

APPENDIX A

PFR Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy

The Recreation Service Plan (RSP) confirms youth as a priority area of service and recognizes that engaging more youth in recreation is an essential step in the development of healthy communities.

A youth recreation engagement strategy was requested by City. To inform this strategy, PFR undertook a period of extensive engagement over the summer of 2013. In addition, a review of youth engagement strategies from other municipalities and youth serving agencies including the United Way of Greater Toronto was conducted.

To ensure youth involvement in the development of the strategy, youth from various PFR Youth Advisory Councils (YACs) provided input on the development of the survey tool and questions. The youth survey was available online through the PFR website and the Youth Agency Survey was distributed to a network of over 200 agencies and community partners. Additionally, twelve focus group sessions were conducted with youth groups, youth-led organizations and youth serving organizations.

PFR's Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy will involve youth in all areas of program planning and service delivery; will be based on a positive youth development approach that builds on strengths of youth; will be flexible and responsive to youth needs and timelines; does not fit into a "one size fits all" model; and will be sustained and ongoing.

The engagement process identified ways to build on current successes, augment our engagement practices and make improvements to support youth participation in our programs and services. PFR identified five principles that will guide the specific activities or opportunities in this strategy:

- Sustained Engagement
- Building on Existing Strengths
- Partnerships
- Fostering Youth Leadership
- Attracting New Youth

1. Sustained Engagement

Effective and ongoing youth involvement is integral to a successful engagement strategy. The PFR Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy is based on sustained, meaningful engagement and proposes the involvement of youth in all aspects of recreation service delivery including program planning, service reviews, and facility improvements.

There are several major initiatives that will be developed over the next few years, as part of the implementation of the Recreation Service Plan including the Facilities Master Plan, the Youth Leadership Model and the Recreation Advisory Group. These should be informed by a youth engagement process.

2. Building on Existing Strengths

Recreation programs develop skills and talents, build social connections within neighbourhoods, and train future leaders. PFR staff is the foundation of current youth engagement practices.

Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) are a unique asset and have been identified by youth as key to the success of a Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy. YOWs link youth to recreation programs and work with community centre staff to meet the needs of youth. YOWs also develop relationships with a broad array of social services and referral agencies and connect youth to housing, employment, health and harm reduction services. YOWs work with Community Recreation Programmers (CRPs) to support youth across the city.

Youth Advisory Councils are youth-led advisory groups that empower and give a voice to youth, and are an important tool to ensure recreation programs are responsive at the local level. YACs provide youth meaningful opportunities to engage in recreation, participate in the decision making process and socialize with peers in a youth-friendly environment. YACs are a successful engagement tool currently used in PFR that help to guide new programming in community centres. Unique opportunities exist to develop new YACs to serve youth populations with special interests such as the skateboarding, which is currently under development in Scarborough. To ensure the successful development and operation of Youth Advisory Councils, a best practices manual is being developed.

Youth identified social activities and special events as alternate ways to engage youth while increasing participation in recreation activities and engaging youth from different neighbourhoods and backgrounds. Special events are a successful tool currently used by PFR that can be expanded and offered consistently across the city.

3. Partnerships

Youth serving agencies identified partnerships as an important way to engage youth. Through partnerships, PFR works with other agencies and providers to maximize opportunities to engage youth. The Toronto Sport Leadership program is an example of a successful program offered in partnership with other agencies.

The Recreation Service Plan identifies the need to enhance and improve recreation access to underserved residents. A key way to do this is by strengthening our partnerships with service agencies that work with underserved populations to promote recreation programs and services. The consultation process enabled an initial dialogue with some of these agencies including the 519 Community Centre, Native Child and Family Services, Toronto Community Housing

Corporation, and the Council of Agencies Serving South Asians and Chinese Canadian Nation Council. PFR will continue to work with these organizations to address gaps and overlaps in service.

Working with schools was identified as a key way to reach a large number of youth in one location. Schools were also identified as an ideal location to advertise and promote recreation programs and special events.

Partnering with other city divisions is an effective way to maximize resources and reduce duplication of work. The interdivisional team working on the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy will work to ensure an integrated approach to youth programs and services.

