



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency & Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	December 7, 2017
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Xperience Annex Update (CES15046(c)) (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
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SIGNATURE:	

Council Direction:

Not Applicable

Information:

Xperience Annex - Overview

Across the 11 priority neighbourhood's residents identified the need for education, training and employment opportunities for youth within their Neighbourhood Action Plans. The Xperience Annex, an initiative for youth ages 18 to 29, was created to address this need. This program was launched in June 13, 2016 and is managed through the Neighbourhood Action Strategy. The Annex is funded until September 2018 through the Local Poverty Reduction Fund (LPRF) and is located at the Hamilton Central Public Library as a safe space for youth to receive assistance in system navigation as they discuss their life plans.

In just over 16 months of operation, the Annex has seen 1,100 individuals make a total of 1,700 contacts to the space, which included 200 individuals out of catchment (18-29 years of age) who were provided service. The Annex has connected youth to over 60 partner agencies and municipal services and collaborated with over 50 various employers, agencies, educational institutions and government departments to offer unique learning and employment opportunities for the youth of Hamilton.

The roles of Navigator, Youth Engager and the collaboration of multiple community partners make the Annex effective and unique. The Annex models a new way of systems intervention by which youth are engaged in a neutral youth-friendly space, are empowered by youth-informed program development, provides youth decision making

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authority (Steering Committee), utilize partnerships and collaboration to develop programming and coordinate services related to education, skill building and employment.

The Xperience Annex statistics are attached as Appendix A to Report CES15046(c).

City staff and other partners working at the Annex

The Annex now has designated staff from Public Health (Social Determinants of Health), Housing (Shelter and Lodging) and Ontario Works (Addiction Services) who have schedule hours at the Annex. Having these staff located at the Annex lends to efficient service for youth who are in immediate need. The Annex also can utilize Library staff that specializes in dealing with crisis intervention and assistance with OSDP applications. Other partners such as Employment Ontario Agencies have physical presence at the Annex to offer their services on site.

Xperience Annex Staff

Navigator

The Xperience Annex Navigator plays an integral role in creating a trusting relationship with the youth. Out of these trusted relationships the Navigator and youth mutually discuss and assess options moving forward on their life path. The Navigator then connects the youth to the services and or programs to help them in their path. The Navigator averages 110 visits per month, many of which are return contacts who are following up and having further discussions on next steps. Many of the youth return to the annex as the navigator has become a trusted adult figure in their lives. Self-directed decision making is encouraged at the Annex. The Annex is the model of a non-bureaucratic framework in which the youth feel that they are in control of their decisions but still feel supported in their life. The Navigator presents options, connections and ongoing support towards their goals.

Youth Engagers Role

The Youth Engager role has played an integral role in our success to date. Youth Engagers work city wide to help promote, refer and offer peer support to youth. To date we have hired 15 Youth Engagers working on 6 month contracts and paid a living wage. We subsidize the wage through the Ministry of Education, Training incentive Placement through Experience Ontario. From the opening of the Annex the engagers have spoken to over 600 youth introducing them to the Annex services. The engagers are involved in promoting/supporting the Annex to the youth as well as sitting on the Youth Steering Committee, alongside other youth and adult allies, in determining the direction of the Annex.

Youth Engagers are brought to partner meetings to speak to the experiences and conversations they are having while engaging. The Youth are engaging at various public libraries, Ontario Works office, various festivals, Redhill and King William Adult

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Education Schools, various Employment Ontario Agencies, the neighbourhood hubs and the McQuesten Urban Farm to name a few. The youth also assist with many meetings, help with data collection, co-present the Annex work at events and assist the Navigator with follow up calls to youth.

Benefit of Being a Youth Engager

Youth Engagers have benefitted from their job in many ways. Networking with partners at meetings and during engagement events has been the biggest catalyst in moving some engagers forward post-employment. Many of our engagers have gained unique experiences through partnership. An example of this would be an engager who was doing volunteer engagement at the McQuesten Urban Farm. From this experience he discovered he had a passion for farming and has since apprenticed with a farmer in Dundas, travelled to Iceland to follow his dreams and works as a farmer's apprentice. Another engager was chosen by the Director of Interprofessional Development for Hamilton Health Sciences, to be enrolled in the LEADS (leadership training) program, the course being financially sponsored by HHS. The Director chose the engager based on his involvement with projects the Annex had developed with HHS. He recognized the engager's insight into youth issues and wanted to add to his professional development. Another engager gained part time work with Mohawk College City School based on her great work at the Xperience Annex. For the engagers, the employment is empowering and can assist in leading them to their next steps once the position has ended.

