

The Dawson Experience

CCAIE presentation

Charlottetown, June 4, 2007

Title Slide 1

Dawson introduced

Good morning, everyone. It's good to be back among fellow advancement professionals and members of CCAIE.

I have given presentations about different aspects of what happened at Dawson College on September 13 in about 6 different cities to some 8 or 9 different groups, but this is the first time that I have talked directly to my own people, that is, the people who are entrusted with communicating to our various target audiences.

We know how important our work is in making sure that there will still be people who want to come to our schools, who will give to our projects and initiatives, who will remain loyal and proud alumni.

But let me tell you, on the evening of September 13 at the news conference at police headquarters, having to tell our students, our faculty and staff, the parents of our students, our alumni, our city, and our country, that we were badly shaken and shocked, and that we had lost a student, this felt like an impossible task.

There have been so many emotions since that day – and they seem to change daily, if not hourly – but we resolved that we would learn from this experience, that it couldn't just begin and end with tragedy, and that maybe, if we communicated what had happened to us, we might help others and perhaps even prevent other such tragedies.

How many conferences have we attended with a crisis management and communications workshop?

If September 13 taught me anything it's that nothing can prepare you for something like this, not because we don't have emergency plans, but because who can imagine a force so violent and unpredictable shattering your peaceful existence?

Slide 2: The Dawson Experience – On September 13, a man ...

By now, everyone knows what happened on that fateful day in our school.

But what have we learned? And what are the lessons ... we continue to learn?

As I said, we cannot come away from this tragedy without learning something. We owe it to our students, especially to those who suffered physical and psychological wounds ...

And to the memory of Anastasia De Sousa, the beautiful 18-year old student who was killed that day, just three weeks into her first term. Yesterday would have been her 19th birthday.

Theme slide 3

We learned that there is not a lot of time for horror, sadness, anger. We had an entire a community to reassure, to keep safe, to go on.

Today, I will try to explain – as much as I can – how we got through those first few days and weeks at Dawson after the shooting.

- I will tell you a little about Dawson College and the kind of place it was, and is.
- I will try to give you a sense of how the crisis management team dealt with the many aspects of the crisis, how we made decisions, how we carried them out.
- Also, how did we prepare for the return of our students, faculty and staff? How did we go about setting up the support and care they would need, and briefly what we did to salvage the academic year.
- I'll show you how we used the media and the Internet to communicate with our own community, the greater Montreal community, the rest of the country, and in fact, the world when you consider how widely the tragedy was covered.
- Security is the single most asked question we've been asked and I'll give you a quick overview of how we are communicating the security improvements we are making to reassure not only the people at Dawson, but colleges and universities across Canada.
- I'll tell you how our foundation went from 0 to 120 in just a few months and I'll tell you a little about how we've tried to support the very brave young people who were shot that day and who, incredibly, have come back to school to finish their studies.

Who is Dawson?

Slide 4: About Dawson

Before September 13, people outside Quebec had a vague idea of what the CEGEP system is. Since that day, people have a greater understanding of the kind of students

CEGEPs produce.

Dawson has always had a high profile in Quebec because of its colourful history, its size and location.

Dawson College was the first and largest English-language college in Quebec's unique CEGEP network.

There are in Quebec 48 colleges offering two-year pre-university programs that lead to university studies and three-year career programs that lead to the workplace or to further study.

As you may know, in Quebec, high school ends with Grade 11.

Dawson opened in 1969 with 1,200 students. Until 1988, the school had several campuses located throughout downtown Montreal.

Slide 5: About Dawson

- In the 1980s, Dawson acquired the mother house of a teaching order of sisters
- The College consolidated its operations there ... between 1988 and 1997 with major renovations and expansion.
- The heritage building from 1908 sits on 12 acres of green space in downtown Montreal and today occupies a full city block.
- The final phase of construction will be completed this summer with the addition of a theatre and the expansion of the Atrium
- In an odd twist of fate, the Atrium is the common area where the tragedy occurred. The transformation of this place had been long planned and we are hoping that the inauguration of the new space will signal a time of renewal for the College to move beyond the terrible events of that day last fall.

Slide 6: Who is Dawson today?

