



STAFF REPORT ACTION REQUIRED

Recreation Services for Youth Report

Date:	September 4, 2013
To:	Community Development and Recreation Committee
From:	General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Division
Wards:	All
Reference Number:	P:\2013\Cluster A\PFR\CD23-091813-AFS#18210

SUMMARY

In November 2012, City Council adopted the City of Toronto 2013-2017 Recreation Service Plan (RSP). The RSP will guide the City of Toronto's planning and delivery of recreation programs and services over the next five years. An Implementation Plan was approved in July 2013.

This is a comprehensive report that recommends a Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy to guide implementation of the Recreation Service Plan and planning for youth. The Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy was informed through extensive outreach in summer 2013 that included input from approximately 1,600 individual youth and 80 community agencies.

In addition, this report responds to several other City Council directions regarding the provision of youth recreation programs and services in the City of Toronto. This report includes an inventory of current recreation programs and services for youth and explores options to expand additional youth drop-in programs. The report also provides an update on the strengthened Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) relationship with Duke of Edinburgh's Award program and integration with the Toronto Youth Equity Strategy.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. City Council approve the Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy attached as Appendix A to this report from the General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation.

Financial Impact

There are no financial implications resulting from the adoption of the recommendations included in this report. Parks, Forestry and Recreation has a current annual net expenditure of \$5.1 million to provide a combination of programs and services for youth including: registered and drop in programs and the Youth Outreach Worker program.

For information purposes, as requested by City Council, the report contains projected financial impacts of expanding existing youth drop-in programs, and lounges. The cost of such an expansion is projected to be \$73,000 annually for each Youth Lounge (with an additional \$10,000 required as a one-time start up cost); and \$10,000 for each additional youth drop in program added (based on one 3-hour program per week).

The Deputy City Manager and Chief Financial Officer has reviewed these impacts and agrees with the financial impact information.

DECISION HISTORY

The Recreation Service Plan was approved by City Council in November 2012 and included a request for a report on a youth recreation engagement strategy and youth drop-in programs.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CD17.2>

The Recreation Service Plan Implementation Plan was approved by City Council in July 2013.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2013.CD22.1>

The update report on the review of the Youth Outreach Worker Program was received on November 14, 2012, by the Community Development and Recreation Committee. This report was provided in response to a request at the June 2012 meeting of City Council.

<http://app.toronto.ca/tmmis/viewAgendaItemHistory.do?item=2012.CD17.3>

ISSUE BACKGROUND

The Recreation Service Plan (RSP) aims to increase overall participation in recreation, decrease financial barriers, and improve local and geographic access. The Recreation Service Plan was approved by City Council at the November 2012 meeting. The Recreation Service Plan Implementation Plan was approved by City Council at the July 2013 meeting.

The Recreation Service Plan contains a broad range of 27 actions designed to achieve the Council approved principles of Equity, Inclusion, Capacity Building and Quality. The Implementation Plan outlines ways to improve access to recreation with specific attention to children, youth and seniors, and reduce barriers faced by low-income families, newcomers, and people with a disability.

Throughout the Recreation Service Plan and Implementation Plan approval processes, Council and a variety of deputants expressed interest in recreation programs and services for youth as well as youth engagement. This comprehensive report responds to several Council directions related to youth. The engagement work undertaken with youth and community partners for this report will inform PFR in our youth planning efforts over the next five years, as recommended in the RSP Implementation Plan.

COMMENTS

I. Inventory of Recreation Services for Youth

Youth have historically been, and continue to be, a priority service area for PFR and the broader recreation service sector. PFR delivers a wide range of programs and services to meet the needs of youth between the ages of 13 and 24 years. These include registered programs, drop-in programs, leadership programs, permits, special events and youth lounges. In addition, PFR has a Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) Program that connects youth to our programs and services. The current net expenditure for registered, drop-in and YOW programs is approximately \$5.1 Million. The Recreation Service Plan identifies a continued focus on youth over the next five years.

