



THE ROMÉO
DALLAIRE



CHILD
SOLDIERS
INITIATIVE

DALHOUSIE
UNIVERSITY



Rob Lewis

2017 VTECS Graduate

Rob Lewis, an RCMP officer from British Columbia, regularly deals with youth gangs and holds passionate views on how to tackle the growing problem in Canada. “You’ve got to start treating them with respect; find out what they want and what they need. You’ve got to start bringing in your social workers and community members,” he says.

But Rob did not always feel this way about young people engaged in conflict. “Before, I always thought the child soldier was the kid in Africa with the AK 47,” Rob says. “I didn’t know the roles girls played, I didn’t know it was happening in South America and other parts of the world, and how the same things are happening here with gangs and organized crime.” Robs’ perspective changed after participating in the Veteran Trainer to Eradicate the use of Child Soldiers (VTECS) program in 2017. “I was unaware of the similarities between child soldiers and youth involved in gangs/criminal organizations. I would say that after attending the program there is no difference between the two. The only difference is what we call them,” he says.

Learning new – and nuanced – perspectives are something many VTECS graduates say is the most rewarding part of the program. One very special aspect of the course is the pairing of veterans with Dalhousie University students. “We really enjoyed being embedded with the students and feeding off their energy,” Rob says. “The mix in the classroom allowed students to learn from the experience of the veterans, and allowed the veterans to listen to the perspectives and passion of

undergrad students.”

Since graduating from VTECS, Rob went back to his work with the RCMP with new ways to approach his work with youth gangs. “I have raised awareness regarding the issue of child soldiers, especially when dealing with immigrant youth gangs in BC. The standard approaches we’ve been using would not be appropriate as these youths have been exposed to, or may have been involved with, child soldiers overseas.” He has also been working with the Dallaire Initiative on some of the organization’s police programming in Canada. The aim of the work is to better equip a range of frontline workers with the knowledge and skills to identify, respond to and prevent radicalization leading to violence among youth in Canada.

Based out of the Dallaire Initiative’s institutional home, Dalhousie University, the Wounded Warriors Canada Veteran Trainers to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers (VTECS) program delivers education and skills transition training for Canadian veterans by combining academic, fully-credited university classes with specialized training that build on Canadian veterans’ skills, expertise and experience.