

## **Awakenings Intervention Program- Q&A**

**Where did the idea for this program come from? This is a new CFPS initiative, not something we heard about in the Mayor's original proposal.**

- As you know, the Community First Public Safety (CFPS) Initiative uses a Public Health approach to address the epidemic of violence in Saint Paul. Emphasizing violence prevention strategies requires integrating policy and programming in a multi-disciplinary effort. Fundamental to this approach is incorporating and coordinating work across our diverse enterprise. This multi-pronged and multi-year effort requires a high level of coordination. Beginning in January of 2020 Parks and Recreation realigned existing resources and assigned a senior level position within our department to better align our work on the Mayor's core principle, "Improving Community Connectivity and Supports."
- The concept of this program was in development while current CFPS Manager Gwen Peterson was in the role of Recreation Services Manager. It has been included as part of the Community First Public Safety initiative because of the parallels in scope and project intent.

**What are the goals of the program?**

- The goal of the Awakenings program is to prevent violence by empowering our youth (in age appropriate approaches) to identify their own trauma and its consequences and empower them with tools to promote resiliency and healing.

**How many young people will be served and how will they be identified?**

- Participants will be identified by our Community Youth Workers (CYW) and/or Community First Public Safety partners based on known exposures to trauma, such as community violence, or because they have already exhibited destructive behaviors.
- Each Community Youth Worker will be assigned 20 youth. As spots open up, new participants can join at any time during the year. As of right now there isn't a set program length. As we further develop the program model – staff will be looking to refine what would determine program success.

### **2020**

budget includes 4 FTE Community Youth Workers  
20 youth x 4 CYW = 80 participants

### **2021**

budget requests 2 additional FTE Community Youth Workers  
(4+ 2 CYW) x 20 = 120 participants

\*Please note that CDC health guidance may impact the size of our groups.

**"Provides a trauma focused mental health component largely driven by the youth themselves and under the oversight of a mental health professional within a defined program structure." - What does this mean? What will the program actually do?**

- Community Youth Workers, under the guidance of mental health professionals, will establish cohorts of five to ten youth participants. The program structure includes bi-weekly group

meetings that incorporate traditional youth engagement strategies designed to build or strengthen relationships and trust between youth participants and our staff. These sessions are tailored to two age groups and will incorporate the mental health curriculum. The six to nine year-old group is named AWAKE (Able and Willing to Access Knowledge to Exceed). The ten to thirteen year-old group is called WOKE (Working On Knowledge and self Elevation). In addition to the group sessions, youth and CYW's will meet weekly for one-on-one sessions.

**Are we hiring mental health professionals? I just see Parks and Rec staff listed in the budget.**

- No. These will be contractual services.

**"Contracting with mental health professionals to develop implementation plan that includes evaluation criteria focused on data collection and qualitative measurements." Where does the budget for this contract come from (is it the \$69,500 for "services/materials"?)**

- Yes.

**Why is this a better investment than keeping rec centers open late and providing youth sports to kids above 8 (both of which we could do for less \$ than this program budget)?**

- The Parks and Recreation budget includes several divisions across a wide range of service areas. While the Awakenings program is identified as a new program within the Community First Public Safety initiative, strategies for violence prevention are embedded in work across the department. Among those investments are youth jobs, recreation center programming, building hours, youth sports, and creating safe spaces through environmental design.

**Have we spent money on Awakenings this year?**

- No money has been spent on Awakenings yet in 2020.
- We have an active professional services agreement for up to \$5000 this year (nothing spent yet). Funds are from the youth support budget and would have been used for miscellaneous expenses (supplies, food etc.) related to Right Track and/or SPYC and not covered by grant funding. Not spent because of scaled down Right Track Program this summer and SPYC did not complete leadership projects.

**What do Community Youth Workers (CYW) do?**

- Pre-Covid CYW's served as community engagement specialists for Parks and Recreation, liaisons between community organizations and Rec Centers, advising on community needs and programing ideas etc. They also serve as a resource for Rec. Center staff – examples include: providing staff training on youth engagement with an equity lens, often called in to help with specific youth that have challenging behavioral issues, helping alleviate conflicts, etc.

**How does Awakenings fit in?**

- Parks and Recreation staff, Saint Paul youth commissioners, policy makers, SPPD, etc. have long recognized that rec centers (programming, youth sports, positive adult interactions, pro-social youth activities, safe spaces) provide needed connections for some of our most at risk and vulnerable youth. However, youth who need rec centers the most may not be using them or have had major behavioral issues and have been kicked out of rec centers. The assumption is that these youth have experienced trauma aka ACES (adverse childhood experiences)

- Awakenings was developed to target engagement with these youth and train our staff with the skills they need to not only provide diversionary activities, but to also play a role in helping youth with development and relationship building.

### **What's happening now/have we already started awakenings?**

- Rec Centers remain closed to the public – so Community Youth Workers are more limited in their work compared to pre-covid.
- Starting in July CYW's started to work out in the community again but focused their engagement (building trust and establishing relationships) with youth between the ages of 6 and 13. These youth are either known to our Community Youth Workers and Rec Center staff for previous engagements in destructive/behavioral challenges at our Rec Centers/Parks/programs.
- CYW's have been engaging with known youth (6-13), recruiting new youth (6-13), meeting weekly in small groups and one-on-one, establishing trust and supporting positive pro-social relationships among youth members.
- While these groups are already meeting, the key to Awakenings is the staff training and the specific curriculum that will be used. That's what is being requested for the 2021 budget.

### **What will the new money for awakenings do that's different than what we do now?**

- Provide trauma informed youth development training to our staff
- Contract for professional services to provide training, advise on curriculum, develop data collection methods and quantitative evaluation for program
- Focus Community Youth Workers engagement work on a smaller and more targeted population of youth
- Hire two new Community Youth Workers and interns so that we can expand the number of youth the Awakenings program will serve

### **Is it appropriate for Parks to engage in this kind of work – shouldn't it be left to child psychologist/psychiatrists?**

- Training parks and recreation staff in trauma informed approaches is not new. Per NRPA: "From an organizational perspective, Trauma Informed Care changes culture to emphasize respecting and appropriately responding to the effects of trauma at all levels. It is not the intention of TIC to treat individuals, rather, to provide support and related services in a way that is accessible and appropriate to those that may have experienced trauma. The risk for triggering or worsening trauma symptoms and re-traumatizing individuals increases when not using this approach."
- Trusted community contacts are important to youth who experience trauma, many of whom have existing barriers to traditional, professional support.

### **What would we do without the money in the mayor's proposed budget?**

- Continue the more generalized work the Community Youth Workers were doing pre-covid.
- Look for other funding options to provide training and support for our staff to implement this important work.

