

Nareka Jacques

From: Anna Warhurst [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, September 28, 2024 10:02 AM
To: Anna Warhurst
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: MYST funding crisis will impact area families
Attachments: MYST Policy Report 26 September 2024.pdf

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Hello Greater Victoria Area Mayors & Council,

As of the week of September 30, 2024, the counsellor position on the MYST team will have its funding reduced to where Mia Golden can only work two (2) days per week. I am writing to you all together because this issue is of critical importance and crosses all parties and jurisdictions.

The Mobile Youth Services Team is a partnership of one police officer and one child, youth and family counselor. They are relied on by families, schools, medical professionals and police for their specialized knowledge and skills.

They currently handle 250+ active case files involving Greater Victoria children and teenagers who are experiencing – or are at severe risk of – exploitation (online and in-person), drug addiction, homelessness, mental health issues, sexual exploitation, violence, gang recruitment and entanglement. The team has also maintained relationships and contact with 23 youth who have “aged out”.

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 MSYT 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. That is the beauty of their program - and the service is critical to youth and families in Greater Victoria.

Attached please find a Policy Report written by Dr Rebecah Nelems including her proposal regarding funding for this service that is so vital to our youth and community. Her goal is to see funding secured locally for MYST and we would appreciate you raising this issue in Council. Dr Nelems can be reached for questions at [REDACTED]

As a parent, I can tell you the kids are not alright. They need every agency available to help them and the MYST team provides a service like no other. I needed you to know this crisis is unfolding and parents are afraid. Please let me know if you have any questions or reach out to Dr Nelems directly.

Thank you,
Anna Warhurst
[REDACTED]

POLICY REPORT:
MOBILE YOUTH SERVICES TEAM (MYST):
CRITICAL STATUS REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Prepared by Dr. Rebecca Nelems¹ (PhD)
Capital Regional District, BC
September 26, 2024

Executive Summary:

This report presents the recent findings and recommendations of an external review of the Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST), CRD, BC. Conducted by a local researcher with expertise in child-centred programming and well being, this report is based in an analysis of a wide range of data and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with leaders representing the education, government, legal, health, police, social services and child welfare sectors who have worked directly with MYST. The research consistently showed that:

- As one of the fastest growing Capital Regional Districts (CRD) in Canada, and with the intersecting crises of opioids, homelessness, mental health, surging gang presence and online exploitation, *we have reached an urgent crisis point with respect to youth gang exploitation and entrenchment* in our region.
- The *Mobile Youth Services Team (MYST) is directly reducing and preventing youth gang exploitation across the CRD* by offering effective, economically efficient, critical and unique support to youth.
- Despite the surging needs, and MYST's proven track record, *funding for MYST has reached a crisis point*, with MYST having to dramatically reduce its operations effective as of September 30, 2024.

Recommendations include:

- 1. To secure long-term, 5-year funding to support two full-time MYST teams.**
- 2. To urgently convene local leadership across education, health, police, legal services, child and family services, and all levels of government to strategize and guide long-term, inter-institutional funding mechanisms and strategies.**
- 3. To conduct research on MYST as a model of youth-centred, wraparound support that could be replicated in other municipalities and capital regional districts across Canada.**

¹ This report was prepared by Dr. Rebecca Nelems (PhD), Assistant Professor with the Centre for Social Sciences at Athabasca University (AU) & Associate Faculty in Leadership Studies at Royal Roads University (RRU). The research for this report was made possible with the support of the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (VFCYJC), Capital Regional District (CRD).

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1. MYST PROGRAM

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 and one child, youth and family counselor. 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.

Up until Monday, September 30, 2024 – when funding for the counselor position will be reduced to two days/week – the two-person team carried 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 has also maintained 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;
- updates and presentations to the Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (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;
- support for 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.

3. FINDINGS: IMPACT OF THE MYST PROGRAM

This review found MYST to be a unique, multi-disciplinary, inter-institutional partnership through which the team has built significant relationships of trust and support with young people from across the CRD. 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” as the MYST 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.

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 June 2024, MYST had 254 youth (active cases) to whom they were 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 has continued 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 recommendations below focus on securing funding and long-term support for MYST in general, it is also 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 through appropriate succession planning and capacity building of future personnel.

2 ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions were reached based on a comprehensive analysis of the data reviewed.

Conclusion 1: Current reductions in funding mean the MYST program is having to significantly reduce its services and may eventually have to shut down.

As of the week of September 30th, 2024, the counsellor position in MYST will be reduced to only two days/week, due to lack of funding for the program. Not all regional police departments have confirmed their ongoing funding for MYST, which could result in reducing the budget allocation of the police position for MYST dramatically. Inconsistent, precarious funding of MYST threatens staff retention and ongoing consistency of program staff and their relationships with youth, that have been so critical to the program's effectiveness.

Conclusion 2: Long-term commitment in the form of funding, inter-institutional collaboration and strategic planning is required by actors from across all levels of government (municipal, provincial and federal), civil society, criminal justice, police, education and health to support and ensure the ongoing services provided by MYST.

