

Dawson College Shooting, September 13, 2006:

Evaluation of the Emergency Psychological Intervention Plan



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A very special thank you to all those who agreed to participate in remembering these tragic events: the students, the support staff, the teachers, the professionals, the administrators and the first responders and mental health professionals, the parents, and especially, the family of Anastasia De Sousa.



To the Honourable Jean-Marc Fournier,

Minister of Justice for Quebec

On September 13, 2006, an armed individual burst into Dawson College, killing one person, wounding 19 others, and subsequently killing himself. It was the third tragedy of this kind to occur in Quebec; a tragedy that has left its mark in our collective memory.

It was the hope of Dawson College, in accordance with its teaching mission, that an analysis of the intervention would improve the psychosocial support offered in the event that such an incident were ever to occur again.

It is in this context that the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) received funding in 2007 from the Government of Quebec to study the psychological impact of this dramatic event. In order to do so, a dynamic inter-academic collaboration was created with McGill University, the Université de Montréal and the Université du Québec en Outaouais, as well as with Dawson College. In addition to examining the psychological impact of this dramatic event on the population exposed to the event, the study allowed for the evaluation of the existing emergency psychological intervention plan and for the proposal of an intervention plan model for responding to similar situations.

Under the scientific direction of Dr. Alain Lesage, our team, made up of researchers from the Fernand-Seguin Research Centre of Louis-H. Lafontaine Hospital, the McGill Group for Suicide Studies and the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre, would like to present to you the following four documents:

- Evaluation of the emergency psychological intervention plan;
- Report on a study conducted with students and staff of Dawson College on the psychological impact of the incident and the search for support;
- SECURE (Support, Evaluation and Coordination United for Recovery and Education): a multimodal psychological intervention program;
- Summary and recommendations.

By presenting these documents, the associated researchers wish to bring the necessary information to the health, education, justice and public security networks so that they may intervene efficiently in the context of a dramatic event such as the one experienced on September 13, 2006 at Dawson College.

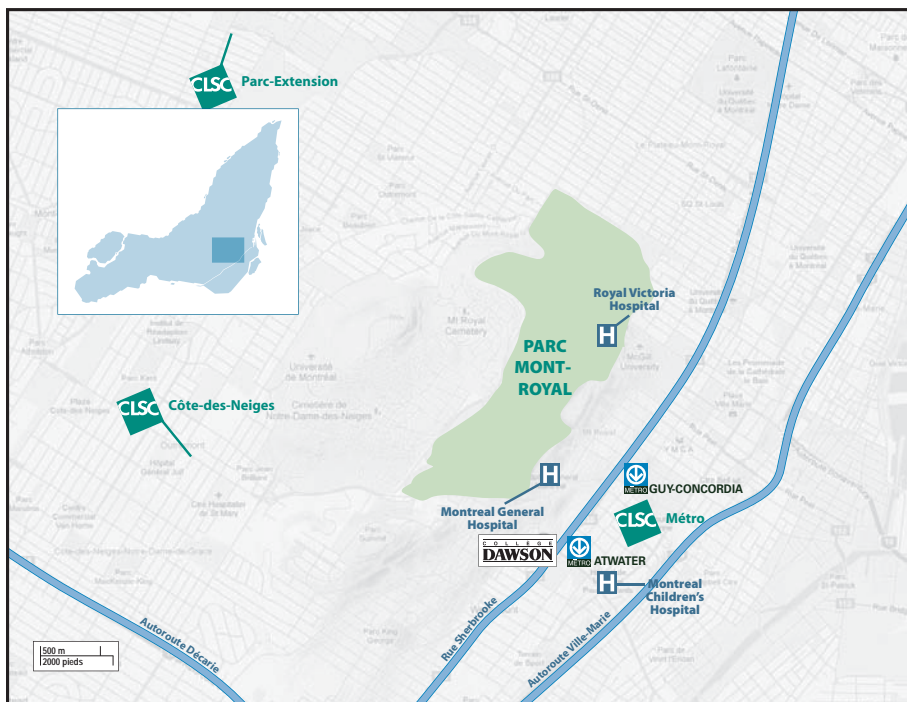
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The Evaluation of the *Emergency Psychological Intervention Plan* or *de Facto Plan*, provides an account of the way the psychological support services were organized after the September 13, 2006 Dawson College shooting. The project had received the approval of the research ethics committees at Dawson, the McGill University Health Centre and the Fernand-Seguin Research Centre of the Louis-H. Lafontaine Hospital. Data was gathered qualitatively, as this method is particularly suited to enable researchers to understand the social reality from the point of view of those who experienced it (Mayer and Deslauriers, 2000)¹. Key people involved in the organization of the psychological support as well as some of the mental health professionals who intervened at Dawson were interviewed. Twelve people, from the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC), the Dawson College administration, the Agence de santé et des services sociaux de Montréal, the Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC), the Centre de services sociaux et de santé (CSSS) de la Montagne and the CAVAC 24/7 team were interviewed individually or in pairs. In addition, approximately 30 Dawson and cafeteria employees were interviewed in groups. Students who had been injured, as well as some who had not, were also interviewed either individually or in pairs; some parents were also interviewed. We wish to thank everyone who agreed to participate in the research.

The interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The individual interviews lasted an average of one hour while the group interviews took 2 hours. The comments were coded by theme and subsequently analyzed.

The key players' descriptions of events were sorted according to actions and strategies, and analyzed in terms of the following factors: intentions, decisions, evaluation of needs, actions. These factors refer to the essential elements taken into consideration by the team leaders involved in the setting up of services. The team members work in different resources, but their goal was the same: to provide psychological support to the members of the Dawson Community. The period of study covers the 12 months following the shooting.

This document is structured chronologically and clearly illustrates the intensity of the interventions in the first few days after the shooting.



1. Mayer, R., and Deslauriers, J.-P. (2000) « Quelques éléments d'analyse qualitative ». In R. Mayer, F. Ouellet, M.-C. Saint-Jacques, D. Turcotte et al. *Méthodes de recherche en intervention sociale*: 159-189. Boucherville: Gaëtan Morin publisher.

Day 1

The speed with which the key players mobilized their respective resources proved to be critical in the delivery of psychological intervention.



WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2006

The first gunshots are heard at 12:41 p.m. Little information is available regarding the circumstances of the shooting: How many shooters are there? How many people are dead or injured? The cell phone network overloads quickly as people try to reach each other; it takes seven or eight attempts to get a line. This lack of information is paralyzing.

What Happened Next?

In the first hours after the shooting, the main activities revolved around gathering information, mobilizing resources including resources needed to provide psychological support and an intervention strategy, and the creation of a crisis management team.

Key Players

Four groups played major roles: the Dawson College administration, the Montreal General Hospital (MGH), the Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal (Agence SSSM), and the Crime Victims Assistance Centre (CAVAC). On September 13, these organizations relied on the Service de Police de la ville de Montréal (SPVM) and the media (television, radio and Internet) to obtain information.

- **Dawson College Administration:** In the initial confusion following the shooting, the College's administration tried to locate and regroup managers scattered throughout the area surrounding the College. A number of managers had remained inside the building until the evacuation was completed. Once the managers were regrouped, some were dispatched to the three hospitals where the injured had been transported: the Montreal General Hospital, the Jewish General Hospital and Hôpital Jean-Talon.
- **The Montreal General Hospital (MGH)/McGill University Health Centre (MUHC):** Two psychiatrists recognized the need to have people posted at the entrances of the hospitals to meet and direct the surge of people looking for information and support.
- **The Agence SSSM:** The Agence contacted the CSSS de la Montagne, which serves the area where the College is located, and evaluated the situation with the police to determine when the area would be secured.
- **The CAVAC's 24/7 team:** Six responders were ready to intervene in the minutes following the shooting.

Mobilization of resources for psychological intervention

The speed with which the key players mobilized their respective resources proved to be critical in the delivery of psychological intervention.

Each organization had access to responders specializing in psychological support: psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, nurses and mental health counsellors. Everyone understood that it was imperative to intervene with members of the Dawson College community, and this urgency guided them in the decision-making process.

- **The MUHC** focused on designating personnel to perform triage at the entrances of the MGH; rooms were identified where people could be directed according to their level of need; professionals were dispatched to intervene with families; and psychiatric evaluations were conducted when necessary.
- **The Agence SSSM** mobilized the CSSS de la Montagne, which identified available professionals; assigned additional resources to the Info-Santé helpline (a referral service that serves the island of Montreal); established links between the other CSSS, the Centres locaux de services communautaires (CLSC), and the Dawson College community and their families to ensure they were seen as a priority.

- **Dawson College:** the Human Resources Coordinator contacted Dawson's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and ensured that the EAP staff was ready to meet the needs of employees. With the approval of Dawson's insurance company, the EAP provider was asked to extend its services to all categories of employees. At 5 p.m., with members of the College's administration assembled in a temporary location, there is a spontaneous session of talking and listening, supporting and comforting each other.
- **The CAVAC 24/7 team** was ready to intervene. The Clinical Director communicated regularly with the SPVM, and awaited authorization to send a team to Dawson.

Less than two hours after the shooting, the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport and the Fédération des cégeps offered condolences and pledged their support to the College's administration. No request for support was made by the College that day, as the Administration was focused on the immediate crisis response.

Televised images show students and other people in a state of panic, running in various directions. Some ended up at the Montreal Children's Hospital, several blocks from the College, and others went in the direction of the Guy Metro station and Concordia University.

