

## The Benefits and Economic Value of Community Recreation: Proposal for an Analytical Framework Based on an Exploratory Study

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### **ABSTRACT**

This article presents the results of an exploratory study on the impacts of a program provided by a community recreation centre. The study proposes an analytical framework to assess the impacts of recreation on young people and refers to product and impact concepts developed by Marée (2005). The proposed framework includes dimensions that are sufficiently precise to grasp the impacts of community recreation centres (benefits, savings, impacts on individuals, life settings, and society), yet also sufficiently broad to allow for the evaluation of the impacts of other social endeavours.

### **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article présente les résultats d'une recherche exploratoire qui étudie les effets d'un programme d'un centre communautaire de loisir. La recherche propose un cadre d'analyse des impacts du loisir chez les jeunes qui prend appui sur les concepts de produits et d'impacts développés par Marée (2005). Le cadre d'analyse proposé comporte des dimensions suffisamment précises pour appréhender les impacts des centres communautaires de loisir (bénéfices et économies pour les individus, les milieux de vie et la société), mais il est aussi suffisamment large pour évaluer les impacts d'autres entreprises à vocation sociale.

### **Keywords / Mots clés**

Community organization; Social performance; Economic value; Recreation /  
Organisme communautaire; Performance sociale; Valeur économique; Loisir

## **INTRODUCTION**

The importance of community intervention to prevent school drop-out<sup>1</sup> (Cook, 2008; Mercier, 2000) and its influence on social relations and academic perseverance (Roy, 2003; Bourdon, Charbonneau, Lapostelle, and Létoumeau, 2007) has already been shown. The same can be said for the contributions made by Quebec's *centres communautaires de loisir* (CCL) (community recreation centres) to the prevention of social problems, the networking capabilities of people and families, and community development (Fréchette, 2000). However, the economic value of the impacts of community recreation continues to be a subject of debate, especially as conventional financial indicators do not provide information on the spin-offs of programs offered by community and social economy organizations. Despite the imprecision and difficulties inherent in the notion of social utility (Marée, 2005), as well as the pitfalls presented by its evaluation and measurement, this study aims to offer indicators for understanding the impacts of community recreation and, more generally, to contribute to the development of a framework for analyzing the performance of social organizations.

This article is organized as follows: We will first present the general issue of the value of the impacts of recreation. We will then develop an analytical framework and present the program studied as well as the methodology used. Next, we will present and discuss the data collected and proceed with an analysis of the economic value of the program under study. In conclusion, we will identify possible avenues for future research.

## **WHAT IS THE VALUE OF RECREATION?**

In this article, recreation refers to community-based educational or sports activities that contribute to the overall development of individuals and the ability of citizens to take charge of their local community (Fédération québécoise des centres communautaires de loisirs, 2001, p. 40). Thus, recreation has a value for individuals and groups and also constitutes a means of improving the functioning of societies. These views are in line with the findings of many studies.

In his meta-analysis of studies on the effects of recreation on young people, Torjman (2004) shows that recreation has positive spin-offs for the social relationships between adolescents and their peers and teachers. Torjman also points out that recreation has an impact on the behaviour of young people with regard to the prevention or reduction of negative behaviour, stress and petty crime, alcohol or drug consumption, and eating disorders. Recreation can also stimulate the adoption or maintenance of positive behaviours such as involvement in volunteer activities and peer and mutual support, as well as increased self-esteem, and it has positive effects on social participation, social cohesion, and intercultural understanding.

Torjman's (2004) assessments concur with those reported by Fréchette (2000); namely, that recreational activities aimed at developing the potential of individuals, supporting life settings (e.g., school and family), and, more generally, improving life conditions for vulnerable groups are beneficial (Fréchette, 2000). There is therefore a consensus that the enrichment of the social and educational capital of settings constitutes one effect of recreation in a local community or institutional setting (Fréchette, 2000, 2002).

The studies of Browne, Byrne, Roberts, Gafni, and Whittaker (2001) also discuss the effect of recreation in the context of social-community interventions and its economic value. These authors argue that recreation interventions help children who have emotional problems and whose parents are on social

assistance maintain their social, physical, and academic skills at a level comparable to those of so-called healthy children. These interventions also impact mothers with mental health problems, for example, by helping them to reduce their use of medication, to make use of counselling services, or even to go to food banks.

**Table 1 - Spin-offs of recreation**

<b>Problems encountered</b>  School absenteeism Consumption of alcohol/drugs Anti-social behaviour Isolation School drop-out/social exclusion Vandalism Attention deficit Aggressive behaviour Negligence and lack of hygiene  Sources: ACLP (1998); CPRA (1998); Bouchard et al. (1994); Krichbaum & Alston (1994); NRPA (1994a,1994b); Montelpare et al. (1993); Crompton (1993); Shilts (1991); Torjman (2004); Beauvais (2001).
<b>Personal skills and attitudes promoted among the young participants</b>  Self-esteem/self-confidence Leadership Improvement of school grades Development of professional or personal goals Crisis management Perseverance Hygiene habits Mutual support Development of life habits compatible with work and social life Positive relationship with adults  Sources: ACLP (1998); Driver et al. (1991); Haggard & Williams (1991); Sonstroem (1994); Fréchette (2000); Beauvais (2001).
<b>Collective effects identified</b>  Feeling of belonging to the school community Keeping young people in the regions Positive school climate Network of mutual academic support Recreation in rural communities Positive representation of recreation in the regions Improved representation of teens among adults (teachers, parents, and townspeople) Support for vulnerable families  Sources: Fréchette (2000; 2002); Fréchette et al. (2002 and 2003); MELS (2005).

