



***Improving Access to Recreation
for Vulnerable Citizens in Ottawa***

**Crime Prevention Ottawa response to
Parks and Recreation Master Plan Consultation**

May 28, 2009

Executive Summary

Improving Access to Recreation for Vulnerable Citizens in Ottawa

Growing up poor in Ottawa is very expensive – we all pay the costs when vulnerable residents are excluded from community life. We all pay the price when at-risk youth can't take part in quality recreation programs. Crime goes up and people get sick. Divisions are created between the rich and the poor, between mainstream and minority cultural groups. Lives are wasted because young people can't achieve their full potential. Neighbourhoods suffer because social cohesion is weak. It's about time we invested in quality prevention programs to improve the health of all residents. It's about time that the City of Ottawa catches up to the best practices of other Canadian cities. We can't afford to pay the heavy price of failing to invest in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

This document provides a summary of the large body of scientific evidence on the significant health, social and economic costs of limiting access to recreationⁱ for vulnerable people. It is the hope of Crime Prevention Ottawa that City Council will take this indisputable body of research into consideration in their deliberations over the Parks and Recreation Master Plan. We are concerned that the City's financial framework, which shifts funding from tax support to a revenue-covered model, will result in increased barriers to participation for vulnerable residents. This in turn will result in increased crime and public safety issues.

Despite the undeniable health and social savings of providing no cost or low cost quality recreation activities, Ottawa lags far behind the best practices of other cities in Canada and other parts of the world. The studies we refer to – provincial, national and international - prove that limiting access to recreation programs for at-risk citizens backfires immediately – cities actually have to spend way more money on policing, health care, education and social assistance as a result. Ottawa taxpayers are better off with improved access to recreation for vulnerable individuals and families.

It is not good enough to maintain the status quo in Ottawa – far too many needy residents are not accessing existing services due to a variety of barriers. The negative health outcomes experienced by these individuals is profound. Instead, we need to provide vulnerable young people with increased access to quality activities. Poverty is the greatest barrier to achieving physical and mental health for the residents of Ottawa. We must increase opportunities and supports for at-risk residents by prioritizing low-income neighbourhoods for construction of new and upgrading of old facilities. We need to increase the capacity of schools in disadvantaged areas to provide programming in the evenings and weekends. These initiatives do not have to cost more money, nor do they have to create a divided public. There are excellent models in other Canadian cities upon which Ottawa can base its Master Plan.

Accessible Recreation Promotes Healthy Development of all Ottawa Citizens

The health of Ottawa citizens is determined by individual bio-physiological and psychological characteristics, combined with family, school, peer group, neighbourhood and community resources. A large body of scientific evidence substantiates the health benefits of broad participation in recreation programs, such as:

- ◆ Increased appropriate access to existing social, health, and community services;
- ◆ Enhanced physical and psycho-social health of families;
- ◆ Reduced rates of obesity and childhood diseases;
- ◆ Increased attendance and achievement at school;
- ◆ Decreased number of behavioural/emotional problems among children;
- ◆ Increased self-reliance and enhanced life management;
- ◆ Decreased use of emergency services (emergency medical services, child welfare, police) and increased proactive use of health promotional services;
- ◆ Reduced future costs in emergency services;
- ◆ More efficient use of existing resources; and
- ◆ Increased ability of agencies and organizations to work together across sectors.ⁱⁱ

Who is at Risk for Unhealthy Development in Ottawa?

A large body of research on human development shows that health and well-being is linked to financial resources. Low-income individuals and families are more vulnerable: they generally experience more physical, behavioural and mental health problems; they are more likely to be overweight and obese; they suffer more neglect and physical violence; they do less well at school and are more likely to drop out; and they experience less labour market success than people from more affluent family backgrounds. Racial and ethnic minorities, Seniors, and disabled people have higher levels of social disadvantage and many live in grinding poverty. They, too, are at significant risk for unhealthy outcomes.

