

**REDUCING THE RISK: CONTACT FOR SUPPORT**

**Report on At-Risk Youth in Haliburton**

Produced for

Family Services of Haliburton

by

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## Executive Summary

This qualitative study examined the efforts, experiences and attitudes underlying current programs for Haliburton youth considered to be at risk. The data was collected between the months of April 2004 and July 2004. Semi-structured interviews produced the major volume of the data complemented by print program information provided by the participants and produced through Internet searches.

Thirty-two interviews were conducted during the period of the study. Forty-three individuals were involved since three of the interviews included more than one individual. Thirty-three residents of Haliburton County were interviewed. Thirty-four of the total group delivered or administered programs to at risk-populations in Haliburton and neighbouring areas. They included educators, social/community/church workers, various program administrators, other professionals and members of the community.

The study sought to confirm an accepted profile of youth at risk and receiving service in Haliburton. Education difficulties, poverty, highly stressed or dysfunctional home environments and antisocial behaviour leading to court experiences were the characteristics most frequently identified by the study's participants.

Participants were asked to identify barriers they had encountered during the delivery of their programs. They were also asked to list the barriers that had confronted or had the potential of discouraging their clients. Lack of transportation, a dearth of easily accessed, low-cost activities for youth and the absence of parental support were most frequently identified.

The participant group provided a number of program ideas for at risk youth in Haliburton. While no complete program model was offered, the list of the suggested characteristics included:

- *The development of teamwork and a group identity*
- *Physical and mental activities that include literacy and work skills*
- *A program coordinator with credibility within the community*
- *A community focus*
- *A youth drop-in to provide one-stop shopping for services*
- *A cooperative partnership among community service providers*
- *A paid subsidy and nutrition for participants*

The researcher examined a number of program alternatives in operation elsewhere and searched the literature for pertinent supportive information. This report recommends the formation of a multi-service partnership to:

- Address Immediate Needs First: Establish a Place of Contact
- Address Education Gaps and Losses Next
- Develop Community Partners through Work Projects
- Support the Creation of Easily Accessible, Low-Cost Youth Activities

It also produced the following nine recommendations:

#### Recommendation #1

Establish, advertise and staff a drop-in centre to provide “one stop shopping” access to and coordination of already existing support services in the county. The centre must be made available seven days a week in some way, through a phone line with a dispatcher, or an individual in place. Ideally staff would include two workers, one male and one female who already are experienced youth workers and familiar with the area.

#### Recommendation #2

Initiate and enhance partnership among community service providers to develop a database of resources that these staff members can access for the client group. Some resources are easily identified but there appears to be an informal support network not currently advertised. An example of this is short-term shelter provided by responsible individuals that meets the criteria of court placements and which would accept these clients.

#### Recommendation #3

Establish an operating budget to set up and maintain the initial drop-in centre. This should include funds for two salaried staff, a donated space, and office equipment including a telephone line that can be operated 24/7. The budget should allow for subsidies that staff could use to address clients’ immediate, short-term needs such as food and clothing.

#### Recommendation #4

Various service partners in the county need to work together to design, finance and deliver a multi-service program flexible enough for continuous intake that supports the acquisition of

secondary school credits and whose direction is the completion of the high school diploma. This program should include young people who choose an alternative education experience as well as providing support for students on an extended suspension from school.

#### Recommendation #5

A program to support the continued education of students on extended suspensions from school should include liaison with their current classroom teachers so that students can complete registered credits, a counselling component to provide them with positive alternatives to their current behaviour and new strategies for overall success upon their return to school. The program should also provide support to both the student and parents upon the student's re-entry to the school.

#### Recommendation #6

The community multi-service program should also address the needs of young people brought into the formal justice system for minor offences by providing them with opportunities to demonstrate personal accountability and reparation. It should include a counselling component to focus on the development of positive alternatives to their current behaviour as well as strategies for school success as needed.

#### Recommendation #7

The multi-service program needs to address the needs of all its clients by providing a social component that includes physical recreation activities, pre-employment training, skills development and a work component with subsidy.

Recommendation #8

The multi-service program needs to generate community contacts to promote support for its participants and provide them with opportunities to give back to the community. The program should initiate a process of exploring and generating community works projects to be completed by participants. Such activities will benefit both the community and the participants of this program.

Recommendation #9

Because there is an identified need for additional social and recreational activities for Haliburton youth, and because participation in such activities produces well-documented benefits, members of this partnership need to actively pursue and support the development of low-cost, easily accessible social and recreational activities geared to all adolescents.

**Reducing the Risk: Contact for Support**  
**Final Report on At Risk Youth in Haliburton**

1. Purpose of the Study

Family Services of Haliburton County sponsored this study as the first step in the development of a strategic multi-service intervention plan to maximize community-based opportunities for county youth considered to be at risk.

The changes in services assumed by the new Ministry of Children’s Services that combined the Ministry of Community and Social Services, and plans to assume responsibility for services currently delivered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care as well as the Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services present an immediate opportunity to expand current local services for at risk youth in Haliburton. Since the new minister has also pledged to work closely with the education, arts and recreation sectors this is a chance to design a new multi-service initiative to address current gaps in service for our at-risk youth.

This study was undertaken at the direction of Dr. Fay Martin, executive director of Family Services, in anticipation of a “window of opportunity” to engage additional resources. It sought to identify best strategies to initiate an integrated broad-spectrum intervention to assist young persons between the ages of 15 and 18 in Haliburton County “at all stages of risk”. These findings should assist young people, their families, educators, health and social service personnel in determining how to deliver a multi-service, integrated set of programs that will best meet the current and future needs of Haliburton youth.

## 2. Description of the Study

This was a qualitative study that sought to explore, understand and interpret the efforts, experiences and attitudes underlying current programs for Haliburton youth. A qualitative approach was necessary to provide the best in-depth answers to the questions posed by the study. (Appendix 1)

The data was collected between the months of April 2004 and July 2004. Interviews produced the major volume of the data. Data sources included the following:

- Semi-structured interviews in person and by telephone
- Print program information and data provided by the interviewed participants

All participants were contacted by telephone or e-mail to ascertain their initial interest. The researcher presented participants with a letter of introduction outlining the purpose of the study during the interview session. Three interim reports, approximately a month apart, summarizing program information, identifying gaps in services, and highlighting the major themes of the interviews were presented to Dr. Martin at various stages of the process.

