

PROPOSAL TO INCREASE STRATEGIC SUPPORT & BUDGET FOR THE MOBILE YOUTH SERVICES TEAM (MYST)

Submitted to:

Greater Victoria Area Police Chiefs

Date:

June 28, 2024

Subject: Three-part* proposal:

- (1) To increase the annual budget allocation for the next five years (2024-2029) to secure long-term funding for two full-time MYST police officers – *financial impact detailed below*;
- (2) To participate with PCFSA, AU and other local and provincial agencies in several inter-institutional planning meetings (in 2024) to offer strategic leadership and collective support to secure long-term funding for 2 MYST counselor positions – *minimal financial impact (detailed below)*; and
- (3) To formally partner in the preparation of a 7-year inter-institutional partnership funding proposal to the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) with PCFSA and Athabasca University (AU) (among other institutional partners TBC) to seek long-term core federal government research funding that will support the collection of baseline data, ongoing monitoring, and the development of a comprehensive knowledge management system – *minimal financial impact (detailed below)*.

** Please note the proposal components have been separated to facilitate consideration of each element independent of one another.*

Prepared by:

This proposal¹ was prepared by Dr. Rebecca Nelems (PhD), Assistant Professor at Athabasca University (AU) & Associate Faculty in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University (RRU). An Associate with the International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD), Dr. Nelems has extensive experience in research, monitoring and evaluation with a focus on child and youth well being. This report is based on a data and document review, as well as Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with MYST team members Cst. Gord Magee (Victoria Police), Mia Golden (BA, Justice Studies) as well as a range of individuals representing

¹ I would like to acknowledge the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (VFCYJC), Capital Regional District (CRD), whose pledge of Capacity Funding for Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) Advocacy made the preparation of this proposal possible.

education, government, legal, health, police and child welfare agencies – all of whom work directly with MYST.

Summary of Request:

Leaders interviewed from across sectors – municipal and provincial government, police, schools, healthcare, youth welfare, and the legal system – are in clear agreement: ***MYST offers urgent, unique and critical support to youth in crisis that directly increases child, family and community well being and safety across the Greater Victoria Region.*** The need for MYST’s unique and effective services has dramatically increased in the past 5-10 years. Like many other cities, Greater Victoria has witnessed a spike in youth exploitation due to increased gang activity, online exploitation, sexual exploitation and violence, drug use, the opioid crisis, poverty and homelessness – all amidst ongoing population growth. Despite the growing needs, the funding for MYST – and the size of the MYST team – has remained the same.

This proposal is a ***three-part request*** for the Greater Victoria Area Police Chiefs to support to MYST. It has been separated into three separate components to facilitate discussion and decision-making of each item, independently of one another. The components are proposals:

- (1) To increase the annual budget allocation for the next five years (2024-2029) to secure long-term funding for two full-time MYST police officers – *financial impact detailed below*;
- (2) To participate with PCFSA, AU and other local and provincial agencies in several inter-institutional planning meetings (in 2024) to offer strategic leadership and collective support to secure long-term funding for 2 MYST counselor positions – *minimal financial impact (detailed below)*; and
- (3) To formally partner in the preparation of a 7-year inter-institutional partnership funding proposal to the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) with PCFSA and Athabasca University (AU) (among other institutional partners TBC) to seek long-term core federal government research funding that will support the collection of baseline data, ongoing monitoring, and the development of a comprehensive knowledge management system – *minimal financial impact (detailed below)*.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. MYST Program

1.1 Overview.....	1
1.2 Context.....	2
1.3 Impact of the MYST Program.....	3

2. Rationale for MYST Program Expansion & Long-Term Planning.....7

3. Proposal Details and Financial Impact

3.1 Part 1: To increase the annual budget allocation for the next five years (2024-2029) to secure long-term funding for two full-time MYST police officers.....	9
3.2 Part 2: To participate with PCFSA, AU and other local and provincial agencies in several inter-institutional planning meetings in 2024.....	10
3.3 Part 3: To formally partner in the preparation of a 7-year inter-institutional partnership funding proposal to the SSHRC with PCFSA and AU.....	11

4. Concluding Remarks.....12

5. Appendices

5.1 MYST Team Testimonies.....	14
5.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs).....	18
5.3 List of Documents Reviewed.....	19
5.4 Letters of Support for MYST Proposal.....	21

1. MYST PROGRAM: OVERVIEW, CONTEXT AND IMPACT

1.1 Overview

The Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) is a critical, multi-disciplinary, integrated unit that has served the CRD and youth at risk for ten years in its current form. The team is made up of one police officer, Const. Gord Magee, and one child, youth and family counselor, Mia Golden. While police agencies have had a MYST program since 2004, the unique collaboration between a police officer and community counselor was initiated by the police agencies and the Pacific Centre Family Services Association (PCFSA) in 2014 when following a community inter-agency meeting, they decided to pool resources and join forces in their shared goal of preventing youth exploitation, including from gangs. The police position is currently funded by the Greater Victoria Police Integrated Units, and the counsellor position has been funded by various funding sources secured by PCFSA.