Lastly, US studies (CPRA, 1998) indicate that recreational programs have preventive effects on young people with social problems, allowing for substantial savings in social programs. Table 1 presents a summary of studies on the spin-offs of recreation for young people based on different problem areas.

In light of the consensus on the benefits of community recreation, and given the investment that such intervention requires, the need to measure its economic value has become increasingly apparent (Quarter, Camichael, Sousa, & Elgie, 2001). The fact that conventional financial statements do not reflect the economic and social performance of nonprofit businesses has been generally recognized for some time; it is also acknowledged that there is a lack of standardized and generally accepted performance indicators for social organizations comparable to the financial indicators used to measure for-profit businesses (Renaud & Brésil, 2006). Authors have even criticized conventional accounting for creating the perception that collective businesses are consumers of resources rather than creators of value (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003a).

There is therefore a consensus on the need to develop accounting practices, indicators, and measures that adequately reflect the characteristics and specificities of social economy organizations (Bouchard, Leblanc, & Michaud, 2005). In this context, it is important to underline the efforts that have been made to identify social and economic indicators (CSMO-ÉSAC, 2004, 2007) as well as the work dedicated to the development of an analytical framework that can be used to identify the basic parameters for measuring the social utility of businesses in the social economy (Gadrey, 2003 and 2004; Bouchard, Fontan, Lachance, & Fraisse, 2003; Bouchard, Bourque, & Lévesque, 2000). Finally, the application of a strategic approach and a performance-based management system in nonprofit organizations represents another way of evaluating the social economy and contributes to creating a bridge between management sciences and the social economic sciences (Renaud & Brésil, 2006; Shwu-Ing & Jr-Mong, 2008). However, there is still substantial work to be done in terms of developing a "social accounting" system (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003b).

## **A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING THE COLLECTIVE IMPACTS OR SPIN-OFFS OF COMMUNITY RECREATION IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ECONOMIC VALUE APPROACH**

### **The analytical framework of Marée (2005)**

Collective impacts refer to the advantages that communities draw from the actions of a social program, including positive effects on the public budget, improved functioning of the job market, or strengthened social links (Marée, 2005). These impacts justify the existence of public policies in support of social economy corporations; their study allows for a comparison of the returns on investment of the sums allocated in order to promote the optimal distribution of public funds. Collective impacts can be direct, in which case the public programs or policies bring results for the people targeted, or indirect, meaning that the programs or policies have consequences (adaptability, productivity, greater human capital, improved job market) which, in the short or medium term, affect people or organizations that are not the direct beneficiaries.

Marée (2005) also suggests that social programs generate three "products": a main product (a job, for example, in the case of a work integration program), support products (e.g., an increase in family income), or derivative products (e.g., collective well-being). Marée associates three categories of impacts with these products:

- impacts related to the program as such (impacts on the economy, avoidance of expenses, impact on the public budget, increase in social capital);
- impacts attributable to the organization's activity (e.g., local development); and,

- impacts generated by the organization's production and methods (economic and social innovations, increased productivity).

According to Marée (2005), a measure is a quantitative estimate of the impact based on indicators. An indicator designates a non-monetary value of the impact, while a measure (or value) refers to the expression of this indicator in monetary terms. Some impacts can be measured while others cannot; the latter can thus only be expressed qualitatively or in non-monetary quantitative terms.

Lastly, Marée (2005) evaluates collective impacts according to the economic value approach; that is, based on the market price or the consent to pay individuals for non-market goods, with the consent to pay being generally determined through surveys with individuals. This approach has conceptual problems (that of the non-determination of preferences, in particular) and raises methodological issues, but it retains a certain potential for assessing the value of non-market goods (Marée, 2005). However, while the economic value approach can be a reliable tool for evaluating non-market goods and collective goods, in particular, it alone does not suffice in terms of clarifying decisions pertaining to public matters. Marée thus favours the development of approaches based on non-monetary indicators of non-market production and multi-criteria analyses, a path that has been relatively disregarded to date.

### ***The analytical model of community intervention through recreation***

Based on the summary of the spin-offs of recreation established in Table 1 and the concepts and framework developed by Marée (2005), we established the following model (Figure 1):

**Figure 1 – Analysis model of community intervention through recreation**

PRODUCTS			
IMPACTS	Individual	Family/school	Community
Savings			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drop-out</li> <li>• School abandonment</li> <li>• Employment programs</li> <li>• Social assistance program</li> <li>• Premature pregnancy</li> <li>• Vandalism</li> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Social decay</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Suicide</li> </ul>
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Skills development</li> <li>• Socialization</li> <li>• Persevering in school</li> <li>• Employability</li> <li>• Increase in level of income</li> <li>• Improved quality of life</li> <li>• Absence of dependence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Environment climate</li> <li>• Increase in family income</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Mutual aid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health and collective well-being</li> <li>• Social solidarity</li> <li>• Educational capital</li> <li>• Decrease in economic dependence on government transfers</li> <li>• Increase in the active population</li> <li>• Increase in total earnings and average income of the population</li> <li>• Law and order</li> </ul>