Importance of Partnerships and Opportunities

First and foremost, the Annex relies on community partnerships and collaboration to enable the navigator to move youth forward in their lives, for basic needs, health concerns, education or employment. The relationship that has developed between the Youth Navigator and community agency frontline staff is strong and provides an informed soft hand off (referral) for our youth.

Partnerships are integral to the success of the Annex. The Xperience Annex works with over 60 partners that either connect youth to services or partner on unique education, training and employment opportunities. A list of the key partners and their roles is attached as Appendix B to Report CES15046(c).

Specifically, we have partnered with 10 organizations who have demonstrated a passion and dedication to the youth we serve resulting in nine unique educational experiences for youth, many leading to further educational opportunities or employment. 43 youth have graduated from various educational/training opportunities and 13 youth have gained fulltime employment. One person has started their own business and three have gone on to pursue post-secondary education.

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We have also been integral in idea sharing and research for youth. We were active participants and advisors on McMasters Young Workers Co-Design Study. The goal of the research was to understand the experiences of youth with mental health issues in finding and keeping work, and to identify ways of improving their experiences. Our Navigator and one of our engagers were advisors at their steering committee and this opportunity was promoted through our Annex partnership network. We were also asked to be a part of advising on an access strategy for McMaster University for youth and non-traditional learners.

Ongoing Annex Partnership Collaboration

1. Digital Literacy (A McMaster University Community Campus CoLaboratory Project): An Intergenerational pilot project that partners the Annex, Age Friendly Strategy and City Housing Hamilton enabling seniors and youth to work together through technology. The idea being youth teach seniors how to use cellphones/tablets and film a five minute story about their lives.
2. Mohawk /Annex Employment Program – Partnership between Mohawk College City School and the Annex to facilitate pre-employment and skills program that would then lead to specific training in either customer service or mechanical detailing
3. Leadership Training – Annex partnering with the Recreation Division and Children’s Aid Society to deliver a specialized course in leadership to youth who reside in foster care.
4. CityHousing Hamilton Improvement Program (CHHIP) – Annex facilitated a partnership between CityHousing Hamilton, Threshold School of Building and funded in part through Councillors Collins, Green and Farr, to provide pre-apprenticeship training for youth resulting in City Housing Hamilton residential units being renovated for accommodation for families on the social housing waitlist.
5. Hamilton Youth in Construction (HYIC – Though initial contact of Dan McKinnon, General Manager Public Works Department, and Steve Jacques, Director Ontario Works, the Annex facilitated a partnership between LIUNA and youth receiving Ontario Works as well as through the Annex contacts, to undertake a two week life skills education program, followed by a six week general labourer specific training at LIUNA’s training campus. In addition, through HAND Association, each of the graduates received paid employment with a local contractor.

Xperience Annex Evaluation

As required by the LRPF Grant, evaluation is being conducted by a third party evaluator who has extensive experience evaluating this demographic. Our Evaluator started with the Annex May, 2017 and has conducted some preliminary analysis to help us guide our project. We also have an evaluation advisory committee whose meetings help to

scope evaluation and provide advice on issues such as engagement methods. To date, over 30 interviews have been completed, including participants, staff and partners. Some of the findings from the evaluation are included in the following table:

Baseline Participant Data from Employment Readiness Scale	
<i>Number of clients included in report: 21</i>	
Age Distribution	Percentages
18 and under	5%
19-24	29%
25-29	52%
30-45	14%
46-65	0%
over 65	0%
Equity Group Membership	Percentages
Aboriginal people	5%
Persons with disabilities	33%
Visible minorities	19%
Women	19%
Clients who are not yet self-sufficient	Percentages
Career Decision-Making	48%
Skills Enhancement	43 %
Job Search	62 %
Ongoing Career Management	67 %
Clients who are not yet strong on Soft Skills	Percentages
Self-Efficacy	57 %
Outcome Expectancy	29 %
Social Supports	33 %
Work History	52 %
Job Maintenance	52 %
Top Five Reported Challenges	Percentages
i. I can't find affordable housing near where I want to work.	76%
ii. I am having health or emotional problems.	62%
iii. I often feel like a failure.	62%
iv. I never seem to have enough money to survive without assistance.	52%
v. I worry about someone close to me who has problems with drugs and/or alcohol.	52%

