SUBJECT: Access to Subsidized Recreation Programs at the City of Hamilton – Update (ECS08011(b)) (City Wide)

RECOMMENDATION:

That contingent upon approval of the $400,000 enhancement request for subsidized recreation funding, the Youth Serving Agencies Network GROW program be extended until September 30, 2010.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

The City of Hamilton has demonstrated its commitment to subsidized recreation for families for which affordability constitutes a barrier. To address this issue, the City has its own internal “Bridges” program that offers subsidized rates for citizens experiencing low income to register for recreation activities at City of Hamilton facilities and recreation centres. The other program supported by the City is the Youth Serving Agencies Network (YSAN) GROW program. This program was initially financially supported through the Municipal National Child Benefit Strategy. Changes in policy at both the Provincial and municipal levels resulted in municipal funds previously used to fund programs like GROW being returned back to social assistance recipients from which they were clawed back. Consequently, the City of Hamilton needed to address on-going funding for all programs previously funded by the Municipal National Child Benefit Strategy, and has done so with the exception of the GROW program, which is funded
until April 30, 2010. In Report ECS08011(a), it was noted that staff from the Recreation Division of the Community Services Department intended to bring a report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee on this issue by September 30, 2009. Given that the Recreation Division is also in the process of developing an overall Affordable Access to Recreation Policy, this report provides an update on the current status of the issue. A program enhancement in the amount of $400,000 has been submitted by the Recreation Division as part of the 2010 City of Hamilton budget process. Since staff will not be able to bring forward a draft of their Affordable Access to Recreation Policy until the first quarter of 2010, funding for the GROW program should be extended until September 30, 2010; contingent on approval of the proposed budget enhancement request, to avoid any potential service disruption for families.

BACKGROUND:

This report represents a follow up to report ECS08011(a) – Youth Serving Agency Network (YSAN) GROW program. The recommendation approved in that report was:

“That one-time funding, in the amount of $406,672, be provided to the Youth Serving Agency Network GROW Program for the period of January 1, 2009 to April 30, 2010, to be funded first through unallocated National Child Benefit Reserve #110047 with the remaining balance to be funded from the Social Services Initiative Fund Reserve #112214.”

Further, this report indicated that staff from the Community Services Department’s Recreation Division would complete a review of program and service delivery options for allocating subsidized recreation and arts in Hamilton, and report back to the Emergency and Community Services Committee by September 2009 regarding the development of a framework to determine and allocate subsidies for low-income families to facilitate access to recreation and arts programs. Due to the significant workload generated by the influx of infrastructure funding for recreation facilities and additional work required to assist with the Pan Am games bid, staff were unable to report back in September 2009. This report provides an update to information included in report ECS08011(a).

ANALYSIS/RATIONALE:

A. Policy Support for Municipal Subsidized Recreation Programs:

The importance of recreation and arts to the healthy development of children and youth, and their feelings of social inclusion is supported by a significant body of literature. These benefits include skill building, increased social competence, developing a positive identity, physical health, exposure to positive adult role models, positive participation in the community, and opportunities to have fun and to make friends.¹

A current public health concern across Canada is obesity in children and youth and the increased risk of certain diseases and other negative health outcomes. Access to physical activity through recreation is an important part of prevention and health promotion strategies. To emphasize the importance of access to recreation and a myriad of other social determinants of health at a local level, the Board of Health recently approved a Social Determinants of Health Position Statement (see BOH090008). In order for the Public Health Department to include and integrate the social determinants of health in public health programs and services, partnerships with other municipal departments and community stakeholders will be required.

Locally, the importance of recreation is also emphasized as one of the five critical points of investment identified in the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction’s Change Framework Report. This report acknowledges that children from diverse backgrounds encounter barriers to participating in local sport and other recreational opportunities and that the financial cost of recreation programs is prohibitive for families whose incomes fall below Statistics Canada’s Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO). The critical points of investment identified in the Roundtable report are part of an overall strategy to move children out of poverty and “make Hamilton the best place to raise a child”. With strengthened capacity, the City of Hamilton could significantly contribute to local poverty reduction strategies by broadening access to recreation programs via a number of measures including addressing issues of affordability.

The link between access to recreation and poverty reduction has also been made at the Provincial level. The recently released report from the Ministry of Community and Social Services: “Breaking the Cycle – Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy” identifies two areas within which municipalities have an opportunity to take on a leadership role with respect to poverty reduction strategies. These two areas include access to transportation and recreation. The City of Hamilton has already shown leadership with respect to access to transportation by piloting the Affordable Transit Pass Program. Although the Recreation Division is currently involved in a number of strategies to make recreation programs more accessible to low income citizens and those from diverse communities, it is anticipated that more work will be undertaken in this area. Other municipalities in Ontario that have a subsidized recreation program include: the cities of Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, London, Waterloo and most recently Kingston and the towns of Ajax, Oakville, Peterborough, Markham and Vaughn.