Registered Programs

Registered programs offer an instructional component, providing an opportunity for youth to develop skills in a variety of program areas. In 2012, PFR offered over 45,000 hours of direct, registered programming for youth at 161 locations. Youth can also register in children's and adult programs. In 2012, over 27,000 individual youth registered in PFR programs. Total attendance for registered programs was approximately 210,000. The majority of youth registered programs have fees which range from \$35-\$66 per program. Youth aquatic leadership programs such as Bronze Cross/Medallion range from \$81-168. Many of these programs include first-aid certification.

Youth Drop-in Programs

Parks, Forestry and Recreation offers over 32,000 hours of drop-in programs at 127 locations. Programs include sports, arts and youth lounge programming. The total 2012 attendance for drop-in programs was approximately 187,000. The majority of drop-in programs for youth are free with the exception of indoor swimming, fitness centres and weight rooms. A breakdown of registered and drop-in program attendance can be found in Appendix B.

Leadership Programs

Youth also benefit from participating in structured leadership programming. Registered leadership programs are offered at 46 locations, offering 155 courses and over 5,600

hours of programming. The Toronto Sport Leadership Program (TSLP) serves additional youth who participate in skill development, sport instruction and first aid training. To date, more than 1,100 youth have been trained through the TSLP with 263 trained in 2013 alone.

Permits

Parks, Forestry and Recreation permits space in community centres to youth serving organizations. In 2012 over 397,000 permit hours were booked by 801 child and youth organizations.

Special Events

Special events provide the opportunity to expose youth to a variety of activities in a social setting. Examples include off site trips, sports tournaments and dances. PFR organizes over 250 special events annually attracting over 25,000 youth.

Youth Lounges

A youth lounge is a dedicated youth space or time in a community centre that provides youth with the opportunity to meet other youth and participate in a variety of free drop-in activities in an unstructured setting. PFR currently has 30 youth lounges across the City of Toronto. Youth lounges typically operate multiple days per week, for an average of three hours per day.

II. Youth Engagement

How We Currently Engage Youth

Parks, Forestry and Recreation recognizes the importance of engaging youth and giving them a voice to help shape recreation and their local communities. The range of current youth engagement initiatives and opportunities are outlined below.

Youth Outreach Workers

There are currently 29 Youth Outreach Workers (YOWs) in neighbourhoods across the city. YOWs provide outreach and engage youth that face barriers to participation, by linking them to recreation programs and services. Working with Community Recreation Programmers (CRPs), YOWs advise on program needs of youth in the local community and support Youth Advisory Councils that help empower and give a voice to youth in program development. YOWs also develop relationships with a broad array of social services and referral agencies and connect youth to housing, employment, health and harm reduction services. In 2012, YOWs made over 88,000 youth referrals.

Youth Advisory Councils

Youth Advisory Councils are PFR youth-led advisory groups, supported by YOWs. Youth Advisory Councils provide youth meaningful opportunities to engage in recreation, participate in the decision making process and socialize with peers in a youth-friendly environment. Many YOWs have established more than one Youth Advisory Council in their area in order to engage youth from different communities and different areas of interest. One of the most important benefits of local Youth Advisory Councils is the ability to provide youth services that are relevant and locally responsive.

Toronto Sport Leadership Program

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is a partner in the Toronto Sport Leadership Program (TSLP) with the Toronto school boards, United Way, YMCA and funders such as the Toronto Community Foundation, Canadian Tire Jumpstart Foundation and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The TSLP helps youth become certified for coaching, instructor and leadership positions. Since the start of the program in 2004, 1,100 youth have graduated and many are employed in recreation programs such as basketball, soccer, swimming, tennis and skating. In a survey of 2012/2013 program graduates, 86% of respondents indicated that they were employed for the summer season at the City of Toronto or with other recreation service providers.

Volunteering

Parks, Forestry and Recreation offers volunteer opportunities for youth looking to complete their mandated volunteer hours and for those looking to learn new skills. Volunteer placements in camps and special events are the most common opportunities within PFR. Community Recreation is currently reviewing its volunteer opportunities and practices as outlined in the Recreation Service Plan and has recently developed an Aquatics volunteer program.

