



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Toronto Youth Equity Strategy

Date:	January 7, 2014
To:	Community Development & Recreation Committee
From:	Executive Director, Social Development, Finance & Administration
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	AFS #18222

SUMMARY

Youth violence remains a continuing concern in the city of Toronto. Much research and many reports have studied the challenges of youth violence and proposed recommendations for tackling the issue, however actions to date have not adequately addressed the root causes of violence. Two main reasons for this have emerged: one, the youth services sector as a whole is vast and poorly coordinated across communities, service providers, and governments; two, youth most in need of supportive intervention to reduce the likelihood of involvement in violence are those who face the most barriers to accessing those supports.

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) seeks to support youth (aged 13-29) who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime both by taking steps to better coordinate youth service delivery in Toronto, and by identifying specific service enhancements directed at those youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

While an issue as challenging as youth violence cannot be addressed by a municipal government alone, through the TYES, the City of Toronto can lead in responding to both these challenges. The Strategy identifies 28 key issues and corresponding recommendations. The Strategy proposes 110 specific actions that can be taken by City divisions, agencies, and corporations to build resiliency in our youth and create the supportive systems that can help young people resist the frustration and disillusionment that can lead to involvement in violence and crime.

This report details the development of the Strategy, explains the reasoning behind its development, and sets out a plan for ensuring accountability and assessing impact.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration (SDFA) recommends that:

1. City Council adopt the service planning principles, recommendations, and accountability and monitoring framework contained in the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (Attachment 1);
2. City Council approve the implementation of all Toronto Youth Equity Strategy actions (identified in Attachment 2) which can begin in 2014, subject to Council approval of the 2014 Staff Recommended Operating Budget;
3. City Council refer all Toronto Youth Equity Strategy actions requiring additional resources to the respective program areas for consideration and potential inclusion in future operating and capital budgets;
4. City Council direct the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to coordinate and monitor the implementation of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy and provide an annual progress report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee starting in 2015.
5. City Council forward the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy to the Premier of Ontario, and the Minister for Children and Youth Services.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

The financial implications associated with the 110 recommended actions identified in Attachment Two are summarized as follows:

1. 77 actions for which implementation can be achieved within the existing resources identified in the 2014 Staff Recommended Operating Budget pending Council Approval,
2. Six (6) actions which will require funding beyond the 2014 Staff Recommended Operating Budget, to be considered by Budget Committee on January 8, 2014 (Extended Library hours, Expansion of Youth Spaces, and Youth Equity Strategy 2014 Funding) estimated at \$2.477 million gross and net, which will require Council approval as part of the 2014 budget process; and
3. 27 actions identified which will be implemented in 2015 or beyond, and may have budget implications for the 2015 and future budget processes.

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

EQUITY IMPACT

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) has been developed to address the complex needs of youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The TYES is premised on the idea that the Toronto youth service system which the City, other orders of government, funders and institutions support, is not currently providing equitable access and outcomes for this population. Focusing on the City of Toronto's role within this service system, the Strategy seeks to improve services and supports within City jurisdiction in order to positively impact the quality of life of Toronto's most vulnerable youth.

The Strategy draws on the City's recently adopted definition of vulnerability as a service gap or a context rather than a defining feature of a person. It does so to ensure that the City brings a consistent approach to its work with vulnerable populations, and in recognition that terms such as "at risk youth" and "high risk youth" are imprecise and stigmatizing. The TYES supports an understanding of vulnerability which emphasizes the interaction of young people's risk and resilience, with attributes which often characterize equity-seeking groups, such as: race, gender, sexual orientation, disability, mental health, and housing status, among others. The Strategy encourages this approach in order to better identify and understand how barriers to service are created and persist.