Today, the two-person team carries a large case load, currently handling 250+ active case files involving Greater Victoria children and teenagers who are experiencing – or at severe risk of – exploitation (online and in-person), drug addiction, homelessness, mental health issues, sexual exploitation, violence, gang recruitment and entanglement. The team also maintains relationships and contact with 23 youth who have ‘aged out’.

The MYST approach is unique in the region, with a police officer and community counsellor working together to take a hands-on, strength-based approach to building relationships and trust with young people. Their multi-jurisdictional coverage follows youth across geographies and systems in ways that helps break down silos of information that often exists between institutions and sectors. They are often the first – *if not the only* – point of contact for *hundreds of young people in crisis, and their families*. The MYST approach supports both intervention and prevention, enabling the team to have their finger on the pulse of who is at risk, but may not yet have reached crisis or interacted with the criminal justice system. However, the team is often the liaison for both young people once they do enter crisis, whether their contact occurs with the education, health or criminal justice system, and professionals working within these systems.

The work of MYST is “24/7”. Documents, reports and interviewees testified to the fact that this team frequently works around the clock – for example, in schools in the mornings, on the streets in the afternoon, attending committee meetings in evenings, etc. – all whilst responding to calls and emerging crises on the street.

In addition to a sizeable case load and expansive geographical coverage, the scope of MYST’s work is considerable. It entails providing:

- responsive, ongoing counselling support and education to young people who are in crisis or at severe risk;
- support and education to parents and families of young people in crisis or at risk;

- strength-based support and opportunities to direct youth towards positive life alternatives (e.g. School of Rock);
- presentations, education and training in schools (children, teachers and administration);
- ongoing support to youth and families as they navigate health, education, housing, community services, and criminal justice systems;
- providing updates and presentations to the VFCYJC, municipal councillors, hospitals, Victoria Native Friendship Centre, Child and Youth Mental Health centres, and Capital Regional District appointees about the mounting crisis experienced by vulnerable youth in the region;
- maintaining vital ongoing partnerships with provincial ministries and government agencies, Victoria and regional police departments, CRD municipalities, school districts, hospital and frontline health workers, including mental health workers, and the Capital Region Action Team for Sexually Exploited Youth (CRAT/SEY), which is affiliated with VFCYJC; and
- liaison, data-sharing and advocacy with wide range of actors, including municipal and provincial government workers, police, child welfare, youth justice advocates, educators and health workers.

1.2 Context

The population of greater Victoria has increased rapidly, reaching 470,921 in 2024. This represents a 2.9% population increase in the last year, an increase of roughly 85,000 people over a ten-year period (386,770 in 2014) and 124,000 over the past twenty years (347,239 in 2004). Langford currently has the fastest growing population, seeing a 31.8% population increase in just a five-year period – a statistic that directly impacts the entire Greater Victoria region. While it is expected that youth exploitation would rise in proportion to the population, Greater Victoria is seeing *an exponential increase in exploitation due to the intersecting crises that are affecting youth and families in the region*. These crises include increased: gang presence and activity; online exploitation; drug and opiate use; sexual exploitation and trafficking; peer-to-peer exploitation; targeting of younger children; weapon possession and use; homelessness; and mental health issues, including suicide.

While gang violence and youth exploitation are not new in the Greater Victoria area, lower mainland gangs have increasingly entrenched themselves in the region in the last five-seven years, including the Glory Boys, Brothers’ Keepers and Red Scorpion. Gang-affiliated local youth are increasingly being used to run “drug lines” whereby they are expected to create customer bases using online platforms and social media (e.g. Snapchat) to advertise and maintain this base.

The rise in unhoused youth and families has also increased youth vulnerability as unhoused youth are often exploited, trafficked, or used to deal drugs. MYST has documented youth being trafficked to the mainland, other parts of Vancouver Island, and in downtown Victoria. Skyrocketing cases

of mental health issues, drug use and addictions in the region – particularly in the past five years – are exacerbating these vulnerabilities significantly. With the normalization of opiates and other “party drugs”, youth between the ages of 11-18 are increasingly using. Predators will often use drugs as a tool to continually exploit the youth once they become addicted. Cases of fentanyl use amongst at-risk youth have resulted in some of the overdose deaths we have seen in the region, including one case of a twelve-year-old.

Online exploitation has also dramatically increased in the past five years, with significant mental health effects. It is noted that exploitation started via online grooming has a greater tendency to escalate into high-risk violence when this shifts to face-to-face. The dissolution of healthy families and extended family units – due to increased poverty – is one cause several interviewees cited as the reasons for young people’s susceptibility to online exploitation. Online and face-to-face sexual exploitation of both girls and boys has also been on the rise, also often preying on young people’s drug addictions or debts.

