



Item No. 10.1.2
Halifax Regional Council
April 23, 2013

TO: Mayor Savage and Members of Halifax Regional Council

Original signed by 

SUBMITTED BY: _____

Richard Butts, Chief Administrative Officer

Original Signed by 

Mike Labrecque, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: April 5, 2013

SUBJECT: **Youth Advocate Program Review**

ORIGIN

2012/13 HRM Operating Budget Objective to “seek Youth Advocate Program funding/service delivery partners and conduct program review with Regional Council”.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

Section 79 (1) (d) of the *Halifax Regional Municipality Charter* which allows HRM to expend funds on police services (including crime prevention).

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Halifax Regional Council request the Board of Police Commissioners to assume responsibility for HRM’s Youth Advocate Program as detailed in this report.

BACKGROUND

On March 1, 2011, Regional Council directed staff to maintain the Youth Advocate Program (YAP) as a Municipal service by:

1. Allocating an additional \$550,000 to Community Development's operating budget to sustain staffing and program costs;
2. Expanding the service to include priority communities beyond the 6 pilots; and
3. Pursuing funding partnership opportunities including federal and provincial governments and others.

Further, on December 4, 2012, Regional Council confirmed Youth-At-Risk as a priority outcome.

In recognition of this direction, staff included an objective in the 2012/13 Operating Budget (approved by Regional Council) to "seek Youth Advocate Program funding/service delivery partners and conduct program review with Regional Council".

This report is intended to provide Regional Council with:

- a. Youth Advocate Program background;
- b. current Program status; and
- c. intended Program direction for 2013/14 to facilitate Council's consideration of the 2013/14 Proposed Operating Budget.

Youth Programming Overview

HRM offers a diverse range of youth, youth development and youth-at-risk programs, and services ranging from youth recreation and skill development programs, to youth leadership and outdoor recreation and environmental education programs. There are over 4,700 youth registered in direct youth development programs, with thousands more involved in other community development and volunteer initiatives. HRM also employs over 600 youth on a casual basis.

HRM's current youth-at-risk program offerings include the Youth LIVE (Learn, Inspire, Venture, and Experience) and the Youth Advocate Program (YAP). The Youth LIVE program provides youth-at-risk an opportunity to develop job skills and gain hands on work experience while engaged in HRM business operations that provide valuable services to the community. The Youth LIVE program supports youth by building their self-confidence and resiliency, overcoming their barriers to employment and developing the skills necessary to make a positive contribution to their communities.

Youth Advocate Program (YAP) Overview

The Youth Advocate Program is a neighborhood-based intervention program targeting youth between the ages of 9 to 14 years who are at risk of, or involved in, criminal activity and/or gangs. The primary goal of the program is to prevent these youth from engaging in gang related activities, anti-social and criminal behaviours. The key objectives of the program are to:

- 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; and
- Increase and share knowledge of intervention strategies to prevent youth at risk from engaging in gang activities.

The Youth Advocate Program utilizes a wraparound intervention model that delivers a coordinated approach to help youth and their families who require support from multiple service providers and government agencies. The wraparound model is an intensive, one-on-one model with a Youth Advocate Worker working closely with the youth, his/her family, teachers, social service agencies, and community agencies to develop stronger life and social skills. Each Youth Advocate Worker supports up to 5 youth at any point in time, and youth continue with the program anywhere between 6 to 10 months (on average). Given the complexities of the risk factors and challenges that these youth face, it has been proven through an evidence based independent evaluation that low staff participant ratios are necessary to maintain successful outcomes. The program was originally federally funded through Public Safety Canada's National Crime Prevention program for 4 years, with a one year extension. In March 2011, Regional Council chose to continue the program as a municipally funded service.

DISCUSSION

YAP Evaluation Summary

The final Federal project evaluation report provided findings on the overall effectiveness of the program as it related to three specific evaluation questions.

1. Did the program reduce isolation and negative rushes among youth at risk for gang involvement?
2. Did the program increase the pro-social and life skills competencies in participating youth?
3. Did these changes reduce the incidences of factors associated with criminality?