References:
- See: http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca/progress.htm
- Task Force members consisted of representatives from the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, Canadian Tire Jumpstart, Canadian Parks and Recreation Association, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Ontario Municipal Social Services Association, Ontario Public Health Association and Parks and Recreation Ontario.
Everyone Plays” sets out to establish a vision, objectives and strategic directions to guide those who develop public policy, make funding decisions, offer recreation programs or build and maintain facilities or open spaces to develop in a more systematic way affordable access to recreation in Ontario. To garner momentum and support for this policy and other issues related to accessible and inclusive recreation programs, PRO has ratified a charter to which members can sign up to acknowledge their support. The City of Hamilton has signed this charter.5

B. Access to the City of Hamilton’s Recreation Programs:

Access to the City of Hamilton’s recreation programs can be obtained once the applicant visits a recreation or community centre requesting subsidy.

In 2001, City Council approved the Culture and Recreation Division’s Community Access to Recreation for Everyone Policy (C.A.R.E.). The C.A.R.E. program is offered to individuals and families that require financial assistance to participate in the Recreation Division’s programs. In 2002, the C.A.R.E. name was changed to the “Bridges” program. Eligible participants receive a 75% reduction off the cost of a recreation participation pass (membership), plus a 75% reduction for one aquatic program and one additional activity per session per individual.

There is currently no base funding for the “Bridges” program. The Recreation Division absorbs the revenue shortfall within the annual operating budget. In 2006, the Recreation Division absorbed a revenue shortfall of $238,259; 2007 - $249,493 and 2008 - $282,749 in fee assistance. As of October 2009 - $254,221 of fee assistance has been absorbed with a projected shortfall of $275,000 to $300,000 by year end. Currently this year, 4,003 individuals have accessed the “Bridges” program in over 5,841 activities.

Of the $254,221 for 2009, an estimated $75,193 or 30% represents the amount of reduced rates provided to GROW program participants. Currently, the City’s Recreation Division offsets the YSAN Grow program at a 3-to-1 ratio ($3.00 revenue shortfall for every dollar spent) for the majority of City offered recreation programs including memberships, swimming lessons, summer day camp and a portion of gym and club programs.

In addition, the City of Hamilton provides a 50% subsidy affiliate rate for minor youth sport organizations for ice, sport field and gym rentals as a means to ensure registration fees remain affordable for families.

The Youth Serving Agencies Network (YSAN) GROW program began in May 1999 and acts as a broker to purchase and provide recreation/cultural programs for children up to the age of 18 whose families are in receipt of OW or ODSP assistance or are low income. The GROW model, an intensive case management approach, is based on

4 See: http://www.prontario.org/initiatives.html
5 See: http://www.prontario.org/
research and best practices which demonstrate the significant benefits of proactive subsidized recreation for vulnerable children.

The GROW program was funded from the City of Hamilton’s Municipal NCB Reinvestment Strategy. In 2006, the City of Hamilton shifted its NCB Reinvestment Strategy to focus on returning NCB claw back funds to the families from whom the funds were taken, namely families receiving social assistance. Report ECS08011(a) recommended funding GROW at a cost of $406,672 for the period of January 1, 2009 to April 30, 2010 (16 months) through unspent 2008 municipal NCB funds (Reserve #110047) and the Social Services Initiative Fund (Reserve #112214). There is no further funding source available for this program after April 30, 2010.

For 2009,^{6} the total operating budget for the GROW program is $602,472. This figure includes a $48,818 contribution of in-kind assistance provided by the YMCA. Roughly 46% ($279,626) of the total budget is allocated towards infrastructure, administrative and staffing costs^{7} and 54% ($322,846) of the total budget for the year is earmarked for subsidies. Of the total 2009 budget, the City’s funding represents 54%. Other revenue sources include Canadian Tire Jumpstart and the Hamilton Community Foundation. Due to the work of the GROW staff with respect to leverage reduced rates for recreation programs, staff from the GROW program project that for 2009 roughly $170,000 of revenue will be realized as a result of obtaining reductions in subsidized rates for GROW applicants. In other words, since staff from the GROW program are able to negotiate reduced rates for recreation programs they purchase on behalf of clients, this results in additional funds being available to allocate for subsidies for other applicants within the program.

