



OTHER REPORT

Report Date: November 25, 2009
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Meeting Date: December 17, 2009

TO: Standing Committee on City Services and Budgets
FROM: Family Court/Youth Justice Committee
SUBJECT: 2009 Family Court/Youth Justice Committee Annual Report

RECOMMENDATION

This report is submitted for INFORMATION.

CITY MANAGER'S COMMENTS

The City Manager submits the following for INFORMATION.

PURPOSE

The purpose is to provide Vancouver City Council with a report on the activities of the Family Court/Youth Justice Committee (FCYJC) for the period of January 1 to December 31, 2009.

BACKGROUND

The Vancouver Family Court/Youth Justice Committee (FC/YJ) is appointed by City Council annually. This role is delegated to Municipalities by the Provincial and Federal governments. Family Court and Youth Justice Committees' authority and duties are set out in Provincial and Federal Legislation. Section 5 of the *Provincial Court Act* establishes the Family Court Committee. Youth Justice Committees are appointed pursuant to Section 18 of the *Youth Criminal Justice Act*, which came into force in April 2003.

The Committee reports annually to the Attorney General of British Columbia and to Vancouver City Council regarding its work. Reports are also forwarded to Justice Canada.

The Committee's duties are to: examine and consider resources available in the community for families, children and youth, professionals working with this population and young offenders; assist the Court when requested in individual cases referred to the Committee; make recommendations to the Court, to the Attorney General, to the City Council or to others, as required; act as a Family Court when required; and provide leadership on youth justice, family, and social issues.

Structure

In 2009, 22 advisory committee members were appointed by City Council- 17 committee members completed their term. See Appendix A for the list of committee members, liaison members, City staff and interested parties.

The Committee divided its responsibilities among subcommittees which reported back to the Committee as a whole on activities and for approval of any initiatives to be undertaken by the subcommittee. The five subcommittees for the 2009 term were:

- i. Research & Partnerships Committee
- ii. Youth at Risk- Olympics Committee
- iii. Youth at Risk- CASA Exploratory Committee
- iv. Youth at Risk- Gay & Lesbian Committee
- v. Youth Liaison/Youth Exchange Committee

DISCUSSION

1. Guest Presenters

The following people made presentations to the Committee as a whole:

Names of Presenters	Subject
Michael Piraino, CEO (National CASA Assoc. - USA)	Court Appointed Special Advocates
Sara Kendall, Leave Out Violence (LOVE)	LOVE (Mandate, Programs)
Inspector Scott Thompson (VPD)	Youth Services Section, VPD
Kinex Youth Initiative	Decision Making & Running Effective Mtgs.
Simon Richards, Administrative Crown Counsel	Youth Court System

2. Focus of the 2009 Term

At the beginning of the term, the Chair addressed the Family Court/Youth Justice Committee regarding concerns that had been voiced during the previous term of the Committee: lack of measurable goals/objectives and progress resulting from the need for clarification or interpretation of the mandate for the Committee (Committee members did not clearly understand the purpose of the Committee).

The Chair proposed to the Committee that this term address these concerns through the striking of a subcommittee (which was later named the Research & Partnerships Committee) that would develop recommendations to "improve the effectiveness of the City of Vancouver's Family Court/Youth Justice Committee." The consensus acknowledged that this research would build a

foundation for future terms to more effectively understand and discharge the mandate of the Committee, and the subcommittee was struck.

The members of the Research & Partnerships Committee determined that it would be most effective to develop the requested recommendations by consulting related community organizations and reading existing reports. Reports from the Research & Partnerships Committee highlight some of the recommendations that resulted:

- "greater continuity of membership and more resources are required in order for our Committee to create meaningful work. We are not likely to obtain further financial resources from City Council anytime soon, but should aim to obtain support from Council in the form of their time. Greater support from City Council could also result in more members of the Committee returning for another year, which would in turn result in the possibility of working on more meaningful, long-term projects."
- "gain access to the voices of 'at-risk' youth" by engaging with organizations such as Leave Out Violence (LOVE) or the Federation of BC Youth in Care Networks
- network and collaborate with other Family Court/Youth Justice Committees in British Columbia to share information, event invitations and best practices.

Furthermore, for the latter part of the term, the Family Court/Youth Justice Committee conducted an experiment regarding the structure of the Committee and appointed four 'Meeting Facilitators' to chair the monthly Committee meetings, while the Chair of the Family Court/Youth Justice Committee focused on the Annual Report and the administrative responsibilities of the Committee.

3. Future Directions

The Committee recommends that the following projects continue in 2010:

- Continue the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Exploratory Sub-committee and to educate the community about the CASA structure.
- Continue the Research and Partnerships Sub-committee - ongoing liaison and coordination with FCYJ Committees in other municipalities.

