

DATE OF MEETING July 6, 2020

AUTHORED BY DAVID STEWART, SOCIAL PLANNER

**SUBJECT COMMUNITY VITALITY GRANT – TAKE A HIKE FOUNDATION**

## **OVERVIEW**

### **Purpose of Report**

To obtain Council direction with respect to the Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation's request to reallocate project funding previously awarded through a 2020 Community Vitality Grant.

### **Recommendation**

That Council provide direction regarding a request from Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation to redirect \$10,000 received from a 2020 Community Vitality Grant toward mental health supports for students.

## **BACKGROUND**

Each year since 2001, the City of Nanaimo has allocated Social Planning grants to non-profit societies and/or recognized faith groups in Nanaimo. Applications are evaluated on their potential impact and ability to respond to the following strategic priorities:

- Social Equity (projects addressing issues related to poverty or social inclusion)
- Community Diversity (projects that support an inclusive and equitable community)
- Community Wellness (projects addressing the social determinants of health)
- Vibrant Neighbourhoods (projects that build community by enhancing social connectivity)

Applications are reviewed by Staff and forwarded to the Finance and Audit Committee, which then makes a recommendation to Council. The grant cannot be used to fund ongoing operational expenses.

A total of \$85,000 is available in annual grant funding in two separate categories: Social Response Grants (\$60,000) and Community Vitality Grants (\$25,000). Social Response Grants are generally intended to support larger-scale projects, whereas Community Vitality Grants are targeted towards smaller initiatives.

On 2020-JAN-13, Council voted to allocate the grants as follows:

### *Social Response Grants*

- Literacy Central Vancouver Island (\$30,000)
- United Way Central and Northern Vancouver Island (\$15,000)
- Nanaimo Region John Howard Society (\$15,000)

### *Community Vitality Grants*

- The Society for Equity, Inclusion and Advocacy (SEIA): Central Vancouver Island (\$10,000)
- Spinal Cord Injury Organization of British Columbia (\$5,000)
- Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation (\$10,000) |

## **DISCUSSION**

The \$10,000 Community Vitality Grant awarded to the Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation (“Take a Hike”) was to be used towards the purchase of a 24-passenger van to be used to take youth at risk on adventure-based learning activities. Take a Hike is requesting permission to redirect the \$10,000 grant towards mental health supports for their students. Take a Hike’s letter of rationale is included as Attachment A.

Take a Hike has advised that COVID-19 has impacted the foundation’s need and ability to secure the originally-proposed passenger van. Social distancing restrictions and school closures have reduced the immediate need for the passenger van. COVID-19 has also hampered the foundation’s fundraising efforts to raise the required additional funds to purchase the van. Their applicant’s grant application indicated they were waiting to secure a Variety Sunshine Coach grant to also help purchase the van.

Take a Hike partners with public school districts to engage vulnerable youth in a full-time mental health and emotional well-being program embedded in an alternative education classroom. Through their partnership with the School District, the school district provides:

- Academics (full-time teacher);
- Youth and family workers (or sometimes a social worker) to help families access other community supports and resources; and
- Administrative support from the district principal and access to other school amenities, such as the library and gymnasium.

Take a Hike provides what is critical to a vulnerable youth’s success, but outside of the education system, including:

- A full-time clinical counsellor;
- An adventure specialist; and
- All outdoor adventure and volunteer activities (gear, transportation, meal programs, etc.)

The clinical counsellor is embedded in the classroom with the students in order to establish a positive relationship with the youth, support learning, and provide early intervention and mental health supports.

With the redirected funding, Take a Hike would like to hire its clinical counsellor to start earlier than anticipated in order to support youth over the summer and be prepared to help children transition back to the classroom program. The proposed increased mental health support addresses the community wellness and social equity strategic priorities within the grant criteria. Alternatively, if the request to redirect the funding is denied, Take a Hike will be required to return the funds.

Social Planning grants are intended to support a proposed program or project as proposed within the grant application submission. Grants are not permitted to support ongoing operating expenses. Take a Hike has plans to hire a counsellor during the school year; as such, the proposal would supplement ongoing operating expenses. In the past, where an organization has been unable to follow through with the proposed program to be funded by the grant, the funds have been returned.

## OPTIONS

1. That Council authorize the Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation to redirect the \$10,000 Community Vitality Grant toward mental health supports for its students.
  - Advantages: Redirecting the funds will allow Take a Hike to provide mental health supports for at-risk youth during the COVID-19 crisis. Helping vulnerable youth to improve their mental health and resilience now will not only support their wellness through the immediate crisis, it will help them to re-engage with school and achieve social and academic success. Given the barriers the youth face with respect to Wellness and Social Equity, the proposal continues to meet the strategic priorities supported by the grant.
  - Disadvantages: Allowing Take a Hike to redirect the funds to a separate program not included in the original grant proposal may set a precedent for other grant recipients or be seen as unfair to others who were denied a grant or required to stick to their original grant proposal. Given Take a Hike already has plans to retain the clinical counsellor during the school year, it could be argued the proposal to redirect the funds to hire the counsellor earlier may be supporting ongoing operating expenses. The grant criteria state grant money cannot be used for ongoing operational expenses.
  - Financial Implications: If Option 1 is selected, Take a Hike will be permitted to keep the \$10,000 grant and no funds will be returned to the City.
2. That Council direct the Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation to return the \$10,000 Community Vitality grant and direct Staff to reallocate the funds to the 2021 Community Vitality Grant budget.
  - Advantages: Option 2 is consistent with past practices and encourages accountability among grant applicants to deliver on the program proposed within their grant application. The option will allow for a greater amount of funds to be available for next year's grants.
  - Disadvantages: Requiring Take a Hike to return the funds will impact their ability to provide increased mental health support to their youth over the summer and transition back to school in the fall.
  - Financial Implications: If Option 2 is selected, Take a Hike will be required to return the \$10,000 grant. The funds will then be redirected to the 2021 Community Vitality Grant budget, thereby increasing the total available grant amount from \$25,000 to \$35,000.
3. That Council provide alternative direction.

### **SUMMARY POINTS**

- The Take a Hike at Risk Youth Foundation was awarded a \$10,000 Community Vitality Grant to be used towards the purchase of a 24-passenger van to support adventure-based learning.
- Take a Hike has not been able to secure the additional funding required to purchase the van, and social distancing restrictions have impacted Take a Hike's programming, making the van no longer required at this time.
- COVID-19 has resulted in an increased mental health impact on the vulnerable youth that Take a Hike supports.
- Take a Hike is requesting the \$10,000 grant be redirected towards mental health support in order to allow them to retain a clinical counsellor over the summer.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

ATTACHMENT A: Take a Hike Foundation - Letter of Rationale

#### **Submitted by:**

Lisa Bhopalsingh  
Manager, Community Planning

#### **Concurrence by:**

Bill Corsan  
Director, Community Development

Dale Lindsay  
General Manager, Development Services

Laura Mercer  
Director, Finance