

Dusdal attributes the schools' enthusiasm to the program's positive, strengths-based approach—one of the four guiding principles of the Community-based Standards. Seeds of Resilience does not focus directly on substance use; instead, it teaches youth coping mechanisms such as self-efficacy and emotional awareness to make healthy and positive life choices. "We teach about reaching out, being able to know that it's okay to ask for help," says Dusdal. "We also teach about taking on new challenges and feeling supported in taking on new challenges, and not thinking that just because you made a mistake or because you failed that it's the end of the road—that you can get up and keep going," says Dusdal.



Graphic representation of youth's ideas about resilience.

Making youth drug prevention programs sustainable

As the funding for the Seeds of Resilience program lasted only for one school year, CADAC's next step is to make the program sustainable ([Community-based Standard 10](#)). Its next grant proposal focuses on training youth-serving service providers to deliver the Seeds of Resilience's curriculum across Vancouver Island.

CADAC committee member Gus Papagiannis says this process has already been informed by the Standards. The committee started about eight months ago incorporating the Standards into their initiative. "One of the mistakes we've learned from was that we didn't involve youth from the beginning," he states.

Incorporating a diversity of voices into the program

[Community-based Standard 4](#) encourages the engagement of youth partners in the initiative as early as possible. "Their input and vision had equal merit as anyone else at the table. That's what we learned from the Standards," says Papagiannis. "We do icebreakers now at the beginning of meetings and we let the youth lead them because they bring a different energy to the room. Not only are they in the room but we say, 'Hey, you're going to plan this and you come up with it and we'll listen.'"

Dusdal says involving youth from the outset is an integral ingredient of any successful youth drug prevention program. "You can't create a successful youth program if you haven't run it by them first," she says. "Invite them to fun activities and have them fill out a questionnaire. Sit down for 10 minutes and talk. If you're developing a youth program, listen to them. You can't just talk to them and then throw their ideas out the window. When youth actually see you applying what they've told you, it's so much more powerful. They feel like they've been heard, that they've had a voice."

Youth now make up part of CADAC's steering committee. Two youth attended a partners' meeting and got paid for their time. They also assist with writing grant proposals. "We've taken the Standards and applied them. We weren't as strong before so now we've taken the next step where we've invited youth in so that they're directly involved," says Dusdal.

CADAC has also taken time to consider [Community-based Standard 6](#), building and maintaining team capacity, including cultural capacity. In a community that includes three First Nations reserves, putting this Standard into action was essential. Papagiannis admits it was not easy. "That was a struggle," he says. "Our concept was, 'We'll just go and talk to a couple of the chiefs; we'll tell them about our resiliency program and they'll just buy in.' But it didn't work that way."

The committee eventually hired a First Nations consultant to listen to—and act upon—the very specific needs of the First Nations communities. This earned CADAC respect and co-operation among First Nations partners, ultimately leading to a stronger, more inclusive committee.

Using the Standards to enhance programs already in place

Papagiannis notes that the Standards are not regulations: they are a framework to help guide planning and evaluation. “I always tell people, the time to plant the tree is 20 years ago. The next best time is today. That’s how we looked at it,” he says. “We were halfway through our project when we started using the Standards so we said, ‘Well, let’s plant the tree today and let’s move forward and see if we can incorporate some of the Standards. And if we can’t, hopefully when we start our next project we can use these guiding principles.’”

For Dusdal, the evidence-informed Standards confirmed everything they had done well. “The biggest takeaway was that it was nice to have some standards to compare what we were doing against and to know that we were on the right track,” says Dusdal.

[Learn more about Campbell River’s Seeds of Resilience youth drug prevention initiative.](#)

Guelph and Wellington County’s Strengthening Families Program

The families participating in the Strengthening Families Program (SFP), a youth drug prevention initiative in Guelph and Wellington County, Ontario, are happy and loyal clients. “We have an over 90 percent retention rate, which is unheard of,” says Raechelle Devereaux, manager of the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy (WGDS).

