



July 22, 2022

Attention: Regional Governance Council - Integrated Police Units

c/o Paula Kully, Executive Assistant, Oak Bay Police Department (pkully@oakbaypolice.org)

David Screech, Co-Chair, RGC-IPU ("David Screech" <dscreech@crd.bc.ca>)

Kevin Murdoch, Co-Chair, RGU-IPU ("Kevin Murdoch" <kmurdoch@crd.bc.ca>)

Re: Increased funding and staff resources for MYST/CRED

The Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee is writing to urge the Regional Governance Council to continue its efforts to secure increased staffing and resource funding for the Greater Victoria Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) and its critically important collaborative work with the Pacific Centre Family Services Association's Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED) program.

An alarming and urgent presentation by CRED's Mia Golden at our April 28, 2022 committee meeting generated a request by our members to write the Regional Governance Council – IPU expressing strong continued support for her partnership with MYST and colleague Constable Gord Magee from the Victoria Police Department.

The pair have been regular attendees at VFCYJC meetings in recent years, providing ongoing updates to the committee's mix of municipal councillors and Capital Regional District appointees about the mounting crisis experienced by vulnerable youth in the region.

Golden and Magee have a case load of 200+ young people at risk throughout Greater Victoria. Many are still in school and present as average teenagers who participate in sports and extracurricular activities while also dabbling in risky behaviours that can quickly spiral out of control. A sadly familiar litany of often tragic outcomes – drug addiction, gangs, exploitation and sexual trafficking included – can result.

They are the only police officer and counsellor duo working this supremely challenging beat in the region, and the hours they can dedicate are severely limited. "We go from one fire to the next," Golden said. "There are just the two of us, and we are barely keeping heads above water."

The VFCYJC ask:

i) That the Regional Governance Council advocate to the Province of British Columbia for increased resource funding and staffing for MYST/CRED street teams. At a minimum, one additional CRED counsellor/MYST police officer team is required immediately.

ii) MYST appointees from regional police departments turnover every three years on average. It can, however, take an extended period for an individual to develop the unique skills required to deal effectively with vulnerable youth and to develop relationships with these youth. We agree with Ms. Golden that extending MYST postings to up to five years makes excellent sense.

To repeat, this is a critically urgent matter that requires quick action. “We are frankly overwhelmed by the size and scope of the crisis on our streets,” Golden told us. “This service model demonstrably works and we continue to experience wins as we intervene with young people and support both them and their parents. Yet we urgently need more help.”

Thank you to the Regional Governance Council for hearing this message and your good work to date. Please continue your likely ongoing efforts to secure additional support and ongoing reliable support for MYST/CRED.

Sincerely,

Marie-Terese Little, Chair
Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee

cc Premier John Horgan
cc Hon. David Eby, Attorney General
cc Hon. Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General
cc Hon. Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions
cc CRD Chair Colin Plant
cc CRD Municipalities
cc SD#61, SD#62, SD#63, SD#93

Attachment: Appendix: Summary Report on Mia Golden’s April 28 VFCYJC presentation

Appendix: presentation by Mia Golden, Mobile Youth Services Team, Crime Reduction and Exploitation Diversion (CRED) program director with the Pacific Centre Family Services Association.

