

Addressing youth violence through Advance Peace

Date: September 15, 2020

To: City Council

From: Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report provides information from City staff review on how the Advance Peace program can support existing City of Toronto efforts that are aimed at violence interruption, intervention and prevention, specifically, the development of TO Wards Peace.

Advance Peace is a non-profit organization based in Richmond, California that aims to reduce the spread of gun violence in urban neighbourhoods in America. The Advance Peace program works to interrupt and prevent gun violence by identifying and providing "transformational opportunities" (e.g. case management services, social service navigation, internship opportunities, etc.) to young men who are most likely to be perpetrators of gun violence.

In 2019, Toronto City Council requested Social Development, Finance & Administration Division to develop TO Wards Peace as a strategic community safety intervention. TO Wards Peace is a comprehensive Toronto-made model for violence interruption, intervention and prevention. The model is currently in development and will leverage the lived experiences of credible community members within the city, health and community teams, service agencies, and grassroots groups.

Social Development, Finance and Administration's review of the Advance Peace program, including consultations with the Advance Peace organization, provided key learnings of international best practices that can help to inform the development of the TO Wards Peace model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact arising from the adoption of this report.

DECISION HISTORY

On June 29, 2020, based on item MM22.36, City Council adopted a motion requesting the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to examine how the Advance Peace program can support existing efforts aimed at violence prevention and intervention and to report back to the September 30 and October 1, 2020 meeting of City Council.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.MM22.36>

On October 2 and 3, 2019 based on item MM10.2, City Council approved the increase of the 2019 Operating Budget for Social Development, Finance and Administration to implement year one of the TO Wards Peace program; funding of \$0.3M gross and net to be provided by a one-time draw from the City's Tax Stabilization Reserve.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MM10.2>

On October 2 and 3, 2019 based on item EX8.26, City Council adopted a motion directing the Executive Director of Social Development to submit a business case for consideration during the 2020 budget process to fund the implementation of TO Wards Peace program.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX8.26>

At its meeting on September 18, 2019, Executive Committee requested the Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration to review the outstanding funding proposals under the National Crime Prevention Strategy Fund and determine which initiative will make the most meaningful impact to reduce gun violence and the City's long-term Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan, and report directly to City Council at its meeting on October 2 and 3, 2019.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.EX8.26>

COMMENTS

Toronto Police Service's data shows that 2020 has the highest number of shootings recorded in the past five years.¹ Toronto's experience with gun violence escalation is not unique, gun violence continues to be an issue in cities across North America. The City of Toronto continues to invest in programs and initiatives to reduce the escalation

¹ Toronto Police Service Public Safety Data Portal. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://data.torontopolice.on.ca/pages/shootings>

of gun violence and is committed to finding innovative approaches to enhance the safety and wellbeing of Torontonians. City staff have reviewed violence interruption, intervention and prevention models in jurisdictions across Canada and the United States in order to inform the development of a comprehensive Toronto-made model for violence interruption, intervention and prevention, TO Wards Peace. One of the key reviewed models is Advance Peace.

Advance Peace Model

Advance Peace was founded in 2010 as a non-profit organization with the core mission to end “cyclical and retaliatory gun violence in American urban neighborhoods” by investing in the development, health, and wellbeing of people who are most likely to be perpetrators of gun violence.² At the core of Advance Peace is the “Peacemakers Fellowship” – a personalized program that provides “transformational opportunities to young men involved in lethal firearms offences.”³

The Peacemakers Fellowship relies on key activities and opportunities to enhance positive outcomes for those who are enrolled in the program. These activities include goal setting, daily check-ins, social service navigation, transformative travel opportunities, internship opportunities, engagement with elders circle, and a milestone allowance.⁴

In addition to engaging potential perpetrators of gun violence in the fellowship, Advance Peace participates in extensive conflict mediation within the community. Advance Peace relies on the efforts of street outreach workers called Neighbourhood Change Agents who simultaneously work to provide individual support to fellows and “mediate street conflicts, interrupt imminent violence, and respond to shootings.”⁵

In December 2017, the City of Sacramento, California entered into a multi-year partnership with Advance Peace. The City of Sacramento committed to \$1.5 million dollars of matching funds to support the implementation of the Peacemakers Fellowship with the goal of “reducing gun related assaults and homicides by 20-25 percent in the first two year of the program.”⁶ Funding from the City helped to build the critical infrastructure for delivering the program including hiring and training program managers and outreach workers, recruiting program participants, and recruiting and building long-term capacity of program partners. The Advance Peace program was implemented in three priority neighbourhoods designated as “Advance Peace Zones” by the City of Sacramento. The Advance Peace Zones are geographic areas in the city that are heavily impacted by gun violence.⁷

² Advance Peace, (2020). “About.” Retrieved from <https://www.advancepeace.org/about/>

³ Advance Peace, (2020). “The Solution.” Retrieved from <https://www.advancepeace.org/about/the-solution/>

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Jason Corburn & Amanda Fukutome. (2020). “Outcome Evaluation of Advance Peace Sacramento, 2018-19.” UC Berkeley, Institute of Urban & Regional Development. Berkeley, CA.

⁶ Jason Corburn & Amanda Fukutome. (2019). “Learning & Evaluation 2018 Year-End Progress Report.” UC Berkeley, Institute of Urban & Regional Development. Berkeley, CA.