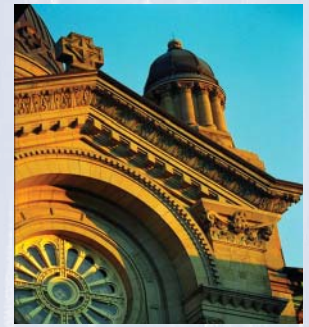
Types of intervention

- **The Agence de santé** was in contact with CLSC Métro and decided to send a support team to the College.
- **CLSC Métro:** Social workers and psychologists from CLSC Métro were the first mental health professionals to arrive on the scene. Wearing white security badges, they circulated on the streets near Dawson and Concordia to identify people in distress and help victims. The presence of around 20 identifiable responders near the site of the tragedy had a reassuring effect on people who were in a state of panic.
- **Concordia University** spontaneously opened its doors to people fleeing Dawson College. The University used the media to inform students that space had been made available there for those seeking a safe haven; food and drinks were provided, as well as bus tickets and the use of telephones. No formal psychological support was offered; students were helping other students. This safe haven functioned for two or three hours, as most students wanted to make their way home as soon as possible.
- **the Montreal General Hospital:** Three major actions were taken by the Montreal General Hospital to deal with the surge of people at the hospital. Two psychiatrists assumed a leadership role in 1) organizing services to reduce chaos; 2) organizing triage in two different rooms, according to their needs; and 3) adding staff to offer psychological support services during the time the Code Orange is active².
- **CAVAC 24/7 team:** Four or five hours after the shooting, the SPVM authorized the CAVAC 24/7 team to go to the SPVM operations centre (Service à la communauté – région Sud) where some witnesses had been taken. By the time the 24/7 team arrived, however, the students had already been released and had gone home to be with their families.

Debriefing by CSSS de la Montagne and CAVAC

Once the CAVAC responders returned to their offices at 5:30 p.m., they were debriefed by the clinical coordinator of the CAVAC 24/7 team. At the CSSS de la Montagne, the same process was taking place. The responders had met very concrete needs, but felt they had not accomplished very much. Some were frustrated by their inability to fulfill their role as "specialized resources in crisis intervention". They had only provided basic help to those in a state of panic, such as giving change for pay phones, providing information about bus routes, offering cups of coffee or lending cell phones. By 6 p.m., the debriefing sessions were over and everyone went home.

2. A Code Orange is called in the case of external disaster, where it is likely that the hospital will have to accommodate a larger-than-usual number of casualties transferred from the site of the disaster, along with a surge of family members, loved ones and other people affected by the disaster.





After reports in the media that casualties have been taken to the MGH, the hospital's telephone lines are overloaded.

Creation of a crisis management team

- The Agence SSSM, which was responsible for public security, was unable to establish contact with the administration of Dawson College.
- The creation of a crisis management team quickly became a priority for the administration of Dawson College. Spontaneously, and without going through formal channels, the administration asked for the assistance of two MUHC psychiatrists to direct psychological support services.
- A meeting was convened for the following day, Thursday, at 8 a.m.

Informing the public

At 9:15 p.m. on the evening of the event, Dawson College's Director General, the Director of the SPVM, the Coordinator of Urgence-Santé, and the Montreal General Hospital hold a news conference at SPVM police headquarters to report on the events of the day and give an update on the situation.

THURSDAY: THE DAY AFTER THE SHOOTING

Three factors contributed to the prompt implementation of the psychological support services

- The partnership to provide counseling and support between the Dawson College administration and the two psychiatrists from the MUHC, who offered support over the long term.
- The flexibility of the Agence SSSM, which adapted its intervention plan to meet the needs of the other groups while fulfilling its mandate as "regional coordinator for public security and health". Because of the expertise in posttraumatic intervention of the MUHC's Psychiatry department and its Anxiety Disorders Program, the Agence asks the CSSS de la Montagne to join the crisis management team rather than lead it.
- The decision to organize and offer psychological support services on-site at Dawson rather than the MUHC hospitals or the CLSC Métro, which are located close to the College.

The administration of Dawson College which made decisions after consultation with the MUHC and assistance from the CSSS de la Montagne, comprised the key players in planning services.

Re-appropriation of the College by the Dawson community

The main focus was to provide effective support to the students and employees. This was articulated by the Psychiatrist-in-Chief of the MUHC, and adopted by the crisis management team at the first meeting held on Thursday morning.

The return to school was planned in three phases, each of which required significant psychological support services:

- Friday, September 15, at 1 p.m., two days after the shooting: meeting with teachers and other employees;
- Monday, September 18: the entire College community was invited to return to the school, although no classes were held;
- Tuesday, September 19: classes resumed, providing an opportunity for teachers and students to meet in the classroom setting for the first time.

