for high-risk young people. It is equally important to take an integrated approach that involves inter-sectoral supports from social services, education and training, and employment, as well as health practitioners, to ensure effective long-lasting positive outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Through negotiations with Public Safety Canada (PSC), SDFAs secured approximately \$350,000 in one-year funding to continue the City's work to develop effective policies and programs that support communities, youth and families at high-risk of youth gang attachment. These funds will be used to build upon the lessons learned through the PIT research project.

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**SIGNATURE**

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