

**Needs Assessment and Service Awareness of
Youth Aged 10 to 14, Living in the
South-East and West Priority Areas**

**Report to John Howard Society of Ottawa
For Crime Prevention Ottawa's Gang Prevention Initiative**

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the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa commissioned by the John Howard Society
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*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

Section 1 - Introduction

The purpose of this study, conducted by (YSB) Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa and in partnership with (JHS) John Howard Society of Ottawa, was to engage with a diverse ethnic group of youth aged 10-14 year old in the Ottawa Youth Gang Prevention Initiative-defined South East Priority Area (parts of the South-East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community Catchment Area) and West Priority Area (parts of the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre Catchment Area) to identify their needs. These two communities were chosen out of 6 known high risk communities in the Ottawa region because they were classified as the most at risk in previous research work. These two targeted community areas are highly culturally diverse with most of the population consisting of newcomers and multicultural residents.

Partnering up with groups already present in the neighborhoods, including, but not limited to: Community Health Centers, Community Houses, youth serving agencies, elementary and middle schools was strongly encouraged. Also encouraged was to align with initiatives already in the neighborhoods. Consideration of what already exists in the neighborhoods in relation to services offered and what is missing for youth aged 10-14 years in the targeted communities was to be analyzed.

YSB was contracted to create a youth engagement model for JHS to approach the communities and service providers in a needs assessment and service awareness for youth aged 10 to 14. The youth engagement model consisted of four youth; two youth leaders from the Ethno-Cultural Youth Advisory Committee of YSB and one youth recruited from each of the targeted communities.

The study itself wanted to learn about the youth in these communities, such as; what services were present when the youth were 7-10 years old and how has that helped/hindered their ability to be happy, and stay out of trouble at home, school and in the community. The study also wanted to learn what is working for the youth now as children aged 10-14 years to help them be successful in achieving their goals. What is not working for the youth, or what barriers are faced with existing services was also studied. The study also wanted to find out directly from the youth how to best implement services in their community including how to present culturally sensitive counseling.

The aim for this project was to gain knowledge through a needs assessment on the services offered to youth aged 10-14 years while reflecting with the same youth on when they were 7-10 years old, and then modify the services to better accommodate the youth, with an overall intention of decreasing youth related crime in the targeted high-risk communities.

We would like to acknowledge the generous assistance of the Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre and the South East Ottawa Centre for a Healthy Community in organizing the focus groups.

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Section 2 - Youth Crime and Safety

About 78,000 youth aged 12 to 17 were charged with a Criminal Code offence in Canada in 2004, while a further 101,000 were cleared by means other than laying a formal charge. Combined, this represents a 4% decline in the overall youth crime rate — a 6% drop in youths charged and a 2% drop in youths cleared by other means. The youth crime rate had generally been increasing between 1999 and 2003. The rate of violent crime among youth fell by 2%. Over the past 15 years, this rate has remained fairly stable, except for a large increase in 2000. Most categories of youth violent crime declined, including a 30% decrease in the youth homicide rate and a 2% drop in robbery. The youth property crime rate fell 8%. The majority of property offences declined, including an 11% drop in the motor vehicle theft rate and an 8% decline in the rate of break-ins.

With respect to an on-line survey conducted for Crime Prevention Ottawa in 2008 called “Now is the Time to Act: Youth Gang Prevention in Ottawa”, respondents (n=25) expressed strong agreement with the notion that Ottawa needs a more extensive crime prevention response and a broader intervention/diversion response to address youth gangs. What was discovered in this 2008 study was; the principal reason for youth gang affiliation were protection, belonging, accessing lucrative drug markets, lack of school engagement and inadequate parental supervision. Some youth as young as 14 are recruited either by older youth to hold/hide drugs at school and assist in some trades.

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Section 3 - Methodology:

This project was the first report writing experience for the four youth working on it. The youth participants gained many valuable skills such as learning to facilitate focus groups, time management, research skills, and report writing skills. This project took a lot of dedication and hard work from all stakeholders and youth participants.

The first step was recruiting two members from the ethno-cultural youth advisory committee. These two youth leaders were selected because of their past experience and interest in advocating for the ethno-cultural community. They also have the training and skills required to facilitate focus groups, conduct surveys, and analyze results. Two other youth, Tristann and Ikram, were recruited from the targeted communities, one from each community. Since the youth have firsthand experience with their community, it has been very helpful having these youth on this specific project. They have connections with service providers and services that has helped build bonds and trust to allow this project to conduct focus groups with the youth who participate in the programs.