- Dawson houses a community of 10,000
- It is made up of full- and part-time students and about 1,000 faculty and staff
- Our school is a microcosm of what Quebec is, or should be, with virtually every race, colour, language, ethnic background, culture and religion, living harmoniously in an environment that is open and welcoming.

And it is important to note that there is no culture of violence at Dawson and that we have a non-confrontational security presence.

- Students know our guards by name and the guards know the students by name.
- In fact, on September 13 our regular guards were instrumental in evacuating the students from the area where bullets were flying and securing alternate exits. They saved many lives that day.

Slide 7: Assembling the Crisis Management Team

Imagine if you will the task of not only physically restoring this building, but of creating an environment that not only students, but faculty and staff, who spend 8 hours a day in their workplace could feel safe in and wanted to come back to.

How to manage a crisis in those first crucial hours and days? We knew this would be the real test for us and would be the measure of success or failure.

We only knew that we could not *afford* to fail them.

When we left police headquarters that night on September 13, we were in complete shock.

But we also knew that we had a lot of work to do.

Overnight, a chain of telephone calls began, one manager alerting the other that we would gather outside our building at the Sherbrooke Street entrance, the point farthest from where the shooting had taken place. First, we would have to see if we could even get in.

When we arrived that morning, reality struck us in the face: our school was now a crime scene.

But the police allowed a certain number of people in whose names we had put on a list. We were able to enter and move through the two wings closest to Sherbrooke Street.

Slide 8: First Crisis Management Meeting

As I said, shocked, sad and horrified, but we had a lot of work to do.

At that first meeting, there was a moment or two of stunned silence and tears. and then we set out to begin our work.

Teams were drawn up to deal with

- Restoring the building physically and trying to make some sense of the thousands of items left behind in the rush
- We needed to connect with the mental healthcare providers who had generously offered to help us coordinate the counseling services we would provide to our students, faculty and staff for months to come
- We had to come up with ways to communicate with our immediate community and beyond
- And we had to prepare for the re-entry of the faculty and staff on Friday and the students on Monday

Slide 9: The decision making process

The crisis management team met as a large group for a major meeting in the morning to set priorities and objectives for the day.

Then, every two hours or so, we re-convened to check on the status of each task to see if they matched our expected results and to make re-adjustments, if necessary.

Slide 10: Facilities / Security

For 30 hours, there was nothing we could do to restore the building until the police gave us it back to us. The handover occurred on 6 p.m. on Thursday.

We planned to meet the faculty and staff at 1 p.m. Friday. That gave us just over 18 hours if we worked through the night to get it done.

There are companies that specialize in disaster recovery, and I watched them work for a while from a distance. They are truly amazing people, doing what they do so that victims of major crimes can try to regain some level of comfort in their surroundings. Then our own maintenance crew plastered and painted.

Slide 11: Tagging belongings

Almost more surreal was retrieving and identifying the thousands of items left behind – back packs, shoes, cellular telephones, jackets, purses, books, artists’ portfolios, iPods, keys, wallets ...

Dawson staff sifted through the things that had not been removed by police as evidence and tried to match it up with some sort of identification so that students could get their personal possessions back.

Slide 12: Patience, Flexibility, Sensitivity

On September 15, the staff and faculty would come back to the school for the first time as group. There are about 1,000 people on staff and over 800 arrived that day.

We asked them for 3 things:

1. Patience

- with each other
- with the administration
- with the students

2. Flexibility

- we were making decisions based on information that changed hourly
- we needed to be creative and ready to change our assumptions and our plans on a moment's notice

3. Sensitivity

- to the pain we were all feeling and our students would exhibit
- to the fact that we may not all be handling the situation well
- to the fact that we needed to comfort each other

We were sensitive to the needs of our students and staff for psychological and mental health counselling. We knew immediately that our students and employees would require counselling and that it needed to be in place as soon as they returned.

- Everyone was feeling fear, sorrow, depression, anger, anxiety, helplessness, survivor guilt
- And mercifully, all the resources for support were being coordinated through the hospital.

We had to set up phone lines

- The police had done so immediately for victims and families.
- Hospital lines went up for counselling the next day, but it soon became clear we had to set up our own lines.
- A lot of the questions they were receiving were about academic information at Dawson, about belongings, re-entry, exams, the school year. By Saturday morning, our lines were up and running.
- EAP's support to employees was set up around the same time.

