

Subject: Building Safer Communities Grant Program Update

Report to: Public Health and Social Services Committee

Report date: Tuesday, April 8, 2025

Recommendations

1. That the Building Safer Communities Grant Program update for year one **BE RECEIVED** for information.

Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide a year one progress update of the Building Safer Communities Grant Program.
- Niagara Region staff developed the multi-year Youth Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy 2023-2026, in consultation with the community, based on best practices and local youth crime data. Niagara Region allocated federal funding to nine community agencies through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program.
- The nine funded agencies served 576 at-risk youth in the first year of the program through programs targeting ten areas of focus.

Financial Considerations

The Federal Building Safer Communities Grant Program provides designated funding to municipalities and Indigenous communities to develop and deliver community-based gun and gang prevention and intervention programming for youth. Niagara Region Community Services has allocated these federal funds to nine local community partners through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program. Through this pilot project grant recipients receive funding for up to two years, ending in December 2025. All funds related to this grant have been provided by Public Safety Canada pursuant to a contribution agreement with Niagara Region. In total, \$2,250,000 has been allocated over two years to support these community initiatives ending December 31, 2025.

Analysis

Background

Reducing youth involvement in crime through the Building Safer Communities Grant Program is a key action in Niagara's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. Through initial community engagement for the creation of the Youth Gun and Gang Prevention Strategy, youth at-risk identified a number of key factors in health, happiness and safety including the need for close interpersonal connections, desire to live in good health, participate in meaningful activities, access safe spaces and adequately meet their basic needs such as housing, income and food. Through a successful granting process, the Building Safer Communities Grant Program awarded nine community agencies funding to run initiatives for youth at-risk of gun and gang involvement for a two-year period (Jan. 2024 to Dec 2025).

In 2024, the nine youth funded agencies reported collaborating with 64 unique community partners to support youth at-risk and their families. With more than 576 total youth at-risk served collectively, the following highlights the significant impact of these programs across all ten areas of focus during the first year of funding.

Focus 1: Programs which prevent youth homelessness

Two youth funded agencies have implemented programs that provide support and build life-skills for youth at-risk of experiencing homelessness. These programs help individuals develop the skills to secure housing and provide wraparound support to ensure youth remain housed.

The Raft has provided support to 34 youth at-risk and their families in the first year through their Family and Natural Supports program, with 80% of participants remaining housed and out of shelter to date. Additionally, 69% of youth who have completed the program remain in high school, have completed high school, or are employed.

Family and Children's Services Niagara, through their Navigating Adulthood program are providing life skills training, supports and mentorship to youth at-risk preparing to transition out of care. After completing the program, 72% of participating youth report they feel well equipped to live safely and independently.

Focus Two: Programs which support the early identification and treatment of mental health concerns for children and youth

Early identification of mental health concerns through equitable access to appropriate treatment and support is important in preventing criminality and victimization among youth with mental illness.

Quest Community Health Centre provides specialized therapy services directly to youth with assistance from their Youth Outreach Worker. Over the first year, the Youth Outreach Worker referred 133 unique individuals to their Youth Therapist who was able to support 96 of these youth with mental health and addictions concerns.

Focus Three: Programs which provide opportunities for mentoring and connection to positive peers or caring adults

Social connections through mentoring can provide guidance, support, and improve self-esteem for youth at-risk. This ultimately leads to a decreased likelihood of criminal involvement and victimization by supporting higher levels of educational attainment and increasing their ability to find meaningful, rewarding work.

The Transitional Youth Program (TYP) through Family and Children's Services Niagara supported 38 youth in the Navigating Adulthood program and had approximately 50 attendants at each of the Home for the Holidays events. By prioritizing mentorship and building connections, youth at-risk have received emotional support from Transitional Youth Workers, engaged in social-recreational activities, and experienced positive behaviour modelling from group facilitators.

Focus Four: Programs which develop youth conflict resolution skills and/or enable alternative dispute resolution

Strong conflict resolution skills are protective factors for improved mental health, reduced risk of substance use, and involvement in violence and criminality.

The primary goal of the Stop Now And Plan (SNAP®) program is to help children stop and think before they act keeping them in school and out of trouble. Run by Contact Niagara with support from the Child Development Institute, the program supports youth aged 6 to 11, and their parents/caregivers in learning skills that build effective emotional regulation, self-control and problem-solving skills. In the first year, 68 children and their families were identified and supported with direct services and additional referrals, including SNAP® programming, to increase conflict resolution skills.

and reduce the likelihood of future criminal justice involvement. Facilitators within the Niagara Resource Service for Youth's (RAFT) Family and Natural Support program are also supporting youth participants by teaching them conflict resolution skills that enable them to manage relationships and remain housed. All 34-youth participating in this program attend Caring Adult Circle meetings, where they are provided opportunities to communicate with the adults in their life, address conflict and establish foundations for life-long support and healthy relationships.

