

## 'Critical hours' program funding gets council OK

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Offering citywide after-school programs will go a long way to keeping kids out of trouble, say advocates of a \$3.8-million initiative approved by the City of Calgary.

The so-called "**critical hours**" program, approved by city council during budget talks this week, will provide supervised activities from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

"Council has been very supportive," said Chris Branch, the city's director of community and neighbourhood services.

The decision shifts \$3.8 million no longer needed for after-school care to the **critical hours** programs.

Branch said the money was freed up when the province started to cover the subsidies for out-of-school care, which helped pay for 70 per cent of the cost.

The **critical hours** program will reach many more children -- and won't be tied to income.

Graham Clyne, director of the Calgary Children's Initiative, said the program will more than pay for itself because it will prevent children from getting involved in crime.

"If a kid ends up in the young offender system, that costs us \$97,000 a year," he told the crowd gathered at the Renfrew Boys' Club on Thursday.

They were recognizing National Child Day, which marks the day **Canada** adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The Children's Initiative recognizes all children need access to recreation, keeping them away from crime, drug abuse and gang activity.

Clyne said it's not just about money for new programs, suggesting there's also a need for community support to provide more opportunities and help kids get to those programs.

Kids attending the event said they would like to see programs that cost less money or take place closer to home. The city's **critical hours** program will meet those needs, offering youths between the ages of six and 16 several choices.

Those living close to a recreation centre or swimming pool would have access to activities there, while newer neighbourhoods and those facilities would see programs offered at community halls or schools.

A pilot project running in the northeast offered activities as varied as a comedy club, mountain biking, hip-hop and a homework club.

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