Slide 13: Communicating with Students Faculty and Staff

The Website became the primary source of information. I will talk about that in a few moments

The media became a vital link for communicating with the larger community as well as offering reassurance and comfort to our internal community. I'll expound on that in just a bit.

WebCT was an important forum for students and faculty to communicate with each other, to pour out their hearts.

- We communicated to employees through List Serve e-mails, but unfortunately they did not work for students. Students do not have Dawson e-mails, but that is being reviewed right now.
- Both formal and informal telephone chains sprang up
- The informal electronic communication channels among students were integral in the return to school

Slide 14: Organizing Re-entry for Faculty and Staff

On September 15, we organized the return of our staff and faculty to the College.

We wanted to bring them into the building as a group ... before the students in order to give them an opportunity to comfort each other and to bring them up to date with the facts that we knew. Also, we wanted to help them retrieve their belongings – even cars that were left on campus – and to prepare them for receiving the students both emotionally and practically

We talked about:

- Signs to look for from their students and colleagues (long and short term)
- Each one of our staff had an individual story of courage and pain.
- We were all victims in one way or another ... and they were all heroes. Not only because of the heroic acts that took place on September 13, but in the strength and compassion that they would show when the students returned

We made psychological counselling available right there in the gym that day

Slide 15: Re-entry of Students

On September 18 (Monday) at 11 a.m., students and their families were invited to return to the school:

- to collect their belongings
- to reconnect with friends and classmates
- to reconnect with teachers
- to find counselling

- Teachers had been prepared (as much as possible)
- 120 mental health care practitioners were available
 - Some at the door
 - Some in offices/Library
 - Some just circulating
- We wanted to make students feel welcome, secure, safe – to acknowledge their strength in returning
- In a symbolic gesture, the Director General and head of the student union helped students and staff move thousands of flowers, candles that had been left as an impromptu shrine (to be composted and used to start a memorial garden)
- The path was cleared for students to enter to spontaneous applause from all the faculty and staff and neighbours who were there

Sometimes, no matter what the plan ... students will act on their own

- They organized among themselves that they would “TAKE BACK” their school at 12:41, the same time it had been taken away 5 days earlier
- Many who were in the school at 11 a.m. came back out to enter at 12:41 as a group
- Thousands of students, families, neighbours ... were silently waiting and the students slowly and respectfully re-entered the building

September 19 was the first day of classes. It had only been six days, but it felt like 6 weeks

- The academic calendar was adjusted to make-up for days lost
- We left a lot of **flexibility** for teachers to make up material
- They were advised to use what happened as a learning tool, but only if that was what the students wanted
- **We asked for Sensitivity** to authorized absences, etc., realizing that some students would not identify themselves as needing help, or would not know that they needed help until much later in the term
- No matter what we did collectively to prepare, on September 19 it came down to one teacher and his or her class.
 - Some students needed to talk about it
 - Some needed to get on with classes
 - Some needed to cry

- Some needed to relive their collective experience
- We were aware that long term counselling would continue to be an issue; there have been other triggers (Virginia Tech)
- On-site counselling would continue for 4 months, ebb a little, be re-established around the holidays and allowed to decrease as the end of term approached, then re-instated in the week or so before exams

Slide 16: Communicating Strength and Compassion

We realized very early on that we had to be seen to be handling the crisis – and the operative word here is seen. But first we had to figure out what the crisis was.

Crises come in many shapes and sizes, but I think I can say, without reservation, that this is as bad as crisis gets.

We had chaos, confusion, misinformation, real danger, perceived danger and threats, we had SWAT teams surrounding our building, and sharpshooters in it, we had a hostage taking, we had a death, we had a suicide, we had evacuation and we had to file out with our hands in the air. It doesn't get much worse than this.

And somehow we had to communicate to our community, to the people of Montreal, including the parents of our students, and thanks to CNN, to the whole world that we were handling it.

Slide 17: Communications 1:20 to 4:15

For more than three hours, the chaos and confusion was its peak.

My small communications team managed to reunite on a street corner at 1:20, diagonally across the school. Remember that it was lunch time and adults are off doing various things. We don't necessarily roam around in packs, like the students do. So my staff and administration were scattered all over.

It was a miracle really to be at the corner, where we could see what was happening, but what we saw was very disturbing – SWAT police in trees, crouching between cars, taking aim at what, we could only imagine.