Context and Issues

- Victoria is a harbour town, and as such is an increasingly notorious prime location for gang activity, drugs and sex trafficking
- BC declared a public health emergency in April 2016 in response to the rise in drug overdoses and deaths. Coroners Service statistics show that there have been 9,013 unintentional illicit drug toxicity deaths in British Columbia since then (through March 31, 2022).
- Encouraging drug addiction in teenagers is a proven way to control and make them dependent on abusive figures. Youth in the Victoria region are being used as mules for drugs to Vancouver and Washington state.
- A decade following Amanda Todd's tragic death, cyber-bullying, extortion and sexual harassment remain a huge issue yet has become so normalized that many youth no longer regard it as a big deal. "The explosion of social media, easy access to the internet and pornography, and the normalization of highly sexualized and often violent content are all issues that contribute to the exploitation of young people," said Golden.
- Predators seeking to groom and socialize (condition) young people have been dramatically enabled by social media. In the past, they were in plain sight while lurking in malls, parks and outside schools. Now they operate in the virtual shadows.
- Predators scan social media seeking evidence that a young person is vulnerable or having a bad day. They then act with a variety of direct and subtle strategies that include friending, meet-ups, favours/gifts, desensitization, drugs/addiction, "sextortion," threats and outright ownership.
- Gang recruitment occurs on the street, at parties and also on social media. Children in the region as young as 12 are being enlisted and are wearing gang colours. There is a danger of minimizing this behaviour as youthful indiscretion. Abbotsford's 856 gang started small yet has evolved into a Canada-wide organization. Victoria-based WCGF (West Coast Goat Fuckers) was responsible for 200+ police files in 2014 alone, including assault with a weapon.
- Most young people on the street carry pepper spray for self-defence. Some have knives, replica guns and, in some cases, actual firearms.

- There are numerous ways in which vulnerable youth find themselves in serious trouble. Golden offered several case studies as examples:

i) An 18-year-old girl newly arrived from Quebec was turned into a prostitute by her thirtysomething boyfriend (aka pimp), who set her up in a Victoria hotel and marketed her through Leo's List. MYST/CRED offered information and support, which she declined, claiming she did not have a pimp.

ii) A 22-year-old whose violent boyfriend, a member of Victoria's Norteno (aka XIV) gang and a drug trafficker, branded his name on her face and induced her into a heavy drug addiction (she is now clean and sober); and

iii) Three teenaged sisters from a stable, loving family in the region who were introduced to crystal meth and exploited by a man in his 40s (later convicted; two of the sisters are doing well today, however the third remains trapped in addiction).

- Gaps and barriers include: systemic issues; lack of sufficient staff and operational resources for front-line case workers; outdated legislation (i.e., reforms to the BC Infants Act regarding youth consent in particular); lack of sufficient early intervention programs; denial of emerging or even full-blown problems by youth and parents alike; vicarious trauma (experienced by parents, caregivers and professionals), social bias and more.

Signs of Progress

- Supporting both young people in crisis where they're at on the streets while also being an essential go-between with them and their often helpless, overwhelmed parents is a key role for the MYST/CRED street team.

- The system, while stretched well beyond capacity, is positioned for improved outcomes through early intervention strategies that include education, collaboration, communication, parenting support and other resources. These strategies are becoming more sophisticated through engagement by parents, schools, police, probation officers and others community resources.

- MYST/CRED maintains vital ongoing partnerships with provincial ministries and government agencies; Victoria and regional police departments; CRD municipalities and school districts; and the Capital Region Action Team for Sexually Exploited Youth (CRAT/SEY), which is affiliated directly with VFCYJC.

- Safer Schools Together, based in Surrey, BC, works closely with Victoria-region school districts to monitor open-source social media content related to student and staff safety. Among other danger signs, it looks for key words that may indicate grooming activities by predators.

- There is strong and encouraging short and longer-term direction from the Province of BC to address the crisis, including investing in community based mental health and social services so there are more trained front-line workers to help the vulnerable; expansion of the successful 'situation table' model that connects front-line workers from different health, safety and social service sectors; and a commitment to keeping our streets safer from gangs and guns.

- A growing number of service providers are working with vulnerable youth in the Greater Victoria region, among them Pacific Centre Family Services Association, The White Hatter, Safer Schools Together, Youth Empowerment Society, Kiwanis Youth Society, Sanctuary, the Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Deborah's Gate, Canadian Centre for Child Protection, Children of the Street Society, cybertip.ca, needhelpnow.ca, the Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre, Discovery Youth Services and The Foundry.