



Skylark Children, Youth & Families

SESSIONS – Training to Make Informed Decisions About Drugs

About Skylark Children, Youth and Families

Skylark-born from the merging of Delisle Youth Services and Oolagen Youth Mental Health. The combining of nearly 90 years of experience has resulted in a leading Toronto based charity dedicated to children, young people and their families struggling with complex mental health and development needs. Offering a range of high quality prevention, intervention and treatment services to children and youth aged zero to 24 years, Skylark provides the help they need, when they need it.

Executive Summary

Why Support SESSIONS and Tuning In, Comprehensive Drug Education?

What are SESSIONS and Tuning In?

SESSIONS and Tuning In are part of the Integrated Resiliency Model of drug education which equips youth 13-24, with the social, emotional and critical thinking skills they need to make decisions about substance use in their lives. Parents and professionals working with youth develop skills in harm reduction, relationship and communication to continue the conversation and offer ongoing support when the workshops end. Target audiences: youth 13-24 years, parents and professionals.

Why SESSIONS and Tuning In?

Youth develop trusting relationships and skills

- Just telling youth to say “no” to drugs does not work!
- Youth learning to make “informed choices” works! This is supported by sound evaluation.
- To date 320 Youth have attended

Parents and Professionals learn how to talk to youth about “informed choices”

- Parents do not have the tools to have discussions about drugs
- Professionals need new approaches that work
- To date 75 Parents and 171 Professionals have attended workshops

Research Data Demonstrates the Success of this Approach

- The most frequently reported problems by youth due to substance use were *missing school, forgetting what happened, having money problems, and having issues with emotions/mental health.*
- A statistically significant difference between two of the pretest and post-test responses was found, indicating that after participating in SESSIONS youth felt that it was **more important** to them to have reliable drug information in general and specifically when they needed it.
- The majority of the responding 49 parents (61%) indicated that over 40% of the workshop content was new material for them, indicating they had acquired quite a bit of knowledge.
- Tuning In participants indicated the relevance of the workshop to their work and/or life. The vast majority of parents (86%) indicated the workshop had at least some relevance to their life and nearly all parents (92%) reported likelihood of using what they learned with their child.

Why is there a Funding Need?

- Previous funding based on time limited grants
- Increasing demand for SESSIONS and Tuning In Programs but no permanent source of funding
- Aspirational 5-year Funding Goal - \$2 million - \$400,000 per year
- Funding Sources: Partnership with Federal and Provincial Governments, Donors, Fees for Service – Parents and Professionals (based on affordability no one turned away)
- Funding recognition opportunities

Cost per 10 week SESSIONS workshop series: \$3,000 - 3,500 depending on location; 3 week Tuning In workshop series: \$1,000

Projected number of participants attending workshops over 5 years: 2939

Youth: 1070 Parents: 504 Professionals: 1365

Long-term opportunity to licence and embed the program in organizations across Canada



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SESSIONS and Tuning In a Comprehensive Drug Education Program

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Who Benefits from SESSIONS and Tuning In?

3 target audiences

- Youth 13-24 years
- Parents
- Professionals

SESSIONS for Youth 13-24 years:

Skylark Children, Youth and Families, developed the curriculum to answer an unmet demand for evidence informed, replicable drug education for Youth 13 to 24. SESSIONS has been designed, piloted, revised and evaluated over the past 5 years. Its design incorporates elements from evidence based theories, research and best practices with an emphasis on respecting youth knowledge and engaging them by building relationship through a creative, interactive curriculum. SESSIONS shifts the focus from “just say no”, fear based learning and shaming to an anti-stigma approach based on relationship and resiliency. Youth need to trust facilitators so that they can enter into genuine dialogue about drug use. We use the stages of changes theory, which recognizes that people often go through a series of steps when changing behaviour. SESSIONS is based on starting conversations where youth are at, instead of focussing on where we would like them to be; research has proven that people don’t change until they are ready and have compelling reasons to change.

Tuning In for Parents teaches parents how to talk and listen to young people about drugs. Parents are able to learn new and better ways to communicate with you about drugs. Parents are provided with lots of practice and supportive feedback from expert facilitators and a chance for families to share experiences and learn from each other.

Tuning In for Professionals is for service providers, teachers and professionals who are working with young people who may be using drugs. We specialize in training frontline staff to communicate with youth about drugs in ways that build resilience and decrease the negative effects of stigma. We work with organizations to develop and deliver introductory, intermediate and/or advanced trainings that are adapted to meet the specific needs of each organization and/or group.

