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Item No. 3

Halifax Regional Council
February 26, 2008

TO: Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

SUBMITTED BY:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Paul Dunphy".

Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Frank A. Beazley".

Frank A. Beazley, Chief of Police

DATE: February 19, 2008

SUBJECT: Youth Advocate Program Update

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

On January 9, 2008, the Minister of Public Safety, Stockwell Day, announced 1.9 million dollars in funding to HRM over a 4 year period for a new Youth Advocate Program.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth Advocate Program is a 4 year program focussing on building community and fostering improved options for youth living in specific urban communities. The program is designed to prevent youth between the ages of 9-14 from entering into criminal and anti social behaviours, especially gang activity.

HRM is the lead organization for the project's coordination and management. The project however also involves many active partners. These partners provide direct services to youth in the program as well as professional advice and oversight to the program. Individuals and local organizations in each community are also key partners in assisting the youth and families participating in the project.

A "wraparound" service delivery model is being used to structure and deliver the program. This model required the cooperation and coordination of different levels of government, community organizations and volunteers. Each partner must work collaboratively to ensure services and supports are in place for each youth and their family. Using the model, the program develops individualized plans with specific goals and objectives for each youth.

The key objectives of the program are to:

- C Reduce the key risk factors of isolation, stress and negative rushes that make youth vulnerable to engaging in gang related activities.
- C Increase the protective factors including self reliance, resiliency, life and pro-social skills by engaging youth in constructive behaviours with family, school and community.
- C Increase and share knowledge of intervention to prevent youth at risk of engaging in gang activities.

BACKGROUND

Council has identified youth as one of its primary areas of focus. Over the last year HRM has launched a number of new initiatives aimed at empowering, engaging and improving youth related services. These initiatives include the Youth Governance Model, the Youth Community Art Project, Youth Web Page and the Youth Engagement Tool Kit. Additionally, HRM continues to collaborate with youth organizations and service providers, such as Heartwood, to build on these efforts and to partner on new initiatives that promote and support community-based youth development. These initiatives do not specifically target youth-at-risk however.

The issue of youth-at-risk is very complex and poses unique challenges requiring a much more specialised strategy than the type of initiatives outlined above. For instance, one area of particular concern is how HRM can become more proactive at preventing youth from engaging in criminal and gang related activities. It is estimated that there are 80 youth directly involved in gangs with an additional 20 youth identified who are affiliated with gang members or gang activities. Currently, there are seven gangs active within the HRM.

In the spring of 2007, Community Development and Halifax Regional Police submitted a funding proposal to the National Crime Prevention Centre's Youth Gang Prevention Fund. HRM proposed

the Youth Advocate Program which is essentially an intervention strategy targeting youth at the elementary school age (grades 4-9). The Program aims to identify risk factors and design program strategies to address them. Specifically, because the family is a key factor, the primary area of work of this project would build on the youth and families strengths.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of the Youth Advocate Program is to prevent youth between the ages of 9 to 14 years old from engaging in gang related activities, and anti-social and criminal behaviours while enhancing public safety. The program does not focus on those youth who are already involved in gang activities. This is because this program is geared towards preventative measures, versus corrective measures, which require a different approach and degree of sophistication.

Objectives

The key objectives of the program are to:

- C Reduce the key risk factors of isolation, stress and negative rushes that make youth vulnerable to engaging in gang related activities.
- C Increase the protective factors including self reliance, resiliency, life and pro-social skills by engaging youth in constructive behaviours with family, school and community.
- C Increase and share knowledge of intervention to prevent youth at risk of engaging in gang activities.

Communities of Focus

The pilot will focus on six HRM urban neighbourhoods:

1. Uniacke Square,
2. Dartmouth North (Victoria/Green Rd.),
3. Woodside / Gaston Road,
4. Spryfield,
5. Bayers-Westwood; and
6. Fairview.

Communities were selected to be part of the Youth Advocate Program based on the results of a review of police information and statistics on gang activity and on the findings of an assessment of the indicators of community risk. Many communities in the HRM are “at risk”, however, not all “at risk” communities are included in the Youth Advocate Program. The exclusion of specific communities from the Youth Advocate Program does not mean that gang activity is absent in that community. For example, there is evidence of gang related activities in Mulgrave Park. Since several community initiatives are currently underway in Mulgrave Park to prevent and reverse gang related activity, it was decided not to include Mulgrave Park in the program. Factors which were taken into consideration when selecting communities to participate in the program included:

- C High crime
- Youth in trouble
- C Presence of gangs and a supportive gang culture
- C Availability or perceived access to drugs
- C Availability of firearms
- C Feeling unsafe
- C High poverty and residential mobility

Project Governance

HRM's Community Relations division oversees the management and implementation of HRM's Youth Advocate Program. The project will be managed by Sharon Martin and will be based out of Bloomfield, with several satellite offices located within the respective target communities. Governing the project will be several committees with different functions.

The Youth Advocate Workers will begin to establish a community committee for each pilot neighbourhood. The committee will be made up of "community connectors" such as community leaders, representatives from recreation, police, church, school, social service organizations etc. The main objective of these committees is to ensure that services required to support youth and their families are available in the neighbourhood or at the very least easily accessed by the youth.

In addition, the Youth Advocate Workers will establish a support committee for each youth. Members of the support committees will be selected by the families and the Youth Advocate Worker. These individuals will provide coaching, support and encouragement to the youth and their family to ensure that the youth achieves success. The Youth Advocate Worker will be a member of these committees.

