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CHILDREN'S PROGRAM PILOT INITIATIVE "SWIM TO SURVIVE"

The Community Services and Housing Committee recommends adoption of the recommendation contained in the following report, November 3, 2005, from the Commissioner of Community Services and Housing:

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that:

1. This report be received for information.

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide Committee and Council with information regarding the Swim to Survive pilot initiative administered by the Community Services and Housing Department.

3. BACKGROUND

Swim to Survive is a program developed by The Life Saving Society offering students in Grade 3 the basic skills required to survive an unexpected fall into water.

The Life Saving Society recommends Swim to Survive to students in Grade 3, or children aged 7 to 8, as they are at an optimal stage of physical development to learn the skills taught in the Swim to Survive program.

This past summer saw an unprecedented number of drownings in Ontario lakes, backyard and municipal pools. While there may be a multitude of reasons for such tragic accidents, everyone agrees that a more concerted effort to teach children "drown proofing" would be a great start to prevention. It should be noted that "drown proofing" through a program like Swim to Survive is quite different from the well known learn-to-swim programs offered locally by our municipalities.

Following the drownings, the Minister of Education began making public statements about the importance of children learning to swim and suggesting water safety become a component of the school curriculum. While discussions at the Ministry level occur, it is important for municipalities to identify potential delivery models and the challenges of implementing a school-wide, learn-to-swim / water safety program. York Region and its partners would be in a position to inform such discussions following the conclusion and evaluation of this pilot initiative.

3.1 Needs Assessment

There is no known Federal and/or provincial funding or grant available for implementation of the Swim to Survive or basic learn-to-swim programs.

Swim to Survive would be of benefit to most children in York Region but this pilot initiative will be targeted to all Grade 3 students in the schools identified by the public and catholic school boards.

4. ANALYSIS AND OPTIONS

4.1 Partners

Swim to Survive will be delivered by the nine local municipal recreation departments who will provide pool space in-kind and schedule the required aquatic instructor/lifeguards. Direct instructional costs will be funded by York Region.

The school boards will facilitate transportation and student/parent information.

The Life Saving Society will provide classroom teacher resources, student handbooks, parent information on water safety and any aquatic instructor training required.

The Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAKE Foundation supports this initiative and its founder and spokesperson, Barbara Underhill, is expected at the official public launch. The Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAKE Foundation, named after Barbara Underhill's infant daughter, was founded when Stephanie died in a backyard pool drowning. Since then, and through her foundation, Ms. Underhill has used her celebrity to raise funding for research and drowning prevention programs. Having the support of the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAKE Foundation brings further attention to the need for both water safety education programs and communities working together to put drowning prevention strategies into place.

York Region continues to play a co-ordinating role and will provide the required funding for instructor and busing costs.

This initiative is an excellent example of partnership and collaboration among the levels of municipal government, community agencies and Boards of Education.

4.2 Outcomes and Indicators

Swim to Survive will launch this fall with the official public launch scheduled shortly thereafter.

Between November 2005 and March 2006, 2,531 Grade 3 students, in 55 schools across York Region, will participate in the Program.

Students will receive instruction in three basic water survival skills:

- Rolling into deep water.

- Treading water.
- Swimming 50 metres.

Students will be assessed on:

- Successful achievement of skills.
- Successful achievement of skills using a personal floatation device (PFD).
- Attempting the program.

Municipalities will report on the number of students who achieve each level of completion and the number of students without previous swimming experience.

4.3 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

Swim to Survive is anticipated to cost \$47,000 in its entirety and is being funded through the National Child Benefit Reinvestment Strategy. There is no additional cost to York Region for this program.

6. LOCAL MUNICIPAL IMPACT

Swim to Survive provides York Region families and their children, in the identified schools, access to basic water survival training in each of the local municipalities.

Families will be informed of the various learn-to-swim programs available in each municipality. Eligible families may access additional subsidy for swim lessons through York Region's PLAY program or municipal subsidy programs where they exist.

7. CONCLUSION

Implementing Swim to Survive in York Region will be "*breaking new ground*" as stated by both the Life Saving Society and Barbara Underhill. The Ministry of Education is also interested in the results of this initiative.

York Region remains committed to working in partnership with the community to deliver innovative services to support families and children.

The Senior Management Group has reviewed this report.