



OPINION

February 2016

School Perseverance: The part we all must play

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Hooked on School Days is in full swing across the province. At this time, it's important to ask ourselves whether our collective efforts have had a positive impact on the academic success of youth in our society? Are we winning the battle against dropping-out of school? That's a difficult question that can't be answered with statistics alone. But, sometimes, a quick anecdote can provide some answers.

At fifteen, Joseph, a withdrawn kid with a difficult history, was having problems at school. He had a friend who attended a YMCA program after being suspended. His friend's mother urged Joseph's mom to seek support from the YMCA. So, last year, one of our youth workers followed up with Joseph to help him find himself and thrive.

Last summer, Joseph was chosen to take part in a canoe trip—ten days in the great outdoors, hiking, paddling and camping in Ontario's Algonquin Park. Completely out of their comfort zone and with no access to technology, Joseph and eight other teens had to quickly learn to adapt to their environment and overcome challenges as they arose. After being put to the test, Joseph became more mature and made great strides. By boarding a bus to northern Ontario one morning, this young man's life had been changed forever.

But Joseph's story does not end there. As summer drew to a close, he asked to meet with some of the people in charge at the YMCA. His mother came with him to the meeting, at which he revealed a big surprise: he wanted to make a \$200 donation to the organization. Joseph had spent the rest of the summer working and collecting empty bottles and cans. Why? He wanted to give back to those who had given him such an amazing experience and to make sure that other young people would receive a similar opportunity.

Joseph's story shows that it is not only schools that must encourage students to persevere. It is the responsibility of society as a whole. We all must do our part. Joseph chose to give back to his peers not only because of what he learned in school or the support he received from his YMCA youth worker or even the daily encouragement of his parents. His life was changed by all those efforts combined.

This week, as part of Hooked on School Days, people all over Québec are coming together to praise the incredible achievements of individuals and the invaluable work of school boards, schools, community organizations, parents and volunteers. As a society, we must once again make the success of each and every one of our young people our priority. Join us as we celebrate youth who are persevering in school and life. Encourage a young person today.

**Name has been changed to protect the identity of the student.*