

Council asks youth for input on new youth programming

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In February, the town announced an expansion of its current youth programming to include free swims, gym access and various others programs at three Halton Hills community centres a few days per week.

Shortly after that announcement, staff and users at the Links2Care centres responded with concerns that, while providing recreational opportunities for youth, the programming at the youth centres also focused on social issues affecting youth.

The youth and myself have visited the programs and seen first hand that they only deal with the recreational aspect of the program, said Ivy-Lynne Halis, a 19-year-old Georgetown resident who used the centres for many years, and is among those fighting to keep the centres open.

If the current Links2Care Youth Centres aren't saved, the youth are hoping to see a similar model be set in place. This will combine both the recreational, and social service aspects.

Sometimes there are youth who walk into the centres having no idea what they need, want, or are able to get access too, so there will need to be a relationship made between staff and youth to allow them to pick up on a youth who may not know they need

help, Halis told the IFP.

Some of the services the youth are concerned about losing in the transfer include basic or extensive counselling, grief support, substance abuse services, among others.

Council and town staff heard those concerns, and are now working on further expanding youth programming offered by the municipality in hopes of meeting some of those needs before the June 30 deadline.

It's something that we've just started to address. I'm sure all of these problems have been out there forever, but now having hit this crisis point, now we're trying all these different things and these problems are showing up. But at least we're making progress in my mind, said Coun. Jane Fogal at during a Community Affairs committee meeting on March 27.

Council has directed staff to continue studying the issues and exploring options to address the concerns and report their findings back to council before any further steps are taken.

For their part, Halis said the preferred option for the youth would be to find a way to keep the centres open. A Facebook group called Save the Youth Centres, advocating just that, has accumulated more than 410 members.



The Off the Wall Youth Centre in Acton.

Photo by Graeme Frisque

However, at this point, saving the centres doesn't appear to be a viable option and according to Links2Care would require an outside group or organization to take over control of the programs.

We were really hoping we could find somebody who could or would (take over) and we were not successful, said Power. As a result of our inability to find someone to operate them or take them on, they may close. Forgive me for being an optimist, but

we're not at the end of the road yet.

Even in the absence of saving the centres, Halis says the kids using them remain optimistic.

In going forward, the youth plan to continue staying on board and working with the town in different aspects to not remodel what we already have, but to continue the current model which is a one-stop shop that allows easy access to services and recreation, she said.



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