Please refer to the Appendices for Annual Reports from the above Sub-committees.

CONCLUSION

The above information is presented to Vancouver City Council for information.

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APPENDIX A

2009 Committee Members

Chair: Mark Gueffroy
Vice Chair: Jesse Tarbotton
Treasurer: Andy Chan

Laura Bakan
Natasha Durich
Murphy Fries
Rachel Gold
Scott Gray
Barbara Harvey
Matt Kadioglu
Jacky Leung
Valentina Malenovic
Joel Milgram
Benjamin Ralston
Christabel Shaler
Dorothy Watts
Fiona Weller

Sarah Goldstein (Resigned)
Tess Lawson (Resigned)
Alexandra MacGregor (Resigned)
Leah Ro (Resigned)
Parrish Wilson (Resigned)

Council Liaison: Councillor Andrea Reimer
VPD Liaison: Inspector Scott Thompson
School Board Liaison: Tom Harapniuck
Meeting Coordinator: Lori Isfeld

APPENDIX B

Research and Partnerships Sub-Committee 2009 Annual Report

Active Members: Murphy Fries, Rachel Gold, Barbara Harvey, Jesse Tarbotton, Dorothy Watts, Christabel Shaler

This sub-committee was created to gather information regarding family and youth justice and create partnerships with relevant service providers in the community. In the sub-committee work plan struck at the beginning of the year, the intention was determined to, "improve the effectiveness of Vancouver's Family and Youth Justice Advisory Committee. Gather information and identify gaps- i.e. what information is already out there that may be helpful to the Committee? What issues are not being addressed?" To achieve this goal the Committee began researching existing literature and surveying other community organizations. The following is a list of research conducted:

1) Struggling Youth and Their Encounters with the Justice System

Dorothy Watts and Christabel Shaler attended this community dialogue, which brought together service providers, school board trustees and police officers. Although, there was not an action plan created by the group, the UBC Faculty of Education is slowly putting together a website that will highlight relevant research. Christabel Shaler spoke with Stephanie, and Joel Milgram (FYJC member), who will stay connected to the FYJC as their project progresses.

2) Guest Speaker: Peer Net BC

Rachel Gold booked a workshop through Peer Net for the FYJC committee. This workshop was about running effective meetings. We learned about various methods of leadership, decision-making, conflict resolution, and communication.

3) Guest Speakers: Leave Out Violence L.O.V.E.

Christabel Shaler booked Leave Out Violence (L.O.V.E.) to speak at a committee meeting. Sara Kendall and two L.O.V.E. youth discussed the purpose of the organization, and the importance of youth voices. It was suggested that the FYJC find ways of engaging with L.O.V.E., in order to gain access to the voices of "at-risk" youth.

4) North Vancouver FYJC Meeting, April 16th 2009

Murphy Fries attended this meeting and wrote a report, which stated that, "greater continuity of membership and more resources are required in order for our Committee to create meaningful work. We are not likely to obtain further financial resources from City Council anytime soon, but should aim to obtain support from Council in the form of their time. Greater support from Council could also result in more members of the Committee returning for another year, which would in turn result in the possibility of working on more meaningful, long-term projects.

5) Information Meeting with Andrea Reimer, August 7th 2009

Dorothy Watts composed an agenda for our meeting with Andrea Reimer. Jesse Tarbotton, Rachel Gold, Dorothy Watts and Christabel Shaler were in attendance. We discussed ways of communicating with Councillor Reimer and aligning with the goals of City Council. Youth and housing are issues that Council finds very relevant

6) Family Violence Conference, Richmond BC, October 16th 2009

Christabel Shaler attended the Richmond FYJC conference, which consisted of interesting workshops and excellent networking opportunities. FYJC representatives from across the Lower Mainland were in attendance. During the round-table discussion, Christabel offered to create a Google group, so that the committees can stay connected, collaborate, share information, and invite each other to relevant events. This will commence in January 2010, when FYJC members have been established.

7) Four Pillars Community Dialogue: Creating a Culture of Prevention, November 17th 2009

Christabel Shaler attended this community dialogue, which was informative and inspiring. She connected to the Four Pillars Steering Committee and discussed ways that the FYJC can collaborate with their work. Christabel was invited to attend one of their upcoming meetings. She is considering the possibility of becoming a liaison between the committees.

8) Guest Speaker: Simon Richards re: Youth Court Administrative Crown Counsel, November 25th 2009

Jesse Tarbotton booked this speaker, so that the FYJC could increase their knowledge regarding the youth court system

Goals for the future

We hope to create a Google group that will connect us with other FYJC committees in the Lower Mainland. We hope to create a partnership with the 4 Pillars "Creating a Culture of Prevention" Steering Committee.

