

Youth Recreation Services Action Plan - Responding to Local Needs in the Rustic Neighbourhood

Date: June 14, 2022

To: Economic and Community Development Committee

From: General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

Wards: York South-Weston - Ward 5

SUMMARY

At the October 29 and 30, 2019 City Council meeting, the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services and the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation were directed to: 1) to allocate funding from TO Wards Peace to support youth in the Jane Falstaff community who have lived experience with gun violence; 2) consult with youth from Jane Falstaff community and to report back on a local plan for the provision of recreation program and services.

The Jane Falstaff community is located at Jane Street and Falstaff Avenue within the boundaries of the Rustic Neighbourhood Improvement Area (NIA). The Jane Falstaff community is comprised of three Toronto Community Housing high-rise apartment buildings. This community has experienced a high level of violent incidents in recent years. Community members voiced concerns about personal safety, community safety, and the need for increased employment and recreation opportunities for local youth.

This report highlights actions taken by the Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division (PFR) to develop a local Youth Recreation Services Action Plan for the Jane Falstaff community and on funding allocations from the Social, Development, Finance and Administration Division (SDFA). This work aligns with several City of Toronto corporate strategies, including the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, SafeTO, Youth Outcomes Framework and the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation recommends that:

1. The Economic and Community Development Committee receive this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendation in this report.

Annual base funding for the Youth Violence Prevention Grants is included in the Social Development, Finance and Administration's 2022 Council Approved Operating Budget.

Resources to implement actions in the Youth Recreation Services Action Plan for the Jane Falstaff community are included within the 2022 Council Approved Operating Budget for Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

The Chief Financial Officer and Treasurer has reviewed this report and agrees with the information as presented in the Financial Impact Section.

DECISION HISTORY

At the October 28 and 29 2019, City Council meeting, the Deputy City Manager, Community and Social Services was directed to allocate funding from the TO Wards Peace program to support youth in the Jane Falstaff community who have lived experience of gun violence with capacity building supports related to employment and leadership development and City Council requested the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation to consult with youth from the Jane Falstaff community to develop a local plan for the provision of recreation programs and services to respond to local need, and report through the Economic and Community Development Committee on the resources required for the implementation of the plan.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2019.MM11.16>

COMMENTS

Funding to Support Youth in the Jane Falstaff Community

At the time of the October 2019 City Council meeting, the TO Wards Peace program was in the early stages of development. As such, SDFA leveraged other funding to support the recommendation. In late 2019, SDFA administered a grant call within the Jane Falstaff community to support local youth who have lived experience of gun violence. The focus of the grant was to support capacity building related to employment and leadership development.

A panel, including three youth from the local community, was established to review submissions and select the recipient alongside City of Toronto staff. The Jane Finch Community and Family Centre was the successful applicant and received \$125,000 to support local programming. When the Youth Violence Prevention Grants (<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2020.EX13.2>) were announced and administered in 2020 the grant size was increased to \$200,000 per year and the grant term was extended to three years to align with youth violence prevention grants in other neighbourhoods.

Since 2020, this funding has supported the Jane and Finch Community and Family Centre to deliver the Youth Inclusion Program. This program supports youth to gain the skills and supports needed to maintain their mental wellbeing with skill building workshops and trainings, as well as information and referral services. The program also supports youth to build trusting and mutually respectful relationships with peers through peer-to-peer activities and community events. In the first year of programming, 30 workshops, 50 group sessions, 100 one-on-one sessions, 50 peer-to-peer sessions and 12 community events were provided to youth in the community.

Youth Recreation Services Action Plan

In September 2019, the Ward Councillor and PFR engaged local youth from the Jane Falstaff community in a visioning session to better understand key issues for youth in the community and to explore youth recreation program service needs and enhancements. There was a diverse group of youth (gender, age, culture) that participated in the visioning session.

Key issues identified include:

- the need for safety improvements at Jane Falstaff Toronto Community Housing (TCHC) buildings
- additional community events such as BBQs, tournaments, and festivals
- diverse recreation programs
- support for local youth hiring within Parks, Forestry, and Recreation
- the need for dedicated youth spaces

The Youth Recreation Services Action Plan for Jane Falstaff is comprised of work related to youth employment opportunities, youth recreation services, the introduction of an Enhanced Youth Space (EYS) which officially opened in 2021, amenity improvements, and community safety and partnership efforts.

Youth Employment

On February 13, 2020, the Ward Councillor, in collaboration with PFR, organized a community hiring event. More than 250 youth (ages 16-30) attended the event at the York Recreation Centre. Youth were provided with workshops covering interview tips, resume writing, online job search skills, and job retention tips.

PFR and Toronto Employment and Social Services Division (TESS) staff were on site to provide information and to promote employment opportunities. There were many local employers at the event to recruit and promote employment opportunities, including the TTC, Leon's Furniture, McDonalds, and Tim Hortons.

Increasing youth employment opportunities continues to be a priority for PFR. Building Skills through Recreation is an employment readiness program targeting equity-deserving youth (ages 13-24) with a focus on Black and Indigenous youth living in Neighbourhood Improvement Areas. The program offers access to free workshops (soft skills, technical skills) and certifications (First Aid, High Five Principals of Healthy Child Development). This work is done in collaboration with other City Divisions and partners including TCHC, TESS, and the Confronting Anti-Black Racism Unit. Community

Recreation staff deliver localized workshops and trainings in the Jane Falstaff community as part of the employment readiness program. In fall 2019, four employment readiness workshops were held with a total of 80 youth in attendance.