So what’s the secret to WGDS’s success? Its commitment to quality improvement as well as its coordination of a diverse team of professionals. Together, these factors have enabled WGDS to create a drug prevention program where both families and service providers alike are seeing differences in their lives.

SFP, which is composed of the Strengthening Families for the Future program (SFF) and the Strengthening Families for Parents and Youth (SFPY) program, has served more than 100 families in Guelph and throughout Wellington County since 2010. SFPY takes place over a nine-week period, engaging parents with children aged 12–16 to attend weekly sessions with facilitators and volunteers. SFF is a 14-week program for parents with children aged 7–11. It features a similar format and curriculum as SFPY, but is geared to the younger participants and their parents.

Each SFP session begins with a communal family meal. After dinner, the families split into separate facilitated sessions, after which they reunite to share lessons learned. During these separate sessions, the parents might learn how to provide guidance to their children while the children might learn the consequences of negative behaviour. In the family session that follows, parents and their children might then apply those lessons by practicing how to hold a family meeting.

Only two of the sessions actually address the issue of substance use. “The ultimate goal of the program is to enhance the communication and family relationships such that parents play their role as primary prevention agents,” says Devereaux. The strengthening of protective factors such as family cohesion is emphasized in the [Community-based Standard 2 of Canadian Standards for Community Based Youth Substance Abuse Prevention](#).



A family that participated in the Strengthening Families Program.

“When a parent has the capacity to give and to have open communication with their child, the child actually respects them and listens to the parent in a way that their role as the primary prevention agent is enhanced,” she says.

The importance of non-punitive prevention messaging

SFP uses an experiential approach with children and youth that’s in line with one of the Community-based Standards’ [guiding principles](#): promoting positive youth development in a non-punitive setting.

Devereaux says one of the exercises that really sticks with youth involves bubble gum. “The youth take a piece of gum and the facilitators get them to touch it to their lips. Then they get the youth to chew it once—and then not again for another 30 seconds,” she says. “The lesson behind the exercise is that drug and alcohol use often won’t feel or taste bad—it can actually taste really good. However, like the gum, it may be hard to stop. This is as opposed to saying, ‘Drug use is bad! Just say no!’ It’s really powerful.”



A family that participated in the Strengthening Families Program.

Devereaux says a lot of the criticism around prevention messaging is that it’s not truthful—for example, when the message implies a person will “go crazy” after using drugs. “Then somebody tries drugs and says, ‘Wait, I didn’t go crazy. I felt really good!’ So I think the gum exercise is a really neat example of flipping that.”

The family meal that begins each SFP session often becomes the catalyst that helps families change the way they communicate. “When some families begin the program, they’re not eating their meals together,” says Devereaux. “Eating together is something that is a new experience for some of them. They may not be sitting down together and talking about things over dinner.”

“Something that many of the family members talk about after the program is they’ve started these family meetings and these opportunities to talk about issues they are experiencing,” she adds. “Often the issues they talk about are how parents’ substance use impacts children.”

A program built on solid research and evidence

Developed in 1982, SFP is a well-researched, internationally recognized model that is now used in 26 countries around the world. “Our strategy is to support evidence-based programming,” says Devereaux.

That’s exactly what [Community-based Standard 11](#) stresses: the promotion of high-quality prevention activities, with preference given to evidence-based programs. Instead of creating a new program, WGDS conducted an environmental scan to identify the targeted prevention programs already being implemented in Guelph and Wellington County. This scan discovered that SFP was already running, albeit on a small scale, through a local Children’s Aid Society, and that it had the most rigorously evaluated and highly researched curriculum. “One of the first things I read in CCSA’s Standards was the encouragement to really look at what could be a good example of a prevention program, but maybe needs some enhancement or expansion or support, so to not always rush to try something new,” says Devereaux.

