

As the fall season begins, the Cadet Program turns its emphasis from summer camps to recruitment and regular training activities.

Strategies for recruiting in schools

Most CIC officers are aware of increasing competition for young people's time—from other youth-centered organizations, part-time jobs, community service, organized sports and local school extra-curricular activities. For this reason, you must be more strategic than ever when recruiting.

To recruit youth, you have to access them. Since young people spend most of their day in school, this article will outline some strategies for contacting schools, meeting with school personnel and emphasizing the many benefits youth will gain from being a cadet.

Before you start, you need a clear understanding of the students you want to recruit.

PROFILE OF YOUTH FOR RECRUITMENT

The students with the highest potential for engagement in Cadets are 12- and 13-year-olds in Grades 7 and 8. In all provinces, these young

people are considered elementary school students even though, in some cases, they are housed in a school that offers Grades 7 to 10.

Present the Cadet Program in such a way that the principal will believe that having students in the program will improve her/his school.

The elementary school program is significantly different from secondary (high school) programs in that elementary school students are enrolled in a program, while secondary school students take courses that are part of a permanent record.

Senior students in a Kindergarten to Grade 8 school are the oldest and most experienced students in the school and are often its leaders. Grade 7 and 8 students in a Grade 7 to 10 school are the youngest and smallest students in a much larger student population.

Grade 9 is considered one of the most anxiety-causing events for students coming from an elementary school. There is an intense desire to belong and not stand out from their peers. Adolescents face anxiety about their physical appearance, new situations, judgment by others (peers and adults), threats to their self-esteem, and what they will do in the future.

MAKING A CONNECTION

In my experience as a principal and teacher, I have learned that the Cadet Program is virtually unknown by many adults in our communities and particularly in our schools. I believe that emphasizing what you do well and raising the visibility of cadet youth on a regular basis will help recruit new candidates.

To recruit successfully, CIC officers need to make a connection between the benefits and rewards of being in Cadets with both the students' needs and the goals and expectations of local schools and provincial ministries of education.

For example, Cadet Program aims and core values have strong linkages to major initiatives of Ontario's Ministry of Education, such as health and fitness; identifying bullying, intimidation, harassment and abuse and teaching students and staff how to deal with them; technical training; trades training and community service.

How could a school *not* be supportive of the Cadet Program's core values of loyalty, professionalism, mutual respect, and integrity? Or how could a school *not* be supportive of some of the most important benefits of being in Cadets, such as self-confidence, self-discipline and self-awareness?

ACCESS TO SCHOOLS AND STUDENTS

Getting access to schools and students is a critical part of recruitment. You must become well informed about local schools and also be well prepared when meeting with school staff or parent groups.

What do you need to know?

These facts about Ontario schools may serve as an example.

- There will be declining enrolment across the province for the immediate future. This means that in Ontario, your targeted cohort of 12- to 13-year-olds will diminish in numbers for the next decade.
- Virtually all principals and vice-principals in our schools are female, as are most teachers. This trend is becoming more pronounced in the secondary schools.
- Remembrance Day is the only service conducted in publicly funded schools.
- Guns or weapons (models or real)—on display or as part of a ceremony—are not permitted in elementary schools and most secondary schools because of zero tolerance policies. Principals, teachers, and parents

are not aware of the Cadet Program's "arm's length" from the military.

- Principals are regularly out of their schools, attending meetings.
- Principals spend most of their days dealing with personnel, parents, and pupils.

MEETING THE PRINCIPAL

Some of the above facts may be relevant to your locality; some may not. Regardless, when recruiting, there are some basic steps you should take before/when meeting with the school principal:

- Don't arrive unexpectedly at a local school. Make an appointment, and plan on a maximum of 15 to 20 minutes of the principal's time.
- Do your homework on the school—visit its website, or the board's website for information.
- Find out the multi-cultural mix of the students, or if there are classes for students with special needs. What is the major focus of the school? What big events are planned?
- Be prepared to outline which students you want to access, for how long and have copies of what you want to present on hand.
- Present the Cadet Program in such a way that the principal will believe that having students in the program will improve her/his school and that students who are cadets will enhance the school's reputation in the community.
- Try to find some school activities where cadets can play a role and remember that in Ontario at least, any volunteer hours count towards a school credit. Perhaps cadets can serve as school crossing guards, read to younger students, or take part in Remembrance Day services, Canadian Flag Day celebrations and school anniversary celebrations. Or perhaps

they might serve as volunteers for sports events and field trips, place flags on stage for assemblies and take part in band concerts and assemblies. They might even sponsor and run a robotics club or competition.

The important thing is to look for opportunities to show off your cadets in schools. They will rarely let you down. And recruitment will be a lot easier! ✱

Michael Harrison was an educator with two Ottawa school boards for close to 40 years. He is a former teacher, vice-principal and principal and was seconded to the Ministry of Education for six years. He is currently a site administrator for the Ottawa Carleton District School Board and a part-time professor for the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa. Mr. Harrison will present some more ideas for increasing the visibility of Cadets in your community in our next issue.

