March 18, 2020

Executive Policy Committee
City of Winnipeg
510 Main Street
Winnipeg, Manitoba
R3B 1B9

Re: Letter to the Executive Policy Committee

Hello Councillors and Your Worship Mayor Brian Bowman,

Today is an overwhelming day, both for you, and for us, but we want to thank you for your work in our communities - because we know - it isn't always easy.

Now, it's possible that you haven't heard of YAA, and we hope to change that. YAA is a collective network of *fifteen* not-for-profit youth serving organizations, including agencies you know - like Boys and Girls Clubs of Winnipeg, Art City, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, and Rossbrook House. Today, we are here to advocate for our member organizations, for the youth in our communities, and - for the well-being of our city.

YAA assembled in 1995 as a direct response to the overwhelming gang recruitment and violence involving youth in our communities. YAA is fifteen organizations like Spence Neighbourhood Association, Graffiti Art Programming, and Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, who work day-in-and-day-out to support our youth and strengthen our communities. These organizations support those in most need of our care and services: many children and youth like my friend Mohammed, who was so thankful he could have a granola bar before after school program because that was his first time eating that day or - children like Precious, who lives in an apartment of 11 siblings, with a single mother who is often absent because she is working two jobs to provide for her family.

We recognize the many priorities you've had to balance to prepare this multi-year budget, and we know it's a challenge. But, we are willing to bet that you are not doing this work because you love concrete. Like all of us working in the community services sector, you are where you are because - you love people. Your families, your neighbors, and constituents. Now, you know why we are here. It is because YAA members feel strongly enough to stand with their allies: organizations who are facing the proposed 10% decrease of your support to agencies, like: Art City, Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, Graffiti Art Programming, IRCOM, Rossbrook House and Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre.

We are here to explain that YAA's collective reach to youth across our city is extensive and deserving of greater attention. Our members focus on neighbourhoods where youth are exposed to many systemic, community, and individual risks such as: discrimination, negative peer-influence, problematic substance-use, and adverse childhood experiences. We represent 15 agencies who operate over 230 youth programs and serve over 24,000 youth between the ages of 6 to 29 each year, all at no cost. These organizations address social determinants like income, mental and physical health, and marginalization, all of which further burden struggling families with the ability to invest in their child's well-being and development outside-of-school time.

YAA members remove these prevalent barriers, granting youth comparable opportunities to those enjoyed by more privileged youth in our city.

All youth in Winnipeg deserve meaningful involvement in organized sports teams, artistic projects, culturally-relevant teachings, and a variety of other skill-based programs that are not necessarily available in schools, or fostered by families. But our agencies are in a position to lose more than $60,000 in 2020 and nearly a quarter million ($245,000) over the next four (4) years because of the proposed City cuts to Community Services.[i]

At YAA, we work to increase the quality of programming and reinforce the shared vision of our members - who see the collective voice as being essential to the quality of work they do. When we imagine these cuts, we know the immediate hardships this will cause - both within their agencies, and in their ability to strengthen the not-for-profit youth sector.

With the proposed decrease in city investment, we see our sectors balance of priorities being compromised. We want our city to understand that effects from these cuts will emerge in Winnipeg's communities both immediately and in the long-term. The potential decrease in program availability and the number of youth served has a direct correlation to less employment or volunteer opportunities for youth. This will extenuate the already high youth unemployment rates across Winnipeg - of which is a stated "worsening trend" in the latest, "A Peg Report on Sustainable Development Goals".[ii] Without these opportunities, youth will seek other areas of belonging, potentially working us backwards to the return of the youth gang epidemic that acted as the catalyst for YAA's formation.

YAA agencies experiencing these funding cuts are essential to the prevention through social development framework that has not been properly supported in Winnipeg. We believe in the importance of acting on the notion that life set-backs and second-chances are not distributed equally among youth in our city. Our agencies' youth have a heightened disposition to use drugs in order to cope with poor mental health, and to neglect the importance of healthy role-models when already struggling with authority-figures.

