

Ontario's Youth Action Plan

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August 22, 2012

Introduction

Every young person in this province has the potential to contribute positively and productively to their neighbourhood, their community and our province; every young person must feel valued and be valued. We all have a responsibility to ensure that youth have access to the right supports and the right opportunities so they can make positive choices and reach their full potential. This is the foundation of Ontario's Youth Action Plan.

There is significant leadership, ability and commitment in communities across the province to address the challenges our young people face. The government acknowledges and respects the role our diverse communities and their leaders play in helping young people succeed, and must listen to and work in full and meaningful partnership with local leadership to support youth effectively.

Ontario has made progress in partnership with young people and their families. Our high school graduation rate has gone from 68 per cent in 2004 to 82 per cent in 2011, and our postsecondary participation rate of 64 per cent is among the highest in the world. Violent crime by youth is down 17 per cent compared to a decade ago.

However, many youth – particularly minority and racialized youth – continue to face significant challenges and multiple barriers to success. Despite the leadership and efforts of individuals, communities, youth-serving organizations and different levels of government, too many kids in our province do not have access to the necessary supports, services and opportunities to succeed. In particular, the Review of Roots of Youth Violence report – authored in 2008 by former MPP and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Dr. Alvin Curling and former Chief Justice of Ontario the Hon. Roy McMurtry – correctly identifies other challenges that disadvantaged youth face, such as racism and lack of culturally appropriate services.

The context for, and the causes of, youth violence are effectively explained in the Roots of Youth Violence report. This report is and will remain the blueprint and foundation for action on youth violence in Ontario. Although the government has made progress on the recommendations contained in that report – including actions that have lifted more than 20,000 children out of [poverty](#), improvements to [child and youth mental health](#), [youth employment opportunities](#), [youth engagement](#) and hundreds of community-based programs that are helping young people make positive choices – recent tragic gun violence in Toronto reminds us just how much more needs to be done. We must take a balanced and sustained approach and we must work in partnership with local communities to successfully overcome these challenges.

Over the past 30 days we have heard from youth and their families, community leaders, community organizations that serve and support youth, representatives of education, media, social service, business and justice sectors, elected officials and other levels of government, and members of the public. We are impressed by the remarkable and effective work already being done, the capacity of the existing leadership, and the overwhelming show of support for a balanced approach; one that emphasizes the potential of youth to positively contribute to our communities and our province, as well as our collective responsibility to ensure our communities are safe.

Over and above all else we have heard that there are already significant resources, capacity and leadership in these communities, and that we need to learn from and build on programs that are already working. We must increase support for evidence-based, impactful initiatives that provide opportunities to youth and that strengthen community capacity; we must begin early in a young person's life, and we must better coordinate our efforts and take a long-term, sustained approach that focuses on positive youth outcomes.

The province's Youth Action Plan builds on this advice and on the research and recommendations in the report on the Roots of Youth Violence.

Ontario's Youth Action Plan

No child should be disadvantaged just because of where they live, the colour of their skin, their socio-economic status or their religion. We must collectively do more to provide the right combination of culturally-sensitive supports and opportunities so that all young people can thrive. The future prosperity of our province depends on the success of our young people.

This plan includes immediate actions that fill identified gaps in services to support underserved and disadvantaged communities, along with long-term strategies to address structural challenges, improve coordination and integration of services, and ultimately increase opportunities for youth and improve youth outcomes.

In order for this Action Plan to succeed, we recognize that stronger collaboration with all of our partners and local leadership will be critical. As the Roots of Youth Violence report emphasized, a coordinated place-based approach that focuses on those areas "where there are concentrations of disadvantage" is the first step in ensuring that, together, we can have maximum impact on the lives of young people and the safety of our communities.

Moreover, we recognize the need to focus on outcomes for youth by supporting programs and partnerships that are evidence-based and regularly evaluated.

Immediate Actions

Our immediate actions focus on programs that expand opportunities for young people living in underserved and disadvantaged communities – especially employment opportunities and mentorship. We are committed to strengthening communities and community partners because their leadership and commitment is essential to the success of our collective efforts. Further, we believe in the potential of all young people; we will support them to stay on a positive path and we won't give up on those who go off track.

Moving Forward – A Sustained Commitment

These challenges will not be solved overnight; our success depends on a sustained commitment from communities, community partners, and all levels of government. Therefore, moving forward, we will develop a province-wide evidence-based youth strategy focusing on outcomes. As part of this strategy we will conduct a cross-government review of programs to ensure that resources are aligned and effectively targeted to achieve intended outcomes. An Action Committee on Youth Opportunities will be established to help advise the government throughout the development of this strategy and on an ongoing basis, and we will expand the role of the Poverty Reduction Strategy cabinet-level committee to include a permanent focus on the Roots of Youth Violence. Dr. Alvin Curling will be appointed as a Strategic Advisor to the Minister of Children and Youth Services to oversee this new focus.