What Participants Say:

SESSIONS Participant: "They (school) focus on the negatives; ignoring that drugs do have positives for some people and the reality that teenagers do drugs. But at SESSIONS they don't say drugs are bad. They give us facts about drugs, but at the end of the day, it's our decision; they are here to educate us; so we are prepared if we were to do it; more in touch with reality".

88% of youth who attended SESSIONS felt it was important for them to have reliable drug information
94% of youth said after SESSIONS they knew where to find reliable drug information

After completing SESSIONS youth indicated that they would use their knowledge, or seek information to help them plan and stay safe while using drugs.

SESSIONS-How It Works

In SESSIONS youth learn how to make decisions based on knowledge and an evaluation of their circumstances. The program is a series of 10 workshops each 180 minutes in length.

This approach leads to better outcomes for youth and potentially less problematic use of drugs in adulthood. Based on Motivational Interviewing, which is an evidence-based practice used to support behaviour change, facilitators take youth through activities and discussions that encourage them to reflect on their current beliefs/ideas, hear beliefs/ideas different than their own, and explore the differences. The result is the youth construct their own meaning around new learning instead of having it dictated by a person of authority.

More than 320 youth have taken SESSIONS in over eight different locations including 4 shelters and 4 community agencies in the Greater Toronto Area.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rwpPq-MW4Ys&t=8s>

Our program for parents and professionals focuses on building relationship and communication skills.

- **Tuning In for Parents** is three 2-hour workshops for parents on how to talk and listen to young people about drugs and has been run with 75 parents to-date from across the GTA. We are working on developing additional modules based on feedback from parent participants.
- **Tuning In for Professionals** is at minimum a 3-hour workshop for service providers, teachers and professionals who are working with young people who may be using drugs that has been run with 171 professionals. Workshops are geared to the needs of each staff group and organization.

Both workshops for parents and professionals provide tools and support skill development to communicate with young people about drugs in a way that builds trust and rapport.

This type of intervention, which we have called the Integrated Resiliency Model, creates positive changes by bringing together youth, their families and the people who work with them to reduce harm caused by substance misuse. Stigma is reduced, trust is built, new knowledge and skills are learned and youth are more likely to access needed services if their use is causing harm. An implementation science framework identifies and strengthens mechanisms that make the intervention work so that positive outcomes are achieved when implemented by new partners.

Outcome Indicators of Success

Over the past 5 years we have evaluated the SESSIONS and Tuning In curriculums and training model.

SESSIONS has been tested in a number of different settings (mental health agencies, shelters, community and afterschool programs) with a range of target populations: high risk youth, indigenous youth and incoming 9th graders among others. Evidence from pre/post surveys and focus groups, indicate changes in knowledge and beliefs as well as the beginnings of behaviour change. There is early, solid evidence for the effectiveness of SESSIONS. Tuning In for parents and professionals are newer elements and although early indications are promising, more evidence is needed to test and improve these components. Feedback from parents is that the number of workshops needs to be increased. Incorporating peer co-facilitators is another new element that is currently being tested and has shown promising results in other interventions both internally within in Skylark and in the research literature.

Project outcomes and indicators include:

- ✓ Number of participants for each intervention component (SESSIONS, Tuning In)
- ✓ Key demographic information (age, gender, sexual orientation, language, race, specific target population/setting, etc.) regarding all participants which will be used to analyze data for differences in response
- ✓ % of youth demonstrating increased knowledge about drugs, where to get reliable drug information, having a reliable person to talk to about drugs
- ✓ % of youth who have learned decision making skills to avoid harm associated with substance use
- ✓ % of youth using learned skills to avoid harms associated with substance use
- ✓ % of parents and professionals who have increased their confidence in initiating conversations about drugs with youth, have confidence that conversations will benefit youth, have confidence in providing harm reduction resources and are knowledgeable about where to find accurate information
- ✓ % of parents and professionals who report likelihood they will use skills learned
- ✓ % of partners, able to continue delivering the intervention at the end of the implementation process
- ✓ the ability to sustain implementation with new partners through a licensing model at the end of the funding period

Investment

We are seeking funding from government and donors for \$2 million over 5 years. (See following section on financing needs).

In addition, we are working with LIFT Philanthropy Partners to incorporate a social enterprise model into our drug education program so that it can be scaled throughout Canada.

