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Dying Regent Park program jeopardizes youngsters

Safe escorts to and from after-school programs being cut due to lack of funding, says Kiwanis

Community agencies say the award-winning **Regent Park Safe Walk Program** is being cancelled due to a lack of funding.

The Regent Park Safe Walk Program was founded in response to community safety concerns after nine young men died due to shootings which occurred in daylight hours in 2001. It has for the past five years supported children and youth in Regent Park thorough a program that hires local youth to pick up younger children from school and bring them safely to after-school programs, and then walk them safely home in the evenings at the end of the programs.

One parent wrote: "I heard they'll cancel safe walk. I don't agree, because the children in Regent Park wouldn't be safe! Here are the reasons why we shouldn't cancel the safe walk: most families can't afford childcare, many parents/guardians are working more than one job, so sometimes they will work during the night. Kids will be unable to attend to programs/activities, but if they cancel the safe walk it'll cause more kids to be involved in gun-violence, criminals which is dangerous."

"We have tried all of the usual avenues, and none of them have been willing or able to fund us this year." Said Ian Edward, Executive Director Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs (Safe Walk Trustee) "So now we are appealing directly to the people of Toronto to ensure that we are able to continue to provide this important program for the kids in Regent Park.

Safe Walk is a collaborative project of SCAARP – The School Community Action Alliance Regent Park which includes schools and organizations serving children and youth in Regent Park. The lead organization for Safe walk is the Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs.

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*School Community Action Alliance Regent Park
(SCAARP)
Safe Walk Program*

Regent Park:

- Regent Park is Canada's largest and oldest social housing complex, and is home to approximately 10,000 people. Because of the predominance of larger units, Regent Park is home to many large families - 37% of residents are children aged 14 and under, much higher than the City's average of 17.5%

What is the Safe Walk Program:

- Children are picked up from school and walked to numerous after school programs, and then walked home in the evening at the end of the program by local at risk youth. This program recently won the Mayor's Safety Award, and is a model for other communities.

Participating After School Programs:

- Toronto Kiwanis Boys & Girls Clubs
- Yonge Street Mission
- St Bartholomew's Children's Centre
- Parks and Rec. North Centre
- Parks and Rec. South Centre
- John Innis Rec Centre
- East African Homework Club
- Dixon Hall
- Green Thumbs Growing Kids

Schools:

- Lord Dufferin

- Nelson Mandela-Park
- Regent Park Duke of York
- Spruce Court
- St Paul
- Our Lady of Lourdes
- Winchester

Safe Walkers:

- 21 local at risk youth are employed to walk younger children.

Participants:

- In 2005, 330 kids aged 6-12 were walked 5 days a week. There was a waiting list of approximately 70
- Cost:
- Approximately \$80,000 or \$8,000/month for 10 months. SCAARP thanks the Toronto Kiwanis Boys and Girls Clubs for accessing \$25,000.00 annually from the United Way for Support of this program. Unfortunately this will only allow TKBGC to continue walks for their own members.

Impacts of the loss of the program:

- Many parents will be unwilling to allow their children to walk from school to programs throughout the community to participate in After-School programs due to the escalating violence and criminal activity , without a safe escort.
- The decrease in participation in after school programs will directly impact on the resilience of children and lead to increased obesity, gang affiliation and criminal activity, negating the positive outcomes that research supports.

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