

INTRODUCTION

St. Albert, like most communities in North America, is dealing with drug use and abuse problems among our youth. A number of initiatives are already in place, but most of these have never been publicized and the community is not aware of the great work that is already being done.

Recognizing that this is a community issue requiring a community response, the St. Albert Community Drug Response Committee was formed in January 2002. The committee has undertaken the responsibility of providing leadership in the development of a community response to drug issues in St. Albert.

This manual is a culmination of prevention, education and treatment services available in the community targeting St. Albert's children, youth, families and the community as a whole. Targeting individuals already engaged in risky behaviors is not going to eliminate the use of drugs among our youth. We must begin to implement a broad range of services including education to our parents, prevention programs in our schools, working with coaches and mentors so that as a community we can work towards increasing the protective factors in our youth and build a community that is resilient to Societal pressures.

This is a working document and as new information, services, programs, educational materials and resources become available, please continue to update this manual.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

In 1997, a working group referred to as the St. Albert Student Conduct Committee formed in response to a number of froshing incidents in the St. Albert community. Collaboratively, representatives from the Greater St. Albert Catholic Schools, St. Albert Protestant Schools, City of St. Albert FCSS, RCMP, St. Albert Stop Abuse in Families Society, St. Albert Youth Community Centre and several local students implemented a campaign to eliminate froshing. This successful model of identifying and resolving a community concern encouraged the identification of other initiatives and the inclusion of more stakeholders.

The second initiative of the Student Conduct Committee was the development of a two-year drug free protocol involving the school systems and the RCMP, designed to deter the infiltration of drugs and create drug-free schools.

On January 15, 2002, the St. Albert Student Conduct Committee held a special meeting to review the need for the development of a drug response task force to address any identified drug issues in St. Albert. Students, school staff and a number of community agencies and organizations were invited to share their perspectives. In addition, they shared information about the programs and services they provide in addressing drug issues. The following are some of the concerns received in the feedback from the thirty-five participants:

- The RCMP indicated a growing concern about the active drug trade in the City.
- There is a huge problem with students having very easy access to drugs. We need to focus on the junior high age.
- It's hard to get kids to stop doing drugs.
- A provincial government report on early school leavers indicate approximately 25% of students are leaving school early. In one counsellor's experience, a vast majority of early school leavers admit readily to using cannabis at the junior high level. It was suggested by this same counselor that 60% of the students he sees have been negatively impacted by drugs. This is not just a student problem...the family system is the problem. This is a systemic problem related to family and to the community.

Recognizing that this is a community issue that requires a community response, the Student Conduct Committee formed a sub-committee, now referred to as the St. Albert Community Drug Response Committee. This committee has been given the responsibility of developing a response to St. Albert's drug issues.

MISSION, GOALS AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES

MISSION

To provide leadership in the development of a community response to drug issues in St. Albert.

GOALS

Reduce risk factors in youth aged 11-18 years.

Build on protective factors that keep youth safe.

Develop and propose a community approach to building resilience in youth in the community.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Build a Strong Framework

The drug response committee will work together to develop a balanced response which emphasizes research, prevention, early intervention, treatment, training and liaison.

Community representatives will work together, within the terms of their respective agency mandates, to ensure a successful response to substance abuse.

The drug response strategy will focus on factors that most directly promote resiliency.

Activities will complement efforts by others in the community for a holistic approach.

Strive for Accountability

Goals, objectives and activities will address community circumstances and will be measurable and time limited.

The committee will work toward long-term sustainability and integration of the program into the community of St. Albert.

Understand and Involve Young People

Substance use or abuse issues should be seen within the context of the stages of adolescent development in order to respond most effectively.

In order to be credible with participants, programs need to take into account the way young people view the benefits and the risks associated with substance use.

Create an Effective Process

Involve youth in program design and implementation. Young people need to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as their own best resource for minimizing any harm associated with substance use.

Develop credible messages. Both the explicit and implicit messages delivered in a program need to be viewed as realistic and credible by participants.

Combine knowledge and skill development. Skill development needs to be a central element in programs and it needs to be accompanied by accurate, objective information.

Use an interactive group process. Engage and involve participants in skill development activities and discussions.

Select and train leaders or teachers who demonstrate competence, empathy and an ability to promote the involvement and interaction of young people.