Strengthening coordination among local initiatives

Devereaux brought together multiple organizations, including the Children’s Aid Society, to expand the accessibility of the program. Two years later, WGDS coordinates an SFP team that includes crisis educators, family support workers, pharmacists, public health workers, addiction therapists and housing support workers. Strengthening coordination among local initiatives is an approach recommended in [Community-based Standard 12](#).

She's found that SFP facilitators are able to respond quickly and appropriately to many situations because they have such a diverse team behind them. For example, one of the facilitators might learn about a family going into financial crisis. "An Ontario Works worker on our prevention team is informed and asks, 'Hey, why don't you come into my office tomorrow morning?' They have the pre-existing relationship. They're in the next morning looking at employment, looking at food bank capacity, all sorts of different supports."

Devereaux says lessons learned through monitoring and reflection ([Community-based Standard 14](#)) with respect to proper screening and support have led to a number of improvements, including the addition of information sessions to ensure participating families are the best fit for the program and hiring an intern to make sure facilitators are well supported.

The challenge of participant retention in a family setting

Because most family programs struggle with retention, taking steps to retain participants is a key element of program success—and one of nine guidelines in the [Canadian Guidelines for Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Family Skills Programs](#).

As part of the newly implemented information nights, the intern coordinators organized a scavenger hunt. While not part of the curriculum, the scavenger hunt has fostered a greater feeling of connectedness between the families and the facilitators.

"When you strengthen the facilitators' capacity and you strengthen group morale, things just go more smoothly," Devereaux says. "This is a really well-oiled group and you see that reflected in the program's retention rate."

The program effectiveness is also reflected in the engagement of facilitators. "It's something they do that they feel really connected to and part of their practice," says Devereaux. "They'll talk about looking forward to it and feeling like they're truly making a difference in the lives of families."

[Learn more about the Wellington Guelph Drug Strategy's youth drug prevention programs.](#)

Richmond's Peer 2 Peer Program

Danny Taylor isn't shy to admit how proud he is of the Richmond Addiction Services Society (RASS) Peer 2 Peer program. "I like to say it's our flagship program," says the addictions specialist.

In 2004, RASS piloted Peer 2 Peer at a high school in Richmond, British Columbia. Eight years later, the youth drug prevention program has expanded to nearly every secondary school in the city. "We've had very positive feedback from the schools," says Taylor.

Taylor is one of two RASS addictions workers who spends three days with Grade 10 classes throughout Richmond, teaching students about addictive behaviour, and drug use and misuse, as well as the risks and harms involved in drug use. Following these sessions, the students break into groups to develop 10-minute presentations that they then present to Grade 8 students.

"We leave them open to creativity," says Taylor. "A group last year did a presentation on how music, movie and television shows influence our perceptions of what's normal."

Other students have presented on peer pressure, decisions youth make at parties and other addictive behaviour such as gambling.

Taylor says students are motivated by the fact that Peer 2 Peer doesn't send out a punitive, "drugs are bad" message. Instead, it reflects positive youth development—one of the guiding principles of the [Canadian Standards for School-based Youth Substance Abuse Prevention](#). "We're trying to say to the students that you can actually wield your influence in a positive way," he says. "You have something valuable you can share that can prevent others from making choices they might regret."

Building relationships to build a better program

Part of Peer 2 Peer's effectiveness is due to RASS taking the time to develop positive relationships with students and teachers—one of the protective factors mentioned in [School-based Standard 3](#). “For us to come in for a one-off presentation, that wouldn't really provide much opportunity to break through that initial suspicion,” says Taylor. “The kids will listen and they'll participate because a lot of our presentations are interactive. We find that by the third day you're getting a much different level of participation and discussion.”

Students also take Peer 2 Peer seriously because the presentations are graded. “Richmond has a very successful program and we are working on ensuring that every kid in Grade 10 has experienced it,” says Rick Dubras, Peer 2 Peer's Executive Director.

