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**Subject:** ProKids Program – Providing Recreational/Cultural Opportunities for Children/Youth 2018 Year End Report

**Report to:** Public Health and Social Services Committee

**Report date:** Tuesday, July 9, 2019

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## Recommendations

That this report **BE RECEIVED** for information.

## Key Facts

- The purpose of this report is to provide Council with a year-end report on the ProKids program.
- In 2018, 2,398 children and youth from low-income families participated in a sports, recreation or arts program of their choice supported through the ProKids program.
- Every year since the program's inception, Niagara Region has invested \$250,000 to support the healthy development of disadvantaged children by supporting their participation in activities through the ProKids program.
- The YMCA of Niagara seeks additional donations, funds and in-kind contributions. In 2018, the YMCA of Niagara garnered additional resources of an approximate value of nearly \$386,000 to support the program.

## Financial Considerations

The Niagara Region investment of \$250,000 to support the ProKids program was made available through the approved 2018 Social Assistance and Employment Opportunities (SAEO) budget (100% levy). Part of the \$250,000 in funding is used to support program delivery costs (20%), and the rest for purchasing registration fees.

The YMCA of Niagara is the program placement-coordinating agency. In this role, the YMCA works to maximize funding by seeking in-kind contributions (waived or reduced registration fees) from participating sports clubs and programs, as well as donations from the private sector and funds from social service agencies. In 2018, additional contributions valued at \$385,739 were received and combined with the annual investment from Niagara Region. Total funding provided to this program was \$635,739, allowing 2,398 children and youth from across Niagara to participate in a sport, recreation or arts program.

## Analysis

ProKids was implemented in Niagara as a pilot project in January 2000, after the release of research from McMaster University, which concluded that investing dollars to support the involvement of children and youth in sport and recreation activities was a sound investment in the healthy development of children, benefitting their families and the community.

The ProKids program supports the participation of financially disadvantaged children and youth (0 to 18 years) in the sport, recreation or arts program of their choice. The program operates across all 12 municipalities within Niagara. This program helps to cover some or all of the registration costs for families with an annual taxable income below \$40,000. Once eligibility is confirmed by Children's Services, a service request is forwarded to the ProKids Coordinator at the YMCA of Niagara. Families are contacted by the Coordinator and provided with a full range of options for sports, recreation and arts programs. The process is completely confidential and once placed, children/youth are fully integrated into the selected activities.

Each child or youth receives an allocation up to \$100 annually to participate. The ProKids Coordinator works to ensure each \$100 allocation is maximized by leveraging in-kind contributions from sports clubs and recreation programs (through reduced or waived registration fees), donations made by private business and/or fundraising events, and community foundation funds. The example below illustrates how the ProKids Coordinator will use combinations of resources to stretch the funds with the goal to support as many children as possible:

- Hockey registration is \$250. A private business made a donation \$1,000 to the ProKids program to support children wanting to play hockey. One hundred dollars of the donation is used towards the registration, the ProKids program pays \$25, and the remaining \$125 of the registration fee is waived by the hockey club.

In addition to covering the cost of registration fees, the ProKids Coordinator has developed partnerships with organizations to provide free equipment to those families who need added support, thus removing any additional barriers to participation.

ProKids works in partnership with other programs, such as Canadian Tire Jumpstart to support as many families as possible. Families can apply to ProKids at any time throughout the year, and can reapply each year. Because of this, families can turn to the ProKids program if their application to another program is declined. This can occur for a number of reasons such as: program funds have been depleted; the timing between the funding and the activity starting do not coincide; or the family has already received financial support through another program. The demand in Niagara, for such programs, is known to exceed the funds and resources available, as was the case in 2016, when applications exceeded available funds which required a moratorium of new

applications. This prompted a critical review and subsequent changes to eligibility policies and processes, and other opportunities for refinement. Children's Services staff closely monitor the program uptake on a monthly basis, with the goal of meeting increasing demand for the ProKids program.

In addition to Regional funding, community and individual donations are crucial to program success and viability. Since the launch of the pilot project in January 2000, donations, and in-kind contributions have a total value of over \$3 million dollars, and have benefited just over 39,000 children and youth. Over the years, the ProKids program has grown to include approximately 160 sports clubs, recreation and arts organizations offering children and youth activities such as swimming, rowing, hockey, soccer, dance, acting/drama, arts, Scouts, Brownies, etc.

### **Alternatives Reviewed**

Not applicable – year-end report.

### **Relationship to Council Strategic Priorities**

Not applicable.

### **Other Pertinent Reports**

- COM 11-2018 ProKids Program – Providing Recreational/Cultural Opportunities for Children/Youth 2017 Year End Report

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#### **Recommended by:**

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*This report was reviewed by Darlene Edgar, Director, Children's Services.*