



STAFF REPORT INFORMATION ONLY

Update on the Youth Outreach Worker Program

Date:	November 1, 2012
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	Jim Hart, General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
Wards:	All
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SUMMARY

As directed by Council on its meeting of June 6, 7, 8, 2012, the following report summarizes the review of the Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) program including appropriate qualifications, training and supervision of staff.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts resulting from the receipt of this report.

The full annual cost of \$2.68 million for the Youth Outreach Worker Program, with the restored complement of 29 positions, will be submitted for consideration in the Parks Forestry and Recreation 2013 Operating Budget. This follows the direction by City Council on June 6, 2012 to include the full year cost of \$1.35 million for the reinstatement of the 17 positions which had been deleted in January of 2012 as part of the reduction strategy for the 2012 Operating Budget.

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

DECISION HISTORY

In the 2012 operating budget, as part of an overall 10 per cent target, City Council approved the elimination of 17 of 29 positions in the Youth Outreach Worker program, in order to achieve a savings of \$1.35 million dollars in the Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) Operating Budget.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.EX14.1>

On the meeting of June 6, 7 and 8, City Council amended the January 2012 decision. Council directed the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to reinstate 17 Youth Outreach Worker positions to the full complement of 29 positions for 2012. As part of this amendment, the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation was directed to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee on a review of the Youth Outreach program and that the required funding for 29 Youth Outreach Worker positions be included for consideration in the 2013 operating budget process. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewPublishedReport.do?function=getCouncilDecisionDocumentReport&meetingId=5664>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

History of YOW program

Recreational programming for youth has always been a primary focus of Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) programming. In 1999, several reports identified the need to address issues of youth at risk: The Mayor's Report on Violence and Gang Activity, The Task Force on Community Safety Report and Action Plan on Violence in Schools Report.

In response to the need for support and expansion of recreation opportunities for youth, PFR implemented the Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) program in 2000 with 13 part-time outreach positions. This was in response to youth gang violence in schools, the focus of work at that time was on general outreach in malls, TTC stations and late night drop-in recreation programs.

The YOW program has evolved over time. In 2005, funding was allocated for permanent, full-time hiring of Youth Outreach Workers. There are currently 29 YOW's working in high need communities across the City of Toronto. YOW's focus on engaging youth that face barriers including newcomer and diverse youth, those from at-risk neighbourhoods and youth with a disability, and linking them to recreation and other services.

The Recreation Service Plan 2013-2017 confirms children, youth and seniors as a priority for service delivery. The YOWs are an integral component to the delivery of recreation services for youth in Toronto. The current direction of the YOW program will focus on long-term strategies to ensure consistency of the program across the City, accountability and measuring performance outcomes. The YOW program will be integral to the City's work on integrated planning for youth and will work in partnership to support the Province's recently announced Youth Action Plan.

COMMENTS

Recreation, Supporting Youth

Engaging youth in recreation is essential to building strong citizens and healthy communities. Participation in recreation contributes to improved self-esteem, self-empowerment, academic performance and community enhancement. It creates resiliency and has a positive effect on youth development, leadership, and personal growth by promoting a healthy transition into adulthood.

Youth programs are a primary service delivery area for Parks, Forestry and Recreation. Programming spans a wide array of options including free drop-ins for youth at community centres, youth lounges, local youth advisory committees and registered youth programs in skill and leadership development. The Youth Challenge Fund and federal/provincial infrastructure funding has also supported recent youth focused capital developments at the Don Montgomery, McGregor Park and Dennis R. Timbrell Community Centres. PFR also supports the development of skate and bike parks in a variety of locations across the city including a new installation at the Wallace Emerson Community Centre. The YOW program is an important component to the delivery of meaningful recreation opportunities for youth in our high needs communities. YOW's provide outreach and engage youth that face barriers, linking them to recreation programs and services. Working with Community Recreation Programmers (CRPs), YOW's advise on program needs of youth in the local community and support Advisory Councils that help empower and give a voice to youth in our program development. While YOWs are stationed in local community centres, they also connect with youth where they congregate, such as at school and parks, and generally make themselves visible in the community as an adult that can be trusted. YOW's also develop relationships with a broad array of social services and referral agencies and connect youth to housing, employment, health and harm reduction services.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Youth Outreach Worker role is designed to support, connect and engage youth in addressing a number of issues that are critical to the positive personal development of young people; especially for youth who lack positive role models and/or are experiencing negative peer influences. These issues include building self-esteem, trust, cooperation, teamwork, leadership, decision-making, self awareness, connections, conflict-resolution and recreation participation. These assets are identified as integral components to the healthy development of adolescents (Health Communities, Healthy Youth, 2006).

Key Points

Review Process

Over summer 2012, PFR conducted a review of the YOW program. The review involved a survey with all YOW's to determine current activities, community priorities and partnerships. There were several meetings held with Youth Outreach Workers to discuss challenges, barriers and opportunities within the program and to seek input in moving forward. Meetings were also held with the local Community Recreation Supervisors

across the city. Exploratory research was conducted on best practices and performance measurement tools, this included reviewing and reviving past initiatives and trainings that were successful, and consultation with outside youth agencies.

PFR YOW Program Work Plan

Recreation is delivered at the local level, and managed through a District operational model. A key challenge for the Youth Outreach Worker program has been to balance the need to respond at the local level to youth recreation needs, while ensuring overall consistency of program delivery across the City of Toronto.