Employment

Parks, Forestry and Recreation is the largest employer of youth in the City. PFR currently employs 5,358 youth.

Developing a Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy

A youth engagement strategy was requested by Council and is required to ensure PFR has a recreation system that is responsive to youth and that youth are engaged not only as end users, but also in the planning and delivery of services. It was important, therefore, that the development of the Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy was informed by youth. PFR undertook a period of extensive engagement over the summer of 2013 to inform this report. The engagement process included the development and distribution of two surveys – one geared to individual youth and another to youth serving organizations. A

series of focus groups with youth groups, youth-led organizations and youth serving organizations was also conducted.

Youth from various PFR Youth Advisory Councils provided input on the development of the survey tool and questions. The youth survey was available online through the PFR website. YOWs were instrumental in having youth complete surveys through one-on-one outreach.

The Youth Agency Survey was distributed to a network of over 200 agencies and community partners. The survey was promoted by City partners, through the newly established interdivisional youth team. The survey was promoted through social media by the Civic Engagement Office, Toronto Public Library and Toronto Public Health. The high number of completed surveys demonstrates the benefits of a concentrated interdivisional approach to engagement and outreach. Both surveys are attached to this report as Appendices C and D.

Twelve focus group sessions were conducted with youth groups, youth-led organizations and youth serving organizations including: City Youth Council of Toronto, Toronto Youth Cabinet, 519 Community Centre, Native Child and Family Services, Toronto Community Housing Corporation, TDSB Newcomer Orientation Sessions, Council of Agencies Serving South Asians and Chinese Canadian Nation Council Toronto and Youth Outreach Workers from the Province of Ontario. The focus groups were attended by over 400 people. The focus groups were helpful in starting a dialogue with groups we had limited relationships with prior to this process.

What We Heard

There was an overwhelming response to the youth survey with over 1,600 youth responding; 57% of respondents were male, 42% were female and 1% responded as other which included transgender, female to male, male to female and pangender. Respondents represented many diverse groups including Aboriginal, LGBT community, youth with disabilities, newcomers, ethno-cultural and racialized youth. Youth identified special events and social activities as the most important part of an engagement strategy. Youth identified that having "somewhere to hang out" is the most important factor in making community centres youth friendly. Youth identified that time to attend programs, cost of programs and transportation were the most common barriers to participation.

Over 80 youth serving organizations responded to the survey. A broad range of organizations responded, representing sectors such as recreation, mental health, culture, employment and housing. These organizations provided valuable input and expertise. For the most part organization responses were similar to youth responses. Organizations placed particular importance on partnerships with other agencies as an important component of a youth engagement strategy. Youth and agencies both identified a lack of awareness of PFR programs and services and identified the use of social media as a tool for improved communication.

A detailed summary of the survey responses and focus group feedback will be incorporated into a report and widely distributed to respondents, consultation participants and recreation sector partners later this year.

Several themes have emerged from the survey and focus group responses and are outlined below.

Themes

1. Inclusion

- Youth face multiple barriers to participation
- Need for ongoing, meaningful engagement
- Strong connections with organizations that work with underserved residents

2. Welcoming Environment

- Acknowledging youth as they enter a PFR building
- Provide a space for youth to hang out that is bright, has comfortable furniture
- Safe community centre space
- Training for part-time and full-time staff on working with youth, including maintenance staff
- YOWs are an asset and are highly valued by youth as an engagement resource
- Availability of Wi-Fi in youth spaces
- Provision of snacks

3. Programming

- Non-traditional programs such as arts, media arts and skateboarding to attract youth that are not current users
- Sports instruction to help build foundational sports skill
- After-school homework help and job preparation
- Volunteer opportunities
- Youth recognition

4. Designated Youth Spaces

- Need for additional youth spaces
- Lounges are the preferred model

5. Communication

- Effective tools for communicating with youth: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, text messaging
- Use of schools for advertising and promotion of programs and services
- Importance of word of mouth / friends

6. Recognizing Youth

- Youth achievement award identified as one of best ways to engage youth

III. Proposed Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy

A review of youth engagement strategies from other municipalities and youth serving agencies including the United Way of Greater Toronto, helped inform the approach used to develop this proposed youth engagement strategy. This approach was validated through the extensive youth engagement work by PFR during the summer of 2013. The Parks, Forestry and Recreation Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy has been attached as Appendix A.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy will involve youth in all areas of program planning and service delivery; will be based on a positive youth development approach that builds on strengths of youth; will be flexible and responsive to youth needs and timelines; does not fit into a "one size fits all" model; and will be sustained and ongoing.