### 2.1 Design of the Study

The study first sought to confirm a community profile of ‘at risk’ clients by collecting data on their numbers, education, employment patterns, their mental health issues (such as depression, addiction and suicide) and their involvement with youth justice services and the courts. It incorporated the following:

- an examination of the current assumptions that underlie the existing programs as well as their targeted interventions,

- a review of the evidence provided by the research literature and projects in other jurisdictions
- a review of current programs in Haliburton including the following service providers and resources:
  - Trillium Lakeland District School Board
  - Sir Sandford Fleming College
  - Churches
  - Social services
  - Recreational facilities/programs
  - Police/probation officers
  - Courts
  - HRDC
- an identification of the gaps in service-targets to identify what individuals would like to see changed or added
- an examination of working models and programs in other jurisdictions that might be transferable (either fully or partially)

The researcher also attended a seminar on rural transportation conducted by Mr. Harry Gow, volunteer executive director of Transport 2000 and participated in a community consultation sponsored by the Workforce Development Board. In addition, Internet searches were conducted to access information about urban and rural programs serving at-risk youth; pertinent literature and reports were examined.

## 2.2 Definition of At Risk

The study attempted to confirm that there is a commonly accepted profile of the ‘at risk’ group within this community that can include:

- A problematic or interrupted educational experience
- Socialization issues which have resulted in patterns of harassment, or bullying in school or the community sometimes from an early age;
- Anti-social, mischievous or criminal activity that has led to involvement with the justice/court system
- Economic issues requiring that youth drop out of school to work
- Mental health or addiction issues which interrupt schooling and employment and affect health
- Unsuccessful, or interrupted employment patterns
- Lack of appropriate housing or a difficult, non-supportive family environment

The term “at risk” is one currently very much in favour. However, various institutions define “at risk” youth differently depending on their service mandates. *A Successful Pathway for all Students: Final Report of the At Risk Working Group* (Ministry of Education, 2003) provides three broad parameters when defining students at risk of educational loss for funding and program purposes. This report suggests addressing the needs of students who:

- Perform at level one, or below grade expectations
- Are disengaged
- Have very poor attendance

The Trillium Board of Education expanded this definition to include a much longer list of behaviours for its elementary and secondary students. The elementary list contained twelve descriptors and ranged from specific reading levels and language difficulties to “tends to be withdrawn; immature and, is working at alternative expectations”. The secondary list assumed the characteristics contained in the first list but included indicators such as lack of success with the literary test, absence of involvement in extra-curricular/community activities and expanded

beyond exclusively educational references to include “has left home on occasion” and “evidence of substance abuse/criminal activity”. Professional educators, for the most part, referred to these behaviours during their interviews and focussed on concerns about literacy and numeracy weakness leading to an individual’s inability to obtain a high school diploma.

Social agencies supplied broader concepts. One agency provided its own descriptors for clients. Although it acknowledged the low levels of literacy/education and substance abuse characteristic of many of its clients it also added “isolation both social and geographic” and “poverty”. Social service workers stated that it was necessary to address their clients’ primary needs for housing, transportation and nutrition at least prior to or concurrently with programs that develop self-confidence through the growth of educational and employability skills. One individual’s statement “these people are broken” seemed to summarize this latter view.

### 2.3 Profile Provided by Secondary Sources

A 1995 report titled *Impact and Benefits of Physical Activity and Recreation on Canadian Youth-at-Risk* argues that no youth is immune from risk and describes a continuum of social behaviours that can constitute low levels of risk for a large group of youth since “all youth face some sort of risk”. It urges efforts at all stages to “lower the risk environment and to prevent youth from moving along the continuum to situations of greater risk.”

The same report identifies five groups of factors that affect the likelihood that youth will be at risk and notes that the chance that a youth will engage in risk-producing behaviour depends on their interaction.

These factors are:

- individual factors (eg. boredom, lifestyle behaviours)

- family
- peers
- school
- community

The following table summarizes the at-risk continuum of behaviours suggested by the study completed by the University of New Brunswick for the Canadian Parks Association in partnership with the federal and provincial levels of government. This table will be used as a reference for Haliburton resources contained in Table 3.

**Table 1: At risk continuum**

<b>LOWER RISK</b>		<b>HIGHER RISK</b>
Experiment with drugs	Substance abuse	Substance addiction
Skipping school	Chronic truancy	School drop out
Disobey curfew	Run away	Homelessness
Depression		Attempted suicide
Unlawful activity	Vandalism	Serious Crime
Hanging out	Gang Involvement	Gang Violence
Shoplifting		
Some physical activity	Sedentary	Withdrawn
Experiment with sex	Promiscuity	Prostitution

### 3. Methodology

In the four month period from April 2004 to July 2004, the researcher conducted thirty three interviews with forty-four individuals in person and by telephone. These semi-structured interviews lasted about an hour and provided information about the purpose of various programs, their clients, assumptions about client needs, and barriers encountered during program delivery.

Six person-to-person interviews were taped and transcribed, however as time pressures increased, the researcher transcribed her field notes from the interviews and used them for

analysis and coding. Seven of the interviews were conducted by telephone with non-residents of Haliburton. The researcher is aware that telephone interviews limit the research because of the distance created between interviewer and interviewee. To offset this limitation, she encouraged each one to provide any additional information they felt would add value to the study and many obliged by sending printed information or data.

All the participants were responsive to the open-ended format of the interview, and seemed to enjoy the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences.

Each individual interview was transcribed, some from tapes the remainder from field notes, and coded according to themes and categories. This information was then clustered into key themes that provided the structure of each interim report.

