



# Annual Report

2020 - 2021



# project step

**Project step** is a community-wide response to address the need for **support, treatment, education** and **prevention** of problematic substance use and technology use among young people. *Project step* partners deliver addictions counselling, prevention education, and family support in 57 publicly funded high schools, five community-based schools and two residential treatment centers.



**Our vision** is a community where all youth and their families have access to timely, culturally appropriate and evidence-based support, treatment, education, and prevention of problematic substance and technology use.

SINCE 2007	<b>14,549 +</b>	students access school-based counselling
<b>project step</b>	<b>176,151 +</b>	students receive education sessions
HAS HELPED:	<b>10,469</b>	parents obtain support

## ISSUE

Experts working with youth have seen troubling trends among young people during the COVID-19 pandemic: declining mental health, educational disparities, and increased substance use and misuse among the most vulnerable youth. The need for services to address mental health concerns, problematic substance use and problematic technology use among youth is significant, as it directly influences their success in reaching their full potential.

According to the 2019 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, the most frequently used drug among youth in grades seven to 12 is alcohol (41.7 per cent). The incidence of students who used e-cigarettes for the first time has jumped exponentially in 2019 (21 per cent) compared to 2017 (14 per cent) and 2015 (14 per cent). Among high school students, consuming cannabis edibles significantly increased from 11 per cent in 2017 to 14 per cent in 2019.

In the year prior to the survey period, one in seven (15 per cent) students in grades seven to 12 reported riding in a vehicle driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol; and one in 10 (10 per cent) reported riding in a vehicle driven by someone who had been using drugs.

Among school-aged children and youth, the need for substance use intervention becomes greater as children advance in school. Drug use typically begins in adolescence, and there can be short term consequences even after infrequent use, including school problems, family issues, mental health problems, or legal issues. This is a vital point in a young person's development and drug use can negatively alter their learning and life course.



## HISTORY

In 2007, United Way East Ontario (UWEO), 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 of substance use.

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 \$3 million 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 (now Le CAP Centre d'Appui et de Prévention), and one for

anglophone youth, run by the Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre. These sites are now supported by ongoing funding from the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN).

The school-based **support, education, and prevention** functions are the result of a multisector community partnership and is now funded by the Champlain LHIN, Ottawa Public Health, the four Ottawa school boards and United Way East Ontario. The program is delivered in partnership with the four school boards and six service partners (Le CAP, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, Operation Come Home, Youville Centre, the Ottawa Catholic School Board, and Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health). *project step* is coordinated by the Ottawa Network for Education (ONFE) and United Way East Ontario.

## PROGRAMMING

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



“Meetings with (staff) were very helpful in my recovery. I learned many tools and techniques to help me cope with cravings. Also, the services at Rideauwood helped me take better care of my mental health.”

### Mainstream settings

In public school settings, *project step*'s mainstream programming is delivered by Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, Le CAP and Ottawa Catholic School Board counsellors.

Students at all 57 high schools in Ottawa, including alternative schools, have access to school-based prevention, education, and counselling. Many intermediate and elementary schools (grades five through eight) also have access to education and prevention programming.

In addition to services for students and families, school-based addiction counsellors provide educational sessions and support for other initiatives, including teacher training and parent events related to mental health and substance use.

### 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 supports 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. *Project step* ensures addictions and mental health counselling is available to all OCH youth.
- **Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health** has traditionally worked in partnership with the Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School and Rideau High School to provide culturally appropriate mental health and addictions programming for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families through *project step*.

**NOTE:** This past year, Wabano experienced obstacles related to the pandemic that prevented them from facilitating the program. The program has been temporarily paused, and funding has been deferred to March 2022.

## IMPACT

Data is collected during each school year, between September to June. Some non-mainstream programming carries over into the summer months.

