



*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.

<b>Since 2007</b>	<b>9,400+</b>	students access school-based counselling.
<b>project step</b>	<b>48,100+</b>	students receive education sessions.
<b>has helped:</b>	<b>7,900</b>	parents obtain support.

## 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. Eleven percent 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. Fourteen percent 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 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*, there were no residential facilities in Ottawa 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 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.

## PROMSMART CAMPAIGN 2017:

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

## 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. 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

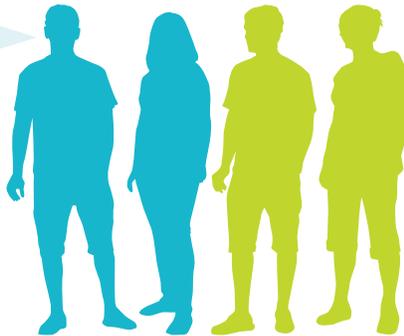
### Mainstream settings

School Year	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Youth engaged in counselling	1,250	1,500	1,600	1,770	1,300	1,400	1,500
Youth participating in prevention and education	5,100	5,400	6,200	9,800	8,600	12,300	5,800
Parents engaged in counselling	650	500	500	550	480	240	210
Parent information sessions	N/A	N/A	110	137	202	3015	2415

(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

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

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**PROGRAM PARTNERS:**



**United Way  
Centraide  
Ottawa**



**OTTAWA  
NETWORK FOR  
EDUCATION**



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



**OTTAWA-CARLETON  
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**SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS:**



**Operation  
Come Home**



**Opération  
rentrer au foyer**

**WITH GENEROUS FINANCIAL SUPPORT FROM:**



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**project-step.ca**