The engagement process identified ways to build on current successes, augment our engagement practices and make improvements to support youth participation in our programs and services. There are five principles that will guide the specific activities / opportunities in the PFR Proposed Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy: sustained engagement; building on existing strengths; attracting new youth; partnerships; and fostering youth leadership.

1. Sustained engagement

- PFR programs and service delivery will be informed by youth
- Effective and ongoing youth involvement is integral to a successful engagement strategy
- The Facilities Master Plan, the Youth Leadership Model and the Recreation Advisory Group should incorporate youth engagement into their development process

2. Building on existing strengths

- Youth Outreach Program
- Youth Advisory Councils and the establishment of best practices
- Community development approach based on a partnership between Community Recreation Programmers, Youth Outreach Workers, and local community agencies
- Special events; citywide and local

3. Partnerships

- Partnership programs such as Toronto Sport Leadership Program
- Continued relationship-building with agencies that work with underserved residents including: newcomers, youth with a disability, Aboriginal youth, LGBT youth
- Improved outreach and promotion of our programs and services in schools

- Integrated planning for youth with other City divisions to maximize resources and reduce duplication

4. Fostering Youth Leadership

- Acknowledging youth achievements through strengthened relationship with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award
- Continued youth leadership programming; leveraging the opportunity of the Youth Leadership Model proposed in the Recreation Service Plan
- Support civic engagement through linkage with Toronto Youth Cabinet and the City Youth Council
- Continue efforts to recruit and employ local youth in our programs

5. Attracting New Youth

- Making our spaces more welcoming to youth
- Improve communications, promotions and advertising including social media
- Special-interest programming such as arts, media arts, and skateboarding

IV. Youth Drop-in Programs

At its meeting of November 14, 2012, the Community Recreation and Development Committee directed PFR to report back on options for expanding youth drop-in programs. In order to do this, an internal review of existing youth programming was conducted to identify what currently exists. In addition, data was reviewed from the PFR program registration system database.

Parks, Forestry and Recreation currently offers youth space in a variety of ways. The majority fall into two main categories: youth lounges and drop-in programs. Currently PFR spends approximately \$1.9 Million annually on these programs.

Youth Lounges

The term "youth lounge" refers to dedicated spaces or times within a recreation centre that are designated specifically for youth to participate in drop-in or registered programming. These programs can take place in youth dedicated space or through the use of multi-purpose rooms in community centres that are used for other programming. PFR currently offers youth lounges in over 30 locations. Youth lounges typically operate multiple days per week, for an average of three hours per day.

Projected Cost to Expand Youth Lounges

Additional youth lounges can be created for a one time equipment cost of approximately \$10,000 for computers, comfortable "youth-friendly" furniture, media and sports equipment. The ongoing cost to operate an additional youth lounge is estimated to be \$73,000 per year. This includes part-time youth staff to provide general supervision and

skill based instruction in programs such as fitness and wellness, dance and sports. These programs can be created within existing community centre space. The youth lounge can also host special events. This was identified in the survey as an effective way to engage youth from different communities and cultures. Events should be offered in partnership with community organizations to maximize outreach, publicity and funding.

An expanded youth lounge location can serve approximately 45 youth per day, five days a week, three hours per day, 50 weeks a year. This would result in an estimated 11,250 additional youth participation opportunities annually.

Youth Drop-in Programs

Youth indicated that drop-in programs are an effective way to engage youth. Youth Drop-in programs provide an opportunity for youth to participate in a wide variety of unstructured recreation programs. Youth drop-in programs respond to local needs and interests and can be offered in most community centre spaces. Popular drop-in programs include sports (basketball, soccer), game rooms and homework clubs. In 2012, PFR operated 833 drop-in programs for youth at 127 locations. A typical youth drop-in program operates for approximately 3 hours, one day per week.