The framework summarizes the impacts reviewed and presents them by referring to the hypotheses developed by Marée (2005):

1. Community recreation generates direct and indirect *products*; that is, for the individuals targeted by the activities, their life settings (family, school environment), and the broader community. These products can be observed in the short, medium, or long term. The notion of *product* makes it possible to situate the *impact of recreation* at one of the three levels of analysis: the individual targeted by the program, their family or immediate environment, or the extended community from which they come.
2. The *impact* element refers to the idea that *recreation* generates *savings* (e.g., savings of funds otherwise spent on the education of young drop-outs, employment programs, social assistance programs) and *benefits* (e.g., personal well-being, increased employability, improvement of health and collective well-being).
3. The *benefits* are observable at each of the three levels of analysis but are generally difficult to quantify in monetary terms. The *savings* are, for their part, normally realized at the level of the community and are consequently measurable; it is acknowledged that an individual or family can invest monetarily in a private intervention (consultation, therapy, etc.). However, given that community recreation primarily affects the most vulnerable individuals and groups, we postulate that *savings* at the individual and family level are non-existent or, at best, minimal.

## **CASE STUDY**

The community recreation centre, Service d'animation des jeunes de l'Outaouais (SAJO), which offers programs for young people, is one of 83 centres communautaires de loisir (CCL) (community recreation centres) in the Fédération québécoise des centres communautaires de loisir (FQCCL). CCLs are organizations dedicated to the development of individuals, families, and the community through community recreation, popular education, and community action. By encouraging the active participation of its users, these centres allow users to discover their qualities and skills, experience solidarity, and organize in order to promote the social development of their milieu.

Founded in 1970, SAJO operates in the rural region of the Petite-Nation in Outaouais within the Papineau Regional County Municipality (Papineau RCM). The Papineau RCM comprises 18 towns and has no highway infrastructure. Most of its towns have fewer than 1,000 inhabitants and none has more than 5,000 inhabitants (Duval & Gagnon, 2006). Since the mid-1980s, the region has experienced an exodus of young people. Subsequently, the proportion of people aged 34 and under has dropped drastically: of the 51% represented by this group in 1986, only 36.6% remained in 2001 (Duval & Gagnon, 2006).

SAJO's mission is to promote a positive life setting for all, and in particular for people going through difficult life situations that are likely to destabilize them with regard to their family life, social integration, or personal development. In concrete terms, the centre implements activity programs that call on many disciplines and apply various educational and pedagogical strategies.

### **The emergence of the Bouffée d'oxygène (BO<sub>2</sub>) program**

Over the course of the year 2000, recreation workers in the Papineau RCM observed the following: recreational activities for adolescents of the Petite-Nation region were limited and transportation services were non-existent. These findings brought to light the insecure conditions faced by individuals and families, the isolation of the population, and the lack of available resources to organize group activities or counter the exodus of young people.

The directors of the local school board (Commission scolaire au Cœur-des-vallées, CSCV) were also concerned about the situation of young people, and decided to invest in special projects to motivate young people and involve them in various forms of learning (Savoie-Zajc & Lanaris, 2002). This resulted in SAJO's mandate to develop a program for adolescents in the Papineau RCM. The Bouffée d'oxygène (BO<sub>2</sub>) program was thus created, with one of its components (the Kamis project) being offered at the Louis-Joseph-Papineau High School in Papineauville. SAJO provided a facilitator to create and lead sports and recreation activities at the school during free time; that is, during recess, at noon, after school, and on weekends. The project enjoyed tremendous success. Over the course of the 2004–2005 school year, the BO<sub>2</sub> program recorded 10,482 sign-ups (SAJO, 2005): nearly 60% of students in the school participated in organized activities during their lunch hour, and approximately 35% of students participated in at least one extracurricular activity in the evening that same year (SAJO, 2007). In 2008, the number of sign-ups rose to 23,459 (SAJO, 2008).

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **General approach**

The objective of this study was to identify and evaluate the impacts of the BO<sub>2</sub> program to broaden our knowledge of the performance of social organizations.

The study focused on individuals because the program's activities were easier to define at the individual level. More precisely, we sought to identify the impacts and products generated by the program by studying the life paths of five young people who participated in the program.

### **Data collection**

Three data collection tools were used in the study: non-structured interviews, a discussion group, and document analysis.

The interviews were conducted with two workers from the community recreation centre and one administrator from Louis-Joseph-Papineau High School, where the program took place. The interviews aimed to gather the respondents' perceptions of the spin-offs of the program. The respondents were encouraged to express their views on how the program had affected young people, the school, and the community.

