Report to/Rapport au :
Ottawa Board of Health /
Conseil de santé d’Ottawa

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CITY WIDE/ À L’ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE
Ref N°: ACS2014-OPH- HPDP-0001

SUBJECT:  OTTAWA’S SCHOOL-BASED SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAM UPDATE

OBJET :  MISE À JOUR SUR LE PROGRAMME DE PRÉVENTION DE LA TOXICOMANIE EN MILIEU SCOLAIRE À OTTAWA

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa health unit receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d’Ottawa prenne connaissance du présent rapport à titre d’information.

BACKGROUND

In 2008, several community organizations identified the need for increased substance misuse prevention for youth in Ottawa. To address this community need, the four local school boards (Conseil des écoles catholiques du Centre-Est, Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario, Ottawa Carleton District School Board and the Ottawa Catholic School Board), Ottawa Public Health (OPH), the Champlain Local Health Integration Network (LHIN) and the United Way Ottawa’s project s.t.e.p. came together and developed a multi-year program to ensure the availability of addictions counselling in all public school boards. The partners initially identified a total of one million dollars for ongoing operations in this School-based Substance Abuse Program. OPH recognized that reducing the harms associated with alcohol and drug misuse
would require a comprehensive approach. Leveraging resources from all partners would create a comprehensive, school-based program aligned with OPH’s four pillar approach to substance misuse, which includes prevention, harm reduction, treatment and enforcement. This program model also had the supporting foundation of community engagement with different sectors working together to address community need.

The program enabled drug and alcohol abuse counsellors from Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services and Maison Fraternité to provide counselling in Ottawa high schools. This made counselling both more convenient and universally accessible for youth, thus designed to help students decrease their drug and alcohol misuse, improve academic engagement and increase their health and wellbeing.

On March 18, 2013, the Ottawa Board of Health endorsed a report entitled Addressing Substance Misuse in Ottawa. The report directed OPH to continue to fund the Ottawa School-based Substance Abuse Program. This report provides additional information on the school-based program and an overview of the results from the 2012-2013 school year.

**School-based Substance Abuse Program Evaluation**

A formal evaluation was undertaken during the 2012 - 2013 school year. Health Canada (via Project s.t.e.p.) as well as the Champlain LHIN, provided funding for the first program evaluation of Ottawa’s School-based Substance Abuse Program.

In the 2012 – 2013 year, over 1,600 students received counselling through Ottawa’s School-based Substance Abuse Program at 57 schools across all four school boards. The majority of these schools receive 14 hours per week of service by an addiction counsellor throughout the school year. In addition to direct counselling for students, 500 parents also participated in programming. More than 560 teachers received training on youth addiction, counsellors delivered presentations for over 50 community-based events and another 6,200 students participated in prevention and education sessions delivered by the school-based counsellors.

Results indicated that the typical school-based counselling client is consuming cannabis 18 days a month, drinking 6 days a month, is struggling academically, and is at-risk of leaving school. At the end of the evaluation period 2012 - 2013 school year, the sample group of students participating in the school-based counselling program were found to have notable improvements to their health and well-being. Over 70 percent of clients who previously used cocaine and/or ecstasy reported that they achieved abstinence from these drugs, average cannabis use decreased by half (based on frequency and quantity consumed) and overall alcohol consumption decreased by 23 percent.

Feedback from participating schools indicates that the partnerships are working well and that the services are highly valued by the school community. School staff appreciate the addiction counsellors being at the school, and most schools have established mechanisms to support collaboration and communication between staff and the counsellors. The training offered by the counsellors is well received. In some cases, school respondents also indicated that they would like more hours of service.
The evaluation found that the program was found to be effective primarily due to its very high rate of student engagement. Getting youth to act on a referral and engage in ongoing counselling is one of the most challenging aspects of intervention and treatment and one of the hallmarks of this school-based model. The program’s success in this area is credited to the close partnership between school staff and the service. Once involved in the program, students were experiencing positive outcomes with respect to health, wellbeing and academic success. In addition, each counsellor made an effort to visit as many classes as possible early in the school year to introduce themselves to new students, and to be a visible part of the school community.

As the program was meeting its objectives, a goal of expanding the School-based Substance Abuse Program to every high school and non-mainstream academic setting in Ottawa was set by partners. Local fundraising efforts spearheaded by the United Way of Ottawa in recent years have allowed the program to expand into non-mainstream schools, such as The Youville Centre, Operation Come Home, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health – Working Hope Program, and the Eastern Ottawa Youth Justice Agency.

DISCUSSION

Together with other school-based programs and services, the evaluation indicates that the School-based Substance Abuse Program is meeting its objectives and helping keep at-risk high school students in school, and improve their health and wellbeing.

OPH continues to fund the School-based Substance Abuse Program to prevent substance misuse among Ottawa youth. The evaluation also recommends a joint workshop for school-based counsellors to facilitate dialogue and information sharing, continued collaboration between Maison Fraternité and Rideauwood Addiction and Family Services and a separate report addressing the outcomes for all school settings. OPH supports these recommendations as they would enhance the program, further leveraging resources to the common end of school-based tertiary prevention for at-risk youth.

The direction of the program also complements OPH’s work in mental health prevention in high schools through the Healthy Transitions program and across all stages of life through early childhood development and maternal health focus of the Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program.

Next Steps
OPH will continue to work with all partners in this program and strive to ensure that the evaluation recommendations are realized.
LEGAL IMPLICATIONS
There are no legal impediments to receiving the information in this report.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS
There are no financial implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS
There are no technology implications related to this report.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES
The recommendations in this report support the 2010-2014 Term of Council Priorities under “Healthy and Caring Communities”.

BOARD OF HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES
The recommendations in this report support the Board of Health’s 2011-2014 Strategic Priorities: B5 Reduce health risks related to preventable infectious and non-infectious diseases; and B1 Advance mental health promotion and services primarily for children and youth.

DISPOSITION
Ottawa Public Health will work with partners to execute the recommendations in this report.

i School Based Evaluation, Oct 2013