

MYST REPORT 2023

The Mobile Youth Services Team is comprised of 1 police officer and 1 counsellor/parent educator. The area of responsibility is the entire CRD, although, the team has had several calls and referrals from the Duncan/North Cowichan area. The mandate of the team is exploitation prevention including online exploitation, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking and gangs. This is a team with a supportive focus, which gathers real time intelligence in relation to their mandate across the region and beyond. The team supports youth and families in community and liaises with multiple agencies. Additionally, as the school liaison positions have been lost in certain areas, MYST has had to help fill that role. As a result, a large portion of the work MYST does is school based, whether it is consultations with staff, students, parents or conducting presentations on healthy relationships, exploitation and gang activity.

The counsellor part of the team is employed by Pacific Centre Family Services, whose head office is in West Shore, and is funded by various means. Every year, the counsellor half of the team has to advocate for funding for this essential service. The police officer half of the team is funded by the region's police departments; all of which contribute funds. The tenure of the police officer on the team has just been extended to 4 years. Ideally, it would be a 5-year position with an option for a 6th to mentor the new officer in the role.

There are currently approximately 145 youth and families across the region that MYST supports and several hundred more peripherally. This number continues to climb at an alarming rate. This has various levels of engagement from meeting in community, to receiving disclosures of sexual assaults, sexual interference, exploitation, extortion, and gang involvement, to name a few. This is a relationship focused team and works to establish trust and rapport to support the youth and their families, as well as gathering intelligence on the predators involved. A unique aspect of the current team is being able to connect with youth through music. Cst Magee plays various instruments and provides instruction as a way to establish rapport and engagement.

As MYST is not an investigative unit, the team will conduct the interviews of youth making the disclosures if required and advise the respective police departments to manage the investigation. MYST will stay engaged with the youth and family through the court process and beyond. The team can be on foot, meeting youth in community, handing out food vouchers one minute, and the next, conducting interviews of youth who are victims of horrific sexual assaults.

The referral process is as simple as a phone call or email, alerting the team of a situation needing their expertise. They are received from multiple sources including schools, hospitals, the Ministry of Children and Families, police agencies, other outreach agencies, parents and youth themselves. As this is a relationship and supportive focused team, the police officer half is in plain clothes and is not focused on youth criminality. If the team was visibly involved in arresting youth, there would be zero trust in community, not only with youth but the other youth focused agencies. This would put vulnerable youth in community in more danger.

The MYST team is also a strong advocate for youth and change. They have a unique, regional perspective regarding youth issues and what challenges youth are facing. They also have a comprehensive picture of systemic challenges facing youth who are street entrenched, drug addicted and at extremely high risk. They bring this knowledge to the multiple committees and meetings that they regularly attend across the region. This advocacy has led to the current team being a part of a Fifth Estate episode focusing on youth drug addiction, which aired on national television in April of 2022. As a result of the current team's reputation and esteem in which they are held in community, The Ministry of Children and Families invited Cst Gord Magee of MYST to be on a panel to hire the high-risk youth team leader. This is the first time that a police officer has been given the honour of being involved in the hiring process for MCFD.

The work load of MYST is extremely heavy and is not sustainably effective with just one team. It takes time to establish rapport with youth and gain trust to receive disclosures. A typical day can see the team in Sooke, Saanich, Victoria, the Peninsula, and Westshore, for multiple issues. The work is extremely difficult and deals with horrific events and situations involving youth. This can take a personal toll and the team relies on each other for support.

The question was asked by this committee of MYST, "What would make your job easier?" Without hesitation, the answer is at least one more team of a counsellor and police officer with a tenure of 5 years.

Thank you for your time.

Cst Gord Magee

Mia Golden

Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST)