

Community Safety Working Group
2019 Summary and Transition Report

The community Safety Working Group of the Advisory Committee for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD) was a new pilot working group created in 2019. The working group was proposed to tie connect and amplify broader conversations regarding the safety of members of marginalized communities in Hamilton with a specific focus on disabled community members. The full terms of reference for the working group may be found in Appendix A. The community Safety working group had four ACPD members sitting on the committee and met September, October, and November respectively. Minutes from these meetings may be found in Appendix B. The below report acts as a summary and reflection of the conversations had by the working group during these past few months and explores possible future directions for the working group.

Bullying

Concerns were raised regarding the prevalence of bullying in Hamilton Wentworth District School Board schools, particularly bullying that is ableist or targets students on the basis of disability in some way. It was noted that students with disabilities, in general, are more likely to be targets of bullying and may have unique needs or concerns that may not be adequately addressed by general anti-bullying initiatives. As this is currently a subject of great concern to the school board, it was noted that it would be desirable for the Board to consider the unique concerns of disabled students during their ongoing consultations and interventions regarding bullying in HWDSB schools. As this falls

under the purview of the Special Education Advisory Council of the HWDSB, contact has been made with a member of the SEAC to offer support and/or assistance to ensure that they will continue to raise the issue of disability and disability-related bullying throughout the Board's attempts to address the issue of bullying within HWDSB schools.

Hamilton Police Services

Concerns regarding Hamilton Police Service Actions and Policies were discussed. Concerns discussed focused on the treatment of disabled detainees and arrestees, as well as disabled people who are in holding/detention in HPS facilities. During the first meeting discussion and concern regarding the use of solitary and the extremely concerning number of overdose deaths in the Provincially operated Barton Jail were discussed as well. Specific concerns discussed included:

- Use of force against people in mental health crises, including the use of firearms.
- Concerns about the relationship between people with disabilities and the Hamilton Police Services, particularly disabled Hamiltonians who also occupy another marginalized identity. Conversations had centred on comfort and likelihood of interacting with HPS as well as critiques of the utility of these interactions.
 - Questions were asked if for example individuals would feel safe calling the police if a friend was experiencing a mental health related crisis or they had witnessed or experience hate based violence.

For this work to continue it would be beneficial to request and compile more information on how the examples above and other

situations are addressed and what the policies exist regarding disability as it intersects with criminal justice. A request has been made under the municipal freedom of information and protection of privacy act for any and all records relating to the treatment of people with disabilities, including mental health concerns and substance use disorders, in HPS custody. Initial recommendations discussed included both the need and value of disability representation on the Hamilton Police Services Board as well as community delivered non police alternatives to seeking support for instances regarding mental health crisis and/or hate based violence. Given many community organizations are doing this work in various capacities already within the city, the motion to explore a community hub as proposed last week at Council, was discussed positively amongst the Working Group.

Public Space

Concerns have been raised about the impacts of construction on the safety of residents with disabilities, particularly the impacts of sidewalk closures / detours, incomplete construction projects impacting the surfaces of the roads and sidewalks, and detours that are not fully accessible. Full and barrier-free access to public space is a vital aspect of an accessible city, and the safety of disabled Hamiltonians should be paramount when there are disruptions, particularly as the result of construction. Construction often impacts access to curb cuts and transit stops, and pedestrian detours are often inaccessible either to people with mobility devices and/or balance issues, or to blind/ low-vision people due to a lack of tactile paving directing people on these pathways.

There is also a desire for an increased number of benches within the city, as this would improve the ability of residents with disabilities to access vital services on foot, and would increase safety by mitigating fall risks for disabled and older Hamiltonians. So-called “hostile architecture”, which generally describes a series of architectural/design decisions in the design of public space that attempts to limit the ability of people to lie down, sleep, or comfortably shelter within that space. These designs often limit the abilities of people with disabilities to comfortably use this infrastructure, and an example was given of benches with bars that make it impossible to stretch or lie down on them, which in addition to targeting low-income and/or indigent populations, also impinge on the ability of some people with disabilities to transfer onto these benches or to stretch or rest their legs. However, this section has a significant overlap with a number of other working groups, and as a result the issues were not pursued in great detail. Should there be a desire to do so amongst the committee or the general public, these issues could be pursued further.

Weather

Conversations were had regarding the impacts inclement and extreme weather events have on the safety of residents with disabilities. Given overlap with other working groups there was hesitation to delve too deeply into specifics regarding the follow beyond information gathering:

- Snow and Ice Removal: Given there is a feasibility report currently underway by staff regarding the city clearance of snow and ice the committee briefly discussed the numerous additional barriers and safety concerns that uncleared/poorly cleared/inconsistently cleared snow and ice creates for

residents with disabilities. There was interest in reviewing and commenting upon the report at either a working group level or at ACPD upon its release.

- Rain and Scooters: During the rain many scooters can lose function stranding residents in the city. This can make loading a scooter onto an HSR bus extremely difficult and ostracizing creating safety concerns for these residents. It was mentioned a program has been developed with the Hamilton Police to respond in these circumstances. This raised comments regarding the availability of this knowledge and if people know this resource exists.
- Extreme hot and cold events can be life or death for precariously and (un)derhoused residents in the city. Given people with disabilities are disproportionately (un)derhoused the working group discussed means by which the city can and should guarantee shelter (at minimum) during these events. Conversations also arose regarding the necessity of cooled public spaces as well as the danger overheating presents for individuals with certain conditions or who are taking specific medications. Should individuals be able to subscribe to alerts and reminders from Hamilton Public Health to ensure they remember to be heat cautious and are checked in on during these events?

Community Forum

It is the aim of this working group to develop a series of recommendations or guidelines relating to community safety and disability in Hamilton. In order to do so, it is desired that a community forum be held in consultation with other groups in Hamilton who may have input on this matter, e.g. SACHA, HCCI,

DJNO. However given these groups have limited resources relationship building as well as specific but flexible proposals should be a first step in pursuing this. Engaging with the broader disability community can only strengthen and improve the above recommendations and bring new insights based on a broader array of lived experiences to the working groups discussions. If the working group is to continue into the new year a community forum is strongly recommended to be a part of the work plan.

Committee Next Steps

Two options were discussed as next directions for the working group to be explored by the ACPD at a following meeting.

1. Extend the pilot for this Working group. This would necessitate interest from new members to join and actively contributed to what would be a somewhat intensive work plan. The current membership of the working group would strongly recommended on hosting a community forum as part of this workplan.
2. Not continuing the working group. Work with ACPD to preserve this report as background and context in case of future discussions on these issues. The current working group membership would pursue a more active role in other working groups and bring these conversations to those groups where appropriate.