

COMMUNITY NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A variety of methods were utilized in capturing the needs and capacities of the community in relation to the issue of drug use and potential service gaps or needs.

ST. ALBERT STUDENT CONDUCT SPECIAL MEETING

The St. Albert Student Conduct Committee held a special meeting on January 15, 2002 that included participants from both St. Albert school jurisdictions, agencies, youth and the community at large. Thirty-five individuals shared their perspectives on drug issues within the St. Albert community. The following is the feedback received from that working group:

- There are several chemical drugs, as well as marijuana being used in St. Albert.
- There are more substances available to youth. Estimated approximately 25% of St. Albert high school population have had experience with drugs, and this should be dealt with.
- The RCMP have indicated a growing concern about the active drug trade in the City. This involves not just students, but a large number of adults as well.
- The DARE program is in place in St. Albert, but is in jeopardy due to lack of resources.
- A provincial government report on early school leavers indicates 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. He also suggested that 60% of the students he sees have drugs playing a negative part in their lives. He further stated, "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."
- There is a huge problem with students having very easy access to drugs. We need to focus on junior high age.
- We need to do more to let kids know what their limits are. (i.e. school handbooks)
- This issue needs to be addressed at the community level.
- Kids need to know who they can tell..."open the door" to go to an adult, yet remain anonymous.
- It's hard to get kids to stop doing drugs.
- Kids who get in trouble have an "alienation of relationships"...they need a significant relationship with an adult. We need programs that would help adults to make good relationships with kids.
- The alienation comment is a good one. Often there is no parental family relationship.
- Organizations need to support one another.
- We need to empower kids to help each other.

- Suggestion that the school administrators be empowered to say, “AADAC counseling is required”, (rather than recommended), as a condition for a student to return to school after disciplinary action.
- Making the community aware of the problem is a weak way of going about it. Action is needed.
- Perhaps the committee needs to do something a bit different to coordinate action against drugs. We need tools. Adding more of the same may not be the answer.
- Research shows that students showing the traits of non-attendance, non-conformity or non-performance, have often taken on the characteristics of their peer group.

FAMILY & COMMUNITY SUPPORT SERVICES COMMUNITY SURVEY

St. Albert Family & Community Support Services conducted a community survey in the fall of 2003. When asked about important social concerns or issues faced by St. Albert residents, respondents most often articulated issues related to crime, particularly youth crime, gangs and vandalism (21%). This was followed by issues related to drug and alcohol abuse (12%).

YOUTH FEEDBACK

Youth representing St. Albert’s schools and the St. Albert Youth Council attended a meeting of the Student Conduct Committee to provide the following information specific to drug use among St. Albert’s youth.

Students in St. Albert:

- Have money and time.
- Perceive there are barriers to participating in extra-curricular activities.
- Come “high” to school.
- Say they are bored.
- Use energy drugs at school and ecstasy on the weekend.
- Say glamour is associated with some drugs like ecstasy.
- Rarely go to a party where people aren’t drunk or high.
- Who say no to drugs have more self-confidence.

The St. Albert Youth Council conducted a random survey (2001) among youth in junior and senior high schools that showed, of the youth surveyed, 28% of junior and 53% of high school students regularly use drugs and alcohol.

THE ALBERTA YOUTH EXPERIENCE SURVEY 2002

Prevalence of alcohol, drug and tobacco use:

- Alcohol, at 56.3% is the most frequently used substance by Alberta adolescents.
- Alcohol use increased by grade.
- The next most used substances were cannabis (marijuana or hash) at 27.6% and cigarettes at 16.2%.
- 13% of youth who drank reported signs of abusing alcohol.

- 7.8% of Alberta youth report use of chewing tobacco.
- Cannabis is by far the most used illicit drug among Alberta youth (27.6%). Followed by mescaline/magic mushrooms (10.4%), inhalants (5.6%) and club drugs such as ecstasy and crystal meth (5.3%).
- Use of cannabis by Alberta adolescents at least once in the last 12 months increased from 11.8% in grades 7-9 to 41.9% in grades 10-12.

RESEARCH AND TREND ANALYSIS

St. Albert is no different than any City in North America in dealing with growing substance abuse issues. Statistics show that youth in St. Albert are experimenting with drugs. There is a perception that young people in St. Albert have money and time and are easy targets for drug dealers. There is also a perception among drug dealers that St. Albert is a sleepy bedroom community, making it easy to set up grow operations or Crystal-Meth labs.

Prior to 2003 the St. Albert RCMP Detachment did not have a localized drug enforcement team. However as a result of pressing needs and trends in the community, the St. Albert Detachment seconded a member to the Edmonton Police Service/RCMP Drug Section Street Team for the purpose of developing dedicated Drug Enforcement Activities. In a report to City Council in the spring of 2002, a concern was expressed in relation to drug related violence within City limits. Evidence of these concerns was the noticeable increase in local and Edmonton youth and adult activity (drug culture) that was more present in the local community (Water Park and various local sites). In the spring of 2003, the Detachment received support from the City of St. Albert and City Council to initiate a Drug Enforcement Unit made up of three RCMP Constables. The addition of these resources considerably enhanced the drug enforcement efforts of the St. Albert Detachment.

Crystal-Methamphetamine, along with related crime and injury, is an escalating problem nationally, provincially and regionally. It has become a key focus nationally and provincially for the RCMP and provincially for the Solicitor General who is spearheading an inter-ministerial group focused on this serious issue. With the established St. Albert Drug Enforcement Unit and St. Albert Drug Response Committee as well as a Regional Hospital, proximity and access to RCMP K Division Alberta Headquarters and its dedicated Fire and Emergency Services, St. Albert has been identified by the RCMP as the desirable location to pilot a “Drug Endangered Children” Program.