

Greater Sudbury Development Corporation Funding for March of Dimes

Presented To:	City Council
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Type:	Managers' Reports
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Recommended by:	Chief Administrative Officer

Report Summary

This report provides a recommendation regarding authorization of funding from the City of Greater Sudbury Community Development Corporation (operating as the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation, or GSDC).

Resolution

THAT the City of Greater Sudbury hereby authorizes an investment of \$450,000 from Greater Sudbury Development Corporation (CGSCDC) Community Economic Development Fund to support the March of Dimes' Project SEARCH initiative, to be disbursed as \$150,000 annually for each of three years, under the terms and conditions outlined in CGSCDC Board Resolution 2025-172, dated June 11, 2025, and as outlined in the report entitled "Greater Sudbury Development Corporation Funding for March of Dimes' Project SEARCH Initiative", from the Chief Administrative Officer, presented at the City Council meeting on July 15, 2025.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan, Health Impact Assessment and Climate Action Plans

The March of Dimes' *Project SEARCH* model is a nationally recognized best practice for improving employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. It aligns with the City's *2019–2027 Strategic Plan* objectives under Economic Capacity and Investment Readiness by addressing workforce gaps and advancing inclusive employment.

Financial Implications

If approved, the total contribution of \$450,000 will be advanced exclusively from CGSCDC in allocations of \$150,000 annually for a three-year term, subject to the conditions identified in CGSCDC Board Resolution 2025-172 and the terms outlined in the funding agreement between the recipient and the CGSCDC. No further municipal contribution is required for this project.

Background

On June 11, 2025, the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation (GSDC) approved Board Motion 2025-172

to support Project SEARCH, an initiative of March of Dimes Canada, with a funding commitment of \$450,000 over three years (\$150,000 annually) from the Community Economic Development (CED) Fund. As this exceeds the \$250,000 threshold outlined in the City of Greater Sudbury–GSDC Operating Agreement, Council approval is required.

Following due diligence completed by Economic Development staff, the project has been reviewed and recommended by the GSDC's CED Committee and was approved unanimously by the Board.

March of Dimes Canada is a national non-profit organization with extensive experience in the design and delivery of programs that promote independence and employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Project SEARCH is a globally recognized workforce development model tailored for high school students with disabilities in their final year. The program combines 500 hours of classroom-based employability and life skills training with approximately 700 hours of hands-on work experience through three ten-week internships embedded in real workplace settings.

The program operates during the academic year but includes year-round activity including recruitment, partnership coordination, and post-program employment support. Graduates are supported to secure and retain competitive, integrated employment—defined as paid work in typical workplace settings, earning standard wages, and working at least 16 hours per week.

Employment outcomes for the program here in Greater Sudbury have been highly successful, with a reported 90% of graduates securing meaningful employment within nine months of program completion.

Project SEARCH is a collaborative initiative involving education, health care, long-term care, and private sector partners. Together, they provide the classroom instruction, host worksites, and strategic supports that enable students to develop transferable and marketable skills. However, there is currently no consistent provincial funding stream for the program's essential skills trainer role—a key component of the model that ensures job coaching, technical instruction, and personalized employment planning.

The requested funding from the GSDC will fill this gap by supporting two skills trainers per cohort of 10 students, ensuring the continuity and growth of the program over a three-year period. These staff, typically trained in developmental or social services, work alongside employer mentors to help participants acquire job-specific and soft skills aligned with local labour market needs.

The total program budget is \$2,512,662, with confirmed funding from all partner organizations and sponsors. The GSDC contribution represents 17.9% of the total cost and will directly support local workforce development and inclusive employment strategies.

As is standard with multi-year funding agreements, the organization will be required to provide updated financial information and reporting on project deliverables, reviewed and approved by the Board following each year of the project before the subsequent year's disbursement is released.

This initiative addresses the systemic employment gap faced by youth with disabilities—an equity-deserving group with some of the lowest employment outcomes in Ontario. The model aligns with transition best practices and provincial policy, while supporting local employers by expanding the pool of job-ready talent in sectors experiencing chronic labour shortages.

In addition to positive economic and social outcomes, Project SEARCH offers measurable public savings. Each employed graduate is projected to reduce lifetime reliance on social assistance by over \$127,000, delivering a strong return on investment for government and community stakeholders.

The GSDC has provided previous funding for March of Dimes and the Project SEARCH initiative, and the Board was recognized in 2024 with the March of Dimes' national Changemaker award for this previous support. In this new funding request, the intention of this expanded funding scope is to position March of Dimes to seek permanent or long-term financial support for the Project SEARCH program from senior levels of government and other potential donors.

With continued multi-sector support, Project SEARCH is positioned to become a sustainable and impactful employment pathway for youth with disabilities in Greater Sudbury.