

DESTA Black Youth Network

2015 Annual
Report

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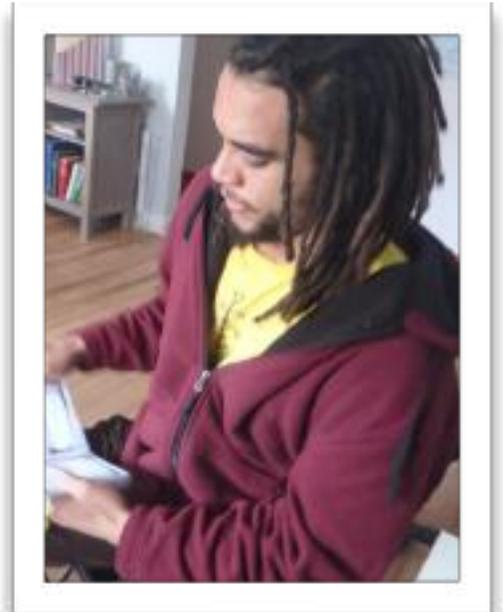
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<http://www.youthtools.com>

Who we are

DESTA, an acronym for Dare Every Soul To Achieve, is a not-for-profit organization serving Montreal's at-risk youth; daring them to achieve their dreams, one step at a time. This community-based, grass roots organization has been supporting the educational, employment, and psychosocial needs of youth aged 18- 25 since 2007. The only centre of its kind, DESTA aims to provide personalized, holistic support for a largely underserved segment of the population.

A Portrait of Our Youth

The young adults who walk through our doors face a number of intersecting challenges. Poverty, unemployment, lack of education, mental illness and precarious housing are stark realities for our participants. They are young mothers, young fathers, gay, straight, survivors of physical and sexual abuse; all trying their best to improve their lives.



Our Approach

At DESTA, we employ a strengths-based, empowerment approach to working with marginalized youth. We meet participants where they are, assessing their individual needs and working collaboratively with them to create action plans. By highlighting their existing skills and exploring their options, we have found that participants gain the self-esteem they need to achieve their goals.

What We Offer

Recognizing the social issues facing at-risk youth, DESTA's programming is dedicated to addressing their challenges and helping them actualize their potential. We do this in our 3 departments:

- Continued learning
- Health & Personal Development
- Employability

Continued Learning

For youth who have not completed their secondary education, DESTA's Lion Wolf School provides individualized academic support as they strive to obtain their high school leaving certificate. In partnership with the Eastern Township School Board, we complement the distance education model by matching students with volunteer tutors who work one-on-one to help them grasp challenging concepts. Additionally, we extend this free tutoring service to youth enrolled in other schools but in need of supplementary academic support.



This year, 37 students were enrolled in DESTA's Continued Learning Department; 26 were registered in Lion Wolf School and 11 received supplementary tutoring. In total, these youth dedicated nearly 1700 hours to achieving academic success. Thirteen of the 16 ministry exams sat were passed successfully and two students obtained their high school leaving certificate.

Our Success Stories

Meet Tiffany:

Tiffany McLean, 22, describes her experience at DESTA as, “a great one”. She first came through our doors in October 2013 after being referred by a partnering community organization to complete her secondary studies at DESTA’s Lion Wolf School. Upon discovering that she was pregnant in 2015, Tiffany was even more determined to achieve her academic goals. And that’s just what she did! Shortly after giving birth to her first child, James, Tiffany received her high school leaving certificate and attributes much of this to the support she received at DESTA!



Meet Jarad:

“Classrooms can get hectic,” and for Jarad McFarlane, 20, this is the reason he felt that DESTA Black Youth Network was the best place to complete his high school studies. Through the programs at DESTA, Jarad’s hard work and the dedication of committed volunteers, Jarad was able to complete the math course he needed to receive his high school diploma, as well as the higher level math needed for civil engineering. He is now well on his way to his dream career.

New Developments in the Continued Learning Program

We are proud to announce that, this year, in partnership with The High School of Montreal Adult Centre (also known as Montreal High) and Cote-des-Neiges Black Community Association (CDN BCA), we launched the DESTA High School Leaving Certificate Program. Through these partnerships, we are now able to offer an educational program that provides small class-room learning in addition to our individual tutoring. Montreal High has designated a Math teacher and a French teacher to instruct students enrolled in Secondary 4 Math, as well as Secondary 4 and 5 French courses. With students attending classes and individual tutoring twice a week, students are attaining high school completion at a faster pace.



Did you know...



DESTA provides:

- bus fare to participants who are unable to afford to travel to our centre
- free childcare to participants who must bring their children to their tutoring session
- free healthy meals to students and volunteer tutors

Health & Personal Development

This pillar of our programming was developed to address some of the underlying reasons participants were struggling in their daily lives. Poverty, social isolation, and systemic racism are but a few of issues challenging the health and wellbeing of our youth. To support them, we offer a number of services, including...

Information & Referral | Advocacy & Accompaniment | Informal Counseling

This year, 18 youth received a total of 62 informal counseling sessions to address their physical and psychological challenges, engage in academic planning, and deal with problematic personal relationships.