The good news is that diverse outcomes are possible for Ottawa children who grow up in poverty. The key is the ability of caring adults, families, schools, and communities to mitigate risk factors.ⁱⁱⁱ Participation by young people in quality recreation activities builds 'protective pillows' and develops resiliency.^{iv} Kids need protective pillows because they face different risks and their resiliency varies tremendously. Low-income young people who have regular involvement in structured, skill building recreational activities have protection against these risks. Such activities provide

mentorship opportunities and often are integrated with other child and youth prevention services.^v

The bad news is that most kids who live in poverty in our City don't participate in programs. Data from the National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth show that only 25% of low-income children and youth participate in arts and recreation programs in Canadian cities, whereas 75% of children from more affluent families participate.^{vi} A primary reason for this lack of participation is the fact that the current mix of the fee assistance program and tax dollar support for low-income Ottawa residents does not provide sufficient funding for long-term (continuous, year-round) participation in City programs nor does it allow for participation in advanced skill development programs. Instead, only informal programs (such as public swimming, skating or drop-in activities) are financially supported. As well, costly sports activities offered by other service providers (for example, hockey) are not covered by the City's subsidy policy.

Accessible Recreation for High Risk Individuals and Families Prevents Crime

Accessible, quality recreation opportunities increase a community's^{vii} capacity to provide youth with a dense network of social ties and meaningful opportunities for engagement.^{viii} Young people who have higher participation rates in structured recreational activities have reduced rates of criminal arrest (by as much as 71%) and antisocial behavior and increased success at post-secondary education.^{ix} These activities can also provide safe, developmental opportunities for latch-key children, who have reduced opportunities for physical activities and socialization due to a lack of parental supervision. Youth crime peaks in the after-school hours, and structured after-school programming benefits young people in situations where supervision would be otherwise absent.^x For example, London England's *Youth Inclusion Program* targets the 50 most at-risk youth ages thirteen-sixteen years living in high-crime neighbourhoods. It provides them with activities ranging from sports and recreational opportunities to skills training (literacy, anger management, dealing with gangs and drugs). A 2003 evaluation found that the program reduced school expulsions by 27%, reduced youth arrests by 65% and overall crime in neighbourhoods by 16% to 27%.^{xi}

Accessible Recreation for Vulnerable People Builds Healthy Families and Communities

Regular involvement in recreation activities in one's community builds and maintains strong families and neighbourhoods. Participation in healthy lifestyle behaviors such as soccer or dance promotes social bonding, enhances family interaction, peer influence and develops the capacity of communities. Building capacity means empowering communities to change things by using their own resources (skills, knowledge and experience) and by working in partnership with other groups and agencies.^{xii} People who get involved in team-oriented activities with common goals tend to have healthy interpersonal relationships due to the intensive interaction with others. This is called social cohesion, or the glue which binds social networks of residents together. This is integral for the building of social capital – the networks of reciprocal social relations which are of value for achieving mutual goals.^{xiii} When recreation is accessible, it promotes the social inclusion of residents in their own communities – where everyone, including the most vulnerable, can achieve their fullest potential.^{xiv} There are meaningful opportunities for involvement and membership for all residents. Parks and recreational facilities create a sense of space and belonging for local neighbours. When activities are accessible, they develop a sense of ownership and pride, and increase the community's image and socio-economic status.^{xv} Therefore, local infrastructure and quality programming is of the utmost importance. Vulnerable people are highly unlikely to participate in programs offered in facilities outside of their own neighbourhood.

Quality recreation promotes tolerance and harmony by helping young people appreciate and better understand cultural diversity, think critically and solve problems. Kids learn how to interact socially and negotiate fair resolutions amongst peers who have different viewpoints.^{xvi}

It is a primary avenue which can promote civic development and volunteerism.^{xvii} Many recreation groups and agencies rely on adult volunteers to deliver programs and services. These adults, who play a central role in moral development of young people, are highly likely to have been active participants in organized recreation as children themselves.^{xviii}

The most cost-effective way to increase quality infrastructure and programming in low income communities is to adopt the 'school as hub' model. Many municipalities in Ontario have entered into contractual agreements with the Province, local service providers and school boards allowing for low cost or no cost recreation programming during after school, evening and weekend times.

Investment in Recreation Saves Money

Growing up poor in Ottawa is very expensive – we all pay the costs of having twenty percent of our citizens live in poverty. Investments in the voluntary recreation sector achieve substantial savings to the municipally funded health, social and police budgets while at the same time improving the quality of people's lives.