With respect to the number of children served by the GROW program, Figure 1 summarizes this data. Given that the GROW program was initially required to serve only OW/ODSP families, it is not surprising to see the consistent high number of children whose families were in receipt of OW and ODSP. As funding sources became available, the GROW program was able to expand the target group to include children from families who were low income.

Although figures for 2009 only represent six months of data, the trend from 2007 and 2008 in terms of total number of children by family income is consistent, and will likely reflect the proportions of children by income group as shown for 2008. This projection can be made based on discussions with staff from the GROW program who indicate that many of the children have been long term participants with the program and the fact that the GROW program has not admitted many new children into the program due to current financial capacity in the program. The one area that may see some growth could be that of low income as the GROW program has received funding to target enrolment for this target group from other sources.

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^{6} Although the YMCA’s fiscal year runs April 1 to March 31, they provided budget information to staff based on a calendar year.

^{7} Includes the $48,818 in-kind contribution from the YMCA.
Figure 1: Number of Children Served by GROW by Family Income – 2006-2009*


Figure 2 highlights the types of activities that children are registered for by the GROW program from 2006-2008. This data was obtained by analysing and coding of all applicant registered activities as provided by the YMCA for the three full calendar years from 2006-2008. To sort through this information, data was first coded to identify activities that were provided by the City (i.e. memberships at the recreation centres, or registration in a program clearly delineated by the YMCA as being a City provided activity such as swimming or program at recreation centre.) Following this similar pattern, activities were also coded to reflect YMCA, YWCA or Kiwanis provided memberships or activities. Finally, generic categories were used to capture items like soccer, hockey etc., to identify the main activity rather than listing each individual provider. This data was coded by City staff and reflects the data as provided by the YMCA based on information in their GROW database. A number of single item activities were coded as “miscellaneous” and are not included in the data for Figure 2. Further, the information on main activity does not factor in duration. In other words, a child could be registered in a one hour program at a recreation centre, or could have been registered for a week long camp, etc.

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Based on the coding used by City staff, it would appear that a significant number of registrations for children’s recreation activities were for memberships or programming at City of Hamilton recreation facilities. Aside from sport activities, data from the YMCA also highlights the types of programming for which children were registered that might not be available through City of Hamilton recreation programs - camp, scouts/guides, music, dance, etc.

### C. Program Evaluation of City and GROW Subsidized Recreation Programs:

In order to better inform future funding decisions, the Community Services Department commissioned an evaluation study of the Youth Serving Agencies Network (YSAN) GROW program. The intent of the evaluation was to look at the impact of an intensive case management approach on recipient’s engagement, participation and satisfaction with subsidized recreation/arts programming in the community. The study followed two groups of families - one enrolled in YSAN GROW (the intensive case management approach), while the other group received only a financial subsidy from the City of Hamilton to participate in recreation and arts programs, (i.e. no intensive case management). The evaluation was completed in October 2008 and a full copy of the...
The evaluation provides useful insights about the GROW model and the City’s subsidized recreation programs. Some of the consultants’ findings would be applicable regardless of how a subsidized recreation program is accessed by the participant. These findings are that:

- The qualitative data suggests that social connections with other children/youth and staff contributed to engagement for children/youth and the survey results also revealed a positive result for both cohorts on engagement factors. It is likely that children’s engagement is highly influenced by the quality of the program itself and the child’s ability to participate or not. In other words, children’s participation experiences in the subsidized recreation programs lead to engagement regardless of how access to the program was obtained (i.e. City direct program or through GROW).
- In both the YSAN GROW and subsidy approach the quality of interactions with staff contributed significantly to parents’ overall satisfaction with the experience. Highly trained and welcoming staff are a necessary requisite to overcoming the stigma that is often felt by families accessing subsidies.
- For many families accessing recreation and the arts requires supports to access transportation, equipment, and translation services. Here, partnerships with existing community services to provide additional supports may help to offset the cost of both the YSAN GROW and Subsidy approach.

With respect to the evaluation’s findings on the GROW model, the consultants made the following recommendations:

- The YSAN GROW case management process be kept; it is necessary to keep the most vulnerable families connected to recreation in our communities.
- The strength of YSAN GROW is also their networks within the City of Hamilton which enables them to provide access to a broader range of opportunities for children.
- For some families, a subsidy only approach may provide support to overcome barriers to participation in recreation and the arts in community. Ensuring that the community is aware of the opportunity to gain a subsidy through the City, will be critical to ensuring that families that can do so are able to access the program.

