



DAVIS PIER

# Halifax Regional Municipality Youth Services Review

August 2023

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# Glossary

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<b>BSCF</b>	Building Safer Communities Fund
<b>CMT</b>	Community Mobilization Teams
<b>Collaborators</b>	This term refers to individuals and organizations that work jointly on a project, program, or activity.
<b>CSEC</b>	Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth
<b>DOJ</b>	Department of Justice
<b>Equity-Deserving Groups</b>	The term “equity-deserving groups” is based on the understanding that all people deserve the right to equitable treatment. It specifically refers to groups of people who deserve these equitable rights, but who have not currently afforded them. <sup>1</sup>
<b>Halifax region</b>	Another term for the geographic area of the Halifax Regional Municipality which is comprised of diverse communities.
<b>HRM</b>	Halifax Regional Municipality
<b>HRP</b>	Halifax Regional Police
<b>LOVE</b>	Leave Out Violence Everywhere
<b>NEPRC</b>	North End Parent Resource Centre
<b>POSSE</b>	Peer Outreach Support Services & Education
<b>TESS</b>	Trafficking and Exploitation Services System
<b>The Den Youth Centre</b>	A safe and inclusive drop-in space for youth located in the Acadia Centre in Lower Sackville
<b>YAP</b>	Youth Advocate Program
<b>Youth Violence</b>	This term refers to two main forms of harm experienced by youth which are gun violence and commercial sexual exploitation.
<b>YWCA Halifax</b>	Young Women’s Christian Association of Halifax

<sup>1</sup> Halifax Regional Municipality. (2022). *Diversity and Inclusion Terminology Guide*.

# Acknowledgements

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Davis Pier and the Halifax Regional Municipality would like to recognize that this project was made possible through funding from Public Safety Canada.



# Executive Summary

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## Project Objectives

In 2023, the Public Safety Office at the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) engaged a consultant to conduct a Youth Services Review. Through this project, the consultant worked collaboratively with a group of HRM staff from the Community Safety and Parks & Recreation Business Units and a member of the African Nova Scotian Support Worker program to conduct an analysis of programs and services available to youth between the ages of 13 and 24<sup>2</sup> who are placed at an increased risk of harm from gang involvement and gun violence in HRM. The objectives of the report included:

1. Identifying a strengths-based evaluation of existing services and supports.
2. Examining which services work well together.
3. Understanding which structures or conditions enable or hinder collaboration.  
and
4. Providing recommendations to help HRM understand the strengths of the youth violence prevention and intervention system, and to address barriers facing youth and youth service providers.

## The Approach

Throughout the research process, there was a focus on practicing the principles of inclusivity, equity, collaboration, and cultural humility. Quality over quantity during the participant interview phase, valuing meaningful engagement and respectful relationships based on trust was prioritized. The feedback received from participants was overwhelmingly positive, reflecting the success of the efforts in fostering an inclusive and collaborative research environment.

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<sup>2</sup> 13 to 24 is the age range defined in the HRM's Youth Services Plan. HRM's Youth Advocate Program serves youth between the ages of 9 and 15.

The team collaborated with a diverse project work group and applied inclusion lenses such as Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) to the methods and materials, including the creation of questionnaires and engagement practices. This involved considering factors such as geography, race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and ethnicity. By considering these intersecting identities and experiences, inclusivity in the approaches and materials was fostered. Examples of ways these values were practiced include facilitating interviews using a semi-structured approach and providing honorariums for time and input. Respecting informed consent, we provided participants with the interview questions in advance and offered them a transcript of their interviews for review and validation. This provided an opportunity for participants to contribute to the accuracy and interpretation of their own experiences.

Project efforts were dedicated to engaging with **27 professionals and practitioners** who work at **15 organizations across the municipality** that support youth who are at an increased risk of harm from gun and gang violence. In short, the learnings gained as part of this review would not have been possible without the contributions and wisdom that they shared with the team during the project.

## What Was Learned

As part of the Current State review, materials on **61 programs** that serve youth across the Halifax region were reviewed to better understand the landscape of youth service provision and to identify systemic trends, strengths, and gaps. These programs and services are operated by a variety of organizations including the Halifax Regional Municipality, schools, and non-profit organizations and possess a variety of strengths and assets that support youth who are experiencing harm from gun violence. We identified several promising practices and strengths within the existing system that support youth violence prevention, including:

- Preventative programs that promote youth resilience through self-esteem and skill-building (e.g., *P.O.S.S.E and Hope Blooms*);
- Community outreach services that address the need for social support (e.g., *Phoenix House*);
- Work being done to support equity deserving youth with complex needs (e.g., *John Howard Society*);
- Wrap around services for specific community groups (e.g., *YWCA and Youth Advocate Program*);
- Programs for youth who are at an increased risk of harm from gun and gang violence are often embedded in programs that serve youth more widely (*broad reach*);



- Coordination and collaboration/partnerships between supports in the ecosystem (e.g., TESS & The Den Multi-Service Youth Centre service provider table);
- Many dedicated municipally owned and operated spaces for youth within municipal recreation centres that provide programming and drop-in time (e.g., The Den and youth rooms);
- Diverse community organizations that work with youth who experience harm from gun and gang violence;
- Community-led crisis response initiatives (e.g., CMTs).

**Through a combination of methods, six thematic priorities emerged to improve the youth violence prevention system in the Halifax Regional Municipality.**

1. Promote Youth Violence Prevention Program Strengths
2. Address the Effects of Systemic Oppression
3. Improve Capacity, Collaboration and Coordination of the Youth Violence System
4. Enhance Relationships between HRM and Community Organizations
5. Improve Data Collection and Information Sharing Practices
6. Adapt to a Changing Landscape in HRM

Within each of the six thematic priorities, detailed recommendations are identified. While it is believed everyone has a role to play in preventing youth from experiencing violence, most of the recommendations focus on what HRM can do to act as a leader within its own service provision and policy making, but also highlight areas where HRM can play a larger role as an advocate, convener, or collaborator with other groups and levels of government.

**Highlights of the findings and recommendations include:**

- Service providers (including HRM) are providing valuable services that are positively impacting the lives of youth. Based on the research and interviews, **several promising practices were identified that should be considered when expanding, evaluating, or developing youth violence prevention programming.**
- Service providers indicate that they believe the prevalence of harm from youth violence is increasing in HRM, particularly for marginalized youth. **HRM has a key role to play in helping service providers better understanding the prevalence of violence impacting youth and their families and the intersecting factors contributing to violence.**
- HRM lacks a unified approach and clear vision for youth violence prevention/intervention across its business units. As HRM continues to provide services to youth to reduce and prevent violence as well as expand its reach to



support more external organizations it should clearly define its desired direction and role in the ecosystem of youth violence prevention and what objectives it hopes to achieve. **It is recommended that HRM develop a Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy to establish its vision and approach.**

- The youth violence prevention system requires changes to improve coordination and collaboration within it. There is little formal, consistent collaboration or strategic planning occurring within the youth violence prevention system in HRM. **There is opportunity to bring together service providers, funders, policy makers and researchers to improve the system and better meet the needs of youth in inclusive and equity driven ways.**

## Next Steps

It is recommended that HRM staff review this report and begin to act, where appropriate, on the priorities that fall under their mandate and role as a collaborator, convener, service provider and policy maker within the community safety and youth violence prevention system. Aligned with the original intent of the municipality's request for proposals, it is suggested that HRM staff consider the findings and recommendations of this report in the development, enhancement or refinement of initiatives funded through the *Building Safer Communities Fund* grant from Public Safety Canada as they are intended to leverage local solutions to prevent and reduce harm from gun and gang violence in the Halifax region. Specifically, it is believed that learnings from this review can add value to the Municipality's collective impact approach to gun violence funded through Public Safety Canada and in the advancement of the strategic action in HRM's [Public Safety Strategy \(2023-2026\)](#) which seeks to address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement.

Based on the analysis of the evidence gathered through this review, it is believed the most impactful recommendation that HRM can adopt moving forward is to develop and adequately resource a **Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy** which is strengths-based, guided by the values of equity and inclusion, and seeks to address the effects of systemic oppression. This Strategy will help HRM play a leadership role in a coordinated and evidence-informed approach to youth violence prevention across all municipal activities, policies, and programs and should integrate (where appropriate) the findings, recommendations, and outcomes explored in this report.

It is also recommended that HRM mobilize the knowledge and evidence gained during this project by sharing the results of the report in accessible and inclusive ways with youth service provider participants who contributed their time to the project, as well as organizations and institutions that have a role to play in youth violence prevention like government funders and policy makers including the Halifax Regional Centre for Education, IWK Mental Health & Addictions Program, Public Safety Canada, and the

Nova Scotia Departments of Justice and Community Services.

Finally, it is recommended that HRM, government partners, youth service providers and professionals supporting youth at risk of harm from gun and gang violence use the evidence and information available throughout the report such as the “The Youth Services System Map” (page 21) to help inform their practices, policies, and decisions. Readers are invited to use this as a “go-to” evidence-informed resource that will contribute to a culture shift that builds on and promotes the strengths and assets of the youth violence prevention system.

# Introduction

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The overarching goal of the Youth Services Review is to help inform HRM's understanding of the current landscape of prevention and intervention activities to reduce gun and gang violence and CSEC amongst youth placed at increased risk of harm. The findings and recommendations outlined in this final report can help HRM:

- 1. identify how specific programs and services for youth in HRM fit within the larger systems of violence prevention and intervention for youth, and**
- 2. identify opportunities to improve existing services for youth who are at risk of harm related to gun and gang violence.**

The Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) Public Safety Office worked with a consultant to conduct a Youth Services Review in early 2023. The review analysed programs and/or services available to youth between the ages of 13 and 24<sup>3</sup> who are at an increased risk of gang involvement and gun violence in HRM. This work recognizes the work that has been completed in the youth-serving sector by the Trafficking and Exploitation Services System (TESS), advocates, and other organizations, to understand and address the harm from commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC) in HRM. It seeks to fill a gap identified by TESS<sup>4</sup> related to the extent to which commercial sexual exploitation impacts children and youth and provided an opportunity to explore possible links between CSEC and gun related violence and their impact on youth. As a result, there is a review included on CSEC literature with a focus on programs and services offered to youth at risk of harm due to commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) in HRM.

The recommendations at the end of this consultant report aim to inform HRM's next steps for enhancing services for youth who experience harm from violence, reduce barriers to accessing municipal programs and services, and improve coordination and

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<sup>3</sup> 13 to 24 is the age range defined in the HRM's Youth Services Plan. HRM's Youth Advocate Program serves youth between the ages of 9 and 15.

<sup>4</sup> Based on evidence from the TESS *White Paper #2* and the *Hearing Us Reports*, we understand that there is not enough research or data to help upstream efforts and policy and planning strategic responses to commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. We also understand that police-reported data on human trafficking charges (Trafficking in Persons aka TiP) only covers some of the extent to which children and youth are being impacted by CSEC and that there is a need more for data to inform policy and planning in the areas of intervention and prevention.

collaboration across the community safety and violence prevention system. Through the Building Safer Communities Fund project, HRM is positioned to leverage insights from this report to mobilize stakeholders contributing to youth violence prevention through:

- Enhanced services to youth and their families who experience harm from gun violence. Services include mobile youth counselling, healing opportunities following a critical incident of gun violence, and youth outreach services; and
- A collective impact approach to gun violence prevention which will build capacity in the community safety system by creating opportunities for diverse community-based organizations to collaborate and coordinate their efforts while sharing information, developing measurement frameworks, and gaining access to training and professional development for their staff.

# The Approach

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The approach to this project was based on a mixed-methods research design<sup>5</sup> and guided by the principles of inclusion, equity, collaboration, and cultural humility. This approach was chosen to gain a deeper understanding of the strengths and assets that currently exist within the community safety and violence prevention system and identify opportunities for HRM to make improvements to programs for youth who experience harm from gun and gang violence.

The research design included common and emergent approaches adapted based on the opportunities and constraints that arose during the process. These methods were identified by trial and error through conversations with the project work group and participants.<sup>6</sup>

The questions that guided the inquiry included:

1. What strengths (*e.g., services and relationships*) exist in HRM to support youth who are at an increased risk of harm from gun and gang violence?
2. Which models or promising practices can we learn from, both locally and nationally?
3. Which structures or conditions enable collaboration and coordination in the youth violence prevention and intervention system and what barriers exist to collaboration?
4. What approaches can the municipality use to:
  - a. improve their current services and availability of supports for youth who are at risk of harm from gun and gang violence?
  - b. improve the system that supports young people and their families?

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<sup>5</sup> This methodology is best described as a flexible research approach that focuses on mixing methods to gather diverse perspectives and combine the strengths of methods that gather qualitative and quantitative data.<sup>5</sup> This approach can facilitate a deeper understanding of a complex issue, such as violence and harm experienced by youth, and can strengthen a study's conclusions.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> For example, after the project initiation phase, HRM staff added a research question around the link between commercial sexual exploitation and gun and gang violence following conversations with community-based organizations which suggested that there was a lack of information on this topic.

- c. support coordination and collaboration between service providers?
- 5. What are key contributors or factors that lead youth to involvement in gun and gang violence and commercial sexual exploitation?
- 6. What is the connection between harm from gun and gang violence and commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth (CSEC)?

To answer these questions, the following methods were utilized:

1. A **jurisdictional scan and review of primary and secondary sources.**<sup>7</sup> This research focused on gun and gang violence prevention and intervention programs throughout Canada as well as risk factors that may put youth at additional risk of harm from violence (qualitative and quantitative).
2. A **current state analysis of programs and services** available in the Halifax Regional Municipality (quantitative and qualitative).
3. **Identification and analysis of statistical and administrative data** sources related to the research questions (quantitative). For a detailed list of data sources and limitations please see [Appendix A](#). Examples include Census data, Youth Advocate Program evaluation results, youth resident feedback, and administrative data from other HRM youth services (qualitative and quantitative).
4. **Semi-structured participant interviews** (qualitative).
5. **Content mapping of programs, services, and relationships between organizations** (qualitative).