Excellent communication between the MUHC and Dawson College facilitated the planning and coordination of mental health services.

Day 2

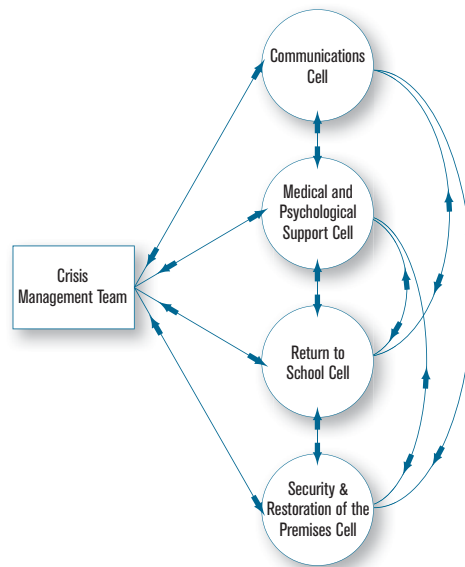
Excellent communication between the MUHC and Dawson College facilitated the planning and coordination of mental health services.

Structure of the crisis management team

The crisis management team was made up of four groups, each responsible for planning the activities required to ensure the return to school:

- Psychological support;
- Reclaiming of the facilities;
- Academic and pedagogical concerns and the resumption of classes;
- Media relations.

The following section refers primarily to the actions taken by the psychological support component of the crisis management team.



As early as Thursday morning the crisis management team began to organize psychological support activities including the assembly of resources required (...)

Structure and modes of psychological support

As early as Thursday morning, the crisis management team began to organize psychological support activities, including the assembly of resources required for the meeting with employees scheduled for Friday, September 15 at 1 p.m. at Dawson College.

The team recognized that it was unable to predict the number of requests for support that might be made by students and employees. At first, approximately 30 mental health professionals were recruited, from the CSSS de la Montagne, the MUHC and Dawson's Employee Assistance Program (EAP). After pooling the available resources, the crisis management team concluded that the mental health professionals from the three CLSCs of CSSS de la Montagne and the EAP had the training and experience required to handle the situation.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15

MUHC preliminary meeting with the responders

During the morning briefing, a short training session was offered to the mental health professionals. This session reviewed the types of interventions that might be required, and outlined the available resources including office space. Identification badges were distributed as well. An intervention model was chosen, using an acute stress approach and countering the avoidance reflex³. The recommendation was to avoid "pathologizing", thinking that most people would probably not require more formal intervention. The MUHC's decision to use this theoretical model supplanted the evaluation of the presence of pathologies. A member of the crisis management team suggested that the entire community keep three words in mind when dealing with each other and with the students: patience, flexibility and sensitivity.

The decision was made to offer both individual and group support. In addition, a list of psychological support services available close to the College was provided. Fortunately, Dawson College is geographically very close to a large number of front-line resources, including hospitals and psychiatric services, as well as those of the CLSC Métro.

3. The concept of avoidance: avoid thinking about the trauma, avoid people or places that are associated with it; indifference, reduced affect, incapacity to see the future positively.

Day 3

The overriding message to Dawson employers was that they would be supported and supervised. The Director General spoke «openly and from the heart.»

Meeting with teachers and employees in the College gymnasium

On Friday afternoon, the Director General, accompanied by his administrative team and the MUHC psychiatrists, met with employees. It was an important meeting and the group was well-prepared, according to some of the survey respondents who attended. The overriding message to Dawson employers was that they would be supported and supervised. The Director General spoke openly and from the heart. More than 800 employees (teaching and non-teaching staff) were present at that meeting, as well as about 30 responders.

The goals of the meeting were to provide accurate information about the event, to allow employees to retrieve their personal belongings, and to inform them of the protocol for the return to school. The meeting also served to help employees recognize that they also had been affected by the traumatic event and would need to also focus on their own healing process. A number of mental health professionals were present and prepared to meet with the employees. A psychologist, who is also a Dawson faculty member provided information about methods of intervention which could be effective in trying to help colleagues and students. Having a teacher speaking to other teachers was helpful. A leaflet outlining possible disorders subsequent to a traumatic event was also distributed. It offered advice on ways to provide support. The leaflet was later made available on the College's website.

During interviews with employees, several people indicated that they were uncomfortable consulting mental health professionals on the premises; they feared that their colleagues and/or supervisors would be made aware of their distress.

Role of the Web and the media

- The media (*The Gazette, La Presse, CBC, CTV, etc.*) kept the community informed about the three phases of the return to school.
- The College's website was an important tool and was used by the College to communicate with employees, students and their parents, throughout the process.
- Informal information and support networks were rapidly organized between teachers and their students using electronic means.

