



*project step* is an award-winning community response that addresses the need for a drug and substance use initiative to help youth in Ottawa. Through *project step*, youth in all 57 of Ottawa's high schools and in three community agencies offering education programs have access to counselling, support, addiction education, and prevention programming.

<b>Since 2007</b> <i>project step</i> <b>has helped:</b>	<b>11,760+</b>	students access school-based counselling
	<b>75,710+</b>	students receive education sessions
	<b>10,930</b>	parents obtain support

**VISION**  
A community in which all youth have access to adequate, appropriate and evidence-informed support, treatment, education and prevention for substance use.

**ISSUE**

The need for mental health and addictions counselling is important for youth, as it directly influences individual success in achieving educational goals.

According to the 2017 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 38% of students in grades 7-12 reported using an illicit drug in the past year, 43% consumed alcohol (more than a sip) and 17% reported binge drinking. 11% report non-medical use of prescription opioid pain relievers such as codeine, Percocet, OxyContin, Demerol or Tylenol #3 in the past year. As well, 19% of students reported cannabis use. 14% of Ontario students (grades 7-12) may have a drug use problem, but only a small fraction of students have received treatment. Research shows that 85% of adults struggling with addiction began using when they were teenagers.

The link between mental health and drug use has been well studied. People with mental illness are over seven times more likely to use cannabis weekly than people without a mental illness.

Among school-aged children and youth, the need for intervention becomes greater as children advance in school. Generally, drug use is more likely to occur as grade level increases, typically peaking in grade 12 (ages 16-17). This data corresponds directly to the priorities identified by *project step*.

**HISTORY**

In 2007, United Way Ottawa, together with 11 other partners, launched *project step* to work collaboratively to address the need for the support, treatment, education and prevention of substance use issues among youth in our community. At its outset, *project step* had two areas of focus: the development of residential treatment facilities for youth and school-based prevention and intervention.

Before *project step*, there were no residential facilities in Ottawa to help youth deal with serious substance use issues. In 2012, the *project step* partnership raised \$3M to build two residential facilities providing treatment and counselling for youth with addictions on a 24/7 basis: one for francophone youth, operated by Maison Fraternité, and one for anglophone youth run by the Dave Smith Youth Treatment Center. These sites are now supported by ongoing funding from the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

The school-based initiative is the result of a multi-sector community partnership and is now funded by the Champlain LHIN, Ottawa Public Health, the four Ottawa school boards and United Way Ottawa (with support from *project step* donors like the Senators Foundation). The program is delivered in partnership with the four school boards and five service partners (Maison Fraternité, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, Operation Come Home, Youville Centre and Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health). *project step* is coordinated by the Ottawa Network for Education and United Way Ottawa.

## PROGRAMMING

*project step's* **support, education, and prevention** activities take place within the high school environment. For most youth, this means access to counsellors through their mainstream (publicly funded) high school. For some it means accessing the program through non-mainstream schools hosted by community-based organizations, which offer high school programming as a part of their supports to vulnerable youth.

### Mainstream settings

In mainstream public school settings programming is run as a close partnership between the schools and the two core service delivery partners: Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, and Maison Fraternité.

Students at all 57 high schools in Ottawa, including alternate schools, have access to school-based prevention, education and counselling. Many intermediate and elementary schools (grades 6-8) now also receive education and prevention services.

In addition to services for students and families, the addiction counsellors also provide support for other school-based initiatives, including teacher training and parent events.

I think one of the big shocks for many of the parents in our community is that addiction doesn't discriminate. *Project step* is a lifeline for us.

- Cathie Bourgon Department Head, Student Services, All Saints Catholic High School

### Non-mainstream settings

Counselling services are provided for youth in the community through the following partners:

- **Youville Centre** provides young single mothers and expectant mothers with a full range of counselling and life skills support through *project step*.
- **Operation Come Home (OCH)** provides employment and support programs for street-involved and at-risk youth, as well as education through the **Rogers Achievement Centre (RAC)** alternative school. Addictions and mental health counselling is made available to all OCH youth.
- Working in partnership with the **Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School** at the **Odawa Friendship Centre** and **Rideau High School**, the **Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health's** Working Hope program provides culturally aligned mental health and addictions-focused programming for First Nations, Metis, and Inuit children, youth and families.



Without the *project step* staff at Operation Come Home I couldn't have achieved all that I have within the last year, a job, my mental health stability, ability to actually talk to people. *project step* staff have given me the push I need to live my life and not be scared of living. Because of the staff, I am not only living my life, I'm loving it.

- Student who completed the program



I am very happy that there are services like the ones offered at Maison Fraternité for francophone families. I really appreciated the counsellor's professionalism, as well as her patience and availability.

