



Youth Ottawa End of School Report 2020-2021



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Wrapping up the 2020-2021 School Year!

What a year! This past year of school has been no easy feat. In the face of these challenges, students have demonstrated tremendous resilience, and teachers have worked diligently to offer students meaningful learning experiences. We are grateful for the ongoing support that you have shown for our mission: empowering youth to become agents of change in their communities.

We want to send a special recognition to all teachers, students, and partners for welcoming us virtually into their classrooms. Navigating learning under COVID-19 has presented many challenges, and we appreciate your magnificent efforts to continue community-connected learning at home!

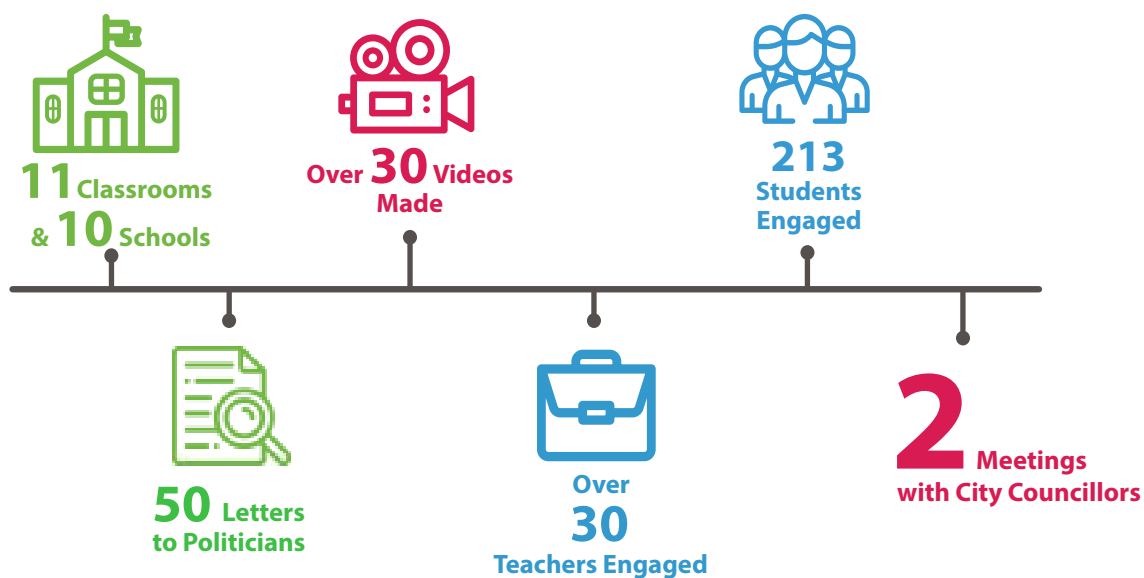
As we close off the school year and begin planning for September 2021, we are recapping the unique student projects that came out of this year and the exciting new program adaptations that will be available to teachers in September.

The Impact of Experiential Learning on Student Success

At Youth Ottawa, we focus on helping students and teachers achieve success. We connect facilitators to high school classrooms through an experiential, curriculum-based experience. We help teachers engage students in focused reflection and hands-on experiences that increase knowledge, develop skills, and expand students' capacity to contribute to their communities.

Experiential learning gives students the opportunity to apply ideas in a real-world situation where they too play an active role. It expands their creativity by learning that there are many solutions to the world's challenges and puts them in the driver's seat - building a true sense of agency and identity.

