



project step is an award-winning community response to address the need for a drug and substance abuse 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.

Since 2007 project step has helped:	7,700+	students access school-based counselling.
	42,300+	students receive education sessions.
	5,500	parents obtain support.

ISSUE

The need for mental health and addictions counselling is great in the high-risk youth population, and it directly influences individual success in setting and achieving education goals.

According to the 2015 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, 46% of students in Grades 7-12 reported using an illicit drug in the past year, 68% consumed alcohol (more than a sip).

Ten percent report non-medical use of prescription opioid pain relievers such as codeine, Percocet, OxyContin, Demerol or Tylenol #3 in the past year. One in six 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 the child advances in school. Generally, drug use is more likely to occur as grade level increases, typically peaking in grade 11 (ages 16-17). This data corresponds directly to the priorities identified by project step.

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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 abuse issues facing 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*, Ottawa had no residential facilities to help youth deal with serious substance abuse issues. In 2012, the *project step* partnership raised \$3M to build two residential facilities providing treatment and counselling to 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 provincial government, the four Ottawa school boards and United Way Ottawa (with support from *project step* donors like the Senators Foundation). Coordination is assured by the Ottawa Network for Education and United Way Ottawa in collaboration with the four local school boards and five service providers. This support has enabled school-based services in Ottawa to more than double (based on total hours of service) since 2007/08. However, new high schools continue to open in Ottawa, with more planned, so the demand for service continues to grow.

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 (publically funded) high school; while 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. The majority of these schools receive 14 hours a week of service by an addiction counsellor throughout the school year. Many intermediate and elementary schools (Grades 6-8) now also receive some 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.



"The impact our counsellor has made can easily be seen. I see it as grads pass across the stage, when a student's health improves, when a student stays clean and sober, and students meeting their potential. I have met former clients who tell me how much they appreciated this service. It helped them through difficult times"

-Ottawa High School Staff Member



"I flourished because a group of people believed in me so strongly that I finally realized that I am a woman worth believing in. That I am a woman worth investing in... I have attained a two bedroom apartment... I am confident in my ability to parent my child... I am finally a graduate."

-Student who completed the program

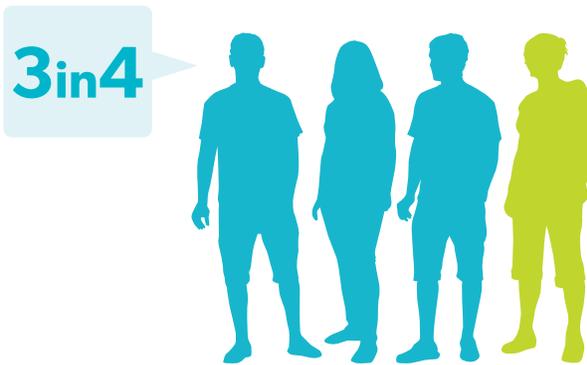
IMPACT

Mainstream settings

Participation numbers	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Youth engaged in counselling	1,250	1,500	1,600	1,770	1,300	1,400
Youth participating in prevention and education	5,100	5,400	6,200	9,800	8,600	12,300
Parents reached out to by counsellors	650	500	500	550	480	240

(Note: the slight decline in individuals served in 2015-2016 is a reflection of reduced available funds; the partnership is working to elevate available funding going forward.)

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 2015-16:



- **3 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 46%** (based on frequency and quantity consumed). Overall alcohol consumption decreased by 44%.
- **Over 75%** of the clients who previously used cocaine reported that they achieved abstinence from this drug.
- **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).
- **97% of the students** admitted to the counselling program completed the school year.

Non-mainstream settings

Participation numbers	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Youth engaged in counseling	239	401	210	257

84% of youth who reported drug use reduced their frequency of use since participating in the project step program

80% of youth felt better about themselves after completing the program

66% of youth felt that the program helped them build or rebuild healthy relationships with their family, partner or their community

91% of youth who participated in the survey reported they had fewer suicidal thoughts.

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

PROGRAM PARTNERS:



**United Way
Centraide
Ottawa**



**OTTAWA
NETWORK FOR
EDUCATION**



Ontario

Champlain Local Health
Integration Network
Réseau local d'intégration
des services de santé
de Champlain



**CONSEIL DES
ÉCOLES CATHOLIQUES
DU CENTRE-EST**
*Le meilleur conseil
qu'on puisse vous donner.*



**OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD**



**OTTAWA
CATHOLIC
SCHOOL BOARD**

**Conseil des
écoles publiques
de l'Est de l'Ontario**



SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS:



The Youville Centre



Maison Fraternité



Rideauwood
ADDICTION & FAMILY SERVICES

**Operation
Come Home**



**Opération
rentrer au foyer**

WITH GENEROUS FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM:



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