



INFORMATION REPORT

TO:	Chair and Members Emergency and Community Services Committee
COMMITTEE DATE:	May 5, 2022
SUBJECT/REPORT NO:	Update on Youth Violent Crimes Motion (HSC22017) (City Wide) (Outstanding Business List Item)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
PREPARED BY:	Chelsea Kirkby (905) 546-2424 Ext. 3539 Jenn Hohol (905) 546-2424 Ext. 7857
SUBMITTED BY:	Angie Burden General Manager Healthy and Safe Communities Department
SIGNATURE:	

COUNCIL DIRECTION

The Emergency and Community Services Committee Meeting at its meeting on October 7, 2021, approved that staff be directed to:

- a) Review projects like Operation Ceasefire and other holistic community responses, that were designed to deter youth from joining gangs and holding guns;
- b) That staff be directed to engage youth to inform the process and partner together to address the issues that are driving our youth to guns and gangs;
- c) That staff invite the Ontario Solicitor General, Hamilton Police, youth workers, clergy, criminal justice practitioners, and other experts to identify solutions to create a city-wide action plan response to guns and gangs in our community;
- d) That staff be directed to include a city-wide action plan response to guns and gangs in our community through Hamilton's Youth Strategy;

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

- e) That staff be directed to share any data specific to guns, gangs and violence through our 2021 re-engagement for the Youth Strategy; and,
- f) That the city-wide action plan response to guns and gangs in our community be created in collaboration with and incorporated into Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan under the priority of violence.

INFORMATION

Since October 2021, City staff supporting Hamilton's Youth Strategy and Community Safety and Well-Being Plan have started work to respond to all parts of the motion on youth violent crimes.

In Hamilton, overall youth crime is declining, with violent crimes decreasing by 23% from 2019 to 2020¹. Youth crime is also decreasing across the province, yet there continues to be worrying trends related to youth and fire-arm related cases, with approximately 60% of cases at the Ontario Court of Justice since 2013 involving an accused person under the age of 29². Through preliminary discussions with service providers in Hamilton, the issue of youth violence, although improving, continues to be one of concern and has a lasting impact on individuals and communities involved.

As this work has taken shape it has been acknowledged that the complexity of this issue requires meaningful engagement with service providers, youth and community members that are involved in, impacted by, or at risk of youth violent crimes, guns, and gangs. This includes building trust with Indigenous and Black youth and communities facing long-standing inequities, such as overrepresentation in the criminal justice and child welfare systems³; discrimination and racism in health, education, and social systems; and lack of representation in leadership positions across institutions and systems^{4,5}. Ensuring that this work is led by community providers and partners who bring relevant expertise is also a key factor in moving forward successfully.

Environmental Scan

¹ Hamilton Police Services. (2021). 2020 Hamilton Police Service - Youth Services Annual Report. Retrieved from: <https://pub-hamilton.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=270500>

² Government of Ontario. (2021). Ontario Increasing Community Programs to Prevent Youth Violence and Human Trafficking. Retrieved from: <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1000604/ontario-increasing-community-programs-to-prevent-youth-violence-and-human-trafficking>

³ John Howard Society Ontario. (2021). UnEqual Justice: Experiences and outcomes of young people in Ontario's youth bail system. Retrieved from: <https://johnhoward.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Youth-Bail-Highlights-Final.pdf>

⁴ Government of Canada. (2022), Social determinants and inequities in health for Black Canadians: A Snapshot. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health/social-determinants-inequities-black-canadians-snapshot.html>

⁵ National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health. (2022). Anti-Indigenous Racism in Canada. Retrieved from: https://www.nccih.ca/28/Social_Determinants_of_Health.nccih?id=337

As per part (a) of the motion, a review of holistic community responses being used to prevent and address youth violence, guns and gangs has been completed. This included a literature review of international, national, and provincial programs for youth 14-29 years old as well as a scan of local programs delivered in Hamilton.

Successful community responses reviewed applied approaches across the spectrum of the Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework⁶ from social development and prevention to risk mitigation and incident response. Some programs focused on changing social and economic structure (e.g. providing universal income to eliminate poverty) and others addressed the effects of youth violence (e.g. providing counselling for youth who have served time in custody)⁷. The most common conclusion in the research is that “the most effective and sustained response to youth violence is a balanced and strategic prevention approach”⁸.