Immediate Actions

Early Intervention

The research is clear: investing early helps prepare our kids for success in school and in life. That is why our government provides over \$250 million annually to support healthy child development programs across the province. We know that when disadvantaged children and families are provided with supports early, there is greater opportunity for them to thrive. The McGuinty Government is also committed to fully rolling out Full Day Kindergarten by 2014. This is one of the best investments we can make in our kids and the future prosperity of our province.

Taking Action

Expand early years supports for parents and their children

There are currently 155 Parenting and Family Literacy Centres located in schools across the province. These centres provide families with a space for children to learn literacy and numeracy skills along with specialized supports for parents to ensure their children are ready to enter kindergarten. These centres, located in schools in disadvantaged communities across the province, are free to attend and require no pre-registration.

- 1. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will expand Parenting and Family Literacy Centres to an additional 17 sites located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across Ontario.**

Greater Opportunities for Youth through Positive Alternatives and Jobs

We know that employment, mentoring and other opportunities, as well as support services, are critical in helping youth succeed by helping them enhance their skills, boost their confidence, and provide hopeful options for the future. Creating employment opportunities for disadvantaged young people is one area where collaboration between the private sector, the community sector, and government is especially important.

Taking Action

Expand the Summer Jobs Programs to provide employment opportunities for youth during the school year

The Summer Jobs for Youth Program – part of the government’s Youth Opportunities Strategy – provides up to 8 weeks full-time summer employment to approximately 4,000 youth from disadvantaged communities across Ontario, including more than 1,100 young

people in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods. The program supports the development of self-esteem, positive relationships, and employability through pre- and post-employment training as well as the ongoing support of a Youth Worker Leader.

- 2. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will expand the Summer Jobs for Youth Program across the GTA to provide 320 new after-school jobs during the school year, increasing to 440 part-time jobs next year. Community agencies that oversee the program will work closely with schools to ensure that students' part-time employment supports success in school.**

The Youth in Policing Initiative, also part of the Youth Opportunities Strategy, provides nearly 400 youth from across Ontario with the chance to work with their local police service. Youth develop their teamwork, organization, and problem-solving skills – skills which support educational attainment and can be applied in their future careers and in life.

- 3. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will expand the Youth in Policing Initiative across the province to provide 270 new after-school jobs during the school year.**

Launch a jobs initiative in partnership with the private sector

We heard from many partners, including the private sector, who believe that business has a much stronger role to play in supporting employment opportunities for young people from disadvantaged communities. Collaborating with partners in government and the community sector, we can provide young people from disadvantaged communities with employment opportunities as well as mentorship and support for entrepreneurship.

- 4. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will work with our partners to launch a Private Sector Jobs Initiative led by a council of community and business leaders. This initiative will build on successful models and leverage existing partnerships. It will include a jobs/internships stream, a mentorship stream, an entrepreneurial stream, and a stream to engage schools and the community.**

Expand opportunities for youth in the summer

Ontario's Focus on Youth program provides employment opportunities for young people in the delivery of summer recreation programs and activities through local school boards. To date, over 100,000 youth from disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton and Windsor have participated in recreation programs and 5,000 young people have been employed through the program.

- 5. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will expand the Focus on Youth Program to provide summer employment for 220 more young people and summer recreation activities for 3,500 more children and youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods across the Greater Toronto Area.**

Expand opportunities for youth after school

Ontario's After School Program operates at 108 sites in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods alone. This program provides supervision and programming to students in grades 1-12 between the hours of 3:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. Research tells us that we can maximize the efficacy of our programs by focusing on important transition times in a young person's day, including those crucial hours at the end of the school day.

- 6. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will expand the reach of our After School Program in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods and to York, Halton, Peel, and Durham regions.**

Supportive, Safer Communities

The Roots of Youth Violence report identified a place-based approach that focuses on areas of concentrated disadvantage as the first step in addressing the causes of youth violence. This includes enhanced focus on communities that face multiple barriers to success, including disproportionate poverty, racism, and other factors. Building on this foundation and supported by collaborative evidence-based programs, we can build stronger communities that are both safer and more supportive for young people.

Taking Action

Launch a Youth Opportunities Fund to support community-based initiatives

Through the 30-day process that led to the creation of the Youth Action Plan, we heard from our partners throughout the youth-serving sector on the need to continue to target the neighbourhoods with the greatest need, as well as specific populations of young people who are more likely to face multiple barriers to success, such as youth from racialized communities.