In-depth research on immigrant and ethnic youth relating to crime and their needs from past reports and studies were researched such as:

- “United Neighbors, a report to the Pinecrest-Queensway community on the state of crime and safety” – July 2008 – Robynn Collins
- “Now is the Time to Act, Youth Gang Prevention in Ottawa” – January 2008 – Michael Chettleburgh
- “The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging “Best Practices” to Meet Those Needs” – February 2004 - Paul Anised and Kenise Kilbride
- “Needs Assessment of High Risk Somali Youth in the West End of Ottawa” – August 1995 – Dr. Mohamed Nuuh Ali
- “Needs Assessment of Arabic-Speaking Youth in Our Neighbourhoods” – July 2009 – Zelda Shore and Gwen Barton
- “Community Policing—A Shared Responsibility” – December 2008 - Sulaimon Giwa
- “Community Development Framework” – November 2008 - Steve Kanellakos

Once research had been completed, surveys and focus group questions were created for a need assessment of youth aged 10-14 years in targeted communities and schools. The purpose was to get feedback from the youth who use the services directly and who have the most accurate information about the services. Feedback was also received about how the youth feel about safety and crime in their community.

Partnerships were established with an elementary school and community house coordinators of the PQCHC catchment area which allowed the project to conduct focus groups with the youth that attend the services hosted by the community houses. Flyers were sent out to advertise the focus group and maximize the number of youth participants. This helped recruit youth aged 10-14 for focus groups being conducted at the community houses during one of the more popular programs so that the youth would not have to go out of their way to give their feedback about their community. Pizza, juice and pop were used as incentives for the youth to participate.

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

The survey and focus group was a great opportunity for the youth to give their feedback on issues they may have faced concerning crime and safety and services geared towards them. They were given a chance to speak out about these topics whether be it positive or negative, to potentially create an outcome of improved services and a decrease in crime rates in their communities.

There were 8 focus groups conducted in total; 4 in each targeted community. The focus groups were conducted at local community agencies. There was a total of 92 youth aged 10-14 years who participated in the focus groups, 59 youth were from the South-East Ottawa region while 33 youth who were interviewed were from the West priority area. There were 115 surveys completed from students at an elementary school in grades 6, 7 and 8.

Section 4 - Focus Group Results

According to *No Community Left Behind*, a social development initiative with the objective to prevent crime and address social determinants of health, and current focus groups conducted by the Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa, commissioned by the John Howard Society in partnership with Crime Prevention Ottawa, has indicated many needs within the South-East Ottawa area and Pinecrest-Queensway catchment area pertaining to services offered to youth age 10-14 and crime levels. Youth between the ages of 10-14 expressed their concerns regarding their daily community programs, services offered to them and how safe they feel in their own community. As a result, many of these youth would like to see more staff, larger facilities, community gatherings, learn proper procedures for reporting a crime and increased police patrol.

The four youth leading this project conducted 8 focus groups, 4 in each targeted community. There were 92 youth in total aged 10-14 from various ethnic backgrounds interviewed in the Pinecrest-Queensway CHC catchment area and South-East Ottawa catchment area. The ethnic groups of the interviewed youth ranged from Afghanistan, Algeria, Burundi, Cambodia, Canada, Caucasian, Congo, Djibouti, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, Haiti, Iraq, Jamaica, Kosovo, Mullato, Nigeria, Pakistan, Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and the United States. The youth were very energetic and excited to give feedback on the services they use and on issues relating to crime and safety. The questions asked during the focus groups were the same questions used in the survey. The focus groups were conducted during youth after school programs such as homework clubs or youth drop-in. This was where most of the youth congregated after school and they were well informed about services offered to them since they used these services.

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

4.1 South-East Ottawa Priority Area

Focus Group A

Twenty-one youth living in the South-East Ottawa area* reported in a focus group held on May 19, 2010, that they are satisfied with their current community programs. However, the youth would like to see a skate park, a weight room to keep them healthier, and a recreation room with more activities, in addition to what they already access. The youth also mentioned they would like to have more volleyball and basketball tournaments for youth all ages in their community. Many youth clearly stated during the focus group, “We use these services because they are fun and we also get to practice what we love...its good exercise and it keeps us out of trouble and busy.”

Youth living in the area are well aware of the services offered to them; staff, local newsletters, and websites are their primary resources in finding out what is offered in their community. Nonetheless, some of their concerns with these programs are the times that they take place; the majority of the youth would like to have these programs start immediately after school and run until 6:00PM or 7:30PM. Also, the youth stressed that “Waiver Forms” are not working in their favour because of the obstacles they have to go through for their parents to sign it and have them eligible to participate in programs that interest them.