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Xperience Annex Sub Committees

In listening to the voice and issues of the youth, the Annex called upon our partner's expertise and established three sub-committees around the issues of Housing, Employment/Education and Mental Health. These meetings are well attended and the youth engagers participate to give the youth perspective. These committees are now bringing partners together to enhance conversations that were limited in the past. Having the youth voice at these tables brings reality and a feeling of immediacy to the issues arising. Partnerships have emerged out of these honest conversations.

One example is with our valued partnership through Hamilton Health Sciences. The Director of Inter-professional Development at HHS sits at the mental health subcommittee table. The Director heard the issues of many front line workers dealing with their youth around mental health. He connected Annex staff to the Psychologist & Clinical Director for the Child and Youth Mental Health Programs at the Ron Joyce Children's Health Centre. The Dr. and his team facilitated 2 informative mental health workshops (in-kind) for front line workers who specialize in youth. There was over 150 frontline staff registered for these sessions. This is one of main ways in which our partners have reached out to assist with youth work in Hamilton through the Annex. These workshops have provided tools and strategies for frontline workers to counsel their youth.

Xperience Annex Challenges

The Xperience Annex is a unique service not otherwise provided in the City of Hamilton whereby a youth-specific navigator builds the confidence in the youth to make their own decisions. The Annex is a connection point for youth to the many services and programs provided within the City and done in a safe youth-friendly space. While we have seen positive results from the work within the Annex, it also has not come without its challenges.

Some of the challenges are:

Multiple Barriers – While there are many “quick wins” where a connection with an employer results in new employment for a youth or a specific need can be addressed through a connection to a specific program or service, many of the youth who enter the Annex have multiple barriers such as a youth with untreated mental health issues, lack of stable housing, no high school completion and no stable support network/family to rely upon. Not all issues can be addressed immediately and many discussions result in breaking down the issues into small manageable components where over time they may be addressed provided the youth are willing and ready to take the necessary steps.

Staffing – Prior to the launch, staff had suggested that if the Annex could connect with 50-100 youth a year, this would be a success. Through word of mouth regarding the

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comments of a trusting safe space, a non-governmental, non-structured approach and successful connections, the attendance at the Annex has far exceeded initial projections in that the Youth Navigator sees approximately 110 visits a month. While we like to serve more youth, staff capacity does not currently exist.

Youth not attending appointments/Inability to reconnect with youth – The intent of the Annex is to support youth in providing a range of options from which the youth can make their own decision on how to move forward on their life plan. Success is left to the youth making their own decisions versus being told the right decision. The Annex is not always aware if the youth have followed through with connections from the navigator hence the challenge of evaluating the success. Addresses change, phones are disconnected and meetings/appointments are not always attended.

Youth Specific Housing – Many youth seen through the Annex lack stable affordable housing that is youth-specific or have youth-specific supports available. There are limited beds in the City for marginalized youth which limits opportunities for access to stable housing.

Employment/Education Program Funding – While the Annex has developed partnerships with institutional and private sector partners, not only is funding needed to provide training at no cost to the youth but also there is a need for stipends during the training. Retention in programs have benefited from stipends which provide the youth immediate rewards for continuation as well as assists in providing some financial support for immediate needs. The Annex continues to explore methods to find funding for both programming and stipend costs.

Future of the Xperience Annex

The Xperience Annex has responded to a gap in supports for youth and built a navigational role which builds trusting relationships in a safe space for youth to discuss their future. The Annex will continue to model an alternative way of offering service to youth by empowering them to make informed decisions and to reach out to our partners to assist them on their life path. Working with Community Partners the Annex is able to collaboratively facilitate programs, services and connections to find the path the youth desire.

The Annex is funded through a three year grant from the Local Poverty Reduction Fund, administered by the Trillium Foundation extending until September 2018. Discussions are being held within the Community and Emergency Services Department regarding the sustainability of this program as well as how these navigational opportunities can be created for Hamilton residents beyond 30 years of age.

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Appendices and Schedules Attached

Appendix A to Report CES15046(c): Xperience Annex Statistics

Appendix B to Report CES15046(c): Key Partners and Roles