**-Parent of youth in the program**

## IMPACT

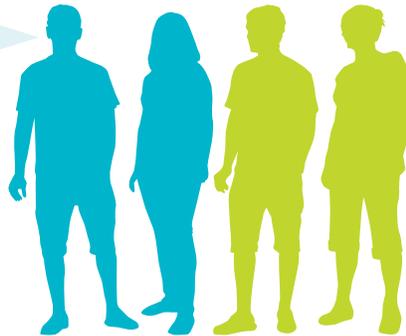
### Mainstream settings

School Year	2007-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Youth engaged in counselling	650	1,250	1,500	1,600	1,770	1,330	1,420	1,460
Youth participating in prevention and education	3,300	5,000	5,400	6,300	17,100	15,500	12,310	14,100
Parents engaged in counselling	480	650	500	270	320	260	200	220
Parent information sessions	N/A	N/A	N/A	110	140	200	3020	2420

(Note: the decline in parents engaged in counselling is due to the fact that many parents are receiving the information they need from parent information sessions.)

By the end of the evaluation period, the following outcomes were observed for the sample group of students participating in the school-based counselling program in 2016-17:

**2 in 4**



- **2 out of every 4 students** in the sample group were able to reduce or stop using one or more drugs during the evaluation period (less than one school year).

- **Average cannabis use decreased by 71%** (based on frequency and quantity consumed).
- **Students** who were experiencing moderate to severe difficulty upon entering the program showed notable improvements in health and wellbeing (as measured by the BASIS 32 assessment tool).
- **95% of the students** admitted to the counselling program completed the school year.

### Non-mainstream settings

School Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Youth engaged in counseling	239	401	210	257	320

**79%** of youth who reported drug use reduced their frequency of use since participating in the *project step* program.

**91%** of youth achieved academic or employment success.

**81%** of youth felt that the program helped them build or rebuild healthy relationships with their family, partner or their community.

**84%** of youth who participated in the survey reported they had fewer suicidal thoughts.

## SUPPORT

### United Way Ottawa Launched a Fentanyl Outreach Campaign

In early 2017, United Way Ottawa, with the support of *project step* partners, launched an awareness and fundraising campaign to respond to the community's concerns about the rising prevalence of opioids like fentanyl. Awareness and fundraising activities are ongoing.

### Mauril Bélanger Memorial Youth Addictions Research Grant

Long-time Liberal Member of Parliament for Ottawa-Vanier, Mauril Bélanger was a longstanding champion of *project step* before he died in 2016. In his memory, United Way Ottawa established the Mauril Bélanger Memorial Youth Addictions Research Grant to support research related to youth substance use .

This \$60,000 dollar grant is available through a partnership with Mitacs. One research application was received.

## TREATMENT

### Residential Treatment Programs

The Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre (DSYTC) provides residential treatment services for English speaking youth in Ottawa. DSYTC programs and services include: comprehensive assessment, up to three months of residential treatment (flexible length of stay), post-residential continuing care and family services (education, counselling, support). Psychiatric support, primary care via nurse practitioners and academic programming are also provided.

Of the youth who accessed residential treatment at DSYTC, 77% had experienced homelessness and 93% had struggled with at least one mental health condition.

During the 2016-2017 fiscal year, DSYTC reported:

- 148 youth and 268 caregivers were provided with services.
- The average wait time for treatment was 26 days.
- 44% of clients completed the entire three months of the residential program (the remaining 56% completed various lengths of stay).

- The median length of stay was 53 days.
- 13 clients graduated from high school.
- In total, clients completed 222 high school credits and two post-secondary courses while in treatment.

For francophone youth whose substance abuse and concurrent disorder issues require a more protected environment than a school-based format, Maison Fraternité provides two intensive treatment programs: a day program and a residential program.

## EDUCATION

### Parent Information Sessions

Ottawa Public Health (OPH), in conjunction with the four Ottawa school boards, provided 12 public information sessions for parents in 2017 with 677 parents, youth and staff in attendance. The sessions were also broadcast in both languages on Facebook Live.

The presentations addressed: counterfeit drugs found in Ottawa (including fentanyl), overdose response, overdose prevention and current substance use prevention education within the schools (Note: These activities are separate from the mainstream setting parent information sessions).

## PREVENTION

### PromSmart Campaign 2017

Ottawa Public Health and *project step*, in consultation with the four Ottawa school boards and prom organizers, created [www.promsmart.ca](http://www.promsmart.ca) to ensure youth would have access to accurate and reliable information regarding substance use and sexual assault prevention during prom events.



**PromSmart.ca**

All you need to stay smart.

**project step** is made possible through the partnership  
of these caring and committed organizations

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## PROGRAM PARTNERS:



**United Way  
Centraide**  
Ottawa



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## SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS:



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