With the best available evidence, there are three common types of youth violence intervention models that experts have relied on to build recommendations to reduce youth violent crimes. These three models include:

- Focused deterrence model which attempts to change criminal behaviour through enforcement and social service support⁹. This approach is often seen as problem-oriented, which means proactively addressing criminal and social problems through law enforcement and community resources instead of responding to a single incident or crime¹⁰;
- Public health model which focuses on preventing violence before it happens and is an alternative to law enforcement-based strategies¹¹. This approach includes using data to assess the problem and identify effective strategies and collaboration across sectors that can work together to produce change, and

⁶ Ministry of the Attorney General. (2018). Community Safety and Well-Being Planning Framework: A Shared Commitment in Ontario. Retrieved from: <https://www.mcscs.jus.gov.on.ca/english/Publications/MCSCSSOPanningFramework.html#Section2>

⁷ National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health. (2014). *Let's Talk: Moving Upstream*. Antigonish, NS. National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health, St. Francis Xavier University.

⁸ International Centre for the Prevention of Crime. (2005). Youth and Gun Violence: The Outstanding Case for Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/youth-and-gun-violence-outstanding-case-prevention>

⁹ Urban Institute. (2022). A Research-Based Practice Guide to Reduce Youth Gun and Gang/Group Violence. Retrieved from: <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/105303/a-research-based-practice-guide-to-reduce-youth-gun-and-gang-group-violence.pdf>

¹⁰ Centre for Evidence-Based Crime Policy. (2022). Focused Deterrence Strategies. Retrieved from: <https://cebcp.org/evidence-based-policing/what-works-in-policing/research-evidence-review/focused-deterrence/>

¹¹ Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth through Violence Prevention. (2009). A Public Health Approach to Preventing Violence: FAQ. https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/FAQ%20preventing%20violence_A_112109-1.pdf

solutions that improve the well-being on an entire community or population.^{12,13,14}; and,

- Comprehensive Gang Model which is a collaborative multidisciplinary response that leverages community resources to make the community better able to prevent, intervene, and suppress youth gang crime and violence¹⁵. This is achieved through five main strategies including:
 - a. Community mobilization, such as involvement of local citizens and former gang members and coordination of programs across agencies;
 - b. Opportunities provision, including education, training and employment opportunities for gang-involved youth and young adults;
 - c. Social intervention, including outreach and access to services;
 - d. Suppression, including law enforcement and close supervision or monitoring of gang-involved youth; and,
 - e. Organizational change, such as the development of policies for the effective use of resources¹⁶.

One intervention that reflects the models above is Operation Ceasefire which began as a focused deterrence strategy that includes street outreach and changing community norms¹⁷. The program has since evolved into more of a Comprehensive Gang Model approach through the development of the Partnership for Safe Communities, Cure Violence, and Safe Streets programs. A key takeaway from the history and evolution of the Operation Ceasefire program is that any deterrence strategy should be used within a larger partnership-focused approach to gun violence.

Beyond the literature, service providers shared several programs with staff that are in place in Hamilton to address youth violence including:

- Initiatives that address root causes, such as breakfast programs and empowerment programs for youth involved in the justice system;
- Extrajudicial programs; and,
- Detention and reintegration programs.

¹² Prevention Institute. (2022). Gun Violence Must Stop. Here's What We Can Do to Prevent More Deaths. Retrieved from: <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/focus-areas/preventing-violence-and-reducing-injury/preventing-violence-advocacy>

¹³ Urban Institute, 2022.

¹⁴ Urban Networks to Increase Thriving Youth through Violence Prevention, 2009.

¹⁵ Urban Institute, 2022.

¹⁶ National Gang Center. (2022). Comprehensive Gang Model: Core Strategies. Retrieved from: <https://nationalgangcenter.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh331/files/media/document/CoreStrategies.pdf>

¹⁷ David-Ferdon, C., Vivolo-Kantor, A. M., Dahlberg, L. L., Marshall, K. J., Rainford, N. & Hall, J. E. (2016). A Comprehensive Technical Package for the Prevention of Youth Violence and Associated Risk Behaviors. Atlanta, GA: National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/yv-technicalpackage.pdf>

There are also many programs and services that community partners, organizations and/or City of Hamilton offers that address the various risk factors that may prevent involvement in youth violence. City programs include services for child care and early years, parents and families, recreation, mental health, housing, and social assistance.

Identifying existing programs has shown the range of services and approaches currently available in Hamilton and confirms that there is a solid foundation of local programming on which to build a city-wide plan to further address youth violence.