The Agence SSSM played a supporting role during this period. It provided the CSSS de la Montagne with a sufficient number of responders for the Friday meeting. In addition, it provided documentation to the responders on procedures to follow, information on posttraumatic stress, etc.

By Friday afternoon, most teachers and employees believed that they would be ready to welcome the students back to Dawson the following Monday. The sentiment that the College was entering a healing process was being expressed in the community and reflected on the College website.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY

Days 4 and 5

Planning for the students' return to school

- The goal was to make the students' return to school as smooth as possible.
- Throughout the weekend, the two MUHC psychiatrists acted as consultants to the College administration and together, they coordinated the implementation of the psychological services to be offered on Monday
- One of the MUHC psychiatrists described the type of reactions that were likely to occur (crying, shock, etc.) and what could be expected in the following days. The psychiatrist reminded everyone that these reactions would decrease over time. He mentioned that 2% of the student population could be afflicted with posttraumatic stress disorder. He underscored the importance of the support and accessibility to services. The simple fact of knowing that these services were available would help reassure students.
- The MUHC took steps during the weekend to find 65 mental health professionals to support the approximately 3,000 students expected on Monday. In addition, schedules were made, rooms were designated and ID cards were prepared.
- A leaflet and posters were printed, detailing the locations where counselling would be available, where personal items could be retrieved, etc...
- At the same time that the crisis management team was preparing the return to school, students were expressing their wishes by organizing their own re-entry, led by the Student Union. The students planned to converge on the school at the symbolic hour of 12.41 p.m., the time at which the armed attack began five days earlier.
- The Clinical Director of CAVAC and the 24/7 team were invited by the MUHC to join the responders for a meeting, scheduled Monday morning at 8.30 a.m. at the College.

The goal was to make the students' return to school as smooth as possible.

Maintaining control

Offers of help were being made to the crisis management team from different services and professional groups. It was decided to decline these offers, as it could become difficult to manage and coordinate the large number of offers of partial and temporary availability on a daily basis. By maintaining control of the care and the professionals providing it, the team was certain that all responders would work in a consistent manner and would transmit common messages.

The choices made by the MUHC psychiatrists were questioned by some doctors with regard to the approach used to manage the crisis. The doctors met with the Dawson administration to inform them of these concerns, and after some reflection and discussion, the College reaffirmed its confidence in the expertise of the MUHC psychiatrists and elected to continue working with them.

Media

Activities surrounding the return to school on Monday were publicized in print and electronic media, as well as on the College's website.

Day 6



The College was the main site for psychological support during the first two weeks after the shooting.

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

The College was the main site for psychological support during the first two weeks after the shooting. The rationale for this decision was to facilitate the reintegration of the community into the College, thus countering the avoidance reflex. Furthermore, it was felt that the students would be more likely to accept psychosocial help at Dawson rather than in a CLSC or the Allan Memorial Institute of the MUHC, given the negative bias associated with mental health facilities. The decision to offer support at Dawson College was made despite the major space constraints.

The intention of the crisis management team was to make the return to school a meaningful and memorable event in the re-appropriation of the College by the entire community.

- At 10.45 a.m., students removed the hundreds of bouquets of flowers and objects that had been placed at the entrance by Montrealers wishing to express their grief and support, creating a shrine at the entrance. This took on ceremonial and symbolic significance
- At 11 a.m., hundreds of students entered the College through the de Maisonneuve entrance which leads directly into the Atrium, while others entered via the Metro-level doors. As they walked in, employees, onlookers and neighbours from the surrounding area burst into spontaneous applause in an emotional show of support for the returning students.
- At 12.41 p.m., a second symbolic entrance was made by thousands of students through the same doors the assailant used to gain access to the building five days earlier on Wednesday, September 13. Members of the Dawson College women's hockey team led the way in the memorable procession, wearing team uniforms in the school's colours. Students, parents and employees wrote or drew on the panels set up in the College. Within three hours, the panels were covered with comments, most of which expressed the feeling the killer would not win, and that the community would emerge stronger. According to the Dawson administration, the ability of students to express themselves spontaneously appeared to have had a cathartic effect and facilitated the reintegration.

Evaluation of needs

At 11 a.m., between 60 and 70 mental health professionals, identified by red armbands, circulated in and around the College. Thirty minutes later, the Director of the MUHC Department of Psychiatry contacted the MUHC hospital network to send 30 additional responders in anticipation of the emotional impact that the second entrance at 12.41 p.m. would bring. They were from the CSSS de la Montagne, CAVAC, Dawson's EAP and clinicians from Out-Patient Psychiatry at the MUHC, including the Anxiety Disorders Program. The crisis management team informed the responders that regardless of their training, everyone was needed and they had to work together.

