

## Verdun

**Host agency:** Toujours ensemble  
4926 rue de Verdun, Verdun, Quebec H4G 1N3  
Tel.: 514-761-7867

**Program director:** Mathieu Sage

**Boundaries:** Neighbourhoods in east Verdun.

**Area dropout rate:** 50% (Ministère de l'éducation, du loisir et du sport).

**First cohort size:** Eligible are 90 students currently in *Secondary I* (Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys).

**Participation rate:** 73% are currently registered and outreach continues.

### Brief description

Verdun, located on the south part of the Island of Montreal, was founded in 1671 and is one of Quebec's oldest municipalities. According to a comprehensive 2003 socio-economic survey of the area, there are 13,981 families with children, most of whom are economically marginalized. Key issues identified by the local community are the high dropout rate and the need for school supplies. The vast majority of families are Francophone, with smaller English speaking and Vietnamese communities. Leading the development of the Pathways to Education Program in Verdun is Toujours ensemble, a not-for-profit organization that has been providing services to young people for 25 years.

### Why Verdun has a Pathways program

Verdun, located on the south west end of Montréal, is large and socio-economically diverse. The neighbourhood targeted for replication of the Pathways program is in the eastern part of Verdun. It is one of the most impoverished areas in Montréal, with high proportions of sole support parents, families living on social assistance and unemployment. Over 45% of Verdun households (not including the high-income Nun's Island) have annual incomes of less than \$30,000, the majority in the targeted area. It is two-thirds Francophone and 15% recent immigrant. Immigrants are mainly Asian, the largest group being Chinese.

The issue of school dropout is a big one in Québec and is a large concern for the people of Verdun. Toujours ensemble, the program's host agency, sits on both provincial and local round tables devoted to this issue.

Over 300 parents, youth and service providers have participated in focus groups, interviews and community discussions about the Pathways program. Parents in the community have demonstrated great support for the Pathways program and strong interest in enrolling their children.

Issues identified by youth, parents and service providers alike include little support in the home for schooling, partly attributed to the negative experiences that parents and grandparents had themselves, and lack of communication between parents and school. Further issues include the difficulty of subjects in high school given low levels of education in the home, stress, peer pressure, bullying, students lacking organizational skills, and parents having no time because of other life pressures. Some students leave school to work when an opportunity becomes available. Reading and math have been identified by teachers and others as areas of great need. Literacy is a particular concern, given its large impact on everything else.

Toujours ensemble has been working closely with local community partners as well as a broader network to provide a solid foundation for the program. These partners have responded enthusiastically and have connected the director to other key people in the education sector. The principal school board serving local students is the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, one of five in Montréal. The local principal, primary and secondary teachers and other school personnel have embraced the program. Some sit on the program Advisory Committee with parents and youth and other service providers. The director has begun to establish connections with the English language school system and the largest local English language service provider in the area, Dawson Community Centre, with a view to expanding the program to include the Anglophone students in the catchment in 2008.

For more information about the community and the Verdun Pathways to Education Program, please contact:

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