

York Regional Police

Parks Ambassadors Program



Community Services Bureau – Community Mobilization Unit
May 2009

In 2007/2008 Constable Houghton, the 2 District Crime Prevention officer, in partnership with the Town of Richmond Hill Parks and Recreation Department and the Westbrook Residents Association created a pilot program in the Westbrook Community of Richmond Hill. This first group of 14 Richmond Hill Park Ambassadors has now been in operation for one year and their involvement has continued into 2009. The Community Mobilization Unit is currently in discussion with the municipality to expand the program across the town. In addition there are discussions with representatives from the Town of Markham to create a pilot program in Ward 1 of their municipality.

The 2008/20010 business plan identified that "York Regional Police create a park safety program with community partners." That program is the Parks Ambassadors Program and is actively being pursued by the Community Services Bureau, Community Mobilization unit.

STRUCTURE

The program is run under the guidance and coordination of the Municipality's Parks and Recreation Department. Police provide support through training of volunteers and completing the volunteer clearance letters at no cost to the volunteers.

Citizens who are already out in the community have the ability to access the manager of each department within the town to advise of issues they observe. This could be property damage, maintenance issues etc. They are given the knowledge of how to appropriately contact the



DUTIES OF A PARK AMBASSADOR:

- Walk through their neighbourhood public spaces wearing our distinctive yellow "Park Ambassador" golf shirt/jacket
- Direct all concerns to the appropriate municipal staff person by cell phone, email or fax
- Provide advice to residents on how and who to contact for local issues
- Act in a totally non-confrontational manner being a good witness and report issues
- Serve as a goodwill ambassador for the Municipality
- Provide valuable information to friends and neighbours about municipal services, programs and events
- Participate in local municipal-sponsored events such as new park openings, concerts, etc

TRAINING FOR VOLUNTEERS

Due to the importance and need to ensure that volunteers have the appropriate knowledge and understanding of the program proper training is a necessity. The following provides details in which consistency between the programs should remain.



- Awareness of basic crime prevention Principles and what is suspicious or criminal behavior
- CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) awareness
- How to access Emergency and Municipal Services
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- Be provided with an understanding and knowledge regarding local events, special events and any other functions that they might want to promote and attend.
- Establish expectations for use of "Ambassador" attire

Do

- Treat your Safety as number one, Walk with a buddy
- Share knowledge with others in the community
- Report to police when a crime is suspected or witnessed.
- Use the access numbers to report issues to the correct department or agency



Don't

- Confront persons involved in anti social and or criminal behaviour
- Pick up needles or anything that may be hazardous to your health
- Become involved in anything that you are not trained to do (i.e verbal arguments, fights, animal control)

CONCLUSION

This program is being marketed to all municipalities across the region. York Regional Police will assist in the development of the program with each municipality and training of participants. The goal is to have this program active in all municipalities by the end of 2010. The extent to which each program is used will be dependant upon each municipality accepting the concept and their willingness to manage a group of residents.



This program fills the gap left by other crime prevention programs due to their structure and focus. It uses people already spending time in the community and arms them with the knowledge and ability to make a meaningful contribution within their community. It allows for a rapid notification of criminal and anti social behaviors to be reported to the authorities and be dealt with efficiently. It creates the perception in the eyes of the public that the community is safe and secure. It promotes guardianship and takes back parks for legitimate use for the community by members.