Meeting with a mental health professional

- Some responders were assigned to one of 15 classrooms reserved for consultations.
- Other responders circulated through the College and the surrounding area to talk with students and invite them to meet with a responder in one of the classrooms if they felt it could be helpful.
- Sessions with students, parents and employees were carried out in groups or individually. Some students asked for advice on dealing with friends in need.
- At the end of the day, a form was quickly put together to record the necessary information in order to conduct follow-up. This form (name, birth date, postal code, required for follow-up with the CLSCs, etc.) would make it possible to track the approximately 300 people who sought consultation to assess their needs.

The CAVAC 24/7 team

CAVAC responders attended to people in the building who were alone, upset or crying; whether they were students, employees, or members of the Montreal community. They explained CAVAC's role during these interventions which were carried out informally, and not in an office setting.

The 24/7 team accompanied students who had witnessed the crime when they were interviewed by police detectives to give statements.

Reviewing the efficacy of the intervention

At the end of the day, the group in charge of organizing psychological support concluded that the return to-school event had been a success and that the model of intervention used was effective.

Approximately 5,000 people came to the College between 9 a.m. and 8 p.m. These included students and employees who wanted to reintegrate into the school environment and see their friends and colleagues. Some students were accompanied by friends and parents. Parents wanted to speak to other parents or sought advice for themselves or their children. There were also a number of onlookers who wanted to visit the premises, and others who wanted to offer their help or services, etc. Responders kept a list of people who had consulted, flagging those who may have needed a follow-up.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 19: CLASSES RESUME

Support for students by teachers

On Tuesday, September 19, classes resumed. The administration had asked teachers to broach the subject at the beginning of class, to invite students to express their thoughts, to speak about their experience, their feelings, etc. They had also been told to look out for signs of distress and to refer students to the psychological services. They were asked to take attendance and take note of absent students. Some teachers found these tasks difficult to carry out, as they felt uncomfortable talking about the events or reporting absences. While some teachers felt powerless in the face of what had happened, others were able to talk with their students and were able to facilitate the return to a normal situation.

Psychosocial support in the library

Mental health professionals continued to be available but were relocated to cubicles in the library, as the classrooms were needed for teaching. Large numbers of students continued to consult with about 10 mental health professionals, including some from the EAP. They dealt with a variety of cases including a teacher who had a panic attack when entering the classroom, students who feared other assailants during their breaks, people experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.

The library was chosen as the location for intervention to reduce potential stigmatization for those seeking psychological support services. However, during interviews with students and employees, several cited a lack of privacy when lining up in the library. For this reason, some people chose to consult with mental health professionals off-campus.

Starting on September 19, a list was kept of those who sought help. This list included the name of the client, the name of the mental health professional they saw and a severity scale based on the following criteria:



Day 7

The administration had asked teachers to broach the subject at the beginning of class, to invite students to express their thoughts, to speak about their experience, their feelings, etc.

At least one psychiatrist was available to handle matters involving medication and diagnoses.

- Level 1: Need to be followed closely;
- Level 2: Need to be contacted for a follow-up;
- Level 3: No follow-up required

Each member of the crisis management team was responsible for the responders within its area of responsibility. The Coordinator of Human Resources at Dawson ensured that psychological support was organized to allow for an efficient rotation of responders by planning break and meal times. At least one psychiatrist was available to handle matters involving medication and diagnoses, providing supervision to the responders who came from approximately 10 different services.

The funeral of Anastasia De Sousa was held on Tuesday, September 19. Members of the Dawson community were permitted to attend the funeral, but the choice was left to each individual. And STM (Société des transports de Montréal) bus transported Dawson students to the funeral home. This was followed on Wednesday by a ceremony, after which campus life was expected to start to return to normal.

Week 2



ONE WEEK AFTER THE SHOOTING

Other forms of support

- On Wednesday, September 20, a healing ceremony organized by a former College Director General, was held at Saint James Church. This was an opportunity for the Montreal community to share feelings and express their support.
- On Thursday, a meeting was organized for parents of students at the Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom synagogue located near the College. The meeting provided parents with details of the plan the College had put into place regarding the academic aspects of the school year and support services offered to students. CLSC Métro representatives and police officers also took part in the meeting.

Telephone follow-up

- Responders from the CSSS de la Montagne and CAVAC communicated with those who had been identified as needing follow-up. More than 400 people were called in the first two days. Some were referred to family doctors, psychologists at the school and/or CAVAC. When students were not at home, the responders spoke with their parents or siblings.
- The Student Services department set up consultation rooms and implemented an appointment system so that the CSSS and EAP mental health professionals could meet students and employees. In-office consultations began on September 25
- Responders from the CLSC Métro, the EAP and CAVAC together answered phone queries from worried parents. They tried to reassure parents by normalizing their feelings, dispelling rumours, assuaging their fears about safety, etc.