Holding a discussion group is a method largely used in the framework of exploratory studies (Morgan, 1997). The technique consists of bringing people together and stimulating a discussion by starting from a group interview guide touching on the themes and subthemes retained in the study and then drawing up a partial and later a global summary analysis of the discussion (Simard, 1989). The main objective of the

discussion group was to identify the paths of different young people who had been active in the BO<sub>2</sub> program. The group was composed of five representatives from the school (the principal and four teachers) and one worker from SAJO. The discussion lasted a little over two and a half hours. At the request of the researchers, the group identified five young people who had participated in the program. In choosing the five cases, participants were asked to adhere to two requirements: 1) choose cases that presented different situations; that is, young people with different problems (learning disabilities, social integration problems, etc.) and 2) choose three cases involving a girl and two cases involving a boy. The sample is decidedly biased given that the cases were selected on the basis of particular characteristics responding to specific objectives (Mayer & Ouellet, 1991); also, the choice of the subjects was based on "expert opinion" (Lefrançois, 1991), in this case the school and community representatives, because the latter were considered to be in the best position to identify the cases to be studied. This approach is, however, justified by the exploratory nature of the study.

To ensure reliability, the interviews were recorded and transcribed; the discussion group was led by three individuals, and notes were compared and discussed.

Lastly, we analyzed internal SAJO documents, statistics, and reports of the Cœur-des-Vallées School Board, as well as general documents (results of national censuses from 2001 and 2006, statistical bulletins on education, budget regulations for school boards established by Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, and information documents on job assistance and social security programs). The goal of this documentary analysis was to document the impacts observed and to collect data that would make it possible to determine the economic value of these impacts.

Despite the methodological precautions taken by the researchers to ensure the reliability and validity of the data collected, the limitations inherent to this research must nevertheless be recognized. First, it should be noted that it is impossible to isolate the impact of a recreation program from that of other organizations or people involved in a young person's life, such as school, family, and other groups. Moreover, no control group was used in this study (that is, one group having undergone a community-based intervention and the other not) in order to evaluate the real impact of the BO<sub>2</sub> program and provide a comparison over time (before and after) (Duncan & Magnuson, 2003). Also, it was impracticable to take into account the characteristics of the young people (e.g., mental health problems) and their surroundings although it is recognized that students' networks (family, friends, and others), the mobilization of school teams, and a positive relationship between young people and the institutional system contribute significantly to preventing school drop-out (Beaumont, Bourdon, Couture, & Fortin, 2009; Vultur, 2009; Cook, 2008; Marcotte, Royer, Fortin, Potvin, & Leclerc, 2001; Rousseau, Tétreault, Bergeron, & Carignan, 2007; Molgat, 2007; Bourdon & Vultur, 2007). Another limitation concerns the impossibility of generalizing the results due to the small number of cases studied. We believe, however, that the exploratory nature of the study explains this limitation and justifies the publication of the results. Lastly, the degree of savings realized is based on the hypothesis that there are public programs that aim to minimize or abate the effects of school dropout (adult education and employment assistance programs in this study). Because it is impossible to confirm that public programs exist for other problem areas, or that these are sufficiently financed, the quality of the calculation of savings is strongly compromised.

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### Benefits of the BO<sub>2</sub> program for the community and the school

The documentary analysis indicated that the general situation of the Papineau RCM improved slightly between 1996 and 2001, and that this progress accelerated somewhat between 2001 and 2006. The data from the last national census showed, in particular, a decrease in the ratio of economic dependency on government transfers and an increase in the active population (see Table 2).

**Table 2 - Socio-economic data for the Papineau RCM**

	1996	2001	2006
Average income of the population aged 15 years and over	\$19,394	\$21,578	n/a
Economic dependence on government transfers	24.0%	23.4%	21.7%
Median income of families	\$40,544	\$44,775	\$47,380
Median income of men aged 15 years and older	\$24,013	\$25,983	\$25,385
Median income of women aged 15 years and older	\$14,257	\$16,920	\$17,314
Active population	8,720	8,880	10,335
Employed population	7,505	7,970	9,420
Participation rate	53.4%	53.1%	56.0%
Employment rate	45.9%	47.7%	51.1%
Unemployment rate	13.9%	10.2%	8.9%

Based on the school board's annual reports, there was progress at the Louis-Joseph-Papineau High School at various levels (decrease in the drop-out rate, vandalism, drug use, etc.).

It is recognized that the improvements observed do not result solely from the implementation of the BO<sub>2</sub> program. However, the 2005–2006 Annual Report of the CSCV makes explicit reference to the contributions of community organizations such as SAJO to such progress. The discussion group participants also confirmed SAJO's contribution to the improvement of living conditions in the region and at Louis-Joseph-Papineau High School. In fact, SAJO was perceived as the key link to a holistic approach to supporting young people.

The data collected during the interviews and discussion group show that the BO<sub>2</sub> program had positive spin-offs on parent-child relationships, the resilience of children living in difficult settings, the climate at the school, the students' overall motivation to go to school, the students' relationships with teachers, and the spirit of mutual support at the school. The program's contribution to the socio-professional integration of young people was underscored and many of the program participants went on to pursue postsecondary education. Although the program was only one of many influences (teachers, social workers, etc.) on these young people, there was a distinct drop in absenteeism and school drop-out rates, while participation in extracurricular activities increased; the school environment subsequently became more stimulating.

