

Mobile youth centres hit the road

Revamped bus ready to take outreach workers to kids 'wherever they are'

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A refitted commuter bus will connect Surrey outreach workers and kids this summer.

Fitted with couches and plasma-screen TVs, the roving youth lounge will be staffed with outreach workers and visit various Surrey parks and SkyTrain stations throughout July and August.

"It's a dry, safe place for youth to spend time," said Pacific Community Resources Society's Martin Hurst.

"Not only that, youth have immediate access to information about the different programs available to them in Surrey."

The youth outreach supervisor said the initiative is a joint venture of a number of Surrey community groups, as well as the Surrey parks department.

While a version of the program, called MoYO, has been running for about three years, this will be the first time kids will be invited inside a bus, thanks to a decommissioned vehicle donated by TransLink.

Modifications have turned the bus into a youth lounge in which kids can relax, play video games and access information.

Hurst said youth workers interacted with about 3,000 youth last summer, but expect to see many more with the bus.

The mobile youth centre is not a new concept.

The Tri-Cities region has had a similar program for about three years, called Project Reach Out.

Youth workers aim to "take services to youth, wherever they're at," said executive director Jerome Bouvier.

The Tri-Cities' seven-metre-long mobile drop-in centre provides one-on-one support for kids, as well as drug-prevention education, followup and referrals.

The bus runs about 10 nights per month, every month, and sees about 40 kids per night.

"We're dealing with a subculture that's not going to walk into a drop-in centre to seek drug counselling. This way, we go to where we're needed," said Bouvier.

Earlier this year, the bus held a late-night barbecue at a middle school where vandalism had become a problem. After the event, vandalism dropped by about 40 per cent.

"It's all about creating relationships with these kids," Bouvier said.

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