The TYES also recognizes the vital importance of ensuring youth involvement in strategies and initiatives intended to serve them. While the strategy's development did not involve a broad public consultation, significant effort was made to involve youth voices throughout the process, including engagement with an External Panel with significant youth representation from across Toronto, consultation with the Toronto Youth Cabinet, and the recruitment of youth from youth-led arts organizations to provide artistic interpretations of the experiences of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

DECISION HISTORY

At its meeting of February 20 and 21, 2013, City Council adopted Member Motion MM30.13 *Taking Action on the Roots of Youth Violence*. The motion directed City staff to report to the Community Development and Recreation Committee by June 2013 on the status of Provincial-Municipal actions recommended in the reports, *The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* and *Ontario's Youth Action Plan* and identify additional measures to address youth violence in Toronto. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.MM30.13>

At its meeting of July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2013, City Council approved the Framework for the development of a Toronto Youth Equity Strategy and directed inclusion of a gender-based analysis in the Strategy. Council also directed Social Development, Finance and Administration to consult with relevant program areas to review current service levels supporting youth at risk of marginalization and report to the September 18, 2013 meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee as to options and priorities for increasing service supports for youth at risk in Toronto.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD22.8>

At its meeting of October 8, 9, and 10, 2013, City Council adopted the report *Review of City Service Levels Supporting Toronto's At Risk Youth*, which reviewed City service levels for at risk youth and detailed five (5) key observations of the City's services for this group. The report also detailed eight (8) service priorities for youth at highest risk of involvement in serious violence and crime. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD23.8>

At its meeting of December 4, 2013, the Community Recreation and Development Committee referred item CD 25.14 *Youth Equity Strategy Funding in 2014 Budget* to the Budget Committee. <http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD25.14>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

All young people in Toronto deserve the opportunity to pursue their goals and to access the tools and supports to overcome the specific social, economic, academic, health, geographic and/or criminal justice system challenges they may face. While many Toronto youth have the supports that allow them to live, learn, work and play in safe and nurturing environments, a segment of youth – particularly minority and racialized youth – face significant challenges that leave them exposed to social and economic marginalization, and greater vulnerability to involvement in violence and crime.

The 2008 report by The Honourable Roy McMurtry and Dr. Alvin Curling on the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* identified the marginalization of youth as the key contributing factor to the escalation of youth violence in communities. Increases in the social and economic marginalization of youth affect Toronto residents in their neighbourhoods and across the city by increasing youth susceptibility to becoming involved in criminal activity. The cycle of violence negatively impacts individual and community perceptions of safety and social cohesion, and increases the stigmatization of youth, communities and neighbourhoods. Youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime require additional community-based mental health, substance abuse, social, recreational, employment, legal, education and targeted engagement supports that exceed community-based resources traditionally available for youth at a neighbourhood level.¹

Many community service providers have remarked on the importance of the *Review of Roots of Youth Violence* as a blueprint for how to support youth who are the most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy seeks to build on this blueprint and address the fact that five years after the release of the report, delivering coordinated, consistent, concrete actions to adequately address the root causes of violence remains a challenge. TYES identifies two main reasons for this:

- 1) the youth services sector as a whole is complicated and not well coordinated across communities, service providers, governments and institutions; and,

¹ Canada. Ontario. Office of the Premier. *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, vol. 2 – Executive Summary*. [Toronto, O.N.]: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008. p.6-16

- 2) the youth who are the most in need of supportive intervention to reduce the likelihood of involvement in violence are those who face the most barriers to accessing those supports.

For this reason, the TYES proposes two types of recommendations and actions. The first type speaks to better coordination of the range of City's services and programs which do or should serve youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. This work will have universal benefit for all youth and their communities but will be done in a fashion which respects the needs of youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. The second type specifically targets the needs of youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

COMMENTS

Identifying the target population

One particular challenge in the development of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is how to describe the target population with clarity to ensure that those youth at highest risk of involvement in serious violence and crime become the central focus of equity efforts. While staff worked to refine the definition of "high risk youth" used in the Toronto Youth Equity Framework in June 2013 by drawing on much of the literature that has expanded on the work of the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence*, youth repeatedly and clearly reported that they view the term "at risk" as a label that stigmatizes and marginalizes youth and their communities.