### Benefits of the BO<sub>2</sub> program for the young people studied

The impacts of the BO<sub>2</sub> program were also noticeable in the five cases studied. The results obtained from the discussion group revealed that the program enabled three of these young people (cases A, B, and C)

to pursue and obtain a high school diploma in the regular school system; reduced the harmful effects of having dropped out for another young person (Case D) by giving this person the tools necessary to integrate into the job market; and helped a fifth young person (Case E) to overcome major behavioural problems. The following sub-sections present a narrative description of the path taken by each of these five young people. It should be noted that the following data come solely from the discussion group and that the young people represented by the five cases were not interviewed

### **Case A**

The first case involved a young person (hereafter referred to as “Case A”) whose hyperactive tendencies were controlled by medication. This student was rarely absent from school and displayed a strong need to be active. As this student had been subjected to harassment at elementary school, he/she had become quite intolerant as a teenager. Nevertheless, Case A felt constantly under attack and was always on the defensive. This student’s relationships with peers were hostile and he/she tended to be aggressive. In terms of school performance, Case A was not without intellectual resources, but his/her marks were low. Case A’s behaviour could not be explained by his/her family environment, but the CLSC (local community service centre) nevertheless offered follow-up support to both the family and Case A.

When Case A began high school, he/she took part in a support program for students who were experiencing difficulties, contributed to the development of the student radio station, and joined a student exchange program. Case A had problems with social integration. This student demonstrated leadership skills but was not very open to other people’s ideas and showed even less tolerance when his/her ideas were challenged, in which case he/she would become verbally aggressive. Because of this behaviour, Case A was forced to leave the student exchange program against his/her will and not without some fuss. In referring to this, one participant in the discussion group said, “We had a rough time of it!”

The BO<sub>2</sub> program reached out to Case A and those around this student noticed a significant change in his/her behaviour. This young person, whom the respondents described as a “time bomb,” became much more sensible and reasonable. Moreover, this student’s school marks improved. This change was immediately attributed to the BO<sub>2</sub> program and its flexibility. While participating in the program, as elsewhere, Case A sometimes displayed inappropriate behaviour and mood swings, but also showed a strong willingness to participate in teamwork. The BO<sub>2</sub> program made allowances for Case A’s behaviour and mobilized his/her energy in a positive way.

To sum up, the following characteristics of the BO<sub>2</sub> program made it possible to assist Case A: the program offered a wide variety of activities at different times of the day and a personalized approach to young people in crisis or who were seriously withdrawn. Thus, each participant was eventually able to get something out of the program, which was not the case in a classroom setting with 30 or so other students.

The program was centred on recreational activities; consequently, the young people who took part were seen not in terms of their differences or problems, but simply as participants. This made it an appealing intervention program compared to social or support services offered to young people, which define themselves first and foremost in terms of the young people’s problems. Lastly, isolated young people were *naturally* integrated into the BO<sub>2</sub> program. Recreation workers met students in the hallways or on the school grounds, in the same way that street workers might operate.

In concrete terms, the BO<sub>2</sub> program had an important impact on Case A given that, according to the

respondents, this student would very likely not have completed his/her high school studies without it. As it offered a variety of activities, the BO<sub>2</sub> program gave Case A the chance to discover and develop his/her skills. The respondents, moreover, asserted that the program helped Case A choose a career path since this student decided to pursue postsecondary studies in a helping profession.

**Case B**

In the opinion of the respondents, Case B was “miraculously saved from the school system.” Suffering from physical health problems and difficulties with verbal communication, this young person had been constantly rejected by his/her peers. This student had become aggressive and often got into fights. Case B had experienced many failures in extracurricular activities. His/her academic performance was poor.

The room used for the BO<sub>2</sub> program — “the shack” — became a haven where this student could go during “down time” instead of remaining isolated in the library as he/she had tended to do in the past. The BO<sub>2</sub> program helped Case B improve his/her communication skills and this student made significant progress in this regard, opening up the possibility of making friends.

Without the intervention of the BO<sub>2</sub> program, this withdrawn young person would have continued to be isolated. The respondents agreed that the program helped Case B come into his/her own, develop his/her strengths, and set aside his/her weaknesses. Case B began to make friends, feel accepted, and take pride in his/her successes in these extracurricular activities. Case B developed problem-solving strategies that helped this student overcome his/her difficulties and adopt appropriate social behaviours. Case B also made progress academically. His/her marks rose from a 50% average to a 70% average, thus allowing this student to follow the regular academic program. Case B’s parents expressed their gratitude to the program workers, saying that it was the BO<sub>2</sub> program and its Kamis component that enabled their child to stay in school.

Furthermore, the BO<sub>2</sub> program proved to be a space in which different workers could come together to support Case B. The discussion group participants expressed the view that, in terms of intervening to support students, the school team was faced with limits that the community-based nature of the BO<sub>2</sub> program enabled it to overcome. Case B managed to carve out a place for him-/herself. This young person even won a prize for the student who had made the most progress, and his/her academic achievements were recognized on several other occasions as well.

**Case C**

Case C had experienced a significant bereavement and displayed a very self-effacing personality. This young person had grown up in a family that was facing many problems. The family’s socio-economic difficulties had brought them to collect social assistance. Case C had been exposed to domestic violence, family breakup, drug addiction, and the world of drug dealers. The respondents said that this young person “had raised him-/herself” and was doing quite well given the disadvantaged circumstances. They nevertheless acknowledged that Case C had a negative self-image and low self-esteem. This student sometimes simply ran away when there were tensions in a group setting and often went to “the shack,” where he/she participated in several of the program’s projects. The program offered a wide variety of activities and Case C took advantage of many of them. These projects and activities allowed this young person, above all, to gain a sense of self-worth, build his/her self-esteem, and develop his/her intellectual resources.

