

Annual Report

2022 - 2023



project step

project step is a community-wide initiative that ensures young people and their families have access to **support, treatment, education, and prevention** of harms related to substance and technology use. *project step* partners deliver addictions counselling, prevention education, and family support in every publicly funded high school and in five community-based schools in Ottawa. The partnership also provides live-in treatment at two centres—one in each official language.

Addressing substance and technology use challenges early is key. If we stop the cycle of addiction before it begins, we set kids on track for a healthy life with stable employment, housing, and social connections.



BECAUSE OF PROJECT STEP...

- Youth have ready access to substance use counselling in any of the publicly funded high schools in Ottawa, and in several community agencies focused on helping young people.
- Teachers and school staff receive presentations and workshops to help them identify youth experiencing challenges with substance use or addictions, and connect those students with *project step*.
- Parents with children experiencing challenges with substance or technology use can access counselors to help them support their kids on the path to their success or recovery.
- Young people receive education on substance use health and mental health. They also receive information on how to support their peers and where they can turn to for help with their mental health, or if they are questioning their relationship with substances or technology.

SINCE 2007	16,400 +	students access school-based counselling
project step	219,900 +	students receive education sessions
HAS HELPED:	15,500 +	parents receive the support they need



THIS YEAR'S ACTIVITIES

2023 CALENDAR YEAR

Developed a shared blog post endorsed by the initiative and profiled in local media

In the winter of 2022, [Ottawa Public Health released local Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey data](#). In response, [United Way East Ontario](#) convened *project step* partners around a shared blog post highlighting the issues related to youth mental health and substance use health, the urgency in addressing them, and championing *project step* as a solution. Additionally, United Way and [Ottawa Public Health](#) participated in several radio interviews discussing the data and what it means for *project step*.

Finalized a regional environmental scan on child and youth mental health, addictions, and substance use health

In 2022 and into 2023, [Vivic Research](#) conducted an environmental scan for *project step* to scope the context across East Ontario pertaining to substance use and mental health supports for youth. The results of this environmental scan are being used to identify gaps in service provision, areas for improvement in collaboration, policy barriers, and attitudes that may influence the work of *project step*. This data-backed report will help strengthen *project step's* impact and ability to be responsive to the needs in our region.

Identified goals and milestones for 2023 to 2025

Based on recommendations from the environmental scan as well as opportunities and needs identified by stakeholders, the *project step* backbone team proposed Goals and Milestones to the *project step* Cabinet in May 2023 which outline priorities from 2023 to 2025.

The six goals are:

- **Strengthen** our common agenda to better align community members around a shared vision and progress through an equity and anti-oppression lens.
- **Review and renew** a financial sustainability strategy.
- **Develop** a community engagement strategy that ensures the voices of those with lived experience are included in the common agenda.
- **Improve** aligned shared metrics and processes and set a research agenda.
- **Develop** a shared harm reduction framework that recognizes the continuum of practices and interventions which reduce the negative effects of substance use and addictions.
- **Develop** a systems-based communication and advocacy plan.

Each project step committee then developed Action Plans in alignment with the Goals and Milestones. Action Plans will keep members and backbone staff accountable to the Goals and Milestones.

The United Way backbone team, in partnership with project step stakeholders, created a process for the yearly planning cycle, defines Cabinet and Committee activities, and identifies responsibility leads to maintain accountability to the Action Plans.



Welcomed new project step Chair

In June 2023, a task group of *project step* partners confirmed [Dr. Paul Roumeliotis](#) as incoming Chair of *project step*, replacing former Chair and current [Mayor of Ottawa, Mark Sutcliffe](#).

Pediatrician Dr. Paul has been the Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer of the Eastern Ontario Health Unit since January 2007, and Past President of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies. As Chair of *project step*, Dr. Paul aspires to strengthen and broaden the scope of *project step* across Eastern Ontario and beyond. Dr. Paul has a strong background in government relations advocacy, and we are looking forward to adding this skill to the *project step* collective.

Conducted a process evaluation in partnership with Carleton University

A cohort of students in [Carleton University's Public Policy and Program Evaluation](#) diploma compiled an evaluation framework and theory of change for *project step*. These performance measurement tools will help *project step* understand the impact of our convening efforts, which bring together multiple partners from diverse sectors and organizations in pursuit of a common mission.

