

**EAST METRO YOUTH SERVICES  
YOUTH OUTREACH WORKER PROGRAM REVIEW 2008-2009**

**General Overview of Activities**

The Violence Intervention Project at EMYS has the lead role in coordinating a comprehensive multi-agency youth outreach strategy for marginalized youth in seven underserved neighbourhoods in East Toronto. With funding from Ontario's Ministry of Children & Youth Services, as part of a city-wide strategy directed towards Toronto's 13 priority neighbourhoods, Youth Outreach Workers have been assigned to a key youth organization in each of the underserved neighbourhoods.

Program goals:

1. Engaging youth in order to identify their needs, strengths and interests;
2. Connecting youth to a full continuum of prevention, early intervention and diversion resources such as employment, education, health/mental health, social/recreation, restorative justice and other services;
3. Working with community resources to create youth development opportunities, identify and address access barriers;
4. Engaging youth and their families with their communities.

The program has 7 partner agencies including EMYS, Malvern Family Resource Centre, Boys and Girls Club of East Scarborough, Neighbourhood Link, Agincourt Community Services Association, Rosalie Hall and YOUTHLINK.

In 2008-2009, some notable program activities and accomplishments included:

- LaMarsh Centre for Research on Violence and Conflict Resolution at York University completed a program evaluation research component for the YOW program. The evaluation findings have been disseminated to program partners, community partners, ministry, YOWs and youth who participated in the focus groups. The following recommendations were presented in the evaluation report:
  1. Providing follow-up on youth referred by the YOW program
  2. Training and support for YOWs
  3. Further strengthening links with community partners and systems.

After the release of the evaluation report, EMYS was invited to meet with senior staff from the various divisions of the Ministry of Children and Youth Services including children and youth services, policy, youth justice, and corporate to present the recommendations. The key messages delivered in the presentation to the Ministry were expansions on the report findings and also in line with the recommendations of the provincially commissioned Roots of Youth Violence report.

1. Core training for new Youth Outreach staff and ongoing training for existing staff.
  2. Develop case management capacity and dedicated mental health supports for the program.
  3. Enhanced data tracking capacity to facilitate more robust research outcomes.
  4. Identification of YOW program lead agency attributes in a community collaboration which are necessary to ensure relevant and sophisticated support to community partners and maintain appropriate linkage with the Ministry.
- Developed and implemented specialized web-based database (Outreach Record – OR) across the 7 neighbourhoods. In 2008, the Access and Counselling team brought the YOW data collection and reporting functions in line with the existing databases of EMYS. This involved further development work with the database developer with enhancements to statistical reporting and training manual development. From the data, it has become apparent that tracking the number of times that YOWs are interacting with marginalized youth will be important to understand the time needed to achieve the necessary relationship with which to facilitate a successful referral. Additional training will be required to support the YOWs with this process. Two sessions were facilitated by the YOW lead for some staff and we are planning a training session in April for the full YOW team.
  - YOWs took the lead on coordinating a number of STEPS events in the priority neighbourhoods, which was a change from the previous year where a single large community coordination event was hosted. The neighbourhoods of Kennedy Park/Eglinton East, Scarborough Village and Kingston Galloway hosted “Unite the Neighbourhoods” events, with Kingston Galloway adding a youth conference; Malvern hosted a youth academic appreciation ceremony with scholarships presented; Steeles L’Amoreaux hosted a 3 on 3 basketball tournament, Dorset Park hosted a community BBQ and awards night as part of Dorset Park day, and Crescent Town hosted a multicultural fun day.
  - YOWs were involved in successful Youth Challenge Fund applications in Dorset Park, Steeles L’Amoreaux, Kennedy Park/Scarborough Village, Kingston/Galloway as well as a multimedia program which serves youth in all 7 neighbourhoods. The YOWs have been involved in YCF activities, especially where disconnected youth have not been previously engaged, to generate projects that are of interest and benefit to them. In the final year of YCF funding where legacy projects are being developed in Scarborough Village, Dorset Park and Kingston Galloway, YOWs are working as “adult allies” to support youth with these major initiatives. As the YCF initiative enters the final year of its mandate, YOWs are involved in legacy initiative funding in the neighbourhoods of Kingston Galloway, Steeles L’Amoreaux, Dorset Park and Malvern.

- The YOW program continued to experience some challenges with turnover. At the supervisory level for the YOW partner agencies, there was over 66% turnover for various unforeseen circumstances. At the frontline level there was a 22% turnover of YOWs, with 4 staff moving on or taking leaves of absence. The frontline turnover is due to staff returning to school and one maternity leave.

**Service Statistics**

	2007-2008	2008-2009
<b>Youth contacts</b>	1795	961
<b>Family contacts</b>	222	30
<b>Referrals</b>	2046	735

**Gender Demographics**

Gender	2008	
M	511	M
F	444	F
U	6	U
<b>Total</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>Total</b>

**# of New Youth Contacts\***

Age	2008	
12-15 Years	267	12-15 Years
16-18 Years	467	16-18 Years
19-21 Years	160	19-21 Years
22 Years and Over	67	22 Years and Over
<b>Total</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>Total</b>

The mandate of the program is to reach youth between the ages of 12 and 21. On occasion the YOWs may interact with youth under 12, or over 22, but the majority of youth are between 16-18.