Ontario data suggest that participation in recreation by low-income families pays for itself in the reduced use of professionals and probationary services and mental health benefits for mothers. Savings have been found in the tax system when people exit welfare and gain employment.^{xxix} Gina Browne and her colleagues (1998, 2001)^{xx} at McMaster University in Hamilton have demonstrated that proactive coordination of arts, ballet and music lessons for low-income children and youth results in increased exits from social assistance and significant cost savings to the health, youth justice, child welfare and educational sectors. Children and youth who participate in at least one 13-week skill development program per year can substantially increase their cognitive, physical and emotional competencies. Ottawa studies by Dr. Dan Offord showed similar results in the 1990s.^{xxi}

Successful programs reduce the funding silos between public health, recreation, daycare, education and Ontario Works. There are promising approaches to reducing these silos in a handful of Ontario municipalities. Hamilton, Peel, York region, and London have created historical partnerships between sectors within their municipalities, increasing the participation of low-income families. The greatest successes are achieved in smaller communities where the senior managers of municipal sectors have developed excellent working relationships. These personal ties are able to surmount the bureaucratic red tape characteristic of many cities. Typically, these services are housed in the same building, providing consumers with 'one-stop-shopping'. In the *Families First* program, for example, when parents apply for Ontario Works, they are also introduced to day care, recreation, and public health staff. Families are provided with a yearly stipend of approximately \$250 per child for recreation expenses, which parents can use in a variety of ways to access recreation services and equipment. The Peel program is being replicated in Edmonton with a \$10 million evaluation study.

In other parts of the world, there is indisputable scientific evidence that quality recreation and arts programs can achieve significantly more benefits than costs.^{xxii} These programs give taxpayers a good return on their dollar. Scientists have developed a comparative costing of services using an inventory to track direct and indirect costs, and cost-benefit models have been constructed to assign monetary values to any observed changes in education, health (including frequency of visits to the doctor or hospital, medications used), crime, substance abuse, child abuse and neglect, teen pregnancy, and social assistance outcomes. Evidence points directly to the high returns on these programs for young children.^{xxiii} In the U.S.A., a cost-benefit

analysis of the High/Scope Perry Preschool Project has established a savings of approximately \$16 for every \$1 spent on such programs.^{xxiv}

Moving the Master Plan Forward: Options to Increase Access to Recreation

CPO has generated a number of recommendations to support moving the Master Plan forward. These options will increase opportunities and supports for Ottawa's most vulnerable residents, thereby preventing crime and increasing healthy outcomes. They include:

- 1) *Eliminate user fees in low income neighbourhoods:* The current mix of the fee assistance program and tax dollar support for low-income residents does not provide sufficient funding for long-term participation in City programs, including advanced skill development programs. The City should use tax dollars to support programs for vulnerable residents.
- 2) *Reduce funding silos between public health, recreation, daycare, education and Ontario Works:* Separate funding for health, social, education, and recreation sectors presents a major challenge for the elimination of user fees for low income families. The City of Ottawa should explore modeling its investments in recreation after the quality programs reviewed in this report.
- 3) *Increase quality recreation infrastructure and programming in low-income communities:* Recreation facilities in low-income neighbourhoods should be prioritized for upgrading. New facilities under consideration should be built in disadvantaged communities lacking adequate infrastructure. The 'school as hub' model should be adopted.
- 4) *Reduce other barriers to accessibility:* Significant barriers which limit accessibility by vulnerable residents include transportation costs, language, availability of child care, physical barriers, lack of awareness about the service, and appropriate support services. A proven way to increase accessibility is through outreach services to at-risk families and other vulnerable individuals.

This position paper was authored by Dr. Mark Totten, President of Totten and Associates. He is the past Director of Research at YSB and has worked with high-risk children, youth and families for three decades. He collaborates with groups across Canada and in other countries in the areas of crime prevention, intervention and suppression. He has authored over 30 books, studies and government reports and is a frequent media commentator and keynote speaker at national and international conferences.

End Notes

ⁱWe use the term 'recreation' to refer to both structured and unstructured recreation and arts activities.