2020-2021 Classroom Impact

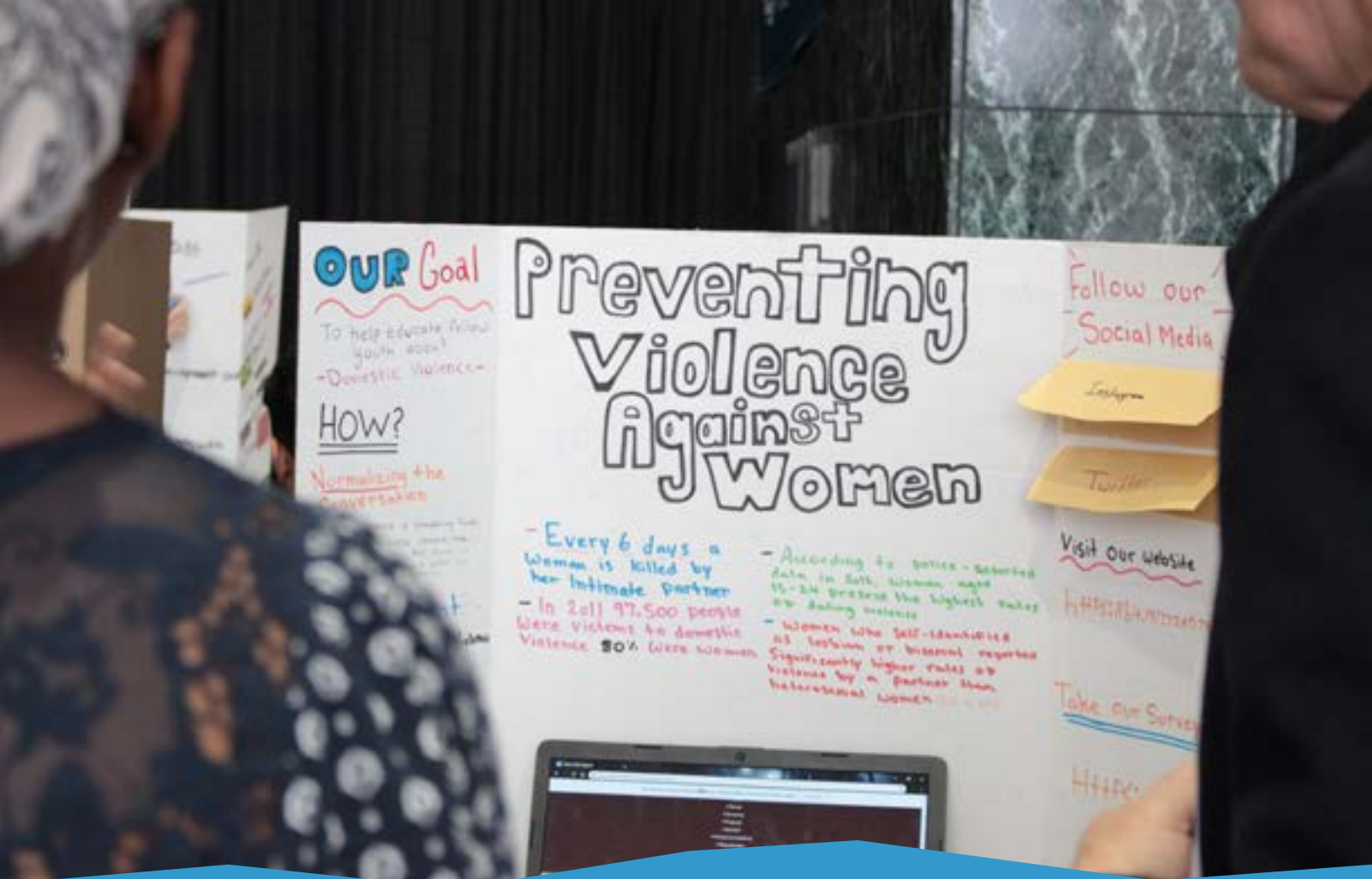


Here's How We Do It

- 1 Trained Facilitators**
Youth Ottawa's trained facilitators lead classroom discussions, activities and help students learn from their own experiences.
- 2 Ongoing Teacher Support**
Through webinars, online resources, digital lessons, and dedicated facilitators, teachers are fully supported to implement the program in their classrooms.
- 3 Stakeholder Measurement and Research**
We provide pre, post, and comparison program evaluation measures and report on student impact and achievement through student and teacher feedback.
- 4 Connecting Students to the Community**
We connect students to the community by inviting grassroots organizations, community groups, and City Councillors to meet with students and discuss their action projects.

If you're interested in learning how to bring project-based learning into your lesson plans, we can help! To see if our programs are right for your classroom, send us an email at:

info@youthottawa.ca



Active Citizenship Initiative Pilot

This year, we piloted a new 3-step version of the Active Citizenship Initiative (formerly our DILA program). The ACI is used in Civics classes and other issue-based electives to guide students through taking action on a social or environmental civic issue of their choice - from the cost of a bus pass to climate change to anti-racism.

We piloted this new 3-step program with 50 students in 2021.

