



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Bonnette and Members of Council

FROM: Samantha Howard, Director of Recreation Services

DATE: September 30, 2020

MEMORANDUM NO.: MEM-RP-2020-0002

RE: Youth Services Update

PURPOSE OF THE MEMORANDUM:

The purpose of this Memorandum is to update Members of Council on the status of Youth Services in Halton Hills.

BACKGROUND:

In May 2019, Council approved Memorandum RP-2019-0003 regarding Youth Services Update through Resolution No. 2019-0139 that provided an update on the work of the Youth Network and the delivery of youth services in Halton Hills.

In 2019, Council approved an operating budget of \$324,000 to support continued operations of the two youth centres and the overall youth program.

COMMENTS:

The purpose of this memo is to provide Council with an update on the following information regarding the provision of youth services in Halton Hills:

- a) Impact and status of Halton Hills Youth Centres in Acton and Georgetown including a status update on the new Acton Youth Centre;
- b) Summary of continued youth service delivery throughout the pandemic;
- c) Actions resulting from the Youth Network and continued coordination with youth service providers in 2021.

Halton Hills Youth Centres

The Town of Halton Hills Youth Centres is committed to the development of recreation programming that promotes an active, social and educational environment for youth visiting the space. Recreation continues to play an important role on the health care continuum and is a conduit for single-point access to a variety of health and social services. Participants range from ages 12 – 24 years for daily recreation programming and wrap-around services by various partner agencies. Youth are able to come and go to each location freely and there are no barriers to entry and no cost to participate. Aligning with the priorities of the Youth Service Delivery Model, youth have the opportunity to participate and engage in the following at the centres:

- Recreation and socialization opportunities including physical fitness and active living
- Food security
- On-site mental health and addictions supports and obtain referral services to which they may otherwise not have access
- Increased life skills through participation in workshops from partner agencies
- Service navigation
- Youth leadership and community involvement

In 2019 and early 2020, the Halton Hills Youth Centres experienced substantive growth in participation and engagement at both locations. Both locations are open Monday to Friday from 3 – 7:30 p.m.

Halton Hills Youth Centre – Georgetown

September 2020 marks the two year anniversary of operating our youth centre inside Gary Allan High School through a partnership and further annual lease agreement with Halton District School Board. This location offers multiple spaces for small and large group programming, private spaces for connection with health and social services providers, a gymnasium to foster physical activity, and a newly renovated kitchen which supports daily food security and the opportunity for food programming.

Before the pandemic closure, the Centre had an average of 28 youth drop-in per evening with the highest being over 69 participants on a single evening.

Halton Hills Youth Centre - Acton

Since assuming this space in Acton in 2017, the youth centre continues to operate out of a store front on Mill Street in Acton. Before the pandemic closure, an average of 22 youth attended drop-in per evening with the highest being over 35 participants on a single evening.

This space supports the well-being of youth in many capacities however more space is needed to fully integrate “one-stop-shop” services in a central location. In 2018, an architect was commissioned and in consultation with Youth, staff, and the Youth

Network, a conceptual design was completed for renovations to 2900 square feet within the former Acton Town Hall for a new Youth Centre. The new space is designed to support the principles and priorities of the youth service delivery model.

After a short pause due to the pandemic, staff is pleased to announce that construction began on October 5, 2020 with an anticipated opening in spring 2021. The design consultants for the project are ATA Architects and the contractor is Basekamp Construction Corporation.

Youth Service Delivery through COVID-19

At the onset of facility closures and program cancellations due to COVID-19, Town staff and members of the Halton Hills Youth Network, immediately pivoted to serving youth in a virtual environment. Referred to as the **Youth Engagement and Outreach Action Team**, their purpose was to use existing social media channels for the Town and agencies of the Halton Hills Youth Network to offer relevant services virtually. Instagram and Twitter were used daily to connect youth with recreation, active living, health, and social services by agency partners including ROCK, ADAPT, Bridging the Gap, Support and Housing Halton, Halton Food Network. Throughout the four months of solely virtual service delivery, there were over 1100 followers and 170-180 views with each new video post on these social media channels managed by the Town's Recreation Coordinator of Youth Services. Highlights of virtual services include:

- regular youth-friendly posts about physical distancing
- online recreation and social activities and DIY projects
- mental health related topics, coping mechanisms, live mindfulness exercises and strategies for reducing anxiety
- ROCK's virtual walk-in clinics
- virtual Just Be Youth group programming offered in partnership with ADAPT and Support and Housing Halton
- employment assistance
- live music sessions on Instagram by ROCK's intensive youth worker

Staff and members of the youth network working frontline met weekly throughout the closure to collaborate on content, plan strategies for continually engaging with youth and identifying gaps in service. Online polls, questionnaires, surveys and chats were used to garner feedback to ensure that content was useful and meeting needs.

Staff hosted a successful Virtual Youth Week 2020 that was celebrated May 1 – 7, 2020. A full week of activities was planned online along with a virtual Youth Recognition Awards and Youth Art Exhibit. Recipients from the 120 nominations for youth recognition awards were featured through videos and messages, with an introduction to the awards by Mayor Bonnette. The annual Youth Art Exhibit was featured virtually and throughout one day, art from the 95 submissions was showcased on Instagram and Twitter to celebrate the talented youth artists in our community.

On July 13, 2020 staff was pleased to be able to reopen both centres for modified in-person programming. With appropriate precautions in place, the centres successfully reopened and during the first week saw 43 youth. All arrived wearing masks and adhered to the new protocols in place. Food security has been one of the main resources accessed since reopening. Food supports are provided through Food for Life, Halton Food for Thought and the Georgetown Breadbasket. In August the number of participants grew to 91 and in September following the expansion of hours of operation and increased programming, 156 youth visiting the centres. In September 2020, we also saw the return of in-person service by ROCK's Intensive Youth Worker, ADAPT's Peer Support Worker and Positive Space Network. Staff is also pleased to report that in September 2020, the Town secured \$2700 of funding through Canadian Tire Jumpstart Community Development grant to support equipment and program fees for an on-site youth yoga program at both locations.

Through the staged reopening, staff and agency partners of the Youth Network will continue to offer a blend of online and in-person services to promote safety and reach the largest number of youth possible over the coming months.

Skatepark Ambassador

In alignment with reopening the skateparks on May 29, 2020 the Town's Skatepark Ambassador returned to the staff team and worked 12 – 15 hours per week across three neighbourhood skatepark locations. The focus for this position is promoting youth engagement and community education including proper protective equipment related to skateboarding, sharing the space, and skateboarding etiquette. Given the pandemic conditions, the Ambassador was provided with Canada Skateboard's Guidelines to support this new element of education related to safe use of the skatepark.

Youth Network

The Halton Hills Youth Network is a collection of youth-serving agencies. The purpose of the Network is to ensure youth service delivery is aligned and most effective in addressing youth needs through coordination and collaboration.

In 2019, ROCK, in partnership with ADAPT and Support and Housing Halton, was successful with a grant proposal through the Halton Region Community Investment Fund and received 3-year funding in the amount of \$289,478 to provide on-site mental health, addictions and substance use supports for youth in the Youth Centres.

Highlights during the first year of funding include:

i) Intensive Youth Worker

The Intensive Youth Worker is an on-site mental health professional who provides support and enhances positive mental health in the community by providing dedicated service in the Youth Centres. During the first year (following the pilot), the intensive youth worker connected with 149 unique clients and a total of 511 mental health counselling sessions. According to the results from the evaluation survey, 89% of youth reported that they learned new

ideas/approaches that will help them manage the challenge/problem for which they came in.

ii) Peer Support Worker

In April 2019, a Peer Support worker with ADAPT started at the Centres to support and plan for young people seeking substance use information and services. During the first year, a total of 618 direct service activities occurred for youth registered for this portion of the project including 50 counseling sessions and 568 additional check in activities. The Peer Support Worker also hosted individual support meetings to approximately 8 youth per month. This specific activity did not continue through the pandemic closure but, as of September 2020, in-person peer support has resumed.

