



MONCTON

Evaluation of the Downtown Ambassador Program



Canadian Mental
Health Association
New Brunswick
Mental health for all

Association canadienne
pour la santé mentale
Nouveau-Brunswick
La santé mentale pour tous



Ambassador

Evaluation of the Downtown Ambassador Program

Introduction

This report is an evaluation of the 2016 Moncton Downtown Ambassador Program. This pilot project evolved out of concern about the aggression displayed by some panhandlers in Moncton's Downtown core, including an increase in visible homelessness and poverty within the downtown core. The Downtown Ambassador Program was initiated in partnership with the City of Moncton, Downtown Moncton Centre-ville Inc. and YMCA Reconnect. The partnership secured funding through the quality of life grants and social inclusion plan budget. This program was initiated by Downtown Moncton Centre-Ville Inc., with the City of Moncton Social Inclusion Department as a key partner, while YMCA ReConnect hosted and managed the Ambassador staff. Recruitment and training of the first team of two full-time Downtown Ambassadors took place and the program launched in June 2016.

Objectives

The purpose of the program was to make downtown Moncton a welcoming and inclusive place for those living, working and visiting. This initiative is in response to an increase in visible homelessness and poverty within the downtown core; which also impacts the quality of life for residents, visitors, shoppers and the business community.

The Ambassadors also provided a variety of public safety, hospitality and goodwill services. Ambassadors are unarmed and non-confrontational; limiting themselves to observing and providing outreach services to both the homeless and business communities. In addition, the Ambassadors will provide referrals and guidance to the city's most vulnerable populations and connect them to community based services. The Ambassadors are visible and responsible to the needs of the downtown community.



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The Program

The individuals chosen to be Downtown Ambassadors were studying or had experience in social services, sociology, criminology or law enforcement and demonstrated nonjudgmental communication skills. The Ambassadors worked a total of 35 hours per week; Tuesday to Friday from 12:00pm-8:00pm, Saturdays from 9:00am to 2:00pm and Sunday/Monday off. Shift times during the weekdays were scheduled to cover hours of the day that the YMCA ReConnect outreach team were offering their drop-in program and not present on the streets. Saturday shifts were scheduled to cover the busiest time at the Moncton Market. The program focused on tourism, safety, crisis intervention, existing social programs, mental illness, life on the streets and all staff familiarized themselves with the new city staff protocol for vulnerable people in public spaces. They worked in teams of two that covered off downtown Moncton. Each team was equipped with a cell phone, YMCA Resource Information cards, Food Security Sheets, Rooming House guides etc.

An Ambassador provides a variety of public safety, hospitality and goodwill services. Ambassadors provide street level interventions and regular “walk abouts” of the downtown core and are expected to follow the vulnerable people in public spaces protocol with the overall purpose to make downtown Moncton a welcoming and inclusive place for those living, working, and visiting.

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Results

The pilot project was originally meant to run from June to the end of October; however, we operated from June to the end of December for a total of 28 weeks. Unfortunately, one of the Ambassadors was let go due to issues with attendance. As a result, it was determined that it was best to extend the program with one confident and capable Ambassador than to attempt to recruit a second ambassador for a brief two-month contract.

With additional funds, a CMHA (Canadian Mental Health Association) Outreach Worker was contracted for a period of October to December to accompany the Ambassador to provide, once a week, mental health support to the vulnerable population on the streets.

The Downtown Ambassador(s) walked the streets of Moncton and, during this time, made contact with the vulnerable population, tourists and downtown merchants.

The following statistics are from June to December 2016:

3,635

Contact with vulnerable population (street outreach)

Males: 2,368

Females: 1,108

Youth: 159

85

Contact with tourists (majority of these results in July and August)

Males: 48

Females: 34

Youth: 3

23

Contact with downtown merchants

11

Contact with partner organizations

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The program received a tremendous amount of local support, including local coverage. The majority of the merchants that responded to our survey agreed that the program had an effect on the reduction of aggressive panhandling in the downtown core, as well as in their place of business. Also, 63% of the respondents indicated that it should become an annual program. However, some individuals felt that the program did not go far enough to address the problem as they were hoping to eliminate “panhandling” in its entirety.

Items distributed

195	ReConnect referral cards
7	The Humanity Project referral cards
3	Big Hearts Small City referral cards
8	By-Law Enforcement Phone Number <i>(surprisingly most merchants had little interest in taking this information)</i>
18	City maps
36	Rooming House Guides
41	Placement Agency Guides
52	Food Security Sheet
112	Shower passes (YMCA)
122	Hygiene items: soap, shampoo, feminine hygiene, etc.
49	Underwear/Socks
59	Snacks (granola bars)
86	Bottles of water
88	Non-perishable canned food items
6	Codiac Transpo Bus Tickets <i>(most are distributed via YMCA ReConnect Program)</i>
4	Shoes
8	Winter gear: hats, gloves scarves, jackets, etc. <i>(most are distributed via YMCA ReConnect Program)</i>

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Data collection

Survey Content

The opinion survey used in this evaluation was devised by the working group of the Downtown Ambassador Program. The survey was designed to collect information on:

- The effectiveness of the program on the reduction of aggressive panhandlers and customer complaints;
- Awareness of the program and the role of the Downtown Ambassadors;
- The visibility of the Downtown Ambassadors;
- The opinion of the merchants for the continuation of the program as an annual program during the summer months;
- The opinion of the merchants for the extension of the program to cover year round.

Key Results

82%

neutral or in agreement that aggressive panhandling had been significantly reduced in the downtown core.

67%

indicated that they were aware of the presence of the Downtown Ambassadors

55%

either neutral or agreed the Downtown Ambassadors were visible

78%

agreed the program should become an annual program

56%

agreed the program should become a year-round program.

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Conclusion

The Downtown Ambassador working committee is very pleased with the partnership between business, government, and community which took place to implement this initiative. It recognises that some improvements must be made, but considers the Program a success and recommends its continuation. The following initiatives would be undertaken should the program be continued:

Summary of Recommendations

- Establishing partnerships with volunteer programs in order to provide more coverage and reduce costs.
- Expand partnership with other social agencies.
- Assign Downtown Ambassadors to specific areas.
- Increase direct communication between Downtown Ambassadors and merchants, etc.
- Develop a five-year plan to ensure that the program becomes self-sufficient.
- Provide the program year-round.
- Organized launch or downtown meeting in the spring to introduce the ambassadors.
- Expand the borders of what we currently recognize as “downtown Moncton.” Include Mountain Road and along the entire length of the trail on the waterfront.
- Continue partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association.

The total budget raised for the Downtown Ambassador Program for 2016 was \$30,000. Expenses for the operation of the Program were approximately \$30,000.