Youth Recreation Services

In 2020 and 2021, as a result of COVID-19 public health guidelines, Community Recreation Centres were periodically closed to the public. During this closure, the Falstaff Community Centre was utilized to support the City's COVID-19 response through the provision of mobile vaccine clinics and food security initiatives. PFR shifted programs and services from in person to virtual offerings, continuing to engage youth.

The Falstaff Community Centre resumed in-person services in spring 2022. Youth programming included instructional and drop-in recreational programs, reflective of those requested by youth which included a range of activities such as but not limited to soccer, basketball, volleyball, and table tennis. Fitness programs including yoga and Zumba have also been introduced. These recreation programs have been well received and attended by youth. Programs such as gardening, visual arts, keyboarding, drumming, coding and video game design are planned for fall 2022.

Falstaff Community Centre has a dedicated Youth Council led by a Youth Outreach Worker (YOW), designed to engage youth in local decision-making through civic engagement workshops, collaboration with the Toronto Youth Cabinet on community events, and supporting youth recreation needs. Most recently, the Falstaff Youth Council led an in-house basketball tournament, including youth from the Jane Falstaff and Jane Driftwood communities, and organized a Black History Month speaker series with advocates against gun violence.

The City of Toronto also offers a variety of youth leadership programs that support individual and community development. At the Falstaff Community Centre, Youth leadership-in-training and volunteer programs are well attended and provide youth with the opportunity to build leadership skills, gain valuable recreational experience and help support a link to employment in recreation.

A further enhancement to youth recreation programming was introduced in spring 2022 with the dedication of the entire Falstaff Community Centre, one evening a week for youth. During this designated time, youth have sole access to the Centre and its various facilities. This provides local youth an opportunity to try a variety of drop-in programs and supports the ability to safely socialize for three hours in the evening. There is also a basketball house league that has been established for tweens and youth who are interested in participating in a lightly competitive experience.

Enhanced Youth Space Expansion

In 2020, City Council approved \$1.889 million for an additional 10 Enhanced Youth Spaces (EYS) city-wide with a focus on anti-violence prevention. EYS are built on three pillars: 1) dedicated space 2) dedicated staff and 3) locally responsive programming co-designed with youth. Enhanced Youth Space locations are selected based on a series of criteria, including: crime (gun related violent crime rate), addressing youth service

gaps, minimizing duplication of services for youth, and supporting marginalized youth (racialized youth, Indigenous youth).

As part of this 2021 expansion, the Falstaff Community Centre was designated as a location with an Enhanced Youth Space (EYS). This provides a dedicated Youth Recreation Programmer (YRP) staff, specialized equipment and furnishings for the dedicated space, and enhanced youth programming.

Given COVID-19 restrictions, the Enhanced Youth Space at Falstaff Community Centre offered various virtual workshops and programs in summer 2021 including martial arts, photography workshops, and instructional cooking programs. In addition, Summer in the 6IX, a free program designed for youth aged 13-24, was offered outdoors at Falstaff Community Centre. Programming included dance, fitness, and leadership skills. Currently, the EYS at the Centre offers a series of activities, including: a four-week partnership with the Jane/Finch Centre and TCHC for steelpan workshops for youth from Jane Falstaff community. For summer 2022, Summer in 6IX will be returning to Falstaff Community Centre with outdoor and indoor programming at the EYS.

Amenity Improvements

In 2019, Parks, Forestry, Recreation completed capital enhancements and safety upgrades for the Falstaff Community Centre. Through a partnership with October's Very Own/Raptors and Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment Foundation, the indoor gymnasium and outdoor basketball courts were refurbished. PFR received a donation of \$102,374.00 for the refurbishment and enhancement project. Capital enhancements at the Falstaff Community Centre supported the introduction of enhanced programming for the local community.

Community Safety and Partnerships

In response to feedback from the community with regard to safety concerns, a lighting audit was completed in the summer of 2019 by the Corporate Security Division. A recommendation was made to improve the exterior lighting around the Falstaff Community Centre. In September of 2020, with the support of TCHC, new lights were installed, which has significantly improved sightlines and visibility. Camera enhancement and new monitors for the interior and exterior of the building will be installed in the fall 2022 to bolster the current security system.

PFR continues to meet regularly with Toronto Police Services (TPS), City of Toronto Community Crisis Response Officers, TCHC, and local community networks to work collaboratively on issues of community safety, enhanced programming and partnerships in order to meet the needs of the Jane Falstaff community.

On the programming side, TPS offers a boxing program once a week at the Falstaff Community Centre, through the ProAction Cops and Kids initiative. It is intended for youth ages 15-24 years, and is supported by TPS officers to support youth in learning the skills and techniques of the sport of boxing.

Conclusion

Despite the impacts of COVID-19, much focus and progress has been made by PFR on the development of a Youth Recreation Services Action Plan for the Jane Falstaff community in response to community violence and the need to provide enhanced programs, opportunities and employment for local youth. PFR will continue to build on and enhance these efforts, in collaboration with TPS, TCHC, other City Divisions and community partners, guided by the identified needs of local youth and intentional youth outreach. This Youth Recreation Services Action Plan aligns with several key City of Toronto corporate strategies including the Poverty Reduction Strategy, Youth Equity Strategy and the Toronto Action Plan to Confront Anti-Black Racism.

CONTACT

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SIGNATURE

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ATTACHMENTS