Overall, MYST has observed an increase in the number of youth being exploited, and a growing number of younger children are being targeted, exposed and exploited. MYST is increasingly being contacted by elementary schools and parents who are concerned about their kids who are under age 12. Cases in which youth are themselves the predators exploiting their peers are also on the rise. According to MYST: “the tide of violence on our streets is rising and online exploitation is increasingly normalized...Young victims are experiencing trauma, including suicidal ideation.” Significant trauma impact has been observed in youth who witness and/or participate in violent acts associated with gangs.

1.3 Impact of MYST

MYST is a unique, multi-disciplinary, inter-institutional partnership and the team has built significant relationships of trust and support with young people from across the Greater Victoria Area. Youth have been highly responsive to engaging with the unique team of a police officer and youth counselor work together, and MYST has built significant trust and relationships, including maintaining relationships even after youth pass the age of 18. Interviewees commented that this is one of the most unique elements of MYST as most other actors within the various systems (health, education, justice, police, social services, etc.) simply are not able to invest the kind of time into relationship-building and meeting young people “where they are, and where they are at” that this team has. This gives them unique access to the latest information ‘on the street’, which has proved critical for a wide range of service providers and the police.

The result is that MYST is often the first – *if not the most critical* – point of contact for *hundreds of young people in crisis, and their families*:

- As of January 2024, MYST has 254 youth (active cases) to whom they are offering direct support, offering consultations to a wide range of agencies, monitoring for risk and/or

providing support to parents and caregivers. All of these youth are at severe risk of, or experiencing exploitation, related to drug addiction, homelessness, mental health issues, sexual exploitation, trafficking, violence, gang recruitment and entanglement

- MYST continues to support 23 youth who have “aged out” (over age 18), recognizing that this critical support has important downstream effects for both these individuals and the wider community
- MYST’s advancement of protection and/or intervention orders has resulted in the prevention of potentially numerous criminal offences by 100+ youth
- MYST has conducted presentations on healthy relationships, exploitation and gangs to 23 schools representing 2,530 students in 11 schools across the CRD
- MYST has made presentations to the following agencies: Crown, MCFD, Surrounded by Cedar, Queen Alexandra Hospital, Victoria Native Friendship Center, Child and Youth Mental Health, Detox
- Positive outcomes of MYST’s work for youth can be measured on a continuum of indicators, ranging from: reduced police contact; locating missing persons; exiting from gangs and exploitative relationships and situations; transitioning to long term counselling programs; reunification with families; strengthening foster parent relationships; engagement with services; increased mental and/or physical health; increased positive engagement in (and/or or a return to) school; and accessing employment programs and other pro-social activities. ***Progress along this spectrum has been documented for the significant majority (+/- 88%) of youth that MYST has supported to date.*** Positive outcomes for numerous families have also been tracked.

Insofar as they have been able to successfully support and direct young people away from exploitation, harm and risk, ***MYST is making an important contribution to the prevention and reduction of crime, exploitation and violence in the Greater Victoria Area.*** They are directly contributing to increased community safety on the streets, at schools and in the home. MYST is thus indirectly reducing the burden on numerous systems and actors in the region, at a time when these systems are facing unprecedented pressures from intersecting social, economic and health crises in the region.

However, beyond reducing the burden on other agencies and services, MYST was found to be directly contributing to the work of police, child welfare, youth justice advocates, health care workers, educators, school administrators, and government actors, due to the unique information and data to which they have access through their connections and relationships with young people.

Interviewees unanimously agreed that MYST offers unique value to the community in the following ways:

- **Providing multi-jurisdictional coverage:** MYST is not restricted to working in one sector or geography, instead following youth across geographies and systems. This offers

more effective wraparound support to youth that better meets their needs and the needs of their parents and families.

