

Outreach Program—Overview & History

The Outreach Program was developed to meet the diverse needs of youth at risk who have a variety of issues that are not being met. The fundamental purpose of the program is to enhance all aspects of these youths' lives, including their physical, social and emotional development.

The Outreach Program's aim is to reach youth who have "fallen through the cracks" of traditional service programs, connecting them with services that they may be unaware of or have had difficulties accessing.

The Outreach Worker's challenge is to guide and support these youth back into the use of traditional and non-traditional supports and services. Through the use of these supports, youth at risk will be able to achieve a more productive and meaningful lifestyle.

The Outreach Program targets young people who inhabit public places and the streets of Thunder Bay, forging a life style of survival which may include engaging in unhealthy behaviours such as: prostitution, shoplifting, vandalism, substance use/abuse, and panhandling. The Program also works with youth who are struggling to find their own way and make positive choices in their lives.

Priority populations include: homeless youth and "couch surfers" who are experiencing problems in their home environment and running on a consistent basis; young parents/

single mothers; pregnant teens; and youth/young adults struggling to live independently.

Although the Outreach Program works with youths between 12-24 years old, the majority of clients are between 16 and 20 years of age. The youth population includes both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal youth.

The Outreach Program, run by the Children's Aid Society of the District of Thunder Bay and funded by the City of Thunder Bay, began in January 1988. The program idea originated from residential workers who were frustrated with the large number of youth in the city who were not accessing traditional services. These were youth at risk who were increasingly turning to drugs, alcohol, prostitution, violent relationships and criminal behaviour. A number of these individuals were pregnant teens or young parents.

In conjunction with the Ministry of Social Services, the Children's Aid Society held a Community Consultation with other community organizations in order to gather statistical information and share in recommendations for the at risk youth population.

Early stats (1988-1990) estimated that there were approximately two hundred youths living on the streets of the community of Thunder Bay at any given time.

Outreach Program



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Outreach Program



MISSION STATEMENT

To assist marginalized youth to improve the overall quality of their lives, physically, socially and emotionally.

Outreach Activity

The Outreach Worker makes him or herself available to meet with youth in the community for counselling, support, direction, and also assists the youth in accessing many basic necessities such as shelter, food, clothing, employment opportunities and medical services.

Relying upon the development of trusting and unconditional relationships, the Outreach worker strives to motivate and empower these youths to explore their options and meet new challenges to work towards bettering their current life situation.

Frequently, the Outreach Worker serves as an advocate for the youth often functioning as a mediator in situations where the youth may struggle with family, Ontario Works, school, probations services, landlords and employers.

Monitoring progress and offering encouragement and support as a follow up is also an important role of the Outreach Worker. In cases where referrals are made to other services, the Worker assists and supports through this process.

The role of the Outreach Worker is diverse and holistic in nature. Some of the duties include:

- Counselling
- Encouraging use of/making referrals to Community Services Agencies
- Bridging or Mediating Parent/Teen conflict
- Accompanying youth to court/assisting youth who are going through the legal system

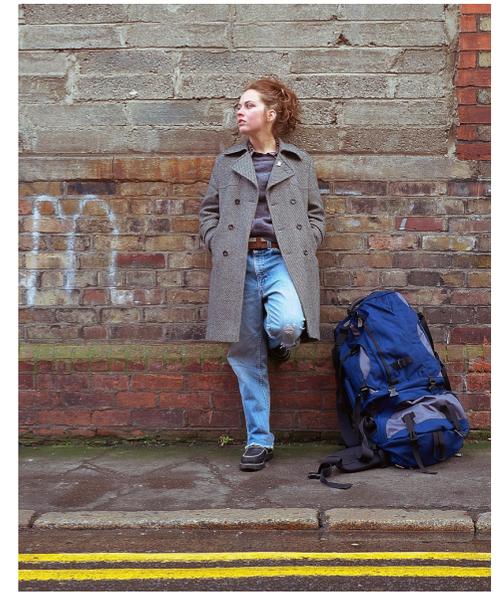
- Teaching life skills
- Connecting single parents and young families to services
- Encouraging and connecting with the educational system
- Connecting pregnant youth to pre-natal care
- Finding suitable accommodation and housing
- Assisting with employment opportunities

Some of the agencies and organizations in Thunder Bay that the Outreach Worker accesses on a regular basis are:

YES Employment
Thunder Bay Regional Hospital
Ontario Works
Thunder Bay Food Bank
NorWest Community Health Centre
Shelter House Thunder Bay
Adult Education programs
Thunder Bay Aids Committee
Beendigan
Lakehead District School Board
Catholic District School Board
Housing programs/registry
Thunder Bay District Health Unit
Single Parents Program
Faye Peterson
Creighton Centre
Children's Centre Thunder Bay
Our Kids Count
Smith Clinic
Family Services Thunder Bay
Thunder Bay Police
Lakehead Social Planning Council
Superior Points
Canadian Mental Health Association
Catholic Family Development Centre
Salvation Army
Shelter House
Justice Referral Centre

Facts on Street Youth

- In 2003, in Canada, there were 53,459 reports of runaway children. (and these are only the ones that were reported)
- In a 2001 Thunder Bay study, "Youth Homelessness in Thunder Bay, A Snapshot", 467 youth between the ages of 10 and 24 were identified as homeless or at risk of becoming homeless
- 64% of homeless youth are male
- 60% of homeless youth have less than grade 11 education
- Approximately 70% of street youth report they have experienced some form of sexual, physical, or emotional abuse – many of the remaining 30% report ongoing neglect issues
- The use of drugs by homeless youths is 7 times higher than the general population
- In Toronto, based on a 1999 study, 36% of street youth earned money by panhandling, 19% from break and enters/selling drugs, 18% receive social assistance, 17% have paid employment, and 10% do sex trade work (although 31% admit to working in a sex trade at least once in their life)
- In the past 25 years there has been a 450% increase in youth shelter beds
- According to a 2006 Thunder Bay study on drug usage among street youth, 98.4% of the youth interviewed reported using drugs in the past 12 months; injection drug use was reported by 95 youth interviewed (7 youth were under the age of 16 years old)
- 38% of homeless women are using alcohol while they are pregnant as a means of coping
- In 2002, 47% of street youth reported being physically attacked and 52% reported being threatened; 42% had been sexually assaulted or threatened with an assault
- In a recent Quebec study, the homeless youth mortality rate was 11 times higher than the general population of youth between the ages of 14 and 25



Making a Difference

While the underlying goal and belief of the Outreach Program is focused on improving the living condition/ life development of street youth, the benefits to society should not go unobserved.

Less loitering, vandalism, prostitution and substance abuse on our streets are positives for business owners, travelers and community members who have concerns for a safer and healthier community

But the real benefit is to our youth. They receive a chance to live a healthier and more promising life. When we help youth make positive choices, we give them the encouragement and confidence they need to believe in themselves and the possibility of a better future. Something everyone deserves.