Projected Cost to Expand Youth Drop-in Programs

Where current capacity does not allow for a five day per week youth lounge, additional drop-in programs provide an option for expansion.

The annual cost estimate for an additional drop-in program opportunity is approximately \$10,000. This cost includes part-time youth staff to provide general supervision as well as basic program supplies. This capacity can be created within existing community centre space and assumes no additional equipment costs. This expanded drop-in model could serve 45 youth per day, one day per week, 50 weeks a year. This would result in an estimated 2,250 additional youth participation opportunities annually.

Challenges for Expansion of Youth Lounges and Drop-in Programs

Preliminary analysis indicates that while there is some capacity to expand, there are also a number of limitations. PFR has a set number of facilities; therefore community centres need to balance a variety of programming needs including that of youth, children, adults and older adults. Competition for space, particularly for gymnasiums, is highest during prime times such as after school and evenings.

In addition, PFR's operating budget for youth lounges and drop-in programs has not increased over time and this has limited the ability to expand. There may also be a revenue impact as many adult programs generate significant program revenue whereas youth programs are generally free or low-cost.

If directed, PFR would use the following planning criteria to determine locations for youth lounge and drop-in expansion within existing community centres.

- **Space availability** – Appropriate space for programming; may be limited during high demand times.
- **Program Mix** – Need to balance the needs of youth with other age groups.
- **Service Levels** – Underserviced areas should be the priority for expansion of youth drop-ins.
- **Youth Engagement** - Youth should be directly engaged in any expansion of programs to ensure input and that local needs of youth are considered.
- **Stakeholder Engagement** - Community partners should be engaged to ensure that programs are inclusive and that duplication is reduced.

V. Strengthening Our Relationship with the Duke of Edinburgh's Award

The Duke of Edinburgh's Award is an award for 14-25 year olds which encourages participation in four key areas: community service, personal skill development, physical recreation and adventurous journey. Youth document their activities and time commitments towards achieving three award levels: bronze, silver and gold.

In September 2012, the Community Recreation Branch formalized the relationship between the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and PFR. Youth that are registered with the Award and participating in recreational and leadership programs offered by PFR will be able to use their experience towards achieving the Award. A new annual recognition event at City Council is being explored for participants who have achieved the Duke of Edinburgh's Award through participation in a PFR program. This would be a prime opportunity to incorporate what we heard from youth regarding the importance of recognition.

VI. Toronto Youth Equity Strategy

Social Development, Finance and Administration Division (SDFA) has been directed by City Council to develop a Toronto Youth Equity Strategy, in conjunction with a range of City Divisions and community partners. The Strategy will seek to improve City services and supports in order to positively impact the quality of life of Toronto's most marginalized and vulnerable youth through a comprehensive, holistic approach.

The information related to PFRs service levels and programs for youth is reflected in Appendix 1 of the “Review of City Service Levels Supporting Toronto’s At Risk Youth” report. Both reports are planned for the same September 2013 agenda of the Community Development and Recreation Committee, providing a seamless point of intersection for this important work.

In order to develop this Youth Equity Strategy, an interdivisional team comprised of City Divisions has been established. PFR is an active member of this team and will be engaged with all interdivisional initiatives to improve service coordination, service planning and youth outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This is a comprehensive report that recommends a Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy to guide implementation of the Recreation Service Plan and planning for youth over the next five years. The report was guided through an extensive period of outreach with youth and youth serving agencies. The report also includes an inventory of current recreation programs and services for youth and explores options to expand additional youth drop-in programs.

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SIGNATURE

Jim Hart
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation

ATTACHMENTS

Appendix A - Proposed Youth Recreation Engagement Strategy
Appendix B - Youth Registered and Drop-in Attendance by Program Type
Appendix C - Toronto Youth Survey – Youth
Appendix D - Toronto Youth Survey – Agency