



**Richmond Community Services
Advisory Committee**

Schedule 1 to the Minutes of the
Planning Committee Meeting of
Tuesday, March 5, 2013.

To: Mayor Brodie and Councillors
 From: Rick Dubras and Lisa Whittaker, Co-Chairs, RCSAC
 CC: Cathy Carlile, Lesley Sherlock, John Foster
 Date: January 2013
 Re: RCSAC Youth Sub-Committee report: **Feedback on “Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents”**

Issue	Potential impact	Agency or individuals affected	Suggested action
<p>The RCSAC Youth Sub-Committee was asked by the RCSAC executive committee to review and provide feedback to a report from the Richmond School District regarding issues that may be impacting Richmond adolescents in school.</p> <p>The resulting report, including youth interviews, is attached called: RCSAC Youth Sub-Committee report Feedback on “Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents”</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Confirm positive/negative outcome of the change from the Youth Support Worker positions to the current Adolescent Support Team model. 2. Confirm current effectiveness of the Adolescent Support Team model. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adolescent Support Team (AST) staff - Youth. - Teachers, administrators, school counsellors, and the Youth service agencies and other collaborative agencies in the Richmond community who are attempting to “provide positive programs, services and support for youth in Richmond.” 	<p>That the attached report be received for information, and that a request be made through the Council-School District Liaison Committee that SD#38 evaluate and report back regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the impact of the change from the Youth Support Worker positions to the current Adolescent Support Team model, and - the effectiveness of the current Adolescent Support Team model.

RCSAC Youth Subcommittee

Feedback on *"Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents"*

November, 2012

Completed by:

Danny Taylor
Chair of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee

Origin

The RCSAC Youth Subcommittee was asked to review the report titled "*Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents*" and submit their results to the executive. We were under the impression that in addition to providing our comments on the report directly, we were also reviewing the impact of the change in School District #38 from having Youth Support Workers in each Secondary School, to the current Adolescent Support Team.

Upon our review, here are our comments and discoveries.

Findings

In effort to provide a rounded review of these changes, our sub-committee was able to secure several diverse sources of experience.

- (a) Danny Taylor, Chair of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee, was able to interview 3 leadership students from a Richmond school. All 3 leadership students indicated they did not know that there ever existed a Youth Support Worker at their school. At the same time these students were also unaware of the current Adolescent Support Team. These students articulated that had they known about the YSW positions, it would be doubtful they would have needed to access that resource in their lives. In as much, they did not feel a current need to have exposure to the AST staff. Possibly this is a result of the type of students these 3 represent: leadership kids highly motivated by academics and extra-curricular school involvement, socially active and connected to multiple support structures in their lives. By all accounts, these kids would not be considered "at-risk" youth, and would not actively need the support of a "Youth Support Worker".
- (b) Danny subsequently interviewed a grade 11 female student, who we will call "L". L had maintained an active and vital relationship with the YSW from her school, and was devastated by the termination of that position. Attached in **Appendix A** are the comments from this interview. Highlights include the availability and accessibility of the YSW; the supportive relationship that was developed between YSW and L; as she faced issues of substance misuse and family problems L placed a high value on her relationship with the YSW; the YSW provided security and safety in the school environment for L; and L's view that the YSW assisted school admin and teachers in effectively and constructively managing at-risk youth. Currently, the AST seems unavailable and inconsistent, preventing L from utilizing

them since the change. She strongly expressed her disappointment in losing her YSW.