Stakeholder Engagement

In addition to the environmental scan, as per part (c) in the motion above, over 50 service providers and other key stakeholders were engaged during a virtual consultation session on November 30, 2021 and through individual meetings co-facilitated by Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan and Hamilton's Youth Strategy. The purpose of this engagement was to better understand the context of youth violent crimes in Hamilton and how these issues are impacting the broader community. Those consulted included representatives from Hamilton Police Services; the Province; school boards; hospitals; child welfare agencies; organizations focused on youth justice, housing and homelessness, mental health and substance use services, education and employment; faith organizations; and other community-based policy and advocacy groups.

Stakeholders shared what initiatives and strategies already exist in Hamilton to address youth violent crimes and where there are gaps. This consultation demonstrated the complex nature of youth violence and involvement in guns and gangs in Hamilton and identified factors that contribute to youth involvement in violent crimes, including but not limited to:

- Unstable or unsafe home and/or school environment;
- Trauma, mental health and/or substance use;
- Lack of sense of belonging, lack of connection to services/supports;
- Poverty;
- Homelessness;
- Gender;
- Influence of social media; and,
- Systemic racism and racial bias.

Many of these factors match what are identified in the literature related to youth involvement in violence^{18,19}.

¹⁸ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020). Youth Violence – Risk and Protective Factors. Retrieved from: <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html>

¹⁹ Public Safety Canada. (2018). Youth gang involvement: What are the risk factors? Retrieved from: <https://www.publicsafety.gc.ca/cnt/rsrscs/pblctns/yth-gng-nvlvmnt/index-en.aspx#s2>

Service providers also identified gaps in initiatives to prevent and address youth violence, including the need for:

- Increased access to services during the evening and overnight hours;
- Safe spaces for youth to gather and/or seek support without repercussion or judgement;
- Harm reduction approaches to youth violence and associated risk factors;
- More wraparound support for youth to address various needs (e.g. housing, food, income, trauma, etc.); and,
- Culturally appropriate care.

A key learning from this consultation is the need to be more intentional in engaging with Black service providers who were under-represented at the initial consultation to ensure Black voices and experiences are centred in this discussion. It has also been acknowledged that engagement with individuals and communities impacted by gun violence must be trauma-informed and facilitate recovery and healing from the consequences of trauma.

As per part (e) in the motion above, concerns related to youth violence, guns, and gangs were also identified through the 2021 Youth Re-engagement Survey that informed the City of Hamilton's Youth Strategy. This survey had 523 respondents including youth, parents, organizations and service providers. Although youth violence, guns, and gangs were not identified as priority areas of concern in the survey, the three top priorities all contribute to addressing root causes of youth involvement in violence, guns, and gangs. These priority areas include:

- Improve access to mental health supports;
- Increase supports to youth who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness; and,
- Improve youth access to safe and affordable housing.

To ensure a continued focus on youth gun and gang violence in Hamilton and to address part (d) in the motion above, the Youth Strategy includes the priority of Enhance Safety and a Sense of Inclusion.

Next steps

This work fits within the context and priorities of Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. With local experts and community leadership, staff will continue to support community partners in the development of a city-wide action plan responding to guns and gangs in Hamilton. The action plan will build on existing community-wide and current community youth initiatives. Immediate next steps include staff support for community-led engagement with youth who are or have been involved with, impacted by, or at risk of gun and gang violence in a trauma-informed, healing-centred way, and identifying appropriate community leadership in the development of this plan. This will address part (b) of the motion above.

City staff have started bringing together community partners to lead and guide the pace and approach of youth engagement to ensure a safe space for these conversations, meet basic needs of participants, and provide opportunities for healing throughout the process. As recommended from initial engagement with service providers, further community-led engagement will also take place with Black service providers in a trauma-informed, and healing-centred way, following the guidance of Black service providers and community leaders. Staff will serve in a supportive role for this engagement, however will not be leading these conversations.

The success of this plan relies on a collaboration with community partners to ensure a comprehensive, community-driven response that both prevents and addresses youth violent crimes. The City will support community partners in the development of this action plan by providing coordination support, bringing partners together for discussion, collaboration and the identification of community leads to champion and progress this work.

As per part (f) in the motion above, collective work on reducing youth gun and gang violence in Hamilton will continue to be done in partnership with the Youth Strategy through Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan. Future updates on this work will be provided to the Emergency and Community Services Committee through reporting on Hamilton's Community Safety and Well-Being Plan.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

N/A