

Increase City Investment in Accessible Recreation for a Safer, Healthier Ottawa

Growing up poor in Ottawa is very expensive – we all pay the costs when vulnerable residents are excluded from full community life. We all pay the price when youth in at-risk neighbourhoods can't take part in quality recreation programs. Crime goes up and people get sick. Neighbourhoods suffer because social cohesion is weak. *

Crime Prevention Ottawa is calling on City Council to invest in accessible, high quality prevention programs. We can't afford to pay the heavy price of failing to invest in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

Less than 1 in 5 Eligible Children Use Fee Assistance

The City's fee assistance program is an important tool for creating access, but it is not enough, it does not reach the vast majority of children living in poverty. There are over 32,000 children in Ottawa living below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO). Last year less than 6,000 children accessed fee assistance leaving 26,000 without services. The current "cost recovery" model increases barriers to participation which can result in increased crime and public safety issues for some neighbourhoods.

Flexible Programming is needed

Formal, scheduled programs with registration requirements are not meeting the needs of many stressed families, overwhelmed by poverty and at times beset by addictions and mental health problems. We need to invest in positive, informal outreach-based recreation opportunities based in low-income communities as well as fee assistance.

Spare Victims and Save Tax Dollars

Investing in prevention means that there are less victims of crime and less costs associated with crime. The University of Ottawa's Institute for the Prevention of Crime estimates that the cost to victims and the public of crime in our City is \$1.3 *Billion*.**

Make a Serious Investment

The City needs to invest at least **\$2,500,000** in outreach-based recreation services with the savings accrued from the provincial upload of parts of Ontario Works. This investment would allow 15,000 children currently living in poverty to access positive, pro-social recreation opportunities out of the 26,000 who are currently not receiving services***. It would be based on an outreach model of programming in order to reach the hardest to serve families for whom registration-based programs are out of reach. This investment would be focused in under-served neighbourhoods with concentrations of poverty, youth gang activity, and drug trafficking.

*CPO's "Improving Access to Recreation for Vulnerable Citizens in Ottawa" (May 2009)

**IPC, "Making Cities Safer: Action Briefs for Municipal Stakeholders" (March 2009)

***Based on an investment of approximately \$165 per child which is equivalent to current the fee assistance level.