



## MEMORANDUM

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**TO:** Chair and Members of the Healthy Environment and Community Committee

**FROM:** Samantha Howard, Director of Recreation Services

**DATE:** October 28, 2024

**MEMO NO.:** MEM-CSE-2024-0005

**SUBJECT:** Youth Services Update 2024

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### PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide Council with an annual update on the provision of youth services in Halton Hills, with a focus on:

- a) Status of the Halton Hills **Youth Network** and the Halton Hills **Youth Centres**
- b) Outcome of the Town's business case submission for funding to **Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario**
- c) Launch of **My Wellness Passport** software at the Youth Centres

### BACKGROUND:

In August 2023, Council approved report RP-2023-009 regarding Youth Services Update through Resolution No. 2023-0150 that provided an update on the work of the Halton Hills Youth Network and endorsed staff to pursue Youth Wellness Hub Ontario funding. Mayor Lawlor and staff submitted the business case in September 2023. In November 2023, staff hosted a "Spotlight on Halton Hills Youth Centre" event inviting dignitaries, other levels of government, donors, service providers and youth to showcase the work of the Centres.

Continued delivery of youth services is a core Town service and a key deliverable of the Community Services department. The pursuit of the Youth Wellness Hub project aligns with Council's Strategic Plan priority of Safe and Welcoming Communities, ensuring that facilities and programs meet the evolving needs of the community.

## **COMMENTS:**

### **Halton Hills Youth Network**

The Halton Hills Youth Network is a collection of youth-serving agencies developed and led by the Town since 2016. Its primary objective is to enhance youth service delivery by ensuring alignment and effectiveness in addressing the diverse needs of youth through coordination, collaboration and partnership.

As of 2024, the Network comprises of 17 organizations that offer a wide array of programs and services. Additionally, each Centre includes a Youth Advisory Committee that represents the youth voice, liaising with the Network to provide input and make decisions on behalf of young people.

The Youth Network meets quarterly as a large group to share updates and disseminate information relevant to the unique landscape of youth in Halton Hills. In addition, smaller groups meet monthly to focus on specific topics, programs, or service areas. Key members of the Network, known as the Integrated Governance Team, provide a governance framework for the programs, services, and activities available at the Youth Centres. This team developed the Town's youth service delivery model and has contributed to the business case to the province for Youth Wellness Hub funding.

Each year, the Network creates a comprehensive business plan and collaborates on initiatives such as funding applications, youth outreach, engagement, and recognition within the community.

The Halton Hills Youth Network includes representatives from the various sectors serving youth across Halton Hills, including:

- Youth
- Recreation and Sport
- Mental Health
- Addictions and Substance Use
- Library
- Housing
- Food Security
- Employment
- Police and Justice
- Primary Care
- Social Services
- Multicultural Services
- Community Living
- 2SLGBTQ+
- Halton Region – Public Health, Social and Community Services, Housing
- Halton District School Board and Halton District Catholic School Board
- Service Clubs

- Local Businesses
- Community at Large

### **Halton Hills Youth Centres**

The Town of Halton Hills is committed to the development of recreation programming that promotes an active, social and educational environment for youth. Recreation plays an important role in the healthcare continuum and the two Youth Centres in Acton and Georgetown act as a conduit for single-point access to a variety of important services to support the overall wellbeing of youth. Participants range from ages 12 – 24 years for daily recreation programming, coupled with the opportunity to access “wrap around” services offered by various partner agencies. It is a drop-in model where youth can come and go to each location freely. There are no barriers to entry and there is no cost to participate. The Youth Centers are open Monday – Friday from 3 – 7:30 p.m. between September and June, and 1:30 – 6 p.m. in July and August.

Aligning with the priorities of the Youth Service Delivery Model, youth can participate and engage in the following at the Centres:

- Physical activity and social connections through recreation services.
- Food security with daily snacks, prepared meals, and an open access food pantry.
- On site mental health and addictions support using Crisis Workers and Peer Supports through ROCK and ADAPT.
- Increased life skills through partnership programs with the Halton Hills Public Library, Employment agencies and Halton Police Services.
- Service Navigation and Housing support through Bridging the Gap and Halton Region.
- Youth leadership, volunteerism and community involvement.

Youth needs are dynamic and constantly evolving. To effectively respond to these changes, programs and services at the Youth Centres must be adaptable and responsive. A model that enables staff and service providers to quickly pivot and access necessary resources allows organizations to better address the current trends and challenges faced by youth.

Through collaboration, the Town has successfully adopted a flexible approach to meet youth needs and provide timely local responses to emerging trends. This model aligns with the provincial Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario initiative. In the wake of the pandemic, service providers continue to face challenges related to the increasing volume of youth needs, particularly in mental health and addiction services and are challenged to have the resources available when youth need them most.

Now, more than ever, it is essential to create opportunities, environments and circumstances that support youth in pursuing recreational activities that enhance their mental and physical well-being and prioritize the reduction of social isolation and loneliness through in-person services and activities is critical. The Youth Centres serve as a safe place for these activities.

Here are the key highlights of the Youth Centres in 2024:

- A total of 11,100 visits across both Youth Centres, serving over 1200 youth from Halton Hills, which represents approximately 10% of the total 12-24 years population.
- The Youth Advisory Committees are in their second year, with 8 to 10 youth participating each month.
- A free Youth Leadership and Standard First Aid course was offered, funded by a donation from the Norval Church Community Outreach team, with 10 participants.
- A collaboration with Halton Region Police hosted basketball games and skating nights at MMSP, attracting 100 youth participants.
- An intergenerational workshop called "Clef Notes to Canvas" was held in partnership with Hillsview Active Living Centre and the Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton to celebrate Black History Month.
- There were 6,400 total food interactions across both youth centres, which included food programming, pantry access, food for life, and healthy snack programs.
- A total of 560 referrals and connections to service providers were made.