Evaluation Highlights

As evident in Table 21, after participating in SESSIONS youth rated significantly higher three statements assessing their awareness of drug-related effects ($p<.001$), ability to get reliable drug information ($p=.006$) and confidence that their decisions will reduce harm ($p=.027$). These are highly encouraging findings.

Table 21. Drug-related rating statements

Q3. Please rate...	n (matched)	Pretest		Posttest	
		% High	M (of 5)	% High	M (of 5)
Your overall awareness of drugs and their effects	97	58%	3.62***	73%	4.00***
Your ability to get reliable information at the right time	96	58%	3.61***	73%	3.92***
Your confidence that your decisions will reduce harms to yourself	93	69%	3.92**	73%	4.15**

** Statistically significance difference, where $p<.05$;

*** Statistically significance difference, where $p<.01$

As evident in Table 20, after participating in SESSIONS youth agreed significantly more often with three statements assessing their knowledge of drug information sources ($p<.001$), decision making about drugs ($p=.007$) and confidence in the quality of the information they receive ($p<.001$).

Table 20. Knowledge of reliable sources of drug information

Q2. How much do you agree or disagree with the following...	n (matched)	Pretest		Posttest	
		% Agree	M (of 4)	% Agree	M (of 4)
I know where to get reliable information about drugs	97	75%	2.92***	91%	3.28***
This information helps me make decisions about using drugs	94	81%	3.00***	91%	3.28***
I am confident the information is truthful	94	82%	3.04***	98%	3.54***

*** Statistically significance difference, where $p<.01$

Quotes from Youth who have taken SESSIONS:

"Now if I want to try a new drug or even a drug I tried before, I would research it first, make sure it's safe in combination with something or in a certain situation and then do it. I'm more cautious, now I make sure I know where it's from, who is giving, and who I would do it with."

"They [school] focus on the negatives; ignoring that drugs do have positives for some people and the reality that teenager do drugs. But at SESSIONS they don't say drugs are bad. They give us facts about drugs, but at the end of the day, it's our decision; they are here to educate us; so we are prepared if we were to do it; more in touch with reality."

Quotes from Staff at agencies where SESSIONS has been run:

"Youth experienced a non-judgmental, affirming atmosphere and showed gradual comfort and confidence in the development of critical thinking and decision-making skills."

"(I learned) how powerful, strong and resilient these youths are."

Quotes from parents who have taken Tuning In about what they learned:

"How to deal with my son and not push him away."

"Learning to speak to my daughter in a way information will sink in."

"How to help him find better channels for coping with life."

"Better knowledge of where to find resources or help."

DRUG EDUCATION FOR YOUTH BY



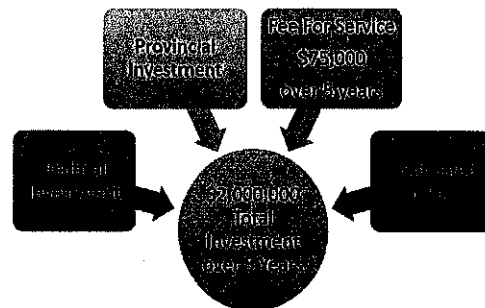
SKYLARK
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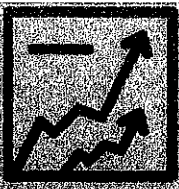
WITH A \$2 MILLION INVESTMENT OVER 5 YEARS



With a multi-level investment from federal, provincial and local governments in addition to agency donors and fee-for-service supporting this initiative, 3000 youth and families will be directly positively impacted through attending SESSIONS, Tuning In for Parents or Tuning In for Professionals.

Funding Aspiration





IMPACT ON YOUTH IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION



After participating in SESSIONS, youth rated significantly higher their awareness of drug-related effects, ability to get reliable drug information and confidence that their decisions will reduce harm.

After participating in SESSIONS, youth agree significantly more often that their abilities to get reliable information about drugs and to make decisions about using drugs has increased.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING...