Given the evaluation report’s recommendation that an intensive case management process be kept for the most vulnerable families requiring subsidies to access recreation, particularly those from cultural and diverse communities, and the

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10 The report’s findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. These include the timing of the evaluation (summer of 2008) and the consultants’ inability to follow up with families that did not have a telephone.

consultant report’s observation that not all families require that level of support, it would be useful to explore a wider range of program delivery models by which a subsidized recreation program could be delivered.

D. **Next Steps:**

Using the Parks and Recreation Ontario policy framework, Everyone Plays, other policy and supporting research, as well as best practices from other municipalities, the Community Services Department’s Recreation Division intends to bring an overall Affordable Access to Recreation Policy for the consideration of the Emergency and Community Services Committee by March 31, 2010.

The Community Services Department’s Recreation Division has included a 2010 budget enhancement in the amount of $400,000 for a subsidized recreation program. Consequently, included in the report being brought forward by the Recreation Division by March 31, 2010 will be a discussion of ways that a subsidized recreation program could be provided for residents of the city of Hamilton that would also address how subsidies would be addressed with the Recreation Division. Options or models could include, but not be limited to:

1. Continue to fund the YSAN GROW program
2. Introduce a City of Hamilton Subsidized Recreation Program
3. Develop a hybrid model that would include the best features of both the GROW model and the City of Hamilton current subsidized recreation program
4. Define a preferred model for the delivery of a subsidized recreation program, but issue an RFP to seek interested providers.

If the $400,000 budget enhancement is approved as part of the 2010 City of Hamilton budget, staff are recommending that funding for the GROW program be continued until September 30, 2010 in order to provide continuity of service to those families currently accessing the GROW program. Depending upon whether Council approves the $400,000 program enhancement to fund a subsidized recreation program in 2010 and approval of a preferred model, extending the timeline for GROW would provide for a seamless transition into another subsidized recreation program model, if such a transition is required.

**ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:**

Council could decide not to approve the $400,000 program enhancement submitted by the Recreation Division as part of the 2010 budget. If that were to occur the following impacts will result:

a) Funding for YSAN GROW would cease as of April 30, 2010 resulting in the loss of subsidized recreation services for approximately 2,300 children on average per year, as well as loss of funding that currently supports YSAN program administration at the YMCA.
b) The City of Hamilton Recreation Division would be limited to continuing to provide subsidies through the current process of absorbing the revenue shortfall within the annual operating budget.

**FINANCIAL/STAFFING/LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:**

**Financial:**

There are no funds available to extend the GROW program beyond April 30, 2010.

The City of Hamilton has a funding agreement with the YMCA to deliver the GROW program. Although not specified in the City’s agreement, extending the funding for the GROW program until September 30, 2010, contingent upon approval of the $400,000 enhancement included in the 2010 City of Hamilton budget, would provide a minimum of 90 days notice if Council recommends a change in future funding for the GROW program. Assuming that a staff report with options on alternatives for a subsidized recreation program is received by March 31, 2010, this would provide ample time for Council deliberation of any program delivery options and the impacts to be adequately assessed pending the approval of the $400,000 program enhancement for a subsidized recreation program.

**Staffing:**

There are no staffing implications associated with this report.

**Legal:**

There are no legal implications associated with this report.

**POLICIES AFFECTING PROPOSAL:**

The following policy initiatives/directions support the need to increase access to recreation for low income families:

- Parks and Recreation Ontario (PR0) Affordable Access to Recreation for Ontario – Policy Framework and Charter
- Province of Ontario “Breaking the Cycle – Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction – Change Framework Report – Critical points of Investment
- City of Hamilton Board of Health Social Determinants of Health Position Statement

**RELEVANT CONSULTATION:**

- Community Services Department, Recreation and Social Development & Early Childhood Services Divisions
- Corporate Services Department, Budgets and Finance Division
- Management of the YSAN GROW program
- Hamilton/Burlington YMCA
CITY STRATEGIC COMMITMENT:

By evaluating the “Triple Bottom Line”, (community, environment, and economic implications) we can make choices that create value across all three bottom lines, moving us closer to our vision for a sustainable community, and Provincial interests.

**Community Well-Being is enhanced.** ☑ Yes ☐ No
The report highlights the significant social and health impacts of providing access to recreation programs for children of low income families.

**Environmental Well-Being is enhanced.** ☐ Yes ☑ No

**Economic Well-Being is enhanced.** ☑ Yes ☐ No
The enhanced social and health outcomes as a result of access to affordable recreation programs results in less economic support for low income families in the short term, and fewer health and social services costs in the long term.

Does the option you are recommending create value across all three bottom lines?

☐ Yes ☑ No

Do the options you are recommending make Hamilton a City of choice for high performance public servants?

☐ Yes ☑ No