#### 4. The Participants

Thirty-three interviews were conducted during the period of the study. Forty-four individuals were involved since three of the interviews included more than one individual. The researcher did not have a pre-established relationship with any members of the group. Thirty-three residents of Haliburton County were interviewed. The participant group was a “purposive” sample because the individuals were selected with a specific purpose in mind. Thirty-five of the total group delivered or administered programs to at risk-populations in Haliburton and neighbouring areas. They included educators, social/community/church workers, various program administrators, other professionals and members of the community. The researcher began by contacting those recommended by the executive director and then used “a snowball” technique and asked each participant to suggest someone else whom they thought should be approached. The participant profile is summarized in the following table:

**Table 2: The Participants**

Residents	Non-residents	Field	Program Focus
33	11	Education-13 Social/community/church workers-8 Students - 8 Employment services – 8 Youth justice services/police – 4 Members of community –3	Secondary education Alternative education Adult up-grading Administration Employment resources Recreation Nutrition Counselling Restorative Justice

## 5. Analysis of Data

Field notes based on the interviews and telephone dialogues were written and examined. This initial information was then summarized into three interim reports. Each report was then reviewed and coded into themes and categories. Multiple readings were required before thematic strands emerged that related to the primary research questions.

### 5.1. Limitations of the Study

There are limitations in the use of the interview as a primary data source. “Self-report data are always limited because they can be biased in ways that make the respondents look and sound better than they actually are” (Bredeson, 1993, p 61). Interviews are always subject to an

individual's ability to describe or recall his/her own actions; and participants can exaggerate. There is "selectivity in human perception and the probability of bias" (Schatzman & Strauss, 1973, p.8). Interviews are not neutral interactions. The personal characteristics of the interviewer do influence them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). As well, data collected in this way must be interpreted and the researcher has a great deal of influence on what part of the data will be reported and how it will be reported (Fontana & Frey,2000).

## 6. Profile of At- Risk Youth Receiving Service

Education difficulties, poverty, highly stressed or dysfunctional home environments and antisocial behaviour leading to court experiences were the characteristics most frequently identified by the participants in this study.

### 6.1 Youth Struggle with Education

Thirteen participants in this study identified as a primary characteristic of at risk youth those who seriously struggle with their education. Participants variously described them as encountering "social barriers to education", challenged by attention deficit limitations, encountering social barriers such as being teased, bullied or harassed at school, or facing educational gaps which means they simply cannot handle the academic program at the only high school in town. They "can't handle the school structure with 76 minute classes, four teachers and four different sets of expectations; they get into trouble with their teachers" offered one respondent. Another remarked, "For some of these kids going back to high school is not a realistic outcome and that needs to be acknowledged."

In addition, increasing numbers of students are routinely excluded from school as a consequence of the implementation of the Safe Schools Act. There is, for example, an automatic twenty-day suspension imposed on a student for a drug offence on school property. This current pattern of 'limited expulsion' creates a need for students to participate in some form of program or employment experience in order to keep up with schoolwork or to qualify for subsequent re-entry. If an extended suspension occurs towards the end of a semester, however, there is little or no opportunity at present for a suspended student to keep up with or complete courses and earn the credits for academic work completed prior to exclusion from school.

The eight students engaged in studies at the Highland Learning Centre on the day of the interview stated they were "really happy to be here"; "it's an awesome place to be"; "it's a friendly, easy place"; "everyone gets along here, there are no bullies" and provided these reasons for their participation in alternative learning:

They were "kicked out" or not allowed to return for various infractions.

They "didn't fit in" because of too few credits for their age group or were quite simply "behind" in school.

One stated he needed individual assistance with work that a teacher with a much larger class could not provide. All applauded the personal benefits of studying one subject at a time and confirmed the observation of one educator that "the school organization doesn't fit all kids".

## 6.2 Education Deficits noted in Secondary Sources

The literature provides the following context for this discussion and reflects the impact of a negative school experience for this population group.

*Preventing Crime by Investing in Families and Communities* (1997) a nation-wide discussion paper written for the National Crime Prevention Council, notes “for students whose social academic foundations are weak or who are isolated or pushed away by peers or others, the school environment can be a source of much pain, frustration and failure”. This frustration can lead to antisocial behaviour, dropping out, drug abuse, and delinquency.

*The Street Lifestyle Study* (1996) examined the antecedents to street involvement and identified prevention strategies aimed at young people at risk of going to the street. It noted that negative school experiences are common in this segment of a high-risk youth population. 91% of their study population of 70 youths indicated that they had dropped out of school.

As well, a program for youth in Bancroft delivered by the Industry Education Council and funded by HRDC includes 11 of 12 participants, who shared the economic challenges and employment barriers of an incomplete high school education.

While several service providers stated that the education level of their clients in Haliburton is rising, others noted that their clients hide their literacy deficits well. Any new local initiative therefore will need to address the educational needs of this group as one of its priorities. Early school leavers fare poorly in the job market compared with youth with high school or university education. Young people who drop out of school are more likely: “to be living with neither parent; to come from single-parent homes; to have parents who have low levels of education or blue-collar jobs; to be married; to have children; or to have disabilities (Statistics Canada, 1993a,p.24)”. (*Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth*)

### 6.3 Poor Families and Stressed Home Environments

Poverty, highly stressed families and poor home environments were all identified next. “How do adults and students get a diploma and still live?” wondered one educational administrator. Others also pointed out that all youth need a support system and strong positive role models to successfully make the transition from youth to adulthood; their clients generally did not possess either one. “Peer support is very important particularly if there is little or no support at home; they need a support system and their peers aren’t usually good role models,” offered one.

This view is supported by an observation in *Preventing Crimes by Investing in Families and Communities* report which notes “hanging out with a deviant or antisocial peer group gives antisocial youths a sense of safety in numbers and a feeling of belonging. Antisocial peers also provide the acceptance that supports and encourages antisocial values, attitudes and beliefs.” This report suggests that supervised recreational youth activities are a strong preventative measure to the development and maintenance of antisocial behaviours by young people.

### 6.4 Court Involvement

Court involvement was the next identified major characteristic interviewed participants identified most often. One respondent noted that of 57 charges laid in Haliburton County last year 20-25% were against young people. One alternative educator noted that almost all the current students were involved with the courts or on probation despite that fact that this population would not all be considered ‘at risk’ in educational terms. Another respondent working with young offenders described them as either not doing well at or disliking school and coming from low-income families struggling to provide necessities of rent and food.