Over 3 or 4 classes, students learn about specific civic issues in Ottawa, choose one of the issues, and write unique lobbying pieces expressing their opinions to a decision-maker. Students learn about the key concepts of oppression, privilege, and power and formulate an informed approach to their topic through research and group discussion. And finally, by actually sending their lobbying pieces, students begin to understand how to have their important voices heard.

This new version also includes voices from the community. Students watch a series of Community Challenge Videos from Ottawa City Councillors and representatives from local organizations who introduce tangible civic challenges. These videos allow students to connect with the community outside the classroom walls and focus their efforts on issues that are relevant locally.

We now offer this 3-step, lobbying-focused Active Citizenship program in Civics classes in addition to our traditional 8-step version, in which students work collectively to plan and enact an action plan that addresses a civic issue of their choice.

I think the 3-step Active Citizenship Initiative program really made Civics accessible by allowing students to choose a topic they were interested in and also do an action to a real-life decision-maker. It makes our political representatives more real. Students feel more connected to the process when they email an actual person who has the responsibility to hear their voice and to act on problems students feel connected to/are relevant to students.

- Malia Robin, Teacher at Ottawa Carleton Virtual School



Take a look at some of the student projects & the Civics issues they addressed!

Program Goals

To increase students' sense of civic agency and identity and understand that, with basic knowledge and a few simple skills, anyone can engage effectively in the democratic process.

At the end of the program, Councillor Catherine McKenney (Somerset Ward) and Councillor Shawn Menard (Capital Ward) virtually joined students for a Q&A session facilitated by Emma Buchanan, our Youth Civic Engagement Lead. The Q&A provided students with the opportunity to connect with established community leaders and engage in deep inquiry about their chosen civic issues and what they, as young leaders, can do to make an impact.

“Today I spoke with a class from Cairine Wilson HS on homelessness. I have never experienced such an engaged and empathetic class of kids who wanted to understand how we got here and what it will take to ensure everyone has a living wage and a place to call home. Hope for the future!”

- Councillor Catherine McKenney



“How can you create resources for peers and staff to learn more about Trans, Gender Diverse and 2SLGTBQ+ identities and experiences?” —Kaeden Seburn, Trans and Gender Diverse Support Coordinator OCDSB Equity Program

A.Y Jackson

Decision-Maker: Minister Stephen Lecce, Ontario Minister of Education / Civic Issue : Gender Identity and Inclusivity

Dear Minister Lecce,

LGBTQ+ students have been overlooked by the education system continuously for several decades, leading to hazardous learning environments for any student under the lesbian/gay/bi/trans/queer umbrella. There have been a multitude of faults perpetuating this issue, but it's time for the Ontario government to take action and provide safe and healthy learning conditions for students of all gender identities and sexual orientations alike.

While extensive reform of curriculum and resource programs would be required in order to dissolve this issue entirely, it is important that we focus on smaller-scale changes that are vital to providing all students with equal opportunities and accessibility in our schools. Primarily, there needs to be more access to LGBTQ+ sexual education in Ontario health classes. As someone who is in tenth grade in Ontario, and has taken the respective courses, they are simply just not inclusive enough or educational for non-heterosexual students. The homosexual sex-ed curriculum, or lack thereof, leads to LGBTQ+ youth being unaware of how to practice safe sex. In fact, young gay and bisexual men account for 8 out of 10 HIV cases in youth. Secondly, bullying and discrimination are both massive issues in public school systems, but the effects on LGBTQ+ students are astonishing. A Canadian research study in 2011 concluded that 64% of LGBT youth in Canada feel unsafe at school, 55% of LGB and 75% of transgender students reported being verbally harassed about their gender or sexual identity. Sexuality is not something that an individual can control, nor is it a choice one can make. Our youth should not have to suffer in order to be who they are.

I know you may think that there are sexual health resources as well as programs in place to prevent bullying at schools in Ontario, however, it just isn't competent enough to satisfy the needs of an abundant (and increasing) population among our youth. The mental health of Ontario's students is your responsibility, and you can not fail the ones that don't identify as cis or straight.

I understand that as a minister, especially as the Minister of Education during a pandemic, these issues might not exactly be your top priority. I urge you to take them into consideration nevertheless.

