

SHINE ... A New Prevention Program Aimed At Preventing Youth From Running Away and Falling Victim to Sexual Exploitation!

Montreal, February 14, 2018. Today on Valentine's Day, the Missing Children's Network unveiled, **SHINE** (*Self-esteem, Healthy relationships, Independence, No means No, Empowerment*), a new interactive prevention program tailored for students in Grades 5 & 6, and Secondary 1. These workshops will be offered in both English and French to schools throughout the province of Quebec and the contents will be customized to reflect the individual needs of the Native communities and at-risk youth.

SHINE is designed to help students build a positive self-image, recognize the components of healthy and egalitarian relationships, learn to set boundaries, thus protecting them from abuse, aggression and exploitation. Seminars will also be presented that will allow parents, legal guardians and educators to gain deeper insight on issues facing teens today and will provide them with tools and resources to prevent their children from falling victim to sexual exploitation. An online directory of services and resources for youth victims of sexual exploitation will soon be available, as well as a turnkey tool kit for educators.

"Every year in Quebec, on average, 5,000 cases of runaway youth are reported to law enforcement. Our experience has shown that **one in every three runaways** fall victim to sexual exploitation. This province-wide program was designed to protect youth and help them make safer choices. We are immensely grateful to our partners that include law enforcement, child welfare agencies and youth-serving organizations who joined forces and shared their expertise in the development of **SHINE**. As well, we wish to sincerely thank our generous financial partners who are funding this important initiative", declared Pina Arcamone, Director General of the Missing Children's Network.

During the press conference that was held at Collège Notre Dame, Sue Montgomery, Mayor of the borough of Côte-des-Neiges/Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, reiterated the importance of sensitizing youth about the hidden dangers of running away and their right to say NO to anyone and in any situation that leaves them feeling scared, threatened or uncomfortable.

Eric Hauptman, a father whose teenage daughter ran away in 2016, delivered a poignant message of hope and reminded parents to never give up on their children. "Keep a solid link with your children; reassure them of your unconditional love and that you will always be there to listen to them, no matter what they are living. When the foundation is solid, everything is possible!"

The Missing Children's Network concluded today's event by proudly introducing their dynamic Youth Ambassador, Ludivine Reding, a young and talented actress who is currently starring in the lead role of the hit television series *Fugueuse*. "I am so excited to be associated with this wonderful organization!" exclaimed Ludivine Reding, "My goal is to sensitize youth about the reality of running away and prevent them from falling victim to acts of aggression or exploitation."

The creation and implementation of **SHINE** was made possible thanks to a substantial grant by an anonymous donor, as well as a generous contribution by the Air Canada Foundation. This initiative will allow the Missing Children's Network to increase the personal safety of more than 40,000 youths over the next three years.

About the Missing Children's Network

Founded in 1985, the **Missing Children's Network** is the only non-profit organization in Quebec that is dedicated to the search for missing children and the prevention of their disappearance. Regardless of the motive for the disappearance, from running away to a parental abduction or criminal kidnapping, the Missing Children's Network's team supports, accompanies and counsels families whose child is missing.

In addition, the team works closely with law enforcement agencies, child welfare organizations and the media in order to recover these children and bring them home safely. Since its creation, the Missing Children's Network has assisted law enforcement in recovering 1,340 children and has educated over 185,000 students on how to stay safe in their day-to-day lives, both on and offline.

The Missing Children's Network is a frontline partner of the **AMBER Alert** program in Quebec and a recognized partner of the **National Centre for Missing Persons and Unidentified Remains (NCMPUR)** of the RCMP.

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