

**Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved  
and Homeless Youth in Hamilton**

**Drop-In Visioning Event:  
Report Back to the Community**

June 2008

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Social Planning & Research Council

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

On March 26, 2008 the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton (SPRC), the Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC) and a group of students from the McMaster University School of Social Work 4J03 Class hosted a community discussion about drop-in programming for street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton.

This report reflects the proceedings from that event. It is divided into the following sections:

- Background - including drop-in as a best practice and the Hamilton context
- Consultation Design
- Findings
- Analysis and Conclusions.

Attached to this document is a calendar of existing drop-in services for street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Drop-In as a Best Practice

Literature, youth and service providers agree that street-involved youth respond well to approaches that are flexible, youth friendly and that offer a one-stop-shop model. According to the best practices identified in the 2005 report, *Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton*:

*Agencies that provide many services in one space work well with youth. An open access program with representation from health, mental health, substance misuse, housing, legal supports, sexual health education, education and employment help and income security provide the most meaningful help to youth who are often reluctant and unable to meet appointments, access transportation and who find traditional services intimidating. Additionally, offering services to street-involved youth in the spaces they access most often and feel most comfortable, helps service providers to build relationships and trust enabling the transition to other services.*

The best practices literatures suggests that despite some of the most important relationship building happens with the most street-entrenched young people through the flexible, non-intrusive nature of drop-in services. Youth are often reluctant to access the variety of services they require (mental health, substance use, income support, housing, primary and sexual health) however, if these service providers are consistently on-site in a youth friendly atmosphere, eventually a young person might feel comfortable seeking assistance. This is the philosophy behind drop-in programming for street-involved and homeless youth.

### 2.2 The Hamilton Context

Wesley Urban Ministries delivered comprehensive, drop-in programming for street-involved youth for 20 years through the Transitional Youth Program. A community decision to reallocate that funding to a new transitional housing project meant the closure of this service in the spring of 2007. In response, through the leadership of the Street-Youth Planning Collaborative, the community has come together to offer youth a range of drop-in services. Every day of the week at least some drop-in opportunity is available. Recommendation #5 from the *Addressing the Needs* report calls for the availability of open-access programming 24 hours per day and 7 days per week:

*Street-involved youth do not have open access services available twenty-four hours a day. It is recommended that the community identify resources to guarantee that youth have an open-access program open to them at all times of the day.*

Currently, in Hamilton we offer close to 50 hours per week of drop-in programming therefore, youth can access drop-in programming for approximately 30 % of the week. During the day through the week and Friday evening are particular gaps in our community (please see calendar attached).

The Street Youth Planning Collaborative (SYPC) is an executive group from agencies which are mandated to provide services to homeless youth. They exist to advocate for, support, and facilitate an enhanced, seamless system of services that is both comprehensive and accountable. In order to achieve this, the SYPC has committed to the following:

- ✓ Ensuring that the current service system is well-maintained and stable. If gaps or potential gaps occur – the SYPC commits to finding ways as a collaborative to fill those gaps;

- ✓ Soliciting and responding to feedback from key stakeholders in the community (youth, front line staff, managers) about emerging trends and gaps in demographics and services;
- ✓ Broad level community and systems planning – paying attention to best practices and innovative models in other communities.

To respond to this emerging need, the community was called together on March 26<sup>th</sup> 2008 to document the community conversation on drop-in programming for street-involved and homeless youth.

### 3.0 CONSULTATION DESIGN

A group of seven students from a McMaster University Social Work class worked closely with the Addressing the Needs project staff from the Social Planning and Research Council to organize a half-day event for young people and service providers to talk about the need for drop-in programming. We defined drop-in programming with the following parameters:

- *Drop-in means that youth can go at any time when it's open (there is no such thing as being late), don't have to pay anything, don't have to do any specific programming.*

Thirty-seven community members participated, 14 of whom were currently or formerly street-involved and homeless youth. Members from the Street Youth Planning Collaborative, the Street-Involved Youth Network and the Street Youth Involvement Committee all made introductory remarks.

The participants were divided into small groups with youth and service provider representation. Each group had a student facilitator.

After an icebreaker exercise, participants were asked to answer the question – *What currently exists in Hamilton for street-involved youth on each day of the week?* Each group was given a different day and mapped out their answers on flip chart paper. The flip charts were posted around the room during the break.

The second small group exercise had participants answering the question - *What kind of drop-in services do we need in Hamilton to add to what we already have?* Facilitators prompted the groups to talk about space, hours, staff, location, rules, etc.