The project is based on collaborating with other levels of government and organizations who have as their primary client group, at risk children and youth. These organizations will be used to establish an advisory committee to provide professional and administrative oversight of the program (see Attachment 1)

What Will Be the Focus of the Program Activities?

In order to achieve the above objectives, the Youth Advocate Program will apply a "Wraparound" service delivery model. A Wraparound model requires the cooperation and commitment of several different levels of government and departments. Each partner will need to work collaboratively to ensure the necessary services and programs are in place for each youth and their families and that any barriers to services are eliminated. Service delivery will be tailored to each youth and reflect their individual challenges and opportunities.

The programs and services offered will be geared to addressing the following 4 categories and the respective issues. Programs will range from life skills, parenting, recreation and sport to counselling, and housing.

- (1) **community** (e.g., availability of drugs, firearms, media portrayals of violence, transitions and mobility, community disorganization, extreme economic deprivation);
- (2) **family** (e.g., family history of problem behaviours, family management problems, favourable parental attitudes toward and involvement in criminal behaviour);
- (3) **school** (e.g., early and persistent antisocial behaviour, academic failure in elementary school, lack of commitment to school); and
- (4) **individual and peer risk factors** (e.g., alienation, rebelliousness, lack of bonding to society, friends who engage in problem behaviours, and factors that have a biological or physiological foundation).

How Will the Funding Be Used?

The program has been awarded funding up to 1.9 million over the 4 year period. Pursuant to the contract, the funding is directed towards sustaining a project staff team and the project's administration. The program calls for 1 project manager, 1 administrative assistance, 6 youth case workers and 1 project evaluator. A matching value-in-kind contribution must be made by HRM and the project partners. Most of the in-kind-contribution provided by HRM and other service providers will be directed at office accommodations, staff resources, advisory committees, and specialized programs and services including recreation programs, life skills development training, counselling etc.

Each Youth Worker will have a case load of five youth. On average they will have 5 hours of contact with each family per week. Each youth and their family will undergo an assessment process. The results of the assessment will form the basis of individual action plans. The Youth Advocate Program will use the Wraparound model to implement the action plan and to support the youth and their family throughout the process. The Wraparound model is designed to provide formal and informal support to families or individuals who face special challenges. It is a strength based planning process that builds on the families strengths, values and beliefs. It builds partnerships between the family and the broader community

Individualized planning is one of the pillars of the Wraparound model. It relies heavily on the development of customized plans that establish specific goals and objectives for each youth. The plan must speak to the youths strengths, challenges and opportunities within the family, at school, in community and with their peer group; it must establish measurable outcomes with realistic time lines that factor in each youths unique personal circumstances. Implicit in customizing each plan is the belief that youth should remain in the program for as long as they need to. Therefore, there is no time limit on the length of their stay, some youth may be ready to leave the program after six months, while others may need to stay for a longer period of time.

Youth will be referred into the program through a variety of organizations. For example: Halifax Regional Police, local elementary and jr. high schools, Department of Community Service,

Recreation Centres, etc. Youth will be identified through an assessment of risk factors. The referral protocol and assessment tools are currently in development.

What Happens Next?

The Youth Advocate Worker will begin work on March 17, 2008.

The first few weeks will involve an intensive training program. The training will provide an orientation to HRM and other departments structures, as well as training on youth referral, code of conduct, etc.

BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Expenditures for the program will be funded from the \$1,900,000 federal grant. Matching value-in-kind contributions will come from all participating organizations. HRM's participation does not require any budget increase.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT POLICIES / BUSINESS PLAN

This report complies with the Municipality's Multi-Year Financial Strategy, the approved Operating, Capital and Reserve budgets, policies and procedures regarding withdrawals from the utilization of Capital and Operating reserves, as well as any relevant legislation.

ALTERNATIVES

None

ATTACHMENTS

Advisory Committee Membership

A copy of this report can be obtained online at <http://www.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/cagenda.html> then choose the appropriate meeting date, or by contacting the Office of the Municipal Clerk at 490-4210, or Fax 490-4208.

Report Prepared by: Sharon Martin, Community Developer, 490-4567



Report Approved by: Andrew Whittemore, A/Manager, Community Relations and Cultural Affairs 490-1585

Attachment 1
Advisory Committee Membership

Universities:

Dr. Stephen Schneider - St. Mary's University Dept. of Sociology and Criminology
Dr. Donald Clairmont - Dalhousie University Professor Emeritus Director, Atlantic Institute of Criminology

Province:

Valerie Pottie-Bunge - Dept. Justice - Policy and Research
Robert Wright - Dept. Community Services - Youth Strategy
Department of Education - Rola AbiHanna - Guidance Consultant
Halifax Regional School Board - to be named

Outside Agencies:

Miia Suokonautio - Director of Programs - Phoenix Youth Programs
Karen Llewellyn - Therapist - Kachina Health Centre

HRM:

Supt. Bill Moore Halifax Regional Police - Support Division
Karen Dahl - Halifax Public Library - Regional Manager Youth Services
Karen MacTavish, Community Recreation - Manager

Federal:

Lucy Burke National Crime Prevention Centre - Public Safety Canada
Karen Swan National Crime Prevention Centre - Public Safety Canada