A study completed between May 2006 and July 2008, by the Project Steering Committee (herein referred to as the *Committee*) for *Community Policing—A Shared Responsibility*; focused on fostering relationship building among Ottawa’s multicultural communities (South-East Ottawa) and the Ottawa Police Service (OPS), has reported that 50% of the workshop participants agreed that they had not been well informed about the OPS complaints process before the workshop, and only 10% strongly agreed that they had been well informed.

Therefore, youth living in the area do not feel comfortable reporting a crime, even if the outcome of reporting a crime can improve something major in their lives. These youth are clearly not aware of the proper procedures of reporting a crime in a safe manner. As a result, the majority of the youth feel that reporting crime is like “snitching” which is a “horrible thing”, many of the youth reported instantly after being asked the question. The consequences of “snitching” is being shunned, having to deal with hatred, verbal and physical abuse along with harassment.

Focus Group B

No Community Left Behind has indicated communities are always different and dynamic; major issues of concern vary from community to community which proves to be correct in many ways. Twelve youth living in the community had shared during a focus group held on May 25, 2010 that there are enough after school programs within their community. They specifically mentioned sports like: basketball, soccer, and floor hockey are present; nonetheless, the youth would like to see these services in better quality for them to be fully successful in their lives. The youth would like to see swimming pools for the hot weather, a skate park, a soccer field,

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volleyball programs, a tennis court, a football field, movie nights, and more sports equipment (hockey pads, basketballs, dodge balls, and better quality basketball courts). In addition to programs the youth would like to have, the youth also feel that increased staff will support their efforts to be successful in their lives.

Furthermore, the youth feel there are enough after school and summer programs-Camp Smitty, which has many outdoor events like volleyball and parks and is held once a year. The youth mentioned that, one of the great things about Camp Smitty is, if the youth cannot afford to pay the full cost, the community centre offers subsidy and support. The youth use these programs for more practice and because it is fun, however, the youth would appreciate if programs could run from 5:30p.m. to 8:00p.m. In addition, the youth also receive information about services offered to them from staff, local newsletter and their parents. The youth briefly mentioned the "Sports Club" program, motivates and encourages them to achieve their lifelong goals and aspirations by staying healthy, having fun and communicating with their peers. In summary for the youth to be fully and completely successful in their lives, they feel there should be more staff in the community centre supervising as well as assisting them.

The youth living in the area feel that the level of crime in their neighbourhood is medium. Half of the youth addressed feel safe and the other feel uncomfortable living in their surroundings. A part of the reason the youth do not feel safe is because of the violence and vandalism rates that take place in their neighbourhood. The youth would like to see more police patrol in their community. Many fights occur and the majority of the youth do not feel comfortable reporting a crime because they do not want to be labelled as a "snitch", hence, most people who report a crime get hurt or looked down upon. Very little youth stated, "I think it's good to report a crime because it's the right thing to do".

Focus Group C

Since August 1, 2006, the *No Community Left Behind* program has been extended to four neighboring communities. Eleven youth living in this community participated in a focus group held on June 1, 2010 and stated the following programs and services they use on a regular basis: homework club, dodge ball, yoga, basketball, karate, soccer, girls night and Christie Lake, a summer camp program. The youth make use of these programs because they would like to learn leadership skills, team building skills, get assistance with homework, have some fun, keep out of trouble, stay fit and most of all, have some good company.

The youth living in the area have greater concerns about their area of residence than just more programs they wanted to see. The youth feel the area is extremely unsanitary due to the garbage that stays out for a long period of time; they would like their garbage picked up more than just once a week. They also mentioned basketball court needs to be fixed with more nets, in particular, smaller ones for the children. Although the *No Community Left Behind* program strives to engage and support community members to participate more fully in neighbourhood planning and decision-making processes, the youth living in the area feel there is a lack of community involvement. In addition, brighter lighting at night would help; some individuals get injured from the lack of lighting as well as more stop signs.

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Another major concern for the youth living in the community is the “gangsters”. Beer bottles are being smashed around the neighbourhood, especially in the playground where most of the children run around barefooted, and the “gangsters” are responsible for this. “We live in this neighbourhood too, so we have a right to play and feel comfortable here and should not have to worry about anything.” said many of the youth during the focus group. The youth would like to see more kind and respectful people in their community so those certain individuals can create a positive name for their neighbourhood and see less of the “gangsters” who frequently used foul language as well as use and distribute drugs around children.