The *Preventing Crime by Investing in Families and Communities* discussion paper suggests that alternative teaching approaches may have positive benefits for high-risk youth. The suggestion that “Some high risk students may benefit more from a part-time academic program with a paid-work component attached” could address the issues of students whose economic circumstances necessitate interrupting their schooling. It may also re-direct those students whose difficulties with the courts may require a more flexible educational program that provides immediate fiscal gratification, develops social responsibility and allows them to develop self-esteem. For example, the program currently offered in Bancroft by the Industry Education Council provides its participants with a weekly subsidy of \$250.00 and childcare because “the only incentive they have is money”. Participants agree to and sign a contract outlining the conditions of the program. Failure to abide by these conditions leads to a financial penalty and the most frequently applied penalty is for tardiness. Lateness, or absence from the daily program results in a \$25.00 to \$50.00 deduction from the weekly ‘pay cheque’. The coordinator explained, “We like to create a work environment [among the participants]. They aren’t going to pay you if you’re coming in late.”

#### 7. Barriers to Program Delivery

Participants were asked to identify barriers they had encountered during the delivery of their programs. They were also asked to list the barriers that had confronted or had the potential of discouraging their clients. Lack of transportation, a dearth of easily accessed, low-cost activities for youth and the absence of parental support were most frequently identified.

## 7.1 Lack of Transportation

Individuals who deliver various programs were the most insistent about the need for transportation. One stated it was “the largest barrier”. Another indicated lack of a car or access to a car seriously hampered individuals in their search for employment as well as their attempts to get to work, to attend alternative or up-grading education sites, take advantage of co-operative education locations and other experiential learning opportunities. The challenge of transportation was repeatedly identified /accepted and worked around as a barrier to alternative education programs and sustained employment. “ I want a bus,” stated one frustrated individual firmly.

For some local school students, transportation by school bus is restricted by a board policy that appears to be unnecessarily intractable. The example of a school bus driving a Minden student right past a co-op job placement in order to deposit her at the high school in Haliburton thus necessitating her further transportation by taxi and incurring an added expense for the school is an example of the impasse. This same student needed to repeat the trip by taxi to the school at the end of the school day in order to catch the school bus for Minden. As well, there is a pool of Minden employers who would gladly accept co-op students of various ages, but students without access to a car cannot tap this productive opportunity..

This same deficit creates additional barriers for students who for various reasons take courses at the Highland Community Learning Centre. While a bus driver from West Guildford, for example, could let students off in Haliburton so they can easily walk the rest of the way to the Learning Centre, this is not a ‘regisyered stop” apparently, so students from various centres must be dropped off at the High School. This means a long walk around the lake, through Haliburton

to the Centre and results in much reduced attendance during the coldest days of the winter. As well, students who are suspended from school are also denied access to the school bus and alternative programs.

There are, however, certain individuals who receive transportation subsidies and some service providers have access to transportation for their clients. These agencies indicated that funding is limited and they encourage networking among clients. Individuals pursuing adult upgrading receive subsidies for childcare and transportation; all educational materials are provided free.

While respondents acknowledged, “ People do the best with what they have” they also highlighted the challenges this deficit adds to the pursuit of employment, “employment stability” and the completion of secondary or upgrading studies for many young people in Haliburton. As well, the recent community research project that studied relevant issues regarding youth, trades and apprenticeships in Haliburton identified the lack of transportation as a ‘great barrier to youth participating in the trades’. The authors proposed that the community “offer some form of transportation, such as a local bus service, shuttle bus, or some form of pre-paid carpooling system to encourage youth to disregard this fear of not being able to partake in the trades” (Houghting & Peter, 2004, p. 48)

The facilitator of the rural transportation workshop described a number of models that had been successfully developed elsewhere to address rural transportation challenges. He stressed that financial support from provincial and municipal levels of government, local partnerships, and the pooling of community resources can create a transportation system jointly subsidized by various agencies and its users. His suggestion included taking advantage of

unused student spaces on school buses and the initiation of a dispatch service to patch together the various transportation methods already accessible in small rural Canadian towns.

## 7.2 Lack of Easily Accessible, Low-Cost Youth Activities

Several respondents mentioned the need for more activities for youth. They also noted that the lack of readily available transportation and a family's financial circumstances are tangential, related difficulties to resolving the need. "Economic issues prevent participation in organized activities" noted one, and "programs for teenagers are negligible" added another. Yet another identified "youth social and emotional inactivity" as an issue.

The importance of recreation activities within the community is stressed by the literature. "Young people need the greatest number of environments in which to experience success. The recreation environment is all the more important for youths who are not as successful or confident within their school or home environments" (*Preventing Crime by Investing in Families and Communities*). The same report argues that communities need to provide supervised recreation programs and activities because the development of trusting relationships with teachers or other adults, and the opportunity to learn, practice and be acknowledged for their positive social behaviours can prevent youth from drifting into involvement with an antisocial or deviant peer group. The activities offered need to be low or no-cost so that all youths may participate.

The report on the *Impact and Benefits of Physical Activity and Recreation on Canadian Youth at Risk* notes:

Strategies involving physical activity and recreation appear particularly promising in minimizing or removing risk factors at all stages. Participation in

physical activity and recreation can provide positive benefits related to psychological health, physical health, familial interactions, peer influence, academic performance, community development and other lifestyle behaviours. The problem here lies in the availability of recreation opportunities.

Activities for youth in Haliburton, particularly organized sports are “distant and expensive” as one participant indicated although there is a wide array of co-curricular programs offered at the high school at the end of the day that engages between 150 to 200 students. Another respondent noted that there are lots of recreational paid activities “but if the parents can’t afford it, the kids can’t do it”. Some church programs are an outgrowth of family programs and currently various youth groups gather to share the cost and use the high school facilities once a month on Fridays. One respondent underlined the importance of engaging families in recreation programs or “ [the aims] will just be social, a way of entertaining teenagers”. Another stated, “Teens need adult leadership to try new experiences”. These views are supported by the *Trends in the Health of Canadian Youth* report that concludes that prevention of at risk health behaviours and attitudes on the part of youth is a fundamental community responsibility. “Community recreation initiatives that provide space and stimulating activities to youth have also been successful. Interventions such as these must recognize the significance of the peer group in meeting basic social and emotional needs if they are to be viable.”