Injured Students

For students who were hospitalized, the crisis management team relied on the psychosocial services of the hospitals. However, the main priority had been to care for physical injuries and psychological support was not adequately addressed. Psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers visited the hospitalized victims, leaving their business cards, but no thorough evaluation of their condition was done. No follow-up was offered to students during their recovery, or afterwards upon their return to school. The services available at Dawson had been greatly reduced by the time some of the injured students returned weeks and months after the event.



Cafeteria Staff

Cafeteria employees worked for a private firm with its own Employee Assistance Program. The day after the event, the firm's Human Resources department and its EAP provider organized a meeting with the cafeteria employees but did not arrange for follow-up care. Some employees took medical leaves of absence, but the EAP did not follow these employees even when requests were made. The Dawson College administration was under the impression that the cafeteria company had taken care of the psychological support needs of its employees and therefore Dawson did not offer psychological support. Cafeteria manager and employees indicated that they would have liked to be invited to meetings with the College administration, as the team had experienced these events and felt they were part of the Dawson community.

Dawson College Guidance Counsellors

The crisis management team considered the College's four guidance counsellors to be victims of the event and therefore they were not asked to intervene during the first two weeks. Some counsellors indicated that they would have wanted to be informed and to have the opportunity to work with the mental health professionals. They felt excluded from the development of the psychosocial intervention plan.

The emergency situation was over. Friday, September 22, there was a progressive drop in the number of requests for psychological support. The responders moved from the Library to a few offices that were made available elsewhere in the College. Consultations took place by appointment.

Rules of operations

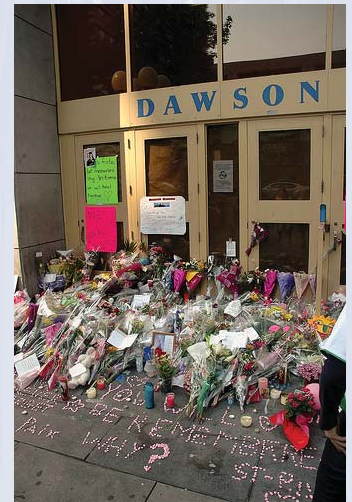
On Friday, September 22, the 24/7 team withdrew from the intervention as CAVAC's mandate is focused on crisis intervention, and not therapeutic follow-up. The MUHC team also withdrew from active participation at the College and resumed its role providing second- and third-line service, but it continued to support the CSSS de la Montagne.

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29 TO MID-OCTOBER

The crisis management team made the decision to significantly reduce the number of responders at the College. Support was redeployed to first- and second line mental health services in the area. The CLSC Métro agreed to keep two responders at the College for six months.

Other forms of support

- **To Dawson College** -The administration received messages of support from individuals and organizations around the world.
- **To students from teachers** -Several teachers played an important role in their students' recovery by providing support and encouragement that facilitated their re-integration. For example, some teachers organized dinners with students so everyone could share their thoughts and feelings. These activities were successful in smaller programs where people know each other well.
- **Between students** - Informal support groups were formed, some of which also included teachers. These groups stopped meeting over time.
- **For Parents** — At the information meeting on Thursday organized for parents, the presence of the police precinct commander, Dawson College administration and the MUHC, as well as responders from the CSSS de la Montagne, appeared to have had a reassuring effect. Parents were able to meet with mental health professionals to express their concerns about the health and safety of their children.

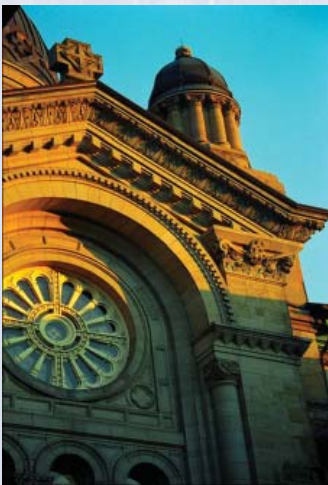


Week 3

The CLSC Métro agreed to keep two responders at the College for six months.

The majority of cases handled by the CSSS de la Montagne dealt with depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, and the inability to concentrate.

Year



16

Dawson College Shooting,
September 13, 2006:
Evaluation of the Emergency
Psychological Intervention Plan

Issues and underlying strategies for the management of resources

The crisis management team was faced with four factors in offering psychological services: 1) lack of space, 2) the existence of similar services outside the College; 3) the significant reduction of requests for help as time went on; and most importantly 4) the need to complete the re-appropriation of the College by all members of the community..

Assessment of needs

The frequency of assessment of needs varied during the first two weeks. Needs were evaluated on an hourly basis on Monday, September 18. Afterwards, psychological support needs were evaluated daily and services adjusted according to demand. In the second week, the needs were assessed regularly but less frequently.

Philosophy underlying the psychological interventions

During the first two weeks, the goals and messages transmitted to responders were similar to those conveyed on the Monday, when students returned to school. The objectives were:

- to establish links;
- to reassure and normalize symptoms;
- to provide information about physical reactions to acute stress.