Dr. Michael Unger, Director of the Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University, is an internationally recognized researcher of at-risk youth, and was retained to evaluate the program over the four-year pilot. In March 2011, in the Final Program Evaluation Report, Dr. Unger concluded the program to be "a national model for at-risk youth". In August of 2012, the National Crime Prevention Center confirmed the YAP to be successful, evidence based national model in preventing youth from joining gangs. A summary of the key evaluation findings include:

- youth who successfully graduate from the YAP program, show an increase in school attachment and a reduction in anti-social behavior, and increase in resilience;
- there is decreased engagement in risk taking behavior, specifically substance abuse;
- there are clear reductions in impulsivity levels; attitude toward aggression, guns and violence and gangs have become less permissive;
- there is increased family relationships and family cohesion;

- partnerships have been established with over 70 different non-profit, private, and government organizations; and
- utilization of para-professionals (staff) is innovative and effective.

Youth Costs and Comparisons:

As indicated in the following chart, YAP costs are approximately one fifth of those associated with incarcerating a youth offender, and 3 to 7 times less expensive than placing a child in care. The chart depicts a cost comparison of intervention options for youth criminally involved or in the criminal justice system.

Intervention Options in N.S.¹	Monthly costs (per youth)	Annual costs (per youth)
Incarceration (youth over 12)	\$10,000	\$120,000
In - care (children under 12) – group home/foster care or secure treatment	\$6,661 to \$17,338	\$79,935 to \$208,050
Youth Advocate Program	\$2,313	\$27,758

According to Halifax Regional Police Chief Jean Michel Blais,

“The Youth Advocate Program supports HRP’s crime reduction strategy and the HRM public safety strategy as it addresses the root causes which lead youth to embrace a criminal lifestyle. In the communities where YAP operates, HRP has seen a reduction in youth becoming involved in gang violence. This program has proven to be successful in preventing youth from joining gangs, helping them make positive lifestyle choices and protecting HRM neighbourhoods from gang activity.”

Current Program Status

Thirty (30) youth are currently in the Program. In accordance with Regional Council’s direction of March 1, 2011, the Program expanded beyond the 6 pilot areas to include North Preston. The Program still operates with 6 youth advocate workers, however, the area assigned to each worker has been expanded. YAP currently services the following areas:

- East Dartmouth
- Bayers-Westwood/Fairview and Spryfield
- Woodside/Gaston Road
- Central and North Dartmouth
- Uniacke Square and Mulgrave Park
- North Preston

¹ Resilience Research Centre, Dalhousie University, “Final Report, Youth Advocate Program (YAP) Evaluation” p.69 (2011)

The current staff team is comprised of a project manager, program assistant, 6 youth advocate workers, and one part time community worker.

Funding Opportunities

As Council directed on March 1, 2011, and as identified in the 2012/13 Budget and Business Plan, staff has pursued discussions with provincial officials from the Departments of Community Services and Justice. Several meetings, including participation from HRP, have been held over the past two years. Unfortunately staff has been unable to garner any direct financial support to offset program costs. While provincial officials recognize and acknowledge the value, benefits and success of YAP, they advise that they are not in a position to contribute any significant funds to sustain the program.

As an alternative, provincial officials indicated they would be willing to consider a proposal that would grant permission to HRM to realign a portion of grant monies received from the “Additional Officer Program” (formerly known as “Boots on the Street Program”) through the Department of Justice to support YAP. Halifax Regional Police explored this alternative; however, HRM’s standing within recent national crime trend reports combined with current budget restraints have led HRP to the decision to not redistribute any of the Additional Officer Program funds in the short term.

It should be noted however that there are 70 active service-in-kind partnerships and collaborative efforts currently underway between Provincial departments and the Not For Profit sector to support YAP.

Legislative Authority

YAP has traditionally been provided under the jurisdiction of Community and Recreation Services; however, during the Program review, staff from Legal Services observed that YAP’s key objectives and functions relate to “crime prevention” rather than “recreational programming”.

