

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

March 23, 2023

Question: In an effort to respond to young people’s requests in recent focus groups to “meet them where they are” and “create more safe spaces,” what would it look like and cost to pilot an approach and/or position at City park and recreation facilities that is designed to better connect residents to mental health services and if needed provide onsite mental health services? What level of qualifications would be needed for this type of position?

Response:

There are a number of services and initiatives underway that support the effort to meet youth where they are and connect them to needed services. For any youth in crisis that demonstrates a need or seeks out assistance at a recreation facility, RPCA’s Outreach Coordinator and center employees are trained to support the youth, keep them safe, and connect them (and their families) to services. Additional services available are described below.

Based on the question received, there are two types of positions that could be utilized to expand existing services.

- A licensed therapist could be used to rotate through recreation centers with the greatest need, providing available hours for onsite mental health services. Qualifications for this position include a master’s degree in social work, Mental Health Counseling, Psychology, or related field and at least two years of post-graduate work experience in providing direct clinical services to consumers. Related licensure is also required (e.g., LPC, LCSW, or Clinical Psychologist). To provide private space in recreation centers for these services, some modifications would be required, including soundproofing, appropriate window coverings/screening, and any necessary furniture at approximately \$8,000 per location. A part-time Senior Therapist at 20 hours/week (.5FTE) could provide five hours/week at four locations at an annual cost of \$54,684 (mid-grade salary with benefits) in addition to \$32,000 in one-time center improvements.
- Alternatively, adding an additional Community Outreach Coordinator to RPCA could expand the existing services provided by the current full-time Coordinator. Certifications for this position include Crisis Intervention (C.I.T), Mental Health First Aid, Virginia Gang Investigations, and Safe Place Licensure. These services include youth and family referrals to needed services, bullying and gang prevention education, intervention and outreach, City of Alexandria Safe Place Program response and support, teen programming, and neighborhood outreach to increase awareness of City services for youth. The annual salary with benefits for this full-time position is \$93,574.

In addition to the RPCA Outreach Coordinator Services described above, there are other services provided in recreation centers in partnership with DCHS that support the needs, including mental health, of youth in the community. Specifically, DCHS provides RPCA center and program staff with training in Developmental Assets, ACEs, and Youth Mental Health First Aid. Specific programs provided include:

Kids are Terrific (KAT) Camp

Members of the Youth Development team and our Counselor Aides lead a summer camp program for at-risk youth 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. There is a family picnic at the end of camp. Fifty of the campers who show the greatest leadership skills are rewarded with a trip to Six Flags. 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 the Department of Community and Human Services, where they facilitate prevention programs for younger youth and continue their role as mentors and role models to younger youth. Peer Advisors and Counselor Aides are integral parts of Kids are Terrific Camp. Participants have weekly staff meetings and training.

Untouchables

In 1988, three young men approached a DCHS employee with the desire to do something other than play basketball after school. 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.

National Safe Place

When teens find themselves in crisis or need a place to stay, they should know how and where to get help. RPCA is a licensed Safe Place partner and provides youth in need access to immediate help and supportive resources. All City of Alexandria recreation centers, libraries and fire stations are identified Safe Place facilities. Safe Place help is free and confidential and is also available 24/7 via text. When a young person uses TXT 4 HELP, they receive help in their current location. They will receive a message identifying the closest Safe Place location and the contact number for the local Safe Place support. RPCA staff are on call to respond to Safe Place requests.