**# of Referrals\*\*\***

Neighbourhoods	# of youth referred	# of Referrals	# of Rejections	# of Successful Referrals
Crescent Town	37	56	0	56
Dorset Park	59	115	2	113
Eglinton East/Kennedy Park	181	246	1	245
Galloway/Kingston Road	26	26	0	26
Malvern	51	60	0	60
Scarborough Village	136	190	0	190
Steeles/L'Amoreaux	5	10	1	9
*Not Specified	16	32	1	31
<b>Total</b>	<b>511</b>	<b>735</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>728</b>

*Rejections\*\*\*\** are captured to help identify service gaps in the neighbourhoods.

The youth referred represent the culmination of a relationship with a YOW which results in a referral.

**# Of Referrals to Services by Service Sector**

Neighbourhoods	Sector													Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	
Crescent Town	4	3	20	2	2	0	1	19	0	0	3	2	0	56
Dorset Park	1	10	34	20	3	2	3	23	13	1	5	0	0	115
Eglinton East/Kennedy Park	43	42	44	20	15	4	37	13	8	0	8	1	11	246
Galloway/Kingston Road	1	5	12	1	0	0	0	4		1	3	0	0	27
Malvern	3	3	20	1	1	2	2	26	0	0	1	1	0	60
Scarborough Village	8	35	62	4	3	1	1	24	1	1	49	0	1	190
Steeles/L'Amoreaux	2	0	2	1	1	0	1	3	0	0	0	0	0	10
Not Specified	9	4	9	2	1	0	3	0	0	2	1	1	0	32
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>102</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>112</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>735</b>

**LEGEND (Sectors):**

- |  |                                  |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 1: Arts/Culture                            | 8: Other                         |
| 2: Education/Skill Development             | 9: Parenting/Prenatal Support    |
| 3: Employment/Employment Preparation       | 10: Primary Health Care Services |
| 4: Housing/Temporary Accommodation/Shelter | 11: Recreation/Sports            |

5: Income Support/Social Assistance  
6: Legal Services  
7: Mental Health/Addictions

12: Relationship Violence  
13: Settlement Support

Referrals to Employment/Pre-Employment services accounted for 28 % of total referrals made in this period. This is logical as the major focus for the YOWs in the April-June period was encouraging youth to take advantage of summer employment initiatives such as Summer Jobs for Youth and the Youth in Policing program. It also speaks to the primary indicator of the underserved neighbourhoods which were identified in United Way's "Poverty by Postal Code" report. The next leading referral destination is for Education and Skill Development. The "Other" sector refers to a variety of referral destinations which may be challenging to categorize. These include non service-related businesses and volunteer/internship opportunities.

### **Service Example**

The YOWs from Dorset Park, with the support of the EMYS YOW team, worked with one youth during the reporting period, resulting in 87 interactions that yielded 5 referrals. The youth in question demonstrated two critical components of the YOW program. The youth served by the program are high needs and very marginalized from most service systems. It was necessary for the YOWs to literally walk her through the process of applying for student welfare, exploring alternative schooling options, the shelter system, living in care and services to support her living independently. During the process, it became apparent that YOWs are not equipped or mandated to support the serious mental health needs of some of the youth they interact with, and can only provide service to address the presenting issue, without necessarily addressing the underlying causes. It is one thing to hook a youth up with employment support because they need to make money to support themselves, but the youth will not be successful in maintaining employment without having the challenges that led to them struggling in academic settings addressed – e.g. learning disabilities, literacy issues, cognitive impairments, etc.

### **Future Directions**

The YOW program will need to explore ways of providing ongoing training to staff despite lack of new resources to accomplish this. With the turnover, which is expected and normal in the field, it will be necessary to ensure that professional development keep abreast of the needs of the program. Having identified this in the evaluation report along with the need to strengthen system linkages with community partners, the program has partnered with the City of Toronto Outreach Program and Toronto Community Housing Youth Engagement department to host the first Youth Outreach Worker peer training conference. The aim is to utilize existing knowledge and experience across the teams to train and develop newer staff to the sector. This

partnership will seek to identify best practices as well as identify gaps and provide recommendations to the relevant authority.

Evaluation and Outcome Measurement are key components of MCYS' strategic directions, and the YOW program will have to bolster its data recording capacity to provide evaluators with more quantitative data to research. The completed evaluation took into account quantitative data with regard to outputs, but most of the results were qualitative, and there was little ability to track this over time. A training manual for the OR database will have to be developed, and a training plan needs to be implemented. The OR needs to be used as a comprehensive case management tool to enable sufficient follow up for high needs youth as well as providing supervisors the opportunity to check in with staff on the youth they are working with.

Mental health supports for the program are the final area for development, and over time will likely prove to be the most essential new component to add to the program. The youth and families targeted by the program face multiple challenges which are compounded by the largely undiagnosed or unknown mental health issues such as attention deficit, learning disability, and personality disorders which make the chances of success for them in educational or employment settings limited. The YOWs are largely not trained clinicians, nor are they expected to be, but when faced with the choice of fulfilling an identified need within their power or placing a youth on a waitlist for mental health support, they will more often than not choose the former. It would be ideal to have a dedicated team of clinicians to provide support to the program in this regard. As it stands, EMYS has made available to the 18 YOWS in the East Quadrant a child and family therapist to provide some consultation and mental health training as needed. While it is appreciated by the team, more intensive clinical support will be needed at the frontline level to make any significant gains with this high risk population.