The respondents were categorical on one point: the less time Case C spent at home, the better. Given this context, the BO<sub>2</sub> program became a refuge for this student. Case C stayed until closing time and participated in all the organized activities.

As this student was very intelligent, Case C would probably have obtained a high school diploma without the BO<sub>2</sub> program. However, he/she would most likely not have developed as many personal and social skills. Although Case C's energy was "spread thin" since he/she took part in so many different activities, this student nevertheless mastered whatever he/she took on and received several mentions of honour.

#### **Case D**

Case D came from a family that was disadvantaged on several levels (economically, socially, and culturally). This student had been tagged as having limited intellectual resources and was quite behind academically. Case D had a neglected appearance, was often dirty, and had questionable personal hygiene. This young person was rejected by his/her peers. He/she was quick-tempered and manipulative, displayed antisocial behaviours, and had been suspended from school more than 30 times. The BO<sub>2</sub> program "picked this student up" when the system had reached its limits and no one wanted to have anything more to do with him/her.

The respondents felt that Case D's involvement in the BO<sub>2</sub> program had prevented this student from dropping out of school and that it had had a positive effect on his/her personal and social development. Case D learned to keep clean, dress properly, and take care of him-/herself. As one respondent put it, "We sort of raised this kid."

Case D spent time with other young people in the BO<sub>2</sub> program and developed acceptable social skills. This student recognized his/her own limits when it came to dealing with other people, especially in situations in which he/she felt frustrated. A teacher developed a special rapport with one of the recreation workers from the program and sent Case D to see this worker whenever this student was on the verge of losing his/her temper. This collaboration proved to be beneficial and prevented Case D from being suspended and expelled from the school. Once this young person began to grasp the basics of acceptable social behaviour, he/she learned to take refuge in "the shack" whenever he/she was about to blow up. Like Case C, Case D stayed at school in the evenings, feeling more comfortable there than at home with his/her family.

Through the activities of the BO<sub>2</sub> program, Case D discovered a certain talent for art, and this helped build his/her self-esteem. This student persevered and even won a prize for his/her artwork. Case D left school before completing his/her high school studies but continued to participate in other BO<sub>2</sub> and SAJO activities. This young person continued to need support and planned to obtain a high school diploma through the adult education program. Meanwhile, Case D was active in the community, leading activities for young people, and recognized that people's view of him/her had changed.

#### **Case E**

Case E arrived at the school after being expelled from another school because of violent behaviour. This young person was raised in a violent family environment and his/her family had broken up. Case E showed the characteristics of a delinquent. This young person took drugs, loitered after school, and did not go home until late at night. This student was thought to be responsible for some acts associated with vandalism and petty delinquency. At school, Case E's relationships with teachers and other students were

troubled and he/she had difficulty integrating into the group. This student's social network was limited and he/she tried using inappropriate behaviour as a strategy for entering into relationships with others. Case E was considered to be at risk of being rejected by the school system.

Case E was first able to integrate into school activities through sports when one of the SAJO workers was assigned the job of coaching the volleyball team. From there, Case E went on to join the Kamis component of the BO<sub>2</sub> program. This young person discovered what it was like to be appreciated by adults and to be valued for his/her personal attributes. This student ended up leading activities for other young people at the school, in line with the philosophy of "activities for young people by young people" that is so central to the approach of SAJO and the BO<sub>2</sub> program. The troubled behaviour that Case E had displayed in the past gradually disappeared and this student developed leadership skills, became involved in causes that were important to young people, and learned to use his/her intellectual resources.

Case E later earned his/her diplôme d'études collégiales (DEC), a technical college diploma, and worked with troubled youth and delinquent adults. At the time of this study, this young person was pursuing university studies and intended to return to the Petite-Nation region upon their completion.

### ***Summary of Paths***

Table 3 summarizes the paths of the five young people: for each case, we will present the difficulties identified, the changes observed, and the benefits attributed to the intervention of the BO<sub>2</sub> program. It should be pointed out that our research approach was based on the perceptions of the respondents and that these perceptions may vary from one person to another. However, the main consensus drawn from the discussion group supports the analysis presented below.

Table 3 shows that for each of the five cases studied, the BO<sub>2</sub> program had positive effects on the young person's self-esteem, skills development, and socialization. More specifically, the program had impacts with regard to employability (four cases), schooling (three cases), and level of income (two cases). Even though these impacts are not measurable, they are considered to be obvious and significant. The same can be said for the benefits concerning school and family, for which improvements were observed in four cases. A greater readiness to engage in mutual support was also observed in one case. Lastly, benefits with a long-term reach were also identified; in particular, improved collective well-being in two cases and increased social solidarity in another case. It should be pointed out that the data on the paths of the young people were echoed in former studies on community recreation (Torjman, 2004; Howard & Peniston, 2002; ACLP, 1998; Tindall, 1995; Bouchard, Shepard, & Stevens, 1994; Krichbaum & Alston, 1994; Montelpare, Yardley & Kannters, 1993; Crompton, 1993; Shilts, 1991; Beauvais, 2001; Driver, Brown, & Peterson, 1991; Haggard & Williams, 1991; Sonstroem, 1994; Fréchette, 2000).