On the street, media and others would come to us to ask us for confirmation of the most outlandish rumours, or so it seemed at the time. We could confirm nothing because, very clearly, there was still a police operation going on.

Our cell phone service was down or spotty at best, so we could not communicate with the people we look to for decision-making in our College, and as I said, we were scattered over several blocks.

Slide 18: Communications 4:15 to 5 p.m.

Finally at 4:15, we managed to get everyone together in a borrowed office – this is when you find out what good neighbours you have. Our Director General was able to confirm some information, but it was not official yet.

And although we were relieved to hear that everyone had been evacuated and were now out of harm's way, we were utterly devastated to learn that we had lost a student.

Slide 19: Communications 6 p.m.

As I said earlier, it was important to be seen on camera to show the Dawson community and the greater community that though we were badly shaken, the leadership was intact and in control.

We did that informally at a news conference in that borrowed office space, by confirming the information that we knew would reassure, that one shooter was dead, that evacuation was complete, and that sweeps of the building had shown there to be no more danger, although that would not be officially confirmed until 7:23 p.m.

And we released the information concerning human life carefully and without confirmation, about “a number of” injured and the “possibility” of one death.

Slide 20: Communications 7:30 to 9 p.m.

While we waited to be summoned to police headquarters, we dispatched teams of managers to the hospital.

At this point, we had no real information, no names, no definite numbers of casualties, no conditions (serious? critical?) We needed for our staff to see for themselves what the situation really was with the injured.

They reported back that we had 2 very critical, maybe 4, who might not make it. Then we were summoned to police headquarters where we learned the identity of the shooter and it was confirmed that one female student had been killed. Her identity was not made known to us as her family had not yet been notified.

Slide 21: Communications news conference 9:30 p.m.

This photo taken as our Director General prepared to make his statement that night at the news conference at police headquarters depicts the depth of our anguish. There might have been the need to say “Yes, we will handle the crisis, yes, we will try to do all the right things, yes, in time, we will even go on,” but for now, there was only this devastating grief at the enormity of what has just happened to us.

In the midst of this grief, we did convey three important messages: a vow not to turn our College into a fortress, to learn from this horror so that others would not have to grieve as we were grieving, and a vow to rebuild, to be even stronger than we were before.

Slides 22-23-24: Using the web to communicate

The next three slides illustrate how we set out to communicate using the Internet with our immediate community and with the global community. This being the web, it meant we were communicating with anyone who had access to Internet.

Slide 22

This one shows the bare bone approach we had to take at the beginning when we had little to communicate other than we were closed, that some off-campus activities would be cancelled, and that we hoped to tell everyone what was going on just as soon as we had the information.

Slide 23

With this one, things started to change as we now had more information we needed to convey.

Slide 24

By this time, a full week after the tragedy, the website started to take on a life of its own, as the outpouring of sympathy grew from the whole community. Now we had a lot of information to impart and the site developed its own character and look.

Slide 25: Crisis Communications Internal

The model we used for internal communications was quite simple. Every single decision taken would have to meet three criteria: is it for the good of the students, our first priority? Does it give the support that our staff and faculty need? And, is this for the good of the entire community?

We needed the communications that went along with those decisions to be constant, visible and accessible.

And it was important to give us the time to grieve. This was not the time to say ok everyone, let's pull ourselves up by our bootstraps and get on with it.

Slide 26: Crisis Communications External

We needed to communicate the decisions made by the crisis management team not only to the Dawson community, but to a much wider community because by now, everyone, particularly in Montreal, had come to see September 13 as a collective tragedy.

The list you see here is the order of priority on which we based our communications strategies.

Students always come first, followed by our faculty and staff. We had to reassure parents that the crisis was being handled in their children's best interest and because of the sheer volume of coverage to be aware that messages were going out nation-wide and internationally.

Slide 27: Crisis Communications Spokesperson

We made a few important decisions early on to protect the integrity of our communications.

We knew that the Director General would be front and centre and that he would have to be supported by the resource people he needed with expertise on the subject at hand

For example

- psychiatrists would address questions of counseling and support ...
- our administrative services team would speak on human resources issues...
- and the academic dean on matters of the school year.