- (c) Danny also was able to secure feedback from a school counsellor in the district, who wishes to remain anonymous. This counsellor's comments can be found in **Appendix B**. To summarize, this counsellor views the termination of the YSWs as a "great loss for the students". The accessibility and approachability of the YSWs was emphasized, as was the unique role the YSWs played in the school, providing a different avenue towards supporting youth than the counsellor role or the admin/teacher positions. The AST approach towards students is viewed as quite different, making relationships of any depth nearly impossible to develop with at-risk students. This counsellor views the loss of the YSW as having a negative impact on the student body, and the AST have not succeeded in replacing this valuable and needed service.
- (d) Carol Hardie, member of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee, writes in **Appendix C** on the loss youth in Richmond have experienced with the cessation of the YSW positions. According to Carol, the confidential source of information and referral services provided by the YSWs has disappeared, making it difficult for significant at-risk youth populations from accessing available supportive people and programs. The outcome has been a rather "reactive" approach to working with youth, rather than a proactive approach to building resiliency and developing relationship, thereby preventing issues from occurring or developing further. Unfortunately, Carol points out that the current AST model would appear to not provide sufficient staffing levels to service the entire school district from a responsive approach alone, let alone making any preventative efforts.
- (e) Michelle Johnson, member of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee, articulates her feedback from an interview with one of her clients (see **Appendix D**). Michelle emphasizes the enormous value of the YSW active presence in the schools and their ability to develop relationships with kids. In contrast to the AST, the YSW maintained strong accessibility and flexibility in supporting at-risk youth. Applied to her client's experience with bullying and mental health issues, the inability for the AST worker – despite good intentions – to be available and accessible proved a marked difference from the YSW.

Michelle shifts in her letter to address the actual research and conclusions found in the "*Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents*" report.

Michelle astutely points at the conflicts in the reporting process; especially regarding the questions being asked of youth and who in particular was consulted in drawing the conclusions maintained in the report.

- (f) Following on Michelle's concern for the report itself, the Youth Subcommittee additionally found several issues drawn from "*Current Issues that may be Impacting Richmond Adolescents*" worthy of attention, such as:
- a. We are very concerned that all of the youth service agencies (Touchstone Family Services, Richmond Addiction Services, MCFD, etc.) and other collaborative agencies (CAP program, etc.) were not consulted and remain absent from this report. Only the RCMP, SD38, and the City have had their voice heard. With the changes to the YSW positions, is it not imperative to find out the ripple effects on the appropriate youth service agencies in our Richmond community? It would be extremely useful to ask questions on the key issues to key service providers/agencies.
 - b. The report identifies that the 2 workers were involved with 131 clients. The report is not clear on how these numbers were captured, nor the specifics of how 2 workers were involved with their 131 clients. What was this clinical relationship like? How were 2 workers able to establish constructive and supportive relationships with this massive number of clients? These massive direct service hours seem unreasonable and far too difficult to provide a comparative service to the YSW positions.
 - c. There is no mention in the report of kids "falling through the cracks" (drop outs, leaving). The YDW brought advocacy for these kids, let alone the simple awareness that these youth even existed. Where are these at-risk youth being represented and how are they being advocated for now?
 - d. The report fails to mention the effect of the dissolution of the YSW positions on Teachers and Administration. It would be valuable to hear more from their experience, following on the feedback Danny received from an SD38 school counsellor.
 - e. The unique school culture / effectiveness of each individual YDW will invariably produce very subjective evaluation depending on the student

and school in question (and yes, the sub-committee is aware this same logic applies to their feedback above).

Conclusion

- Youth who would not be considered “at-risk” for the most part did not access the Youth Support Workers, nor do they currently access the Adolescent Support Team. These services are largely targeting a vulnerable “at-risk” youth population.
- Youth who would be identified as “at-risk” (such as L from Danny’s interview, the anecdotal story of a student from the SD38 counsellor, and Michelle’s client) did benefit from an available and accessible Youth Support Worker. These youth would without doubt continue to access and benefit from an YSW today. Unfortunately, the current AST strategy does not sufficiently provide access and relationship in a preventative way for “at-risk” youth in Richmond.
- The YSWs filled a necessary role in the school environment, different from a school counsellor or a school teacher, and provided valuable contribution to each individual school climate throughout the district.
- Teachers and Administrators need to be interviewed for their opinion on the changes.
- Youth service agencies and other collaborative agencies need to be, and should be, consulted for an accurate review of the effect of the YSW change and the current AST model.

