



Hamilton

INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	October 24, 2016
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Xperience Annex Update (CES15046(b)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Background

In October 2015, staff presented Report CES15046 to Council which outlined the 3-year \$573,000 grant received from the Local Poverty Reduction for the purpose of implementing the Xperience Annex. The Xperience Annex is a hub to connect the youth in the community to services and programs to improve their educational attainment and skill building to ultimately find stable living wage employment. This initiative evolved from actions within the 11 Neighbourhood Action Plans addressing such issues as education, job skill training and employment opportunities for youth. The Initiative was created in partnership with Mohawk College and Workforce Planning Hamilton.

Following this report, staff hired a Youth Navigator – first point of contact with the youth entering the Xperience Annex, as well as Youth Engagers – youth who undertake peer-to-peer conversations to determine what the youth want in the Xperience Annex. A youth-led Steering Committee was formed to assist in the development and operationalizing of the Xperience Annex. The role of Youth Engager as well as for the youth, who participated in the Steering Committee, gave purpose to their role, showed the value of their input and reflected a commitment to the youth to build a hub focussed on youth needs and interests.

Concurrently with the Steering Committee, a Community Partners Network was created to support the needs of the youth. This network is made up of over 50 partners each addressing issues related to basic needs (housing and food), community services, education, skill building and employment services.

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On June 9, 2016, the City of Hamilton, in collaboration with many community partners, including the Hamilton Public Library the Xperience Annex was launched at “The Circuit 4.0” on the 4th floor of the Hamilton Public Library, Central branch. The foundation of the Xperience Annex is connecting youth to the diverse services and programs provided by community partners.

Significant work has been completed to get us to where the Xperience Annex is today. Within the October 2015 staff report (Report CES15046), a program outline was provided (attached as Appendix “A” to report CES15046(b)) and as shown below, staff have provided an update on each of the actions. Some of the accomplishments to date include:

- Youth-led Steering Committee established and monthly meetings established since January 2016
- Community Partner Network established and partnerships are continually being explored and developed
- All Xperience Annex staff hired including Youth Navigator as first point of contact with youth
- Youth involved in the development wanted to be part of the Xperience Annex outreach. Through the use of various Provincial employment programs hired five Youth Engagers with a cost savings versus hiring one FTE Youth engager.
- Branding exercise completed and being marketed throughout City by all Xperience Annex staff
- Initiated discussions with various partners including Hamilton Public Library, developed operating model culminating in June 9, 2016 launch
- Programming and engagement processes are ongoing and continue to improve based on evaluation of the needs of the youth who attend
- Evaluation Plan completed and now underway
- Collaboration with Housing Services and Public Health to provide weekly services within the Xperience Annex to address needs and interests
- Partnering with Mohawk City School on programming to meet the needs of the youth
- Xperience staff continually looking for new opportunities to engage youth, connect service providers and explore workshops, seminars, job fairs to support youth

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As of August 26, 2016 the Xperience Annex has been in operation for three months and activity has exceeded expectations. With each visit our Youth Navigator begins the process of building a trusting relationship, and working with each youth to develop their own unique plan for success.

To date, there has been:

- 357 contacts with Xperience Annex staff for information
- 191 individuals (primarily youth), which includes:
 - 67 female, 124 male participants from across the city
- 50 formal files opened
- 143 referrals to 44 different community partners

As word of mouth travels and the number of participants engaged in the Xperience Annex increases staff anticipate increased participation of youth in this unique navigation program. To date, the Youth Navigator has assisted with addressing basic needs (housing and food), referral to community services, and connections to education and job skills training and finding living wage stable employment. Evident from the 143 referrals to 44 different community partners, the youth who have participated in the Xperience Annex have a wide range of interests and needs.

Through community youth employment programs, staff have been able to hire four Youth Engagers who bring their own life experiences as a way to engage peer-to-peer in the community. These staff have engaged across the lower city and have recently initiated engagement on Hamilton Mountain, Stoney Creek and Waterdown. While the engagers find themselves talking in many group settings, they have also been able to document over 300 one-to-one interactions with youth to explore their needs and interests. Through this engagement youth have become aware of the Xperience Annex and understand that there is a safe trusting space where they can visit the Youth Navigator to just chat, explore opportunities and be connected to various opportunities.

As evidenced by the volume of people who have connected with the Xperience Annex, primarily within the summer months, there is a need to provide navigation services for youth. Without a mandated intake process or a formalized schedule of activities, the success to date can be attributed to the flexibility and the fluidity of the Youth Navigator role. The Navigator is free to work with youth to determine their goals, outcomes and dreams for the future and to help the youth create their own pathway to achieving this dream. Many youth begin their conversation with the Navigator with the question: "I don't know where to go next?" The Youth Navigator connects the youth to the services and supports which will allow them to move forward in their lives.

Looking forward, the Xperience Annex continues to facilitate partnerships and support within the community. To address some common issues, staff have developed

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partnerships with Housing Services Division to provide onsite support to youth looking for housing options, as well as with Public Health Services, who will provide support to the Xperience Annex in the form of a Community Nurse Navigator. Ontario Works has also seen the connection between the youth on the Ontario Works caseload and the youth who access the Annex and has agreed to contribute to staff salaries. These internal partnerships provide a great example of how the Xperience Annex embodies collective ownership within the City of Hamilton and externally with community partners.

In 2017, after we have gathered data and evaluated the first year of the Xperience Annex, collectively as a City and a community, we will begin to map out the future. The Local Poverty Reduction Fund resources are set to expire in September 2018, but based on the early data showing success and the collective ownership by many to support Hamilton youth, we anticipate that this unique youth-led program will continue to evolve and grow, with the support of the City of Hamilton and external partners. Should the evaluation results support the continuation of the Annex, staff will work with partners to prepare a sustainability plan and report back to Council.

Connecting with youth, developing trusting relationships, creating pathways to opportunities with the long-term goal of educational and employment attainment is a process that will evolve over time. Breaking the cycle of poverty, improving the health and wellness of Hamiltonians and creating a skilled and valuable workforce can be accomplished, with the collective will and resources of the whole Hamilton community.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report CES15046(a): October 2015 Xperience Annex Project Outline and Work Plan