

May 26th, 2104

Toronto City Council Executive Committee
City Hall, 10th floor, West Tower
100 Queen Street West, Toronto M5H 2N2

Dear Chair Norm Kelly and members of the Executive Committee:

It is with great concern that we have learned about the decision to cease funding the essential Youth Employment Toronto program. YET has been a partner with our program since 2003, and their staff team has consistently carried out excellent work in assisting young people upgrade their skills, increase their chances of employment, and find the position best suited to their needs.

Youth unemployment is already extremely highⁱ, with the current rate for Canadians ages 15 to 24 at 13.6 per centⁱⁱ. It would be devastating to the youth we work with were YET's work not to continue. We particularly wish to highlight YET's special attention to at-risk youth, which serves our client population extremely well and we consider them a key partner in our important community development work. According to Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance (2013):

Youth face multiple barriers to employment, mentorship and entrepreneurship specifically; youth in or leaving care, youth with special needs, youth in conflict with the law, newcomer youth, LGBTTTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Two- Spirited, Queer) youth, Aboriginal youth, racialized youth, and low-income youth. E.g.

- o Ontario's Aboriginal youth have an unemployment rate of 21.9%
- o Young African Canadians have the second highest rate of unemployment (21.2%)ⁱⁱⁱ

SOY's client population draws from all of the identities and vulnerabilities listed above and more.

A program of Sherbourne Health Centre, SOY works to improve the lives of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and transsexual (LGBT) youth in Toronto through the active involvement of adults working together with youth. We create healthy arts, cultural and recreational spaces for young people; provide supportive housing and employment opportunities; and increase youth access to adult mentoring and support.

As outlined above, LGBT youth face multiple challenges when seeking employment, and subsequently, in spite of ambitions and hopes for their lives, many end up having to claim Ontario Works – or seek alternative, often high-risk options in order to survive. These challenges often relate directly or indirectly to their sexual orientation and/or gender identity due to the prejudice and negative stereotypes still inherent in mainstream society. Many of the youth who come to SOY experience financial and emotional hardship because they have been rejected by their own families and are forced to find alternative housing or end up on the street. Others are newcomers to Canada, seeking safe haven from the extreme, systemic homophobia in their country of origin. They may have left school prematurely as a result of harassment, threats and/or acts of violence committed against them as a result of homophobia or transphobia. All of these factors contribute to increased risk and vulnerability for young people, and compound the challenges they face when trying to enter the workforce.

SOY and YET have enjoyed an excellent partnership, which includes a monthly employment clinic, now in its **eleventh** year, where LGBT youth can come to a safe space to receive invaluable support and advice relating to training and employment opportunities from a skilled, non-judgmental YET worker. Each year at SOY, an between eighteen to twenty SOY youth, who might not have felt comfortable attending a non LGBT-identified

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space, have accessed YET employment clinics at SOY and received invaluable information from the YET worker. Many of these youth live in very difficult circumstances, whether actively homeless, “couch-surfing” at the homes of friends and acquaintances, or living in tenuous accommodations that are often unsafe and insecure. The sensitivity and experience of the YET staff to the living situations of many of our young people are key to **building trust and offer effective long-term solutions**.

Our relationship with YET has also assisted us in accessing important employment-related resources for the young people we serve, including information regarding various training programs through other youth employment partners, and access to clothing for interviews and/or the first week on the job. Not only are these programs highly successful and well received by the SOY community; they also act as a key entry point for a number of youth who would otherwise not have approached SOY. The supports they receive through YET give them increased confidence in the social service network and allow SOY the opportunity to introduce these young people with very limited resources to many other programs and services.

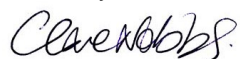
It should be noted that we have referred youth to other youth employment services in the city, but in at least 75% of cases, we hear reports of disrespectful and even blatantly homophobic and transphobic treatment. LGBT youth struggle enough for respect and acceptance; in the absence of YET, we are now deeply concerned that we will not have safe employment supports to which we can refer them. To quote Social Planning Toronto’s 2014 provincial election factsheet on good jobs^{iv}:

The province’s youth unemployment rate is twice the national average, fluctuating between 16% and 17%. Because youth find it difficult to enter the labour force, they tend to engage in precarious forms of employment. Over 50% of youth are in part-time employment, compared to 14% of workers aged 25 or older.

Without the advice and support of the highly skilled, sensitive staff at Youth Employment Toronto, our efforts to make improvements in this area will fall far short of the very real and ever-present need. We are urging you to support the request to City Council to provide bridge funding that would allow YET to continue its work while lobbying efforts take place at the federal level to resume funding for the coming year.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you require further information.

Sincerely,



Clare Nobbs

Coordinator, Community Programs
Supporting Our Youth
416-324-5077
soy@sherbourne.on.ca

ⁱ In 2012, the unemployment rate of youths aged 15 to 24 was 14.3%, compared with a rate of 6.0% for workers aged 25 to 54 and workers aged 55 or older (Statistics Canada, 2013. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-626-x/11-626-x2013024-eng.pdf>).

ⁱⁱ Huffington Post (May 2014). http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2014/05/12/tree-planting-youth-employment_n_5308156.html

ⁱⁱⁱ Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance (June 2013). Downloaded from http://www.civicaction.ca/sites/default/files/Youth_FastFacts_Approved_0.pdf

^{iv} Social Planning Toronto (2014). <http://www.socialplanningtoronto.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Jobs.pdf>