



# **MOBILE YOUTH SERVICE TEAM (MYST)**

## **Sustaining a Proven Regional Response for High-Risk Youth**

### **Executive Briefing**

Prepared for: Victoria Family Court Youth Justice Committee

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# INTRODUCTION

## What MYST Is

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MYST is a small, specialized, mobile, multi-disciplinary team serving vulnerable and high-risk youth across Greater Victoria.

The current model pairs:

- One police officer
- One youth and family counsellor
- As of May 2026, an embedded MCFD social worker

This model allows MYST to respond beyond traditional police boundaries — in schools, homes, hospitals, community settings, justice processes, and wherever youth and families need support.

## A Proven Regional Model

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MYST has served the Capital Regional District and at-risk youth in Greater Victoria for over 12 years in its current form and manages an evolving caseload of more than 250 files.

## 2025 IMPACT SNAPSHOT

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In 2025, MYST supported approximately 120 youth, with an average age of 13.3 years.

Referrals came from schools, police, hospitals, MCFD, probation, community partners, and parents.

## Key Impacts

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- Gang involvement identified as the most common referral concern
- Direct support provided to youth reporting sexual assault and exploitation, including investigative and court-related support
- Prevention and education delivered across all three school districts, an Indigenous school, and multiple community and youth-focused groups
- Parent and community awareness sessions delivered in partnership with police agencies
- Collaboration with policing partners to protect a high-risk 12-year-old from online exploitation

## CURRENT AND EMERGING RISKS IN GREATER VICTORIA

### **Youth risk factors in the region are evolving rapidly, particularly in the online environment.**

Local police have identified the emergence of violent online exploitation networks targeting children and youth, with victims as young as 8 to 17 years old.

#### **In confirmed local cases:**

- Youth between ages 10–14 have been coerced into sexual exploitation online
- Victims have been manipulated into creating explicit content and controlled through coercion and threats
- These cases increasingly involve ongoing control and escalation of harm, rather than financial sextortion
- Youth have been pressured into self-harm and acts of violence

#### **Beyond this, local trends continue to show increasing pressures related to:**

- Online exploitation and sextortion
- Gang recruitment and normalization of violence
- Mental health challenges and social isolation
- Substance use and exposure to the toxic drug supply
- Homelessness and family instability

*These risks are interconnected and accelerating.*

## WHY THE COUNSELLOR ROLE MATTERS

The counsellor role is not an “add-on.” It is central to why MYST works. If the counsellor position is lost, the team will continue in a narrower police/MCFD form, but the service will lose:

- Immediate therapeutic support for youth
- Family counselling and parent/guardian education
- Specialized exploitation and gang-intervention support
- A trusted non-police pathway for youth disclosure and engagement
- Support that helps youth navigate investigations and court processes

While police and MCFD will continue to provide intervention, services will be narrower in scope, less flexible, and limited to each agency's authority and capacity.

### **Cost to Sustain the Position**

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The annual cost to maintain the counsellor position is approximately \$150,000 per year.

This includes approximately:

- \$120,000 in payroll
- Additional costs for administration, mileage, and operational support

This is a modest investment compared to the downstream costs of youth exploitation, gang involvement, criminal investigation, victimization, court involvement, hospitalization, and long-term social harm.

### **Consequences of Lost Funding**

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Without stable funding, Greater Victoria will face:

- Reduced early intervention for youth at risk of exploitation, gangs, and violence
- More fragmented support for complex, multi-agency cases
- Increased police and court workload
- Less support for victims through disclosure, investigation, and testimony
- Reduced prevention education in schools and community settings
- Loss of a proven integrated model at a time when youth risks are escalating

## **THE REQUEST**

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We encourage federal, provincial, regional, and municipal partners to work together to secure immediate bridge funding and establish a sustainable long-term funding model for the MYST counsellor position.

### **Stabilize and Strengthen a Proven Model**

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- Consideration should be given to retaining this team's core position after September 30, 2026.
- MYST is already integrated, trusted, mobile, specialized, and effective.