Sincerely, A Concerned Student



“Climate Change is the most significant risk facing the City of Ottawa. Reach out to your elected representatives either through a letter or email and tell them why climate change justice is important for your future.” —*Councillor Shawn Menard*



“What can we do so that every youth in our city that wants to participate in sports can do so in their neighbourhoods?” —*Councillor Mathieu Fleury*

Ottawa Carleton Virtual School

Decision-Maker: Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson

Civic Issue: Climate Change & Waste

Dear Mayor Jim Watson,

I am currently in 10th Grade. I am writing to you because you need to find a way to push more eco-friendly products to businesses. In 2019, Ottawa declared a climate emergency to try and prevent climate change from getting worse. Even though our greenhouse gas emissions have dropped 22 percent since 2005 we should still try to improve our plastic use. Plastic fills up the landfill, gets washed into our rivers and oceans and produces many greenhouse gases when it is manufactured and when it is breaking down in a landfill.

I am asking that you make laws and standards that force businesses to make more eco-friendly products with less packaging, or that the packaging be completely and truly biodegradable. Another thing that might help is a campaign to encourage people to only buy the food they know they will eat because food often comes with its own plastic packaging.

Every year Canada produces around 3.3 million tonnes of plastic waste and 35.5 million tonnes of organic waste. Ottawa could cut that down a little bit by not using as many plastic straws and forks. In order for people to stop using them, businesses have to stop buying them. If you make a City-Wide ban on the use of plastic straws and forks, then businesses won't buy them.

As for the organic waste, you could continue to use the waste for more organic fertilizer on farms and encourage people to use it in their community gardens as we already do with our green bin program. The Liberal government is trying to take action to protect our natural environment and ban harmful single-use plastics like plastic bags, straws, take-out containers, and more. Some cities have already put a stop to single-use plastics, that's why I'm asking you to make Ottawa one of them.

Please write back as soon as you can.

Thank you for your time.

Ottawa Carleton Virtual School

Decision-Maker: Minister Ahmen Hussen, Federal Minister of Children, Families and Social Development

Civic Issue: Recreational Opportunities for Low-Income Youth

Dear Minister Hussen,

I am a student at Canterbury High School. I'm writing to you because I believe that the government of Canada should fund more programs for youth and kids, like the Boys and Girls Clubs. The reason I believe this is because a lot of kids in the province wouldn't exactly call their home a safe place for them and need an outlet where they can be around other people their age and to express themselves, but in a safe and healthy environment. Programs could be set up for the summer or year-long. I know that there are already a lot of these programs in our province, but they get booked up so quickly because of the growing demand for them, I think that the government should put a little extra money towards creating these programs; no youth should be turned away from a Boys & Girls club, which is what is happening in some areas in Ottawa according to our City Councillor

Another reason why I think there should be more funding for these programs is that not all parents have time to be at home and take proper care of their children. This results in child neglect, which can lead to a lot of trauma in their later lives. I think that having these programs would really help a lot of people so what I'm asking of you is that you set aside more money to be able to create and expand them.

I appreciate you taking the time out of your busy day to read this letter. If it's not too much of a bother, I would like to hear your thoughts about what I wrote and hear back from you by August 1st of this year.

Sincerely,

A concerned student



“In Jan 2020, we declared a housing and homelessness emergency in the city of Ottawa. How can you ensure that the people who represent you hear from you, and how can you make sure that affordable housing is always included in new housing developments?” — Councillor Catherine McKenney



“What can you do to reduce the need for food banks in our city?” —Councillor Rawlson King



Decision-Maker: Minister Ahmed Hussen, Federal Minister of Children, Families and Social Development / Civic Issue: Food Security & Homelessness