iii) Just Be You

The Just Be You program, operated in partnership with ADAPT and Support & Housing Halton, is a youth-led group program providing social recreation and peer-support for ages 15 - 25, experiencing mental health and/or addictions issues. Funded through the grant, it continues to operate virtually once per week with an average of 10 youth per session. This program will continue to run virtually for the foreseeable future. A total of 15 youth have been registered to the Peer Support service from participating in the Just Be You group and of those, 8 youth engaged in both regular individual and group services with Peer Support at ADAPT. All youth who attended reported an improvement in their life situation.

iv) Youth Information Sessions

Education and drop in services through the Youth Centres contribute to the safety and well-being through programs that respond to situations of elevated risk to prevent harm and/or reduce need for emergency or crisis services through a proactive approach. During the first year there were 3 in-person youth information and education sessions delivered with a total of 333 youth in attendance. During the pandemic closure, 26 virtual information and education sessions were offered on topics such as sexual health, self-care, food preparation and 20 interactive webinars on various life skills and mental health topics. Results indicate that a number of youth engaged with these virtual sessions in various ways (e.g., through views, likes, participation in live videos).

v) Evaluation

In January and February 2020, an intensive survey was launched for youth, staff and service providers to obtain a full spectrum review of program deliverables and contribute to the year 2 of the funding work plan.

Youth Survey

All youth who participated in the drop-in sessions at the Youth Centre were asked to complete two surveys: Registration Survey and Feedback Survey. Both surveys were administered online using IPADS. Youth completed the Registration Survey at

the beginning of the drop in session and the Feedback Survey at the end of the drop-in session.

Registration Results:

- 852 Registration Surveys were completed in total. According to the results of the survey youth came to the Youth Centre for a wide range of reasons:
 - 88% came to hang out
 - 53% came to get food
 - 21% came in order to do physical activities
- It is important to note that 8% of youth surveyed specifically came to the Youth Centre to get help (e.g., access supports within the Centre)

Feedback Survey Results:

- 501 Feedback Surveys were completed in total
- The vast majority of youth reported that they had a positive experience at the Youth Centre:
 - 83% of youth rated their experience as “Very Good”
 - 14% of youth rated their experience as “Good”
- Most youth (94%) indicated that they would return to the Youth Centre

Staff Survey

Staff was asked to complete an online survey focused on the number of informal connections they had made with youth at the Youth Centre. The goal of the survey was to capture the number of informal connections made in 4 different areas including social/emotional support, healthy lifestyle, interventions (referrals to), and instrumental support. Staff completed this survey at the end of each drop in session. The period of data collection was January 2020 to June 2020 including virtual connections made through the pandemic.

Staff Survey Results

- 139 connections related to social/emotional support
- 166 connections related to maintaining a healthy lifestyle
- 85 connections related to interventions (i.e., providing referrals to needed supports)
- 90 connections related to instrumental support

Service Provider Survey

This was a “point-in-time” survey administered in January and February 2020 and completed community organizations. Service providers were asked to administer the survey to all youth who accessed services at their organization. Youth were asked to complete questions related to the Youth Centres including whether they had been to the Youth Centres, why they went (if they had), whether they would go back. Over 2 months there were 137 surveys completed.

Results

- 75% of youth surveyed went to the Centre to hang out, 68% went to get food and 44% went to do physical activities
- 41% of youth surveyed reported that they specifically went to the Youth Centre to get help (i.e., access supports)
- Most youth (93%) reported that they intended to go back

The Youth Network has reviewed evaluation information and will use this data as a baseline for comparison and to contribute to the 2021 work program. Early indicators point focus on the following:

- Consider programs that meet the needs of older youth
- Create stronger youth voice in the direction of Youth Centres
- Explore site wide training for staff working at the Youth Centres that would help to enhance skill sets
- Continue to implement data collection efforts to inform decisions

CONCLUSION:

Staff remains committed to being the lead organization of the Halton Hills Youth Network with the purpose of guiding the work of youth service delivery in Halton Hills. In 2021, focus will shift to the development and reopening of the new Acton Youth Space, expanding the provision of recreation programming, improving access to wrap around services, evaluating the outcomes of the Community Investment Fund and working with agency partners on a long-term funding solution.

Reviewed and approved by,



Samantha Howard, Director of Recreation Services



Kevin Okimi, Acting Commissioner of Recreation and Parks



Chris Mills, Acting Chief Administrative Officer