The youth feel the level of crime in the area is medium, therefore would like to see surveillance cameras installed in their community to prevent crimes from taking place. “There are lots of drugs being used in the community, so it's not that safe here.” reported a youth after being asked how safe their community is. The youth are well aware of what areas to avoid; “the longer you live here, the more you know safe and unsafe places.” reported a 10 year old boy. However, an overwhelming majority of the youth do not feel comfortable reporting a crime. “People might get killed or attacked.” stated a ten year old boy after being asked if he personally felt safe reporting a crime. In response, a fourteen-year-old girl stated: “My older brother is friends with the “gangsters” so they’re nice to me and I don’t mind reporting a crime because I have protection.” However, this is not the case for many of the youth living in the community.

Focus Group D

Twelve youth living in this area participated in a focus group held on May 18, 2010 and discussed several issues pertaining to their area of residence and services that are available to them. First, the youth briefly mentioned the services that are offered to them, which included: homework club, dance club, boys club, girls club, summer soccer, and YMCA dance. Although the youth access the homework club program on a regular basis, there is only one tutor in the facility. In addition, youth report limited access for help to those students who speak French. A possible solution the youth came up with was, having youth within their own community work at the homework club program so there is extra help around the table. This would keep the youth occupied and at the same time have them learn new skills and gain some income. The youth moved on by discussing how they were notified about these services and programs offered to them – the coordinator at their local community centre. However, the youth would like to see specific programs that interest them; these programs consist of a talent show event organized by youth, swimming pool in community, cooking club and social activities such as art and crafts and movie night. In addition, the youth feel that summer camps that are being offered to them are activity-limited and costly; they would enjoy having new experiences elsewhere and learn new skills.

The youth were also concerned about the image of their community. The vast majority of the youth feel their community is unsanitary; lots of dog feces and litter everywhere and therefore would like to have more community gatherings to conduct weekly clean ups. In addition, the youth also feel there should be more playing facilities because the children tend to fight over the few swings available in the parks. Another major concern for the youth living in the area is that the older youth take over playgrounds and basketball courts when the younger youth are

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around, therefore bullying becomes an issue; the youth would like to see adult supervision or volunteers in parks and playgrounds during the day. The youth are also pressured by the older youth to indicate hand signals when police are around. Also, the local basketball court is next to the street, which becomes a safety issue when basketballs bounce off the court and onto the nearby street; the youth would like to have a gate or fence built surrounding the basketball court.

Youth living in the area reported that there is a high level of crime in their community; theft, knives, guns, bullying, violence, vandalism and drug use. As a result, the youth do not feel safe in their community. Many of their parents are aware of the existing issues and feel somewhat apprehensive to let their children play outside. The youth who have to stay inside feel stressed and isolated due to the lack of socialization with their peers. "Crime builds fear in us, and we are scared to be kidnapped and hurt." mentioned many of the youth. In addition, the youth do not feel comfortable reporting a crime because of the fear of being caught and facing consequences. The youth strongly encouraged the use of an anonymous drop box or help-line.

5.2 West Priority Area Focus Group Results

Focus Group E

Eleven youth were gathered together in the West Priority area to discuss the needs and wants of their community. The youth were excited and ambitious to let us know what was available and things they would like to have in the future. Their biggest concern was that there was not enough staff to facilitate and organize events along with needing a bigger facility. The Community House is a shelter and a shield for these young children- it is what keeps them out of trouble and they would like access to more space and staff.

The youth feel as though they need more staff in space provided for them. They also would like a gym and swimming pool to play sports in and to fun have. There is homework assistance; however there is no French staff to help the children who go to French schools. They also stressed that the community used to get donations but not anymore and they would really like to have more donations.

Additional programs and services that these youth would like to have in their community are additional after school programs such computers, musical/dance, cooking, art classes and talent shows, tutors, a gym and field trips and sports (football and baseball). The services that they use are homework clubs. The youth use these programs because they want to have fun, take a break, keep out of trouble, it's a safe place, stay away from gangs because they influence them to do bad things and to have a better future. These youth get information about services in the community by their parents and the coordinators at the community centre. The youth would like their community programs to run till 8pm every day.

Services that the youth used when they were 7-10 were not specified but we're assuming some sports and homework club. But the services they would have liked to have had are more field trips (full year round), basketball and skate boarding.

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Services that kept them happy and out of trouble are: playing sports (basketball, dodge ball, ball hockey) and laser quest (community field trip). Things that help them reach their goals are: parents, community house, sports, school and homework club. Things that are not working for the youth are the sanitary issues and gangs – “police need to keep them out”. Things that are missing in their lives are “better role models, schools and sports”.

The level of crime in their community used to be very high but is now medium. Thirteen and fourteen year olds drink and smoke and some individuals bring guns to the community. All of the youth do not feel comfortable reporting a crime in their community because they do not want to be labeled or targeted as a "snitch". Some youth feel safe in their community and some do not. Things that will make their community safer are police patrolling, undercover and dart squad.

