

ALTERNATIVE SUSPENSION PROGRAM

History

Alternative Suspension began in Montreal's Mile End district in the fall of 1999, in response to a request from a neighbourhood school. It was their experience that students would spend their suspensions on the street, without any kind of supervision. In conjunction with the local school commissioner, the Du Parc YMCA started a pilot project in response to this situation. Quickly gaining credibility, the program has rapidly grown, offering 6 points of service as of 2005 and serving over fifty schools within the Montreal area.

Philosophy

A suspension from school represents a failure for both the student and the school. Once the school resorts to suspension, it is important to make the time spent away from school an overall success, for both the student and the school.

The Program

Alternative Suspension is a resource at the disposal of junior high and high schools, offering them support for students who, for different reasons, are temporarily suspended from the school they attend. The goal of this project is to decrease the number of repeated suspensions by offering young people an opportunity to transform the time they spend on suspension into a positive experience. Alternative Suspension fosters an environment that encourages self-esteem, the acquisition of social skills and the promotion of self-respect as well as respect for others. This is accomplished through educational workshops, individual interventions and group activities. The project was conceived in such a way that it intervenes in the overall issues that can arise for young people who find themselves temporarily expelled from school (occasionally or repeatedly).

The intervention targets students aged 12-17. The central component of the program is the direct support provided by primary and secondary youth workers which will be delivered in the development of:

- *Personalized action plans,*
- *Personal management tools,*
- *Lists of personal and educational resources,*
- *Complete reintegration to school strategy.*

The Alternative Suspension projects will be implemented on the **Northeast Avalon** along with the following cities across the country: Chilliwack, British Columbia; Edmonton, Alberta; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Moncton, New Brunswick; and Halifax, Nova Scotia. This project is of five year duration.

Target Group

Alternative Suspension focuses on adolescents who are experiencing difficulties with their school and social development either on a recurring or sporadic basis.

The project will address the following risk factors: disruptive social conduct, lack of educational commitment, academic difficulties, negative attitudes and values among the target population in relation to school, association with deviant peers resulting from lack of supervision during suspension and expulsion, anti-social behaviour related to self-esteem and lack of parental involvement in their child's education.

An Innovative Approach

Schools quickly realize the advantages of such a program offering expertise and professionalism in this setting. Before, suspension from school resulted in young people getting stuck in an academic void; it was perceived as a failure both for the student and the school that resorted to this type of measure. Intervening during a suspension means acting when the issues involved are still in their early stages and being in a position to have an impact. This program is a direct result of a concerted effort between the school and the community.

To learn more about the program, please contact Barry Smith, Project Coordinator at 754-2982, ext. 59 or bsmith@ymywca.nf.net