Hosted a youth and adult conversation on mental health, addictions and substance use health

On September 29, *project step* in partnership with United Way, [Ottawa Youth Engagement Committee](#), [Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative](#), Ottawa Public Health, [Youth Net](#), and [Youth Ottawa](#) gathered youth and adults from youth-serving organizations to have open, collaborative, and solutions-focused conversations about youth mental health, addictions, and substance use health.

Participants were encouraged to share their knowledge on the trends identified by the [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey \(OSDUHS\)](#). [There were six themes uncovered from this conversation](#) that centered around reducing stigma, building healthy support systems, strengthening circles of care, acknowledging differences, and prevention of harms. These themes will enable us to develop a youth-centered vision for mental health and substance use health in our community.



PROGRAMMING

Project step's school-based programming is delivered by Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, [Le CAP](#), and [Ottawa Catholic School Board counsellors](#).

Students at every public high school in Ottawa, including alternative schools, have access to substance use prevention and education programming, and counselling. Many intermediate and elementary schools (grades five through eight) also have access to education and prevention programming through *project step*.

School-based substance use counsellors also provide educational sessions, including teacher training and parent-focused events, related to mental health and substance use health.

Project step also ensures substance use counselling services are available to youth who may not be engaged in the public school system, through three community agencies:

- [Youville Centre](#) provides young single mothers and expectant mothers with a full range of counselling and life skills supports.
- [Operation Come Home](#) provides mental health and substance use counselling to street-involved and at-risk youth.
- [Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health](#) provides culturally appropriate mental health and addictions programming for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children, youth, and families.

IMPACT

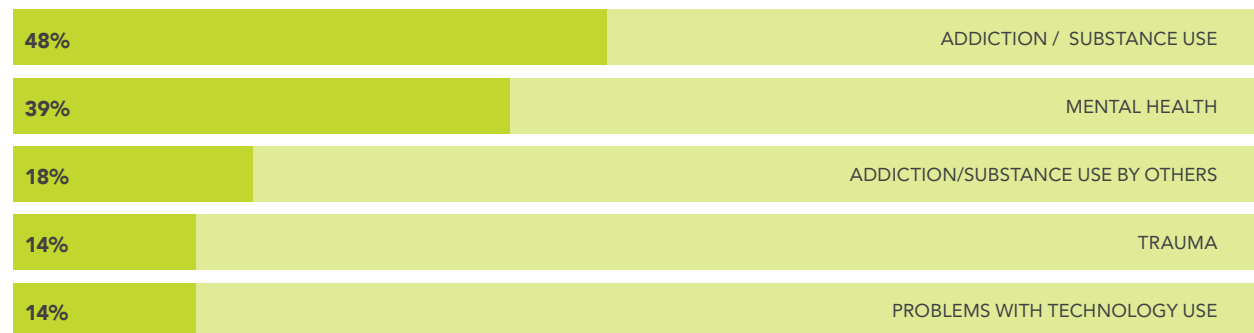
Data was collected during the school year, between September 2022 and August 2023. Some community programming carries over into the summer months. All data recognizes “youth” as students in grades nine to 12, unless otherwise specified.

SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING – OUTPUTS

SCHOOL YEAR	2007-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18 ¹	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	TOTAL
Youth engaged in counselling	5000	1,770	1,330	1,420	1,460	1,188	1,114	758	720	771	937	16,468
Youth participating in prevention & education	20,000	17,100	15,500	12,310	14,100	22,900 ²	34,597 ³	19,477 ⁴	27,350 ⁵	3,850	22,772	219,956
Parents engaged in counselling	1900	320	260	200	220	250	172	233	183 ⁶	51	27 ⁷	3,816
Parent information sessions	110	140	200	3,020	2,420	1,044	2,171	1,364	452	232	962	12,115
School personnel attending training sessions	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	88	234	1,398	504	737	2,961

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.