### **Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario**

Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario (YWHO) is an initiative that aims to bring the right services to youth (and their families), at the right time and in the right place. YWHO is a critical step towards improving Ontario's mental health and addictions services to youth and young adults by:

- Using community space to provide rapid access to easily identifiable mental health and substance use services with walk-in, low-barrier services and clear service pathways.
- Providing evidence-based interventions matched to individuals' level of need, and supported transitions to specialized care services when the severity of the need is evident.
- Using recreation and socialization to integrate services making a "hub" of one-stop-shop model of care offered in youth-friendly spaces.
- Reducing transitions and increasing speed of referrals through co-location of services in a single place.
- Establishing common evaluation and data collection across sites.

The Province of Ontario launched funding for YWHO in 2017. Today, there are 22 funded YWHO's across Ontario and each year 5 more sites are added with base Ministry funding. In 2023, the Town of Halton Hills submitted a business case for Youth Wellness Hub funding. The additional operating funds would allow the Town and identified service partners to expand the level of service and respond to the ever evolving and growing needs of youth. The business case included the following service expansion areas:

- Expand hours of operation at the two Youth Centres.
- Convert existing part-time Recreation Youth Programmers to full-time who will provide on-site supervision and facility management.
- Expand staff hours for mental health crisis and clinical supports through ROCK (Reach Out Centre for Kids) for youth under 18 years and CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association – Halton Region) for youth over the age of 18.
- Expand staff hours for addictions counsellors and peer support through ADAPT following the end of the one-year Halton Region Community Investment Fund that concludes in Fall 2024.
- Secure services of a dedicated Nurse Practitioners for primary care needs through a partnership agreement.
- Complete leaseholds improvements in our Georgetown location in partnership with Halton District School Board

In March 2024, the Town received notice that its business case was not selected for the next round of provincial funding. Since 2016, Halton Hills has worked diligently to develop an integrated youth service delivery model and was well-positioned for funding, as highlighted in the readiness assessment. Following this announcement, staff reached out to YWHO for feedback to improve the Town's chances in future funding applications.

YWHO praised the Town's model and provided suggestions for strengthening partnerships to enhance service delivery and coordination with other municipalities in the region. Ultimately, the selection for YWHO funding is determined by the provincial government. This year's funding round was the fourth phase of the YWHO rollout. Changes to the process are anticipated, including clearly outlining evaluation criteria, identifying core components of the business case, and using geographic and community data to guide future site selections.

The Town's next steps will include:

- Strengthening the Town's partnership with CMHA Halton to provide targeted in-person services for youth ages 18 – 24 years.
- Collaborating with the local Ontario Health Team – Connected Care Halton, seeking their endorsement and relevant health data to support the need for a Hub in Halton Hills.

- Staying connected with YWHO to remain informed about future funding opportunities.
- Accepting the offer to become a YWHO “scale up” site and launch the provincial *My Wellness Passport* software as the central data collection tool at both Youth Centres.
- Staying committed to the Town’s core service, providing high-quality recreation and socialization programs to promote the holistic well-being of youth.

### **My Wellness Passport**

The Town’s Youth Centres have entered into an agreement with YWHO to participate as a “scale-up” site. This involves the Town’s participation in the measurement-based care initiative using the “My Wellness Passport” data collection platform. One of the core components of the YWHO model is measurement-based care, which is a methodology incorporating standardized measures and outcomes evaluations to collect information from youth in order to improve programs and services, and to ensure consistency. This initiative provides a consistent method and location to collect data on users, and to track their experiences and outcomes. The data will assist the Town in evaluating operations more effectively while also contributing important data to the provincial registry.

The data includes:

- Demographic data detailing who is being served.
- Information on why young people are using the Youth Centres.
- Needs related to mental health and substance use prevention and management.
- Collection of data around the pathway of care for youth.
- Risk identification.
- Youth experience.

The data collected will have many uses including:

- Identification of service gaps.
- Identification of critical community needs and issues for youth.
- Development of preventative strategies and links to recreation.
- Critical metrics for grant writing and reporting.
- Informing collection of Key Performance Measures.
- Evaluating successful strategies, programs, and interventions.

The agreement comes with 2 years of funding, at a rate of \$50,000 per year, for a total of \$100,000. This funding will be used to purchase hardware (laptops/tablets) for inputting data, and to increase staffing levels to collect and complete data entry.

The Town has received the first allotment of funding and launched the software at both locations in October 2024. All current Youth Centre service providers have expressed their commitment to supporting this initiative and absorbing any costs related to staff training in the use of the software.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The provision of youth services, a much-needed local community service, aligns with Council's Strategic Plan priority area of Halton Hills being a Safe and Welcoming Community.

The Town's Youth Centres adhere to the Youth Wellness Hubs Ontario service delivery model, enhancing the Town's operations through measurement-based data tracking as a YWHO scale-up site.

The Town and the Youth Network are dedicated to seeking additional funding to expand existing services, reach more youth, and bridge the funding gaps faced by multiple agencies - ensuring local solutions for Halton Hills. The Youth Centres meet YWHO criteria and will continue to provide a safe and supportive environment where young people can access the programs and services they need at every stage of their development.

Reviewed and approved by,

Damian Szybalski, Commissioner of Community Services

Chris Mills, Chief Administrative Officer