

THE REGION

Towns consider police checks for summer staff

BY CHRISTOPHER DOURIS
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A concerned mother is asking for police background checks for summer camp counsellors after learning no research is done on job applicants.

Kim Gauthier approached Richmond Hill council after she learned the parks and recreation department did not conduct background checks of summer staff.

"It only takes a second to molest a kid," said Gauthier, who has a six-year-old son with attention deficit disorder. "If it stops one child molester..."

One of Gauthier's concerns is that if incidents arise, there may be liability issues for municipalities that don't conduct the checks.

"I was really shocked to find out they didn't do them."

Richmond Hill Mayor Bill Bell said his town had never considered it before.

But as a result of Gauthier's calls, Bell said staff will meet in the next two weeks to deal with the issue.

"If I had to bet money on it, we will implement a policy to institute police checks for summer camp counsellors."

Richmond Hill isn't alone in moving toward having the checks conducted.

Markham Mayor Don Cousens confirmed the town does not have a policy in place that provides for extra screening, but staff are investigating the possibility of drafting a proposal for staff's consideration.

In Vaughan, program supervisor Janie Romoff said a proposal to initiate checks in the city will be going before councillors in the next couple of weeks.

The city is not responding to any specific events, she said, but rather to concerns in the community.

"It has been law in any organizations funded by community services (ministry)," she said, such as child care centres and centres for developmentally challenged individuals. It's just starting to catch on in recreation organizations."

Vaughan's policy should be in place in time for this summer's recruitment, Romoff said.

Meanwhile, Newmarket has been conducting checks in a "loose fashion" for the past two years and will implement a formal policy this year.

And in Whitchurch-Stouffville, police checks are not done on any staff people, according to John Crawley, director of the community and leisure services department.

The town has "never been requested to initiate something like this," Crawley said.

2nd in a series

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