Thus, the data collected were consistent with the knowledge provided by the literature review: community recreation programs working to overcome problems with high social costs are beneficial.

**Table 3 – Summary of the data collected on the five young people studied**

	<b>Case A</b>	<b>Case B</b>	<b>Case C</b>	<b>Case D</b>	<b>Case E</b>
Difficulties identified	Social integration problems Aggression Loss of control Rejection by peers Attention deficit	Academic deficiency Isolation/rejection by peers Antisocial Aggression dysphasia Potential drop-out Illness	Low self-esteem Had run away from home Petty crime Onset of drug abuse Complicated relationship with family Lack of behaviour models	Academic deficiency Behavioural problems Compulsive lying Rejection Negligence/lack of hygiene Considered a nearly hopeless case	Aggression Consumption Theft, vandalism Antisocial Difficulties with relationships and integration
Changes observed	Success at school Control of emotions Team work Helped peers with extracurricular activities Offered support to a group of students who were behind academically	Team work Local and provincial awards Perseverance Openness concerning the illness Improved academic results	Exteriorization Recognition of his/her strengths Involvement in activities Experienced success End of drug abuse Academic diligence	Crisis management Improved hygiene Dropped out of school but returned later through adult education program Relationships with others Leadership Academic diligence	Integrated into the group Success in sports Leadership Maturity College studies Employment in social intervention in the public sector Academic diligence
Impacts attributed to the intervention of BO <sub>2</sub>	Prevention of school drop-out Reduced aggression Development of self-confidence Success at school Socialization	Reduced aggression Self-esteem Returned to school Development of personal/professional goals Socialization Completed a process of problem resolution	Self-esteem Prevention of drug addiction Avoidance of social drop-out and deviance Positive relationship with adults	Healthy lifestyle Behaviour/ attitude compatible with life in society and job market Conflict management Returned to school Socialization	Overcame behavioural problems Socialization Integrated into the group Leadership development Integrated into the job market Personal development Returned to the region

When analyzing the results in light of our analytical framework (Figure 2, see the elements in bold), we found that the BO<sub>2</sub> program effectively generated *benefits* for individuals, family, school, and community. We would also argue that the program generated *savings* because it contributed to: young people (cases A, B, and C) persevering in the regular school system instead of dropping out, thereby avoiding the greater costs associated with adult education programs which may otherwise have been incurred; giving one drop-out (Case D) the tools necessary to integrate into the job market without needing additional intervention from the public system.

**Figure 2 – Analysis of the impacts of BO<sub>2</sub> based on the situation of the cases**

PRODUCTS			
	Individual	Family/school	Community
IMPACTS	Savings		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drop-out (cases A,B,E)</li> <li>• School abandonment</li> <li>• Employment programs (case D)</li> <li>• Social assistance program</li> <li>• Premature pregnancy</li> <li>• Vandalism</li> <li>• Crime</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Devitalization of the environment</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Suicide</li> </ul>
	Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem (cases A,B,C,D,E)</li> <li>• Development of skills (cases A,B,C,D,E)</li> <li>• Socialization (cases A,B,C,D,E)</li> <li>• Persevering in school (cases A,B,E)</li> <li>• Employability (cases A,B,D,E)</li> <li>• Increase in level of income (cases A,B)</li> <li>• Improved quality of life</li> <li>• Absence of dependence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Harmony/climate (cases A,B,C,E)</li> <li>• Increase in family income</li> <li>• Health</li> <li>• Mutual Aid (case A)</li> </ul>

Figure 2 illustrates that the direct effects on individuals are more easily identifiable than the indirect effects that manifest themselves over the medium or long term. However, this conclusion is based more on our methodological choices than on the non-occurrence of the products.

Figure 2 also illustrates that the benefits are more easily perceptible than the savings. This finding is, for its part, fully consistent with the conclusions of Marée (2005), which state that impacts are not always translatable into monetary terms and that there is a need to develop other indicators for measuring collective non-market goods.

### **Economic value of BO<sub>2</sub>**

The last part of our analysis consists in attributing a monetary value to the impacts of the actions of the BO<sub>2</sub> program. It should be pointed out that the data support the idea that the BO<sub>2</sub> program contributed to preventing school dropout in three cases and to helping another youth integrate into the job market. We thus set out to measure the economic value of the BO<sub>2</sub> program by referring to the savings realized by the Quebec government in adult education and job market integration. More specifically, we posit that

savings were realized by the public authorities given that the intervention of the BO<sub>2</sub> program allowed: (1) potential drop-outs (cases A, B, and C) to persevere and obtain a high school diploma in the regular school system rather than in the adult education system; and (2) one drop-out (Case D) to overcome the negative effects of having dropped out of school by giving this individual the necessary tools to integrate into the job market.

The values used to quantify the savings achieved by avoiding school drop-out were based on the budget allocations made by Quebec's Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) to a school board to pursue the schooling of a drop-out who had reached majority.

