



Corporate Report

NO: R130

COUNCIL DATE: July 14, 2008

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: Mayor & Council DATE: July 4, 2008
FROM: Crime Reduction Strategy Manager FILE: 7450-30
General Manager, Human Resources
SUBJECT Student Mentoring Program

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of the progress that has been made in enhancing social and mentoring programs available to children and youth in Surrey in accordance with the recommendations of the Crime Reduction Strategy.

BACKGROUND

The Surrey Crime Reduction Strategy (CRS) was publicly launched on February 26th, 2007. The CRS contains 106 recommendations that are focussed on reducing crime and improving perceptions about crime in Surrey and thereby improving quality of life for the citizens of the City of Surrey.

One of the recommendations under the "Prevent and Deter Crime" strand of the CRS reads as follows:

- *Enhance social and mentoring programs.*

That the City in conjunction with Parks, Recreation and Culture, the Surrey School District and the community explore opportunities to expand participation in clubs that are focussed upon creating positive recreational opportunities and mentoring programs for children and youth.

A growing number of evaluations suggest that volunteer mentoring relationships can positively influence a range of outcomes, including improvement in peer and parental relationships, academic achievement, and self-confidence as well as reductions in substance abuse (Rhodes, J. (2001) 'Youth Mentoring in Perspective', The Summer Centre).

School and community-based after-school programs can promote learning, protect youth from negative peer pressure, and create opportunities for them to form relationships with caring, non-parent adults. In addition to the many school-based programs, community-based youth organizations are increasingly seen as important contexts for positive youth development. Such programs can provide youth with a sense of safety, adult guidance, and opportunities to take initiative and engage in pro-social activities. Youth who participate in community programs are not isolated, unsupervised, or on the streets with peers. Participants in such programs often describe them as safe havens from the pressures of the streets— places where adolescents feel comfortable expressing themselves and letting down their guard (Hirsch, et al., 2000).

DISCUSSION

A role of the Surrey School District Career Education Department is to consider the needs of 'at risk' students and to help develop career paths for them. The District Career Development Facilitator tracks those students through District Partnership Programs with post secondary institutions, develops programs for youth, and consults with outside agencies about community options for students who are not making it in the mainstream system.

Discussions between the District Career Development Facilitator and City staff identified an opportunity for the City of Surrey to enter into a career mentorship initiative with the School District for at risk youth. The City's Human Resource Department and CUPE 402 supported the concept and in collaboration with the School District a pilot program was developed.

The program provided an opportunity for students to become involved in a work experience with City staff and learn valuable employment skills. It was intended that students would work for a three week period alongside a City employee (mentor) on a daily basis, under their guidance and supervision. The student would be able to see successful people working in a role they enjoyed. The City employee would help guide them through the workday allocating appropriate tasks and be a person to whom they could direct questions during their time working with the City. The program provided an opportunity for each student to experience a job that they may want to consider as a career and to experience the structure and demands of a work environment.

The Surrey Human Resources Department canvassed City staff and identified employees who wanted to act as mentors in this program. An orientation and training session was facilitated for "mentor" employees. The mentoring program ran over a three-week period in May/June 2008. Six students were accommodated in this "pilot", who worked alongside the mentors. Students were placed in the following Departments:

- Engineering;
- Finance;
- Human Resources;
- Parks, Recreation & Culture; and
- Planning and Development.

A graduation ceremony involving the students, their families and invited guests was held at the end of the program to celebrate the success of the students. Each student and their respective mentor made a short presentation at the ceremony speaking of the personal value they had found in the experience. Parents and care givers of the students spoke on the difference the experience had made in the confidence levels of the student and how it provided them with a focus on possibilities for employment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the success of this pilot mentoring program, the City and the School District have agreed to repeat the program with other students in the next school year.

These types of youth-focussed initiatives play a key role in channelling youth in a positive direction and keeping them engaged in the school system with a view to becoming a contributing member of society. This program also demonstrated the value of partnerships across organizations (e.g., the City of Surrey and the Surrey School District) in delivering positive outcomes.

Nicola Webb
General Manager,
Human Resources

Lance Talbott
Crime Reduction Strategy Manager