### 7.3 Lack of Parental Support

The next most frequently identified challenge faced by at risk youth was their need of a support system and in particular the parental and family support necessary to weather the shoals of adolescence and successfully achieve educational and life goals. Participants indicated that their clients frequently did not have that support. As well, “Parents need to be educated about

how to help,” noted one respondent. Parental support is also central to the process of permitting youth to make the required retribution to the community for unlawful activity such as vandalism or petty theft. Another respondent noted that “a poor parental school history negatively affects kids” with the pattern of school failures, criticism or negative attitudes of one generation repeated in the next.

However one noted, “families are difficult to engage” because they were confronting multiple stresses including searching for the rent money and the next meal. The same respondent noted that the families in question frequently had had a history of poor experiences with social agencies thus creating a cycle of distrust and disengagement.

*The Health Trends of Canadian Youth* report supports the views of participants in this study. Its findings indicate that

Young people who do not have good relationships at home are far more likely to engage in health-risk behaviours, such as smoking and drug use, to experience adjustment problems at school and to suffer from health problems.

It also indicates “parents need information about effective parenting and about the implications of ineffective parenting on the lives of their children.”

Finally, individual participants identified these additional program barriers and needs for youth

- A young mothers’ program at the high school since “ five to ten teenagers per year have a child”
- Need for shelter since they identified patterns of ‘couch surfing’ among some of their youthful clients

- Economic issues and the need for a work program, “some of these kids won’t be hired by anyone”
- Someone to talk to when they were in trouble.

8. Resources Available in Haliburton

One enthusiastic respondent was of the view that there was a strong positive, professional support network within the Haliburton community. Here is a summary of various support systems currently in place to prevent or compensate for at risk conditions. The table incorporates the list of the risk categories included in Table 1, identifies the social agencies and actors in Haliburton and comments on the results.

**Table 3: Haliburton Resources**

Who does what, when, how and results

Risk Categories	Social Actions/Actors	Actions/Results
Substance use, abuse and addiction	4-Cast guidance counsellor Family doctor Job Connect ACE teacher/alternative ed. Teacher FSHC social worker Health Unit	Agencies can suggest programs to youth, cannot refer them. Suspension from school for drug offences interrupts schooling and may contribute to the pattern of risk behaviours.
School absenteeism, repeated truancy, repeated suspensions, dropping-out	Teacher School social worker Guidance counsellor ACE Alternative Education Destination Pathways curriculum Parents Adult Literacy	Alternative Education Centre provides a positive alternative to students who are behind academically. Unfortunately there is a negative connotation associated with the Centre in the community. It needs a higher profile and perhaps

	<p>program/SSFC Job Connect Justice Circle</p>	<p>a larger critical mass. Program is flexible, provides co-op opportunities, work experience and food. There is no continuous intake other than in the ACE for 14-15 year olds. There is no alternative program support available for students on an extended suspension.</p>
<p>Disobeying curfew, running away, couch surfing, homelessness</p>	<p>FSHC social worker OPP Job Connect CAS SIRCH</p>	<p>Identification of cases mainly. Referral to an informal network. There is a lack of low income housing and short-term housing alternatives for youth here.</p>
<p>Depression, attempted suicide</p>	<p>Family doctor Guidance counsellor FSHC social worker parents Health Unit</p>	<p>Privacy issues prevent information sharing and substantiating data</p>
<p>Unlawful activity, shoplifting, vandalism, drug dealing, serious crime</p>	<p>OPP Probation Justice Circle School Parents</p>	<p>These activities can disrupt a youth's education. There is no flexible alternative to support students in completing courses and working at re-integration into the community.</p>
<p>Hanging out, bullying, gang involvement, gang violence</p>	<p>OPP Shop owners School SIRCH Justice Circle</p>	<p>Hanging out is perceived as a negative activity from the community's standpoint. There are no statistics on group violence at the school although some anti-bullying programs are currently being initiated there. Some form of Justice Circle or mediated program could support current discipline and not disrupt schooling.</p>
<p>Reduction of physical activity (formal and informal), sedentary</p>	<p>FSHC Health Unit School Physical Education</p>	<p>After school programs require late bus or other forms of transportation.</p>

practices, withdrawal	program/teams Community organized sports Alternative Education site Church youth programs	Organized sports are expensive and also require transportation. There is no gathering place for informal youth activity (roller skating, basketball, pool, card games, movies,) although skateboarding parks in both Minden and Haliburton provide some outlet. More such accessible sites are needed.
Experimentation with sex, unwanted pregnancy, promiscuity, prostitution	Guidance counsellor Vice-principal Doctor/nurse FSHC social worker SIRCH Health Unit	Program at SIRCH addresses needs of expectant and new mothers. Pregnancy usually interrupts education. Currently not aware of preventative programs in this area. Resources for daycare within a school/education environment would be helpful to encourage young mothers to continue their education with support.
Loss of employment, lack of employment	Job Connect HRDC/Community Futures HRSDC Co-op programs/ Apprenticeship programs	Transportation a major barrier. Some form of subsidy to individuals for transportation needed. The subsidized wage for employment trials offered by Job Connect could be expanded; this is a very positive opportunity with lots of potential
Lack of food and other necessities	Food Banks Food Action committee Alternative Education Centre Health for Life SIRCH	Several programs are currently planned by the Food Action Committee: A community kitchen in Cardiff to provide school lunches A cooking program at Alternative Education Centre in the fall Growing plots with a

		partnership between students and seniors using the high school greenhouse. Program for new mothers provides nutrition information and a meal. Food for Thought workshops provided employment information and food. Certification in food industry provides opportunities for skills acquisition. SmartServe and SuperHost
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8.2 Ideas for Action in Haliburton

The participant group provided a number of program ideas for at risk youth in Haliburton. While no complete program model was offered, this is a list of the suggested characteristics such a program should include:

*The development of teamwork and a group identity*

One participant noted that a successful program should “create young people who will be good employees and good members of the community”. Another suggested, “It should provide a place for them to grow”. Another stressed the developing ability that would result in meeting new challenges through activities with others.