The values used to quantify the savings achieved through employment assistance were based on the allowances paid to the participants of the "Programme alternative jeunesse," run by Quebec's Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale (MESS). This program was deemed to be appropriate because it is specifically aimed at people under 25 years of age who wished to "acquire personal, social, and professional autonomy."

The values retained did not include the expenditures for infrastructures or other fixed expenses in the case of MELS measures, or for the functioning of the programs in the case of the MESS. Moreover, the amounts retained to educate a dropout did not include the sums required to educate students presenting special needs (e.g., disabled students). These amounts could constitute real savings; however, their incorporation into this analysis would have required introducing hypotheses that would have been difficult to support empirically.

The savings made according to the impacts observed were calculated as follows:

- concerning school dropout (i.e., leaving school before obtaining a high school or vocational diploma), the cost of educating a young adult is higher in the adult education system than in the regular system; that is, the system for young people. In 2007–2008, the additional cost incurred to educate a young adult was \$3,408 per year.

The additional cost of \$3,408 corresponded to the difference between the "basic allocation for adult activities in general training" (\$5,606) and the "allocation for the basic functioning for activities of young people" (\$2,026) in effect for the 2007–2008 school year. The "basic allocation for adult activities in general training" comprised an allocation per student for "teaching resources" (\$4,592), an amount for "pedagogical guidance" (\$234), and a sum for "support resources" (\$780). The "allocation for the basic functioning for activities of young people" comprised two basic amounts; that is, \$1,571 for teaching and \$455 for educational activities. These values were drawn from a document titled "Règles budgétaires pour l'année scolaire 2007–2008. Commissions scolaires" (Budget regulations for the 2007–2008 school year. School boards) published by the MELS ([http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfe/regles/reg\\_cs/index.html](http://www.mels.gouv.qc.ca/dgfe/regles/reg_cs/index.html)).

In light of the above, the BO<sub>2</sub> program generated annual savings of \$3,408 per year for each case in which dropout was avoided.

- in the case of employment assistance, it cost \$7,398.36 per year (\$616.53 per month for 12 months) to help a person aged 25 years or younger acquire autonomy.

This cost corresponded to the annual sum of the monthly average allowance (\$616.53 per month) given in 2007–2008 to a participant from the Outaouais region in the Programme alternative jeunesse (MESS website). It should be pointed out that the cumulative duration of adults' participation in MESS programs was 218.9 months in 2008 (MESS website).

Thus, the BO<sub>2</sub> program generated annual savings of \$7,398.26 for each person for whom recourse to the Programme alternative jeunesse was avoided.

## **CONCLUSION**

Programs for young people provided by the CCLs are popular and numerous, and it is thus pertinent to evaluate the real or potential spin-offs of these programs and to estimate their preventive value for individuals, families, and society as a whole. There is a strong argument for developing tools that can translate this value into economic or financial data. The case of SAJO's BO<sub>2</sub> program constitutes a first experience in constructing an analytical model of spin-offs in terms of products that can be associated with an economic value. We can assume that it would be possible to apply this framework to all programs provided by CCLs in order to evaluate the benefits and savings of these programs. Across Quebec, each of the 83 community centres reaches between 1,000 and 5,000 people per week, of whom adolescents represent 14% (FQCCL, 2007).

Therefore, based on this exploratory study, we are convinced of the importance of pursuing research aimed at documenting the savings generated by recreation for young people, despite the absence of public programs aimed at each of the problem areas. However, the challenges involved are considerable. Social accounting is an arduous task given that its social impact does not involve real financial transactions (Quarter, Mook, & Richmond, 2003b).

Our contribution is that of having established an innovative correspondence between community recreation and a novel method, that devised by Marée (2005). On a practical level, this research introduces indicators that are pertinent and adapted to the reality of the population taking part in activities at community recreation centres. The framework developed presents impacts and products of community recreation which have been observed for a long time by recreation workers but which have yet to be acknowledged by the theories. The framework thus provides feedback to administrators and directors of community organizations who often receive no external feedback whatsoever, and offers the funding parties a basis for evaluating their investment in community organizations. Overall, we believe that the study offers critical elements for dialogue between board members and organization managers on the one hand, and the funding parties on the other. Such dialogue could lead to 1) perceiving community intervention in terms of value creation and savings of public funds as opposed to highlighting only the consumption of resources and 2) improving the distribution of financial resources in order to improve practices. As Wheaton (2003) pointed out, "changing the method changes what we see." Our method, albeit very exploratory, provides a fresh view of the impacts that community recreation can have on a

community.

Despite the limitations discussed earlier, this study establishes an analytical framework that brings a new perspective to the impact of community programs. This framework appears to be both broad enough to evaluate the different impacts (savings and benefits) of the intervention on the community and precise enough to present significant results. Lastly, this study brings out the difficulties involved in measuring the economic and social performance of community organizations. However, it opens a way for future research projects based on representative samples, which will lay the foundations of a system of indicators that can be used to evaluate the activities of community organizations.

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## **NOTES**

1. The term "school drop-out" refers to people who have momentarily or definitively left the school system without having obtained a high school diploma (MÉQ, 2000). The term "school leaver" refers to people who have *definitively* left the school system without having obtained a high school diploma (general or vocational). The dropout rate does not correspond to the school leaver rate because the interruption, in the case of the former, is not necessarily definitive (MÉQ, 2000 and 2003).

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