Focus Five: Programs which increase emotional regulation skills or the social-emotional competency for children and their parents

Children and youth who struggle with emotional regulation and/or antisocial/delinquency behaviours are more likely to struggle with mental health, substance use and acts of aggression/violence as adults.

During the first year of funding, the Stop Now And Plan (SNAP®) program being implemented by Contact Niagara, has received referrals for 56 children who are experiencing serious behavioural challenges at home, in school or in the community. Participants who have completed the program, children and parents/caregiver programming, have reported involvement in fewer physical altercations, better ability to self-regulate and increased ability to stay calm in situations where they previously would not have. Parents have reported fewer calls from school administration and an increase in their children's positive social connections with teachers and peers.

Focus Six: Programs which increase positive attachment to school and improve access to post-secondary education

School attachment and commitment serve as significant protective factors against violence and forms of criminality.

The John Howard Society works directly with the District School Board of Niagara (DSBN) to support youth at-risk and their families through Strengthening Families for the Future for Schools. In the first year, 46 families were supported weekly with targeted group programming, structured meaningful conversation and family meals that take place within the school setting. Participants have reported increased connections between families, better coping mechanisms, increased positive communication and decreased behavioural issues at school.

Focus Seven: Programs which connect Indigenous youth and their families with traditional healing and cultural activities

A positive connection to culture, traditions and customs can create a sense of belonging, purpose and self-worth.

Niagara Peninsula Aboriginal Area Management Board (NPAAMB) focuses on skills, while also providing youth the opportunity to participate in traditional rites of passages, ceremonies, and knowledge exchanges. Through their Ceremony 2 Employment (C2E) program, NPAAMB is creating pathways to life and employability skills that create career opportunities, re-engagement with education, and reduce gang involvement. In its first year, 28 youth participated in the C2E program. NPAAMB has maintained a 95% attendance rate with 100% of participants successfully completing the program.

Focus Eight: Programs which provide substance use / addiction treatment for youth

Early substance use is among the top risk factors for one's involvement in the criminal justice system across their life course.

Community Addictions Services of Niagara (CASON) together with DSBN has implemented a summer day treatment program for students with addictions. This service fills the gap during summer months when school-based substance use support or counselling is not available. During the first year of programming, CASON provided programming to 12 unique youth, many of which elected to continue into the second session due to the positive impact of the program.

Focus Nine: Programs which intervene in or prevent youth involvement in human trafficking

Providing youth with the knowledge and skills to combat risk factors associated with human trafficking will decrease their likelihood of victimization.

Crime Stoppers of Niagara is working with community partners to strategically display signage around Niagara to raise awareness among vulnerable groups about the risks of human trafficking. They are also running a social media campaign in partnership with Niagara Regional Police Services that in the first year has produced more than 103,000 views and reached nearly 40,000 individuals, with 61.6% of viewers having identified as women.

Focus Ten: Programs which support Black and racialized youth with a positive sense of community belonging

Creating welcoming spaces free from discrimination or hate, is critical to ensuring Black and racialized youth are safe and have opportunities to thrive.

During the first year of programming, Future Black Female collaborated with more than 17 community partners to deliver empowering workshops, provide mentorship opportunities, and increase access to mental health for Black youth in Niagara. Having 55 unique youth participants in the Empower Youth Program in their first year, Future Black Female continues to offer unique opportunities for Black youth to build connections, establish a sense of belonging, celebrate culture, and build resiliency.

Year two of these programs are currently underway, with an end date of December 31, 2025.

Alternatives Reviewed

Not applicable.

Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities

With a focus on youth-at-risk, the Building Safer Communities Grant Program is aligned to Council's strategic priority of ensuring an "Equitable Region" by listening and responding to community needs and planning for future growth.

Other Pertinent Reports

Confidential COM 30-2023 – Building Safer Communities Fund & Grant Program Pilot

[BSC Grant Recipients - Memo CWCD 2024-30.pdf](#)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/Council%20Weekly%20Correspondence%20Distribution_Mar08_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/BSC%20Grant%20Recipients%20-%20Memo%20CWCD%202024-30.pdf)

[COM 14-2024 - An Evaluation of the use of Granting for the Building Safer Communities Grant Program Pilot](https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_May07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2014-2024%20An%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20use%20of%20Granting%20for%20the%20Building%20Safer%20Communities%20Grant%20Program%20Pilot.pdf)

(https://niagararegion.escribemeetings.com/PHSSC_May07_2024/eSCRIBE%20Documents/eSCRIBE%20Attachments/COM%2014-2024%20An%20Evaluation%20of%20the%20use%20of%20Granting%20for%20the%20Building%20Safer%20Communities%20Grant%20Program%20Pilot.pdf)

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