*Physical and mental activities that include literacy and work skills*

One respondent remarked, “They need ability and skills”. “Employers don’t want to baby-sit them”, another noted. Still another noted that teaching citizenship and a work

ethic were important. Providing skills certificates such as first aid would help these young people “get through the door” suggested another. The TDLSB employer survey revealed the willingness among area employers to hire young people without diplomas. That should be taken advantage of. The program would also address the socialization needs of this group reported earlier in this report. Prior research (Dworkin, Larson & Hansen, 2003) indicates that youth activities provide adolescents with opportunities to

- facilitate identity work,
- develop initiative, emotional competencies, and social skills,
- form new connections while learning from their peers,
- acquire social and cultural capital: the formation of valuable relationships with adult leaders and members of the community.

*A program coordinator with credibility within the community*

Several respondents indicated that such a program leader needed to be familiar with the area, the community and be prepared to work full time “at things that will occupy kids”. Familiarity and trust in the program leader was seen to be very important. One respondent described it as “referral to a particular person rather than a program”. “Anyone working with these people needs to be seen as okay, someone they can trust,” reported another.

*A community focus*

Participants noted, “Youth programs need to be community focussed” with “connections to the community”. It should provide the participants with “a sense of giving back to the

community”. Another pointed out that some members of the community are critical, shun these youth or are fearful of them and that would make their contribution to the community even more significant. Another mentioned “a community stigma” as a barrier to be overcome.

*A youth drop-in to provide one-stop shopping for services*

Some respondents underlined the need “to make the approach appealing; it’s difficult to attract them”. Another described the drop-in as “a central gathering point where contacts can be made”. Finally one added simply “they need a place to go when it rains”.

*A cooperative partnership among community service providers*

Several respondents noted the lack of a critical mass that makes a cooperative effort imperative. One provided an example of a particular program that folded when another agency offered a similar/parallel service. Another respondent indicated they regularly had difficulty in meeting their annual target numbers.

*A paid subsidy and nutrition for participants*

“Food security is an issue, “ indicated one respondent. Another suggested that money would be “the only incentive”.

### 8.3 Programs Provided Elsewhere

The following programs had complete descriptions on the Internet and some of them were confirmed through telephone conversations and site visits. They offer some practical

considerations for inclusion in a successful potential program for local at risk youth. The programs described here provide some training, development of a group identity, support for additional studies toward the completion of a high school diploma, and a community focus.

## **YouthCents**

This is a retail store and training program supporting youth in the community (North York) It is located in a mall and offers a wide range of training for youth looking to be trained in retail. Participants receive four weeks of in-class training, and four weeks of actual paid placement. (retrieved from the web 25/04/2004)

In a telephone conversation, the coordinator stressed the importance of ‘coaches’ or leaders having had previous business experience as well as experience with youth and provided a copy of their training manual. At this location YouthCents is partnered with Job Connect that pays participants’ wages for a three-week placement. They subsidize travel costs for training as well as the hourly wage.

### **Retail and Customer Service Training** (offered by Youthcents as well)

Includes:

- Point of sale hardware and software
- Customer service
- Sales
- Use of scanners, barcoding and pricing merchandise

There is a lab located within the centre; students learn to use cash register and different pieces of equipment. They formerly had a store location but now students do their placement at a kiosk.

Program provides socializing opportunities, through various tasks completed during the program. Participants learn how to greet people, talk to them and provide service through their training before they go out to a site.

The regional manager who manages this customer service and retail skills piece was a site manager with retail experience as well as a background working with their clients. The coordinator stressed again that while other program leaders have worked with youth, a program like this ideally is lead by someone with both experiences. This means someone with a business background and experience serving youth.

### **Roasted Cherry Coffee House**

<http://www.roastedcherry.com/studentcoop.htm>

The Roasted Cherry Coffee House is a youth entrepreneurial program of New Beginnings for Youth, a local Ottawa charity serving the needs of youth and supporting learning outside of traditional classrooms since 1986.

The Roasted Cherry is a coffee house run and managed by youth. It provides training for youth to develop and enhance their entrepreneurial skills. It is a space where youth can transfer learned knowledge into real world settings, learn and accept responsibility, accountability and develop a sense of working as a team.

The team is made up of university; post graduate, high school co-op, college and alternative education students. All proceeds generated through sales, catering and tips are returned to the community in support of youth leadership, development and the advancement of education.

The program also provides a wide range of co-op opportunities, Monday to Friday in both morning and afternoon sessions

Computer graphics

Website design and maintenance

Finance

Customer relations  
Catering  
Food preparation and menu planning  
Marketing

(retrieved from the web 30/03/2004)

### **Threshold School of Building**

([www.thresholdschool.ca](http://www.thresholdschool.ca))

The Threshold School of Building is a not-for-profit organization and registered charity offering practical house-building instruction to the general public. Courses include 'hands-on' training while working on local affordable housing projects.

#### **Threshold courses**

Flexible to accommodate busy adult schedules courses take place weekday, evenings and Saturdays.

They are not too short. Students finish feeling confident and thoroughly trained.

They are not too long. Students learn skills, without committing too much time.

Class sizes are small, typically 6 to 12 students per session

'Classes' aren't confined to a classroom. Demonstration centers and interactive work areas are key elements of the Threshold program (when on-site, students will further benefit from a hands-on contribution to an actual renovation)

The instructors are highly skilled experts with years of experience working and teaching in their chosen trades.

### **Skills Courses:**

These courses, while involving some classroom instruction, primarily have students learn by doing. This 'hands-on' instruction takes place entirely at the school. However, all students are encouraged to improve their skills by working 'on-site' at a Threshold Affordable Housing Project – an actual building site). Skills courses range in length from 4 to 8 hours and are taught and supervised by professional trades people.

(retrieved from the web 30/03/2004)

The director of a social agency in Muskoka described the following two programs in a telephone interview. Her agency will be experimenting with the CEED for younger individuals this summer.

### **CEED**

Her agency purchased this program from CEED (Centre for Entrepreneurship and Education Development) in Halifax. This company whose main goal is the development of entrepreneurship programs have developed programs for the general public and adapted them to the needs of five target groups one of whom is youth at risk.

A five day program teaches 11 to 14 year olds (boys and girls) how to run a business. These individuals tend to be too old for some typical summer programs but too young for jobs. It includes interviewing business owners, developing a business plan and running a one-day pilot.

Another program called Second Chance, is geared to 18 – 30 year olds who have previously been convicted of a crime. The program provides a "second chance" to clients who would otherwise face the possibility of unemployment and a strong likelihood of reoffending.