- **Partnering with all sectors and agencies:** Interviewees noted the way in which MYST was constantly partnering and liaising with different sectors, agencies and systems (education, health, legal, child welfare, etc.). MYST maintains vital ongoing partnerships with provincial ministries, local government and non-governmental agencies, Victoria and regional police departments, CRD municipalities, school districts, the Capital Region Action Team for Sexually Exploited Youth (CRAT/SEY), which is affiliated directly with VFCYJC, hospital staff, mental health workers and the Vancouver Island Health Authority. However, they also actively partner through events, training, and putting positive supports in place for young people.
- **Acting as advocates and “quarterbacks” for youth:** The team is cited as operating as “quarterbacks” for youth as they move through the legal system via Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (e.g. Westshore, Victoria), and plays important roles such as introducing youth to specialized investigator teams (where more involved investigations are needed) in ways that support these actors to more readily establish trust, safety and comfort with youth.
- **Breaking down information silos and connecting actors and information:** By moving across geographies and systems, MYST helps to break down silos of information and understanding that often exists within and between institutions and sectors. Interviewees reported receiving highly valuable information from MYST about youth that directly advanced their own ability to support them.
- **Relationship-orientation and long-term engagement with youth:** Relationship-building takes time and is particularly important when working with youth who are experiencing – or at risk of – exploitation. MYST was identified as being exceptionally skilled at building these relationships and maintaining long-term engagement with youth in the region. Having someone with a youth-centred counseling approach was also seen as critical to building trust, understanding and a sense of mutual respect. Having consistency of MYST personnel is crucial to the ability of this team to offer support, prevent exploitation and share information with different actors in the region, including the police.
- **Unique combination of a police officer and a youth counselor:** This was seen as a factor that has built curiosity and willingness amongst youth to build trust and relationships with the team. Interviewees noted that many young people would not necessarily ‘hang out’ with a police officer, but that the presence of a counselor has

enabled this trust-building to take place. Some noted that the particular information that the police officer could offer – about aspects of the criminal justice system – was incredibly valued and useful to the youth they too had interacted with.

- **Strength-based approach of the team:** Interviewees consistently noted that the style of the MYST personnel was non-hierarchical and empowering, working with them in respectful ways to identify other positive life pathways, such as through programs like the Rock School program.
- **Visibility in community:** Having a mobile team who ‘walks the street’ was seen as offering a critical service, making it known amongst youth that there was a resource available to them, and removing barriers many youth would experience in accessing support.
- **Having their ‘finger on the pulse’ of trends occurring with youth:** From being the first to identify online exploitation happening decades ago, MYST team members hear the ‘word on the street’ directly from young people who confide in them and share critical information. This information proves critical to advising many local agencies with respect to current trends, etc. Interviewees noted that many youth actively recommend to other youth that they trust and engage with MYST, again underlining the importance of staffing continuity within these roles.
- **Particular skills and expertise of current team members:** It would be remiss to leave out that all interviewees spoke of the particular skills, experience, qualities and capacities of the current MYST team members. Genuine concern and care, sensitive, innovative, youth-centred engagement and approaches, and highly knowledgeable about the systems they are navigating - are some of the qualities interviewees identified. *Whilst the below proposal focuses on the recommended expansion of the budget and strategic support for MYST, it is particularly noted that the long-term retention of the current MYST personnel is viewed as a critical element to ensuring that MYST’s current impact is maintained, and the strategic growth of MYST’s operations is optimized.*

2 RATIONALE FOR MYST TEAM EXPANSION & LONG-TERM PLANNING

“The system, while stretched well beyond capacity, is positioned for improved outcomes through early intervention strategies that include education, collaboration, communication, parenting support and other resources. These strategies are becoming more sophisticated through engagement by parents, schools, police, probation officers and others community resources.”

MYST has a proven track record with respect to its work in the areas of intervention and prevention into youth exploitation cases. This proposal is rooted in the following key rationales:

A. Current and anticipated future workload is untenable and unsustainable for existing MYST team

- Current team cannot keep up with growing number of youth in need, as risks increase
- Gang presence is on the rise in the region
- Complexity of youth exploitation is dramatically increasing (e.g. predators grooming of youth now includes conditioning into child pornography, etc.)
- Increased demand on MYST for educational support and training of young people, educators, parents, community agencies and members
- MYST support and services are needed around the clock, which a single team cannot physically provide

B. HR plan is insufficient for the mandate and scope of MYST work

- Need to ensure continuity of MYST personnel to secure current impact and to support the strategic growth of the program and its impact
- Need for transition, succession planning, mentorship, training and capacity building plans for additional and future team members
- Deployment model has not changed since inception, nor changed to match growth
- Current HR is completely reliant on only two individuals, and no HR plan is in place for when these team members are on holiday, sick or go on leave
- Currently the wide range of duties and roles involved in this work happens to be covered by particular skill set of individuals in the position, however it is unreasonable for the same individuals and team members to perform this range of duties
- Lack of adequate data tracking and monitoring system means institutional knowledge is not being passed on should team members change

C. Current funding structure and budget allocations are inadequate

- MYST’s mandate affects the public safety and well being of families, young people and communities across the Capital Regional District

- Long-term commitment of funding for a minimum of two police positions is needed from police agencies
- Secure, long-term funding for a minimum of two counselor positions needs to be committed to and shared by multiple parties, including from municipal and provincial government agencies
- Inconsistent, precarious funding of MYST threatens staff retention and ongoing consistency of program staff and their relationships with youth, that are so critical to the program's effectiveness

D. Need to invest in prevention

- System and region are well poised for critical preventative intervention and support
- Trends towards increased gang presence and increasing exploitation needs to be acted upon now, to prevent compounding exploitations that are resulting (e.g. predators grooming of youth now includes conditioning these youth into child pornography and pedophilia).