The design was informed by the Request for Proposals (RFP) process, the jurisdictional scan, literature review (see [Appendix B](#) for all literature reviewed), and conversations with the working group. The working group was comprised the Davis Pier project team, the Social Policy Strategist from the HRM Public Safety Office, the Youth Section Community Developer for HRM Parks and Recreation, an HRM Community Outreach Coordinator, and an African Nova Scotian Student Support Worker. The working group provided insights to ensure that the approach appropriately reflected what was in-scope of the RFP and aligned with relationships and assets in community. The group met over the duration of the project (January - April 2023) to provide feedback on project approaches, advise on service providers to interview, and support making connections wherever possible.

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of primary sources examined during this project include participant interview notes, census profile data, and crime statistics. Examples of secondary sources which are evaluation reports, reports to Halifax Regional Council, and white papers, among others.

Design research methods were used that were inclusive and eliminated barriers to participation whenever possible. Qualitative methods were prioritized to support engagement, which was inclusive, equitable and collaborative and invested in building relationships that were respectful and based on trust. There was a focus on inclusion over volume during the participant interview phase and positive feedback was received from participants.

Examples of the practices included:

- Providing compensation to participants through honorariums.
- Reviewing methods and materials (e.g., questionnaires) with a GBA+ lens, including considering factors such as geography, race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and ethnicity.
- Engaging HRM's African Nova Scotia Affairs Integration Office team and Indigenous Services Advisor for advice on culturally proficient ways of communicating and engaging with participants.
- Facilitating interviews at a location of the participant's choice.
- Offering participants with lived experiences of violence access to active listeners and follow-up counselling supports.
- Reviewing and validating analysis with working group members; and
- Seeking informed consent by sharing questions in advance and providing a transcript of the interviews with participants for review and validation.



# Limitations & Learnings

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The project work group saw an opportunity to expand the scope of the RFP to explore the link between harm from gun and gang violence and commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth (CSEC). The initial approach involved reviewing publicly available information and secondary research such as whitepapers created by the Trafficking and Exploitation Services System in collaboration with the YWCA; East Preston Daycare; 902 ManUp; and The Association of Black Social Workers. In addition, the *Hearing Them Report: African Nova Scotian and Black Experiences of Sex Work, Childhood and Youth Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Human Trafficking in Nova Scotia* provided important information around CSEC for the project team.

Although the team wanted to engage with front-line service providers who work to intervene and prevent commercial CSEC, we were unable to connect with multiple service provider staff for qualitative key informant interviews on CSEC. The absence of additional qualitative evidence limited capacity to fully comment on the intersection of CSEC and harm from gun and gang violence within this review.

It is also recognized that the report lacks input from diverse Indigenous voices. Efforts were made to include Indigenous voices through key informant interviews however, the team was unable to connect with contacts to ask research questions.

To address these gaps, the team has identified an opportunity for HRM to continue to gather insights and build relationships with community-based organizations that work to prevent harm from CSEC, with Indigenous elders who promote community safety, and other community partners to better understand their unique strengths and youth violence prevention needs.

Despite these limitations, the mixed methodologies utilized allowed the team to review existing research and sources of information, develop relationships with community-based organizations leading to meaningful conversations and insights around the research questions. The participant interviews allowed us to gain a strong understanding of current practices being used by many individuals that work directly with youth. The information and evidence that was collected can assist HRM understand how the violence prevention and intervention system that supports youth is currently working in the Halifax region.

# Current State Analysis

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The current state analysis of **61 programs** helped to develop a foundational understanding of the structures, mandate, benefits, and approaches currently being applied by a diverse range of programs and services available to youth who are at an increased risk of harm from violence in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Each program was reviewed in detail, categorized using the spectrum of action and intervention framework operationalized in HRM's 2018-2022 Public Safety Report and then further analysed to understand which components emerged as assets or strengths within the municipality's community safety and violence prevention system. Specifically, initial hypotheses around the strengths of programs that were analyzed were further explored and validated during the engagement phase of the project during the interviews with participants. Finally, this information was used to inform the research design of the cross-Canada jurisdictional scan.

## Program Highlights

The current state analysis identified several programs that have succeeded in cultivating formal partnerships, collaboration, and internal structures that strive to intervene and prevent youth from experiencing harm from gun violence in the Halifax region. This section provides a selection of program highlights that have emerged from the current state analysis.

- **Youth Advocate Program** connects children, youth and their families to a number of community-based service providers including HRCE, IWK, HRP, RCMP, Department of Justice, Department of Community Services, and more. They also coordinate and work with YWCA and TESS, Stepping Stone, and Girls United to provide educational presentations for youth.
- **Girls United**, a sub-program of HRM's Youth Advocate Program, works with female identified youth at risk of CSEC. The program has partnered with YWCA and TESS, Stepping Stone, Halifax Sexual Health Centre, the Youth Project, Empowerment for Hope and Cyberscan to provide educational presentations.
- **POSSE** works out of The Den in Sackville and operates with a collaborative model, providing referrals to organizations such as SchoolsPlus (West Hants), Cobequid Health Centre, RCMP (Sackville), Stepping Stone, the Elizabeth Fry Society of Mainland Nova Scotia, Adsum, and Phoenix Youth Services. POSSE

also brings in community organizations to conduct training with Youth Peer Outreach staff.

- **LOVE** coordinates with the North End Parent Resource Centre to provide continued support to youth as they age.
- **School Resource / Liaison Officers** work with schools and community organizations that support youth including the Youth Advocate Program, CyberScan, libraries, social workers, DCS youth outreach workers, and IWK Children’s Intensive Services.
- **John Howard Society of Nova Scotia (JHSNS)** offers a Community Navigation program in which youth are connected to a variety of supports to meet their needs.

## Program Level Strengths

Based on the review of current programs, six thematic strengths in the current system of youth services were identified. They are youth resilience, support for marginalized youth, outreach services, wraparound services, crisis response, and existing partnerships.

Youth Resilience	Support Marginalized Youth	Outreach Services	Wraparound Services	Crisis Response	Existing Partnerships
Preventative programs promote youth resilience through self-esteem and skill-building	Work is being done to support equity deserving youth with complex needs	Community outreach services are addressing the need for social support	Wraparound services are available for specific community groups	Community led crisis response teams are in place, but not youth specific	Programs for youth at an increased risk of harm from gun and gang violence are often embedded in programs that serve youth more widely

### Strength Spotlight: Wraparound Services

The whole-family approach acknowledges that the needs of youth are often connected to the need for increased overall family support. Organizations that provide wraparound and holistic social programming often bridge the gap for youth and families who have multiple needs related to things like food and housing as well as programming support.

Many programs in the current violence prevention and intervention system take a whole-family approach, including:

- [The Youth Advocate Program](#)<sup>8</sup>
- [North End Parent Resource Centre](#)
- [Chebucto Connections](#)
- [SchoolsPlus](#)
- [Laing House](#)

The **Youth Advocate Program** builds rapport and trust with families to better understand their support needs and goals. They provide various resources for youth including connection to recreational activities for the entire family. Counselling is offered on a limited basis to help with short term mental health challenges. For longer term counselling, Youth Advocate Workers refer youth to other appropriate community organizations.

The **North End Parent Resource Centre** provides wraparound family support through food security programs, parenting programs, social events, and support for families with infants. The Centre also provides families with support in working with the Department of Community Services and Department of Municipal Affairs and Housing and also provides financial management assistance in some situations (e.g., receiving income assistance cheques and paying rent and power bills for families).

**Chebucto Connections** takes a whole-family approach by providing integrated community supports, including financial support through urgent funds that students and families can apply for to pay for the cost of food and transportation. It also offers a program called 'The Hub' which connects community members - youth, newcomers, and others - to community programs, resources, and services.

**SchoolsPlus** is community-based and provides a wide range of supports to youth and families related to social-emotional learning, food security, housing support, and navigating system services and resources.

**Laing House** offers non-clinical, people-centered mental health programs for youth ages 19-29 through low-cost and low-barrier social and peer support. They offer programs centred on four main priorities: healthy living, community navigation, employment and education and peer mentorship.

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<sup>8</sup> Subsequent interviews indicated that the wraparound services provided through the YAP are available but could be strengthened to provide more consistent and in-depth wrap around supports. For example, all families referred to the YAP have one year of free access to HRM recreation programs

through the Access Pass. However, services such as counselling are limited to a small number of sessions. The support offered to families is primarily navigation support for where to access already existing services.

## Systems Level Strengths

The following were identified as strengths within the youth violence prevention system in HRM:

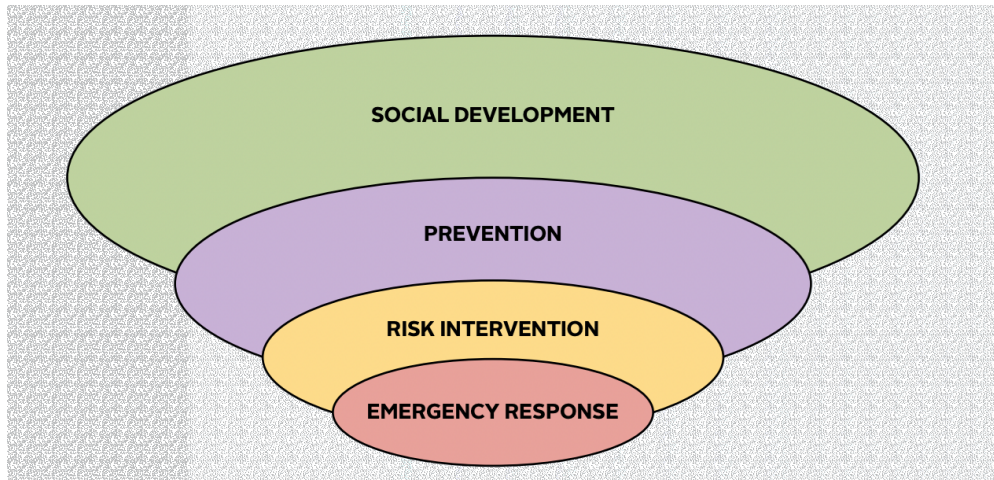
- **Coordination and collaboration/partnerships** between some supports in the ecosystem exist (e.g., TESS & municipal Multi-Service Youth Centres & spaces, service provider tables).
- There are many dedicated municipally owned and operated spaces for youth such as Multi-Service Youth Centres (e.g., The Den Youth Centre, Power House Youth Centre, Spryfield Youth Centre) and youth rooms within municipal recreation centres that provide programming and drop-in time.
- The **diversity** of community organizations that work with youth who experience harm from gun and gang violence.
- Presence of **community-led crisis response initiatives** (e.g., Community Mobilization Teams).

A spectrum of action and intervention framework operationalized in HRM's 2018-2022 Public Safety Report was utilized to categorize programs and services offered to at-risk youth in HRM. The framework includes four levels of action which an organization, program, or service aligns with to reduce criminal activity, promote resilience, and strengthen communities.<sup>9</sup> The framework aims to have an upstream, mindfully integrated approach that is armed to reduce risk factors associated with community crime and incorporates prevention methods to promote public safety.<sup>10</sup> The framework levels of action are as follows:

- **Social Development:** Intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors in the general population.
- **Prevention:** Identifying at-risk individuals or communities and intervening to reduce risk factors and/or enhance protective factors.
- **Risk Intervention:** Responding to acutely elevated risk situations to mitigate harm and decrease the likelihood of (re)victimization.
- **Emergency Response:** Immediate response to urgent incidents to stop harms, minimize victimization, and hold individuals responsible.

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<sup>9</sup> Halifax Regional Municipality (2018). [Public Safety Strategy 2018-2022: Making Halifax a safe place to live, work, and play.](#)



The following service map relies on information from web-based searches of available programs, interview participants, and the project working group. The programs and services listed on the map are not an exhaustive list and may not encompass all of those offered to youth at-risk of gun and gang violence and commercial sexual exploitation in HRM. The programs and services are categorized to align with the HRM Public Safety Office spectrum of action and intervention framework. Programs and services in this map are not limited to the HRM action and intervention categories and are further categorized by youth-oriented services as well as whether they are community-based, municipal, provincial, or Halifax Regional Police/RCMP initiatives.

# HRM Youth Services Ecosystem Map

This map visualizes the existing organizations and services according to the themes identified in the Public Safety Strategy, providing an overview of programs addressing youth violence and commercial sexual exploitation in HRM.