Section 79(1) of the *Charter* enumerates the areas in which Council is permitted to expend money on behalf of the Municipality. “Crime prevention” is not listed as one of these areas; however, section 79(1)(d) does allow Halifax Regional Council to expend money required by the Municipality for “police services”. Section 68(1) of the *Charter* says that Council may provide police services in the Municipality by a combination of methods authorized pursuant to the *Police Act* and that the Board of Police Commissioners of the Municipality has jurisdiction over such police services. Municipal police services are defined in section 35(3) of the *Police Act* as including “crime prevention”. Therefore, to ensure proper alignment with the *Charter*, staff is recommending that Halifax Regional Council request the Board of Police Commissioners to assume responsibility for HRM’s Youth Advocate Program.

Both HRP and C&RS staff propose that the full YAP budget be transferred to the Office of Public Safety under the jurisdiction of the Board of Police Commissioners and that C&RS staff

continue to operate the program as an internal HRM service provider to HRP. This approach will ensure that all of the current youth programming synergies continue to be achieved.

Next Steps/Opportunities

Subject to Regional Council's approval of Community and Recreation Services' 2013/14 proposed budget, it is staff's intention to continue the Youth Advocate Program at its current service level. However, given that Regional Council confirmed Youth-At-Risk as a priority outcome (Dec 4, 2012), staff is pursuing the following Program enhancement opportunities:

Proposal to fund a "Souls Strong" Program in the Community of North Preston:

Staff has submitted a proposal to the National Crime Prevention Centre's Youth Gang Prevention Fund. The proposal is requesting 5 years of (100%) funding to deliver a "Souls Strong" program in the community of North Preston.

The development of the Souls Strong proposal came about after a series of community focus group meetings in January 2012 with residents, community leaders, and service providers in North Preston. Using the ideas generated in the focus group meetings, and by adopting the community based crime prevention model Wrap Around piloted by the Youth Advocate Program, the Souls Strong submission proposes to deliver a community based, community led crime prevention/intervention program targeting young men, living in the African Nova Scotian community of North Preston, ages 15-20, who are at risk of involvement or who are involved in criminal activity and gang related activity. Staff is awaiting response from National Crime prevention as to the success of the proposal submitted.

Proposal to fund a "Girls United" program enhancement:

Staff recently submitted a proposal to the Province's Lighthouse Grant Program and on April 16, 2013 it was announced that HRM was awarded a one-time grant of \$12,000 for the Girls United program. Approximately 21% of YAP youth are girls, with an average age of 12.8 years. The funding will support the YAP and its partner organizations to design and pilot a series of experiential learning modules specifically tailored to address gender based risk factors for girls.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

In 2011, Regional Council approved \$550,000 for the program to continue as an HRM funded program. During HRM's budget exercise for the next fiscal year 2011/12, the budget was reduced to \$504,000. The budget remained flat at \$504,000 for fiscal year 2012/13.

On March 19, 2013, Audit and Finance Sub-Committee approved Community and Recreation Services staff's recommended YAP budget of \$526,300 for fiscal 2013/14. The proposed increase is solely related to wage inflation. The proposed budget is now subject to approval by Regional Council which is anticipated by end of April, 2013.

Should Regional Council and the Board of Police Commissioners approve staff's recommendation; the full YAP budget will be realigned to the Halifax Regional Police under the office of Public Safety. There would be no net change to HRM's 2013/14 budget as a result of this recommendation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Originally there were four community committees that informed the work of YAP and provided in kind support. Over 60 -70 community residents and service providers shaped and supported the program goals from the program's inception.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

None identified.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Regional Council could request legislative amendments to HRM's Charter to enable HRM business units other than Police to assume responsibility for the Youth Advocate Program. Based on the current slate of amendment requests from HRM to the Province, this alternative is not recommended.
2. Regional Council could cease funding and delivery of the Youth Advocate Program. This alternative is not recommended for the reasons outlined in this report.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

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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