E. A comprehensive system and plan to gather MYST data, analyze statistics and support ongoing monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is needed

- This role is beyond capacity, scope and roles of current MYST team
- Current statistics tracking and data reporting needs strengthening to support institutional knowledge, gather baseline and ongoing monitoring data of youth exploitation
- Need for evidence-based and systematic approach that builds on lessons from other municipalities facing youth gang violence and involvement
- Inter-institutional research partnerships could leverage substantial federal government funds to support these components, through developing research funding proposals with the Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and/or the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR). Project funds such as these can draw up to an additional \$2.5 million for up to seven years in contexts where there are matching funds from other agencies, such as those currently being provided to MYST by police agencies and PFSA funders.

3 PROPOSAL DETAILS & FINANCIAL IMPACT

The following is a two-part proposal for increased police agency support to MYST from 2024-2029.

3.1 Part 1: Requested increase in the annual budget allocation for the next five years (2024-2029) to fund two MYST police officers

Proposal: *to approve one-time annual increase of \$222,925 for a total budget of \$412,000 for 2025, and to approve in principle to fund two MYST police officers (approximately \$382,000 per annum) for the subsequent four years (2026-2029).*

A total budget of **\$412,000 budget for 2024-2025** (includes pay for two MYST police officer positions, and has incorporated overtime, training and the cost of purchasing a new vehicle for the second team) and *represents a one-time annual increase of \$222,925* compared to the 2024 budget of \$190,051 (includes salary, benefit, overtime, clothing allowance, vehicle allowance, cell phone, travel costs, vehicle insurance and miscellaneous). To clarify, this one-time 2025 budget is approximately double the 2024 budget, with an additional \$30,000 (approx.) for a one-time vehicle expense.

The total budget requested going forward per annum from **2026-2029** is to fund two MYST police officers, estimated to be approximately **\$382,000 per annum** (taking inflation, standard raises and benefits compensation into account). This proposal seeks police agency commitment, *in principle*, to doubling police resources allocated to MYST beyond 2025, creating the stable five-year (2024-2029) funding trajectory for MYST this program so urgently requires.

It should be noted that the particular skillset of current police personnel in MYST, Cst Gord Magee, and the relationships he has (together with MYST colleague Mia Golden) built was youth, was recognized as a critical success factor in the impact of MYST. Thus, as the police chiefs consider the above proposal, ***it is recommended that they also seek to retain current police personnel Cst Gord Magee as part of their long-term commitment to this funding.*** This would not only secure the ongoing impact of the team, and contribute to long-term planning of mentoring new personnel, but also support the needed longer-term strategic planning process for MYST.

3.2 Part 2: To participate with PCFSA and other local and provincial agencies in several inter-agency, multi-institutional planning meetings in 2024

Proposal: *to secure police agencies' strategic leadership in participating in inter-agency, multi-institutional planning meetings in 2024 to collectively explore and commit to the long-term strategic development of MYST, including securing long-term funding for two MYST counselor positions (2024-2029).*

Please note: It is expected that the financial impact of this role would be minimal to police agencies, requiring that some leadership roles have time and responsibility assigned to advance this commitment.

The primary goals for the multi-sector, inter-institutional meetings would be to: (i) establish clear, long-term (2024-2029) budget-sharing agreements across agencies and levels of government (municipal and provincial) to ensure the long-term funding for two counselor positions in MYST; and (ii) generate long-term planning with respect to MYST human resources, financial and monitoring and evaluation strategies.

Support and leadership are urgently needed to support PCFSA's fundraising efforts for the counselor position. ***If government and local agencies cannot raise the long-term secure funds to resource the counselor position of MYST – let alone the second position sought by the team – the community pays in the negative downstream effect this will have on youth and their families in Victoria.*** The counselor position within MYST – and the unique partnering of a police officer with a child, youth and family counselor – was noted by all interviewees as being critical to the success of the MYST team. As Insp. Brown of the VicPD states: *“The CRED Program has become the linchpin in the police-social work collaboration to combat the exploitation of youth in Victoria's Capital Regional District.”*

Police agencies have regularly written letters of support for applications to external agencies to fund this position. However, despite the proven need and impact of this role within MYST's work, jurisdictional issues and a challenging funding environment have made obtaining consistent, ongoing funding for this role uneven and challenging. Each year, it is uncertain whether PCFSA will be able to acquire funding for this position, a context that makes ongoing retention of trained and effective personnel untenable long-term. PCFSA – and MYST – has been fortunate that Mia Golden has retained this role due to personal commitment, however, such commitment can not be taken for granted long-term.