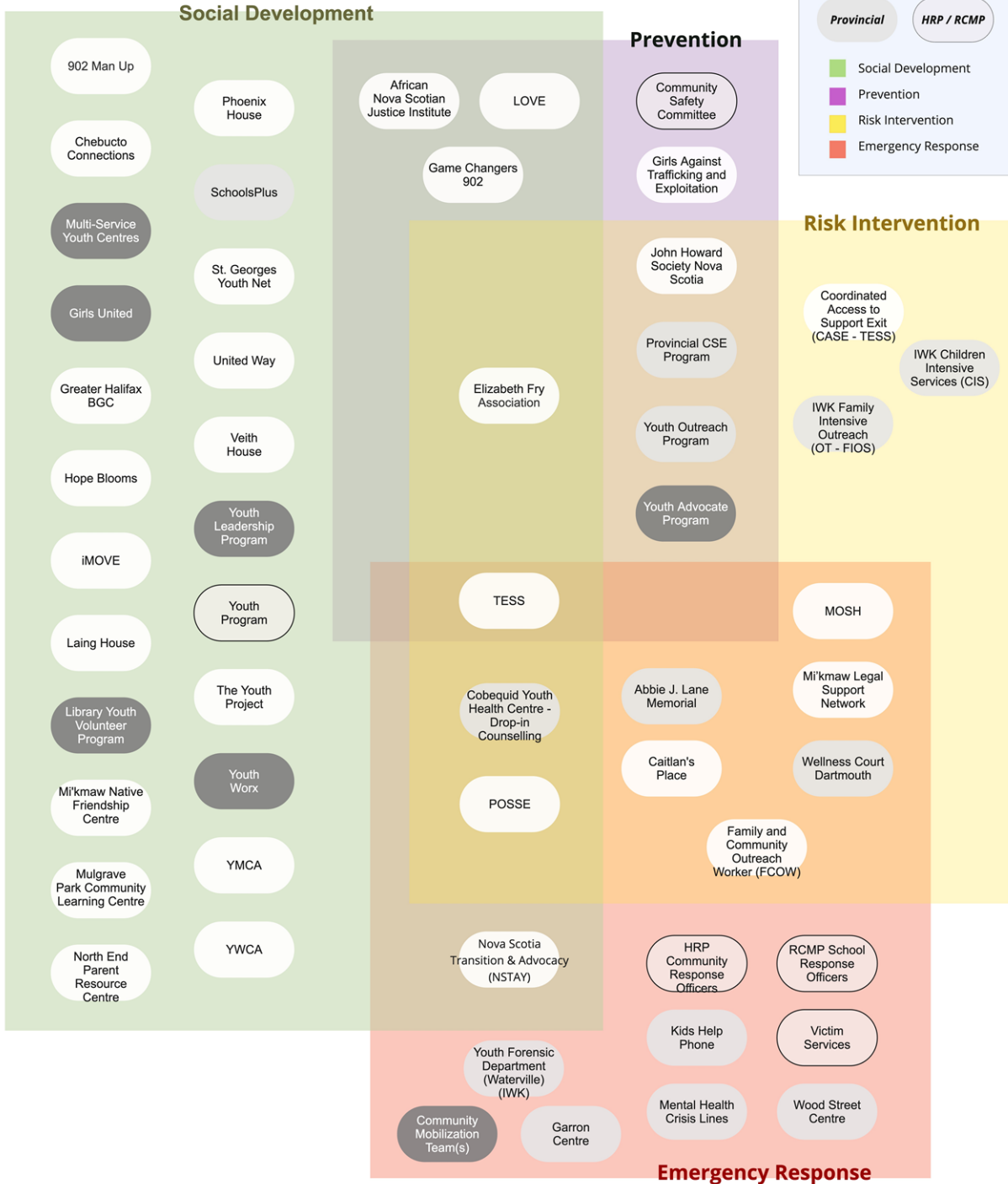
**LEGEND**

*Programs / Services*

Community Led      Municipal

Provincial      HRP / RCMP

■ Social Development  
■ Prevention  
■ Risk Intervention  
■ Emergency Response



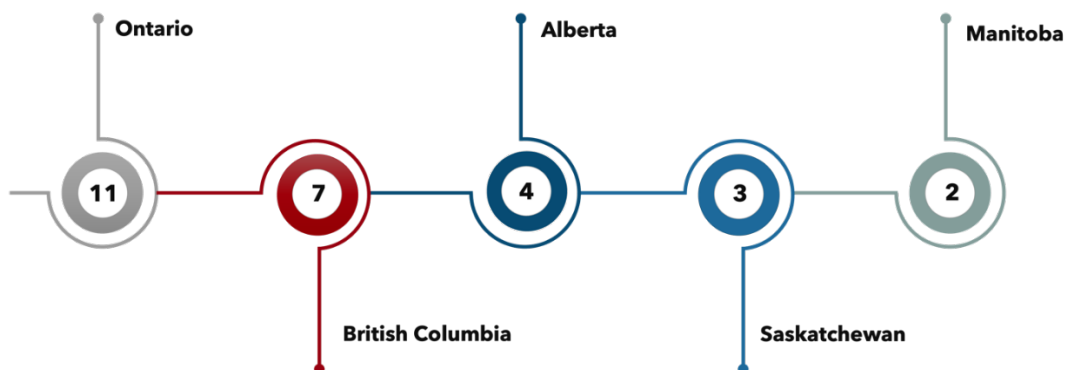


# Jurisdictional Scan

The jurisdictional scan reviewed coordinated youth access programs and evidence-driven programs for youth at-risk of gun and gang involvement in Canadian jurisdictions. The goal of the jurisdictional scan was to inform the understanding of best practice programs for youth at-risk of experiencing harm from involvement in gun and gang violence.

Research conducted through select online sources identified coordinated youth access programs and evidence-driven programs that support violence prevention and intervention.

A total of **27 programs** were reviewed in the jurisdictional scan from multiple Canadian jurisdictions including Ontario, British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.



Number of programs reviewed by province.

The working group also identified programs that were considered promising practices to be included in the jurisdictional scan and literature review. The working group then reviewed and analyzed key categories of information (e.g., ages served, geography, program approaches and models) from these programs. This research informed the design of the participant interviews.

Almost all programs funded by Public Safety Canada had undergone evaluations focused on outcomes related to risk and protective factors. Other programs included research studies to support program effectiveness. Many of the research studies used mixed methods designs involving pre/post intervention measures with youth, their caregivers, and other groups who often interact with youth. Through the scan, several programs were identified that have had positive impacts on youth resilience and have led to reductions of risk for gang

involvement and reduced involvement in criminal behaviours. At a high level, programs included in the review have had positive impact on the following areas, in order of most cited impacts:

Reductions in:	Increased or improved:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criminal behaviours and criminal justice involvement</li> <li>• Gang involvement and positive attitudes towards gangs</li> <li>• Substance use</li> <li>• Association with negative peers</li> <li>• Police interactions or negative police contacts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employment and attitudes towards employment</li> <li>• Resilience levels</li> <li>• Engagement in community</li> <li>• Prosocial behaviours and attitudes</li> <li>• School attendance and academic performance</li> <li>• Understanding of trauma</li> <li>• Anger/frustration control</li> <li>• Relationships with adults</li> </ul>

## Promising Practices Options

A selection of best practice programs from other Canadian jurisdictions are presented as options for HRM to consider as they develop strategies to improve the coordination and collaboration of the community safety and violence prevention systems that support youth in HRM. The programs were selected based on subjective criteria related to program focus on **coordinated access, prevention, collaboration with community, resilience, and increasing protective factors**.

Best practice programs from other Canadian jurisdictions (presented below in the right-hand column) can serve as options for the Halifax Regional Municipality and service providers to consider when developing or enhancing programs for youth who experience harm from gun and gang violence. Additionally, the scan identified HRM's Youth Advocate Program as a leading and innovative youth violence prevention service across Canada. In fact, aspects of the program have been adapted by Reach Edmonton's WrapED program, and Youth at Risk Development Hamilton (YARD) in Hamilton, Ontario.



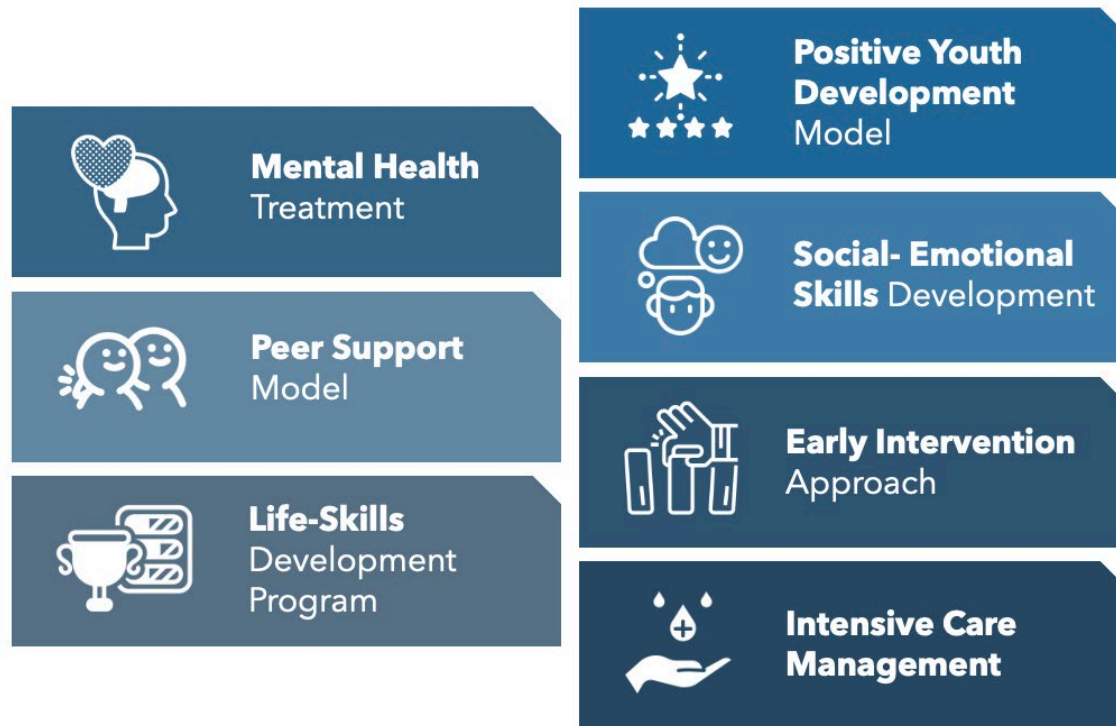
-  Nova Scotia
-  Saskatchewan
-  Ontario
-  Alberta
-  Manitoba
-  British Columbia

- **Community Healing Project Toronto**
- **WrapED**
- **In it Together Anti-Gang Program**
- **Surrey Anti-Gang Family Empowerment Program**
- **Thunder Bay UTIRN**
- **Crime Reduction and Education Division**
- **Wraparound Surrey**
- **Abbotsford Youth Crime Prevention Program**
- **Youth at Risk Development Hamilton**
- **Prevention Intervention Toronto**
- **Project Youth Options for Success**
- **The Regina Intersectoral Partnership**
- **Youth Alliance Against Violence**
- **Youth Leading in a Good Way**

# Program Approaches and Models

Most programs were focused on **both prevention and intervention (40%)** or **prevention (37%)**. A smaller number of programs focused primarily on intervention (18%). Many programs (41%) followed the **Wraparound approach**<sup>11</sup> to providing support to youth in combination with other approaches.

Most programs included a combination of approaches including:



Several programs included in the review, such as the Youth Advocate Program in HRM, [WrapED](#) in Edmonton, Alberta, and the [Surrey Wraparound Program](#) in British Columbia, have had **positive impacts on youth resilience** and have led to a **reduction of risk for gang involvement** and **reduced involvement in criminal behaviors**.

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<sup>11</sup> [Public Safety Canada](#) defines “wraparound” as an “intensive, individualized care management program designed for youth with serious or complex emotional and/or behavioural problems. It is designed to prevent fragmentation and ‘gaps’ in the services often encountered by youth and their families. The wraparound approach seeks to provide more extensive and proactive contact between the youth and their family, and other involved parties (e.g., court counsellor, social worker, etc.). Wraparound is focused on providing a continuum of individualized services and support networks with individualized case management coordination”.

# Project Spotlight



**WrapED** is a collaborative gang intervention and prevention program for youth between the ages of 12 and 17 engaged in or at high-risk of becoming involved in gangs.

The program is offered by [REACH Edmonton Council for Safe Communities](#) where the goal is to increase community safety by collaborating with community partners. The program offered strengths-based support to youth through engagement with cultural brokers, wraparound facilitators, and youth workers.

**The Surrey Wraparound Program** (WRAP) is a partnership between the Surrey School District, RCMP, and the City of Surrey. The program's objective is to positively attach youth to their school, community, and home by building trusting and positive relationships. Parents, caregivers, and/or guardians are included in goal setting while assisting the program's objective of building positive lifestyles and self-worth for youth.

The following are some of the program highlights:<sup>1</sup>

- WRAP can collaborate with school staff, the parent, and youth in goal setting and outlining strategic interventions that assist the youth to be successful in the school environment.
- WRAP has seven school district staff who work collaboratively with youth and family.
- WRAP has two dedicated RCMP members who can build a positive and trusting relationship with youth.
- WRAP can provide athletic and recreational opportunities through the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Surrey, as well as facilitate artistic, creative, and other opportunities in relation to a youth's interests and strengths.
- WRAP can help youth utilize their strengths in a positive manner through awareness in a mentoring relationship.
- WRAP collaborates with family in a manner that is supportive and non-judgmental.
- WRAP can provide and supervise work experiences for youth that are helpful to the community while building self-worth.

# HRM Services that Support Youth

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The Halifax Regional Municipality delivers several youth programs<sup>12</sup> through the Parks and Recreation Business Unit. The following is a brief description of two key programs which emerged as strengths in the current state analysis.

## Youth Advocate Program (YAP)

The Youth Advocate Program is a crime prevention program that works with youth aged 9-15 engaging in or at high risk of engaging in criminal activity by strengthening connections and reducing barriers to creating safer communities. This program takes a youth and family-centered and strengths-based approach best described as “family voice, family choice.” Staff use a trauma-informed lens and Wraparound principles through the practices of crisis intervention, outreach, education, and resource navigation.

The Youth Advocate Program began in 2007 when HRM was awarded funding from the National Crime Prevention Centre for a four-year pilot in six communities. The original communities selected for the pilot were based on crime statistics provided by Halifax Regional Police. Based on evaluation results,<sup>13</sup> the program was effective in increasing pro-social/life skills competencies and resiliency and in decreasing isolation and negative rushes in the participants. These are factors directly related to the likelihood of a youth committing a crime, so the program’s services became a core offering of the municipality after the pilot’s end in 2011. The program is located within the Youth Section of Parks and Recreation due to the expertise required in recreation, leisure education, youth engagement, and community development.

YAP operates in the following communities:

- Spryfield
- Sackville
- North End Halifax

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<sup>12</sup> For a full list of HRM’s youth services, programs and spaces please see: <https://www.halifax.ca/parks-recreation/youth>.

<sup>13</sup> Ungar, M., & Liebenberg, L. (2011). Final Report: Youth Advocate Program (YAP) Evaluation. Resilience Research Centre.

- Dartmouth North
- East Dartmouth
- Cole Harbour
- Woodside/Gaston Rd
- Preston Township
- Bayers Westwood/Clayton Park/Fairview

*The Youth Advocate Program has been huge for our clients!*

*– Interview participant*

**To be eligible for the program, youth must meet the following criteria:**

1. Be between the ages of 9 and 15 at the time of referral.
2. Be engaging in criminal activity or presenting criminal behaviours. This could mean the youth is facing current charges, going through a restorative justice process, or engaged in behaviours that could be criminally charged but have not been for whatever reason.
3. Be exposed to crime through peers, family, or community.
4. Be experiencing hardship or presenting criminal behaviours in two out of the three life domains of home, school, and community.
5. Reside in one of the Youth Advocate Program communities.

## Municipal Youth Spaces

HRM owns and operates many spaces across the city that serve youth in their design and operations. There are two types of youth spaces: youth centres and youth rooms. Youth Centres are spaces for youth to hang out with friends while having access to other supports and services. Youth Rooms are located within Municipal Recreation Centres and offer programming and drop-in time for youth to participate in.

