

BY YOUTH FOR YOUTH: CODA TO BULD A GENERATION OF YOUTH DRUG ABUSE ADVISORS THROUGH A NATIONWIDE YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

In 2008 the Council on Drug Abuse is launching one of its most exciting programs; the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Composed of regional youth representatives from all over Canada, the YAC will act as an advisory body to CODA staff and as CODA youth representatives in their respective administrative regions in each and every Canadian province and territory. Totalling 104 administrative regions nationwide, the Youth Advisory Council will be composed of 104 youth representatives representing Canada from coast to coast.

For the first year of the program, CODA will be building the Ontario Youth Advisory Council as a pilot and a foundation for the national council. As Ontario is composed of 16 administrative regions, the Youth Advisory Council will be composed of 16 youth advisors, one per administrative region. The YAC will serve as an advisory body that will assess and evaluate the relevance of CODA programming to Ontario youth, improving CODA's strategies and methodology.

As a YAC member, youth will be actively working on addressing issues of youth drug abuse directly. In addition to advising CODA about the relevancy of its programs, YAC members will coordinate a major youth messaging campaign that will have a different face each year. Each of the Council members will coordinate the annual event of choice in their respective area. For 2008, the Ontario Youth Advisory Council will be coordinating **JAM OUT DRUGS**, a high school dance and fundraiser for CODA, that will be a key messaging vehicle for preventing drug abuse among Ontario youth.

Each year during National Drug Awareness Week, all YAC members will be invited to attend a conference that will address drug abuse among youth, best practices in community outreach and awareness raising techniques, event planning and fundraising in their community and skills building. As a product of this conference, the YAC youth will output a communication paper on best practices for preventing drug abuse amongst youth. In addition, they will set the agenda, strategic plan and major campaign event for the following year.

The YAC will increase CODA's visibility and outreach to Ontario's diverse youth population. Since CODA programs are geared towards youth, the YAC will be composed of youth representatives from all over Ontario. As drug abuse is a regionally variant social phenomenon, a YAC reflecting that diversity in its composition will be able to provide CODA with further insight into youth needs and concerns as is specific to their respective regions. By developing the YAC, youth involvement in CODA programs is expected to increase. Creating a YAC will stimulate a sense of youth ownership of CODA programs, increasing CODA's outreach.

***If you are interested in becoming a YAC member, or want your school to get involved, please contact the Programs Manager at 416-763-1491 x 223 and stay posted for further announcements in upcoming CODA Reports.**

***If you are interested in sponsoring and supporting the Youth Advisory Council, please contact the Executive Director at 416-763-1491 x 221.**