Report on North Shore FCYJC

A representative of our subcommittee attended a meeting of the North Shore FCYJC on April 16, 2009. The North Shore FCYJC includes City of North Vancouver, District of North Vancouver, and District of West Vancouver. The goal was to learn more about how other FCYJC Committees in the province function, what has contributed to their success, and what the impediments are to an efficient Committee. After reading an annual report of the North Shore, it is clear they have accomplished much more than our committee in recent years. Significant achievements of the North Shore FCYJC include their Domestic Violence Program and Courtwatch Program. The Domestic Violence Program has provided "Day in Court" public education sessions. The Courtwatch Program tracks youth court cases in criminal court and generates statistics (i.e. the number of youth criminal cases that are settled, etc). The statistics tracks trends and does not report month-to-month statistics. The Courtwatch coordinator reports back to the committee and identifies issues of interest or reports on specific concerns of the committee. For instance, in 2007 the Courtwatch program observed a significant decrease in the number of youth matters in court. Other recent achievements have included holding a forum for youth on the impacts of internet use, reviewing the Youth Criminal Justice Act, and consulting on reforms to the Family Relations Act. The meeting we attended began with an "opening round", where members were asked to comment on "Something I enjoy or appreciate about living or working on the North Shore". Next, guest speakers presented their topics (community planner and youth outreach program coordinator). Then, work for the committee for the year was discussed briefly (it was noted that the committee's work would be impacted by the budget to be delivered in May). The Courtwatch and Domestic Violence Program coordinators then provided brief reports. Courtwatch did not have much to report. The Domestic Violence Program coordinator reported that the "Day

in Court" sessions were set. The Subcommittees did not have much to report, as they had not met yet in 2009 (The subcommittees are Family law, Youth, Public Education). From this meeting, it was clear that the most significant achievements of the North Shore Committee are the Domestic Violence and Courtwatch Programs. Aside from those programs, not much had been accomplished in 2009 by the North Shore as of April. After the meeting, we spoke with a few members of the North Shore committee, who used to be on the City of Vancouver Committee. They attributed the success of the North Shore Committee to abundant resources. In particular, the North Shore receives a budget of \$65,000 per year.

The coordinators of the Courtwatch and Domestic Violence Programs are paid contractors. Another factor to past success was that for many years, the North Shore had continuity in its membership. This year, the North Shore had many new members and has faced some of the same challenges that our committee has. For example, many of the new members on both the North Shore Committee and our Committee were not clear on the purpose of the Committee.

In summary, the success of the North Shore's projects, notably the Courtwatch and Domestic Violence Programs are the result of significant resources and support from City council. Current impediments to further achievements are a high turnover in membership from last year to this year.

Conclusion

What this means for Vancouver's Family Court Youth Justice Committee is that a greater continuity of membership and more resources are required in order for our Committee to create meaningful work. We are not likely to obtain further financial resources from City Council anytime soon, but should aim to obtain support from Council in the form of their time. Greater support from Council could also result in more members of the Committee returning for another year, which would in turn result in the possibility of working on more meaningful, long-term projects.

APPENDIX C**Court Appointed Special Advocate Exploratory Committee:
October Report**

Purpose of this Report: To provide the Family Court Youth Justice Committee with a report on the activities of the CASA Exploratory Committee for the period of January 1 to October 27, 2009.

Submitted by:
Natasha Durich
Andy Chan
Joel Milgram
Valentina Malenovic

Introduction to the CASA

From its inception in the 1970's in Washington State, the Court Appointed Special Advocate program in the United States¹ has transformed into a national non-profit organization. The participating states shape CASA to fit within their child welfare structure, with some states calling the volunteer the CASA and other using the term Guardian ad litem (similar to a UK Model, in existence since 1989 and focused on children).

In the US program, the CASA is a trained volunteer court officer who is appointed by the judge to meet weekly with one child who is involved in a child welfare matter. This child has been abused and neglected and is now residing in state care or they remain in the custody of their biological parents, who are under court orders to improve parenting skills. The CASA makes a one-year commitment to that child and the CASA is trained in interviewing and reporting. The CASA is connected to community agencies and services and makes recommendations for the child and professionals to consider.

The volunteer is a constant source of support in the child's life, showing the child that they are important and valuable. Often when a child is involved in the system, the people who surround them are transient professionals: social workers, police officers, therapists, foster parents, judges and lawyers. Due to the extensive community connections of the program, the volunteer is able to access useful resources. Through reporting, the volunteer gives the child a voice in the proceedings and in their plan of care. The volunteer advocates for permanency.

Besides the positive responses of children and volunteers, the National CASA program has received praise from the US Department of Justice (Office of the Inspector General).² In their January 2007 report, it was cited that children with a CASA spent 13.3% of their time in long-term foster care, whereas children without a CASA spent 27.0% of their time in such care, with long-term care being more than 3 years in care. Further, the court ordered more services to be provided to children and parents in cases where a CASA was assigned.

