

Community Recreation for All, 2013 recreation budget analysis, January 4th 2013

We're now in the middle of the 2013 budget process. Council and communities have agreed that expanded access to recreation is needed, and needed now. Over 90 percent of people responding to Parks, Forestry and Recreation's Service Plan survey support increased access to community centres. One excellent barometer of access is the net amount of funds devoted to it. As a result, we ask you to look at the net amount of budget allocated to Priority Centres, the Welcome Policy and drop-in programs at community centres. Is it slated to increase in 2013? Not according to the budget proposals. Which is where you come in.

We're asking Council to take seriously the lives of communities and in particular of youth. This takes investment and sound policy. It will also require your commitment and determination. Below please find Community Recreation's for All's analysis of the 2013 budget process and key demands. This offers a blueprint for a way forward, and a way forward now.

1. Recreation's budget needs to grow, not shrink. This year, Parks, Forestry and Recreation has recommended a \$3.13 million cut to recreation programming allocations including the reduction of 38 jobs—many of which are jobs that generally go to youth.

(1) Why? The need for increased staffing and free programs is clear. Waiting lists continue for summer camps and programs. According to the Recreation Service Plan, 'the number of people on waiting lists has increased by an average of 3.5 per cent per year between 2002 and 2011.' (2) Tens of thousands of Toronto residents face the barrier of user fees and permit fees when trying to access programs or community space. In fact, the Service Plan states that the three largest barriers to access are user fees followed by insufficient program capacity and transportation. (3)

In addition, the Service Plan acknowledges that people want more welcoming community centres. Community Recreation for All's own research strongly supports the fact that people want to be welcomed into community centres by staff who can share information, animate empty spaces and create a feeling of community. Our research also underscores the need for longer—and in particular evening—hours. Staff reductions will only further contribute to the feeling that community members are unwelcome in some community centres.

While the five-year service plan emphasizes the idea of access, an implementation plan has not yet been established. Increased access requires increased resources. Cutting resources means cutting access. The suggested 2013 budget reductions will inevitably lead to shrinking access and increased user fees, whether this is transparent at this stage or not.

2. Add 10 city-run youth drop-ins in 2013. There is a critical lack of safe youth space across the city. This lack has been made more urgent by recent closings of youth spaces and services. At the same time, youth are reporting in different parts of the city that they feel unwelcome in community centres and that they require unstructured programming,

mentorship and safe space. In addition, many argue that safe youth space, access to adult mentors and recreation activities are key elements in addressing violence. As a result, we are asking for the implementation of 10 new city-funded youth drop-ins in 2013, with additional drop-ins as part of the implementation phase of PFR's five-year plan. We have worked with St. Stephen's Community House to draft a budget for a well-run youth drop-in program with capacity to reach 10,000 youth per year. Please see attached document.

3. Community centres should be for everyone, everywhere. Free adult programs should be brought back to Priority Centres for 2013. Priority Centres should expand in 2013, but not shift around. Existing Priority Centres should be maintained.

4. Don't fund free programs by cutting free programs. We support the expansion of Priority Centres in 2013. We do not, however, support draining funds from the Welcome Policy. Parks, Forestry and Recreation (PFR) has suggested that adding more Priority Centres will allow the budget for the Welcome Policy subsidy program to shrink by \$1 million or about 10 percent. (4) This is inaccurate. We have to learn from our mistakes. City Council has used speculative data in the past to support policy directions it has come to regret. For example, in 2011, PFR stated that 20 percent of adults would drop out if user fees were applied at Priority Centres. (5) In fact, 62 percent dropped out, and the majority did not return. (6)

In its service plan, PFR states that the Welcome Policy presently serves 4 percent of people with incomes below the Low Income Cut-Off (LICO). The new, dollar-based allocation—which serves more people by severely restricting year-round access, particularly for children and youth—is expected to bring this to up to approximately 5.2 percent. (7) According to City of Toronto data, 604,048 people in Toronto have incomes that fall below LICO. (8) This means that 527,638 people are currently unserved by the subsidy program. A full 80 percent of Toronto residents have never even heard of it. (9) While the expansion of Priority Centres is a very positive step forward, 527,638 people will not be served by a relatively small number of free programs scattered across the city. (There are 134 community centres in Toronto. The Service Plan proposes to bring the number of Priority Centres from the current 22 to 39 by 2015. There is no detail provided as to the level of programming that will be offered in these centres.)

Until universality of access is achieved—until all centres are 'Priority Centres' with a broad range of sufficient programming—using funding for free programs to fund free programs is nothing more than a shell game that frustrates the hopes of communities to see real improved access in 2013 and beyond. Improved access would be represented by a net gain in access dollars—not by the shifting of insufficient funds between under-resourced programs.

5. Consider the details. User fees for most programs are getting an increase. (10) As far as we could see, however, the Welcome Policy budget is not. In addition, the individual dollar allocations received through the Welcome Policy are not getting an inflationary increase. As a result, it's accurate to say that, in 2013, those using the Welcome Policy subsidy are receiving a cut, and will continue to receive a cut every year until the

Welcome Policy allocation is indexed to user fee increases. From permitting arrangements (and the many associated barriers) to summer camp waiting lists there are many elements in the budget documents that require Council attention and additional detail and data.

From a budget perspective, there are also questions to ask. This year, PFR is projecting \$6 million in unspent budget. (11) According to Recreation Works, “Since 2010, \$28.8 million approved for Parks Forestry and Recreation services went unspent and became part of the general surplus, which was mostly funneled into general reserve funds.” These funds have been allocated to serve communities, and should be used to serve communities, particularly in light of the chronic under-servicing and multiple barriers to access documented in the Service Plan.

For more information, please contact Community Recreation for All at communityrecreationforall@gmail.com

(1) Page 35, Appendix 3, Summary of 2013 Recommended Service Changes, *City Budget 2013, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget Analyst Notes*. (Please note, calculation was made to quantify cuts affecting recreation programming. Cuts related to sign shop operations, turf-management, and parks—though significant and affecting many staff positions—are not factored in.) www.toronto.ca/budget2013/pdf/op13_an_pfr.pdf

(2) Page 52, *Recreation Service Plan, 2013 - 2017*.
www.toronto.ca/parks/pdf/serviceplan/rsp.pdf

(3) Page 51, *Recreation Service Plan, 2013 - 2017*.

(4) Page 6, *Staff Report, PFR five-year service plan, 2012*, City of Toronto.
www.toronto.ca/parks/pdf/serviceplan/staff_report.pdf

(5) Page 3, *2011 budget briefing note: PF&R adult program fees at priority centres, 2011*, City of Toronto. www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2011/cc/bgrd/backgroundfile-36078.pdf

(6) Page 59, *Recreation Service Plan, 2013 - 2017*.

(7) Page 58-59, *Recreation Service Plan, 2013 - 2017*.

(8) *Profile of Low-Income in the City of Toronto*.
www.toronto.ca/demographics/pdf/poverty_profile_2010.pdf

(9) Page 58, *Recreation Service Plan, 2013 - 2017*.

(10) Appendix 6 (iii) Page 13 of 31, *City Budget 2013, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget Analyst Notes*

(11) Page 12, *City Budget 2013, Parks, Forestry and Recreation Operating Budget Analyst Notes*