

Réseau d'intervention de proximité auprès des jeunes de la rue de Montréal (RIPA)

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We have been working for many years with a population of young people who have experienced various forms of breakdown and are living in the street. We know that a period of homelessness can have a devastating impact on their physical and psychological health and on their future, especially when this period includes other risk behaviours that are inherent in this way of life. We also know that the disorganization associated with severe psychiatric problems combined with substance abuse too often leads to homelessness, sometimes quite rapidly for young people who withdraw from their families while going through a period of crisis or illness decompensation. Their isolation deprives them of the support of a social network that could help them to access the professional services they need, and studies suggest that they are at higher risk of developing mental disorders than other youth. The prevalence of mental disorders is believed to increase by 50% following homelessness. Out of alarm at how quickly young people's physical and psychological condition can deteriorate once they are living on the street, we have successfully developed an approach that facilitates their access to mental health services. A proximity intervention network for street youth of Montreal has consolidated for the last ten years. Our outreach approach is based on an ethic of cooperation and shared responsibility, supported by regular clinical and administrative interactions and joint intervention (Aubin *et al.*, 2011, 2012). The know-how and interpersonal skills are shared through close collaboration between institutional teams and community agencies. This approach ensures that the interventions will be effective and that the services offered will be complementary. The *Équipe Sol* mental health outreach team is regularly present in the places frequented by this population. These conditions foster better cooperation among the various workers, while the relationship of trust that the young people develop with their individual workers gets transferred to this new team. Thus, this outreach work has strengthened the partners' trust in one another, as well as their recognition of one another's credibility. Diane Aubin is a clinical psychologist with *Dans la rue*, a Montréal community agency serving street youth. Dr Amal Abdel-Baki is a psychiatrist with *Clinique JAP*, a specialised early psychosis intervention program, at the Notre-Dame Hospital campus of the University of Montréal Hospital Centre (CHUM-HND). We represent a team of several partners in an Outreach Intervention Network : Clinique des jeunes de la rue du CSSS Jeanne-Mance, Le Refuge des jeunes de Montréal, Médecins du monde. Diogène, among others.

The creation of an **Outreach Intervention Network** serving street youth, even wider than the one that we have created (involving, for example, the Youth Protection authorities, the police and the schools), would facilitate access to health services that make sense for these young people, by meeting their needs in an environment that suits them and by offering them care that makes sense for them, enlisting their commitment and thus encouraging harm prevention and reduction. Clinicians from community agencies, medical teams from 1st and 2nd lines, and youth who have benefited from this proximity approach will be invited to share their point of view, regarding the detection and prevention challenges concerning mental health disorders, as well as suicide prevention among youth.

Indicators of improved access to appropriate mental health care

- Reduction in the number of unproductive requests for assistance made before access to appropriate health care is obtained, reduction of untreated mental illness duration.
- Higher rate of engagement to the ongoing follow-up services offered by the organizations in the Network.
- Reductions in number of visits to emergency departments, number and length of hospitalizations
- Increase in the number of homeless youth and youth in highly precarious situations who receive ambulatory care without requiring hospitalization
- Reduction in the duration of homelessness (the length of time it takes to find a home).
- Reduction in suicidal gestures and completed suicides.
- Increase in the proportion of young people who resume a normal vocational path (return to work or school), subjective and objective increase in their quality of life.