



Compass project

Sexual Violence Prevention for Children Ages 6-12



Highlights of the Needs Assessment

Why implement a project of this kind in community and recreational environments?

Marie-Vincent is participating in the creation of a protective community that will ensure the optimal development of all young people, including victims of sexual violence and children with sexual behaviour problems.

For a number of years now, we have been running the Lantern program, a sexual violence prevention program for toddlers and the adults in their lives. The program has been very well received by the community and schools. Indeed, they have asked us to develop a follow-up for 6-12-year-olds. Therefore, based on lessons learned and the principles of the Lantern program, the current project involves developing a sexual violence prevention program for children aged 6 to 12 and the adults in their lives, and assessing its implementation and training needs.

The new program will be called *Compass*. A needs assessment was conducted in five regions of Quebec, three of which will be chosen for implementation of the pilot project.

In order to carry out this needs assessment, we identified 18 sexual violence prevention programs that had been evaluated, along with five literature reviews. We also conducted individual telephone interviews and group discussions in five regions of Quebec. This enabled us to speak to 42 practitioners and professionals working in community and recreational settings. Three parents also took part in a focus group.

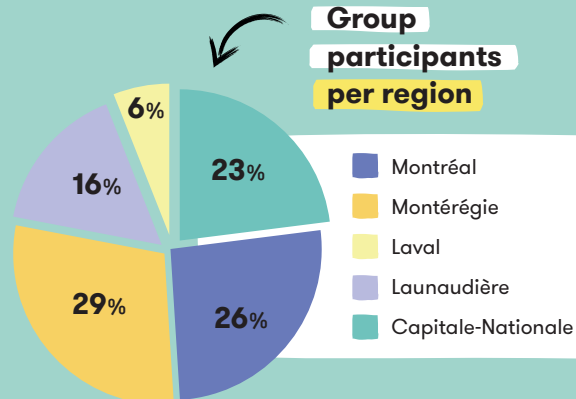
Individual interviews



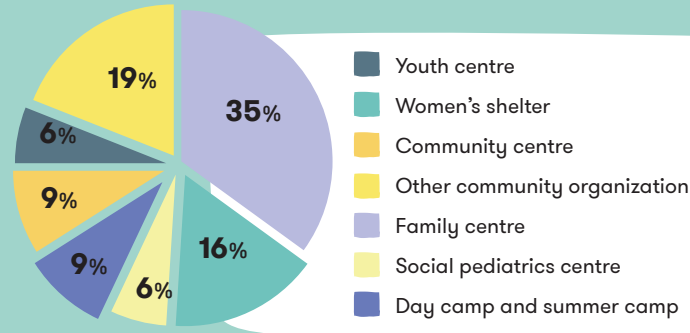
Highlights of the needs assessment and literature review

The assessment was carried out to:

- Identify existing initiatives to prevent sexual violence
- Identify best practices in the field
- Develop a program tailored to the needs of children aged 6 to 12 and the adults in their lives



Types of organizations within the groups



Highlights

Reaching parents, particularly the more vulnerable ones, is a challenge when it comes to addressing the prevention of sexual violence.

The adults in children's lives – parents especially – are best positioned to pass along prevention concepts and to detect high-risk situations.

Adults underestimate the prevalence of sexual violence against children.

Parents and professionals report a lack of knowledge about children's psychosexual development, about healthy, concerning and problematic sexual behaviours, and about the issues surrounding sexual violence, including online sexual violence.

Answering children's questions about sexuality seems to be difficult for adults, both parents and professionals; they are afraid of giving children too much information, lack guidelines regarding psychosexual development, and are afraid of creating anxiety when addressing protective skills.

Although sexual violence is recognized as being gender-based, very few sexual violence prevention programs include the promotion of healthy, egalitarian relationships in their content.

There are still many myths surrounding child sexual abuse. The same is true of sex education for young people, making adults reluctant to teach children about sexuality.

Teaching sex education and promoting egalitarian relationships in a multicultural context is a challenge for professionals, who fear that their values will clash with those of the parents.

Professionals who receive a disclosure of sexual violence often feel ill-equipped to properly support the child and fear causing harm. Furthermore, a lack of familiarity with the processes and obligations involved in reporting and the Youth Protection Act, as well as the complexity of a post-report intervention, can be obstacles to reporting a child's situation.

As regards technology and exposure to online sexual violence, adults admit to feeling quickly overwhelmed by the speed at which new applications and games appear and by the ease with which children can access different technologies. More parents report being concerned about online sexual violence than the professionals interviewed.

Day camps and summer camps present their own issues in terms of work context and training needs: underage camp counsellors who report a lack of knowledge and training in sexual violence intervention; a seasonal job that requires a synthetic training structure; and a unique context of contact with young people (flexible structure, youngsters attending for only a few days, limited intervention possibilities).

Cooperation and communication between parents and workers in community and recreational environments is not always easy, but it is essential if children are to receive a coherent sex education.



Identified Needs

→ Tools

- conducive to parent-child communications
- conducive to parent-professional communications
- interactive, fun, and not requiring a set-up procedure
- customizable to the different stages of a child's development
- requiring minimal use of technologies

→ Approach

- customized for different multicultural settings
- inclusive, fostering equality for all and emphasizing diversity and individual rights
- socio-environmental, fostering the involvement of parents and adults in the child's life as well as in organizations and the general public
- sensitive to traumas, in order to promote resilience and avoid retraumatizing, by supporting front-line professionals

→ Training

- on best practices for receiving disclosures and reporting them to youth protection authorities
- on children's psychosexual development and on interventions regarding healthy or concerning sexual behaviours
- which furthers knowledge of the issues around sexual violence (prevalence, forms, signs, techniques used by aggressors)
- which addresses best practices in sex education and the promotion of healthy, egalitarian relationships



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