MYST's mandate affects the public safety and well being of families, young people and communities across the Capital Regional District. The work of MYST directly contributes to achieving the mandates of all agencies concerned with local, regional and federal governance, health, education, community and family services, legal services, police and the criminal justice system. However, there has been no strategic, inter-institutional long-term plan or agreement for supporting MYST moving forward. This includes attending to the need to ensure continuity of MYST personnel to secure current impact and to support the strategic growth of the program and its impact, and the need to engage in succession planning, training and capacity building and human resources into the future.

Conclusion 3: MYST is an existing strength and resource in the region, offering local actors the critical opportunity to invest in effective prevention and intervention in a highly cost-efficient way, which is not being offered by any other existing service in the region.

The health, education, criminal justice, community and family services systems are well poised in the region for critical preventative and interventionist 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). MYST has a proven track record with respect to its work in the areas of intervention and prevention of youth exploitation cases.

Conclusion 4: MYST's current and anticipated future workload is untenable and unsustainable for even one MYST team, let alone the reduced capacity of the team moving forward.

Even the pre-existing team of two full-time personnel, which is no longer be in place as of the week of September 30, 2024, would not be able to keep up with growing number of youth in need, as risks increase. Gang presence continues to be on the rise in the region and the complexity of youth exploitation is dramatically increasing (e.g. predators grooming of youth now includes conditioning into child pornography, etc.). There has been an increasing demand on MYST for educational support and training of young people, educators, parents, community agencies and members. Even when operating one full-time team, MYST support and services have been needed around the clock, which a single team could not physically provide. Long-term commitment of funding for a minimum of two police positions is needed from police agencies to address the level of need currently documented in the region. Secure, long-term funding for a minimum of two counselor positions is also needed.

Conclusion 5: Given MYST’s track record as an effective, cost-efficient, inter-institutional and cross-jurisdictional approach to youth gang prevention, there is a significant opportunity to research MYST as an innovative, youth-centred wraparound model that could be replicated by other municipalities and capital regional districts across Canada.

The issues BC’s CRD are facing with respect to youth gang exploitation and entrenchment are urgent. However, they are not unique to our region or province alone. Municipalities and capital regional districts across Canada – and North America – are facing relatable crises. *The unique factor about our CRD is we have an effective and cost-efficient model for offering wraparound support to young people already in place: MYST.* Long-term research on this program could document and showcase a replicable model that would benefit other cities, whilst further strengthening MYST in our own community by continuing to build on success factors and evidence for what works.

3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1:

To urgently secure long-term, five-year funding (2024-2029) to support two full-time MYST teams, each consisting of one police officer and one counsellor.

The total estimated budget needed to support the MYST program is:

2024-2025: \$702,000 / annum

- A total budget of **\$412,000 budget for 2024-2025** for two MYST police officer positions.
- A total budget of **\$290,000 for 2024-2025** for two counselor positions through PCFSA.

2025-2029: \$672,000 / annum

- The total budget going forward per annum from 2026-2029 for two MYST police officers is estimated at approximately **\$382,000 per annum²**
- A total budget of **\$290,000 for 2024-2025** for two counselor positions through PCFSA.

Recommendation 2:

To urgently convene local leadership across education, health, police, legal services, child and family services, and all levels of government to strategize and guide long-term, inter-institutional funding mechanisms and strategies for MYST.

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. Community support and institutional leadership is urgently needed to raise the long-term secure support needed by the MYST program.

² Please note the annual budget for 2024-2025 is higher due to the need for a one-time \$30,000 (approx.) vehicle expense in that year.

Recommendation 3:

To conduct research on MYST as a model of youth-centred, wraparound support that could be replicated in other municipalities and capital regional districts across Canada.

The MYST program not only needs to be sustainably funded to avert its closure and reduction of services, it needs to be expanded upon, recognized and replicated, moving forward. Long-term research on this program could offer replicable models for other cities across Canada and North America, and help further strengthen MYST's approach in our own community by continuing to build on success factors and evidence for what works. Inter-institutional research partnerships could leverage substantial federal government funds to support these components. The Social Sciences and Humanities and Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) and the Tri-Council Agencies have a range of research funding opportunities, including some for 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. Current and future funding allocated to MYST by local government or agencies would qualify as such matching funds and could support the leveraging of these funds. The author of this report is currently working with interested local institutions and agencies in developing funding proposals and welcomes additional community partners to get in touch.

4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

MYST is a critical upstream intervention that is proven, effective, and cost-efficient, offering unique value to youth, 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 report aims to advocate for the immediate funding of two MYST teams, 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,



Rebecca Nelems, PhD

Assistant Professor, Centre for Social Sciences, Athabasca University (AU)

Associate Faculty, School of Leadership Studies, Royal Roads University (RRU)

Associate, International Institute for Child Rights and Development (IICRD)

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, 12 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with leaders representing the following institutions all of whom have worked directly with MYST:

- BC Government
- Vancouver Island Health Authority
- 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 Districts 61 and 62
- MYST Team members
- Pacific Centre Family Services Association (PCFSA)
- Victoria Police Department

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

Letters of support for MYST were also reviewed and received from individuals representing:

- Victoria Child Abuse Prevention and Counselling Centre
- Victoria and West Shore Child and Youth Advocacy Centres (CYAC)
- Safer Schools Together
- Greater Victoria School District (GVSD) 61
- Youth & Family Mental Health and Substance Use (CYFMHSU)
- Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD)
- Capital Region Action Team
- Victoria Family Court and Youth Justice Committee (VFCYJC)