Focus Group F

In this community, 9 participants came to participate in the focus group. Ages ranged from 11-14 years old.

The youth attend programs after school hours such as homework club, youth basketball (at the community centre), United Sisters, cooking classes. They have expressed that there should be more sports on weekends for guys or a mixed gender sporting night. Youth come to these programs because it is something to do in an indoor environment to hang out, especially for the winter time. They come to the community house because they are bored after school and coming to the community house also keeps them out of trouble. Youth are satisfied with programs and services. One thing they would like to see stop is the cancelling of programs and more consistency. If the youth have any questions about the services and programs that take place in their community, they would speak to the community house coordinators.

Most of the youth said that they were not aware of programs at age 7; they would usually stay home. One of the youth had expressed that he did know about the programs and services, but he chose not to attend. There should be more field trips for the younger children for example Mont Cascade, museums etc. to get youth involved at an early age.

Programs that the youth would like to see more is peer to peer activities with the younger kids such as a kids club where the youth are leading the younger children. They would also like to see open gym for 7 year olds on the weekends in the afternoon. Other programs include Girls night, Hype Arts Program (poetry program) and more girl specific programs.

The youth have expressed that the crime level in their community is low to medium level. They do not report any crimes that they witness because they don't want to get involved. Some of the youth say it depends on the situation. They feel unsafe reporting crimes because they do not want to be known as a “snitch”. Their feeling of safety has improved. They do not feel safe walking around the neighbourhood past 10 or 11pm. The youth do not enjoy of the smell of their community in certain parts because those parts are known as places where people do drugs. The youth say that there should be more lighting in the parks and houses and other dark areas in the neighbourhood. The youth are not scared to walk home after programs

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because they usually walk in a group and drop each other off as they pass houses. Some of the reasons why the youth do not feel comfortable and in their community are because of drugs, and undomesticated dogs. There are also some “bad corners” that they would like to see eliminated. A service that would make the youth feel safe reporting crime is an anonymous community reporting drop off box. If they saw a crime, they would rather report the crime to someone who works in the community house.

The youth feel that the programs that are offered in the community help develop skills, and being more a part of the community. The top 3 services that the youth attend are youth drop in, sporting services, Homework Club, and another favourite is United Sisters. The youth enjoy that their community is safe and fun. They also appreciate the basketball court, the movie theatre, the corner stores and their transportation to get to school which is the school bus. They have expressed that their biggest concern is the drug trafficking and other crimes that make their community a negative environment.

Focus Group G

Five youth gathered at the community house to participate in the focus group. The age ranged from 10-13 years old. They were more than happy to tell us about how they would like to see their community improve.

The youth feel that there are limited programs after school. They would like more programs like sports (soccer), dancing and more age specific programs. The female crowd has expressed that a lot of their programs are male dominated. They would like more programs that are both gender and culturally specific and informed. The programs they do attend teach them life lessons, discipline and manners. If the youth need information about programs at the community house, they would speak to the coordinator. They also use newsletters, word of mouth, and flyers.

The youth attend programs such as youth drop in, basketball and homework club. On weekdays, they would like the programs to end at 6pm but on Fridays, they would like to see programs run longer.

A new swimming pool is something that the youth would like to see in their community. During the other seasons, they would like to see a cover over the pool so that debris and other things do not ruin the pool. Also the washrooms that are provided need to be cleaned more regularly and properly. During the winter months, the youth have expressed that there should be a board around the community skating rink to separate the kids hockey rink from the hockey rink. They also feel that there should be professionals to maintain the ice instead of volunteers. There is a portable that is located in the community which is used to do other activities that cannot be held in the community house. They feel that it is very unsafe and not up to standard.

Programs that were offered at the age of 7-10 were summer camp and soccer. They would like to see more open gym time and peer to peer programs for that age group. Not everyone feels welcome to the community house because there is a segregation problem with race and gender. Only certain kinds of people attend certain programs. If it does not happen this way,

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then participants do not get along. They would like to see a change in this and make the programs more multicultural.

The crime in the community is at medium level because there are risky areas and corners. However, the crime has gone down from past years. There have been crimes such as setting cars and garbage cans on fire, domestic violence and other negative influences. The youth do not feel comfortable reporting crime because someone may come after them later. The youth have expressed that it is not always someone's fault for doing a crime because people make mistakes. One of the youth expressed "I feel unsafe because of drug dealing and trafficking in the parking lot at night time." People are committing crimes right near other people's houses. They do not feel safe walking around the community after 10pm. People are constantly coming and going with drugs inconspicuously. The youth feel that the idea of regular police patrol would make youth scared but at the same time curious to see what is going on.