The municipality provides permanent funding for the coordination of **Multi-Service Youth Centres**. The first centre to be implemented is called “The Den” by youth. The Den is a collaborative, multi-agency initiative for youth ages 13-18 from the Bedford and Sackville communities. Parks and Recreation and community-based organizations work together to achieve common goals such as:



- Removal of barriers to access around mental and physical health.
- Provision and implementation of various drop-in programs.
- Creation of youth services that are inclusive for all.
- Design of physical spaces that are open and welcoming to youth.
- Policies and best practices for service delivery of youth programs.
- Use of partnerships to deliver on non-HRM programs and services.

Based on pilot evaluation results, the Multi-Service Youth Centre model was adopted by Regional Council in 2021 and approved for expansion to new locations based on needs and budget availability. Spryfield has been identified as the next location and is slated to open in 2023. The Power House Youth Centre provides youth counselling and outreach supports through the Mobile Youth Support Team funded by Public Safety Canada through the Building Safer Communities fund.

The process for identifying new communities and locations for this model includes reviewing data on levels of deprivation <sup>14</sup> the youth population in different HRM communities, service demand, and existing assets and programs within a given community.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> The Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation is an analytical tool developed by researchers at Statistics Canada. It uses data to evaluate areas based on four dimensions of deprivation and marginalization. The four dimensions are residential instability, economic dependency, ethno-cultural composition, and situational vulnerability. The Index calculates a summary index score based on 17 variables within the four dimensions at the dissemination area census level. The indexed scores represent the level of deprivation and marginalization within the dissemination area and is intended to help policy and planning, research and analysis, and resource allocation.

<sup>15</sup> Bishop, B., MacLeod, H. & Moore, L. (2021). Multi-Service Youth Centre Evaluation. Halifax Regional Council. <https://cdn.halifax.ca/sites/default/files/documents/city-hall/regional-council/210608rc1131.pdf>

# Participant Interviews

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Based on the document review, the team created an engagement strategy leveraging a strengths-based approach that focused on mapping the existing capacity, connections, and work of the youth-serving programs. The team then conducted participant interviews with the identified key groups and individuals to:

- 1) Validate the current state.
- 2) Better understand program structures and conditions, how they work together, and the factors that facilitate success.
- 3) Provide insights into challenges and barriers that exist within systems; and
- 4) Identify opportunities to improve supports and services to youth programs across HRM.

A total of **15 interviews with individuals and organizations serving youth in HRM** took place throughout the duration of the engagement phase of the project. The interviews were attended by a total of **27 participants**.

Below is a list of the organizations that participated and agreed to have their perspectives attributed in this report:

- Boys and Girls Club of Greater Halifax
- Chebucto Connections
- A consultant and speaker who specializes in commercial sexual exploitation
- Game Changers 902
- Halifax Regional Police
- Hope Blooms
- Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) H Division
- John Howard Society of Nova Scotia
- LOVE (Leave Out Violence)
- North End Parent Resource Centre
- Nova Scotia Department of Justice
- Nova Scotia Legal Aid
- POSSE (Peer Outreach Support Services and Education)
- SchoolsPlus (Select Staff)
- Parks & Recreation Staff including members of the Youth Advocate Program & Mobile Youth Support Team

The insights from the participant interviews served as a valuable source of firsthand knowledge and experiences of those serving youth and provided the primary

information to support the findings and recommendations found in the section below.

During the interviews, participants shared their personal stories, perspectives, and observations, shedding light on the complex factors contributing to youth violence. Their accounts captured the nuances and realities of the issue, helping to uncover underlying causes, identify key challenges, and reveal potential solutions. These firsthand narratives brought depth and authenticity to the findings, ensuring that the recommendations are rooted in the real-world experiences of those working directly with youth. Moreover, the participant interviews allowed us to hear from a diverse range of voices in the youth services sector. This approach ensured that the recommendations consider the complexities and nuances of the local context, making them more relevant, impactful, and sustainable.

# Findings & Recommendations

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## Introduction

With the advancement of various initiatives like HRM's Public Safety Strategy (2023-26), the Youth Services Plan (2022-2024), and the Building Safer Communities Fund, HRM is actively engaged in expanding and exploring its involvement in youth-focused violence prevention. As the Municipality continues to develop and define its desired role, it is important to consider the recommendations outlined in this report alongside any new or emerging work from the organization. The report provides several suggestions for HRM's potential contributions, including bolstering support for organizations through leadership in the areas of policy, training, and research, building on the strengths of its programs such as the Youth Advocate Program, and investing in more Multi-Service Youth Centres to support partnerships and collaboration. It is essential to evaluate each recommendation within the broader context of overarching strategies and goals as HRM continues to identify and clarify the role it can and should assume in youth violence prevention.

Both the Youth Services Plan (2022-24) and the Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) are considered throughout the recommendations, suggested outcomes, and milestones to ensure they align where possible and to draw on relevant insights.

The following section is divided into two parts:

- 1) a presentation of findings for the mixed methods approach, analysis, and recommendations for HRM as well as diverse organizations that support youth, and
- 2) a table which summarizes suggested outcomes that HRM and its partners in the youth violence prevention systems can strive towards and possible actions that will help achieve these changes. The tables summarize suggested outcomes and possible actions or milestones can be utilized as input in the development of a Youth Violence Prevention Strategy or in program-based theories of change.

**The findings show that there are six thematic priorities that can help improve the youth violence prevention system in the Halifax Regional Municipality.** These priorities are:

1. Promote Youth Violence Prevention Program Strengths
2. Address the Effects of Systemic Oppression

3. Improve Capacity, Collaboration and Coordination of the Youth Violence System
4. Enhance Relationships between HRM and Community Organizations
5. Improve Data Collection and Information Sharing Practices
6. Adapt to a Changing Landscape in HRM

With these findings in mind, the analysis and recommendations focus largely on what HRM can do response to the thematic issues identified in this project, though some of the recommendations will also refer to other levels of government, service providers, or community organizations. HRM will need to work collaboratively with these organizations to implement or support change. Currently, the municipality has the strongest ability to implement, evaluate, and evolve their own youth programming in pursuit of larger goals and these recommendations. However, more work should be done to determine, clarify, and plan for the direction it will play in the future of youth violence prevention.

During the interviews, numerous areas for improvement were identified. The overarching findings emphasize the critical necessity for sustainable funding, enhanced coordination and collaboration, and improved data collection within the realm of youth violence prevention.

Based on the findings and analysis; it is not proposed that HRM become a primary funder of the youth violence prevention sector or offer short-term funding through grants. Although sustainable funding emerged as a concern within the not-for-profit sector, the suggestion is for HRM to refrain from perpetuating the unsustainable grant funding model. Instead, HRM should conduct further analysis on the role of funding youth violence prevention community-based organizations and concentrate on its own program delivery while simultaneously serving as a convener, strategy developer, policy maker, and collaborator that builds capacity in the field of youth violence prevention.

## Key Priorities & Recommendations for the Halifax Regional Municipality

Youth violence prevention and reducing the harms caused by gun violence and the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth are significant and complex issues facing our communities. They will require a diversity of organizations and individuals leveraging their collective strengths and creativity through an array of actions to influence positive systems change. Given the complexity of this issue, and the evidence that was gathered as part of this review, it is believed the most impactful

and important recommendation that HRM can adopt moving forward is to develop a Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy which integrates and builds upon the thematic priorities identified in this review.

A Strategy would help HRM develop a coordinated approach to youth violence prevention across a variety of municipal activities, policies, and programs. It should be developed using strengths-based and equity approaches and with a strong commitment to dismantling anti-Black racism and healing from the intergenerational trauma caused by colonization. Diverse youth voices and service providers should be engaged in developing the strategy. Furthermore, it should integrate the findings from this report to promote equity and take action to address the disparities that young people face, while addressing the upstream factors that contribute to youth violence. It should also recognize that not all young individuals have equal opportunities and experiences due to various social, economic, and systemic factors including the impacts of structural violence and systemic racism discussed in this report. Finally, it will help the municipality clarify when collaborating with community organizations they support to ensure that there is a cohesive, sustainable, and strategic plan for the role(s) that the municipality should play in the future of youth services, violence prevention and community safety (e.g., policy maker, service provider, convener, advocate, crisis responder, etc.).



# 1.0 Promote Youth Violence Prevention Program Strengths

*We are now being more intentional about skill development, job preparation, and networking capacity. Knowing that an investment in young folks today will pay in dividends in the future. In identifying needs, we use a variety of methods including one-on-one interactions, community and service referrals, identification of trends, surveys, and qualitative and quantitative data collection.*

*-Chebucto Connections Staff*

## Findings

Organizations throughout HRM, including the service provider participants interviewed as part of this report, are reporting positive results through their services. Through the key informant interviews, current state review, and jurisdictional scan, several promising programming elements were identified. The objective of this report is not to identify how many or which combination of elements best support youth, but instead to highlight the program strengths as identified by service providers that work directly with youth.

The following elements were noted through interviews and research:

- **Trusting relationships** - Participants identified that ongoing relationship building is critical for a strong program as it shows youth participants that someone cares about them and reduces social isolation. Examples include acting in a non-judgmental way and utilizing 2SLGBTQIA+ inclusive approaches.
- **Work experience or experiential learning** - This could include skill development, job preparation, networking capacity, and supporting youth to find employment opportunities.



- **Recreation** - Interview participants and research suggest recreation is an important protective factor for youth, offering them a place for mentorship, skill development, social connection, and support, and in some cases conflict resolution and problem-solving skills.
- **Safe, youth friendly spaces** - Interview participants identified that youth friendly designs and spaces are important for youth to feel calm, welcomed, and at ease when participating in programming or receiving support. There are many municipally operated youth friendly spaces located in various communities that can serve as hubs for programming.
- **Education support** - For many youth, educational attainment is difficult if relying on school or home supports alone. Additional educational support such as tutoring or targeted support from service providers that ultimately leads to educational attainment at a high level can reduce risk factors for engagement in criminal activity or other high-risk behaviours.
- **Accessible Programming and Outreach** - Meeting youth in localized community settings can help reduce barriers to access (such as transportation) and support youth who may not typically be able to access services.
- **Mentorship and peer support** - Many interview participants discussed the importance of mentorship and peer support opportunities where youth are connected to individuals who have relatable, lived experience. This allows for connection on a deeper level and for mentors to provide effective support while modeling positive behaviours.

*Example:* The LOVE MAP program allows youth to have a choice in who their peer mentor is. The organization connects youth who need support to 2-3 mentors that have similar lived experience and who have overcome relatable obstacles. LOVE indicated that it is important for youth to understand that they have choice in their relationships and that there are others who have successfully overcome the obstacles that they may be currently facing.

- **Wraparound approach** - Within the community safety ecosystem, HRM offers a key service, the Youth Advocate Program, which utilizes a wraparound approach and integrates several of the strengths mentioned in this section including mentorship. This approach is aligned with best practices in gun and gang violence from across Canada. Several interview participants noted positive relationships with the Youth Advocate Program staff and the program was consistently mentioned as a referral point for youth who are experiencing significant harm from gun and gang violence and/or commercial sexual exploitation.
- **After Hours/Weekend Support** - Most of the programs reviewed as part of this project did not offer after-hours or weekend programming. However, participants indicated that youth often require space and support outside of business hours. Flexible hours that meet youth where they are in their journey

were identified as a promising practice. One organization that did offer weekend supports identified that this program element was crucial to building trusting relationships with youth.

## Analysis & Recommendations

HRM and funders of youth service providers should continue to fund and/or deliver programs that include some of the above program elements. Understanding and building on the strengths of the sector is an important part of building community capacity to better reach and serve youth in HRM. In addition to understanding the strengths of program models, considering, or evaluating their effectiveness, including the degree to which the organization is serving their intended population; the outcomes achieved in relation to the goals and objectives of the organization; and the number of youths being served, is crucial to understanding areas where the youth violence prevention system can be improved or enhanced.

Within its own service provision, HRM should continue to build on the strengths of its existing youth programs and continue to evolve these programs to respond to community need. The municipality should seek to expand programs in alignment with the strengths mentioned here as well as evidence informed promising practices.

Finally, to contribute to a cultural shift that is focused on the strengths and assets within the youth violence prevention and intervention system instead of scarcity and deficits, it is recommended that HRM find opportunities to strengthen and share the stories, work, and programs offered by youth service providers. Recognizing that each strength and organization is unique, one recommendation would be to launch a Mayor's Community Safety Award<sup>16</sup> which includes a youth leadership stream to spotlight the strengths of the system and outstanding work being done by service providers to support youth. Other ideas include creating a public awareness campaign using municipal communications networks and channels (i.e. digital screens and ad space in municipal facilities) or by amplifying the programs and services offered by youth service providers.

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<sup>16</sup> For the last 12 years, the City of Thunder Bay has highlighted the work of citizens to promote community safety through the [Mayor's Community Safety Awards](#). This initiative includes a "Youth Leader Award" stream to recognize exceptional youth leadership on community safety.

# Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

1.0 Promote Youth Violence Prevention Program Strengths		
Suggested Outcome	Possible Actions or Milestones	Responsibility (Where Appropriate)
<p>1.1 The youth violence prevention system in HRM uses a strengths and assets-based approach to delivering programs and services that have a combination of these components which are currently present in the youth violence prevention system:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• trusting relationships</li> <li>• work experience or experiential learning, recreation</li> <li>• safe youth friendly spaces</li> <li>• education support</li> <li>• accessible programming and outreach</li> <li>• mentorship and peer support</li> <li>• wraparound approaches</li> <li>• afterhours/weekend support</li> </ul>	<p>1.1 HRM creates a framework of shared outcomes to outline the individual and collective impact of HRMs youth programs on youth violence prevention.</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributor</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Corporate Communication Business Unit</li> </ul>
<p>1.2 HRM staff and youth service providers can easily access information about evidence-informed approaches from other</p>	<p>1.2 HRM shares findings from the Youth Services Review with diverse collaborators throughout the youth violence</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p>

<p>jurisdictions in Canada and local program strengths to help inform their services to support youth who experience harm from gun violence.</p>	<p>prevention system including youth service providers identified as part of this project through a variety of mediums such as their website and community engagement/knowledge mobilization session.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Youth Services Review project work group members</li> <li>• Government funding partners such as Public Safety Canada</li> </ul>
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Aligned to: HRM's Public Safety Strategy 2023-26 Action 3.1 Develop a Centre of Responsibility for community-led public safety and #2.5 Address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement



## Address the Effects of Systemic Oppression



*It's hard to do parenting support or programs for families if basic needs aren't being met.*

*– Interview participant*



### Findings

#### **Structural Violence**

Throughout the interviews many participants identified the impacts of colonization and anti-Black racism such as poverty, food insecurity and housing insecurity are ever present in the lives of many communities in HRM and contribute significantly to the disproportionate harm from gun and gang violence that is experienced by young people.