- 7. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will build on the experiences and positive outcomes of the Youth Challenge Fund to work with our partners to develop a new \$5-million per year Youth Opportunities Fund. This new Fund will support community initiatives in priority and disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and will leverage private sector partnerships to further meet its objectives.**

Increase the number of Youth Outreach Workers in communities

We know that strong mentorship from youth workers who share lived experience with young people from disadvantaged communities is an effective way of keeping youth on-track, encouraging them to make positive choices, and helping them succeed. Youth Outreach Workers operate on the front lines; they identify at-risk and disconnected youth, providing mentorship and support, and connecting them to the right services.

Ontario's Youth Outreach Worker program funds 62 positions across Ontario, including 35 in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods. Since 2006, nearly 120,000 young people have benefited from the support and mentorship of a Youth Outreach Worker.

- 8. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will increase the number of Youth Outreach Workers in communities across Ontario from 62 to 97. We will also review the YOW program to ensure workers have the support and skills they need to improve outcomes for disadvantaged youth.**

Mobilize communities and increase partnerships

Ontario's Safer and Vital Communities Program grants provide funding to community organizations that focus on addressing a specific crime issue through a multi-disciplinary approach. This year's grants support crime prevention initiatives in line with the government's recently-released [Crime Prevention in Ontario: A Framework for Action](#). Community organizations that apply must partner with police and with other organizations in the education, health, government, or community sectors to undertake local crime prevention projects.

- 9. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will provide \$500,000 in Safer and Vital Communities grants to community organizations across the province to work collaboratively with police to prevent crime. This is in addition to the \$500,000 already announced on July 23rd for Toronto.**

Each year, the province's Proceeds of Crime program provides funding received from fines and assets obtained through prosecutions to a priority area of investment. This year's priority area is crime prevention, and in 2012 funding will total over \$2 million and will include 21 crime prevention projects across the province.

- 10. As part of our Youth Action Plan, the Proceeds of Crime program will support stronger co-ordination among the Toronto Police Service, other municipal police services and the Ontario Provincial Police to track guns and gangs and remove them from our streets. In addition, the Proceeds of Crime grant will focus on "Crime Prevention - Community Mobilization" to provide support to encourage police and community groups to work together in disadvantaged communities for the next two years.**

Tackling Violence and Victimization while Helping Youth Get Back on Track

We have a collective responsibility to provide the right combination of supports and opportunities to ensure that our youth have hope for the future. But when crime and, in particular, violent incidents occur, we must take action to ensure our communities and public spaces are safe. At the same time, if young people come into conflict with the law, we must hold them accountable for their actions, while ensuring the right combination of supports and opportunities are in place so they can get back on track.

Taking Action

Continue to support anti-violence strategies

The Toronto Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (TAVIS), launched in 2006, and the Provincial Anti-Violence Intervention Strategy (PAVIS) are specialized police teams who work with partners to target illegal gang, drugs and weapons activities in communities by focusing on prevention, intervention, enforcement and community mobilization. Funding was set to expire at the end of this year. TAVIS is an important initiative which has led to 21,748 arrests and seized 1,991 firearms as of December 31, 2011. PAVIS expanded the initiative to include 22 communities outside Toronto.

- 11. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will secure permanent funding for TAVIS and PAVIS.**

Getting guns off the street

Evidence shows that one effective way of getting guns off the streets is through amnesty programs that provide incentives to people who turn in firearms. In 2008, for example, Toronto Police Service partnered with a corporate sponsor on the “Pixels for Pistols” program which provided digital cameras in exchange for firearms turned over to police by members of the public.

- 12. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will support Crime Stoppers to double the rewards for tips that get guns off the streets and support additional programs that encourage individuals to turn firearms over to the police.**

Greater support from the Federal Government

To effectively address violent crime, we require the cooperation of the federal government. In particular, Ontario is requesting additional support from the federal government for our guns and gangs initiatives.

13. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will request that the federal government:

- i. Add federal prosecutors to our guns and gangs taskforce.**
- ii. Add federal prosecutors to our anti-gun-smuggling border initiative.**
- iii. Implement regulations to improve the markings on imported firearms to help police better trace illegal guns.**

Support for youth to get back on track

The central goal of our province's youth justice system is to hold youth accountable for their actions and reduce the likelihood that they will re-offend. And our approach is working. Over the last decade, youth violent crime is down 17 per cent. The recidivism rate – or the rate at which young offenders re-offend – is also going down consistently. Part of ensuring that recidivism continues to go down is providing young offenders with reintegration support so that they do not re-offend but instead make positive choices that put them back on track. That includes formal transition protocols for young offenders exiting the youth justice system, better access to youth justice facilities for agencies doing reintegration work, and a greater role for probation officers in reintegration planning.

14. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will review and strengthen our reintegration supports to ensure that young offenders can transition smoothly out of the youth justice system.

Moving Forward

Better Governance, Coordination and a Sustained Commitment

Over the course of the 30-day process to create this Youth Action Plan, we heard loud and clear about the need for a balanced approach to confronting youth violence. To be effective, we need to balance supports for law enforcement with community supports, individual supports and youth opportunity. Similarly, we also need to balance immediate action with a long-term commitment.