A recommendation the youth would like to see is a police officer that lived in the community. Their biggest concern is seems to be the crime level and the segregation issue. As a result of this, they would like to have cameras in the parking lot and in other high trafficking areas. It is very dark in the community and the lighting needs to be improved. Also they feel that if kids who come to the homework club should bring their report cards to the people who are helping them with their homework to show the areas which need improving. It was also mentioned that there should be a variety of sports and recreational activities and not only basketball.

Focus Group H

A total of eight youth, ages 13-14, gathered at the community house to participate in the focus group. The youth were eager to tell us about what they would like to see happen in their community.

The youth feel that there are limited programs offered after school. They would like to see programs such as a cooking program which pays you for every time you cook a meal for the community. They would like that their tutoring programs have more bilingual staff as there are some youth who attend a French speaking school. They report limited sporting programs in this community. They would like to have basketball nets that are fixed properly. Programs that they would like to see are cooking classes, field trips and trips to the movie theatre.

Everyone keeps up to date with programs by keeping track of the newsletters that are handed out monthly. The programs that they are aware of are: youth drop in, homework club, united sisters and sports and recreational programs. The majority of the youth say that the community house should be opened on weekends and that there should be a field trip every 2 weeks to places such as the beach or the wave pool. They would like to see a new video game system in their community house, more specifically, a Nintendo Wii. They like the programs that they come to because they enjoy the polite staff, the free food that is offered, free movies and the entertaining people who come to the community house. The community house programs help the youth meet new people, learn social skills, obtain jobs, and build the right skills to obtain a job. The youth feel that the programs should run until 9pm in the summer and 6pm in winter.

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Services that they would like to see for kid's age 7-10 years old are a play structure, field trips, sports lessons, kid's art program or kid's yoga class. There were no programs offered to them at the age of 7-10 years old. The youth have expressed that the youth drop in program is a priority because it keeps them focused on life and school. A youth mentioned that they would like to see more after school programs for low income children at school. Programs that they would like to see are programs that offer jobs, youth engagement program, and peer to peer programs.

The youth feel that the crime level in their community ranges from low to high because there is drug use and trafficking. In the past, they feel that the crime level was very high, but it has settled down because of police presence and patrolling. They do not report crimes because it is insignificant to them and it is usually an older crowd. Another reason is because they do not want to get beaten up or hated. They feel that there should be a phone number to call when they witness a crime.

In some final words, youth feel that there should be more staff that work at the community house and better lighting as there are flickering lights. They also want to see more gender specific sports, more parks and out of town field trips. Their biggest concern is the drugs and trafficking problem. It was also mentioned that they would like to see better play structures and more programs for the younger kids of the community.

Section 5 - Overall Key Themes of Focus Groups

Many of the youth seemed to know exactly what issues their communities had and they understood what approaches and strategies can be taken to better their community. The youth stated that they used current community services such as sporting programs, homework clubs, and the drop-in because it is a place to feel safe, to have fun, to keep out of trouble, and to stay away from the gangs because they tend to influence the youth into doing the "dirty" work for them. The youth have stated that their parents, community houses, sporting programs, schools and homework clubs have thus far helped them reach their goals.

The youth feel that they are sometimes not able to receive the right services that would really get them active and motivated. Programs that used to run off community grants are now being shut down. One youth stated "there used to be a cooking class for us but we don't have it anymore because we don't have the money and no one will teach it". Some services tend to get canceled or postponed; youth would like to see more consistency in the scheduling of the programs available to them.

Programs specific to sporting seem to focus on soccer and basketball. Many of the youth wanted basketball nets that were more appropriate to their height. Many of the youth wanted more variety in the skills and techniques they learn with different sports such as badminton, swimming, baseball, and tennis. The youth also wanted more community sports tournaments which they would participate in. This gives youth a chance to play their favorite sports, while feeling important and part of a team. It keeps their mind on the game instead of what is going on in their neighborhood. Having friendly neighborhood tournaments brings a community together and youth feel motivated to do good since they are getting positive attention from the community.

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Youth feel some programs are not stimulating or engaging enough such as one of the summer day camp programs; it has the same setup of lunch and swimming every week, and the youth believe that they do not learn anything new or exciting. The youth interviewed stated that they want to stimulate their minds when they participate in community programs and learn enhanced life skills.

Language is a common issue that was voiced. The majority of the population of the targeted communities is immigrants or multicultural, therefore English is not always the preferred or most understood language. For many of the youth, French is a first language, and the majority of these youth attend French school. The services offered to these youth are mainly English speaking including the homework clubs. Most of the homework club assistants do not speak French and are therefore unable to accommodate the French speaking youth.