4. Fostering Youth Leadership

PFR offers a variety of leadership programming including Toronto Sport Leadership, aquatic leadership courses and Counsellor-in-Training camps. The RSP recommends the development of a youth leadership program model to serve 50 per cent of all grade nine students in Toronto. The development and delivery of this program will be a way to foster youth development and to work in partnership with other city divisions, school boards, and community partners.

Survey respondents identified a youth achievement award as a good way to engage youth. PFR has recently formalized a relationship with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award which encourages participation in four key areas: community service, personal skill development, physical recreation and adventurous journey. PFR continues to work in partnership with Duke of Edinburgh to promote the program and recognize youth who participate in PFR programs in pursuit of the Award.

The Toronto Youth Cabinet and the City Youth Council provide unique opportunities to support civic engagement for youth. The Toronto Youth Cabinet (TYC) is a youth led civic engagement organization and the official youth advisory body to Toronto City Council. The City Youth Council (CYC) is made up of youth councillors from Toronto wards and aims to increase civic participation amongst young Canadians by providing incentives and delivering experiential educational opportunities. Strengthening the relationship with these organizations is an important way to promote recreation programs for youth, while building youth leadership skills and encouraging civic engagement.

PFR is the largest employer of youth in the City, currently employing over 5,000 youth. PFR will continue efforts to employ local youth in our programs, recruiting youth from our community centre programs, leadership programs, and the new Youth Leadership Program proposed in the RSP.

5. Attracting New Youth

Youth are a priority service area for PFR. The RSP identifies the need to provide increased outreach and promotion to underserved residents including youth. Several strategies were identified as preferable ways to attract new youth to recreation programs and services.

The engagement process clearly identified the importance of creating a welcoming environment for youth. Comfortable furniture, bright colours, murals and wireless internet access (Wi-Fi) were specifically mentioned by youth as contributing to a youth-friendly environment.

Improved communications and the use of social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter, will assist PFR in attracting new youth. Instagram and text messaging blasts were also suggested as new communication tools for PFR that should be explored. The engagement process indicated that some youth weren't currently participating in PFR programs and events because they didn't know about them.

Special-interest programs can also attract new youth into our programs. The engagement process identified introductory programs in non-traditional areas such as arts, media arts and skateboarding as a unique opportunity to engage new youth. Lack of knowledge or skill in sports was referenced as a barrier, in particular for newcomer youth. Sport instruction was identified as an area of interest including seasonal sports such as skiing and skating but also sport instruction in traditional sports such basketball, soccer and skateboarding for newcomer youth.

PFR Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy

PRINCIPLES	ACTIVITIES/OPPORTUNITIES
Sustained Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PFR programs and service delivery will be informed by youth • Effective and ongoing youth involvement is integral to a successful engagement strategy • The Facilities Master Plan, the Youth Leadership Model and the Recreation Advisory Group should incorporate youth engagement into their development process
Building on Existing Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Outreach Program • Youth Advisory Councils and the establishment of best practices • Community development approach based on a partnership between Community Recreation Programmers, Youth Outreach Workers, and local community agencies • Special events; citywide (e.g. STOMP urban dance competition) and local (e.g. Stone Soup cooking program)
Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Partnership programs such as Toronto Sport Leadership Program • Continued relationship-building with agencies that work with underserved residents including: newcomers, youth with a disability, Aboriginal youth, LGBT youth • Improved outreach and promotion of our programs and services in schools • Integrated planning for youth with other City divisions to maximize resources and reduce duplication
Fostering Youth Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acknowledging youth achievements through strengthened relationship with Duke of Edinburgh's Award • Continued youth leadership programming; leveraging the Youth Leadership Model proposed in the Recreation Service Plan • Support civic engagement through linkage with Toronto Youth Cabinet and the City Youth Council • Continue efforts to recruit and employ local youth in our programs
Attracting New Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making our spaces more welcoming to youth • Improve communications, promotions and advertising including social media • Special-interest programming such as arts, media arts, and skateboarding