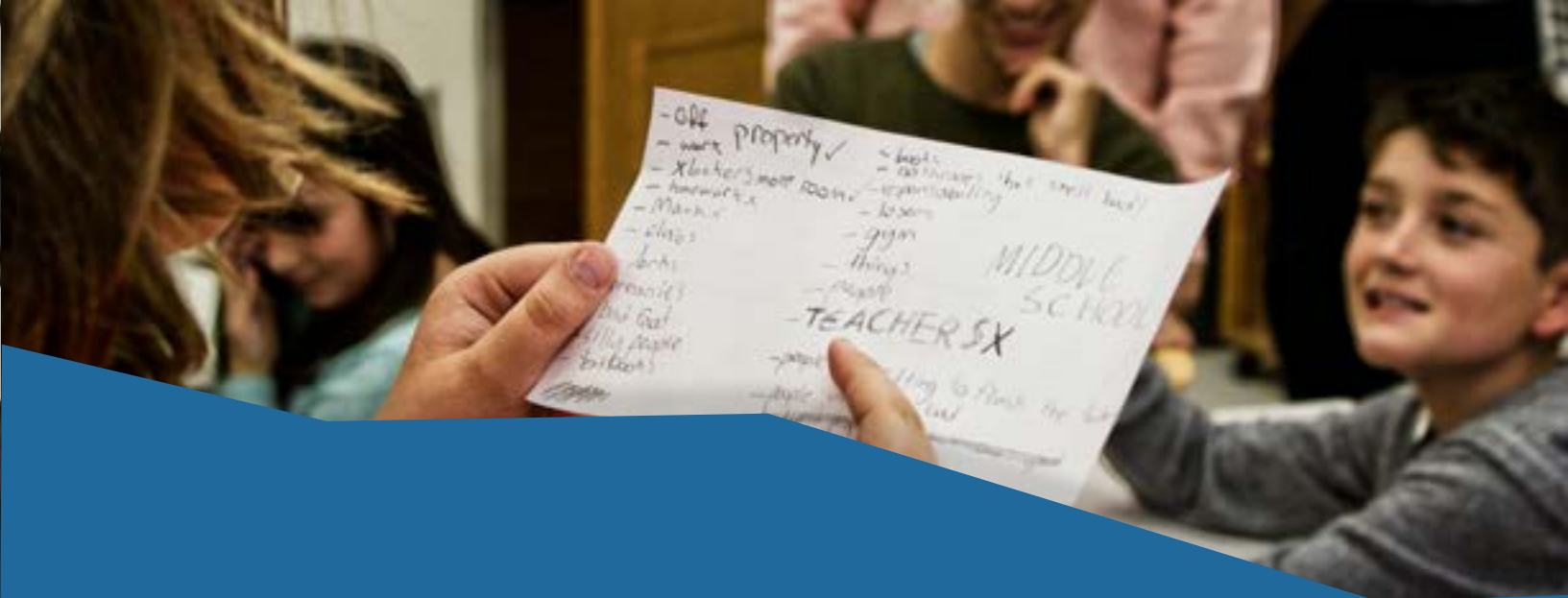
Hello Ahmed Hussein,

I am in a civics class at the Ottawa Carleton Virtual High School in the OCDSB. I'd like you to take your time to look at the issues of food security and homelessness in Ottawa and some ideas to meet the needs of people who are going through these problems. I believe it's important to take action on these problems as everyone should be able to have access to these basic necessities. Some solutions to the issues above would be to have higher-paying jobs that are accessible to everyone so they can sustain themselves, and community gardens for a constant food resource.

There are a number of barriers to accessible jobs. These are different depending on your background in life. The barriers for New Canadians are different from the barriers for people who were born here with English as their first language and have gone through the Canadian education system. We need to make it easier for New Canadians to use their excellent qualifications from their home country and we need to make access to Post Secondary education easier by lowering or eliminating tuition so the cost of the education is not prohibitive for those who do not have a job simply because they are new to Canada. The second barrier to jobs is that people don't have enough support for their own mental health, substance use issues, or depression, and that can prevent people from getting good jobs. If support isn't accessible for them, they'll never be able to help themselves. I would like to ask for more funding for Mental Health help and help for people experiencing substance use disorders.

Taking down the barriers mentioned above will not help if jobs for people are not available. We need more available, secure, full-time jobs that pay a living wage. We could start to help this by making sure that the minimum wage in Ontario is a living wage. A community garden is also a good start as it's more cost-efficient and people within a district and locally can contribute to help. Not to mention these have 24/7 access which is great for people because they always know where their food is coming from for the next day, and it's not a constant worry. Although we do have food drives and shelters for the homeless, generally speaking, that isn't sustainable, because who knows how much will be donated if everyone can get enough of those resources etc, and with shelters, eventually we reach a max capacity, and you can't always control the environment making some people take it as an absolute last resort because they may not feel safe. By instead giving people the opportunity to get good-paying jobs, they can eventually get back on their feet and very well resume a better life.

