



The AC Umbrella Project

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What is the Umbrella Project?

The Algonquin College Umbrella Project is a college-wide project that provides training, workshops, education, awareness and support services for students who use substances, and the staff and faculty who interact with them. The initiative is focused on increasing student awareness and education of how to reduce the harms associated with substance use and on continuing Algonquin College's commitment to a healthy campus community. The specific aims of the Umbrella Project are to decrease barriers to academic success and enhance student's self-efficacy to self-assess and seek support, if needed, through the school's growing resources to assist students in reducing the harms related to substance use. The initiative targets six specific areas to achieve their goals: health promotion and education for students, individual student support, community capacity building, providing culture as the intervention, college policies and working with the residence.



Who helped to make the Umbrella Project happen?

The Director of Student Services was a strong advocate in pursuing funding in partnership with a local addiction community agency. This led to the Umbrella Project. A dedicated team that included a project manager and a harm reduction consultant from the local addiction agency used best practices research and built the project from scratch with the support of an interdisciplinary team. The team included managers and chairs from counselling services, health services, nursing and the Ottawa police foundation, as well as campus security, student association directors and members of the marketing team. Student placements were essential in promoting the Umbrella Project and reaching the student body, both in residence and on campus.

How did you engage students on your campus?

The Umbrella Project team engaged students at many events throughout the academic year at specific times that were shown to have an increase in student substance use, such as Orientation

Week, Halloween, exam periods and St. Patrick's Day. Methods of student engagement included education sessions and information booths, pamphlets and access to online resources. The Umbrella Project initiative also worked with placement students who would go to school events and promote safe behaviour through information and handing out merchandise with harm reduction messages. The Umbrella Project maintains that peer-to-peer education reigns as one of the most effective ways to engage other students and to share information.

Did you have any smaller teams that helped with the Umbrella Project?

Placement students, security, residence staff and faculty members formed many smaller teams that had a big impact on the Umbrella Project work on campus. These teams aided in spreading the message of safe behaviour and the positive effects of reducing the harms related to substance use.

How did your team plan the Umbrella Project?

A number of months were spent on researching best practices for addressing alcohol harms on campus from across North America and the Umbrella Project was built on this evidence-based foundation. The National College Health Improvement Project, Centre for Innovation in Campus Mental Health and the PEP-AH Framework are particularly helpful resources.



How did your team implement the Umbrella Project?

The Umbrella Project used the Plan Do Study Act model and put in place multiple initiatives over the first two years, starting with what could be put in place immediately (harm reduction consultations, branding, creating a general advisory committee) and building from there (online harm reduction game and training, SMART meetings, social norms marketing). Evaluations and adjustments were made along the way.

How did your team evaluate the Umbrella Project?

The Umbrella Project was evaluated in several different ways. Individual initiatives like the harm reduction consultations and trainings were evaluated in real time, statistics from residence and security were collected and questions were added to National College Health Association survey to determine students' overall awareness of the project. Other signs of success were the college's ability to quickly provide information and naloxone kits on campus to address overdose concerns, frequent requests for full-day training and the Umbrella Project becoming fully incorporated into campus events. The RainyDaze game was awarded silver in the Prix D'Excellence by the Canadian Council for the Advancement of Education.

What are the plans for the future of the Umbrella Project?

The Umbrella Project is seen as an integral part of campus health and it is currently being funded by Algonquin College's Health Services for the next two years.

What tips would you give other campuses trying to address alcohol harms on their campus?

1. Build partnerships with a community addiction agency.
2. Use a socio-ecological model like the PEP-AH framework for maximum impact.
3. Secure support from senior administration.

Who can others reach out to for more information?

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