We would generally agree with Kate Rudelier from the report that “the conclusions from this report are mixed...youth who had a positive connection with the YSW in their particular school were impacted by the loss of the YSW position. For youth who did not work with the YSW, there was no measurable impact. For youth requiring support previously received from the YSW, the counsellors and other staff have stepped up to fill that gap in service.”

We would challenge however, that we cannot underestimate the significance of the impact on those students who were experiencing a positive connection with their YSW. As our review has indicated, this change was largely experienced as negative and the positive connection with their YSW is greatly missed. Equally, we have no clear idea on what the opinion is of the “counsellors and other staff” who have had to step up to fill in a legitimate “gap in service”. Has this added responsibility been a

welcome addition to their already busy roles in the schools? As the counsellor included in this review has mentioned, as has L from Danny's interview, the elimination of the YSW positions has been a negative one for the staff in the school who must now attempt to fill in the missing component that the YSW vacancy has left. Unfortunately, the AST model is not substantial enough to meet the needs of our schools and the vacancy left by the YSW positions. As Kate continues in her report conclusion, *"it is too early to tell the ultimate effectiveness of the new service delivery model"*. It would be invaluable to now attempt to gather information on the effectiveness of the new AST model. Our sub-committee would greatly encourage this new report to include the voices of teachers, administrators, school counsellors, and the Youth service agencies and other collaborative agencies in the Richmond community who are attempting to *"provide positive programs, services and support for youth in Richmond."*

Appendix A

Why did you value the YSW?

- Available all day, every day.
- No appointment needed.
- Different than counsellors – non-judgemental, totally open and listened, didn't overreact.
- Was there for more than just a job or a pay check, she cared and was always available – even before/after school hrs.
- She would check in with specific at risk kids (the “freaks”) and would even pull them out of class randomly to see how you were doing. This showed that she cared. We didn't have to go to her, she'd come to us.
- She shared from her own experience, was honest. (Real relationship and connection established).

How did she help you personally?

- The issues I was having at the time, drugs – I could talk to her about the things that I wouldn't/couldn't talk to my family/friends about.
- If I was being bullied or was feeling sad, and didn't want to go to class, I could go to her and sit and chat.
- She helped me deal with my past, showing me how to accept things and move on.
- She helped me with my anger management – if I acted out, I could go to her and talk it through (even if I was facing some punishment!)
- School Violence: she took pressure off the principals by helping manage and mediate issues between kids. This helped the principals and since she has left there is a major impact on teachers to manage kids more.
- She helped kids with substance issues stay in school.

Why were you sad she was gone?

- I lost my “comfort place” at school (school is an environment I don't like).
- I have to face stuff alone – (I don't have the same connection with counsellors).
- I have to “retell” my life story to new AST person...I don't want to...
- The AST people said they'd be around twice/week ...I never see them.
- She was a place I could talk about issues and she would truly listen, but her absence removed this.

Why don't you just see your school counsellor now?

- I do see mine, but just not as often as the YSW. Counsellors are not as available as the YSW. Counsellors have to teach classes. Time issues. And the Counsellors

really seem like they “work” as teachers. The YSW was more like a “really chill family member – like an aunt” but the counsellors seem like “staff members”.

Appendix B

Overall, it is a great loss for the students. Counsellors' loads are excessively big so we do not always have the time to take care of the smaller but important needs of the students, and to be always accessible to the students in a less "formal" way. The YSW used to run *(different)* programs, be a mentor for the students, and help with the fundraising efforts *(for the school)*.

Some *(were)* that other parent/mentor figure for the students they know well. It was comforting for students to know that the YSW was there on a daily basis and could be approached anytime for specific needs. That is no longer the case, and I know the students miss that. I had a grad who told me he was set on the right path because the YSW told him in no uncertain terms what he was doing with his life. He benefitted greatly from it and wanted me to do the same for his brother.