MOST COMMON PRESENTING ISSUES FOR REGISTERED CLIENTS N=937



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

² Includes youth in grades 5-12

³ Includes youth in grades 5-12

⁴ Includes youth in grades 7-12

⁵ Includes youth in grades 4-12

⁶ In 2020/2021, data collection for parent counselling sessions changed. Participation numbers after this year are not equivalent to before the pandemic but are still reflected as outputs towards this effort.

⁷ This number is approximated for privacy reasons



SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAMMING – OUTCOMES (OCSB ONLY)

IMPACT OF INTERVENTION ON STUDENT WELLBEING (N=52)	IMPROVED	SAME
Relationship with family	54%	46%
Relationship with peers	54%	46%
School	58%	42%
General mental health	58%	42%
Moving towards goals	90%	10%
Learning about themselves	92%	8%

N = the number of students who completed pre- and post-program surveys, a smaller subset of the total number of students who accessed the program

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMMING – OUTPUTS

SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNER	INDIVIDUALS SERVED
Youville Centre	78
Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services	105
Operation Come Home	72
Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health	61
Total	316

COMMUNITY-BASED PROGRAMMING – OUTCOMES

OUTCOMES	TOTAL
Clients reduce substance use	29%
Youth with improved mental health outcomes	49%
Youth with reduced suicide ideation	100%
Youth with improved connections to family, friends and community	82%
Academic or employment success	35%
Client distress is reduced	41%
Clients achieve counselling goals	44%
Clients equipped with positive coping strategies	56%

WHAT'S NEXT FOR PROJECT STEP STRENGTHENING THE COMMON AGENDA

In collective impact work where diverse partners collaborate to solve a complex problem, it is important that all participants have a clear understanding of the shared work. In pursuit of this as the first of the Goals and Milestones guiding *project step*, the United Way backbone team is leading the creation of a Plan on a Page for *project step*. The Plan on a Page will be a simple visual representation of what *project step* does, how it works, measurement for success, and how partners work together.

In 2023, *project step* also began consultations with youth, parents, and other youth-serving organizations to strengthen its mission in alignment with others who are doing similar work. This work continues into 2024.

DEVELOPMENT OF SHARED MEASUREMENT INDICATORS

Under the leadership of *project step*'s Research, Evaluation and Learning (REAL) Committee, *project step* partners will work to standardize the way we measure the effects of our programming. Currently, each partner measures the impact of their activities in slightly different ways. Consistent measurement and data reporting will open doors for sustainable funding, nimbleness in how we support youth, and a better understanding of what interventions are most helpful.



CONTINUED ADVOCACY FOR INCREASED PROJECT STEP FUNDING

United Way and Dr. Paul Roumeliotis have been holding meetings with elected officials and provincial and federal ministry staff to highlight the needs facing young people and the programs that serve them. These conversations paint a picture of the complexity of the mental health and substance use challenges facing youth as we come out of the pandemic, and the increased strain on frontline services. Our call to action to government is to increase funding to *project step* so partners can serve more youth and their families, faster.

HISTORY

In 2007, United Way East Ontario, together with the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN), Ottawa Network for Education, Ottawa Public Health, four Ottawa school boards and six community agencies launched *project step* to address the need for support, treatment, education, and prevention of substance use issues among youth in Ottawa.

Before *project step*, young people in need of substance use treatment had nowhere to go. They were often forced to leave home, incur costs, and they did not have access to follow-up support. With the leadership of *project step*, Ottawa now has two live-in substance use treatment programs for youth—one in each official language.

Project step also delivers addictions counselling, prevention education, and family support in every publicly funded high school and in five community-based schools in Ottawa. This programming is delivered in partnership with the four school boards and five service delivery partners (Le CAP, Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services, Operation Come Home, Youville Centre, and Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health), and is funded by Ottawa Public Health, the four Ottawa school boards and United Way East Ontario. *Project step* is coordinated by the Ottawa Network for Education and United Way East Ontario.

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

PROGRAM PARTNERS:



SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNERS:



We also thank other community partners who have helped shape *project step*, including Ottawa Police Service, Dave Smith Youth Treatment Centre, YouTurn, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Royal Ottawa Mental Health Centre, and the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Together, we can change the trajectory of a young person's life – for the better.

PROJECT-STEP.CA