Targeting programs to fit each classroom's unique needs

Dubras says the Standards have provided guidance on how RASS can work with schools to implement its drug prevention program. “The schools actually need engagement from the communities to go in and say, ‘Look, this is what needs to be done. This is the research. These are the standards. Let's meet those standards.’ So it's a way to engage the school district, the individual schools and the individual administrations to buy into school-based prevention.”

As RASS is a community-based non-profit organization with only two addiction workers, Dubras would like to build on Peer 2 Peer's success and convince Richmond's school board to take ownership of comprehensive school-based prevention—an approach that would include the Peer 2 Peer program. He expects that to be a challenge, though. “For the school to own what goes on in its classrooms is the most important piece. However, the teachers have enough to do let alone take on school-based prevention,” Dubras says. “We look to continue to build teacher capacity and work with school administration and the district as a whole to support school-based prevention.”



Addiction Specialist Danny Taylor teaching the Richmond's Peer 2 Peer program to a group of Grade 10 students.

The Standards encourage the use of targeted activities to offer support during the transitional year from elementary to high school ([School-based Standard 13](#)). Adhering to that standard, Taylor says, has been difficult. One school might have a need for programs that look at drinking and driving, while another may need to focus on Internet use and online gaming. Through reflection on this Standard, Taylor says RASS has realized that it can talk with the teachers and have them embrace the program as it fits their needs. “We're asking questions such as, ‘How can this work for you?’ So we're finding that there's more of an ownership in the program from the teacher level,” he says.

Fostering a positive atmosphere

Taylor and Dubras say using the Standards was a great way to gauge whether their program was on track with best practices. For example, [School-based Standard 11](#) encourages taking steps to cultivate a positive, health-promoting climate in a school. One way to achieve this is through positive relationships, something RASS cultivates by spending as much time as possible with students and teachers.

“The best prevention is relationships,” Taylor says. “It's not necessarily anything you're going to say and it's not necessarily the information you're going to pass along. Rather, it's the connections and the relationships that are established. The more relationships you have in your life, such as positive people and people who are going to empower you, support you and keep you accountable, the better.”

The Peer 2 Peer program is built around the idea of Grade 10 students sharing knowledge and experiences with younger students. Student-to-student interactivity is emphasized in [School-based Standard 12](#): delivering developmentally appropriate classroom drug and health education.

A program informed by evidence

One major impetus that led to Dubras reading and using the Standards was the feeling that a lot of the work in his community was not necessarily informed by evidence. “I felt like it was really important for me and for our agency to take a step back and look at our processes. Are there holes? Are there gaps? Are there things that we haven’t looked at?”

Taylor says the Standards could prove to be useful in assisting RASS with the next step: evaluating the program’s effectiveness. Evaluation is one of the biggest challenges of drug prevention work. What comes easy, he says, is his commitment to youth drug prevention.

“The reason I do what I do is that the choices we make have lasting consequences and impact. We need to be encouraging youth to make positive choices while supporting their autonomy.”

Taylor admits the Standards cover a lot of material and people new to them might be a little intimidated. “Don’t be overwhelmed by them,” Taylor says. “See them as an asset that’s going to help only make your programs better.” Dubras agrees. “Just pick them up and use them,” he says.

To make them even easier to use, CCSA has developed a set of [quick-reference tools for the Standards](#).

[Learn more about Richmond Addiction Services Society’s Peer 2 Peer youth drug prevention program.](#)

The Standards are part of [A Drug Prevention Strategy for Canada’s Youth](#), which aims to reduce illicit drug use by Canadian youth between the ages of 10 and 24. To find out more about the Standards initiative, please visit www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/YouthPrevention or contact us at youth-jeunes@ccsa.ca.

The Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (CCSA) provides national leadership, develops sustainable partnerships and advances solutions to ensure that all people in Canada live in a healthy society free of alcohol- and other drug-related harm.



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