

COMMITTEE REPORT

NO: *P005*

DATE: **April 10, 2017**

PUBLIC SAFETY COMMITTEE

TO: **Mayor and Council**

DATE: **April 5, 2017**

FROM: **Director, Public Safety
General Manager, Parks Recreation and Culture**

FILE: **7450-30**

SUBJECT: **Strategic Initiative Update: *MYzone* Afterschool Drop-in Program**

RECOMMENDATION

The City Manager's Department and Parks Recreation and Culture Department recommend that the Public Safety Committee receive this report as information.

INTENT

This report is intended to provide an update to the Public Safety Committee on one of the key initiatives under the Public Safety Strategy, the *MYzone* Afterschool Drop-in Program ("*MYzone*").

BACKGROUND

In 2011 the Community and Recreation Services Division created a Middle Childhood Manager Portfolio. This was in part recognition of research on the importance of the middle years (6-12 years old) as a critical developmental period. The research relevant to the hours most critical for children and youth are on weekdays from 3:00 pm to 6:00 pm. The research indicates that children left unsupervised during this time are most at-risk of injury and victimization. This is further borne out by RCMP Crime data showing spikes in calls for service during these hours among this population. This led to the establishment in 2012 of the *MYzone* Afterschool program to provide recreational and semi-structured activities for middle-years aged children.

The program provides high quality afterschool programming that is inclusive, safe, nurturing and supports the principles of healthy child development. Children in the program experience active play and recreation, and receive homework support, social-emotional skill development, and leadership building. They build peer and staff relationships and increase their civic engagement. Designed based on research and best practices, *MYzone* also includes opportunity for children's voice and input, and includes their leadership in program ideas/activities. The program currently operates at 12 locations across the City and has the capacity to serve 30-45 children per site, per day. *MYzone* was recently the recipient of the 2016 National Play it Fair! Award presented by Equitas- International Centre for Human Rights Education.

DISCUSSION

The City of Surrey's Public Safety Strategies identify the need to create safe and nurturing program options that are universal, accessible and affordable in order to grow our youngest residents. To encourage children to participate in all activities available in their schools and community, *MYzone* offers a convenient drop-in format which is appealing for this age group and is developmentally appropriate. It allows children to access the drop-in as often as they like and is supportive to the family schedule.

Program Goals

Community and Recreation Services ("CRS") developed *MYzone* based on research and identifying the value of a middle years focus and built the program using best practice examples from different jurisdictions. There are three main focus areas in the program.

Support Children ages 6-12

- Provide a physically and emotionally safe place for children to develop and form relationships with positive peers and adults
- Create sense of belonging for the children to their neighbourhood and community
- Decrease opportunities for children to be engaged in negative behaviour such as violence and vandalism
- Foster and promote knowledge and use of civic services
- Foster life skill development and improve confidence and independence (self-reliance)
- Increase choices for drop-in services for children that are accessible, reliable and affordable

Support Families

- Empower families facing transportation and financial barriers by providing an accessible and affordable option
- Connect isolated families to civic services by increasing their awareness and access to resources and other families
- Support families in their caregiver role, allowing them the opportunity to (re)connect in the community
- Support sense of belonging for families to their neighborhoods

Build Capacity

- Enhanced use of existing City space, staffing and resources to maximize the efforts through efficient re-allocation of internal resources
- Provide municipal leadership by showing responsibility for this age-group (a largely unfunded service area) and support others to create services for this age group
- Create an advocacy platform as we work in partnership to develop key messages and raise awareness of the importance of middle childhood/critical hours and look for opportunities to research, educate, evaluate, and influence
- Develop partnership with agencies to build their capacity to support children and families
- Support corporate and business sponsorship and ownership of middle years engagement
- Continue crime prevention and reduction by providing accessible positive engagement opportunities

Impact

The *MYzone* Afterschool Program is a key initiative within the Public Safety Strategy - Prevent and Reduce Crime Priority.

As the second largest municipality in the province, the City plays a strong leadership role safeguarding the development and wellbeing of over 42,354¹ children within the community. Surrey's steady population growth and limited availability of appropriate supports to vulnerable families, leaves children at risk of growing up feeling unsupported, disconnected, and isolated. This impacts the safety of these children and the wider public.

The research is clear that vulnerable children that are not engaged in community are more susceptible to crime, school drop-out, and harm. *MYzone* is adding to considerable international evidence that providing children with opportunities to learn, play, make friends, and be safe during the after-school hours plays a significant role in their positive development and future outcome as adults. With 1 in 3 children and youth accessing recreation services throughout Surrey each year, there is room to grow and ensure more children have opportunities to benefit from City services that help them develop optimally and remain safe.

The *MYzone* program completed an external evaluation of the program to date and found the following positive impacts among participants:

- 85% increased leadership skills;
- 83% increased connections to other children; and
- 80% agreed that *MYzone* helped them build stronger connections to their community.

These impacts create lasting change in children that will have an impact over a lifetime. This data validates the research - that quality programs have potential to make critical differences in the lives of children, their families, and their community through crime reduction activities, increase in positive behaviors, increase in self-confidence, increase in civic engagement and increase in academic-related outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

Recognizing the value of providing affordable drop-in programs, coupled with the continued need for services that will benefit the growing numbers of children in Surrey, *MYzone* has and continues to strategically scale up its efforts. The intention is to expand the program while ensuring continuous improvement and ensuring that the model is responsive to the range of needs of children and families in this age group.

Currently, *MYzone* is offered at 12 sites across the City (9 recreation centres; 1 elementary school; and 2 new sites located within the Kekinow Native Housing Complexes). Further support for enhancements and strategic expansion both by the City and support to partners, is essential for this growing age group. As a key Public Safety partner, CRS is currently working with the School District and others so that prevention programs of all types can be further enhanced.

¹ There are 41,514 children age 6-12 in Surrey; this rises to 42,354 if the population of White Rock is included.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

The *MYzone* program contributes to the Public Safety Strategy, which supports the overall objectives of the City's Sustainability Charter, specifically by creating a safe and secure environment for the City's residents, businesses and visitors. The priorities and objectives outlined in the framework are well aligned with the following Charter action items:

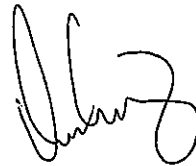
- SC5: Plan for the Social Well-Being of Surrey Residents;
- SC11: Public Safety and Security; and
- SC17: Crime Reduction Strategy.

CONCLUSION

The *MYzone* Program is delivering significant impacts for children aged 6-12 years in Surrey and supports multiple City of Surrey strategies including the Public Safety Strategy. As a young and growing City, the program will continue to see increased demand from children, families and the School District. The Public Safety Office will continue to work with Community and Recreation Services to find opportunities to expand this important program.



Terry Waterhouse
Director, Public Safety



per Laurie Cavan
General Manager
Parks Recreation and Culture

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