



# Implementing *Alternative Suspension* in the Cree Nation

## Context

The YMCA Alternative Suspension program was developed by the YMCAs of Québec and first offered in Montreal's Mile End district in 1999. To date, the program has over 40 service sites across Québec and Canada, and supports over 2,500 students each year.

The program regards school suspensions as opportunities for youth requiring extra skills or help in a specific area they are having trouble in. It is important to ensure that the time spent away from school is an overall success for the suspended students on both a personal and educational level.

As the YMCA program philosophy and approach are aligned with their respective youth engagement and education missions, the Cree Nation Government Department of Justice and Correctional Services and Cree School Board are proud to partner with the YMCA to develop a Cree Alternative Suspension Program, which adapts some culturally appropriate content and takes into consideration the history, culture and realities of the Cree Nation.

## Logo Design and Symbolism

To facilitate program promotion and adoption in the Cree communities, a personalized version of the program logo has been created. While it ties in with the existing YMCA visual branding, color scheme and font, the proposed logo reflects the Cree identity, illustrates the student journey, and shows the three-way partnership, as detailed below.





- **Beaver pelt drying board:** The main component of the logo is the oval beaver pelt drying board. Defining themselves as a nation of hunters – Ndoohenou – the Cree strongly value their traditional way of life based on hunting, fishing and trapping. To this day, beaver hunting and the related fur processing are still common practice. The drying board is also used in the Cree Nation Government and Cree School Board logos.
- **Snowshoes:** Often used by respected Cree elders, the snowshoe symbolism resonates strongly with the struggling youth: much like snowshoes can provide in deep snow, the program provides support and stability to facilitate the youth's journey, help them reach their destination and achieve their goal.
- **Snowshoe path (on the snow, in the center):** Continuing on the snowshoe metaphor, the snowshoe path in the center of the logo represents the journey towards staying in school. It can also show that the youth can create their own path to success, and with the proper support and tools, they can overcome the obstacles and challenges along the way.
- **Trees:** The three trees at the center symbolize the three partners in the Cree program: the YMCA, the Cree Nation Government Department of Justice and Correctional Services, and the Cree School Board.
- **Believe in yourself:** Written in Cree syllabics at the top of the logo is the expression "Believe in yourself" (or Taapwaauchaayimiisu). This sends a strong message of empowerment and self worth to the youth, reminding them that with some assistance, they are strong enough to find their own way and the solutions to their struggles.
- **Mortarboard with feather:** At the top of the logo is the mortarboard, representing education. The Cree strongly believe that education must be upheld and promoted at all levels of the Cree Nation, as it is key for the young generation to become successful contributors to the Cree Nation, and society at large. In Cree symbolism, providing a feather to someone means that you are giving them courage and strength to overcome life obstacles.