“Second Chance is about education, vocation, rehabilitation and exploring the option of entrepreneurship. The program is offered to young offenders selected after an extensive assessment process. Participants have the opportunity to develop personal, social and business skills as they run their businesses within the community.” The program has been successful with a low recidivism rate.

(CEED website: [http://www.ceed.info/programs/sc\\_index.php](http://www.ceed.info/programs/sc_index.php))

### **TRUST program**

This program is being planned by a social agency in a neighbouring small city that also includes a neighbouring rural community. The federal government’s National Crime Prevention Program provided the original start-up funding. It consists of five components; **T**rust, **R**espect, **U**nderstanding **S**elf-esteem and **T**eam work.

The youth participants have been involved in planning a program that will include physical challenges (wall climbing, canoeing) speakers, developing life skills, resume writing and searching for employment. One of the agency’s program co-ordinators indicated they were waiting for confirmation of this year’s funding at the time of the interview.

### **Seeking Alternatives**

This is a highly structured seven month five day per week program identified with the IEC (Industry Education Council) and funded by HRDC. Participants are rural individuals between the ages of 18 and 30, are out of work, out of school and not receiving EI funding. While the participants work at the program for seven months the coordinator is hired for eight.

Participants develop an individual work plan that includes personal development and employment goals. They must complete educational upgrading on their own time since this is a federally funded project. As a group they complete multiple community projects. A “call for proposals” is put out to the community and selected so the participants not only can develop their skills but also have some sense of giving back to the community. There is a weekly subsidy of \$250. and the ultimate goal of the program is gainful employment.

### **CAPSLE PROGRAM** **Community Alternative Program for Suspended Learners in Etobicoke**

A voluntary program offering intensive support to students 10-18 who were under long-term school suspension (six to twenty days). Its stated goal:

the learner will return to the school, family and community with positive alternatives to their current behaviour and new strategies for overall success. Program staff liaise with community service providers, school and board personnel and local police to provide learners with academic support, life skills, individual counselling, career development support, extracurricular programs, information workshops, and parental outreach. The program provides a wide network of ongoing support to the learner, their family, and their schools. This process commences at intake and continues throughout the learner’s stay in the program and during the re-entry process to the receiving school.

This example is contained in *Preventing Crime by Investing in Families and Communities – Setting 3: School* report. There is currently no way of determining whether or not this program still exists in its present name or form. There are indications from educators in other boards that programs of this kind are in still in existence, however.

## **ReBound Programs**

The following programs are offered by Rebound Youth Services in Northumberland. An initial review of their website followed by an on-site visit and interview with their Services Coordinator has confirmed the subsequent information.

The skill-based “Choices” Program is a group program supported by table coaches and volunteers. The youth group meets weekly for ten weeks. The parent group meets twice with a parent session held before the youth program begins and when it ends. Session topics range from “communication” to “anger management” and include videos, guest speakers, role playing and supportive group activities. Parents, the school, various agencies and the police refer participants. A judge may include participation in Rebound programs to a young person as a condition of probation. Approximately 80% of youth referred to Rebound Youth Services are from the Justice System.

This organization also offers a weekly 2 to 5 hour literacy program (READbound) for youth 5 to 18 years of age; enrichment activities during March Break, summer, and after school as well as an After-School Homework Completion program for students up to and including grade 7.

Rebound introduced the Drug Education and Awareness Program (DEAP) to encourage accountability and responsibility among young people referred for drug offences. Referrals come from the local police, the Crown Attorney or the school administrators. If a participant does not complete DEAP, the referring partner is notified and further action may be taken.

Their Positive Alternatives for School Suspensions (PASS) provided support to 122 children and adolescents and their parents during the past year. Young persons must be brought to the program by their parents each morning. They are then supervised to complete the

schoolwork they have previously missed or are missing throughout the period of the suspension for five half days per week. Rebound also facilitates restorative work with students on suspension for fighting and will provide a liaison between parents, youth and the school upon request.

[http://www.northumberland.com/rebound/rebound\\_program.html](http://www.northumberland.com/rebound/rebound_program.html)  
retrieved from the web 22/06/04)

## 9. Conclusions and Recommendations

The changes in services to Ontario children and youth assumed by the new Ministry of Children's Services provide immediate opportunities to expand the current local services for at risk youth in Haliburton. Since the new minister has also pledged to work closely with the education, arts and recreation sectors this is an opportunity to design a new multi-service initiative to address current gaps in service and capitalize on current resources to assist our at-risk youth. The plan should include both short-term and long-term objectives.

### 9.1 Address Immediate Needs First: Establish A Place of Contact

There is currently no central place where Haliburton at risk youth can go to receive information about and access to the services they require. While each social service agency has a procedure that provides mandated support upon a client's approach, young people need to familiarize themselves with potential services before deciding whether or not they need it. While this is a skill that self-confident, independent individuals do develop, the profiles of at risk youth identified here suggest that the targeted clients do not yet possess these skills or may quite simply require greater information and encouragement before selecting their options. As well, sometimes their primary needs for food, shelter and clothing require immediate attention before longer-term plans can be developed.

It is difficult to access current numbers for this client group although the respondents in this study frequently indicated, "everyone knows who they are". This informal identification system makes it difficult to identify and deliver necessary resources efficiently. The proposed multi-service project necessitates the establishment of immediate, short term and longer-term resources. The first step is the identification of clients and an assessment of their needs through

identification, contact and attraction. Once the initial contacts have been established the focus can then shift to assistance with planning, directing them to an appropriate place and maintaining a supportive relationship with them.

#### Recommendation #1

Establish, advertise and staff a drop-in centre to provide “one stop shopping” access to and coordination of already existing support services in the county. The centre must be made available seven days a week in some way, through a phone line with a dispatcher, or an individual in place. Ideally staff would include two workers, one male and one female who already are experienced youth workers and familiar with the area.

#### Recommendation #2

Initiate and enhance partnership among community service providers to develop a database of resources that these staff members can access for the client group. Some resources are easily identified but there appears to be an informal support network not currently advertised. An example of this is short-term shelter provided by responsible individuals that meets the criteria of court placements and which would accept these clients.