This phenomenon is known as **structural violence**. Structural violence is a form of violence where social institutions, such as education, health care and the justice system, harm people by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Policies, regulations, and legislation set by government institutions and larger systems may contribute to the marginalization of youth and the inequalities they face. Failure to address the specific needs of marginalized youth can lead to their further marginalization within these systems. Racism, classism, ableism, sexism, and xenophobia are examples of structural violence.

Furthermore, structural violence is a driver of behavioural violence homicide, suicide, and war.<sup>17</sup> For example, one participant noted that food insecurity is contributing greatly to youth behavioural problems internally and externally at school and in community. Many youths in high-poverty areas show up to school without food which impacts their ability to participate and learn.

## **Systemic Racism**

Participants highlighted the disproportionate impact violence has on specific communities, including communities with inadequate access to supports, African Nova Scotian/Black communities and public housing communities among others.

Systemic racism, particularly anti-Black racism facing African Nova Scotian, Black and African Descent communities in Nova Scotia provides an important context for the disproportionate impact of violence on some communities today.

For example, the displacement of African Nova Scotians from the historic community of Africville further created financial and other socio-economic barriers. Today, communities such as North Preston have been promised land but face legal barriers to land ownership which impacts present access to opportunities for youth. Participants noted that local communities feel a lack of ownership due to ongoing gentrification which impacts violence in communities. In communities such as Dartmouth North and Spryfield racial injustice creates barriers to young people's ability to find employment and meet their basic needs.



*Our history clouds the potential  
that we have for young people.*

*– GameChangers902*



One participant suggested that the stigmatization of communities and groups is perpetuated by media. Often, a small percentage of people behaving in a specific way is inaccurately depicted and does not reflect the reality of what is happening in a community.

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<sup>17</sup> Lee, B.X. (2019). Structural Violence. In *Violence*, B.X. Lee (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119240716.ch7>

Participants also reflected on how structural violence impacts whole communities, surfacing in mental health concerns and trauma. Communities who are disproportionately impacted by violence and crime are often provided with resources immediately following critical gun violence incidents, but once those resources leave, communities lack the support needed to heal and build resilience, resulting in cumulative trauma.

Research demonstrates that there is a strong empirical and theoretical relationship between the experience of victimization from crime and the likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour.<sup>18</sup> This concept is often referred to as the “victim-offender” overlap. As an illustration, research conducted in 2021 at the University of Alberta has demonstrated that in Western Canada almost everyone who is incarcerated were victims before becoming offenders and that victimization rates for incarcerated people are much higher than the general population.<sup>19</sup> This evidence raises important questions about the vulnerability of people who are engaging in criminal behaviour and highlights the importance of using both a public health and trauma-informed approach to violence prevention initiatives.<sup>20</sup>

## Analysis & Recommendations

While the systemic issues of structural violence and systemic racism discussed above cannot be solved by one organization or individual alone, it is important that HRM plays an active and leading role in working to transform the systems which cause harm to young people and to reverse their impacts. HRM should collaborate closely with internal and external partners such as the Province and other service providers and listen attentively to the perspectives of residents and those with lived experience. For example, HRM can draw upon perspectives and experiences shared through HRM’s existing advisory committees such as the Youth Advisory Committee and African Descent Committee as well as upcoming committees and lived experienced advisory groups which will be built through the municipality’s Centre of Responsibility for Community Safety.

To better support youth from equity-deserving communities, it is suggested that the municipality take a leadership role to prioritize understanding and identifying ways to

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<sup>18</sup> Reingle Gonzalez, J. "Victim–offender overlap." *The encyclopedia of theoretical criminology* (2014): 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118517390.wbetc139>

<sup>19</sup> Bucerius, S. M., Oriola, T. B., & Jones, D. J. (2022). Policing with a public health lens – Moving towards an understanding of crime as a public health issue. *The Police Journal*, 95(3), 421–435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032258X211009577>

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

address the underlying factors that contribute to inequities and further oppression of youth. As these issues are complex, a variety of approaches will be required. It is recommended HRM focus its efforts on systems change advocacy and policy development related to community safety, training and education, social procurement, and partnerships to build capacity with youth and community on initiatives that will support healing and reshape narratives about violence. For example, HRM should expand on existing services that support equity-deserving community in the following ways:

- a. by securing sustainable funding for a youth-led and focused Community Mobilization Team<sup>21</sup> that supports a holistic approach to preparing and responding to violence or traumatic incidents and
- b. by expanding the Multi-Service Youth Centre model to priority communities for a coordinated youth services model.

Through the Community Safety Business Unit's increased training capacity, HRM should explore partnering with The Office of Diversity and Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office, to promote training for municipal staff and community-based organization. The goal of this collaboration would be to help staff and youth violence sector professionals develop the skills and knowledge required to integrate anti-racism and anti-oppressive practices into their programs, policies and services designed to support youth. Examples of possible training topics which should be strongly recommended for municipal staff working with youth or in support of equity-deserving communities include:

- Reaching Out From an Afrocentric Place
- Anti-Black Racism Training, and
- KAIROS Blanket Exercise.

It is crucial to adopt anti-Black racism and trauma-informed approaches in all municipal initiatives, and this will be increasingly important in the development of the Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy outlined in Suggested Outcome 3.1 of this report. Furthermore, it is recommended that HRM staff use an equity lens when considering the development of policies, programs, and services as well as in the allocation of financial resources. Specifically, HRM should invest in youth violence prevention efforts and strategies that address structural violence factors like intergenerational trauma and food insecurity. This should be done in conjunction with the program and service strengths and effective practices identified earlier in this report. Within its own programming HRM should conduct necessary budget planning

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<sup>21</sup> Community Mobilization Teams (CMTs) support the response and recovery from the experience of a traumatic incident. They are made up of a partnership among local residents, community organizations and the municipality. After a traumatic incident, CMTs mobilize local and municipal resources to address individual/ community needs, coordinate community debriefings and timely information sharing.



or requests to consistently offer food to participants. Additionally, the municipality should promote and utilize the municipality’s Social Value Framework (Administrative Order 2020-004-ADM) when procuring for services related to youth violence prevention and community safety to promote the economic participation and capacity of underrepresented and equity deserving communities in the municipality’s supply chain.<sup>22</sup>

In order to advance the municipality’s understanding on various issues, HRM should collaborate with variety of organizations such as but not limited to Metro Community Housing, various youth service providers, public health, and the Halifax Food Policy Alliance (JustFOOD) to address structural violence and its harmful effects on young people such as poverty, food insecurity, lack of access to affordable housing, mental health, and social connection through systems change approach to policy and program development.

## Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

<b>2.0 Heal from Structural Violence and Dismantle Systemic Racism</b>		
<b>Suggested Outcome</b>	<b>Possible Actions or Milestones</b>	<b>Responsibility (Where Appropriate)</b>
2.1 The municipality takes a leading role in addressing the disproportionate and diverse impacts of violence and inadequate resources upon African Nova Scotian communities and public housing communities among others.	<p>2.1 (a) Expand Multi-Service Youth Centre model to equity deserving communities and evaluate model routinely to understand impact.</p> <p>2.1 (b) Promote and support municipal staff and community-based organization to develop skills and knowledge required to integrate anti-racism and anti-</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <p>Various Municipal Business Units</p> <p><u>Contributors (will vary by project)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• HRM Community Safety &amp; Parks &amp; Recreation Business Units</li> </ul>

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<sup>22</sup> The goal of the Social Value Framework which seeks to enhance community health and well-being by advancing reconciliation, inclusion, equity and diversity; increase economic opportunities by expanding participation of diverse and social value businesses in the municipality’s supply chain; improve economic independence and capacity by increasing employment and training opportunities for underemployed, unemployed, under-represented equity seeking populations; support community considerations in the supply chain and encourage environmental sustainability.

	<p>oppressive practices into their programs, policies and services designed to support youth.</p> <p>2.1 (c) Promote and utilize the municipality’s Social Value Framework when procuring for services related to youth violence prevention and community safety to promote the economic participation and capacity of underrepresented and equity deserving communities in the municipality’s supply chain.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM’s Office of Diversity &amp; Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office</li> <li>• HRM Youth Advisory Committee of Halifax</li> <li>• African Descent Advisory Committee</li> <li>• HRM Procurement</li> <li>• HRM Legal &amp; Legislative Services</li> <li>• IWK Youth Mental Health &amp; Addictions Division</li> <li>• Culturally Relevant Mental Health Professionals</li> </ul>
<p>2.2 Resources are consistently and equitably provided to youth and their families following critical gun violence incidents to support healing from trauma and build resilience</p>	<p>2.2 (a) Develop, evaluate, and secure sustainable funding for a youth-led and focused Community Mobilization Team that supports a holistic approach to preparing and responding to violence or traumatic incidents and healing from trauma.</p> <p>2.2 (b) Continue to promote and evaluate approaches that support healing from trauma through culturally proficient critical incident debriefs and mobile mental health services for youth.</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Mobilization Team members</li> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• Culturally Relevant Mental Health Professionals</li> <li>• Government Funding Partners such as Public Safety Canada and NS Department of Justice</li> </ul>

<p>2.3 Youth have the food they need to thrive at school and in community.</p>	<p>2.3 (a) Collaborate with a diversity of partners to address food insecurity, through a systems change approach to policy and program development.</p> <p>2.3 (b) Advocate for the adoption and implementation of a universal healthy school food program. Continue to engage with the Nova Scotia Coalition for Healthy School Food.</p> <p>2.3 (c) Complete required planning and budget requests to enable HRM youth programs to consistently offer culturally appropriate food to participants.</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors (will vary by project)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• Food Security Organizations</li> <li>• Halifax Food Policy Alliance</li> <li>• Nova Scotia Coalition for Healthy School Food</li> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Multi-Service Youth Centre partners</li> <li>• IWK Public Health</li> </ul>
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Aligned to: HRM’s Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) Action 2.5 Address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement, Goal #2 to Enhance Equity and Inclusion of HRM’s Social Policy Framework & Goal #1 of HRM’s Diversity & Inclusion Framework which is to ensure inclusive and equitable access to and benefit of, municipal services, programs and facilities, and the Social and Economic Equity recommendations of the JustFOOD Action Plan.



## 3.0 Improve Capacity, Collaboration and Coordination of Youth Violence System Finding

### Findings

#### Prevalence of Harm from Gun and Gang Violence

Interview participants suggested a rise in youth involvement in gun and gang violence and harm from commercial sexual exploitation based on experiences with:

- Youth-involved violence in community programs (i.e., BGC and HRM recreation centres).
- Lockdowns in schools due to threats of local violence.
- Frequency of violent behaviour among youth at school.
- Frequency of cyberbullying and sharing of intimate images.
- Rise in violence with weapons or threat of weapons being spread through social media, and violence in the broader community.

*There appears to be a rise in violence with weapons or the threat of weapons [in schools]. The presence of these weapons and the threat of weapons are being spread through social media and word of mouth.*

*– Interview participant*

Although participants experience suggests a rise in violence of threats of harm, this perceived rise has not yet been reflected in available police data. For example, we were able to access and analyze data related to calls made to Halifax Regional Police ([Appendix C](#), Halifax Regional Police were called to schools 424 times between 2018 and 2022. This data shows relatively stable trends in occurrences of calls for assaults (24-67% of calls), threats (13-28% of calls), sexual assaults (6-13% of calls), and weapons (4-12% of calls) (see [Appendix C](#)). All calls saw a decrease in 2020, presumably due to online learning taking place because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, calls have returned to levels seen prior. Additionally, these calls do not reflect *all* youth crime data in the community. Hence, more analysis needs to be done to determine whether there is an actual increase in youth violence and threats of harm.

What emerges as a finding from this project is that it is difficult to precisely quantify the prevalence of harm from gun and gang violence in HRM and how it is impacting youth due to lack of access to disaggregated, community-level data.

## Barriers and Challenges to Supporting Youth:

### **Funding Scarcity, Program Capacity, Waitlists, and Eligibility**

A consistent theme that emerged among participants was that many organizations would like to do more - serve more youth, expand geographies and services - but lack the staff, funding, and capacity to do so. Multiple interview participants indicated they do not advertise their programs because they lack the funding and resources required to manage any additional referrals or increased demand.



*It feels like we're doing more  
with less funding.*

*- Interview participant*



That said, the knowledge and expertise of service providers that was shared during interviews provides a strong basis to suggest that better and more integrated data is needed to fully understand what is happening with regards to youth violence in the Halifax region.

While organizations have strong relationships with youth and are making a positive impact, they are struggling to efficiently and sustainably meet the needs of young people who experience harm from violence in many communities, particularly in equity-deserving communities most impacted by the devastating effects of colonization. The prevention and intervention system working to support youth is stretched for resources. **Funding scarcity** limits their ability to expand and provide services and programs to more youth. Participants indicated there is competition for resources within the current system and organizations may be more willing to collaborate when they have the funding and support they need rather than existing in a “system of scarcity.” Service providers also mentioned challenges related to funding availability for staff wages and training that would help strengthen the impact they make and the relationships they build in their communities.

Through conversations, it was identified that organizations are relying on **multiple sources of project-based funding**. Even HRM’s own services that support youth at risk of harm from gun and gang violence are funded by an array of financial contributors such as the Department of Justice, Public Safety Canada’s *Building Safer Communities Fund*, and core municipal funding approved through Halifax Regional Council.

Interview participants also pointed to an overall **lack of resources** to support organizations working with youth. To illustrate this, professionals working in the education system discussed how there is little funding available for sports-related activities at the elementary level. When there is funding, the costs associated with equipment, clothing, and transportation are often not considered which makes providing youth-specific programming unattainable.

Program **capacity limits and waitlists** were identified by participants as barriers to youth accessing supports when they are needed. Many service providers operate only during weekdays business hours, limiting youths’ access to support outside these windows. Participants highlighted that youth often require support on weekends and after hours to talk, foster positive relationships and re-enforce the connection that has been built.