For this reason, TYES refers to the youth it is intended to serve as "youth who are the most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime." The use of the word vulnerable now has a very specific meaning for the City of Toronto. On December 16, 2013, City Council adopted a definition of vulnerability as "a service gap, context or situation, not a characteristic or feature of a person. People become vulnerable when there are barriers or gaps in overall service delivery." [EX36.10] In this way, referring to the vulnerability of highest risk youth reinforces the understanding that the vulnerability exists within the circumstances in which racialized, marginalized youth find themselves, not with individual youth themselves.

Accordingly, the TYES views vulnerability as a complex mix of conditions. The deep roots of youth violence as identified in the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence* report create an important base. Poverty, racism, community design, issues in the education system, family issues, health, lack of a youth voice, lack of economic opportunity for youth, and issues in the justice system remain as important in understanding the current context of youth vulnerability as when the Roots report was published five (5) years ago.

The challenge, though, is that the deep roots "frequently interconnect and intertwine in ways that create devastating cumulative impacts for far too many of our youth."² TYES builds on the understanding that vulnerability to involvement in serious violence and crime comes from a mix of not only these deep roots, but also the complex interactions between the individual resilience

² Canada. Ontario. Office of the Premier. *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, vol. 2 – Executive Summary*. [Toronto, O.N.]: Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2008. p.6-16

and supportive systems in a young person's life, as well as other vulnerabilities she or he may experience, such as sexism and homophobia. These many contexts are all bound up in a complex profile of vulnerability and resilience that is particular to each individual.

Development of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy

Staff Teams

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy was managed by a Project Team comprised of staff in the Social Development, Finance and Administration Division. Two cross-corporate teams were involved in the development of the TYES, an **Interdivisional Senior Management Steering Committee**, which provided strategic direction, and a **Staff Working Group**, which coordinated the work of developing the Strategy across the participating divisions, agencies and corporations. Staff from Equity, Diversity, and Human Rights; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration; Toronto Community Housing Corporation; Toronto Employment and Social Services; Toronto Police Service, Toronto Public Health, and Toronto Public Library were involved in the staff teams. While not members of the Staff Working Group, Children's Services, Economic Development and Culture, City Planning and the Toronto Transit Commission were consulted.

Through the Staff Working Group, the Project Team arranged sessions to talk at greater depth both with staff who work directly with youth and staff who supervise or manage programs for youth. These sessions identified the challenges staff across the City face in providing services to youth who are the most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, and what the City can do to better serve the needs of these young people.

Community Consultations

Development of the TYES did not include a broad community consultation — much consultation work has already been done in the development of previous reports to identify the issues and best practices for addressing youth violence. The emphasis for the City's Strategy is effective action — taking an equity lens to the issues and identifying actions with the greatest impact in areas where the City of Toronto can make a difference. To facilitate the development of the Strategy, a targeted group of youth, youth-serving programs and providers, and youth advocacy organizations were engaged in the development process of the TYES.

The TYES was developed in consultation with an **External Panel**. The External Panel was comprised of 20 individuals from across Toronto who are involved in youth service agencies and youth advocacy. A majority of the panel members were youth themselves, ranging in age from 15 to 29. Panel members were recruited through a call for volunteers distributed through Social Development, Finance & Administration's Community Development Unit. Two members of the **Toronto Youth Cabinet's** Executive sat on the External Panel, and the Cabinet was consulted throughout the development of the Strategy. The External Panel met six times throughout the late summer and fall of 2013, working closely with the TYES Project Team to refine the goals, recommendations, and actions of the Strategy.

The TYES project team recruited youth from **youth-led arts groups** to provide artistic interpretations of the experiences of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence

and crime. Many of the creative works produced by youth engaged in these groups are included in the Creative Report developed to publicly communicate the Strategy: *The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy: Building Resilience and Supportive Systems*, which is appended to this report as Attachment 1. Arts groups involved in the project include: Nomanzland and RISE Poetry, which contributed storytelling and poetry; Rich Uncle and Film Stars production companies, which collaborated on a short film; Nia Centre for the Arts, which contributed photography; and 180 Change Street, which contributed song writing and recording. A complete list of participants can be found in the *Building Resilience and Supportive Systems* report.