All media requests would be handled through the Communications Office and the Communications Officer would deal with the media directly on logistical information, operations and to convey key messages on behalf of the College.

Slide 28: Crisis Communications Controlling the message

The media established itself on our doorstep the night of September 13 and would remain there full-time for more than a week.

There was no escaping them. A student from Carleton interviewed me in November about communications and asked me how we convened the media? I hope I didn't sound flip when I answered, I opened the front door.

I often felt whenever I stepped out, like the scenes with the seagulls in my favourite movie *Finding Nemo* ... "Mine mine mine mine mine."

Although having them nearby meant that impromptu scrums served our purpose in that we could get our messages out widely and quickly.

More worrisome were the interviews media conducted with the people on the street – whether they were students, faculty or staff or members of the general public because we could not control those messages. Here is where you find your loose cannons, your "experts" on everything.

We were incredibly proud at how articulate, poised, emotional, but rational, and supportive of the College ... everyone was, especially our students.

Slide 29: Creating Media Opportunities

As I said, the media was relentless and sometimes we had to give them something, a diversion, so we could carry out the work we needed to do.

One of those instances was making sure our faculty and staff could enter the gym where we were going to meet them as a group for the first time without media interference. The employees were adamant that there be no cameras, no reporters in that meeting.

So we opened up the Atrium, the place where the shooting took place, to the media for the first time since September 13. They got their photos and footage and statements and left the 800 or so employees of the College to enter without too much intrusion.

Sure, there are some photos of the faculty and staff entering, but there were a lot more of the Atrium being patched up and painted. In this instance, I was more worried about protecting the humans than protecting the walls.

The second diversion we created was to allow media to come close, but not to enter the building for the removal of the flowers at 11 a.m. This was upsetting to some, but the intrusion was kept to a minimum through the work of the communications staff.

For the 12:41 symbolic re-entry organized by the students themselves, police helped us to move the photographers and cameras back behind a line that would allow them good wide-angle, long-range camera shots, while permitting the thousands of students' access to the doors unimpeded.

Allowing media access became a contentious issue for many members of our community, but as those of us in communications know, you have strike a balance between allowing the media to get close, but not too close.

For their part, the media had a job to do – this was a huge story they were covering – the public was clamouring for more information.

It was not malicious intent. Everyone wanted to share in our grief, to get answers in a situation where there were none. But at the same time, we knew how shattered our community was, and we were trying to be as careful as we could to ensure that we did not do more damage to either the students, faculty and staff, or to our reputation as an open and accessible College. We were trying to show that we were doing our best to deal with this crisis.

Slide 30: Amazing group of young people

For better or worse, allowing media as much access as we did allowed us to show the world what an amazing group of young people we have at Dawson.

As the hundreds of e-mails poured in from around the world, none made me smile like the one from a highly placed civil servant in the Ontario provincial government, who wished to remain anonymous.

He wrote: "I had to tell someone at your college how articulate your students were in front of the camera yesterday and today. That must be some kind of CEGEP you've got over there ... those kids showed tremendous skill when it came to communicating in a crisis. I've heard from political staff, bureaucrats and reporters around Queen's Park, and we are all unanimous in that assessment."

Security

Slide 31: No single security measure

As an educational institution committed to learning, the one thing we could learn about from the beginning was security.

The conclusion we reached was that while emergency plans can always be improved, no single security measure can prevent a tragedy like September 13.

- We acknowledge that we were saved from a worse massacre through a combination of intuition, skill and luck.

We have asked ourselves many times:

- Why did our chief security guard decide to call police during the lunch hour, something he would not ordinarily do?
- And why did the police respond so quickly to a routine call?

Slide 32: Security Existing evacuation plan

We knew that our existing emergency plan was functional:

- Our marshalls are well-trained and are effective in civilian evacuation of the building
- Emergency services – police, fire and paramedics – know the building and understand the culture of the school
- Orderly evacuations take place every year in regularly planned drills and during real emergencies

- We have an agreement with Place Alexis Nihon, a large shopping complex across the street, to harbour our population in an emergency. They have the same agreement with us.
- Everyone knows where to go and we are successful ... in getting students and staff into the mall
- The senior management team knows to meet in front of the information desk to decide on the next course of action

Slide 33: Security / Evacuation plan on Sept 13

On September 13 we learned that our existing emergency plan could not work ... Why?