Although services may be available, not all targeted youth feel welcomed. There are many factors that may contribute to this, but what was discovered through the focus groups was that most co-ed sporting programs seemed to be male dominated. Due to cultural issues, female youth do not feel comfortable attending these programs. Suggested were more female specific sporting programs throughout the week. Gender may be one issue but in such multicultural communities race also tends to be a major concern. Some programs are dominated by Caucasian youth while others are dominated by ethnic youth. Recommended by one of the service providers at a community house was to create team building and bonding activities for the youth to meet each other and respect their differences and similarities.

Some of the youth also mentioned that they feel underestimated for what they are capable of by some service providers at the community houses. Youth would like to be pushed to excel and achieve by support networks around them.

Youth value positive role models and have reported that they often desire stronger relationships and connections to adults; one example being teachers.

Engaging youth is one of the most powerful and rewarding things youth can receive. The youth have mentioned that they would like more peer to peer activities. This includes the 10-14 year old youth supervising or leading a group of younger youth through activities and programs. This not only gives the youth a sense of responsibility, but also a sense of accomplishment and self-worth. Honorariums for participating peer leaders would also be a great incentive for youth to get involved in the community.

Although some services were offered to youth during the ages of 7-10 years, most of the youth interviewed stated that they did not attend those services at the time either because they did not know about the programs running or they were not motivated to attend them.

When discussing the state of the targeted communities, the youth expressed the need to clean up the neighbourhoods. Youth would like to see a higher level of maintenance of washrooms, portables, swimming pools and ice rinks in their community. They have also said that they live in unsanitary and unsafe environments such as having broken beer bottles in the playground

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

sand pits; smelling drugs, marijuana, in certain areas of the communities; and gang related crimes including drug trafficking, vandalism and violence. One of the youth expressed “I feel unsafe because of drug dealing and trafficking in the parking lot at night time.” Crimes the youth have mentioned include older youth setting cars and garbage dumpsters on fire, domestic violence, and other negative influences. Suggested by the youth to prevent accidents and reduce litter was to increase the number of stop signs and garbage cans throughout the neighbourhoods.

Many of the interviewed youth relayed that their parents have the perception that their community is unsafe, and as a result, they lock their children up in their houses. The youth who used to be locked up felt immense stress because they were not able to socialize or play with their friends. Youth would like their neighbourhoods to gain a more positive impression because a negative impression prevents employers from wanting to hire someone who lives in high risk areas.

Youth have reported that there has been plenty of theft in the targeted neighbourhoods. Youth have given examples of leaving their bikes in front of their front door for a few minutes, and coming back to find it stolen. Kids do not leave anything of value to them in their backyards or in front of their houses because they recognize that here is a high chance that it will be stolen. When asked in a survey, “Do you feel safe in your community?” youth replied:

“No I don’t because I think it was last week when me and my mom was getting ready to go to sleep we went upstairs we look outside the window and we see a lady who’s looking into other peoples window she looked into mine then she looked into the next door neighbor then tried breaking into the house.” – 13 years old

Although crime and safety is still an issue in the targeted communities, youth stated that they have seen a decrease in crimes and they do feel safer now than they did 5 years prior. Youth believe that more police presence has helped the crime level decrease. When asked if they feel comfortable reporting a crime, all of the youth said they were not, because they did not want to be labeled as a “snitch” and get targeted by the “criminal”. Youth have mentioned that they try to mind their own business because it is dangerous to interfere with the gangs. An idea some youth came up with that was common to most focus groups was to have more police patrol around the community. When asked in a survey “Do you feel comfortable reporting a crime in your community?” youth replied:

“No because I would be a snitch and people will hate me and probably beat me up” – 12 years old

“No because when you tell somebody about a person that persons friend will come after you, they will come in your house when you’re sleeping and they will sometimes come in with a weapon” – 13 years old

“Sometimes yes, even though I might be “snitching” on a person. But it might help them. Sometimes you need help with things that you can’t handle yourself.” - 12 years old

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

Youth have expressed that there is a lot of bullying of kids by older youth in the community. Bullying behaviour that the youth have referred to include, but is not limited to, taking over playgrounds and basketball courts, physically hurting the youth, and forcing youth to conduct drug transactions. Youth have suggested having either an older youth or adult volunteer that would supervise after school play at the parks and basketball courts. Youth have expressed that they would like to learn skills on how to deal with violence, threats, and unsafe environments. When asked “What services do you feel would make you feel safe in your community?” some youth answered:

“I think that like a supported service that teaches us how to be safe and how to act in desperate measures is something that will help our community” -13 years old