The afternoon wrapped up with short report back comments from each group and a feedback form asking for participants' interest in staying connected.



## 4.0 FINDINGS

### *Small Group Exercise #1*

#### *What drop-in currently exists in Hamilton for street-involved youth?*

The findings from the first small group exercise can be found attached in the form of a calendar with notes attached. The programs identified on the calendar are those that are truly drop-in services for the street-involved youth population in particular. Other services were identified and are outlined after the calendar.

#### CALENDAR OF STREET-INVOLVED/HOMELESS YOUTH DROP-IN SERVICES (8:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.)

TIME	SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
8:00		<b>Living Rock Breakfast</b> (8:00-9:30)	<b>Living Rock Breakfast</b> (8:00-9:30)	<b>Living Rock Breakfast</b> (8:00-9:30)	<b>Living Rock Breakfast</b> (8:00-9:30)	<b>Living Rock Breakfast</b> (8:00-9:30)	
8:30							
9:00							
9:30							
10:00							
10:30							
11:00							
11:30	<b>Notre Dame Brunch</b> (11:30)	<b>Notre Dame Lunch</b> (11:30-12:15)	<b>Notre Dame Lunch</b> (11:30-12:15)	<b>Notre Dame Lunch</b> (11:30-12:15)	<b>Notre Dame Lunch</b> (11:30-12:15)	<b>Notre Dame Lunch</b> (11:30-12:15)	<b>Notre Dame Brunch</b> (11:30)
NOON							
12:30					<b>Living Rock Chapel Program</b> (12:00-1:00)		

**CALENDAR OF STREET-INVOLVED/HOMELESS YOUTH DROP-IN SERVICES (1:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M.)**

<b>TIME</b>	<b>SUNDAY</b>	<b>MONDAY</b>	<b>TUESDAY</b>	<b>WEDNESDAY</b>	<b>THURSDAY</b>	<b>FRIDAY</b>	<b>SATURDAY</b>
<b>1:00</b>		<b>Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House Drop-In (1:00 – 4:00)</b>	<b>Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House Drop-In (1:00 – 4:00)</b>	<b>Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House Drop-In (1:00 – 4:00)</b>	<b>Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House Drop-In (1:00 – 4:00)</b>	<b>Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House Drop-In (1:00 – 4:00)</b>	
<b>1:30</b>	<b>Living Rock Drop-In (1:30-8:30)</b>						
<b>2:00</b>							
<b>2:30</b>							
<b>3:00</b>							
<b>3:30</b>		<b>Health Initiatives for Youth Hamilton Drop-In (1:00 – 8:00)</b>					
<b>4:00</b>	<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>		<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>	<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>	<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>	<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>	<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>
<b>4:30</b>							
<b>5:00</b>		<b>Notre Dame Dinner (4:00-4:45)</b>					
<b>5:30</b>							
<b>6:00</b>							
<b>6:30</b>			<b>Living Rock Evening Program (6:30-9:30)</b>	<b>Living Rock Evening Program (6:30-9:30)</b>	<b>Living Rock Evening Program (6:30-9:30)</b>		
<b>7:00</b>							
<b>7:30</b>							
<b>8:00</b>							
<b>8:30</b>							
<b>9:00</b>							

The following services were identified in the small group discussions but do not fit the defined 'drop-in' parameters for street-involved youth drop-in services:

### **Mondays**

The Hamilton Public Library – Central Location  
Careerworx  
YM/WCA  
Open spaces like Jackson Square

### **Tuesdays**

The Hamilton Public Library – Central Location  
Eva Rockwell Community Centre  
Food banks

### **Wednesdays**

Alternatives for Youth drop-in group on substance use  
Hamilton Youth Voice Against Poverty  
Health Clinic at Health Initiative for Youth Hamilton

### **Thursdays**

Catholic Children's Aid Society – Drop-In for Crown Wards  
Olive Branch  
Salvation Army  
Clean Needle Exchange

## **Small Group Exercise #2**

### ***What kind of drop-in services do we need to add to what we already have?***

The findings from the second small group are organized by theme. Participants were asked - *What kind of drop-in services do we need in Hamilton to add to what we already have?* Responses are divided into eight sections – location, hours, physical space, age limit, services/programming available, community partners, rules and staff.

#### Location

The discussions on location were varied. Most of the respondents agreed that there needs to be some drop-in programming in the downtown core since it is the most accessible area of Hamilton. However, participants also discussed the need for programming outside of the core in order to meet the needs of mountain and east end youth in particular. Most groups decided that multiple locations would be ideal.