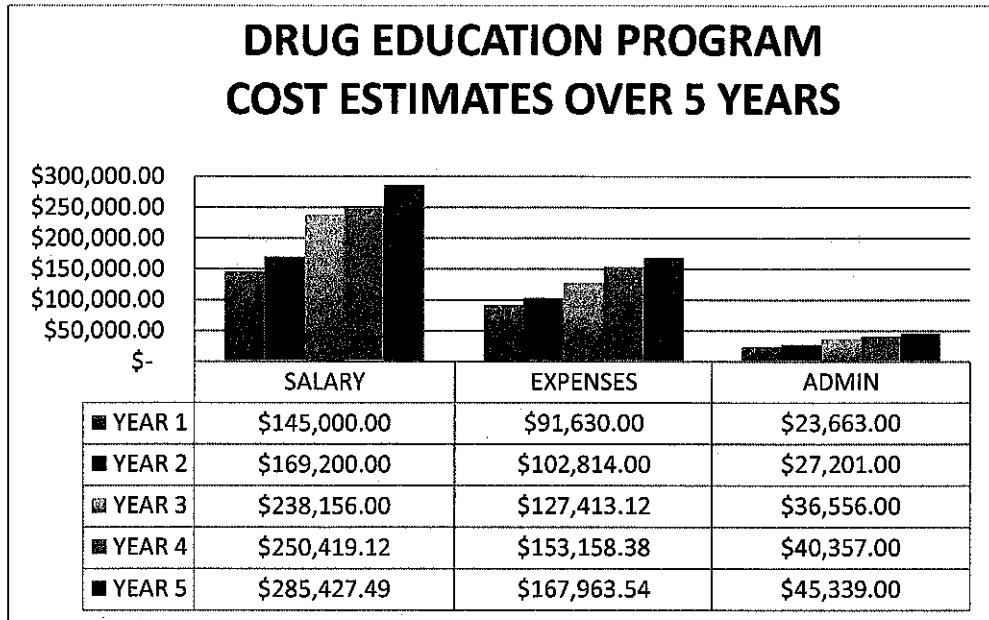
"Now if I want to try a new drug or even a drug I tried before, I would research it first, make sure it's safe in combination with something or in a certain situation and then do it. I'm more cautious, now I make sure I know where it's from, who is giving, and who I would do it with." - SESSIONS Participant

"[The] youth experienced a non-judgmental, affirming atmosphere and showed gradual comfort and confidence in the development of critical thinking and decision making skills." - Staff person where youth attended SESSIONS

"Learning to speak to my daughter in a way information will sink in." & "How to help him find better channels for coping with life." - Two parents who attended Tuning In for Parents

WWW.SKYLARKYOUTH.ORG

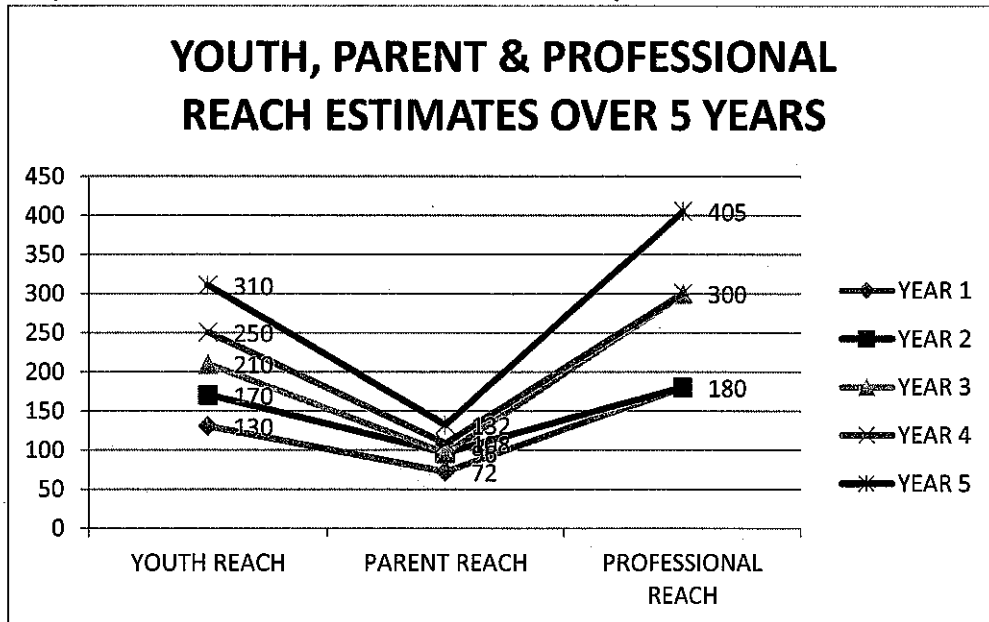
Financial Cost Breakdown



This chart shows an estimate of the costs of running SESSIONS and Tuning In over the next 5 years, including salary, administrative and costs of expenses.