“When I see police cars I feel safe” – 13 years old

“Neighbourhood watch – cops patrolling” 14 years old

*“More *STREET LIGHTS*” - 13 years old*

The youth mentioned that they have seen other youth as young as 13 and 14 years old engaging in activities such as drinking alcohol, smoking marijuana and cigarettes and owning guns. Gang members in the community are conspicuous, and therefore youth have shared that they have witnessed multiple drug transactions. Lighting and safety has come up multiple times through the interviews. Youth pointed out various areas of the neighbourhood where lack of lighting has a connection with the increased amount crimes and gangs. To prevent this and increase the safety of the neighbourhoods, youth would like to see more lighting throughout the communities and parks and more maintenance of lights that have burnt out.

Conclusion

The experience gained from conducting focus groups with youth in high risk communities has revealed valuable information. Many of the youth were very knowledgeable and vocal when it came down to talking about their current issues regarding services they had, services they wanted, and how they felt about the community on various levels. What was learned was that when looking to work with youth or assist them in any way, one must appreciate that youth have a very valuable voice. The results of the needs assessment provided a wealth of information from the youth concerning youth specific services and crime and safety in their communities.

Although many of the youth seem to be satisfied with the services they currently receive from the community houses and recreation centers, they believe they can be more successful and have a higher chance of staying out of trouble if; they had more consistency in the programming of services, had a bigger budget to accommodate the needs of all the youth in the community, had more variety in sporting programs, and had a youth engagement program which would engage the youth, stimulate their minds and acknowledge their efforts and time devoted to certain tasks through honorariums.

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

There has also been a lot of discussion regarding youth and their comfort level with co-ed or male-dominated programs, where female youth tend to feel intimidated or out of place. Recommended by the youth was to create more age and gender specific programs that would allow youth to feel comfortable to express themselves freely without feeling intimidated.

Throughout various focus groups and surveys, youth aged 10 – 14 years have expressed concern over crime in their neighbourhoods. They have stated many different issues relating to crime such as violence, theft, vandalism, drugs, bullying, and gangs. Recommendations to reduce crime rates in the targeted communities were; have more visible police patrol and more lighting in certain areas of the community. Although a common theme was that youth thought crime was down in their communities.

The knowledge and feedback provided by the youth from the targeted communities was collected and analyzed in hopes to better serve these youth with the intention of reducing crime in the future. Targeting the issues earlier helps keep the youth occupied with a positive outlook on life.

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

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Appendix – Survey Results from Public School

The following is the data received from 115 surveys conducted with youth in grades 6-8 aged 10-14 in Pinecrest Public school.

1. Are there enough after school programs in your community?	Number of respondents
Yes	62
No	54

2. Are there enough homework assistance in your community?	Number of respondents
Yes	66
No	27
I don't know	17

3. Are there enough sporting afterschool/ summer programs in your community?	Number of respondents
Yes	51
No	47

4. What services/programs are not available in your community that you would like to have?	Number of respondents
Dance, Art & Music	18
Swimming	11
Field Trips	9
Sports	51
School Assistance	6

5. What services do you use?	Number of respondents
Homework Club	15
Boys and girls club	16
Sports	19
United Sisters	9
Youth Drop In	6
Summer Camps	5

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

**6. Why do you use these services/programs? Number of
respondants**

To have fun	30
Nothing else to do	13
School Help	14

**7. If you look back to when you were 7-10 years old, what services made you happy and kept you out of trouble? Number of
respondants**

None	15
Sports	19
Summer camps	6
Art, Dance & Music	8
Swimming	12
Computers	5
Boys and Girls Club	7

**8. What is not working with services in your community? Number of
respondants**

Everything is fine	7
Programs are too far away	2
Negative Influences while playing	6

**9. What do you feel is the level of crime in your community? Number of
respondants**

None	8
Low	26
Medium	51
High	12
Very High	10

**10. Do you feel comfortable reporting crime in your community? Number of
respondants**

Yes	28
No	38

**11. Do you feel safe in your community? Number of
respondants**

Yes	60
No	15

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.

12. What services do you feel would make you feel safe in your community?	Number of respondents
Police presence & Neighbourhood watch	17
Street Lights	4
Crime, Drug and Self Defense Classes	5
None	12

How old are you?	Number of respondents
11	4
12	26
13	47
14	26
15	1

What is your ethnicity?	Number of respondents
Canadian/Caucasian	30
Jamaican/Caribbean	8
Middle Eastern	11
Somalian/Djibouti/African	14
Ethiopian	2
Asian	10
European	15
Spanish/Portuguese	5
Aboriginal	4

*Please note that specific locations and names have been removed.