

**City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers**

March 22, 2023

Question: How many of the proposed additional investments in Youth and Families can be linked directly to the recommendations youth provided as part of the Youth Safety and Resilience Concept focus groups and conversations?

Response:

Below are the new investments and current efforts that reflect the recommendations in the Youth Safety and Resilience report. A new Youth Engagement Specialist, who will focus on Youth Safety and Resilience, will start on April 3rd. The first task of this position will be to hire and train a group of Youth Ambassadors. The Ambassadors will review the report and plan a Youth Summit to engage youth and families around the issues that matter most to them.

***Recommendation #1:** Offer creative, inclusive, and flexible youth programs that foster social connection and a sense of belonging and promote their behavioral health.*

FY24 Proposed Budget's Additional Investments:

Patrick Henry Teen Program—RPCA will provide two additional operating hours at the Patrick Henry Teen Program on Fridays until 11pm and Saturdays until 8pm. This addition will support Alexandria teens on the City's West End by providing free supervised access to recreation opportunities.

Out of School Time Program (OSTP) Investments—City Council authorized a mid-FY23 addition of 3.2 part-time FTEs to support several high-demand Out of School Time (OSTP) program locations. The FY24 proposed budget recommends a \$200,000 increase in permanent part-time staffing for the OSTP as part of the FY24 budget's alternative one-cent tax rate increase option.

RPCA expanded classes and camps—RPCA is increasing the availability of contractor-led programs for youth and adults.

Current Programs/Efforts/Recent Accomplishments:

Kids are Terrific (KAT) Camp

Members of the Youth Development team and our Counselor Aides lead a summer camp program for at-risk youth ages eight-12 at around ten local community/recreation centers, with direct support from the Recreation Centers. Each location serves 20-25 children. Begun in 1986, this five-week summer camp includes educational sessions on alcohol and tobacco prevention, negative peer pressure reversal, anger management and nutrition promotion, as well as field trips. This program provides a positive alternative to negative activities for some of the most at-risk youth in the city. Outcomes from past years indicate that participants surveyed strongly agreed that they learned something new about alcohol and other drugs, peer pressure, anger management and nutrition and that they had a great time.

Peer Advisor Program

The Peer Advisors/Counselor Aide program has been an afterschool leadership program for at-risk teens since 1985 at Charles Houston Recreation Center. Starting at the age of 12, Peer Advisors are trained in peer pressure resistance skills, tobacco prevention, anger management and mediation. They act as mentors and role models to younger youth. They receive training in leadership and public speaking and give public presentations on prevention

topics. They participate in community service projects. At the age of 15, after volunteering as a Peer Advisor, they become eligible to be hired as part time Counselor Aides with DCHS, where they facilitate prevention programs for younger youth and continue their role as mentors and role models to younger youth.

Untouchables

In 1988, three young men approached a DCHS employee with the desire to do something other than play basketball afterschool. Two DCHS employees, with support from Charles Houston Recreation Center, and the young men pulled ten of their friends together and developed the Untouchables. This male mentoring program focuses on building the physical, emotional, educational and spiritual capacities of young African American and Latino men. The youth are responsible for leadership of the club and run weekly meetings at Charles Houston that focus on club business and planning service projects, as well as issues related to academics, challenges and current events. Once a month, professional men from the community attend meetings to share their experience and motivate members. The mentors provide supportive counseling, tutoring and training in peer pressure reversal skills, anger management and communication. They also help organize field trips and community service projects. Mentors have contact with members' families and are available to members at any time. This program is an independent non-profit organization for which DCHS provides staffing support.

Peer Advocate Program

The Keep It 360 Peer Advocate program is comprised of eight high school students from Alexandria City High School in grades 9-12. They work with other teens and city leaders, as well as staff from the Alexandria Campaign on Adolescent Pregnancy, Alexandria Sexual Assault Center and the Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition of Alexandria to provide monthly workshop lessons to middle schools about sexual and reproductive health, sexual assault prevention, building healthy relationships, substance misuse prevention and many other topics.

- **Youth participated in City-Sponsored Teen Block Parties, Teen Pool Nights, and quarterly Titan Takeovers** – all events for teens to have dinner and a night fun with their friends
- **100+ resources for helping youth cope** with uncertainty and traumatic events are included on [RAISE's webpage](#)
- **21 workshops on ACES, trauma, and resilience have been delivered to 545 community members** this past year
- **4 school-based mental health professionals have been added** to the Children and Family Behavioral Health Services Team which provides support across the ACPS school campuses.

***Recommendation #2:** Promote youth safety and resilience by supporting the city-wide adoption of the developmental assets framework, establishing strong support systems at school, and co-creating solutions with youth.*

FY24 Proposed Budget's Additional Investments:

Minnie Howard Family Resource Center—This capital investment will provide dedicated space to the DCHS Youth Development and Behavioral Health teams to provide youth empowerment and engagement opportunities and intervention/treatment to youth on-site.

Current Programs/Efforts/Recent Accomplishments:

- **400+ youth service providers, mentors, educators, parents** have been trained in Developmental Assets.
- **16 mentoring programs** are now members of the [Alexandria Mentoring Partnership](#), which is actively building a Mentor University.
- **50+ youth participated in the Alexandria Youth Leadership Conference** this summer which empowers emerging young leaders through training and connection to community resources.

Recommendation #3: *Use a variety of methods and partnerships to creatively engage young people and ensure that they are aware of the resources and programs available to them.*

FY24 Proposed Budget's Additional Investments:

Teen Wellness Center Administrative Support—The Health Department is receiving a full-time Administrative Support II position for the Teen Wellness Center at the Minnie Howard Campus. This position will provide administrative support to the existing Public Health Nurse II position to concentrate on the intersection of students' physical and mental health, act as a liaison to DCHS and ACPS mental health practitioners and follow up with students recommendations made by Teen Wellness Center (TWC) staff and by DCHS and/or ACPS mental health practitioners.

Current Programs/Efforts/Recent Accomplishments:

- **255 people follow Alex Teen Life**, the City's Social Media account dedicated to communicating information, resources, and facts with youth about health, relationships, and more.
- **[Resource Directory for Youth and Young Adults](#)** was created and includes hundreds of resources that promote youth well-being in Alexandria.
- **Through workshops and trips to college campuses, Project Discovery** provides vital information to low-income and first-generation youth about how to prepare for college
- **A Community Resource Corner** will be piloted at George Washington Middle School to introduce students to local resources.

Recommendation #4: *Build effective Youth-Adult Partnerships by providing adults with ongoing trainings and technical assistance to promote positive youth development, and by providing youth with a strong foundation and opportunities to participate in decision and policy making with adults.*

Current Programs/Efforts/Recent Accomplishments:

- **Hundreds of students are connected directly to decision and policy makers** through a partnership between ACPS teachers and City staff (through the Youth Civics Academy, CivicTrek, Project Citizen, and Civic Action Projects with 8th and 12th grade students).
- **Boards and Commissions interested in working with youth** are provided with a Youth-Adult Partnerships training.

Recommendation #5: *When asking youth for their input and feedback, it is critical that adults listen, take their ideas seriously, and hold themselves accountable to respond to their concerns.*

Current Programs/Efforts/Recent Accomplishments:

- **1,800+ youth in Alexandria were engaged** in an hour-long workshops and weekly planning sessions where they were encouraged to share their dreams for their future and ideas for how to make those dreams a reality. The result of this effort is a [plan](#) which centers equity while preventing trauma and promoting health, safety, and wellbeing.
- **Youth Speak Up Event on Youth Mental Health** was held in January to engage parents, youth, service providers, and local leaders in a youth-led forum about mental health.