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## 2021 OPERATING BUDGET BRIEFING NOTE

### TOWARDS PEACE

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#### Issue/Background:

- This briefing note responds to a request from the January 22, 2021 meeting of the Budget Committee for the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to provide the current status of the TOWARDS PEACE program and any recommendations for expansion.
- In 2019, Toronto City Council requested Social Development, Finance & Administration Division to develop TOWARDS PEACE as a strategic community safety intervention.
- In its 2020 Approved Operating Budget, Council allocated \$1.5M (gross and net) to develop TOWARDS PEACE, including \$1.2M in new and enhanced funding, while the City continued efforts to seek federal funding for the program.

#### Key Points:

##### A Made in Toronto Approach

- City staff have reviewed violence interruption, intervention and prevention models in jurisdictions across Canada and the United States to inform the development of a comprehensive Toronto-made model for violence interruption, intervention and prevention, TOWARDS PEACE.
- International best practices identify that it is critical to balance reactive investments in criminal justice responses with meaningful and sustained investment in upstream violence prevention. Investments targeted at multi-sectoral approaches leveraging city, health, community and policing expertise, combined with the lived experience of affected communities can provide the most effective results in risk mitigation, prevention and ongoing social development.
- The TOWARDS PEACE model embeds this learning to create a made for Toronto risk-driven approach to violence intervention, interruption and prevention in response to increasing gun violence and exposure to community violence across the city. It focuses on youth involved in violent behaviour or high risk activities and works to interrupt the reoccurrence or escalation of violence in their lives.
- This multi-sectoral model combines the work of City, health and community agency staff, as well as grassroots groups that focus on violence interruption, intervention and prevention, and leverages the lived experience of local community members who have been involved in violence. TOWARDS PEACE leverages the lived

experiences of affected communities to develop and implement effective community engagement approaches, innovative communication tools, social media strategies and targeted investment geared at violence prevention and interruption.

- TOwards Peace is based on a public health approach that will:
  - Define and monitor the causes and consequences of violence
  - Identify risk factors and the likelihood of the perpetuation of violence and pivotal points of interruption
  - Provide wrap around case management, coordination and support for individuals and their families.
- TOwards Peace is intended to reduce risk factors that lead to involvement in violence, exposure to violence and violent behaviours.

### **Program Implementation in the Northwest**

- The need for a risk-drive, multi-sectoral community-based violence interruption, intervention and prevention program is evident in several regions across the city.
- The northwest region (Blackcreek and Rexdale) was chosen as the pilot location to develop and test TOwards Peace based on data from Toronto Police Service and from the FOCUS program, a best-in-class initiative led by the City of Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto and Toronto Police Service, that uses a Situation Table model, to bring together agencies from different sectors weekly to coordinate and provide targeted, wrap-around approach to support individuals and families who are in Acutely Elevated Risk (AER) situations (situations with extremely high probability of harms or victimization). This data indicates significant escalation of gun related violence and community exposure to broader community violence in the northwest.
  - approximately 23% of all shooting and firearm discharge incidents took place in the northwest neighbourhoods of the city
  - 41% of the FOCUS AER situations are located in the northwest neighbourhoods of the City (FOCUS Rexdale and Black Creek Tables)
- In 2019-2020, the City partnered with Black Creek Community Health Centre, Rexdale Community Health Centre as anchor agencies, and with the Revive Consultant Group and the NIA Centre for the Arts to co-design and develop the TOwards Peace pilot.
- At the core of the model is the integrated and supportive work that will be implemented by local community-based grassroots groups that have in depth experience and expertise in working with this population. The City currently has an open funding call closing on February 5<sup>th</sup> specific to the northwest Toronto to identify and select two grassroots organizations to work in the Black Creek and Rexdale communities.
- Grassroots groups will work closely with TOwards Peace lead agencies, Black Creek Community Health Centre and Rexdale Community Health Centre, to hire mentors with relevant lived experience to work with integrated teams including City,

healthcare and local community based staff to identify risks and pivotal points of intervention and violence interruption, and to coordinate critical access to resources and services to mitigate risks. In keeping within COVID-19 health and safety measures, three key intervention and interruption methods will be used:

- Person to Person; on the ground individual or small group interactions
  - Social Media; identification of online risks, conflicts, anti-violence content development
  - Hospital based interventions; bedside interactions, referrals and support for continuum of care and safety planning
- The City as municipal backbone will support community agencies and groups to drive community-led solutions through ongoing engagement activities and public communication initiatives establishing and building further trust and relationships between individuals and communities that work to shift community context, a culture of violence, and change behaviours.
  - The 2021 Staff Recommended Operating Budget for Social Development, Finance and Administration includes \$1.39M (gross and net) new and enhanced investment to implement the TOWards Peace pilot in the northwest (Black Creek and Rexdale). This investment covers costs related to program refinement, staffing, implementation, community investments, program monitoring and evaluation.
  - Implementation is set to begin in April 2021.

**Program Expansion**

- In addition to the northwest, three other Toronto regions were chosen as priority for TOWards Peace expansion:
  - Downtown (Regent Park and Alexandra Park)
  - North Scarborough (Woburn and Malvern)
  - Central (Flemingdon Park & Thorncliffe Park and Lawrence Heights)
- The context of violence is shifting throughout Toronto. Current trends of violence and conflicts indicate that conflict and violence are being both localized and crossing communities. In this context, these three specific regions could benefit from comprehensive, coordinated, multi-sectoral approach that TOWards Peace will provide. Some of these regions already have strong partnerships and a community of practice that enables quicker, more effective and responsive outcomes.
- Table 1 outlines staff's recommended expansion plan from the northwest in year 1 (2021), into the three other regions of the city where data suggests an acute need for a comprehensive, multi-sectoral response:

**Table 1 - Recommended Expansion Plan**

Implementation Year	# of Program Regions	Program Regions	Cumulative Budget*
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2021	1 region	Northwest (Black Creek and Rexdale)*	\$1.38M
2022	2 regions	Northwest (Black Creek and Rexdale) <b>Downtown (Regent Park and Alexandra Park)</b>	\$4.07M
2023	3 regions	Northwest (Black Creek and Rexdale) Downtown (Regent Park and Alexandra Park) <b>North Scarborough (Woburn and Malvern)</b>	\$5.58M
2024	4 regions	Northwest (Black Creek and Rexdale) Downtown (Regent Park and Alexandra Park) North Scarborough (Woburn and Malvern) <b>Central (Flemingdon Park &amp; Thorncliffe Park and Lawrence Heights)</b>	\$6.95M

\*Subject to Council approval through the annual budget process

- Based on promising practices and lessons learnt from other jurisdiction as well as through consultations with community, it is important to complete a pilot first with intermittent evaluation to determine:
  - Best approach for stabilization
  - Identify key risk factors
  - A community of practice for support positive youth development
  - How best to enter other regions based on their unique needs, as informed by that specific community
- Each community must meet the risk factors to receive the unique TOwards Peace service. Risk factors include escalating and retaliatory gang related incidents and violence; critical gaps in service responsive to youth most vulnerable to involvement in crime and victimization; and, high levels of youth who are racialized and marginalized and disproportionately represented in the justice system.
- In preparing each region to receive TOwards Peace, the City staff will:
  - Consult with that community to identify local anchor agency and grassroots organizations/groups as possible partners and to develop knowledge and understanding of the unique needs for best response to risks; and,
  - Work with grassroots organizations to create and implement a testing phase of the model prior to full roll out in the region.
- Promising practices and lessons learnt from other jurisdictions internationally also indicate the need to invest well into the model to achieve impact. As TOwards Peace approaches its northwest launch, staff recommend taking a similar measured approach that builds in the necessary resources in each individual region to set the program up to achieve impactful outcomes.

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