In developing the Strategy, the TYES Project Team consulted numerous community organizations, public institutions, funders and government departments that have an interest in supporting vulnerable youth, including the Youth Challenge Fund's Legacy Initiatives, METRAC, Civic Action, the Roy McMurtry Centre, George Brown's Community Engagement Office, East Metro Youth Services, For Youth Initiative, Breaking the Cycle, the Toronto Catholic District School Board, among others. Conversations focused on deepening the City's understanding of the complex circumstances of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime and the gaps in the youth service system that fail this population.

Recognizing that an issue as challenging as youth violence cannot be addressed by a municipal government alone, conversations also aimed at ensuring alignment between the Strategy's recommended actions in City service areas and other key strategies, such as United Way Toronto's *Youth Impact Plan* and the Province's *Stepping Up – A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*. The TYES Project Team consulted with both United Way Toronto and the Ministry of Children and Youth Services and the Ministry of Community and Social Services to support complementarity of these strategies. The City of Toronto is also a member of the cross-sector, city-wide Youth Anti-Violence Task Force that worked in 2013 to create the report, *From Analysis to Action: A Collective Approach To Eliminate Youth Violence*. Relevant Task Force recommendations have been incorporated into the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.

Alignment with other City Strategies

To achieve a vision consistent with the strategic work underway across the City, the TYES Project Team and Staff Working Group have taken particular care to ensure alignment between the TYES and other related City strategic plans. Linking to the Middle Childhood Strategy is key in providing a supported transition from childhood to adolescence. Links were also provided to strategic work on the Recreation Service Plan and the City's Workforce Development Strategy. The TYES Project Team regularly connected with staff working on the Toronto Strong Neighbourhoods Strategy 2020 and the Toronto Newcomer Strategy to ensure alignment. Staff built on the City's work to develop an integrated service system approach to vulnerability, and to coordinate with work on the *Specialized Customer Service Training Module* so that staff training tools for serving vulnerable people can be developed in a harmonized fashion. Finally, the TYES builds on the age-friendly goals it shares with the Toronto Seniors Strategy, and its accountability framework.

Service Planning Principles and Recommendation Development

The TYES articulates six (6) key principles for service planning which emerged from a review of strategies and best practices for serving youth. This approach is in keeping with other key initiatives within the City, such as the Toronto Seniors Strategy, the Recreation Service Plan, the Parks Plan, the Guide to Good Practice and the Toronto Newcomer Strategy.

The service principles are:

1. Equitable Access and Outcomes;
2. Complexity of Vulnerability;
3. A Commitment to Positive Youth Development;
4. An Age-Friendly City;
5. Collaborative Action; and
6. Accountability.

These service principles are embedded in the Strategy and set the context for implementation of the Strategy's actions. The principles will also guide future decisions regarding funding priorities and service improvements and provide direction for the planning, management and delivery of services, initiatives, programs and investments for youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime in Toronto.

Upon gathering input from the literature, staff, and key community contributors, staff identified the key issues facing youth most vulnerable to involvement in violence and crime. For each of the 28 key issues, staff developed a matching recommendation to address it. In response to the recommendations, the Staff Teams developed 110 specific actions that can be taken to address the recommendations.

Summary of Recommended Actions

The 28 recommendations and 110 actions of the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy have been grouped into 7 broad themes:

1. Youth Voice,
2. Service System Coordination,
3. Service Gaps,
4. Service Relevance & Accessibility,
5. Community Collaboration,
6. Staff Competencies & Support, and
7. Accountability & Impact.

Within these themes, there are actions which focus on improvement to the coordination and delivery of existing City services, and there are some actions which introduce new or enhanced services or programs. Some actions are targeted, specifically aimed to equitably serve youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime, and others are universal, aimed at serving all youth. The table below shows the distribution of TYES Actions across these categories.