First, we were dealing with an unpredictable force, an unstable and armed human intent on violence

In such a case, we have no idea

- where that person will go
- what they will do
- Do they know the building?
- Is there a specific target?
- Is it a random attack?

During a gas leak, a fire or a flood, we have a reasonable idea of how that danger will act and how it will affect our population. But no one can predict what a human in that state will do.

Also, on September 13:

- When rumours and reports of additional shooters began to circulate, and police took these reports very seriously, the mall where we usually assemble was also evacuated

And remember that for a time the police force believed ... this could be a concerted terrorist attack.

The Metro line that runs under our school was stopped, leaving thousands of our students, faculty and staff not only scattered, but stranded, many of them without a penny, keys or ID.

Slide 34: Security Hindsight

Here's another thing we learned: people need to be reassured about security, even if it is mostly a psychological reaction.

Sometimes when we talk about security improvements, it feels a little like closing the barn door after the horse has already left the gate. Are we arming ourselves to the teeth against another disturbed individual who may lay siege to us again?

We knew in those first few days and months that parents, in particular, and our faculty and staff felt comforted by an increased security presence. They needed to see something concrete to regain the sense of security we lost on September 13.

The truth is no number of unarmed guards can disable one person with an assault weapon with 1,700 rounds of ammunition, spraying bullets.

But we also understood that we had to communicate reassurances. So as we set out to improve security installations, we told the general public through the media and our own community through listserve e-mails and newsletters about these improvements.

We even kept the talk a little technical so it they could really feel part of the plan, it was not being “dumbed” down for them.

Slide 35: Security / communications installations

We told everyone

- about the big telecommunications provider who will install 27 antennae on campus to create a dedicated cell phone network.
- how this network will enhance coverage throughout the building including those areas four levels below street level.
- about the 30 special cell phones equipped with a walkie-talkie feature that overrides the cell network in the unlikely event of a crash.
- more landlines
- better emergency telephone equipment
- panic buttons tied to the security station.

And that the equipment ...

- can trace a 9-1-1 call
- and record a distress call.

Slide 36: Security PA SYSTEM

We went into detail about the new public address system ... that will broadcast deeper into the building.

How it can be activated in sections so that even if a general announcement cannot be made, we can alert people trapped in specific areas to specific threats. And we can warn people that the exit closest to them may not be safe or that the safest place they can be in is in their offices or classrooms.

Slide 37: Security/ Improve preparedness

One of things that we have had to communicate, particularly to our internal audience, is what we are doing in terms of preparedness.

Apart from preparing a revised emergency measures manual, which will be in the hands of the members of the crisis management team, we have to make sure somehow that the 10,000 people who inhabit that building on any given day know what to do.

In mid-August, the security company we have hired will run a drill with only the crisis management team, and in the days before the start of classes on August 22, a general assembly gathering all 1,000 faculty and staff will be called to make everyone aware of new procedures in view of the new equipment.

As it is difficult to reach more than 9,000 students at once, we are counting on teachers to take the lead in the classroom should an emergency or test exercise occur.

Incoming students will be able to learn about these procedures at the beginning of the term and we will also have to take very special care when we have drills for at least the next two years so that we do not cause panic, but we also need to make sure that everyone is prepared.

Slide 38: Security/ Conclusion

You may notice that none of these measures impede free access to students, faculty or staff to their College.

Allowing access to only the people that belong in the school would change the way Dawson has welcomed its neighbours and friends for the past 18 years in that building. And we know that restricting access would have made no difference at Columbine or Virginia Tech.

At police headquarters on the evening of September 13, we made a promise not to turn Dawson College into a fortress. We are committed to striking the right balance between protecting our community and maintaining the spirit and freedom of our school

Dawson has been the very symbol of openness and community for more than 35 years.

If you had visited our school at any time during this past term, you would have seen sitting in the very place where everything happened on September 13, a few hundred students doing what students do in their free time – eating, talking, playing cards, meeting with friends, enjoying life.

Our students were very vocal about maintaining the spirit of the school that came across so vividly in the media in those first days and weeks after September 13.

We have to listen to them: Dawson is their school.