The financial impact of the counselor's position is approximately \$150,000 per annum, as funded through the PCFSA. The impact of two counselor roles as detailed above is approximately \$280,000 per annum. The position has been funded by different agencies over the years, drawing from different pockets of funding – including often only one-time funding, such as that received last year (2023) from the BC Government's Policing and Security

Branch Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General. Funding also often only focuses on a single issue, such as exclusively on sexual exploitation, which does not reflect the complex programming and support required to support exploited youth such as is provided by MYST. However, ongoing jurisdictional issues about which level of government should pay for such programs, and stretched budgets across agencies, have meant this funding has been precarious.

It is critical to note that a review of the data shows that PCFSA's fundraising challenges are not a shortcoming of this organization, nor a reflection of the value different actors place on the work of MYST. As the needs of our community grows, so too have the fundraising challenges for community agencies. ***Such challenges are an ongoing symptom of a sector that is also in crisis, in which agencies are struggling to fund some of the programs most needed and valued by our local communities.*** A review of documents shows that PCFSA's fundraising efforts have been valiant, ongoing and consistently of high quality. Silo-ed processes of fundraising and jurisdictional budgeting across agencies and funders place unreasonable burden on community agencies such as PCFSA who already have stretched resources.

In 2013, the Victoria police agencies held an inter-agency, multi-sectoral community meeting to problem-solve about how to best support the then one-person MYST team to be effective in their role – given the overwhelming case load. The discussions resulted in the partnership with PCFSA, which made MYST what it is today. It is the researcher's recommendation that police agencies offer targeted leadership and support to convene multi-sectoral inter-institutional meetings to strategize about long-term, sustainable funding plans for the counselor position within MYST. Additionally, beyond the counselor role, MYST needs support from the wider community to ensure that data and statistics are being collected and monitored moving forward, so as to better meet the information needs of all actors and track the well being of youth, families and the community.

3.3 Part 3: To formally partner in the preparation of a 7-year inter-institutional partnership funding proposal to Canadian federal research agencies with PCFSA and AU

Proposal: *to approve police agency partnership in the preparation of an inter-institutional funding proposal to SSHRC (and/or CIHR) for 7-year program funding that would support the collection of baseline data, ongoing statistics collection and monitoring, and the development of a comprehensive information management system*

Please note: It is expected that the financial impact of this role would be minimal to police agencies, requiring that some leadership roles have time and responsibility assigned to advance this commitment.

The Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) has research funding of up to \$2.5 million for researchers and universities who are partnering with a range of institutions on research projects that address some of Canada's most urgent challenges. Project funds such as these can draw up to \$2.5 million for up to seven years in contexts where there are matching funds from other agencies. Current and future funding allocated to MYST by police agencies and PCFSA funders would qualify as such matching funds and could support the leveraging of these funds. It is believed that such funding could optimally support the strategic development of MYST, particularly with respect to the collection of critical baseline data, ongoing statistics collection and monitoring, and the development of a comprehensive information management system, whilst also directing some funding to each partnering institution. The details of the action research focus would be co-elaborated amongst partnering agencies based on the needs identified but could focus on how inter-institutional partnerships might optimally support the enhanced wraparound support of youth and their families, who are facing increased levels of exploitation, gang entrenchment and related risks in the greater Victoria area.

As faculty with Athabasca University, the author of this report has entered discussions with PCFSA about the possibility of putting forward such a funding proposal but would like to engage the police chiefs' support in also formally partnering in the preparation of this funding proposal, recognizing that MYST is an inter-institutional partnership, and that this is critical to its effectiveness and success to date. Additional agencies and institutions (including Royal Roads University, where this author is also Associate Faculty) could be included as potential partners in the funding proposal and project, however, it is important to first secure agreement of the core applicants, which would critically include local police agencies. Other research funding sources that could also be explored including partnership grants available through the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR).

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Immediate expansion of the MYST team through doubling the number of police officers assigned to MYST will offer immediate relief and critical support to address the growing needs of young people most in need in the greater Victoria area, and their families. However, it is only one piece of a larger puzzle for how to maximize the effectiveness of MYST's work. Targeted and strategic leadership is needed now from police agencies to partake in multi-sectoral and inter-institutional meetings that will secure and establish long-term funding for two counselor positions within MYST, with a view to long-term research collaborations that can draw funding from federal agencies.

In addition to expected ongoing population growth in the Capital Regional District, increasing gang activity amidst compounding risk factors for youth related to poverty, homelessness, drug use, mental health issues, online and sexual exploitation, are placing our whole community at

risk. Youth are the most vulnerable members of our community and are the gateway through which gangs are getting a foothold in our region.

MYST is a critical upstream intervention that is proven, effective, and offers unique value to youth, parents and their families, the wider community, and multiple agencies working to make our community safe and healthy. Many interviewees advised that the MYST team should be “more than doubled”. With this in mind, this proposal aims to alleviate immediate team and community needs by immediately expanding the MYST team, whilst securing leadership and partnership moving forward, so we have a shared solution for achieving the thriving, healthy and safe community we all hope to have in the future.

For comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact Dr. Rebecca Nelems @ RNelems@athabascau.ca.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rebecca Nelems".

Rebecca Nelems, PhD

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5 APPENDICES

5.1 MYST Team Testimonies

5.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

5.3 List of Documents Reviewed

5.4 Letters of Support for MYST Proposal

5.1 MYST Team Testimonies

Testimony – Mia Golden, MYST Counselor

I have been working as the counsellor half of the MYST team since January 2014. The MYST mandate focuses on the prevention of youth exploitation which includes online exploitation, sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, and gang recruitment. It is busy. Never have I worked in a program that was so busy. The work is intense, challenging, emotional at times, enriching, and you never know what the day will bring. The only constant is every morning you hope there isn't a message or a voicemail alerting you of a youth passing. It's a strange way to start the day, but it's now second nature.

This is not a job for one person. It's not even a job for two. Yes, we have been doing it, but it isn't sustainable. The level of risks to youth has increased since I first began. When I first began, we still had SLOs in the schools. They too were building relationships with students and were often the first point of contact when a youth disclosed an exploitive experience. Now we are that point of contact. School staff understand the distress involved in a disclosure and reach out to our team knowing the response will be developmentally appropriate and trauma informed. Not everyone has that training, so they want to ensure the child is met with the best potential response possible. So, they call us.

The skillset involved for the team is unique given the complexities of the cases we are met with each day. The counsellor best suited for this position has significant experience working with youth, marginalized individuals, systems, and a strong parent education background. The police officer half needs to be cloned from my current partner, Cst. Gord Magee. His ability to see all the moving parts within a file is extraordinary. Despite MYST not taking on the investigative side of any files, Gord consistently knows the trajectory of a file and what needs to be done and as a result so many files that are forwarded to their designated investigator have significant background work done to support the continued work on it. And then there is his temperament. Members of this team require specific empathy and understanding of all the behaviors of those we work with. Whether it's the families or the youth. This job is riddled with frustrating scenarios. Having the capacity to see through it and debrief with your partner is what makes the people on this team able to continue on. Currently, with just the two of us, we only have each other to debrief and strategize with. We happen to do extremely well together, and I believe that is why we have been able to sustain the quality of work and attentiveness to those who reach out for services. But when one of us takes a few days off, the load is not manageable. Well, it is currently not manageable, but when having to go solo it is overwhelming.

There is nothing like this work. But it is heavy. A new trend we are seeing are youth are not only being groomed online for images and videos, but pedophiles are now also grooming children and youth to watch child pornography and abuse images within their sexual talks with the pedophiles. That a "MAP" is just another part of the LGBTQ continuum. What is a MAP? It's a Minor Attracted Person. Children and youth are being targeted for indoctrination into the world of pedophilia as well as the BDSM community.

We have gang members from the mainland recruiting middle and high school students, and we recently met with some elementary school students who were vaping.

The number of youth who are becoming addicted to substances and being sex trafficked and exploited is staggering.

Most days we get a call from a parent or school with at least one new referral. We cannot keep up. We are also relied on to provide school presentations on gangs, exploitation, consent, and the impact of pornography on the brain. We are also regularly asked to come in and give talks to school and community resources' staff.

I could go on about this work because there is so much involved, I could go on about how working with my partner has made all the difference in this work, I could go on about the intensity and often extremely dark side of this work and how critical self-care is to avoid or manage vicarious trauma. But I will also say there is nothing like this work. It is important, I would say it's critical. Not only for our youth and their families, but for our communities and society as a whole. We need the future to be healthy, and prevention and immediate interventions are what is needed. Two people doing this work (while collaborating with other valuable services and organizations) is a start, but it is not going to give us the outcomes we need. We need a bigger team.

Thank you,

Mia Golden

June 15, 2024

Testimony – Cst Gord Magee, MYST Police Officer

I have been a police officer for 27 years in 2 countries. I have held various roles over the years. Since being the successful applicant for the police officer half of MYST in 2020, I have had the honour of working with Mia Golden as my partner. I remember her saying at the beginning of our partnership, “Hold on!” The nature of the calls we get from parents, community partners and youth themselves is nothing short of horrific. From drug addiction, mental health and exploitation to gang involvement and sex trafficking, the work takes an even greater personal toll because it involves kids. The complexity of these issues and the fact that meaningful, immediate intervention must be voluntary, certainly makes an already difficult job, much more so. One youth will have multiple contacts from MYST, forming strong, positive relationships. There will also be numerous meetings and consultations with parents, guardians and community partners in relation to this youth. Multiply this by approximately 160 youth and rising, and the sheer volume makes it quite clear that this is unsustainable for 2 people for the entire CRD. The number of contacts from schools has increased since School Liaison Officers have been removed. Issues that arise in the school community that would normally be addressed by SLO’s are now being handled by patrol and MYST, which is already overtasked. We also provide presentations in schools and community centres in the CRD on healthy relationships, consent and gangs which is part of the proactive role of MYST.