The AST's presence and function appears to be entirely different. It is difficult, if not downright impossible, for them to form that kind of relationships with the students. And of course, they can't be around all the time. The same kind of bonding simply does not happen. I have seen only limited success with the AST (I connected them with several students last year). In some cases, the relationship worked out poorly.

In a nutshell, the AST does not come close to replacing the YSW, and in needier schools, losing the YSW has highly negative impacts on the student body.

(Italics added to protect the identity of this School District #38 Counsellor at their request).

Appendix C

RCSAC – Feedback – Impact of RSB loss of Youth Workers

As an adolescent community support in Richmond, the loss of school based youth workers has had a clear, unfortunate impact. The youth workers provided a visible, available school support in compliment to academic advising provided by counselling team. Youth Workers were often accessed by youth who may be struggling with issues relating to academics, home life, relationship issues, health, bullying, drug and alcohol to list a few. Youth Workers provided a necessary, confidential support and often also acted as a referral source to supports 'outside the school setting'.

Once the fiscal decision to delete these positions came to fruition, I strongly believe that the youth lost a necessary adult support and in many occasions, situations had to become much 'worse' in order for youth to reach out for help. This results in community youth work support being very 'reactive' in nature, versus 'preventative'. Research clearly shows this to be not as effective and not in the scope of promoting 'development asset' model, as we all subscribe to. Our community support offered through the Day Program has 'picked up' many youth who normally would have accessed internal school support. Sadly, this is a result of those who are aware of the program. I assume many youth are not getting the help they need simply due to lack of awareness of what is available in the community.

To replace the loss of school based youth workers, there are now 2 FTE youth worker similar positions, with the intent that these two positions service the entire RSB secondary school system?! I empathize with the people in these positions. How daunting and unrealistic the task must be to provide suitable, meaningful connections and relationships with vulnerable youth across the city. I am not convinced this is a fair solution, nor one with the student's well- being as a priority. The ratio of student versus youth worker alone, clearly demonstrates that.

I think it's important as 'youth advocates' that we continue to share feedback and communicate these concerns to administration responsible, so that perhaps, with collaborative community involvement, decisions such as these will be more seriously reconsidered in the future.

Thanks.

Carol Hardie
Member of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee

Appendix D

Attention: RCSAC committee

The biggest asset that YW's provided was prevention, especially in terms of bullying in school. Their presence and relationships with all the students could make a difference in the amount and frequency of bullying. I have permission from my client to speak about the bullying she endured last year. She was severely bullied, both in and out of school. This led to her missing a third of the school year. This is when the Connection Worker became involved with my client. Although she was a great support to my client, she was not there on a daily basis to monitor, deter, or give support in the moment, which I believe would have made a difference. My client was very forthcoming with the school that the bullying was causing her anxiety and sleep issues but she was never visited by the Adolescent Mental Health Worker. I also believe that not every behaviour or issue that arises for students is a mental health issue and I feel that so much can be prevented if someone was monitoring in the school daily.

Accessibility is what makes the YW so effective and this is difficult to achieve with only two Connections workers for the entire community. Flexibility and expertise in issues impacting youth is what builds the relationship youth need for accessing support. When I asked my client about the accessibility of the worker, my client said that schedules often conflicted but the worker made every effort to be available. When asked if it would be easier if the worker were based in the school every day, I received a resounding yes. I believe the bullying in school could have been prevented with the presence of a YW.

It is also important to question the methods in which the research was conducted. Who was polled and what kinds of questions were being asked of the students. Many of the organizations and professionals that make up the Youth Network were not consulted and this decision impacts their work. Also, just because the research didn't note the impact of the loss of the YW, does not mean that the YW did not make a difference in that school. Prevention is a key aspect of the job and I am curious if those types of questions were posed. If different questions were asked to all the students about YW presence, role modeling, support, and thoughts on counsellors as the alternative, the results of this study could have been very different. Thank you for your attention to my feedback.

Michelle Johnson

Michelle Johnson
Member of the RCSAC Youth Subcommittee