*Organizations that are supporting crisis management are in crisis.*

– POSSE



The definition of youth differs between federal, provincial, and municipal government programs and within various youth-serving organizations, leading to variances in who is eligible for their programs and services. Through interviews, participants identified that there is a **gap in programming at younger ages**. Several participants stated that youth between the ages of 10-12 are missing resources and places to spend their time during afterschool hours and/or the summer when they are not in school. They indicated that this age is crucial for involvement as it is the age where youth “tend to get lost” and feel more isolated. Research<sup>23</sup> confirms that interventions in early childhood have the potential for long-term impacts on reducing later criminal involvement. Programs that focus on positive youth development can strengthen protective factors and promote healthy development through fostering a sense of belonging, self-worth, and personal competence, ultimately reducing vulnerability to involvement in criminal activities.

Through conversations with interview participants, the team identified that **data collection across programs** is gathered in an unsystematic way, and with varying degrees of demographic, social, and economic variables, and geographic scales, making it difficult to surmise outcomes, trends, or differences across the sector.

## **Municipal Services**

Evidence reviewed during this project clearly demonstrates that youth want to feel safe and included in their communities and in the spaces they are using.<sup>24</sup> The needs of youth are an important priority not only for youth services providers, but also for the community. HRM plays various roles including as a coordinator of services through the Multi-Service Youth Centres, youth rooms and as a service provider offering an array of programming, policies, and strategies that are designed to meet some of their needs and promote well-being in our communities.

For example, the municipality currently offers the Youth Advocate Program in nine distinct geographic areas identified as being at high risk for youth exposure to gun and gang violence. Yet, HRM staff interviewed during this project shared that youth beyond

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<sup>23</sup> Catalano, R. F., Berglund, M., Ryan, J. A., Lonczak, H. S., & Hawkins, J. (2004). Positive Youth Development in the United States: Research Findings on Evaluations of Positive Youth Development Programs. *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 591, 98-124.

<sup>24</sup> Halifax Regional Municipality. (2022). [HRM Youth Services Plan 2022-2024: A Strategic Vision for Youth Services](#), 15.

these boundaries are exposed to gun and gang violence and there are critical needs beyond the current YAP eligibility boundaries.

## **Coordination and Collaboration Within the System**

In 2011, municipal staff prepared a report to Regional Council on the Youth Advocate Program about a gap in a coordinated approach to supporting youth. The report cites the following:

*"It is not uncommon for a youth-at-risk to be dealing with upwards of 10 different agencies at any one time. The sheer number of service providers and/or agencies involved for one youth proves often to be too daunting for the parent/guardian. Parents or guardians become frustrated, give-up on seeking assistance, and often remove the youth from existing services. They will also disengage from communicating with the service or program provider."<sup>25</sup>*

Through this project, there was little evidence to suggest lack of coordination across systems has changed significantly since the aforementioned report was written and the Youth Advocate Program was approved for sustainable funding. While the municipality has made a significant investment in the Youth Advocate Program and is demonstrating leadership in an integrated and collaborative approach to general youth services through the adoption of the Multi-Service Youth Centre model, findings show that more work is needed. It is imperative to involve a diverse group of organizations, and levels of government, to coordinate the efforts of the entire system and the multiple parts involved in supporting youth who experience greater harm from gun and gang violence.

HRM has strong relationships with organizations that work with youth and a good connection to youth through programs offered through the Parks & Recreation division (such as the Multi-Service Youth Centres), and the Youth Advisory Committee which has helped to develop a community-informed plan for general youth services. However, the municipality **lacks a unified and strategic approach towards youth violence prevention** across the various programs, services, and policies that fall within its mandate as a service provider and policy maker.

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<sup>25</sup> Martin, S. (2011). *Youth Advocate Program Sustainability*. Halifax Regional Municipality. <https://legacycontent.halifax.ca/council/agendasc/documents/130423ca1012.pdf>



Similarly, conversations with services providers indicated many of them are collaborating on an individual basis but there is no coordinated approach. One participant reflected that they feel community-based organizations would be more willing to collaborate with each other if they had the funding they needed and were experiencing what they called “abundance” instead of “scarcity.”

Yet, despite some of these significant barriers and challenges, service providers possess many strengths. They all identified positive outcomes for youth involved in their programs, and many report on yearly highlights and some program statistics through annual reports.

## Analysis & Recommendations

### **For Service Providers & Government Funding Partners:**

Based on the findings, it is believed everyone has a role to play in supporting youth who are at risk of harm from gun and gang violence as well as commercial sexual exploitation. Diverse organizations and levels of government involved in the violence prevention and intervention ecosystem are encouraged to practice the value of collaboration and strive to work together in addressing the complexities of this issue while coordinating their efforts.

Youth service providers, and their government funding partners, should consider the capacity and sustainable funding requirements for an expansion of programming, accessibility, and hours of service to meet the needs of youth. It is proposed that the strengths of the sector be highlighted and built upon to enable economies of scale and to deepen existing relationships and social capital rather than building net-new programming, wherever possible.

### **For HRM - System & Policy level**

The renewed Public Safety Strategy (2023-2026) clearly articulates the need for innovative thinking to address a cultural shift that is taking place in the provision of community safety. The Public Safety Strategy provides a strong foundation for HRM to take a leadership role at the policy and systems level by addressing trauma as a root cause of youth violence. Yet, based on this review, it is believed more resources, and a focused, unified approach will be required to better support youth who are placed at increased risk of harm from, or vulnerable to, participating in violence across multiple systems, programs, and services where the municipality plays a variety of roles.

Based on recent changes to HRM's organizational structure which involved the creation of a new Business Unit dedicated to Community Safety, now is the right time to address the need for a unified and strategic approach to youth violence prevention both internally **within** the programs, services, and policies led by the municipality as well as **externally** in relation to the broader community safety ecosystem.

To help HRM reflect on and articulate their approach, it is recommended a **Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy** be developed. This strategy would encourage equitable access to opportunities, resources, and supports and to reduce the systemic or policy barriers that exist which intentionally or unintentionally impact youth including members of marginalized groups and equity-deserving communities. Evidence suggests a strategic approach to youth violence prevention across municipal departments can help to provide coordinated and more consistent funding to municipal youth violence prevention programs and help cities understand the impact their financial contributions to this work have on young people.<sup>26</sup>

A Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy should consist of a comprehensive plan that promotes equity, identifies actions to address the disparities that young people face, and addresses the upstream factors that contribute to youth violence. It should recognize not all young individuals have equal opportunities and experiences due to various social, economic, and systemic factors including the impacts of structural violence and systemic racism discussed in this report.

The Strategy should include a coordinated approach to youth violence prevention across all municipal activities, policies, and programs. Additionally, it should seek to clarify the municipality's role in participating and collaborating with community organizations that support youth (e.g., define a vision for how the municipality wishes to be involved in the sector). This clarity is needed to ensure there is a cohesive, sustainable, and strategic plan for the role(s) the municipality should play in the future of youth services, violence prevention and community safety (e.g. service provider, convener, advocate, crisis responder, etc.).

The Strategy should build on the findings of this report with respect to the strengths of the system, the collaboration that is already occurring in the sector, and the gaps identified.

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<sup>26</sup> Hackett, S. (2012). *Trends in Youth Violence Prevention Funding*. Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, University of Minnesota. <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/trends-youth-violence-prevention-funding>

It is recommended the strategy:

- Includes diverse youth perspectives and voices and is developed *with* equity-deserving communities,
- builds on the evidence, strengths and assets of the youth violence prevention system identified in this report and considers the suggested outcomes and possible actions referenced herein,
- provide direction on how to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of municipal youth programs and services that promote violence prevention,
- seeks to identify and clarify the municipality's role in youth violence prevention services and funding (i.e., grants),
- aligns with the existing municipal strategies where relevant,
- identifies actions and responsibility for executing actions, and defines how progress and outcomes should be measured,
- includes an adequate budget for community engagement, inclusive strategy development and implementation, and
- develops a plan for how to place a youth equity lens on all municipal practices, policies, and programs.

While HRM is a service provider for numerous youth programs, they also have the potential to assume a broader role. This includes convening youth services, engaging in solutions-oriented advocacy, and adopting a youth-focused perspective in various municipal matters such as transportation, recreation policies, and community response teams. It is crucial to ensure the youth lens permeates beyond the Parks and Recreation Business Unit. If HRM intends to actively contribute to preventing harm caused by youth violence, a coordinated strategy and organizational-wide awareness are imperative, establishing this as a priority across all components of the organization.

To shift from the culture of scarcity within the violence prevention system, it is recommended that HRM advocate to its provincial and federal funding partners such as the Departments of Justice and Community Services and Public Safety Canada to provide sustainable, core funding for community-based organizations that support youth who are at risk of harm from gun and gang violence and commercial sexual exploitation.

### **For HRM - Program Level**

As part of the development of a strategic and coordinated approach to youth violence prevention in the Halifax region, it is recommended the Youth Advocate Program (YAP) service model undergo a comprehensive review which may include revisions to age and geographic eligibility.

HRM should explore opportunities to separate the Youth Advocate Program into two services with one offering programming for children ages 9-11 and the other for youth ages 12-15. It is important to consider different risk factors based on ages because children aged 9-11 cannot be charged with a crime in Nova Scotia. Therefore, risk factors and supports look different for this age group in comparison to the 12-15 age group. It is also recommended this program be reviewed frequently to determine how it can better support children and youth in different age groups while maintaining current service levels in community.

## Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

<b>3.0 Improve Capacity, Collaboration and Coordination of Youth Violence System</b>		
<b>Suggested Outcomes</b>	<b>Possible Actions or Milestones</b>	<b>Responsibility (Where Appropriate)</b>
3.1 HRM has a unified approach and clear vision for youth violence prevention service provision internally and in the broader external youth violence ecosystem.	3.1 HRM develops a Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy to clarify a strategic and unified approach to youth violence prevention and establish this as a priority across all business units/divisions of the organization.	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Youth</li> <li>Members of HRM's Community Mobilization Teams</li> <li>Youth Advisory Committee of Halifax Youth Service Providers</li> <li>IWK Youth Mental Health &amp; Addictions</li> <li>Government Funding Partners (i.e. Public Safety Canada &amp; NS Department of Justice)</li> </ul>
3.2 The Youth Advocate Program (YAP) removes eligibility barriers	3.2 Conduct a review of the YAP. Reconsider geographic boundaries and explore	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> </ul>

<p>related to age and geography which enables youth to receive the support they need.</p>	<p>opportunities to separate the Youth Advocate Program into two services with one offering programming for children ages 9-11 and the other for youth ages 12-15.</p>	<p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Police</li> <li>• RCMP</li> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> </ul>
<p>3.3 Youth between the ages of 10-12 have access to programs, resources, and places to spend their time during afterschool hours and/or the summer when they are not in school that promote safety and prevent violence.</p>	<p>3.3 Diverse collaborators in the youth violence prevention system work together to enhance pre-existing strategies for early identification of risk and support for youth within school and other institutional and community-based settings.</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• SchoolsPlus Social workers</li> <li>• African Nova Scotian and Indigenous Student Support Workers</li> <li>• Youth Advocate Program Staff</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Centre for Education teachers and staff,</li> <li>• Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</li> <li>• School Resource/Liaison Officers</li> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> </ul>
<p>3.4 HRM and youth service providers have access to disaggregated, community-level data to better understand the prevalence of harm from gun and gang violence in HRM and how it is impacting youth to inform decision-making.</p>	<p>3.4 Leverage the Community Safety Business Unit's new training and research capacity to provide accessible education workshops on crime prevention and well-being research, data and evaluation practices, and trends and offer technical support to the Multi-Service Youth</p>	<p><u>Leader</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Service Providers such as Multi-Service Youth Centre partners</li> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Centre for Education</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Police</li> </ul>

	Centre partners and internal Business Units.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RCMP</li> <li>• Academic and research institutions</li> </ul>
<p>Aligned to: Youth Services Plan Strategic Priorities Goal #1.1 To focus on an integrated youth service-delivery approach and Goal #2.2 To develop and improve programs and services for underrepresented youth populations and communities, and Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) Action #2.5 Address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement.</p>		



## 4.0 Enhance Relationships between HRM and Community Organizations

### Findings

Through the participant interviews, the project team identified limited connections between HRM and the service provider community except for the Multi-Service Youth Centre. When asked what HRM could do to better support service providers, participants indicated the need for funding and access to physical space.

With respect to physical space, multiple participants indicated they perceived HRM recreation centres were more available in the past in terms of access to rent for a nominal fee. Participants indicated they felt the same opportunities to rent or borrow space are not currently available.

HRM is not legally permitted to provide access to space free of charge. HRM recreation fees are governed by the following by-laws: [Administrative Order 2019-010-ADM, Respecting Recreation User Charges](#) and [By-Law U-106, Respecting the amendment of by-By-Law U-100 - Respecting User Charges](#). The Administrative Order Respecting Recreation User Charges was approved by Regional Council in July 2021 and implemented on April 1, 2022. For not-for-profit organizations, rental fees cost 50% of the regular price. Therefore, rental fees for non-profit organizations that are registered on the Registry of Joint Stocks would be considered nominal.

#### **Physical Space**

HRM staff who participated in this review identified some barriers that may be contributing to challenges with youth service providers accessing municipal recreation spaces such as gymnasiums and multipurpose spaces. These include many recurring bookings that take place during peak hours and are made by larger organizations. HRM provides residents and organizations with options for booking municipal spaces. The main options are booking online via a platform called Legend and over the phone via Facility Schedulers. Service providers and youth can use the online platform or contact the facility scheduling team for single and reoccurring bookings. The only booking that must be made online are last minute bookings via the self-service option.

While further information is needed to better understand this finding, initial observations from this review suggest the Legend platform may present a

technological barrier for some service providers and possibly youth. The Legend platform is scheduled to be replaced by a new platform called Xplore in 2024-2025. This software change may present an opportunity to integrate learnings from this review to reduce further technological barriers in the future.

As set out in Administrative Order 2019-010-ADM, Respecting Recreation User Charges, the key principles that Regional Council uses to establish recreation fees include **cost recovery, industry best practices, and subsidization only for youth and community users, and consistent and standardized rates and hours.** These principles provide a strong foundation for HRM to reduce barriers to access by building relationships with community-based organizations that serve youth who may experience greater harm from gun and gang violence. To do this, HRM staff use a variety of practices including the use of internal policies to reduce fees for partner community-based organizations who are providing programming that serves youth.