### Mainstream settings

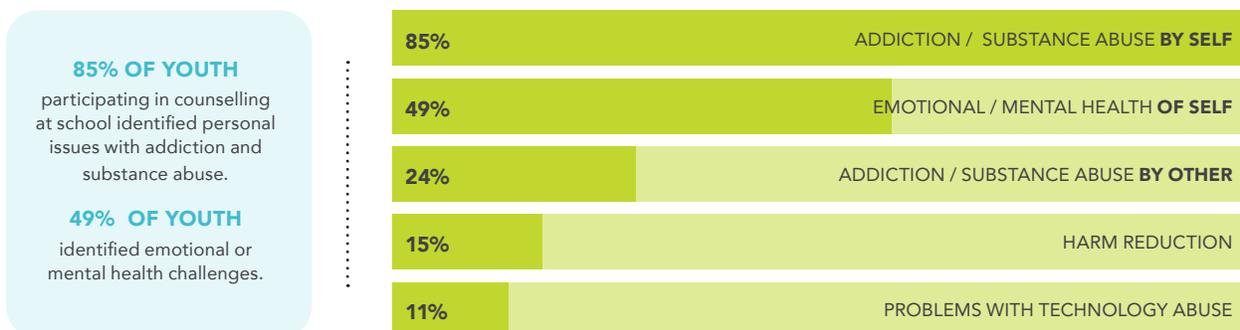
SCHOOL YEAR	2007-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 <sup>1</sup>	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	TOTAL
Youth engaged in counselling	1900	1,500	1,600	1,770	1,330	1,420	1,460	1,188	1,114	758	720	14,760
Youth participating in prevention & education	8,300	5,400	6,300	17,100	15,500	12,310	14,100	22,900 <sup>2</sup>	34,597 <sup>3</sup>	19,477 <sup>4</sup>	27,350 <sup>5</sup>	183,334
Parents engaged in counselling	1,130	500	270	320	260	200	220	250	172	233	183	3,738
Parent information sessions	N/A	N/A	110	140	200	3020	2420	1,044	2,171	1,364	452	10,921
School personnel attending training sessions	N/A	88	234	1398	1,720							

**NOTE:** there is a slight decline in counselling and information sessions from 2019/20, and again in 2020/21 because of school closures during the pandemic.

Due to ongoing challenges with COVID-19, Le CAP and Rideauwood were unable to conduct comprehensive evaluations for the school-based program in 2020-2021. Both service delivery partners launched a hybrid model for programming which enabled them to be flexible to reach youth whether they were learning virtually or in person, but the ability to reach youth was more difficult than in years prior to the pandemic.

What Rideauwood and Le Cap did capture speaks to the type of ongoing issues youth have been experiencing during COVID-19:

### MOST COMMONLY PRESENTING ISSUES



<sup>1</sup> The data provided for 2017/18 is incomplete due to reporting issues.

<sup>2</sup> Includes youth in grades 5-12

<sup>3</sup> Includes youth in grades 5-12

<sup>4</sup> Includes youth in grades 7-12

<sup>5</sup> Includes youth in grades 4-12

<sup>6</sup> There was a decline in parents attending counselling because many parents began attending information sessions when they became available in 2012/13

**Of the students participating in the school-based mental health program,** 70 per cent had also received treatment for a mental health, emotional, behavioural or psychological challenge from a community mental health program or professional within their lifetime.

**53%**

of participants had been prescribed medication for a mental health challenge within their lifetime.

**51%**

of participants had been diagnosed with a mental health challenge by a qualified mental health professional at some point in their life.

**20%**

of participants had been hospitalized for a mental health challenge within their lifetime.

### Non-mainstream settings

OUTCOMES	TOTAL
Clients reduce substance use	77%
Clients reduce harm or enter a treatment program	56%
Youth with improved mental health outcomes	74%
Youth with reduced suicide ideation	70%
Youth with improved connections to family, friends and community	74%
Academic or employment success	69%
Total # of youth who completed counselling	1,817
Total # of parents who completed counselling	153
Total # of staff educated in the prevention program	145

SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNER	INDIVIDUALS SERVED
Le CAP (Centre d'appui et de prévention)	1885
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	0 <sup>7</sup>
Youville Centre	70
Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services	112
Operation Come Home	32
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2099</b>

<sup>7</sup> NOTE: This past year, Wabano experienced obstacles related to the pandemic that prevented them from facilitating the program. The program has been temporarily paused, and funding has been deferred to March 2022.

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

**PROGRAM PARTNERS:**



**SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS:**



For more information on *project step*, please contact:

**MOHAMED SOFA**  
msofa@unitedwayeo.ca



**PROJECT-STEP.CA**