#### Recommendation #3

Establish an operating budget to set up and maintain the initial drop-in centre. This should include funds for two salaried staff, a donated space, and office equipment including a telephone

line that can be operated 24/7. The budget should allow for subsidies that staff could use to address clients' immediate, short-term needs such as food and clothing.

## 9.2 Address Educational Gaps and Losses Next

There is a group of young people who currently are dropping out, being forced out or becoming disengaged from the formal educational structure of the only high school in the county. Positive though the school experience there is for the majority of its students, there is a group who will never 'fit in' and choose to exclude themselves in various ways. These young people deserve the opportunities to develop their intellectual potential, acquire the required social skills, accumulate experiences that can enhance self confidence while completing the requirements for their high school diploma.

The present Ministry of Education has identified 'at risk' students as an initiative and provided funds to school boards to support these students. These funds are earmarked for additional resources to schools to retain these students by providing a broader, experiential curriculum, encouraging teacher professional development to incorporate remedial literacy and numeracy instruction, and promoting links to the business community to assist with these students. There is only one high school in Haliburton County to provide adolescents with a secondary education. The school is acknowledged as having the lowest drop out rate of all the secondary schools within the TLDSB, however, more than one educator participant indicated that this 'one size' does not necessarily 'fit all'. The school dynamic can marginalize some young people early and the process of their disengagement is a complex one. As well, The

School Safety Act prescribes stringent disciplinary consequences that are producing longer periods of student suspension and exclusion from school.

The Highland Learning Centre provides two alternative education programs for students. The ACE program is a legislated program to assist 14 and 15 year olds required by law to attend school but whose lack of attendance seriously jeopardizes their education. Board resources provide a teacher for two half days weekly. Next fall that instructional support will be extended through the services of an EA for the additional three half days. In the other program “one and a half” teachers provide secondary instruction for 16 to 20 year olds prior to their acceptance into the Adult Upgrading program delivered through Sir Sandford Fleming four half days weekly there and more recently, in Minden. Both programs provide half a day’s instruction only.

The Ministry of Children and Youth Services is now responsible for youth justice services for youth ages 12 to 17. Youth Criminal Justice Act places a stronger reliance on community supports to help young people in conflict with the law get their lives back on track and become contributing members of society. Students who are in trouble with the law, or who commit school infractions that bring them into conflict with the law not only face consequences through the justice system they may also be excluded from school for at least 20 days. If their infraction is serious enough they may go into short-term custody. These young people are penalized twice; their education can be seriously interrupted. The current alternative education program provides neither the flexibility such as continuous intake including summer months nor the structure (an extended day’s program to include a co-op work program, and experiential or skill-based activities) that this group require. Young people excluded from school by choice or as a consequence of their own misbehaviour need an individualized, daily program to address their specific needs.

#### Recommendation #4

Various service partners in the county need to work together to design, finance and deliver a multi-service program flexible enough for continuous intake that supports the acquisition of secondary school credits and whose direction is the completion of the high school diploma. This program should include young people who choose an alternative education experience as well as providing support for students on an extended suspension from school.

#### Recommendation #5

A program to support the continued education of students on extended suspensions from school should include liaison with their current classroom teachers so that students can complete registered credits, a counselling component to provide them with positive alternatives to their current behaviour and new strategies for overall success upon their return to school. The program should also provide support to both the student and parents upon the student's re-entry to the school.

#### Recommendation #6

The community multi-service program should also address the needs of young people brought into the formal justice system for minor offences by providing them with opportunities to demonstrate personal accountability and reparation. It should include a counselling component to focus on the development of positive alternatives to their current behaviour as well as strategies for school success as needed.

#### Recommendation #7

The multi-service program needs to address the needs of all its clients by providing a social component that includes physical recreation activities, pre-employment training, skills development and a work component with subsidy.

### 9.3 Engage Community Partners through Work Projects

In addition to classroom based tasks and activities, the multi-service program needs to incorporate projects that address needs identified by community partners. A process that explores and generates community work projects will engender community support and go a long way in altering some negative views held about this youth group. Through this process participants also can gain insight into specific jobs or skills. The successful completion of these projects permits the youth participants to contribute to the community while developing social and cultural capital. These projects could include short-term goals such as providing assistance with or designing beautification projects in the downtown areas, hosting, ushering or advertising community events. Longer-term projects could include gathering data for specific projects identified by community partners.

#### Recommendation #8

The multi-service program needs to generate community contacts to promote support for its participants and provide them with opportunities to give back to the community. The program should initiate a process of exploring and generating community works projects to be completed

by participants. Such activities will benefit both the community and the participants of this program.

#### 9.4 Support the Creation of Easily Accessible, Low-Cost Youth Activities

Both the participants in this study and the secondary literature indicate the need for and benefits of social and physical recreation activities for Haliburton youth. Young people need opportunities to try new things and learn about themselves in the process. Recreational and social activities provide them with opportunities to manage stress develop initiative and interact with peers who would normally be outside their existing social network (Dworkin, Larson & Hanson 2003). Members of this partnership need to actively pursue and support the development of low-cost, easily accessible social and recreational activities geared to the needs of all adolescents. Such projects could provide resources for outdoor activities such as basketball courts and a skating rink as well as an indoor space where youth can gather for a supervised program, developed with and by a group of youth in response to identified needs.

#### Recommendation #9

Because there is an identified need for additional social and recreational activities for Haliburton youth, and because participation in such activities produces well-documented benefits, members of this partnership need to actively pursue and support the development of low-cost, easily accessible social and recreational activities geared to all adolescents,

## Appendix I

### Interview Questions for At Risk Study

*Family Services of Haliburton is undertaking a study as the first step in the development of a strategic multi-service plan to maximize our community based opportunities for at risk youth.*

*I am collecting information that will establish a database about current service providers and resources. I would appreciate information about your current program as well as, your views and experiences.*

### Current Program

Please tell me about your current program

Its goals

Staff

Client group

Age, gender

Education levels

Employment patterns

Age range

Length of engagement/time in the program

Cost/funding/resources

Success rate?

Data?

What assumptions does your program make about its clients and their needs?

What difficulties/barriers have you encountered in program delivery?

If you could make changes or additions to your program, what would these be?

Who else should I be talking to?

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