Finally, there may be barriers for some service providers and youth to access accurate information about the by-law, municipal recreation fees and the booking process.

## **Collaboration and Coordination**

Through the interviews, participants were asked about collaboration or coordination with other organizations. The service map (found in [Appendix D](#)) depicts the connections that were mentioned by participants. While connections and referrals are occurring throughout the sector, participants indicated they are largely informal and built through positive relationships. For example, the project team noted schools serve as a hub where referrals are frequently made to various community-based organizations.

During the research, the existence of various committees dedicated to collaboration and networking, such as the Child and Youth Regional Advisory Committee, Cobequid Youth Services Network, and HRM Youth Connections are in place. However, despite specifically inquiring about collaboration within the sector during interviews, participants did not mention or discuss these committees or any similar ones. Since this project primarily focuses on conducting a strengths-based review of the sector, the report does not delve into additional details regarding these committees.

# Analysis & Recommendations

## **Access to Physical Space**

HRM must build on the successful practices they have used in the past to promote equitable access to their spaces. It is essential HRM leverages access to infrastructure



wherever possible to facilitate and support services that work with youth and to promote networking and collaboration across the sector. By utilizing available resources, HRM can actively contribute to fostering meaningful connections and collaboration among stakeholders.

It is recommended HRM develop an approach that builds on successful equity-based approaches used in the past (i.e., ice booking) and measure access to municipal spaces, gather data to understand facility use, and integrate the findings of this report in the review of the Administrative Order and future decision-making.

Additionally, it is recommended HRM create an inclusive and equity-driven marketing and communications plan that focuses on sharing information with service providers and youth about how they can access and book municipal spaces. Possible strategies could include a focused effort to share information with the youth-serving service providers identified in this report to help them understand how to access the spaces and to understand and budget for applicable fees.

### **Enhance Relationships in the Sector**

HRM's Youth Services Plan 2022-24 identifies an "integrated youth service-delivery approach" as a key priority. Building upon this priority, and the evidence gathered during this project, it is recommended HRM prioritize enhancing relationships with the community, particularly with youth service providers, by actively seeking to strengthen connections within the sector. It is recommended HRM build on its strengths as a convener, but also highlight the strengths of the youth serving sector and test out innovative approaches to find ways of adding value to the youth violence prevention systems.

As expressed by the service provider community, it is important to delve deeper into the identified needs of youth and collaborate on how to support those needs. This can be achieved by engaging with service providers and by sharing relevant research findings. Furthermore, HRM should actively promote collaboration and coordination among various stakeholders, including funders and partners like the NS Department of Education, NS Department of Justice, NS Department of Community Services, NS Department of Health, and Wellness, and the IWK's new Integrated Youth Services sites.

Further assessment is required to determine whether existing collaboration opportunities, such as those facilitated through The Den (Multi-Service Youth Centre) or other tables/committees, are suitable spaces for fostering collaboration. Alternatively, it may be necessary to establish new tables or structures to facilitate

collaboration effectively. HRM should seek to establish relationships with existing committees and gain a comprehensive understanding of their respective mandates. This knowledge will enable HRM to identify areas where they can provide support or complement existing collaborative structures.

In alignment with action 1.4 of the municipality’s Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) HRM should continue to execute their commitment to support service providers and partners in the application of public safety principles and practices through training. An intentional youth lens needs to be brought to this work to ensure the needs of youth and their service providers are considered in terms of training, content development, participation and learning methods.

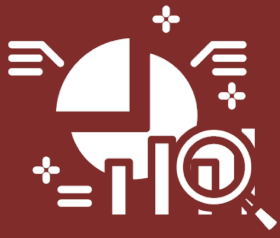
Throughout the interviews participants were asked if they would be interested in upcoming training opportunities hosted by the municipality. Several participants were eager for the opportunity to upskill their staff and take advantage of available opportunities, indicating that affordable and accessible training was rarely available for their staff.

## Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

4.0 Enhance Relationships between HRM and Community Organizations		
Suggested Outcomes	Possible Actions or Milestones	Responsibility (Where Appropriate)
4.1 Service providers, especially those serving equity-deserving communities, have access to municipal recreation spaces to support violence prevention programming and services.	4.1(a) Develop an approach that builds on successful equity-based booking practices (i.e., ice booking) and measures access to municipal spaces by gathering data to understand facility use. Then integrate the findings of this report in the review of the Administrative Order 2019-010-ADM, Respecting Recreation User Charges and future decision-making including the implementation of the	<u>Lead</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> </ul> <u>Contributor</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul>

	<p>new Xplore booking software.</p> <p>4.1 (b) Create an inclusive and equity-driven marketing and communications plan on how to book and access municipal spaces for youth service providers.</p>	
<p>4.2 HRM has strong relationships with collaborators, funders, and services providers in the youth violence prevention system.</p>	<p>4.2 Explore ways for HRM to support existing collaboration and coordination efforts within the youth violence prevention system (i.e., schools as a referral hub, Multi-Service Youth Centres, committees, etc.)</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Youth Services Providers</li> <li>• IWK Mental Health &amp; Addictions</li> <li>• NS Department of Education and Early Childhood Development</li> <li>• NS Department of Justice</li> <li>• NS Department of Community Services</li> <li>• NS Department of Health and Wellness</li> </ul>
<p>4.3 Youth service providers have access to training opportunities that support them to develop knowledge and skills that enhance their ability to serve youth.</p>	<p>4.3 Incorporate a youth lens into community safety and violence prevention training services to help build capacity and relationships with youth service providers in the sector.</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth service providers</li> <li>• Community safety and youth violence prevention subject</li> </ul>

		matter experts and trainers
Aligned to: HRM's Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) Action 1.4 Establish public safety training capacity, Goal #1 of HRM's Diversity & Inclusion Framework which is to ensure inclusive and equitable access to and benefit of, municipal services, programs and facilities HRM's Youth Services Plan 2022-24 Priority 1- Youth have access to spaces in their community where they can take ownership, feel welcome, socialize, obtain support, and access services.		



## 5.0

# Improve Data Collection and Information Sharing Practices

## Findings

While the qualitative data collected through this report offers valuable insights into the experiences of those working with youth, these insights could be strengthened with relevant and available quantitative data. Consistent and thoughtful data collection across service providers that span communities in HRM can enable a better understanding of the needs of youth, the scope of impact, and the effectiveness of programming and the risk factors that are at play in the Halifax region.

Developing this report highlighted significant challenges with consistent research data among service providers. Specifically, quantitative/evaluation data and the lack of accessible data from HRM departments or divisions that could support evidence informed policies and programming. For example, as part of this project, the research team made a request for data from 211 around the number or general frequency of referrals to youth programming, however the organization indicated it does not categorize data according to youth or adult based programs. The project team also submitted a request to Halifax Regional Police and the RCMP for data related to youth gun instances, but it was not fulfilled due to complexities of the request and limited timeline of the project. Similarly, crime data on HRM's Open Data Portal was identified as a potential data source for the project, however the portal only displays the previous seven days of data; other timeframes were requested but not made available for analysis. Furthermore, the data is not disaggregated by age.

Beyond these traditional quantitative data sets, it is important to recognize there are many forms and ways of understanding an issue and the narratives, stories and insights of youth, services providers, municipal staff, and others engaged during this project are valuable and important forms of evidence. However, there are opportunities to improve data sharing across the system and municipality to complement the insights and expertise of those working with youth in the violence prevention system as policies, programming and activities that impact youth are developed.

Participants consistently noted there are barriers to sharing information within their organizations and outside of their organizations with referral partners and other organizations working with youth. Participants mentioned several reasons for this including privacy legislation. Finally, some participants discussed dedicating significant amounts of time to building relationships with other services providers and professionals to quickly share and gain access to information they need to support youth.

## Analysis & Recommendations

It is recommended HRM build capacity in the community safety system that supports youth through their role as a convener and coordinator to promote education around data collection and evaluation practices. In the short term, it is suggested HRM continue to promote the collaborative information sharing practices that are being used at The Den and, if expansions are made to the Multi-Service Youth Centre in Spryfield, to consider the recommendations from this report in the communications practices of the partners. In the longer term, it is recommended HRM clarify the role it would like to play in the youth violence prevention systems as part of the development of the Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy. Further analysis is needed to understand if HRM can offer technical solutions by way of a referral database.

The municipality can contribute to a cultural shift around an “evidence-informed approach to practice.” This approach is best described by Kristen Alla and Nerida Joss as the integration of research evidence alongside practitioner knowledge and those who have lived experience of harm from gun and gang violence. This approach combines knowledge from different sources and is more inclusive because data (or knowledge) is personal, context-driven, and continually changing.<sup>27</sup> Simply put, by using this approach, “traditional” and sometimes difficult to access research data is complemented by practice or practitioner knowledge and expertise. Another strength of this approach is that it has been linked to reductions in cognitive bias<sup>28</sup> which can lead to unintended, yet incredibly harmful decision-making based upon racial, gender or other negative stereotypes. HRM can positively contribute to building capacity for an evidence-informed approach within the youth violence prevention system by

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<sup>27</sup> Alla, Kristel & Joss, Nerida. May 2021. Child Family Community Australia. What is an evidence-informed approach to practice and why is it important? <https://aifs.gov.au/resources/short-articles/what-evidence-informed-approach-practice-and-why-it-important>

<sup>28</sup> Blanchet, K., Allen, C., Breckon, J., Davies, P., Duclos, D., Jansen, J. et al. (2018). Using research evidence in the humanitarian sector: A practice guide. London, UK: Evidence Aid, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Nesta (Alliance for Useful Evidence). [http://www.evidenceaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Practice\\_Guide\\_52pp\\_DIGITAL-FINAL-VERSION-2018-10-02.pdf](http://www.evidenceaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Practice_Guide_52pp_DIGITAL-FINAL-VERSION-2018-10-02.pdf)

providing some technical research and analysis expertise and education and skill development for internal Business Units, fostering greater access to municipal data through collaboration and partnership with expert researchers and equity-deserving youth as well as sharing information in accessible ways through initiatives like open data portals.

HRM is encouraged to continue seeking out front-line professionals and youth voices as important inputs of qualitative evidence in addition to advancing quantitative data collection and sharing. Focus should be placed on ensuring equity-deserving youth are considered throughout these processes and that the lived experiences and perspectives of youth residents, relevant lived experience advisory groups (i.e., Youth Advisory Committee and African Descent Advisory Committee) are integrated into these efforts.

Within the data collection and evaluation space, HRM should collect, analyze, and improve the data collection tools of their own programs such as the Youth Advocate Program, Youth Worx, and the Multi-Service Youth Centres using inclusive and culturally proficient practices.<sup>29</sup> This will enable a better understanding of the demographics and emerging needs of youth and communities and facilitate the creation of effective prevention and intervention programming. HRM should utilize this data for informed decision-making at both the policy and program/service level. Because many of the youth program offered by services providers are funded by a variety of partners such as Public Safety Canada and the provincial Department of Justice, HRM should advocate and request consistent and sustainable financial and technical resources to support data collection and program evaluation.

HRM should also consider how it can promote effective information sharing across the system through its role as a convener. A natural place to play a leadership role would be as the facilitator of the Multi-Service Youth Centre model. Before developing any new services or supports, HRM should conduct further analysis on what role it should play with respect to technical solutions for information sharing across the system (i.e. referral database).

As an important input to their work, HRM should pursue the collection of existing community level crime statistics from relevant sources that help a variety of

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<sup>29</sup> The [Canadian Institute for Health Information](#) recommends the following practices for the collection and use of race-based and Indigenous identity data by health care providers and other authorities:

- Data governance, including protocols for how the data will be managed;
- Appropriate and meaningful engagement with Indigenous and/or racialized groups; and
- Processes to ensure that information is collected in ways that are safe, respectful and do not cause harm (e.g., staff education and training, patient and public education and supports).

collaborators in the youth violence ecosystem better understand the prevalence and impact of harm from gun and gang violence. It is also important to note these statistics should be treated with care and not further perpetuate harm or negative stereotypes that can stigmatize equity-deserving communities.

As aligned with commitments in the Public Safety Strategy, upcoming training and research resources within the Community Safety Business Unit could help build capacity to take on such community-based data collection and analysis initiatives and to build capacity through information sharing and education.

Finally, HRM should actively seek opportunities to collaborate with service providers, the provincial government, and researchers and academics. This collaboration should focus on projects that involve data collection, monitoring, and evaluation of programs and services aimed at preventing and intervening in youth violence. By working together, HRM can contribute value to these initiatives. As a starting point, HRM can leverage the Community Safety division’s new training and research capacity to provide accessible education workshops on research, data and evaluation practices and trends and offer technical support to the Multi- Service Youth Centre partners and internal Business Units on requests related to community safety.

## Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

5.0 Improve Data Collection and Information Sharing		
Suggested Outcomes	Possible Actions or Milestones	Responsibility (Where Appropriate)
5.1 HRM and service providers have access to meaningful and relevant evidence to help inform policies, programs and services that support youth experiencing harm from gun violence and commercial sexual exploitation.	5.1 (a) HRM should lead a shift towards evidence-informed practice and lead by example by collecting, analyzing, and improving its own data collection tools via its youth-serving programs (i.e., YAP) and its role as a coordinator and convener of the Multi-Service Youth Centres using inclusive and culturally proficient practices.	<p><u>Leads</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• Youth</li> <li>• Researchers and Academic Institutions</li> <li>• Government funding partners such as Public</li> </ul>



	<p>5.1 (b) Advocate to provincial and federal partners including Public Safety Canada and the Department of Justice for consistent and sustainable financial and technical resources to support data collection and program evaluation.</p> <p>5.1 (c) Pursue the collection of relevant, community-level statistics that help a variety of collaborators in the youth violence ecosystem understand the prevalence and impact of harm from gun and gang violence.</p>	<p>Safety Canada and NS Department of Justice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Halifax Regional Police</li> <li>• RCMP</li> </ul>
<p>5.2 HRM and services providers across the municipality can share information to enhance and better coordinate services for youth experiencing harm from violence.</p>	<p>5.2 (a) Leverage the Community Safety division’s new training and research capacity to provide accessible education workshops on research, data and evaluation practices and trends. Offer technical support to the Multi-Service Youth Centre partners and internal Business Units on requests related to community safety.</p> <p>5.2 (b) HRM should share information related to youth services and youth violence across the system through its role as a convener of the Multi-Service Youth Centre</p>	<p><u>Lead</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Information Technology Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Access &amp; Privacy Division</li> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• Government Funding Partners</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Police</li> <li>• RCMP</li> </ul>

	<p>model while respecting confidentiality and privacy legislation.</p> <p>5.2 (c) HRM should conduct further analysis on what role it should play with respect to technical solutions for information sharing across the system (i.e., referral database).</p>	
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Aligned to: Public Safety Strategy 2023-2026 Action 1.5 Enhance research and advisory capacity and HRM's Strategic Priorities Plan's "Responsible Administration" Priority Outcome



## 6.0 Adapt to a Changing Landscape in HRM

### Findings

During the interviews for this report, comments from various service providers highlighted an important theme surrounding the changing landscape of HRM. The municipality is the second fastest growing municipality in Canada. Between 2021 and 2022 it saw population growth of 4.5%, with international migration accounting for 60% of this growth.<sup>30</sup> Through the interviews, multiple service providers indicated that there is a growing service gap in meeting the needs of newcomer youth and their families. For example, two service providers indicated in the interviews they are having difficulty finding English as a Second Language (ESL) services despite seeing a growing demand in schools and communities. One service provider reported an increase in concerning behaviours related to gender-based violence and sexual exploitation towards female-identifying youth who are newcomers that suggest they may be at increased risk of harm from commercial sexual exploitation.

