

## **Deputation to the City of Toronto – Community Development and Recreation Committee**

### **East Metro Youth Services**

*The following deputation is made by East Metro Youth Services in support of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.*

East Metro Youth Services strongly supports the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) which strives for equal opportunities for youth across the City of Toronto. We are confident that TYES will be an important cornerstone for building a more inclusive and fair city for youth, and therefore, an important action to prevent youth violence across the City.

East Metro Youth Services is an accredited mental health and addictions services provider with 40 years of experience supporting youth and their families. Each year, our agency provides a range of community and school-based programs and services throughout Scarborough and last year we served over 2,500 youth, including engaging almost 2,000 youth through our Toronto East Provincial Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) network. Every day, our YOWs and other youth workers and counsellors directly witness the complex issues that youth face which reinforces our appreciation of the importance of being proactive in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable youth. Based on this experience, we believe that we have a practiced understanding of the issues that youth face in our communities and throughout the City.

It is with this foundation of understanding the issues of the most vulnerable youth in our City, that we strongly endorse the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy. Our support is not arbitrary: We have carefully reviewed the proposed actions of TYES with specific interest in how the strategy balances with the solutions we see effectively improving the lives of youth every day. Accordingly, we specifically endorse the following actions within the strategy as vital to markedly improve the life opportunities of the most vulnerable youth in our city:

1. Firstly, that the City of Toronto work with community service providers to bring clarity and stability to the youth services sector. We believe that agencies like ours with relatively more resources than many in the youth sector have a leadership role to play in this coordination.
2. Secondly, that the City works with community partners to increase access to trauma-informed mental health and substance use treatment service for youth who are the most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. From our experience and continued review of evidence-based practices, we agree with TYES' recommendation to increase access to mental health and addictions services based on the proven Strengthening Families model.
3. Thirdly, that the City invests in services for youth who are incarcerated or who have been incarcerated to reintegrate in their communities. More specifically, we believe the success of this effort will depend on strong partnerships with community service providers and employers and a commitment to work with youth as well as their families.

4. Fourthly, that the City and Toronto Community Housing work to increase youth employment opportunities for residents of social housing. The levels of youth unemployment in social housing are a key driver of criminal, sometimes violent criminal activity, and must be addressed if there is to be a serious effort to make the City safer.
5. Fifthly, that the City employs Specialized Youth Workers to help engage and connect vulnerable youth to needed services. We believe that this process of brokering services can be improved through more collaboration between City Youth Outreach Workers, Provincial Youth Outreach Workers, Youth Justice Workers, et cetera. We hope that this effort will be based on a collaborative approach that includes sharing in best practices and information.
6. Sixthly, that the FOCUS on Rexdale coordinated service is expanded to Scarborough. We believe that this initiative should include a full complement of mental health supports in order to effectively improve outcomes for youth who are vulnerable to involvement with violence.
7. Finally, we recommend that the committee to endorse this strategy because of its proposal to focus the City's policy and program evaluation towards equity of outcomes instead of sheer numbers of services delivered.

East Metro is encouraged by the proposed focus on youth who are the most marginalized in our city and who are the most vulnerable to violence. We believe that by focusing on this population, we will reduce the level of violence among youth in our city as well as many other negative outcomes that stem out of the roots of violence. Thus, East Metro Youth Services urges this committee to approve the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy and begin the work of improving the lives of youth who are the most vulnerable to violence in our city.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'CF', with a horizontal line extending to the right and a small asterisk-like mark above the line.

Claire Fainer  
Executive Director  
East Metro Youth Services