

**Items for the Action of the Regional Watershed Alliance**

**TO:** Chair and Members of the Regional Watershed Alliance  
Wednesday, September 18, 2024 Meeting

**FROM:** Darryl Gray, Director, Education and Training

**RE: YOUTH GREENSPACE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM**

---

**KEY ISSUE**

To provide the Regional Watershed Alliance (RWA) with information on the Youth Greenspace Employment Program and identify potential collaboration opportunities.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

**IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT the report on the Youth Greenspace Employment Program, be received for information;**

**AND further that relevant collaboration opportunities and updates regarding this program be brought to RWA for consideration.**

**BACKGROUND**

The Youth Greenspace Employment Program is a collaborative project focused on creating enhanced environmental sector learning opportunities while improving the quality of greenspace in York Region for human and wildlife communities.

The 2023 Youth Greenspace Employment Program is a collaborative pilot project between TRCA and York Region's Homelessness Community Programs (HCP) division, part of the Social Services Branch in the Community and Health Services Department. As the Service System Manager for Housing and Homelessness, the Social Services Branch at York Region administers and delivers homelessness prevention and housing stability supports, and provides funding to community agencies who deliver services, such as emergency and transitional housing, on their behalf. These collective efforts are aimed at helping people who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness to find and keep housing and to achieve housing and life stability.

In 2023, through funding provided by York Region for the Youth Greenspace Employment Program, TRCA hired six youth experiencing

## Item 8.1

homelessness for a six-week period to provide the opportunity to gain workplace experience in the environmental sector, develop transferable skills, and receive on-the-job training. York Region HCP coordinated partnerships with 360°Kids and Salvation Army to identify potential participants currently residing in youth shelters or enrolled in youth outreach programs. Participants were selected through a targeted recruitment process, interviewed, and onboarded by TRCA.

Led by staff from TRCA's Education and Training Division and York Region, youth participating in the program were provided with transportation to properties throughout York Region to work alongside TRCA staff from the Restoration and Infrastructure and Conservation Parks and Lands Divisions to learn on-the-job skills in greenspace management.

A key component of the program, in addition to standard on-boarding training provided by TRCA, was a weekly workshop to build job search and employment-seeking skills. The weekly workshops were provided primarily by 360°Kids, with a supplementary workshop delivered by TRCA related to green jobs and green industries. Workshop topics included resume building, interview skills, confidence in networking and an environmental sector information session. Each workshop provided opportunity for program participants to reflect on how they will apply the skills they were learning to a future job opportunity and ask questions of TRCA and agency partner staff. Future iterations of the employment and training program will incorporate expanded opportunities to connect directly with employers, and hear directly from employers, on what skills they are seeking from entry-level employees.

### **RATIONALE**

The 2023 Youth Greenspace Employment Program built on previous TRCA experience in working with York Region, 360°Kids, Blue Door and other social service agencies in addressing pressing housing needs by leveraging TRCA skills and assets, including the provision of one of TRCA's rental houses in Markham for 360°Kids in 2016 and the provision of Lake St. George Field Centre in Richmond Hill as an isolation site within York Region's shelter system during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this program TRCA gained additional understanding and awareness related to working with vulnerable populations, youth housing challenges and barriers

## Item 8.1

that people experiencing homelessness face in seeking and retaining paid employment.

Through the on-the-job training and employment experience, the Youth Greenspace Employment Program had a significant impact for the youth involved, as well as on TRCA and the partner organizations involved. Young people experiencing homelessness face a myriad of barriers to safety, security and employment, and on-the-job training is part of a broader intervention strategy to support individuals early on in their experience of homelessness and provide them with skills needed to secure stable employment. As an employment intervention related to housing and homelessness, this program is intended to address systemic barriers unhoused youth face as it relates to accessing stable, long-term employment.

While the program focused on connecting youth with jobs and on-the-job experience, participants benefited from receiving new job skills, social and career connections, and targeted workplace-specific experience. Participating youth were exposed to different outdoor work environments such as parks, golf courses, and environmental restoration sites in order to gain an understanding of how skills transfer to different teams and work environments. The participants have maintained contact with staff at TRCA, as references and sharing job opportunities.

The program itself focused on developing transferable skills in greenspace management that can be used in a variety of entry-level outdoor jobs or transferred to similar entry-level jobs such as construction labourer, custodial work, or warehouse labourer. The following are a list of various skills acquired:

- Workplace skills: Time management, problem solving, communication, attention to detail and teamwork;
- Outdoor safety skills: hazard assessment, safety awareness, proper Personal Protective Equipment;
- Small tools competencies – some power tools, saws, hammers, loppers, trimmers, shovels, clippers, string trimmers;
- Proper tree and shrub planting;
- Trail maintenance;
- Invasive species identification and removal, and
- Basics of turf management/golf course operations.

## Item 8.1

Through the program participants received the following skill development, training and employment opportunities:

- 23 hours of on-the-job training
- 936 hours field experience
- 27 hours of employment and life skills workshops

TRCA outdoor greenspaces benefited from the program through the completion of priority tasks late in the season including the planting of 1,665 native trees and shrubs. 360°Kids and Salvation Army saw a benefit to the participants through the Youth Greenspace Employment program through the establishment and participation in a program that was specifically tailored towards outdoor work, which some of their clients had expressed an interest in. Additionally, they were able to provide this opportunity to youth that specifically sought work in landscaping or other outdoor jobs.

Overall, the 2023 pilot season for the Youth Greenspace Employment Program was a successful first step in supporting York Region and TRCA's social service partners in efforts to address youth homelessness. Planning for 2024 is currently underway with plans for a second cohort of youth to develop strong customer service and food service skills through job placements within TRCA's education centre food service facilities. A key learning of 2023 was that in order to further make a meaningful difference in the lives of participating youth and improved employment outcomes, it is crucial that TRCA and program partners ensure job opportunities are available to participants immediately following the conclusion of the program. With that in mind, the program will be restructured in 2024 to align with peak hiring seasons and provide additional emphasis and focus on early engagement of potential employers to more effectively close the employment gap following program conclusion.

### **Relationship to TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan**

This report supports the following Pillar and Outcome set forth in TRCA's 2023-2034 Strategic Plan:

#### **Pillar 2 Knowledge Economy:**

2.2 Collaboration to advance a green transition

## **Item 8.1**

### **DETAILS OF WORK TO BE DONE**

TRCA will continue to collaborate and partner with York Region and agency partners to develop and execute the 2024 employment training program. TRCA, through Partners in Project Green and other avenues, is seeking additional employer partners to support post-program employment and placements. TRCA staff will be engaging with PPG EMC members and the broader PPG membership to explore opportunities to leverage the current and future employment programs such as the Youth Greenspace Employment Program to advance and support employment outcomes for participants in this program.

**Report prepared by: Diana Wilson, Senior Manager, Community Outreach & Education**

**Email: [diana.wilson@trca.ca](mailto:diana.wilson@trca.ca)**

**For Information contact: Darryl Gray, (416) 791-0327**

**Email: [darryl.gray@trca.ca](mailto:darryl.gray@trca.ca)**

**Date: December 13, 2023**