Slide 39: New Phase of Recovery

We have learned that recovery takes many forms. The mood changes daily at Dawson. The strangest things set us off, loud noises still bother all of us, distinguishing between a student laughing and one screaming has become a fine-tuned auditory exercise, things that used to drive us crazy we just let slide, someone sitting despondently in a stairwell now gets asked, are you ok? instead of shuffling past, and we are very conscious of behaviour that doesn't seem right.

Slide 40: Foundation

For a lot of people, recovery seems to involve giving to the institution.

One of the Director General's objectives for the 2006-2007 academic year was to establish a foundation to centralize operations, particularly of a fragmented awards and scholarships program and to explore new avenues for funding.

After September 13, our efforts were kick-started when money started to pour in the very next day. The mail carrier couldn't get in, but envelopes began arriving, from an elderly neighbour down the street to the sisters who used to own our building. When we saw them coming, we let them in and they handed us thousands of dollars and just as many prayers. They took the assault on us very personally.

With a very successful golf tournament and all this outpouring of support and sympathy, we rushed into the incorporation so we could concentrate all our efforts under the umbrella of the foundation.

Slide 41: Anastasia's fund

Not surprisingly, the sympathy revolved around Anastasia. Not only was she a beautiful young woman, she had surmounted so many obstacles in her short life – chronic asthma, scoliosis and dyslexia. But she was a fighter.

Between September 13 and May 31, some \$120,000 has been received in her memory. \$40,000 of that money was raised by one enterprising young man, who those of you at McMaster will be lucky enough to have come September.

Michael Wexler took it upon himself to create a blue rubber bracelet that we could sell for \$2 a piece because he knew that students also wanted to give, to do something.

So he lined up all the sponsors himself and ordered 20,000 of these bracelets that say only "Dawson September 13, 2006." They were gone in less than a month.

As Anastasia's fund grew, we teamed up with her parents – who have been nothing short of awe-inspiring – to find ways to best exemplify what their daughter was about. She was not an A student. She struggled with every breath in her body, literally and figuratively,

but she had an unparalleled ambition to succeed. That is the criteria on which the awards that carry her name will be based.

In a separate project, more than \$17,000 was raised by the Quebec Association for Adult Learning for a fund that sends teachers to week-long workshops on non-violent communication.

Slide 42: Hockey

As a lifelong Montrealer and Canadiens supporter, I was a little taken aback by how deeply the Montreal Canadiens hockey organization had been affected by what happened on September 13, management and players alike.

There had been no link between our two institutions, but a news conference that was supposed to take place at 1 p.m. that day to announce the retirement of some sweaters was cancelled, and they called us on Sept 15 to say they didn't know when, they didn't know how, but we had to team up and do something constructive to help our community.

The re-entry of the students on September 18 clinched it when the women's hockey team, wearing their jerseys, led the thousands of returning students back into the school, crying and clutching each other.

They went on to play a perfect season – 33-0 – and won the provincial AA championship, playing in Anastasia's memory, wearing black armbands as all our athletic teams did this year, and using pink tape on their sticks.

In February, we inked a three-year agreement to raise \$60,000 for a fund that will award two scholarships per year for two players on the team going on to university and pursuing hockey.

Slide 43: Supporting the Injured

As I said, recovery takes many forms. We had 16 people who were shot and who were recovering physically and mentally from this attack in a way that the rest of us were not.

They had real scars to look at and pain I can only imagine. They may be 17, 18, 19 years old and seemingly indestructible, but they are human, young people with their whole lives ahead of them and we can never lose sight of that fact.

Between September 13 and the holidays, we kept in touch with our injured students and saw them one-on-one, at home, in the hospital, and those few who had been able to return, at the College.

In January 2007, we learned that fully 11 of the 16 people who had been injured were coming back to school. We worked to reunite them as a group to offer our support in a more constructive way.

A few days before the beginning of term, we assembled our injured students and their families to inform them of the services we had put in place to help them through the rest of the academic year.

These were fast-track services for course change, academic advising, psychological counseling, as well as physiotherapy and massage therapy sessions, with no waiting time and free of charge.

Slide 44: Supporting the Injured

In February, we assembled them again informally as a group to see how they were faring. We had seen them individually in the intervening time using the fast track services or just dropping in on us in our offices to say Hi.