⁷ Jason Corburn & Amanda Fukutome. (2020). “Outcome Evaluation of Advance Peace Sacramento, 2018-19.” UC Berkeley, Institute of Urban & Regional Development. Berkeley, CA.

An evaluation of the efficacy of the Advance Peace Program in Sacramento carried out by the University of California's Institute of Urban and Regional Development, found that the program contributed to a 22 per cent decrease in "gun homicides and assaults in all the Advance Peace Zones combined" and a 10 per cent decrease citywide in the first 18 months of its implementation.⁸

Key Learnings to inform TO Wards Peace Model

In developing the TO Wards Peace model, City staff conducted comprehensive jurisdictional scans of similar best practice models across North America, including Advance Peace in California, and Cure Violence in New York City. Further to the June 29, 2020 directive from Council, staff engaged in a thorough review of Advance Peace.

The core element of the Advance Peace model is their Peacemaker Fellowship which provides opportunities to male youth identified as those most likely to be victims and/or perpetrators of gun violence. Promising practices within this model includes:

1. Evidence-informed

- Development of model requires a multi-year process which includes research, data analysis, and community engagement.
- Utilize information (e.g. data, lived experience, historical and cultural information) of a neighbourhood to develop a deep understanding of the issues that needs to be addressed and what can be changed through intervention.
- A strong and robust monitoring and evaluation framework to inform improvement in intervention and prevention strategies, and program delivery.

2. Place-based and population-based targeted

- Identify defined geography for engagement and program delivery, and integrate local community and system based assets into intervention and prevention strategies.
- Include community investments in youth serving agencies, families and partners.
- Target populations actively and directly involved in the perpetuation of gun violence and/or victims of violence, with particular attention to the shooters.

3. Identified trusted mentors and outreach strategies

- Utilize neighbourhood change agents with the relevant backgrounds, skills, lived experience, knowledge of the community, and relationships with community members.

⁸ Ibid

- Invest in risk management through ongoing access to training and capacity building on emotional intelligence, trauma informed practices, supportive healing, conflict mediation and anger management.
- Account for the time it takes to build trust and establish relationships between mentors, youth and community partners.

4. Wraparound supports and services

- Structured 18 month developmental coaching program providing access to one on one mentorship and services that support addressing untreated trauma.
- Tailored goal setting and service coordination developed with the fellow to address their specific needs and meet personal goals.
- Provide ongoing access to health and social services including mental health supports, income supports, job and skills training, and employment opportunities.
- Provide case management services including extensive engagements and check-ins with target population.
- Stipends provided to each participant within program.

TO Wards Peace Model

At the September 18, 2019 Executive Committee, the Executive Director of Social Development was requested to review the outstanding 2018 grant requests to the National Crime Prevention Strategy Fund, and determine which initiative will make the most meaningful impact to reduce gun violence and the City's long-term Community Safety and Wellbeing objectives, and report directly to City Council at its meeting on October 2 and 3, 2019.

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.

As a result, staff are recommending the TO Wards Peace program as priority for implementation.

TO Wards Peace is a risk driven multi-sectoral model that combines credible community members with lived experience of involvement in violence with integrated City, health and community staff teams, service agencies, and grassroots groups aimed at violence interruption, intervention and prevention. This model 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.

Already, the City of Toronto has made key investments to bolster violence intervention and prevention efforts through its Community Crisis Response Program, the Furthering

Our Community by Uniting Services initiative, the Community Healing Program, and the Breaking the Cycle of Violence with Empathy initiative, all of which will be integrated into the TO Wards Peace model.

Social Development, Finance and Administration Division is currently utilizing a multi-stakeholder process, including working with community partners and grassroots groups, to co-design the TO Wards Peace model expected to launch in the spring of 2021 should ongoing program funding be invested.

The framework for developing the TO Wards Peace model focuses on 5 key strategies informed by lessons learned from existing City of Toronto violence intervention and prevention programs, best practices from violence intervention and prevention models in other jurisdictions, consultations with the Advance Peace organization, and knowledge gained from community stakeholders, including people with lived experience of violence. The framework for the development of the TO Wards Peace model focuses on:

1. **Identification:** Identify risk factors and pivotal points for interruption, intervention and prevention activities with MVP (Most Vulnerable Person) youth, starting in the North West area of Toronto with gradual expansion to identified areas with increased experiences of gun violence.
2. **Interruption:** On-the-ground interruption to prevent escalation, retaliatory violence and reduce impact of violence
3. **Intervention:** Wrap around support that identifies risk factors, critical needs and coordinates responsive life and safety planning
4. **Prevention:** Prevention by providing access to mentors with lived experience from the community with whom MVP youth can identify
5. **Evaluation:** Ongoing monitoring and evaluation to assess impact levels with participants and provide recommendations for program enhancements

Community violence is linked to issues of inequities, including deep poverty, anti-Black racism, anti-Indigenous racism and other forms of racism, and inequalities based on gender and disability among other social issues. Community violence disproportionately affect the lives of Black and racialized residents in areas of the city that face significant socioeconomic disadvantages. TO Wards Peace will align with the strategies both the City's Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit and the Indigenous Affairs Office in order to ensure that the model will not perpetuate systemic racial inequities.

Next steps

City staff will continue to draw from the best practices within the Advance Peace and other similar models across North America and will explore opportunities to access technical assistance for the design and implementation of the TO Wards Peace model.

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