Recommendations from local and national reports on preventative measures have a shared consensus on what needs to happen.[iii] Our city should continue to make social investments in the areas where youth can gain resiliency, reclaim a sense-of-belonging through community involvement - especially for indigenous and newcomer youth - and where they can develop themselves in more holistic ways. Art City, Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, Graffiti Art Programming, IRCOM, Rossbrook House and Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre are those whose work should be increasingly leveraged to ensure that positive influences are in place for our youth.

These organizations mitigate risk factors and target root causes around health and safety, alleviating strains on other core services in our city. Those being, our health-sector, where youth hospitalization rates due to cannabis, alcohol and opioid use would rise; or our police force, where responses to youth gang involvement and drug-related crime would further burden police capacities across-the-board. When the not-for-profit youth sector is leveraged, our city also minimizes collateral costs on other core services.

We see these youth as being part of the solution, not the problem. With less resources supporting our sector's collective goals there will be the same unsustainable responses to rates around

crime, poor mental health, and substance abuse in our city. We see the negative, cascading effects overwhelming our city's youth in more ways than before.

Youth Agencies Alliance is the result of the collaborative approach needed in our sector, and our city. And here is the thing, we want councillors to understand the work being done on a daily basis by these organizations. We invite you to come and see the behind the scenes work for youth who chose to share their lives with us, the ones who otherwise wouldn't have the wrap around supports they need - many youth just like Precious and Mohammed.

There is tremendous value in your investment in our organizations and the return that the city receives as a result. We want to thank you for allowing us to use our collective voice and hope you take us up on the offer to visit YAA organizations and the youth who need your support the most - and see how we can work together to make a difference. We know the decisions are tough, but hope that when you consider the budget, consider a not-for-profit strategy that includes sustained engagement and support for our members, like: Art City, Broadway Neighbourhood Centre, Graffiti Art Programming, IRCOM, Rossbrook House and Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre.

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[i] Canada. Manitoba. City of Winnipeg. *2020 Preliminary Budget: Operating and Capital, Volume 2*. [Winnipeg, MB], 2020. https://www.winnipeg.ca/finance/files/2020PreliminaryBudget_Volume2.pdf

[ii] "A Peg Report on Winnipeg and the Sustainable Development Goals: Youth Unemployment Rate." MyPeg. 2020 IISD and United Way of Winnipeg, January 2020. https://www.mypeg.ca/indicator/youth-unemployment-rate/.

[iii] We are referencing stated prevention strategies for dealing with youth risk factors from the following reports and reputable organizations: the **Illicit Drug Task Force** Report (06/2019), the **VIRGO** Mental Health and Addictions Report (05/2018), the Canadian Community Epidemiology Network on Drug Abuse (**CCENDU**) Bulletin on Changes in Stimulant Use and Related Harms (04/2019), the **Chief Public Health Officer's** Report on Preventing Problematic Substance Use in Youth (10/2018), the Canadian Institute for Health Information's (**CIHI**) report on "Hospital Stays for Harm Cause by Substance Use Among Youth Age 10 to 24" (09/2019), and **Health Canada**'s report on "Strengthening Canada's Approach to Substance Use Issues" (07/2019).

Sincerely,

Youth Agencies Alliance

Jessica da Silva
Amanda Doerksen
Daniel Kennedy

YAA Primary Members

Art City
Boys and Girls Club of Winnipeg
Broadway Neighbourhood Centre
Evermore Gather Grow Lead Inc.
Graffiti Art Programming
I.R.C.O.M
Ka Ni Kanichihk Inc.
Kildonan Youth Activity Centre
Maples Youth Activity Centre
Ma Mawi Wi Chi Itata Centre
N.E.E.D.S Inc.
Rossbrook House
Spence Neighbourhood Association
Teen Stop Jeunesse
West Broadway Youth Outreach Inc.