To: Chair and Members  
Emergency and Community Services Committee

From:
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Goce Dimitrioski (Co-chair)  
Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee

Fan Yang (Co-chair)  
Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee

Date: April 21, 2010

Re: Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee Youth Poverty and Homelessness (HYAC10-002)(City Wide)

Recommendations:

That Report HYAC10-001, Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee Youth Poverty and Homelessness, be received.

Background:

In 2009, members of the Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee (HYAC) identified poverty, homelessness, and drug and alcohol addiction as significant challenges to youth in our community. HYAC wanted to gain a better understanding of these issues in Hamilton.

What we have learned?

- Poverty is Hamilton's biggest challenge, with approximately 20 per cent of its citizens living at or below the poverty line.
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- Currently, one in four Hamilton children lives in poverty.
- Families or youth living in poverty often have to decide between paying rent or buying food.
- A 2005 report by the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) showed there were more than 600 street-involved youth in Hamilton.
- Living Rock Ministries served over 2,606 families and 7,902 youth in 2008.
- Street-involved youth aged 16-21 are typically homeless not by choice. Our peers who become homeless are usually fleeing from something such as family conflict and or abuse of some kind.
- Studies indicate a higher than average number of street-involved youth with mental health issues, and substance abuse problems.
- Poverty impacts overall health, sense of well-being and life expectancy.
- We need places such as Living Rock, Transition for Youth (TY) to provide a better environment for youth and their families.

In July 2009, several members of HYAC, along with Councillor Tom Jackson, accompanied a former street-involved youth, Tyler Steele, on a walking tour of downtown Hamilton. Hearing Tyler’s story first-hand enabled us to gain a better understanding of the struggles he encountered while living on the street.

Tyler, now 23 and a Mohawk College student, is actively sharing his story and warning other youth about the dangers of drug use and life on the streets. On our walk, Tyler told us about feeling marginalized by his peers and turning to drugs in grade 7, and selling drugs by grade 8. He shared how he nearly died once – the result of a stabbing assault. He was expelled from school and drifted away from a loving home environment to a harsh life on the streets. “Drugs were my whole life”, he told us.

On the walking tour, Tyler made note of several places that figured prominently in his life on the streets. He spent time in secluded areas on the rooftop of Jackson Square, stayed at emergency shelters, or slept on a bench at the former Hamilton Bus Terminal. Tyler explained that he had to put on a “tough guy” exterior in order to survive in this environment.

Eventually, Tyler landed in rehab for two months, and began fighting his way back to his former life. This happened with help from several places, particularly the Transitional Youth (TY) Program. TY provided basic needs like food, washrooms, showers, and a place to wash clothes. The program was also a place where homeless or street-involved youth could just ‘hang-out’. TY provided counselling to youth and connections to resources within the community. Unfortunately, the Transitional Youth program is no longer in operation. The decision to close TY was the result of community led discussion to transfer funds to a new transitional housing
program for the same group of people, namely street involved and homeless youth. The current program is the Wesley Youth Housing Program.

Analysis and Rationale:

*How can we help to make change happen?*

As youth living in Hamilton, we need to mobilize and take ongoing action to improve our community. Members of HYAC believe this is a good time for youth to mobilize and share a youth perspective on poverty in tandem with other poverty reduction initiatives such as:

- The Public and Catholic School Boards poverty task forces.
- The Hamilton Community Foundation’s channelling of all of its undesignated Community Fund resources towards poverty.
- The Hamilton Spectator’s declaration that it would focus on poverty over three years, and assigned a full time reporter to cover poverty.
- The integral role taken by the City of Hamilton in developing and supporting the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR).

The Hamilton Youth Advisory Committee has three *points of action (POA)*. By carrying out our POA, we are confident HYAC and youth in Hamilton can positively contribute to poverty reduction efforts among youth in our community.

1. **Partnership, Collaboration and Support** – By forming partnerships, collaborating with youth leaders and supporting initiatives in the community.

   For example, in 2010, HYAC hopes to support the Raise the Roof toque sale in our community by promoting the toque sale program. Raise the Roof is Canada’s only national charity dedicated to finding long-term solutions to homelessness. Proceeds from the sale of toques supports grass-roots agencies serving homeless youth as well as Raising the Roof’s Youthworks Initiative Phase II (in 2010).

2. **Opportunities and Choices** – HYAC will endeavour to provide opportunities for free and accessible skill-building and personal development opportunities. Examples include offering training sessions in areas such as advocacy and influencing public policy, leadership development, and various summits and conferences.

   HYAC will also be launching a HYAC website to help inform and engage youth, as well as to provide links to youth related resources in this community. This would include links to community events, employment, recreation and health related resources.
3. **Awareness and Advocacy** – HYAC will increase awareness among our peers about the challenges facing youth in our community and encourage others to step-up and take action. We will continue to speak-up about these issues and offer ‘do-able’ solutions with input from our peers. We will continue to encourage an attitude of inclusivity and respect.

Along with these three POA, HYAC would like to encourage Council to:

- Continue to support poverty reduction efforts and youth-engagement opportunities for all Hamilton youth;
- To support transition programs and supports for street-involved youth.

**Financial Implications:**

While HYAC encourages Council to support poverty reduction efforts and youth-engagement opportunities, as well as transition programs and supports for street-involved youth for youth, this report has no specific financial implications.

**Staff Consultation:**

Yes X No ☐

Youth Advisor, Community Services Department
Senior Policy Analyst, Community Services Department
I know that government doesn't have all the solutions that real solutions do not come from the top down. Instead, the ways to end poverty come from all of us. We are part of the solution.

-- Kathleen Blanco
Former Democratic Governor of Louisiana
Tyler Steele, Councillor Jackson & members of Hamilton’s Youth Advisory Committee
TY is now closed and will not re-open.

Please refer to the Youth Resources In Hamilton flyers for info on places to go.

Thank you.
Promoting youth drug culture?
KEEP YOUR COINS
I WANT CHANGE
Why is this the right time for HYAC to be involved?
HYAC’s 3 Points of Action (POA)

Doing our part to make Hamilton “the best place to raise a child”

1. Partnership, Collaboration & Support

Members of HYAC enjoy SoupFestVIII 2010
Explore possible partnership with Canada’s only national charity dedicated to finding long-term solutions to homelessness.
2. Opportunities and Choices
3. Awareness & Advocacy
HYAC’s Recommendations

• The City of Hamilton continue to support poverty reduction efforts & youth-engagement opportunities for all Hamilton youth

• The City of Hamilton support transition programs & supports for street-involved youth.
Thank You!