The reason I suggest these things is because even though Canada as a country is taking the initiative to reduce homelessness by 2028 by 50 percent using the "Canada Homelessness Strategy" in that time the homeless population will increase, those who are homeless now will still be homeless for the next six years, and there's no certainty that this plan will actually work and follow through. So right now as a community, we can help instead to make an immediate change and make the lives of those around us better; even if it's in a smaller manner. I believe that more support for new Canadians, mental health and substance use problems, a good living wage, secure jobs and community gardens should be taken into consideration because these are things that are realistic and achievable and will give people more agency to take care of themselves and will solve the roots of the homeless and hunger problems. Thank you for taking time out to read this. I look forward to hearing back from you as soon as you have time. Thank you for your time and effort within our community.



Youth Active Media

Digital Literacy for Learner's Future Success



The pandemic changed education dramatically. With schools shut down worldwide, millions of students had to adapt to new types of learning and technology.

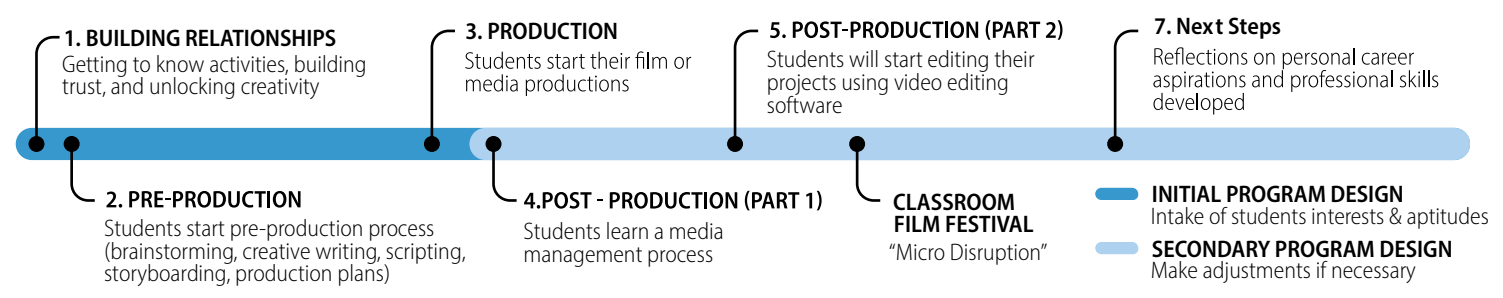
At Youth Ottawa, we know the importance of digital literacy and its potential to improve lifelong learning. To become digitally literate, we guide students to develop technological skills, understand how to access accurate online information, and learn social responsibility while interacting on social networks.

Introducing Youth Ottawa's Mobile Media Bootcamp

Our Youth Active Media (YAM) program was incredibly successful during the pandemic. Through YAM, we work with teachers to integrate innovative, web-based technologies into daily lesson plans, such as digital art production and video recording tools. The program is tailored to the curriculum so that the final product of the program can be used as a learning assessment. Over a series of regular visits, we take students through the basics of filmmaking using the devices that they have most readily at hand. The program culminates with a local screening of student-made films!

We understand, however, that not all students have access to broadband, electronic devices and computers at home. This is why we created the YAM Mobile Media Bootcamp. This program uses easy-to-access editing software to help close the digital divide and empowers students to use technology to express themselves.

Take a look at an example program journey





YAM Program Outcomes

1

Students will develop, design, produce and showcase film or media projects

2

Students will learn storytelling skills and use these skills to tell their own stories

3

Students will have the opportunity to learn new technology software, techniques, and skills

4

Program graduates learn about and access next-step pathways and opportunities

Program Highlights

Meet Damien, a student graduate from the YAM program who now works for Hot Shoe Productions - a social enterprise.

[Read more here](#)

What's to Come in September

We're thrilled to partner, once again, with the Ottawa Carleton District School Board. Beginning in September, our facilitators will be in 10 OCDSB classrooms running our 8-step Active Citizenship Initiative. Our digital lesson plans, videos, and tools will be available to teachers across the school board who would like to run either the 3-step or the 8-step ACI program in their classrooms with our support.

Our newly developed YAM Mobile Media Bootcamp will also be delivered in several schools in the fall. This new mobile media program shows students that a good story trumps production value every time - regardless of the budget or equipment! We're excited to see what youth-led stories will be told next school year.

If you are interested in learning more about Youth Ottawa's school programming in September, please contact our Acting Executive Director, Jesse Card, at jesse.card@youthottawa.ca