TYES Actions	Service System Improvement	New or Enhanced Service	Total
Targeted Initiatives	31 (28%)	18 (16%)	49 (45%)
Universal Initiatives	45 (41%)	16 (15%)	61 (55%)
Total	76 (69%)	34 (31%)	

Most of the TYES actions (69%) aim to improve delivery or coordination of City services. Of these, the majority (45 of 76, or 59%) focus on initiatives to better coordinate all youth services, thereby improving the City’s youth service system, such as better communication services to youth, better evaluation of investments in youth programs, or better involvement of youth in program development. The other 41% of actions focus on service system improvements (31 of 76) are targeted directly at youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime. These include removing barriers to services specific to this population, such as in training or employment programs; improving training for City staff to more effectively work with this population; or specifically engaging youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime to provide feedback on City programs meant to serve them.

A significant proportion of the work of cross-corporate service coordination will be carried out by the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy Table (24 actions in total are led or supported by the TYES table, 20 of these being service system improvement actions). The Table will be comprised of staff representatives from City program areas that have participated in the development of the strategy, initially consisting of appointed management or policy staff members with decision-making capacity to initiative TYES actions. Ultimately, the TYES Table is envisioned as a table of youth advocates (staff) from City divisions, agencies, boards and commissions to coordinate the City’s role in the youth service system. It will also more effectively engage with other governments, funders and agencies around youth equity issues.

A smaller but considerable number of actions (31%) propose new or enhanced services for youth. These actions are split almost evenly between targeted actions (18 of 34 or 53%) and ones which hold more universal impact (16 of 34 or 47%). Examples of TYES’ targeted actions include: supports for post traumatic stress youth experience following occurrences of violence, family support and skills development programs, restorative justice, pre-charge diversion, and risk-driven community safety programs. Examples of TYES’ universal actions are: extending opening hours at Libraries, increasing the number of youth spaces in existing City of Toronto recreation spaces, a youth mental health symposium, and a cross-corporate leadership and skills development recognition program.

Accountability and Monitoring

The Strategy was developed with a primary focus on issues and recommendations that fall within the City's authority to control, plan, manage and deliver. Building an accountability structure directly into the Strategy will help to ensure successful implementation.

The Strategy's accountability and monitoring framework commits to working closely with the Toronto Youth Cabinet and a TYES Community Panel based on the External Panel model to monitor the implementation of the Strategy and report to City Council regularly on progress.

Every one of the actions proposed in the TYES has:

1. a clearly identified lead program area with responsibility to implement;
2. a timeframe for implementation; and
3. a measure by which the status of each action will be reported to the public.

These elements mean that responsibilities for action are clearly assigned, a timeframe to get started on the work is clear, and expectations for reporting are well defined.

To report back on the strategy, City staff from participating program areas will review implementation of TYES in partnership with community partners. Together with community partners, City staff will refine the Strategy by identifying adjustments, additional actions, and/or opportunities for partnerships for the ongoing implementation of the Strategy.

Staff will report on the evaluation of the Strategy and present refinements to Council for approval. Continual monitoring and evaluation by City staff and community partners will keep TYES a living document, one which is responsive to the evolving needs of youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

Where possible, the Strategy identifies specific targets for successful implementation. If a target is not possible, then a measure of progress will be reported. These progress measures will show how well the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy is being implemented.

CONCLUSION

Youth violence remains a continuing concern in the city of Toronto. Much research and many reports have studied the challenges of youth violence and proposed recommendations for tackling the issue, however actions to date have not adequately addressed the root causes of violence. Two main reasons for this have emerged: one, the youth services sector as a whole is vast and poorly coordinated across communities, service providers, and governments; two, youth most in need of supportive intervention to reduce the likelihood of involvement in violence are those who face the most barriers to accessing those supports.

The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy (TYES) seeks to support youth (aged 13-29) who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime both by taking steps to better coordinate youth service delivery in Toronto, and by identifying specific service enhancements directed at those youth who are most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

The 110 actions recommended in the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy are designed to improve youth service system delivery and begin to provide the service enhancements required to achieve more equitable outcomes for those youth most vulnerable to involvement in serious violence and crime.

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ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: The Toronto Youth Equity Strategy: Building Resilience and Supportive Systems
Attachment 2: Issues, Recommendations and Proposed actions of the Toronto Youth Strategy