Activities & Workshops

In an effort to promote healthy living among participants, we provided a number of skill-building workshops.

Collective Kitchen: Under the tutelage of our youth worker, 5 youth learned how to make 6 healthy and affordable meals. Staff and volunteers were then invited to partake in the fruits of their labor. Over the meals, participants shared what was happening in their lives, and connected with their peers.

Yoga & Physical Fitness: In light of the well-documented connection between physical activity and mental health, in 2015, our youth counsellor and resident yogi continued to offer weekly yoga classes to participants seeking a sense of calm in the fast pace of life. Youth were also given access to Concordia University's EV Fitness Centre, courtesy of our long-standing partnership with the university.



Community Events

To combat the social isolation that can come from living on the margins of society, we create opportunities for youth to connect with each other and their community. This year, we hosted...

- **8 Real Talk discussions** exploring social issues, including, Sexual Violence, Preserving Little Burgundy and the 2015 Canadian federal elections.
- **2 Open Mic Nights** where youth and other members of the community came to showcase their talent in front of a supportive and receptive crowd.
- **Health & Wellness Week**, during which we hosted 3 events related to promoting healthy lifestyles in the community. These events included a Sexual Health Workshop, a community pick-up basketball game followed by a men's only discussion forum, and Family Fun Day.



12 DESTA participants received assistance in seeking employment



6 DESTA participants were able to access the resources they need through our information and referrals work

New Developments in the Health & Personal Development Department

- **Brother to Brother:** To provide the young men of DESTA with a space to discuss issues relating to their unique experiences, we decided to create a men's group called Brother to Brother. Co-facilitated by two young men in the community, this discussion group has been a huge success, garnering much attention from men of varying ages and experiences. Topics of discuss have included, mental health, spirituality, and sexuality.

- **Emotional Regulation Group:** To support youth in adopting healthy coping strategies, we held two Emotional Regulation workshops. Participants learned how to identify the physical and emotional signs of anxiety and anger, and how to manage their emotions in an adaptive, solution-focused manner.

SPEAK UP!

Speak Up! is a campaign aimed to raise public awareness about social issues that are directly impacting Black youth. DESTA participants have engaged in the following projects and public speaking events as part of the SPEAK UP initiative:

- **"Talk to me" - prison project** - An audio documentary project initiated by two DESTA participants, Kai and Elena, that features the stories of incarcerated Black Youth. The stories highlight the lived experiences of incarceration, injustices and differential treatment within the penitentiary and judicial system, as well as the affects of incarceration on family members and the broader community.
- **"Shut me out" - Video project on unemployment** - Cedric Kabongo, a DESTA student who attended the Concordia Digital Arts Program, created a short animated video that speaks to the emotional toil/burden that unemployment has on Black youth.
- **Presentation at Vanier Collage Symposium** - Our Youth worker and two DESTA participants, Keena and Jacqueline, delivered a presentation at the Vanier College symposium on Activist Cultural Production by Youth in October. They discussed the social issues facing Black Youth in Montreal and the various DESTA initiatives working to address these issues.
- **CKUT Radio Segment-** Working in collaboration with Innovation Jeunes, two Desta youth, Jacqueline and Shawn, created a radio segment that aired on CKUT that highlight Desta and the various Speak Up projects youth have engaged in since the campaign began in the summer of 2014.



Our Team

2015 was a year of transition for DESTA. It saw Frances Waithe, DESTA's co-founder and longstanding executive director, passed the torch to Tamara Hart, a passionate and accomplished leader in the community. It also brought the establishment of new and stronger community partnerships with the goal of expanding our reach and impact in the lives of marginalized youth. In addition, an extremely committed and well-loved DESTA staff member, Chantal Marulaz, ended her 5 year journey with the organization at the end of 2015. We wish both Frances and Chantal all the best in their future endeavors.

DESTA continues to be led by a remarkable group of women, all of whom are experienced, trained and dedicated to helping improve their community. The unique feature of the DESTA team is that they do not see any distinction between themselves and the participants they work alongside. This year the team also received support from a design student from CDI College and a Social Work student from McGill University.



From left to right: Chantal Marulaz – Youth Counselor, Shanna Strauss – Community Worker, Rachelle Rose – Continued Learning Coordinator, Tamara Hart – Executive Director

Our Partners

As a small team working with a population with many differing unmet needs, partnering with like-minded people and organizations is paramount to helping our improve our participants' access adequate resources. We would like to thank our partners for their continued support and dedication to the success of our participants.

Black Community Resource Centre

Black History Month Round Table
Concordia University
Cote-des-Neiges Black Community Association
Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi Sud-Ouest
Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi NDG
Carrefour Jeunesse Emploi Cote-des- Neiges
CLSC St-Henri
CLSC Cavendish
Community University Talks
Dawson College
Eastern Townships School Board
Head & Hands
Little Burgundy Coalition
McGill University
Montreal Diet Dispensary
Portage
Youth Employment Services Montreal

<http://www.pdf-tools.com>