The interventions required the responders to use their therapeutic skills to deal with clients displaying acute stress symptoms. The crisis management team continued to use the same intervention model used in the days following the event. While there was no specific expertise required in treating posttraumatic stress, mental health professionals were encouraged to work collaboratively, regardless of their institutional ties. The crisis management team strongly felt that that psychological support should be accessible and free of charge to all students, and that support should be provided over the long term.

THE ELEVEN MONTHS FOLLOWING THE EVENT

Psychosocial services continued to be offered at Dawson College but on November 14, the services were reduced from 5 to 2 days per week.

The majority of cases handled by the CSSS de la Montagne dealt with depression, anxiety, sleeping and eating disorders, and the inability to concentrate.

Instructions were given to the three CLSCs of the CSSS de la Montagne to prioritize all requests made by Dawson College, students and their families.

There was no formal mechanism to contact students who were absent. Students were encouraged to seek help. Teachers were asked to follow up and offer support to students who were no longer attending class. Very few of the students contacted the administration to explain why they were dropping their classes⁴

4. The number of requests for authorized absences was 18% higher in 2006-2007 (the academic year of the shooting) than in the previous year. An authorized absence has the effect of erasing the failures from a student's record.

Short-term and medium-term follow-up by local health services

The groups providing psychological support during this phase were:

- The EAP provider for Dawson College employees;
- Social workers from CSSS de la Montagne, for students at the College;
- First line psychosocial services from CLSC Metro;
- Specialized services such as those of the MUHC Adult Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic. As the CLSC responders left the College, Dawson's guidance counsellors resumed their role and met with an increasing number of students;
- Specialized services such as those of the MUHC Adult Psychiatry Outpatient Clinic.

As the CLSC responders left the College, Dawson's guidance counsellors resumed their role and met with an increasing number of students.

DECEMBER 2006

Many employees indicated that they had found the holiday season to be difficult. Having returned to their duties at the College less than one week after the shooting, they felt they had not taken time to attend to their own needs. The holiday break allowed employees to address their needs, exteriorize their fears, etc. After the holidays, mental health professionals providing psychological support to Dawson College noted an increase in requests for help. The College administration anticipated this reaction and set up support services for employees and students for the January start of classes. A similar reaction occurred after the study break in March, and the number of hours of intervention was increased to meet the demand.

JANUARY 2007

Some of the students who had been injured returned to Dawson on a full or part-time basis as early as the Fall 2006 semester. On January 16, the College administration held a meeting for all students who had been injured and who were returning to the college for the Winter semester, and their parents. The primary goal of this meeting was to welcome them back and to gain a better understanding of their needs and concerns, as well as to outline the special services that had been put in place to facilitate their return. In the course of the meeting, the administration learned that the injured students were experiencing dissatisfaction with the Indemnisation des Victimes d'Actes Criminels (IVAC). The students revealed that some psychological services were not being covered, and overall, IVAC was not very responsive to the victims⁵.

Mobilization of resources

Even after several months, troubled students continued to request psychological support at the College. The large-scale mobilization of resources that took place on College premises had been scaled back, and it was difficult for students to obtain services through the health network, which is not very accessible unless entered through the Emergency Department. It became more difficult to refer Dawson students to the necessary resources, and services provided by the College were inadequate; as there is a one-to-two meeting limit per student. Psychologists at the College could not offer therapy and students were referred to therapists, but many did not have the financial resources required nor the insurance coverage for reimbursement⁶.



Even after several months, troubled students continued to request psychological support at the College.

5. It would have been beyond the scope and mandate of this study to audit each individual case, so IVAC was not asked why some of the claims were refused

6. Note that since 2008, the College has a full-time psychologist on staff.

Relations with the ministère de l'Éducation

The ministère de l'Éducation remained cooperative and helpful in the aftermath of the tragedy, as it had promised in the first hours following the shooting. It reimbursed the expenses incurred. According to the Ministère's assessment, only two academic days had been lost. The College administration appreciated this, as it meant the semester did not need to be extended during this difficult time.

Commemoration

On the one-year anniversary of the shooting, a day of commemoration was organized. Spaces were made available where people could gather at 12:41 p.m. and share their experiences, etc. Then a tree was planted in the inner courtyard of the College: Anastasia's tree.

Evaluation of the psychological interventions

During the commemorative day, Quebec's Premier confirmed plans to increase the gun control measures. He also announced that the Ministry of Justice had agreed to finance this study on the evaluation of the psychological impact and intervention after the shooting on September 13, 2006, at Dawson College.

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DAWSON



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du Centre universitaire de santé McGill
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of the McGill University Health Centre



Centre de recherche
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Animés par l'espoir