

## **The Wayfinders Program (formerly Bright Futures Program)**

### **Project Target Risk Factors:**

Healthy Eating  
Physical Activity  
School success (high school drop out risk)  
Tobacco Reduction  
Mental Wellbeing

### **Target Population:**

Teens (14-17 yrs) and young adults (18-20 yrs)

### **Project Lead(s):**

Karen Guenther (Program Manager); Meghan Cook (site coordinator); Awit Marcelino (volunteer coordinator)

**Community:** Maples (NW Winnipeg)

**RHA:** Winnipeg

### **Project Partners:**

Province of Manitoba, The Winnipeg Foundation, Seven Oaks School Division, Winnipeg Regional Health Authority/Seven Oaks Healthy Living

### **Project Details:**

A multiple event and ongoing project

### **Description:**

The Wayfinders Program grew out of the research findings published by the Manitoba Centre of Health Policy that documented the correlation between life-long health and educational attainment. The 2004 report documented staggering high school drop out rates (upwards of 50%) as early as grade 9 in low socioeconomic Manitoba communities. These findings, further study of high risk students' needs, as well as the evidence about how to address these needs, led the school division to partner with like-minded groups who share these concerns. Wayfinders' Programming targets adolescents living in low-income communities in NW Winnipeg by inviting students to engage in outside-of-school mentorship programming that support success in high school and successful transitions to post secondary education following high school graduation. The program provides each student with a student parent support worker serving as the child's advocate at school, within the program, and larger community. Volunteers provide homework support and mentorship 6 days/week for 52 weeks of the year. Students commit to 3 hours weekly of homework support, 4 hours monthly of mentorship, community service, post secondary exploration, regular school attendance and a continuous grades improvement strategy. Students may earn \$1000 (held in trust) for each successful grade level completion and, \$600 annually to support the cost of mentorship opportunities (ranging from music lessons, participation on an athletic team, attending live theatre or other arts, participation in a weekly

community kitchen activity, membership at the Wellness Institute). Healthy nutrition, active living and balanced life choices are significant aspects of the program's daily structures. These activities, and the certainty of daily healthy snacks and a hot meal, are offered to our students and supported by the Healthy Together Now funding. A consistent healthy living framework is expected by students as regular parts of the Wayfinders Program: daily healthy snacks; daily hot meals; weekly community kitchen activities (planned and cooked by students); and daily physical activity mentorship activities. See <http://www.wayfindersmanitoba.com/> for further information.

**Time:**

Completed program year 3, ongoing programming.

**Objectives:**

Improve the high school graduation rate and successful transitions to post secondary education/training in a Manitoba low socioeconomic community.

**Planning Supports:**

The Manitoba Centre for Health Policy Research linking lifelong health to educational attainment (2004 & 2010); other North American programs that have positively impacted high school graduation rates (“I have a Dream Foundation”; Harlem Children’s Zone; 826 National, Pathways to Education).

**Results:**

79.34% of students enrolled in the Wayfinders Program (2010-2011) are on track for on time graduation. All but one Wayfinders student is registered and participating in high school. Current enrolment: 198 students (grades 9 – 12)

**What worked:**

A strong, structured commitment to mentorship and mentorship opportunities; adding one grade cohort each of the first 3 programming years (allowed for a gradual development and evolution of all aspects of programming; and maintaining a 20:1 student/staff ratio that encourages relationship building between our staff, students, students' families, students' teachers have been positive factors.

Student surveys conducted at the start and conclusion of each of our 3 programming years have shown a growing commitment by students to engaging in the planning and offering of the daily healthy snacks menu, and the planning, shopping and preparation of all hot meals. At least 5 days of each 6-day programming week include the opportunity for students to engage in Active Living Mentorship activities. At the conclusion of our third programming year, each Active Living activity was fully subscribed to (all spots taken). During planning for each new programming year, student leaders take an active role in the planning of an increased number and variety of healthy living activities. Students openly profess the benefits personally gained through the healthy choices offered to them at the Wayfinders Program. Wayfinders students readily share the affordability of these options with their families.

**What didn't work and any changes made:**

Volunteer recruitment through print and television media

**Volunteers:**

Just under 100

**Facilities:**

Off campus program centre

**Equipment:**

Current technology, fully equipped kitchen

**Other:**

Student enrolment in the Wayfinders Program is limited only to the adolescent children of low-income families living within the Program's geographic catchment area (Elwick School Community postal codes and Watson Street postal codes)

**Total Costs:**

The total costs of the Healthy Living Activities, Healthy Snacks, Hot Meals, and Community Kitchens: more than \$20,000 in the last programming year.

**Materials developed for your program:**

1. [About Wayfinders Winter 2011](#)
2. [Brochure](#)

**Contact Information:**

Community: Maples

Region: Winnipeg

Contact person: Karen Guenther

Email address: [karen.guenther@7oaks.org](mailto:karen.guenther@7oaks.org)

An alternate contact or for information on Healthy Together Now programs please contact Evan Zarecki - [ezarecki@wrha.mb.ca](mailto:ezarecki@wrha.mb.ca)