



**YWCA**  
TORONTO

A TURNING POINT  
FOR WOMEN



**Deputation**  
**Wednesday January 23, 2008**  
**Community Development and Recreation Committee**  
**Special Meeting**

Good evening. My name is Heather McGregor. I am the CEO of YWCA Toronto, the city's largest organization serving women and girls, with over 30 programs across the City of Toronto. We have a very successful Girls' Centre in Scarborough guided by a neighbourhood Girls' Council.

YWCA Toronto cannot support the staff recommendation chiefly because it is based, simply stated, upon user fees with a subsidized system for the disadvantaged.

I say this despite the fact that the YWCA is a great supporter of the City, and I know that the staff and politicians have been faced with a terrible task of solving a budgetary problem not entirely of their own making. While coming out against this proposed solution to a real problem, YWCA will remain a strong voice at provincial and federal tables for adequate support to the City of Toronto.

I believe in the sincerity of staff to keep programs accessible. I am certain, however, that this particular proposal while containing some very good universal programs - such as the ones proposed for the schools - does nothing to create a truly accessible program for our city.



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In the immediate wake of growing gun violence and the long-standing reality of shocking rates of sexual violence against school-age girls (explicitly named and documented in the Julian Falconer Report) it is wrong-headed and extremely short-sighted to limit access to recreational services by, in essence, creating a two tiered system based upon economic circumstances. Here is why we think so:

- Recreation centres are great levelers and can strengthen the development of supportive and diverse neighbourhoods at a time when gentrification, the overlay of poverty and race, and lack of services threaten to make Toronto a series of economically isolated neighbourhoods. This proposal creates a two-tiered system at the very level where we want the development of mixed communities.
- Recreation programs are very important opportunities for taking preventative steps to work with **all** our children.
- In a means tested world, we are waiting for people to be desperate before we offer the prevention. At this stage, it is no longer prevention, but intervention: in other words, too late:

While these are the broad principles, I would like to share with you as well, our profound difficulty with a growing direction in the provision of youth services. In a bid to assist in the prevention of trouble before it starts in neighbourhoods where youth violence has been an issue, recreation programs have too often responded with one very partial side of the equation in mind. Youth violence across the agendas of many throughout our city is seen as a problem of boys with guns and the solution is posed as increased use of public space to occupy boys instead with basket ball courts and skateboard parks.



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Girls report to us on a daily basis their discomfort with public recreational areas: they are not always places they can feel safe, represented or even included. YWCA Toronto has been advocating for girl-only programs for decades, and the combination of research and our experience with girls has shown us that violence against girls and sexual violence in particular, while the most **frequent** form of youth violence is the **least** acknowledged. Thankfully, the Falconer Report brought this issue to everyone's attention: forced oral sex, gang rapes, harassment, fondling and sexual taunts are a daily reality for many girls growing up in Toronto. It is time for us face this reality, and give girls access to girl-only programs that assist them in developing confidence, skills and a sense of safety. The staff proposal does not seem to offer the opportunity for a more flexible and gender specific approach to program development.

Thank you for listening to me this evening. This forum is one of the things that makes Toronto accessible to all. Let us abide by this principle as we struggle with our heavy financial burden.

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