Many of these long-term ideas focus on the need for better alignment and coordination, not just at the level of the provincial government, but also between governments, private funders, school boards, and the youth-serving sector. We heard the need for programming at all levels to be aligned with a common set of outcomes and goals for youth. We heard the need for a permanent voice for youth in the decisions that affect their lives. We heard the need for a formal body that would ensure that the government continues to make progress on the Roots of Youth Violence report. And we heard the need for greater accountability and measurement of outcomes at all levels.

Development of an Evidence-Based, Outcomes-Focused Youth Strategy

In June 2012, the province released [Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development](#) that describes the stages of development that a young person goes through and lays out age-appropriate interventions so that they stay on track (read it at www.ontario.ca/SteppingStones). This document – called for in the Roots of Youth Violence report – is the first step toward the creation of an Ontario Youth Strategy that includes a common set of measurable outcomes around which government and partners in the youth-serving sector can align programs.

The Youth Strategy will also include the development of an evidenced-based evaluation framework and toolkit to ensure that programs are achieving intended results. To this end, the government will review and reconfigure the 70 programs for youth across 14 ministries to ensure they are working together and having maximum impact. As part of this strategy, we will also undertake a pilot collaborative program review with our community partners in Toronto.

- 15. Begin work with our partners and youth on a province-wide long-term Youth Strategy that aligns programs and supports for young people around a common set of outcomes. The Strategy will also include evidenced-based decision-making and outcome-focused evaluation to ensure that we are funding the right initiatives and achieving intended results. The strategy will focus on youth opportunities and positive development and will look at additional targeted initiatives for youth who are disconnected and facing multiple barriers to success.**

Supporting greater coordination between partners at the local level

A key focus of the longer-term approach will be to establish local planning tables to coordinate efforts across different levels of governments and with community partners. This will help align our efforts and ensure that the individual is placed at the centre of our youth serving system.

- 16. As recommended by the roots of youth violence report, the Youth Strategy will create Local Youth Planning Tables to reduce duplication and better co-ordinate community programs for young people across the province. The tables will be comprised of representatives from various levels of government, school boards, police, the private sector, employers, youth-serving agencies and young people. We propose to begin with a planning table in Toronto and will continue to roll them out across Ontario. This approach will support place-based solutions as recommended in the Roots of Youth Violence report.**

A commitment to an ongoing dialogue with communities and youth

Something that quickly became clear over the 30-day process is that no one is more knowledgeable about what programs work than youth and community members themselves. Ongoing youth and community engagement must be an important goal of any action plan.

- 17. Establish a permanent Action Committee on Youth Opportunities reporting to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. This committee will be made up of individuals from a variety of communities, cultures and backgrounds, including front-line workers, representatives from youth-led organizations and youth. They will provide advice to government on how to better target existing programs and on any new directions that could be pursued by the ministry and the government.**

Monitoring and Evaluation

To properly demonstrate progress and ensure the effectiveness of our programs, we must measure results in a meaningful way. Evaluating the results of our collective investments is critical to ensuring that we are delivering value for money, achieving intended outcomes, avoiding duplication of efforts, and ensuring that partners are not working at cross-purposes. But we know that some smaller youth-serving agencies lack the capacity to spend scarce dollars or time on rigorous evaluation.

- 18. As part of our Youth Action Plan, we will work with partners to develop tools to support the measurement and evaluation of community programs.**

Stronger coordination and governance

To ensure that our efforts are coordinated across ministries and include the voice of the community, the Roots of Youth Violence report recommended a strong governance structure to help oversee progress.

- 19. As part of the Youth Action Plan, the Roots of Youth Violence will become a permanent mandate of the Poverty Reduction Strategy cabinet-level committee. The committee will be renamed “Poverty Reduction and Roots of Youth Violence” to reflect this expanded focus on social inclusion. Future Poverty Reduction Strategy annual reports will include progress on youth outcomes.**
- 20. Dr. Alvin Curling, former MPP and former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, will be appointed Strategic Advisor to the Minister of Children and Youth Services on Youth Opportunities. Dr. Curling will also be made one of the external members of the Poverty Reduction and Roots of Youth Violence cabinet-level committee.**

Conclusion

Over the course of the past 30 days, we have been inspired by the dedication, capacity and leadership both of this province’s young people and of the organizations that help them succeed.

This Action Plan takes immediate steps to provide young people with hope and opportunity. It also places considerable focus on improving the partnership in the long-term between government and our partners who work with youth every day. Preventing violence and providing opportunity is something that none of us can accomplish alone. With a sustained commitment at the provincial level and strong partners in the community, the not-for-profit and private sector, we can ensure that our communities are safe and our young people can reach their full potential.