On a personal note, my daily routine starts with apprehension in checking my work phone in the morning to see if a youth has died. That’s before I leave my house. This is also not sustainable. As partners, Mia and I rely heavily on each other for our mental health. I have started seeing the department psychologist due to the pressure and gravity of this role. This is part of the proactive approach that enables me to manage all that this role entails.

The current model of MYST and the burden the workload places on Mia and myself is not sustainable. There needs to be more teams to effectively continue to support youth and their families. I want to make it clear that this particular role is the most important one I have undertaken in my 27 years as a police officer and one that I am honoured to hold. I would like to remain in this role for as long as I can. We have formed great working relationships with our community partners and have an excellent reputation in the community. We will be able to accomplish so much more with more staff.

Thank you,

Cst Gord Magee

June 11, 2024

5.2 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)

In preparing this report, 8 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted, representing a range of education, government, legal, health and child welfare agencies who work directly with the MYST team.

KIIs were held with representatives from the following agencies and organizations:

- Youth Services, BC Government
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- Pediatrics, Victoria General Hospital
- Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (members include municipal councillors, school district trustees and Capital Regional District appointees)
- Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre
- Safer Schools Together
- School District 61
- School District 62

5.3 List of Documents Reviewed

- PCFSA, 2022-2023 Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF) – Quarterly Progress Report – Quarter 1
- PCFSA, 2022-2023 Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF) – Quarterly Progress Report – Quarter 2
- PCFSA, 2022-2023 Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF) – Quarterly Progress Report – Quarter 3
- PCFSA, 2022-2023 Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF) – Quarterly Progress Report – Quarter 4
- PCFSA, 2021 Year End Report, Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF)
- PCFSA, 2019 Year End Report, Gun and Gang Violence Action Fund (GGVAF)
- PCFSA Annual Report, CRED, 2016-2017
- PCFSA Annual Report, CRED, 2017-2018
- PCFSA Annual Report, CRED, 2018-2019
- PCFSA, External evaluation report, Youth Gang Intervention and Mentorship Initiative (YGIMI), April 2013
- MYST REPORT 2023 for VFCYJC
- Luring Investigation started by MYST
- [Surrey man faces luring, sexual assault charges | Vancouver Sun](#)
- Letter of Support – Laura Vye, Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre
- MYST YOUTH template – running active list (some have aged out, but are still being offered support from MYST as there are few other supports)
- Missing Youth Reports 2023
- PCFSA, Media Statement, CRED, March 15, 2018
- Rock School Proposal
- Letter of Support for Constable Gord Magee
- MYST: Explain your role
- 2022 CRED Advocacy letter VFCYJC
- Case Study of youth supported by MYST
- Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, “Increased Funding and Staff Resources for MYST/CRED”, October 7, 2022
- Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee, “Letter to the Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General,” November 20, 2023
- Letter, “CRED Program and Civil Forfeiture Funding”, by Insp. Michael Brown Officer in Charge – MYST Victoria Police Department, November 22, 2022
- Marie-Terese Little, Mayor, District of Metchosin, Letter to The Honourable Grace Lore, Minister of Children and Family Development The Honourable Mike Farnworth, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General The Honourable Niki Sharma, Attorney General, February 15, 2024

- Policing and Security Branch Ministry of Public Safety & Solicitor General, BC Government, “One-time Funding: Pacific Centre Family Services Association”, March 31, 2023
- Greater Victoria Police Integrated Units, Annual Report 2020-2021
- Greater Victoria Police Integrated Units, Annual Report 2021-2022
- PCFSA Special Report to the Chiefs of Police for the Capital Regional District, BC, CRED Program, May 2014

5.4 Letters of Support for Proposal

Letters submitted in support of this proposal are from:

- Laura Vye, Executive Director, Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre and the Victoria and West Shore Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (CYAC); Retired MYST police officer (Saanich Police Department)
- Jennifer Chambers, Senior Analyst & Trainer, Safer Schools Together; Former Counsellor, Esquimalt High School; Former District Counsellor, Greater Victoria School District (GVSD)
- Jennifer MacKenzie, Regional CYFMHSU Nursing Clinician & Rebecca Butler, Coordinator, South Island CYFMHSU, Island Health Child, Youth & Family Mental Health and Substance Use (CYFMHSU)
- Lee O'Neill, Youth Probation Officer, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)
- Monique Moore, District Counsellor, Greater Victoria School District (GVSD) 61
- Bill McElroy, Chair, Capital Region Action Team; Representative of sexually exploited youth to the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (VFCYJC)