

THE *ALTERNATIVE* *SUSPENSION* PROGRAM

Responding to Suspended Teenagers

The YMCA Alternative Suspension program was first developed by the YMCAs of Québec in Montreal in 1999. The program was created as a response to concerns raised in an inner – city neighborhood where the community had grown weary of the number of students being suspended and left without any supervision.

To date, the program has expanded to over 40 communities across Québec and Canada, and partnerships have been created with over 35 school boards, 350 schools, 300 community partners actively supporting over 3,000 students each year.

Program Benefits

For the suspended student:

- Supervision by qualified youth workers
- Staying up-to-date with their schoolwork
- A time-out and a time to reflect
- Return-to-school accompaniment

For the participating school:

- An additional resource
- Continuity in the educational process
- Greater awareness for students
- A service adapted to the student and school needs

For the community:

- Youth not left unsupervised
- An approach that helps improve school and social integration
- Community actors mobilized around youth
- Youth referred to the resources in their community

THE CREE ALTERNATIVE SUSPENSION PROGRAM

The YMCA program's philosophy is focused on youth engagement, education, and perseverance at school. 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 the model using culturally appropriate content and taking into consideration the history and realities of the Cree Nation.

A Pilot Project in Three Cree Communities

The Cree program will begin as a one-year pilot in schools in 3 Cree communities: Chisasibi, Waskaganish, and Mistissini. Targeted 12-17 years old students are those who are temporarily suspended for a period of 3 to 5 days. The Cree program primary youth worker will help students stay in school through two components:

1. A time of reflection allowing each student to change his / her attitude toward school and turn it into a positive one.
2. Develop and improve social skills and self confidence.

A Variety of Activities

Day-to-day program activities include individual meetings, a time to do schoolwork, and various group workshops, all prepared according to the student's needs and embracing the Cree culture and language.

Workshops cover issues such as addictions and health, education and employment, social skills, and violence, intimidation and conflict.



An Image is Worth A Thousand Words

To facilitate program adoption in the Cree communities, a personalized version of the program logo has been created, tying in with the existing YMCA Program visual branding, color scheme and font.

Alongside the traditional beaver pelt drying loom, the snowshoes, like the program, provide support and stability to facilitate the youth's journey and help them reach their destination. The expression "Believe in yourself", in Cree syllabics, also sends a strong message of empowerment and self worth to the youth.

JOINING THE CREE PROGRAM

Investing in the Child

School suspensions can be a setback for both the students and the school. Providing assistance during a suspension constitutes an opportunity to have an impact on students while their problems are still in the early stages.

Youth that are referred to the Cree Alternative Suspension Program receive supervision from highly qualified and trained youth workers. Parents who invest in their child at this crucial moment also increase the chances of their child's successfully reintegrating his or her school environment.