ⁱⁱ For example, see Totten, M. (2007). *The Health, Social and Economic Benefits of Increasing Access to Recreation for Low-income Families*. Toronto: Parks and Recreation Ontario; Tammelin, T., S. Nayha, A. Hills, and M. Jarvelin (2003). Adolescent participation in sports and adult physical activity. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 24(1): 22-28; Telama, R., X. Yang, L. Laakso, and J. Viikari (1997). Physical activity in childhood and adolescence as predictor of physical activity in young adulthood. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 13(4):317-323

ⁱⁱⁱ Benard, B. (1996). *Environmental Strategies for Tapping Resilience Checklist*. Berkeley, CA: Resiliency Associates; Benard, B. (1991). *Fostering Resiliency in Kids: Protective Factors in the Family, School, and Community*. Portland, OR: Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

^{iv} Resilience is the ability of individuals living in adverse conditions to achieve positive outcomes. See Smokowski P., A. Reynolds, and N. Brezruczko (1999). Resilience and protective factors in adolescence: An autobiographical perspective from disadvantaged youth. *Journal of School Psychology* 37(4): 425-448; Howard, S., J. Dryden, and B. Johnson (1999). Childhood resilience: Review and critique of the literature. *Oxford Review of Education* 25(3): 307-323; Luthar, S., D. Cicchetti and B. Becker (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future work. *Child Development* 72(3): 543-562.

^v The Boys and Girls Club and Big Brothers/Big Sisters are excellent examples of agencies that combine mentorship and support with skill-building recreational activities.

^{vi} Offord, D., E. Lipman, and E. Duku (1998). *Which Children don't Participate in Sports, the Arts, and Community Programs?* Ottawa, ON: Human Resources Development Canada.

^{vii} 'Community' means people who have common needs, hopes, experiences, identities, or interests.

^{viii} Caputo, T, K. Kelly and M. Totten (2006). Evaluating the Move Towards the Community: Experiences from a Community-based Restorative Justice Project. *Canadian Review of Social Policy*. Shaw, M., and F. Jane (1998). *Restorative justice and policing in Canada: Bringing the community into focus*. Monograph. Montreal: Concordia University, Department of Sociology and Anthropology; Stuart, B. (1997). *Building community partnerships: Community peacemaking circles*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Canada; Shaw, M. (2001). *Investing in Youth 12 – 18: International Approaches to Preventing Crime and Victimization*. Montreal, QC: ICPC.

^{ix} Mahoney, J., H. Stattin and D. Magnusson (2001). Youth recreation center participation and criminal offending: A 20-year longitudinal study of Swedish boys. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 25(6): 509-552; Jones, M. and D. Offord (1989). Reduction of anti-social behaviour in poor children by non-school skill development. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 30: 737-750; International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (1999). *100 programs to inspire action across the world*. Montreal: ICPC.

^x US Department of Education (2000). *After-School Programs: Keeping Children Safe and Smart*. Washington, D.C.; Gottfredson, D. C., D. B. Wilson, & S. S. Najaka, (2002). School-based crime prevention. In L. W. Sherman, D. P. Farrington, B. C. Welsh, & D. L. MacKenzie (Eds.), *Evidence-based crime prevention* (pp. 56–164). New York: Routledge; Gottfredson, D. C., S. A Gerstenblith, D. A. Soulé, S. C. Womer, & S. Lu (2004). Do after school programs reduce delinquency? *Prevention Science*, 5(4), 253–266.

^{xi} Burrows, M. (2003). *Evaluation of the Youth Inclusion Programme: End of phase one report*. London: Youth Justice Board. www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk

^{xii} Totten, M., T. Caputo, T. and K. Kelly (2003). *Community Toolkit for a Youth Restorative Justice Project*. Ottawa: Youth Services Bureau of Ottawa.