#### Hours

Most groups indicated that 24 hour drop-in services would work well (but commented on that challenge of that level of service provision). Opening early (before noon) and staying open late (after 7:00 p.m.) were also mentioned as important considerations.

#### Physical Space

The most common response was around the size of the potential facility – most groups talked about wanting an expansive or multi-leveled space in order to accommodate “people not to feel too crowded – some youth need space”.

Participants also talked about wanting the place comfortable, youth friendly and decorated with plants, posters and art. Laundry, showers and storage on site would be ideal.

#### Age Limit

The discussions around age limits were relatively divergent. Many agreed that there needed to be options for a wide age range - 13 – 30 years old. All of the groups decided that younger and older age groups should be separated for safety and to best meet the needs of all of the youth.

A few groups talked about the need for older youth (21 +) having access to drop-in services as many young adults will not find their unique needs met in adult services and many homeless young adults may not be functioning or coping at the level appropriate for their age.

#### Services/Programming Available

Youth and service providers discussed the importance of access to basic needs items and amenities – laundry, shower facilities, toiletries, access to phone and computer. Participants also agreed that youth should have access to a variety of food choices and that they access be flexible. So that youth can get their own, through the day without needing to ask staff for help.

The second most popular suggestion was around access to people to talk to (for emotional support, support in accessing basic needs like housing and food). This support extended in particular to issues around addictions and mental health issues – one participant explained “a lot of youth have concerns”. Another indicated “have a drug or alcohol counselor always available”. There were many conversations about harm reduction including the need to for youth to have access to clean needles and condoms.

Participants also discussed the need for recreation and leisure activities for street-involved youth. Ideas for recreation included: a book exchange, cards, television, board games, healthy activities, game nights, bike racks and connections with local recreation centres.

Finally, youth and service providers talked about having the services extend to pets including access to veterinarian help and allowing hypo-allergenic pets on-site.

### Community Partners

Connected to the conversation about the Services and Programs that would be available was discussion around community partners on-site. The following agencies or sectors were named as important community partners who would visit the site regularly to connect with youth:

- Income Support – Ontario Works
- Health Care – Nurses, Doctors, Dental Professionals
- Counselling – Mental Health, Anger Management, Addictions
- Arts and Recreation – In-House Artist, Recreational Workers
- Pregnancy and Parenting – Pre-Natal Nurses.

### Rules

Service providers and youth agreed that there need to be rules in place to ensure a safe and open atmosphere for youth to get help. Everyone agreed that weapons and violence should not be tolerated. Verbal abuse and discrimination were also considered by participants to be non-negotiable rules.

There was less consensus around drug and alcohol use. All participants felt that drugs and alcohol should not be allowed on the premises. However, there was not agreement as to whether or not youth under the influence should be permitted. Some felt that it would decrease the safety of youth attending and potentially trigger youth who are trying to remain sober. Others felt that this should be a facility that is safe and accessible for all youth, including those under the influence of drugs and alcohol. One recommendation suggested is that youth under the influence have access to a separate space with staff dedicated to understanding withdrawal management and harm reduction.

All participants agreed that the rules should be clearly defined from the outset with reasonable and appropriate consequences attached to those rules.

### Staff

The conversations surrounding the ideal staff indicated the importance of this issue for both youth and service providers. Youth-friendly, flexible, genuine and non-judgmental were the characteristics most often mentioned by consultation participants. Some of the descriptors used were, “understanding”, “real”, “want to be there, not just for the money”, “someone to trust”, “easy to relate to”.

Lived experience was also mentioned as an important characteristic. Nearly every group talked about the possibility of peer support elements.

Finally, participants agreed that the staff need to be diverse and reflect the community of youth they are working with. Young people, people of colour and men were identified as specific considerations when picking staff.

## **5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

There is an identified need for additional drop-in services for street-involved and homeless youth in Hamilton. While we have a community who is working on providing important services, we have now realized that for 70% of the week, street youth have no unstructured, supportive programs to access. The community partners and youth who gathered in March 2008 recognized the need and identified a number of issues to consider in developing additional services. Non-judgmental, youth friendly, flexible programs with access to a number of community partners serving the unique needs of homeless youth are essential for the engagement of disengaged young people.

In addition to providing important information on service development around street-involved youth drop-in, the consultation in March also developed an interest and momentum across community agencies and with youth. After this report of proceedings is shared with the community, the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton in partnership with the Street-Youth Planning Collaborative will convene interested service providers and young people to develop strategies for increasing the street-youth drop-in options in Hamilton.