

JEAN GREIG

KAWARTHA PINE RIDGE DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD
ACCOMMODATION REVIEW COMMITTEE MEETING
THURSDAY, MAY 12, 2011

Presentation on the Carriage House Alternative Classroom

By Jean Greig, Chair, Y.E.S. Board of Directors

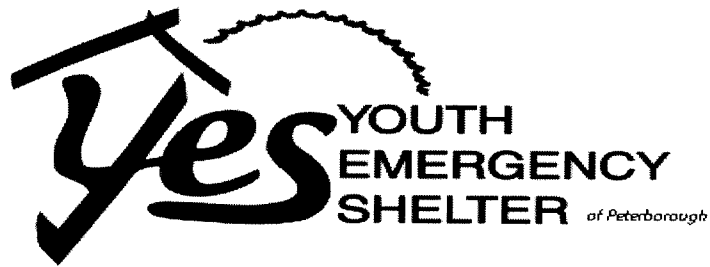
Good evening and thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this evening. My name is Jean Greig, I am the current Chair of the Board of Directors of the Youth Emergency Shelter of Peterborough. I'm not here tonight to speak in favour or against any particular school closure or retention. Rather, I would like to speak to the Committee about the Carriage House Alternative Classroom, a unique partnership between the Youth Emergency Shelter and P.C.V.S (and through PCVS, the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board), and our concern that this program not be negatively affected by the challenges the school board is currently facing vis a vis school closures.

The Carriage House is an alternative classroom located in the old Carriage House directly behind our main shelter building at 196 Brock St. YES houses the classroom, covers overhead costs, provides a child and youth worker, and facilitates classroom volunteers. PCVS (and through it, the school board) provides one full time teacher, occasional part time instructors for special courses, covers part of the salary of the child and youth worker, and provides materials and supplies. All core curriculum courses are offered at the Carriage House, as well as a changing selection of electives depending on the availability of funds and staff.

The program was set up in 2003, in response to the observation that the vast majority of youth staying at the shelter were not attending school. When you don't have a place to live, going to school becomes a low priority. Further, these are young people that are generally facing any number of other challenges – mental health issues, abuse, family breakdown, substance abuse, trouble with the law. Getting them to stay in school is tough. But Ontario law says that all youth up to age 18 must attend school. If they don't, they are truant – and therefore in contravention of the law. Furthermore, a youth who isn't attending school may not be eligible for some social assistance services, such as OW payments. More importantly, perhaps, youth who aren't in school and don't complete a high school degree will remain at a serious disadvantage throughout their lives – making it near impossible for them to break the cycle of poverty and homelessness that put them at the shelter in the first place. The Carriage House provides current and former residents of YES with a workable way of staying in school and working towards a high school diploma.

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Here are some statistics from the past three years:

- A total of 167 students were enrolled at the Carriage House over the past three years (avg. 55 per year).
- The average age of those students was 17.5 years.
- Those 167 students completed 235.5 high school credits.
- Three of those students completed their remaining high school requirements through the Carriage House and crossed the stage with the rest of the PCVS graduates to receive their high school diploma.
- One student completed all of his high school credits through the Carriage House and graduated last fall.

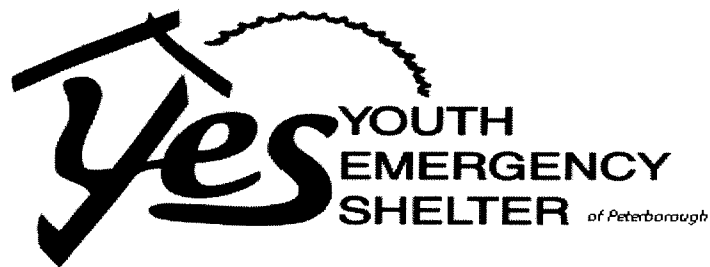
It is important to understand that these are credits – and diplomas – that would **not** have been earned otherwise. Carriage House students aren't just dealing with school – they may be looking for work and permanent housing, they may have to meet with social workers or mental health workers, they may have community service hours to complete. In order to stay in school, they require scheduling flexibility, one-on-one attention, support with other issues such as finding housing or work, referrals to counseling and more – all services which Carriage House and YES staff can and do provide. The Carriage House program makes it possible for these youth to participate and succeed in the educational system.

The Carriage House program has another important benefit for YES -- it allows staff to stay in contact with our clients over the longer term – years, in many cases. Through the Carriage House, staff can continue to provide support and guidance to these young people far beyond the brief time they may be residents in the shelter. That ongoing contact is very important in the long term success of YES clients. And we know that our former clients value and trust that long-term relationship – many former Carriage House students drop by to say hello, ask advice, ask for help or share good news. The Carriage House is YES's single most important ongoing outreach program to former residents.

Finally, the Carriage House provides an important benefit for the KPRDSB and the community – the program is a relatively low cost way for the Board to address truancy in a very hard-to-reach, hard-to-serve population.

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As I stated earlier, we are not here to advocate for or against the closure of any particular school. Our key concern is that the Carriage House continues to operate.

However, we do value our relationship with PCVS for several reasons:

- This is a unique partnership within the community and the Board, forged over years of discussion. To reestablish a similar relationship with another school would take considerable effort and time.
- The physical proximity of PCVS to the Carriage House is convenient, both for administration of the program and for Carriage House teachers, who are in fact PCVS teachers.
- Carriage House students are also, technically, PCVS students. This is an inner city school, with a broad diversity of students. It is located within the downtown core, a part of town that most YES clients are familiar with and feel comfortable in. And the culture at PCVS is perhaps a little more similar and a little more accepting of theirs, so that PCVS may be perceived by Carriage House students as less threatening and more welcoming than most other city high schools. The Carriage House's association with PCVS may give our students the best chance at feeling at part of what most of us would take for granted as the typical high school experience.

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