At that second meeting, we heard about their appreciation for the services we had provided, but also their frustration with some of the other processes they had to deal with to receive help from government and social programs for victims of criminal acts to which they are entitled.

Remember that in the wake of September 13, Dawson College has been thrust into a role for which it had no forewarning, no training, no established resources.

There was no manual to tell us how many psychologists we would need to deal with 50, 500, or even 5,000 injured, scarred, frightened or depressed individuals over the days, weeks and months to come.

We had no idea what forms a student shot in the abdomen or in the leg needs to fill out, or which receipts a family needs to produce to receive compensation for expenses incurred as a result of their injuries?

We had no expertise, but we are learning what we have to do so that we can best support the people that for lack of a better word we call the victims of September 13.

I should tell you about our victims. They hate that word. They are much too defiant and they fought too hard to survive to be called victims.

They trust us. They are enormously grateful to the police, paramedics and hospital for saving their lives, and they stand by their school, the place where they were shot. I find that just remarkable, that they were able to overcome their fears to walk those halls again.

We needed to repay that trust so we committed to help them through the processes. We would learn together.

The group also had some creative and noble ideas about long-term compensation. The Quebec government had gone on record on September 14 to say they would be there for the students and their families, and now they wanted to know what that meant.

We organized meetings with the provincial ministry of justice and the compensation agency so they could express their concerns and discuss their ideas.

The officials at these meetings heard the messages loud and clear. Sometimes emotions ran high, but that is what happens when you have a group of people, students and their parents, who have been traumatized in such a way.

By the end of the meeting, the officials were visibly moved and the students and parents wanted more than anything ... to believe in the good will of the government.

Slide 45: Eureka

At the meeting with the compensation agency in April, no moment was as satisfying as the news that the cumbersome and confusing reimbursement processes had been simplified, and the acknowledgment that the situation of Dawson's victims is unique.

Never had anyone had to deal with so many people injured in a single event and who had survived.

To have all these young people and their families assembled in one room with their different stories and injuries and their individual needs made an impression like nothing had before. It really is the human tragedy that speaks to us.

As we broke up that evening and the families filed out, the head of the compensation agency said "quel beau groupe."

They are. Imagine a group whose membership is defined by an event as traumatizing as this, and who find the strength in each other to go on and to continue to inspire us.

For as long as they need us, they have our full and unconditional support. We are willing to learn whatever we need to so that we can travel this road with them.

Slide 46: CASE

I told you earlier about the raw emotions that still surface, especially as the fatigue of this year sets in and we look forward to the summer holidays to rest, reflect and recharge. Those are our 3 Rs right now.

But I also told you how the students have risen to the challenge.

At the first ever CEGEP level CASE competition, the Dawson teams in both the accounting and marketing streams took top prize.

Slide 47: Athletics

Dawson has one of the largest intercollegiate athletics programs in Canada with 16 teams. Each team but one placed first or second in their respective leagues, including the cheerleaders. The men's AAA basketball team captured the provincial and national championships in what had begun as a very difficult season even before September 13.

Slide 48: St Patrick's Float

Even our float for the St. Patrick's Day parade, with the theme of peace and harmony designed by our own Illustration and Design students, won the Friends of McGill Trophy for Best College or University unit.

Slide 49: Recruitment

That is all well and good, but how does a school shooting affect recruitment efforts? Attendance at all our major events has skyrocketed, from Open House to the golf tournament and an art auction fundraiser, and Convocation, where we will pay tribute to the police force and announcing the details of Anastasia's fund.

Slide 50: Recruitment

We were also worried about our statistics for current students: the drop rates, fail rates, return rates in January and grad rates. We were relieved to see that there had been no significant change over the numbers of the previous three years.

As we enter the new cycle of admissions and acceptances, confirmations, and Orientation, we find ourselves happy to see a 10% increase in applications, and more students confirming that they will be attending.

At the six nights of Orientation last month, almost the full complement of new students has attended whereas we usually expect some 60, 70 per cent at best. There was considerable scrambling for more rooms this year.

Why are they coming?

We think that maybe the vision of so many intelligent, articulate, bilingual, attractive young people committed to their school, standing together under such incredibly difficult circumstances, showed our city and the country what I already knew – what an amazing group of young people we are privileged to call our students, and what a special place Dawson is. No one can take that away from us.

THANK YOU SLIDE

Thank you.