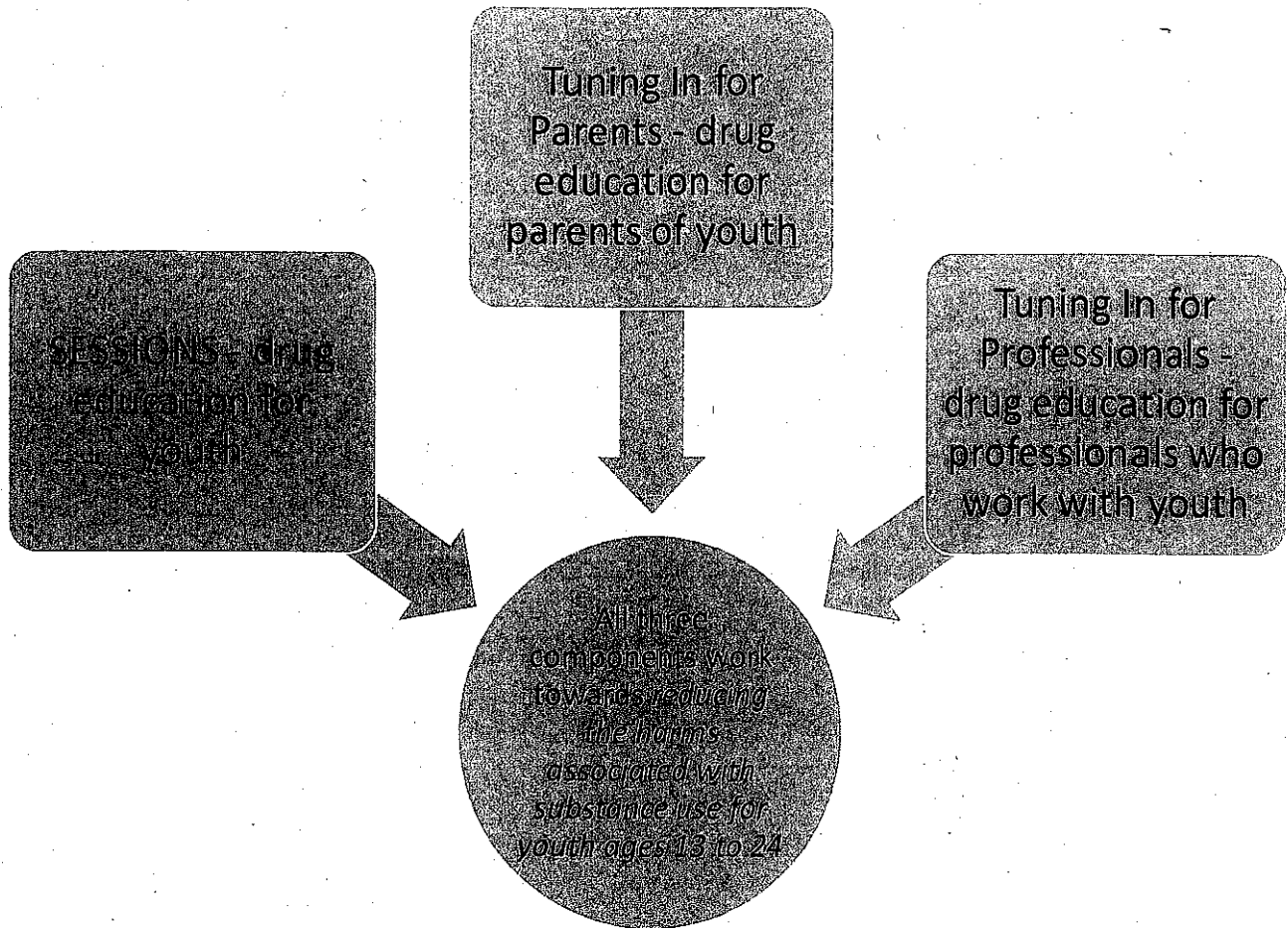
Yearly Totals
 Year 1: \$260,293
 Year 2: \$299,215
 Year 3: \$402,215
 Year 4: \$443,934
 Year 5: \$498,730

Impact: Estimated Number of Participants



This chart shows an estimate youth, parents and professionals we will reach each year through SESSIONS, Tuning In for Parents and Tuning In For Professionals.

Reach Totals
 Year 1: 382
 Year 2: 446
 Year 3: 606
 Year 4: 658
 Year 5: 847



For more information:

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