

# Saskatoon police pilot program looks to find root causes of youth runaways



By Jacqueline Wilson

Anchor Global News

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Pilot program looks to find root causes of runaways by targeting chronic youth, saving Saskatoon police resources and time in protective services.

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A new pilot program, Operation Runaway, was presented by [Saskatoon Police Service](#) at Thursday's board of police commissioners meeting to identify the root causes of why youth run away and to employ positive support mechanism to encourage them to change their behaviour.

According to a report from Chief Clive Weighill, city police received 2,456 missing persons reports in 2016. Of those, 78 per cent were youth.

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Central Division Insp. Randy Huisman said a group of about 30 youth make up the majority of the calls, some running away as much as 30 times a year.

The six-month pilot project that's scheduled to begin in April will hold focus groups with the chronic runaways first.

"Really this is about us telling them that we want to sit and listen to what they have to say and we care for them," Huisman said.

If the project is successful, it will not only help support those in need on a case by case basis, but reduce the impact on police resources.

"There are a lot of costs that go into searching for missing youth."

"When somebody is reported missing the onus is on the police to continue searching for them until we find them. That means continued patrol division response to look for that missing person around the clock for four days," Huisman added.

"The real cost is lives if we don't do anything."

**READ MORE: [When are Amber Alerts issued in Saskatchewan?](#)**

Operation Runaway is a multi-organization project that includes partnerships from city police, Egadz, the Ministry of Social Services, outreach support, and mental health and addiction services.



## Operation Runaway Still in Business

Saskatoon, SK, Canada / Country 600 CJWW

[Drew Wilson](#)

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Operation Runaway has funding for another year.

The program which operates out of the EGADZ Street Outreach centre in Saskatoon is getting 125-thousand dollars from the province in addition to a donation of 25-thousand from Home Depot.

The program which consults runaway youth on how to deal with their troubled lives, has been a life saver for Matthew Wutunee.

He said after spending over two drug addicted years on the street, Operation Runaway turned his life around in less than four months.

"I have a stable house, I'm back in school part time, I'm in the EGADZ day program and if I'm ever feeling alone or if I ever feel like craving or something like that, I know I can call them anytime and they'll help me talk through it," said Wutunee who described his life before Operation Runaway as miserable.

"I didn't know where my mum, my father or my brother was. I had nothing, I was living out of a backpack and some nights I'd have to wander the streets all night because I had no where to go."

EGADZ Executive Director Don Meikle said the most surprising revelation from working with runaway youth is the amount of baggage they carry and how much they are misunderstood.

"The whole thought around these are just a bunch of thugs that are running around and not coming back and being defiant, but what I learned and what was most important for me is half the time these kids are running away from something and fifty-percent are just trying to escape reality," said Meikle.

Meikle pointed out the runaway youth they encounter want to recover and live productive lives.

"One of our youth committee members is just coming out from a six week treatment program because she wants to get clean and healthy and when she started in the program she was gang involved and didn't see much hope for herself," said Meikle.

Prairie Mobile Communications are also providing donated cell phones to the youth taking part in the program.



Comments are closed.

<b>Exhibit: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls</b>		
Location/Phase: <u>Part 2 Regina</u>		
Witness: <u>Clive Weighill</u>		
Submitted by: <u>Ashley Smith</u>		
Add'l info: <u>P02P02P0301</u>		
Date: <u>JUN 27 2018</u>		
<b>Initials</b>	<b>I/D</b>	<b>Entered</b>
<u>CS</u>		<u>63</u>