

NO: **R057**

COUNCIL DATE: **April 2, 2012**

REGULAR COUNCIL

TO: **Mayor & Council**

DATE: **March 27, 2012**

FROM: **Crime Reduction Strategy Manager**

FILE: **7450-30**

SUBJECT: **Forum Related to Developmentally Disabled Youth and the Criminal Justice System**

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Office recommends that Council receive this report as information.

INTENT

The purpose of this report is to inform Council of work that is currently underway towards the development of a stakeholder forum to address the challenges of developmentally disabled youth and their involvement with the criminal justice system.

BACKGROUND

In September of 2011, Councillor Rasode hosted a meeting of representatives of the Surrey School District's Foundation Program and the City's Crime Reduction Strategy Team. The School District staff outlined an overview of the issues facing developmentally disabled youth involved in School District programs with a specific focus as to their vulnerability and an increasing concern about their involvement with the criminal justice system.

DISCUSSION

The Surrey School District is committed to addressing the unique and urgent needs of school-aged youth with developmental disabilities and behaviour challenges; however, it has determined that a growing number of youth with significant cognitive challenges are rebelling against the model of special education services that has been designed with a focus on inclusion and safety for these individuals.

At the meeting in September, School District representatives presented an overview of "real life" examples to demonstrate the emerging and serious involvement of vulnerable youth in high risk and criminal activities in the community. These youth are often recruited and manipulated on the street. The presentation highlighted that, at first glance, these young people look, dress and behave in a very similar way to their counterparts at school from whom they seek acceptance. Very often they may have expressive language skills that betray the extent of their limited comprehension and problem solving skills but they often have a mental age as low as a 5 or 6 year old. This is problematic for justice system staff who are not aware of the youth's specific needs and limited abilities. The youth appear to understand what is being described to them about

their actions as well as the choices and consequences facing them; however in reality the youth often do not comprehend the seriousness of the situation or the consequences of their actions. These challenges become even more serious when combined with the fact that parents are often in denial of their youth's specific needs, of the seriousness of the situation or of the supports required to help keep their children safe. To further complicate the problem, there are often feelings of shame experienced by the family. The School District recognizes that there is an increasing and pressing need for a comprehensive organization of school, home and community supports to help these youth make better choices and to assist them, their parents, their teachers and criminal justice personnel in keeping them safe.

The City has invited stakeholders including representatives from the RCMP, Crown Counsel, Ministry of Children and Family Development, Community Living B.C, Community Corrections, a parent volunteer, and the School District to attend monthly meetings to address this serious matter. A half day forum is being planned for May 4, 2012 with the goal of increasing awareness, partnerships and collaboration among stakeholders to address the issue, to raise awareness of the challenges and to develop networks and actions for support.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The development of a half day forum designed to facilitate dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders related to the issue of developmentally disabled youth and their involvement in the criminal justice system supports action item SC11 in the City's Sustainability Charter, being "public safety and security".

CONCLUSION

The Crime Reduction Strategy office is involved in on-going and focused efforts to address crime and safety issues in Surrey. This includes, among other work, collaborating with other organizations to address issues facing developmentally disabled youth in Surrey as described in this report. The work of the Crime Reduction Strategy Office contributes to the City's overall health and well-being and demonstrates a progressive approach to building a strong and safe community.

Colleen Kerr
Manager, Crime Reduction Strategy

CK/mc

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Attachment: Poster related to "Forum on Issues Facing Developmentally Disabled Youth"



Developmentally Disabled Youth:

Helping to Reduce Involvement in the Criminal Justice System

Friday, May 4th

8:30am – 1:00pm

Cloverdale Recreation Centre

6188 - 176th Street Surrey, BC

Registration at 8:30am

Forum starts promptly at 9:00am

Refreshments will be provided.

Please RSVP with your local agency representative to book your spot by April 15, 2012. This is an invitation only event and space is limited.

City of Surrey

Crime Reduction Strategy