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**Item No. 11**  
**Halifax Regional Council**  
**October 20, 2009**

**TO:** Mayor Kelly and Members of Halifax Regional Council

**SUBMITTED BY:**   
Paul Dunphy, Director, Community Development

**DATE:** September 22, 2009

**SUBJECT:** Youth Advocate Program Update

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### INFORMATION REPORT

#### ORIGIN

- On January 9, 2008, the Federal Government announced 1.9 million dollars in funding to HRM over a 4 year period for a new Youth Advocate Program.
- February 26, 2008 information report on Youth Advocate Project.

## **BACKGROUND**

Youth-at-risk is a very complex social issue. It poses unique challenges to HRM that, beyond police enforcement, HRM does not have direct jurisdictional responsibility for addressing. Nonetheless, HRM is committed to create an environment where such young people are afforded the opportunity to gain the necessary life skills to become successful adults.

In the spring of 2007, HRM submitted a funding proposal to the National Crime Prevention Centre's Youth Gang Prevention Fund. HRM proposed to undertake the Youth Advocate Program - an intervention strategy targeting youth at the elementary school age (grades 4-9) who, to no fault of their own, may be deficient in resiliency and life skills required to become a productive member of society.

The Youth Advocate Project is a signature program for HRM designed to facilitate a more proactive approach to preventing youth from engaging in criminal and gang related activities. HRM has developed an innovative model (**See Attachment 1** for description of Wrap Around Model) that will be piloted over the next 4 years. The model focuses on coordination of service providers, improved service delivery at the community and individual levels, community engagement, and building individual capacity of both the youth and their families.

## **Program Implementation Update**

The Youth Advocate Program was officially launched in March 2008. Over the next 4 years, the program will focus on the following six urban neighbourhoods:

- Uniacke Square
- Dartmouth North
- Dartmouth East
- Woodside / Gaston Road
- Spryfield
- BayersWestwood and Fairview

A total of 6 Youth Advocate Workers have been hired and assigned to one of these respective communities. Each Worker maintains a case load of five youth from each community and spends, on average, 5 hours of contact with each family per week. Depending on the youth, this may vary.

In each community, the program begins with a referral from one of several partners. At present, referrals are accepted from numerous sources including schools, police, library and different government service departments. **Table 1** outlines the list of referral agencies.

Upon receipt of a referral an initial assessment is undertaken. The assessment process is designed to determine whether or not the youth is a good candidate for the program. For instance, an important criteria to enter the program is to determine the level of commitment from family members or guardian; if this is not present, the program intervention will not be successful. The assessment criteria are outlined in **Attachment 2**. In some instance, a youth may not qualify, and is referred to another program.

**Table 1 - Referral Agencies**

| Area                          | Number of Referrals |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| HALIFAX REGIONAL SCHOOL BOARD | 56                  |
| HALIFAX REGIONAL POLICE       | 21                  |
| OTHER                         | 12                  |
| COMMUNITY JUSTICE             | 4                   |
| HRM RECREATION                | 3                   |
| LIBRARY                       | 3                   |
| IWK                           | 3                   |
| PROBATION SERVICES            | 1                   |
| DEPT. COMMUNITY SERVICES      | 1                   |
| TOTAL                         | 104                 |

**Table 2 - Referral Process**

|   |
|---|
| <b>Step One:</b> Referral Form received at the office (date stamped)  |
| <b>Step Two:</b> Within 48 hours - confirmation via email/telephone to acknowledge receipt of referral  |
| <b>Step Three:</b> Youth Advocate Worker assigned referral  |
| <b>Step Four:</b> Within 5 business days Youth Advocate Program Assistant contacts Guardian/Parent to schedule an introductory appointment to discuss program |
| <b>Step Five:</b> Assessment scheduled for parent/ guardian and youth (see <b>Attachment 3</b> )  |
| <b>Step Six:</b> Youth accepted into program, placed on waiting list or referred to another service   |

**DISCUSSION**

Conditions of funding are set out to achieve the following specific objectives:

- Reduce the key risk factors of isolation, stress and negative rushes that make youth vulnerable to engaging in gang related activities.
- Increase the protective factors including self reliance, resiliency, life and pro-social skills

- by engaging youth in constructive behaviours with family, school and community.
- Increase and share knowledge of intervention to prevent youth at risk of engaging in gang activities.

In order to assess the Program's overall success in meeting these outcomes, an evaluation program has been designed. The evaluation is carried out by Resilience Research Centre – Dalhousie University. The evaluation process will consider the following three elements of the program:

- 1) Process related evaluation – youth intake, interventions with youth, parental involvement, staff training, involvement of community partners and the program model
- 2) Outcome Evaluation – assessment of overall program goal and objectives
- 3) Descriptive cost analysis – financial and in-kind in terms of costs and efficiency (average annual cost, cost per youth, cost distribution, etc.)

While an initial evaluation has been completed for the first year, the findings are too preliminary to draw any real conclusions on whether or not the outcomes, such as reduced risk factors (ie. isolation, stress and negative rushes) or increased protective factors (ie. self reliance, resiliency, life and pro-social skills) have been achieved. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that several youth that have entered the program, have since graduated.

Most notable among the evaluation is its validation of the systemic operational problem facing youth at risk in HRM. As noted in the background, the Wrap Around Model necessitates the recruitment of professionals from multiple organizations and government departments for the purpose of developing and managing plans for youth supported through the program. However, when many professionals are involved, and case management leadership is not established nor clear jurisdictional responsibility among providers defined, the process fails.

Program staff have formally raised this challenge as a significant issue that must be addressed over the coming years. A meeting with HRM's senior administration has resulted in an agreement to advance this matter to the Safe & Strong Communities Group. This cross governmental committee has been tasked with improving service integration among government agencies and departments.

As this issue is advanced, staff will be pursuing changes to existing operational models employed at provincial and federal government levels to address the following:

- Coordinating and leading ongoing case conferences
- Collaborating with the family / professionals and others, in the development of the

- youth's action plan
- Coordinating with and following up on the work of the members of case management team

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

None.

**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.

**ATTACHMENTS**

Attachment 1. Wrap Around Model

Attachment 2. Assessment Criteria

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.

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### Attachment 1 Wrap Around Model

The Youth Advocate Program uses the Wraparound model to implement the program. 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.

A wrap around 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 counseling, 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).

**Attachment 2**

**YAP Risk Factors  
(a minimum of 2 required)**

Drug trafficking

Frequent involvement with police – high involvement in criminal activity

High commitment to friends who get into trouble

Friends / Family members who are Gang members

Problems between home/school cultures

Gang presence in or around school (+2 others)

Lack of adult and parental role models, parents involved in crime, parents with violent attitudes, brothers/sisters with anti-social behaviours

Presence of gangs in the neighbourhood (+2 others)

Community supporting gang behaviour