



Deputation to: Community Development and Recreation Committee (Item 2013.CD22.8, Toronto Youth Equity Framework), re: Staff Report, “Youth Equity Framework” (June 12, 2013)

Submitted by: METRAC (the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children)

Presenters: Asam Ahmad and Najla Edwards, METRAC Peer Youth Program Co-Coordiators

Date/location: Wednesday June 26, 2013, 9:30 AM, Toronto City Hall (2nd Floor, Committee Room 1)

Contact information: 416-392-3135 | info@metrac.org

We would like to thank you for the opportunity to present at this meeting. We are here on behalf of the Metropolitan Action Committee on Violence Against Women and Children (METRAC), an award-winning, community-based organization founded in 1984. We prevent violence against diverse women and youth through innovative public education and safety programming.

We are co-coordinators of METRAC’s youth violence prevention program. Since 2001, we’ve provided peer-to-peer education and resources to thousands of young people, educators and service providers across the city. We’ve helped them understand warning signs of violence against women and youth and helped them develop tools, resilience and skills to prevent it.

METRAC agrees that the proposed Toronto Youth Equity Strategy to outline a “comprehensive, holistic and targeted approach to support youth at high risk of marginalization” is critical (Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 2013). Given METRAC’s mandate to prevent violence, we agree that concerted effort to provide accessible, relevant services and supports to underserved young people will help build safety and make our communities better. We believe the proposed vision and principles outlined in “Appendix I: Framework for a Toronto Youth Equity Strategy” are based on best practices in policy development, especially the principle that youth must be included the creation of policies that impact them (Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration, 2013). We stress the need for immediate action, given the fact that the framework responds to recommendations proposed years ago.

However, METRAC also stresses that the strategy and framework must include voices of young women and transgender youth and must attend to gender-based violence and harassment. Unfortunately, The Review of the Roots of Violence report and Ontario Youth Action Plan that this Toronto Youth Equity Strategy responds to are thin their inclusion of gender-based violence, including sexual assault and partner violence. It is a glaring omission given the reality that:

- six percent of Canadian women report being physically or sexually victimized by their partners, with young women at highest risk (Statistics Canada, 2011).

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- sexual assault, of which young women are also at highest risk, is extremely under-reported to police (Statistics Canada, 2006).
- in a Toronto survey, seven percent of female respondents experienced a major sexual assault at school and 21% percent of respondents reported knowing one student who was sexually assaulted at school over the past two years (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008).
- the vast majority of students at two Toronto high schools said they would not report their own victimization to police or school authorities (School Community Safety Advisory Panel, 2008).
- barriers related to racism, poverty and disability significantly increase risks of gender-based violence (e.g. Brzozowski, Taylor-Butts & Johnson, 2006; National Clearinghouse on Family Violence, 1992; Covell, 2005).

It has been METRAC's observation that planning and policy on youth violence often fails to consider gender-based violence. They tend to focus on "guns and gangs" in a way that doesn't acknowledge how young women and trans youth – over half of our city's youth population – are impacted by violence. In addition, they often fail to consider how rigid notions of gender – what it means to be a "real man" and "real woman" – intensify all forms of violence, including gun violence, gang violence, sexual assault and partner abuse. Gender stereotypes and rigid gender roles negatively impact all young people. We suggest that marginalized youth, those who have less access to opportunities and respect, get trapped in the "gender bind" all the more.

In short, METRAC supports the development of a Toronto Youth Equity Strategy as outlined in the June 12, 2013 Staff Report. But we strongly encourage inclusion of young women and trans youth in the process as well as a concerted analysis of gender-based violence.

Thank you.