



Because an adult role model is a plus...

“Every child is one caring adult away from being a success story.” This quote from Josh Shipp, an acclaimed speaker and youth expert, is particularly fitting for the theme of this year’s Hooked on School Days (from February 12 to 16): ‘Your actions, a + in their success’.

Relationships are powerful in young people’s lives and help them learn, grow and thrive. It has been clearly shown that children who do well usually have at least one stable and committed relationship with a caring adult. Along with a child’s father or mother, these relationships may be with an uncle, grandmother, family friend—or a youth worker or mentor...

We see this at our YMCA centres. Many kids and young people come here, whether it is for our TeenZones or academic support programs. Some of them are facing serious problems at home, at school or in their neighbourhood, such as dysfunctional families, poverty, cross-cultural conflicts, or a lack of positive role models. Often, they are on their own trying to deal with domestic violence, bullying, addiction, prostitution, or street gangs. Others are simply trying to find themselves. Whatever the situation, these youth are all in danger of being marginalized, or worse.

And yet... So many of our youth defy statistics and avoid the at-risk behaviour that we might expect from them. I am deeply convinced that one reason for these success stories is that they had a caring adult by their side. Having personal interactions with a positive adult role model who gives them advice, support and attention, and participating in interesting and rewarding activities, creates a climate of trust and a sense of belonging that encourages youth to talk about their problems, both big and small.

And this kind of support works! For example, the YMCA Plusone Mentoring program is a proven early intervention model. After only six months of mentoring, 86% of youth improved their behaviour and 64% developed their skills, talents and positive relationships.

Being there for youth at the right time strengthens their self-confidence and self-esteem. What’s more, youth who have a positive relationship with an adult role model tend to have fewer conflicts at home, attend school more often and get better grades. In the long term, they gain the tools they need to overcome adversity and avoid at-risk behaviours. As many of our youth have told me, they become ‘better versions’ of themselves.

Imagine if every kid benefited from positive relationships at school, at home and in their community. Imagine how resilient, vibrant and open-minded they would become. Imagine if they grew up to be healthy adults who believe in themselves and who are motivated to achieve their dreams. Imagine how much impact they would have on our communities.

And now... Imagine if you were responsible for this impact. Imagine being the person you would have wanted by your side at critical moments in your adolescence.

Hooked on School Days give us an opportunity to celebrate all those who support youth. But it is also a time to act. How can you be a + in a young person’s life?

Someone who cares is often all a young person needs to make positive choices and succeed.

Stéphane Vaillancourt
President and CEO, The YMCAs of Québec