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UPDATE ON THE “SWIM TO SURVIVE” 2005-2006 PILOT AND FUNDING REQUEST FOR 2006-2007

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, May 25, 2006, from the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services, together with Recommendation Nos. 2 and 3 as follows:

- 2. that Council authorize that if additional funds are provided by the Province for “Swim to Survive”, that these funds be used to expand the program to more than the current 52 schools.**
- 3. that the Commissioner of Community Services, Housing and Health Services, or her designate be authorized to sign the amended agreements, subject to prior review by the Regional Solicitor.**

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. Council approve the continuation of the “Swim to Survive” program for 2006-2007 at a cost of \$30,000 within the Community Services and Housing Department Budget approval.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with information regarding the results of the “Swim to Survive” pilot initiative administered by the Community Services and Housing Department between November 2005 and March 2006.

This report also seeks Council approval for the continuation of the Program in 2006/2007.

3. BACKGROUND

In November 2005, staff reported to Council that York Region, in partnership with the nine local municipal recreation departments, local school boards and the Lifesaving Society, had launched the “Swim to Survive” pilot program across the Region.

The Program was developed by the Lifesaving Society with funding from world champion figure skater, Barbara Underhill’s, Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation.

York Region implemented the pilot program in response to a series of child drownings in Ontario last summer. “Swim to Survive” teaches children in Grade 3 about the inherent risks associated with water, provides them with the skills necessary to survive an unexpected fall into water and provides parents with important water education information.

The pilot program was offered to 54 schools in York Region identified by school boards as having a higher percentage of students with families new to Canada and/or families with limited financial resources. Research indicates that these students are less likely to be aware of and have access to traditional learn-to-swim programs and therefore most likely to benefit from “Swim to Survive”.

The Program was delivered between November 2005 and March 2006 to 52 of the 54 identified schools in York Region to an actual total of 2,212 children. A minimum of one school in each of the nine municipalities participated.

3.1 Media Launch

The Program was officially launched on December 5, 2005 at the Centennial Pool in the Town of Richmond Hill. Present were Chair Fisch, Mayor Bell, local and regional councillors, school board chairs, Barbara Underhill and Our Lady of Hope Catholic School students and their teachers.

Media reports described York Region as demonstrating leadership and innovation by implementing this program. “York Region will give us some pointers,” said Provincial Education Minister Gerard Kennedy who wants swimming safety for all Grade 3 students to be part of Ontario’s Healthy School Initiative - *Toronto Star, December 5, 2005*.

3.2 Partner Roles

York Region co-ordinated the Program and provided funding through the Community Development and Investment Fund for instructors and busing costs. Municipalities provided pool space in-kind, school boards identified schools to participate and distributed parent and student kits while the Lifesaving Society provided the resource materials and instructor training.

3.2 Program Evaluation

Each partner agreed to supply York Region with program and expense reports and evaluations. Reports have been used to inform our recommendations about the future of this program.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

Staff have reviewed the success of this initiative using the following performance indicators:

- The effectiveness of the partnerships.
- The access of the intended recipients to the Program.
- The appropriateness of program delivery.
- Participant satisfaction.
- Program operation within the approved budget.

4.1 Partnerships

The planning and implementation of this program required considerable collaboration with each of the partners. The individuals representing their respective municipalities and school boards worked co-operatively and effectively.

Partners have expressed a willingness to work together again should “Swim to Survive” continue in 2006/2007.

4.2 Intended Recipients

“Swim to Survive” is designed to provide children in Grade 3 with three basic skills: roll into deep water, tread water and swim 50 meters. Children at this stage of physical development are typically equipped to achieve these skills.

The Program was therefore only offered to students in Grade 3. Participating schools had a higher percentage of students with families new to Canada and/or families with limited financial resources supporting the media reports that identify these two groups as having limited access to traditional learn-to-swim programs.

4.3 Program Delivery

Classes held in 14 pools across the Region were instructed by qualified instructor/lifeguards who were trained in the delivery of “Swim to Survive”. There were no incidents reported in any class.

Children were initially assessed on their previous swimming experience and then evaluated on their ability to complete each skill. Evaluations indicated that 69% of participants achieved the three skills. Of those, 35% achieved the three skills without using a personal flotation device which is considered a positive achievement given the children had limited or no previous swim experience. Table 1 outlines the achievement results.

Table 1
“Swim to Survive” Achievement Results

Evaluation Category	Number of Children	Percentage of Children
Previous Swim Experience	1,682	76%
No Previous Swim Experience	530	24%
Achieved the 3 Skills	771	35%
Achieved the 3 skills using a Personal Flotation Device	752	34%
Attempted the skills	689	31%

While the pilot program was not available to all schools in York Region, it was available, free of charge, to all Grade 3 students in the identified schools. The results demonstrate that a universal approach in the delivery of programs, especially those programs that educate children on matters of health, wellness and safety, is effective:

- Both school boards reported that all parents were willing to allow their children to participate.
- Children without previous swim experience were not “selected” to attend the Program.
- The Program was open to both children with some previous experience and to those that had no previous experience.
- Having the Program included in the school day ensured children attended each class; supported the boards’ renewed commitment to daily physical activity and provided teachers with resources to contextualize the program within a larger discussion of water safety and education.

4.4 Participant Satisfaction

Parents, teachers, children and instructors had an opportunity to complete a survey to evaluate their satisfaction with “Swim to Survive”. The Lifesaving Society has agreed to compile the data and share the results with all of the partners. An initial limited review however suggests a high level of satisfaction among each of the groups surveyed.

4.5 Cost

The approved budget for the pilot was \$50,000. As a result of volume bus bookings and a ratio negotiated with the municipalities of one instructor to ten participants, the actual program expenditure of \$26,082 was well within the budget approval. This translates into an average of \$11.79 per child for instruction, busing and resource kits.

4.6 2006/2007 Program

The “Swim to Survive” pilot program was successful and was implemented well within the approved budget. The partners are eager to continue this collaboration in the next academic year and are requesting that York Region approve funding for a second year of the Program.

Municipal representatives would seek the necessary approvals to once again provide pool space in-kind.

Within an approved budget of \$30,000, 52 schools could continue to participate in this program in 2006/07.

With Council approval, York Region staff would begin discussions with the partners for a second year of the Program.

4.7 Relationship to Vision 2026

“Swim to Survive” supports Vision 2026 by:

- Responding to the human service needs of a growing and changing population.
- Responding to children in need.
- Fostering effective working relationships with community partners.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The “Swim to Survive” program in 2005/2006 was managed within the Community Services and Housing Department’s budget approval.

The implementation of “Swim to Survive” in the next academic year is anticipated to cost \$30,000 to support 52 schools and approximately 2,300 students. The “Swim to Survive” program cost of \$30,000 will be managed within the Community Services and Housing Department’s 2006 Budget Approval.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

While there are no direct local municipal financial impacts, in each municipality, “Swim to Survive” has provided York Region families and their children, in the identified schools, access to basic water safety and education training.

7. CONCLUSION

Implementing “Swim to Survive” in York Region has been an innovative and groundbreaking pilot initiative. The Lifesaving Society has stated that York Region is the first municipality to implement this program on such a large scale and, according to Barbara Underhill, “countless lives will be saved”. The Ministry of Education and four municipalities have made contact with staff in the Community Services and Housing Department requesting information on our approach, challenges and successes.

The continuation of “Swim to Survive” in 2006/2007 would provide incoming Grade 3 students with the opportunity to experience the benefits of the Program. Staff therefore recommend its continuation for a second year.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.