¹ Please see www.nationalcasa.org for more information.

² Please see http://www.nationalcasa.org/about_us/studies.html

Article I. The Need for CASA in the Lower Mainland

As of February 2009, there were more than 9,000 children and youth in care in British Columbia. In the Joint Special Report released by the Representative for Children and Youth and the Provincial Health Officer, it was cited that children in care are at increased risk for coming into contact with the youth justice system and commonly have mental health issues or developmental disabilities, sometimes the result of the abuse and neglect they suffered at home.³ In addition, approximately 52% of those children in care were Aboriginal.⁴ This number is high compared to the number of Aboriginal children in BC and the number of non-Aboriginal children in care.

In the August 2009 *Ministry of Child and Family Development Service Plan*,⁵ one key objective is for children and youth receiving Ministry services to demonstrate increased resilience and capacity to cope with their challenges. The Ministry intends to continue with their Family Group Conferencing and mediation services for youth and children in care. The performance measures to help reach this objective are to ensure that the children are in the age-appropriate grade at school and observing families for repeat cases of abuse or neglect. Furthermore, "(t)he Ministry is reviewing the child protection decision making model and the result will be a new assessment planning and practice model that supports collaborative, strengths-based practice, and promotes alternatives to investigations and court processes" (p. 14). These performance measures are significant for CASA, as this project supports educational outcomes for children, offers children and youth a voice and may help uncover further incidences of abuse or neglect, and can be set-up as a means of assisting children and youth who are in the system but who are involved in mediation or non-courtroom-based proceedings.

Article II. CASA in Canada

Team Bonsai, a group formed through their participation in Leadership Victoria, organized and held a successful community forum in Victoria on May 28, 2009. They had 30 community members attend and at the end of their forum, 80% of participants indicated their commitment to assist further with the project. Their panel consisted of a foster parent, representatives from the Ministry of Child and Family Development and the CEO of National CASA USA Michael Piraino. Participants were able to share their thoughts on the current system and offered feedback to Team Bonsai. One of the team leaders, Michele McDonald, has been in communication with our Committee and offers her continued support of our work.

Penny Kelly is a member of a Saskatchewan group working on a project in their region. There has been a provincial radio show that profiled the work of her team and they continue to raise support for CASA in their area. Penny has contacted our Committee and she is also encouraging of our work.

Article III. CASA Exploratory Committee - Pilot Project

In January 2009, the CASA Exploratory Committee was formed with the aim of exploring the feasibility of a pilot project on CASA in our community. The major tasks of the group would be to

³ Please see *Kids, Crime and Care* (February 2009), RCYBC and Provincial Health Officer, <http://www.rcybc.ca/Images/PDFs/Reports/Youth%20Justice%20Joint%20Rpt%20FINAL%20.pdf>

⁴ See August 25, 2009, *Ministry of Child and Family Development Service Plan*, <http://www.gov.bc.ca/mcf/>

⁵ See footnote 4.

spread the word about CASA, gain understanding of child welfare in our community, and to gauge community interest and support of such a pilot project.

We brought Michael Piraino from National CASA USA to speak to the Family Court Youth Justice Committee for the City of Vancouver (March 2009). This was an opportunity to cover some key aspects of CASA with the FCYJC and to answer any questions about CASA from members of the FCYJC. At this point in time, we decided to hold a Forum of our own in Vancouver and started some preliminary networking amongst child welfare professionals.

In June 2009, we met with Michele McDonald from the Victoria group and gained first-hand knowledge of their forum. Throughout the summer of 2009, our Committee continued to make plans for the forum. We set the date for January 27, 2010, and secured a venue, the Vancouver Public Library. We are contacting local non-profits, charities, government officials, lawyers, social workers and other interested persons. To date, we have had an overwhelmingly positive response to CASA and have confirmed Michael Piraino to speak at our forum.

In September 2009, we gained funding from the FCYJC for our forum. We have since contacted key figures of interest who are interested in coming to the forum, including a representative from the Collaborative Practice group for the Ministry of Child and Family Development, an advocate from the Office of the Representative for Children and Youth of BC, and the Chairperson of the North Shore Family Court Youth Justice Committee.

Article IV. Closing Thoughts

In closing, the CASA Exploratory Committee is continuing to work towards the community forum in January. There are many questions about the pilot project that are still being considered, including what level of the system would be an entry point for our program, what provincial legislation is available to support our aims and how CASA could tailor itself to address the most pressing problems facing children and youth in care in the Vancouver area. At the end of that forum, we will be releasing a report of detailing our efforts and the next steps for this Committee.