^{xiii} Putnam, R. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

^{xiv} When applied to the adolescent population, this model is called Positive Youth Development. It has been thoroughly researched and has been successfully implemented in North American, Australian, and British communities. Improvement in long-term outcomes for young people is the ultimate goal of PYD initiatives. These outcomes include economic self-sufficiency, healthy family and social relationships, and civic engagement.^{xiv} Achievement of long-term outcomes for youth is not possible without improvements in reaching adolescent developmental milestones, such as learning to be productive, learning to make social connections, and learning to navigate. Increased supports and opportunities for youth are required if improvements are to be made in reaching these milestones. For example, see: The Search Institute. (1997). *40 Developmental Assets for adolescents*. <http://www.search-institute.org/assets/>; Centre of Excellence for Youth Engagement (2003). *Youth Engagement and Health Outcomes: Is There a Link?* www.tgmag.ca/centres/litrev2.htm; Gambone, M., A. Klem and J. Connell (2002). *Finding Out What Matters for Youth: Testing Out Key Links in a Community Action Framework for Youth Development*. Philadelphia, PA: Youth Development Strategies, Inc.; Ausyouth (2003). *Creating the Environment for Youth Development*. Adelaide: Ausyouth. www.thesource.gov.au/ausyouth; Hawkins, J. and R. Catalano (1992). *Communities That Care: Action for Drug Abuse Prevention*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

^{xv} California State Parks (2005). *The Health and Social Benefits of Recreation*. Sacramento, CA.

^{xvi} Laidlaw Foundation (2003). *Towards universality in youth arts and recreation programs in Canada. Ideas that Matter, 2(3)*.

^{xvii} DONNELLY, P. AND J. COAKLEY (2002). *THE ROLE OF RECREATION IN PROMOTING SOCIAL INCLUSION*. LAIDLAW FOUNDATION WORKING PAPER SERIES, PERSPECTIVES ON SOCIAL INCLUSION.

^{xviii} See Statistics Canada's National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (1997, 2000, 2004).

^{xix} **Totten, M. (2005). *The Cost of Excluding Ontario's Youth From Play. Toronto: PlayWorks Partnership*; Totten, M. (2002) *Arts and Cultural Programming for Youth Facing Exclusion from the Labour Market. Ottawa: Human Resources Development Canada*; Totten, M. (2004). *M.A.R.S. Literature and Best Practices Review: Summarising the Risk and Protective Factors Related to the Harassment and Abuse of Young People in Recreation Settings. Ottawa: Canadian Parks and Recreation Association*; Totten, M. (2007). *The Health, Social and Economic Benefits of Increasing Access to Recreation for Low-income Families. Toronto: Parks and Recreation Ontario*.**

^{xx} Browne, G. (2003). Making the case for youth recreation: Integrated service delivery: More effective and less expensive. *Ideas that Matter, 2(3)*; Browne, G., C. Byrne, J. Roberts, A. Gafni, S. Watt, B. Ewart, M. Schuster, J. Underwooe, S. Flynn Kingston, K. Rennick, I. Thomas and S. Haldane. (1998). *When the Bough Breaks: Provider-initiated Comprehensive Care is More Effective and Less Expensive for Sole Support Parents on Social Assistance*. Working Paper Series, System-Linked Research Unit, Health and Social Service Utilization, McMaster University; Browne, G., J. Roberts, C. Byrne, A. Gafni, R. Weir, and B. Majumdar (2001). *More Effective and less Expensive Community Approaches to Care of Vulnerable populations: Lessons from 12 Studies in Ontario*. Hamilton: Working Paper Series,

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^{xxi} Offord, D., E. Lipman, and E. Duku (1998). *Which Children don't Participate in Sports, the Arts, and Community Programs?* Ottawa, ON: Human Resources Development Canada.; Offord, D. and E. Lipman (1996). Emotional and behavioural problems. *Growing Up in Canada: National Longitudinal Survey on Children and Youth*. Ottawa: HRDC and Statistics Canada.

^{xxii} Washington State Institute for Public Policy (2004). *Benefits and Costs of Prevention and Early Intervention Programs for Youth*.

^{xxiii} Jacobsen, V., N. Mays, R. Crawford, B. Annesley, P. Christoffel, G. Johnston, et al. (2002). *Investing in Well-being: an Analytical Framework*. Wellington: New Zealand Treasury; Kalil, A. (2003). *Family Resilience and Good Child Outcomes: A Review of the Literature*. Wellington: Centre for Social Research and Evaluation, Ministry of Social Development; Lynch, R. (2004). *Exceptional returns: economic, fiscal, and social benefits of investment in early childhood development*. Washington D. C.: Economic Policy Institute.

^{xxiv} Schweinhart, L., J. Montie, Z. Xiang, W. Barnett, C. Belfield, and M. Nores (2005). *Lifetime effects: The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40*. (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Press.