Additionally, many service providers feel as though they are “doing more with less” as populations increase and the demand for services does as well. Tensions between longstanding community members and those of newcomer families were also identified by service providers in Halifax’s North End.

With both increasing population and an increasing number of newcomers settling in HRM, additional services and supports will be required to adequately serve this new population and the diverse cultural backgrounds they bring. Services and supports offered today to support youth will need to continue to evolve and change to meet the unique needs of children and youth from other countries and backgrounds. The

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<sup>30</sup> Whalen, J. (2023). [Update- People, Planet, Prosperity: Halifax’s Inclusive Economic Strategy](#). Halifax Regional Municipality.

growth in refugee resettlement in HRM also highlights the importance of trauma-informed approaches to interacting with youth as Halifax's population of youth from countries fleeing war and violence increase such as Syria and Ukraine.

With ongoing population growth and increasing diversity, both the challenges experienced by youth and the demands placed on service providers will evolve and expand. As populations becomes more varied, the challenges and needs of youth will diversify, requiring a broader range of support services from providers. Additionally, existing challenges such as affordable housing shortages, limitations of the transportation system, and food insecurity are particularly compounded by experiences of poverty.



*We are trying to serve more families  
with the same resources.*

*- NEPRC*



## Analysis & Recommendations

Given the population growth and increasing diversity of HRM there will be a need for increased supports for youth and their families in the coming days, months, and years. The municipality will need to plan strategically for how to support youth as communities grow, evolve, and diversify. While HRM does not provide English as a Second Language services to residents, they can support their community-based partners via the Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) to advocate to the federal government for an increase in ESL resources in communities demonstrating highest need. HRM can also promote the use of their forthcoming Multi-Lingual Policy to better support youth who speak diverse languages and provide training opportunities aligned with suggested action 2.1(b) in this report to offer trauma-informed training and cultural proficiency training to municipal staff and other service providers who support youth who are at risk of harm from gun violence and commerce sexual exploitation.

HRM will need to play a leading role in supporting youth and families with diverse backgrounds. Through its own service provision, HRM should lead by example in trauma informed approaches, finding ways to effectively serve youth with diverse backgrounds, increasing the capacity of its own programming to meet emerging needs and working with others to reduce service gaps.

In addition, it is recommended that future locations for Multi-Service Youth Centres be determined through an evidence-informed approach to decision making, drawing on both qualitative data from professionals that support youth as well as relevant area-based measures<sup>31</sup> of socio-economic inequities, known risk and protective factors for positive youth development, and consultations with youth and other relevant stakeholders.<sup>32</sup>

With unprecedented population growth in HRM and service providers reporting high demand for services, HRM can use evidence to guide decision-making about communities that could benefit from the Municipality through the MSYC. Specifically, it is recommended HRM conduct a review of the MSYC model before making decisions around the next site after the Spryfield implementation has been completed.

Lastly, where possible, HRM should expand their services to address the increasing need for gender-based violence prevention support for newcomer youth. Through the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Program, HRM should partner with TESS to conduct more research and engagement to help the Municipality address the gaps in evidence from this report and clarify the role the municipality should play with regarding to reducing CSEC for HRM children and youth.

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<sup>31</sup> The Multi Service Youth Centre model used the Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivations and Demand Analysis<sup>31</sup> to examine quantitative data related to a community such as residential density, employment density, transit, education and other factors.

<sup>32</sup> Bishop, B. (2021). [Multi-Service Youth Centre Evaluation. Halifax Regional Municipality.](#)

# Suggested Outcomes and Milestones

6.0 Adapt to A Changing Landscape in HRM		
Suggested Outcomes	Possible Actions or Milestones	Responsibility (Where Appropriate)
<p>6.1 As communities across HRM evolve they are well-supported and the emerging needs of youth for services that prevent violence are accessible to equity-deserving populations such as but not limited to newcomers.</p>	<p>6.1 (a) Following expansion to Spryfield, conduct a review of the Multi-Service Youth Centre model and integrate learnings to inform future decision-making and enhancements to the Multi-Service Youth Centre model.</p> <p>6.1 (b) HRM promotes the use of the forthcoming Multi-Lingual Policy to support youth who speak diverse languages and advocates for increased ESL resources.</p> <p>6.1 (c) Integrate culturally responsive practices to meet the changing demographics of HRM communities into the Youth Equity and Violence Prevention Strategy.</p> <p>6.1 (d) Build youth resilience and support healing from trauma following critical incidents through the new Community Mobilization</p>	<p><u>Leads</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM’s Office of Diversity &amp; Inclusion/African Nova Scotian Affairs Integration Office</li> <li>• Youth Service Providers</li> <li>• Multi-Service Youth Centre partners</li> <li>• Subject Matter Experts &amp; Educators</li> </ul>

	<p>Team which is under development in Spryfield.</p> <p>6. (e) HRM partners with community organization and subject matter experts to promote intercultural proficiency training for HRM staff when serving youth from diverse equity-deserving communities.</p>	
<p>6.2 (a) HRM has a strategic and evidence-informed approach to reducing harm from the commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth in the Halifax region.</p> <p>(b) Newcomer youth who identify as female have access to culturally responsive community-based supports that prevent harm from commercial sexual exploitation and help them heal.</p>	<p>6.2 (a) Through HRM’s Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Program partner with TESS and work collaboratively to conduct more research and engagement to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• address the gaps in evidence from this report and</li> <li>• clarify the role that the municipality should play with regards to reducing CSEC for all children and youth in the HRM.</li> </ul> <p>6.3 (b) Where appropriate, leverage and/or expand existing municipal programs focused on gender-based violence prevention to provide additional resources to newcomer youth experiencing harm from commercial sexual exploitation such as the Girls United Program and</p>	<p><u>Leads</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HRM Community Safety Business Unit</li> <li>• HRM Parks &amp; Recreation Business Unit</li> <li>• Halifax Regional Police</li> </ul> <p><u>Contributors</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TESS</li> <li>• Youth Services Providers</li> <li>• RCMP</li> </ul>

	the Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Program.	
Aligned to: Public Safety Strategy (2023-26) Strategic Priority #1.2 Enhance Safe Cities and Safe Public Space program & #2.5 Address trauma as a root cause of youth violence and gang involvement		



# Next Steps

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The findings and recommendations presented in this report offer actionable steps for HRM to enhance its role as a leader, advocate, convener, and collaborator in youth violence prevention. They highlight the valuable services already provided by service providers, emphasizing the need to expand, evaluate, and develop promising practices in the field.

To make the most impact, the municipality should define its desired direction and role within the ecosystem of youth violence prevention. With additional clarity and direction HRM can better support the need for improved coordination, collaboration, and strategic planning within the youth service sector.

The report should serve as a guide for developing, enhancing, or refining initiatives. HRM should seek to address the gaps in evidence discussed earlier including building relationships with Indigenous elders and community partners to better understand their unique strengths and community safety and youth violence prevention needs and familiarize themselves with existing research on commercial sexual exploitation of children and youth. Furthermore, HRM should take a proactive role in mobilizing the knowledge and evidence gained during this project. It is crucial to share the results of the report in accessible and inclusive ways with the youth service provider participants who generously contributed their time to this project. By disseminating the findings widely, HRM can facilitate knowledge exchange, foster collaboration, and empower service providers to implement effective strategies based on the report's insights.

By implementing the recommendations and embracing the findings outlined in this report, HRM has a unique opportunity to strengthen its youth violence prevention efforts and create a safer, more inclusive environment for young people in the municipality. This proactive approach aligns with the municipality's commitment to building safer communities and demonstrates its dedication to the well-being, safety and future success of its youth population.

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# Appendix A

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## Data Analysis

### General Limitations

It is important to note although the team used a variety of mixed methods to gain diverse insights into the current system of supports available to youth who are at an increased risk of harm from gun and gang violence as well as commercial sexual exploitation, the findings of this consultant report cannot be generalized to all community-based organizations, youth, or equity deserving communities in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Several factors which contribute to this constraint include:

- The project timeline coinciding with the end of fiscal year and reduced capacity of organizations to participate in the engagement phase due to other important priorities,
- The absence of participation from Indigenous-serving organizations during the participant interviews,
- The absence of participation from organizations that are members of TESS during participant interviews.
- The team identified data sources that were of interest for the project including Statistics Canada, Census data, the HRM Open Data Portal on crime, and more. However, there were significant limitations to accessing relevant and timely data from a number of sources. Challenges included lack of access to relevant data, lack of accurate and relevant collection of data, and a lack of disaggregated data for HRM. Further comments on data can be found below.
- The jurisdictional scan evaluation and effectiveness research yielded a variety of limitations, including unavailability of comparison groups and use of self-reported measures. Generalizability of results to other populations and geographic locations should be further explored.

### Quantitative Data

During the research, the following quantitative data sets were analyzed:

1. Statistics Canada & Census Data
2. Youth Advocate Program evaluation results,

3. Youth resident feedback, and
4. Administrative data from the Multi-Service Youth Centre called “The Den” and the Powerhouse youth space.

Several data sources that could potentially inform a quantitative analysis of youth violence prevention in the Halifax region were also identified. These data sets included:

1. Halifax Regional Municipality’s Open Data Portal,
2. Service Provider Data,
3. The Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivations (CIMD), and
4. Halifax Regional Police crime data.

However, upon review of the aforementioned data sets, some barriers associated with analyzing it within the project timeline and budget and discovered various limitations including discrepancies in geographic units/ community boundaries that impeded the ability to derive meaningful insights from them were encountered. As a result, the capacity to use these data sources to expand on or supplement the qualitative analysis was limited. For example:

- Data was requested from 211 on the number of referrals to youth- based service providers/programs. However, data was not available as 211 does not track referrals from youth or to youth-based programs.
- Service provider data was either not available at all or very limited in terms of consistency, scope, and continuity of data (e.g., outcomes-based data)
- Data from Halifax Regional Police on the prevalence and location of shootings and other relevant crimes for this report are not publicly available. Such data was requested from the Halifax Regional Police but could not be fulfilled due to the complexity of the request and the limited timeframe.

In conclusion, there are some important quantitative data sets that could not be integrated into the analysis of this report and hence the analysis focused more heavily on qualitative data gathered from key informant interviews and quantitative administrative data from HRM. In the future, data sets such as crime statistics, administrative and evaluation data from service providers and the Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivations could be critical sources of information for future exploration by HRM, service providers and collaborators in the youth violence prevention system with the appropriate technical knowledge and resources to collect, analyze and interpret them. Using an evidence-informed approach and with the appropriate analysis, these data sets can complement the knowledge and evidence gained from people with lived experience and front-line youth service providers.

# Appendix B

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## Literature Reviewed

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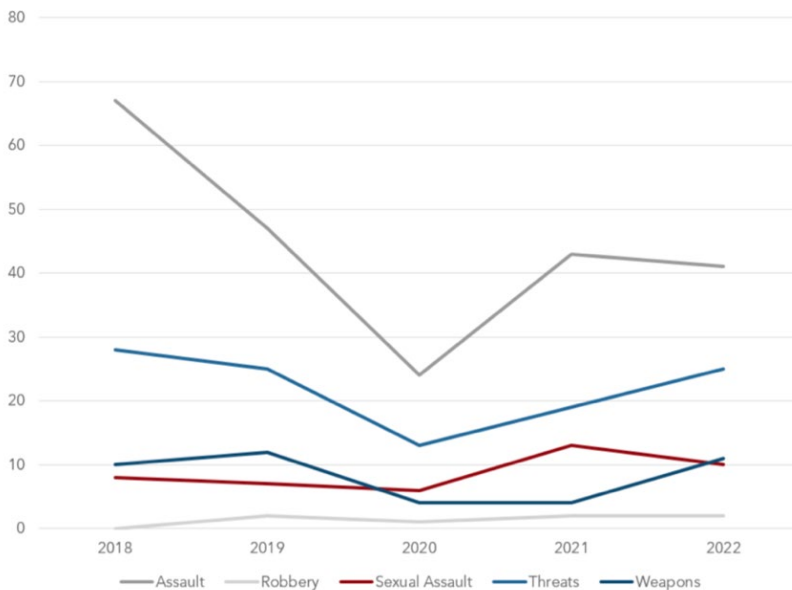
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# Appendix C

## Incidents of HRP being called to or near a school:

Police being called to schools for assaults, robberies, sexual assaults, threats, and weapons are shown.

**Number of times HRP were called to a school and/or near a school**



- Weapons calls range from 4 - 12 per year and have not seen any increasing trend.
- Threats calls range from 13 - 28 and have not shown an increasing trend.
- Robbery calls have remained near zero.
- Sexual assault calls range from 6 - 13 and have not shown an increasing trend.
- Assault calls range from 24 - 67 and have not shown an increasing trend.

All calls saw a decrease in 2020 presumably due to online

learning, and since then have returned to levels seen prior.



# Appendix D

## HRM Youth Services Program Connections Map

This map demonstrates the relationships between existing services consulted during the Youth Program Review and their partnership programs addressing youth violence in HRM.