The PFR YOW Program Work Plan outlined below, identifies several key areas that will be essential to strengthening the YOW program. These include structure and supervision, individual YOW work plans, consistent support of Youth Advisory Councils, training, performance measures and interdivisional youth planning.

This PFR YOW Program Work Plan will increase city-wide communication and information sharing of YOWs across the City, improve support and oversight by supervisory staff and tangible measurements of the positive impacts of the program. It also addresses consistency in programming, staff qualifications, training and local responsiveness.

Structure/Supervision

The program will now be supported within the Children and Youth unit within PFR. The YOW program will move to a centralized model with central Youth supervisors overseeing the work and activities of the 29 YOW's across the city. These supervisors will be responsible for day-to-day operations, reviewing local and district work plans, issues management, professional development and data collection. At the local level, Community Recreation Supervisors will be engaged regularly to ensure responsiveness to local community needs, collaboration, and team building between the YOW and Community Recreation Programmers (CRPs).

Individual YOW Work plan

All YOW's will develop a work plan that encompasses the following components; Youth Advisory Council meetings, drop-in and registered youth programming and events, connections with the community, referral agencies, school boards and Toronto Public Service partners, such as Toronto Police Services and Toronto Public Health. These plans will roll up into the citywide PFR YOW Program Work Plan. The Recreation Service Plan identifies youth as a priority and the YOWs will play a key role in supporting the implementation of the Recreation Service Plan through local planning and engagement of youth.

Youth Advisory Councils

Youth who are involved in meaningful and inclusive engagement activities, high-level decision-making, vision building and the development of youth-led community activities are key leaders in building healthy communities. To advance youth civic engagement and maintain local responsiveness, every YOW will be responsible for assembling a local

Youth Advisory Council, and reporting back on Committee activities, events and involvement in youth-oriented recreation programming at the local recreation centre(s). The Youth Advisory Committees will be a key support in helping to create a welcoming environment for youth at all centres.

These councils empower and give a voice to youth; creating youth led recreation opportunities and advising on program needs of youth in local communities. The skills they garner from Youth Advisory Councils assist in the development of employment skills. PFR is the largest single employer of youth in Toronto and the work of YOWs assists in ensuring that local youth have the leadership and skill development opportunities to be eligible for employment.

Youth Advisory Councils work collaboratively with local community partners and other City services, such as Toronto Police. For example, the Jimmie Simpson Youth Council organized a Police-Peace BBQ. This event brought youth and local police officers together in a neutral and non-confrontational way to strengthen youth-police relations.

Training

The YOWs identified the importance of coming together as a team to learn, develop and provide mutual support, as a key way to strengthen the YOW program. The central Youth supervisors will regularly bring the full team of YOW's together for professional development and training. A core set of trainings will be delivered, including conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity, health and safety, mental health, community engagement, programming, personal development and advancement. The YOWs are a diverse, educated and highly skilled talent pool, with backgrounds in recreation, social work, teaching, health care, community development and policy. YOWs provide support to community centres, equipping local staff with skills to work effectively with youth. PFR will utilize the capacity building expertise and YOW knowledge of working with youth, in implementing the Recreation Service Plan.

Participation in recreation in a "by youth for youth" recreation model offers opportunities for youth to be involved in their own development while working towards personal and community change. As the program progresses, there will be more formal integration of the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. This framework focuses on positive outcomes for youth (such as social, academic or vocational success); over negative ones (such as drug use, unplanned pregnancy, or violence). The PYD perspective gives youth a voice and an equal partnership in program planning and development, and stresses community involvement and collaboration (Parks and Recreation Ontario, 2010).

Parks, Forestry and Recreation will also provide opportunities for YOW's to obtain the most current information on youth development and emerging trends through external training opportunities where appropriate. It is important to build connections to other City and provincial staff that work with youth, both in terms of information sharing and avoiding duplication. In January 2013, the YOW's will be participating in a provincial and municipal training of youth staff in Social Development & Finance and Administration (SDFA), Toronto Employment and Social Services (TESS) and the

Ministry of Children and Youth. This will provide an opportunity for provincial and municipal youth outreach workers to share information and experiences and gain new skills and ideas to bring back to their individual recreation centres.

Performance Measures

To gauge the success and impacts of the YOW program, PFR is in the process of test piloting a performance measurement tool to track a variety of youth focused measures. This tool will measure both quantitative and qualitative data and outcomes of the program. The data collection will include statistics and information on the number of youth in both registered and drop-in programs, the kinds of activities youth are engaging in, Youth Advisory Council events and initiatives, which on-site services youth are inquiring about and utilizing, and the number of referrals to both internal services and outside agencies.

Going forward, it is important that the City collectively determine the best way to measure outcomes of our work with youth. This should be a key activity of the integrated youth planning table, discussed below.

Interdivisional youth planning

There are several City of Toronto Divisions and agencies that also have programs and services that focus on youth, including Toronto Public Health, Toronto Public Library, Social Development, Finance and Administration, Toronto Community Housing, Toronto Employment and Social Services, Shelter Support and Housing Administration and the Toronto Police Service.

There is a clear need to align youth programs and services to maximize the impact of the City's investment and ensure the greatest possible community impact. An integrated City youth planning table is in development, through the leadership of SDF, PFR and TESS and will ensure integrated planning efforts of all City partners.

This integrated table will provide a unified approach for the City to work with other community partners on improving outcomes for youth and connecting to and supporting the Province's Youth Action Plan.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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