



CASE STUDY

The transformative project of a special education class at Sainte-Ursule School



Located in Amqui, in the province of Quebec, Sainte-Ursule School welcomes 290 students from preschool to grade 6. It is classified as a disadvantaged school and employs 65 people. The Vireo hydroponic gardening project was implemented in Annie Fournier's special education class, which has 9 students from grades 2 to 6. Learning in this class is project-based and tailored to students with learning disabilities, behavioral issues, speech and language difficulties, mild intellectual disabilities, and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

Adopting the Vireo Project: A solution to a real problem

During a history lesson, a discussion about food revealed that the students' parents found groceries expensive. **When asked, "What can we do to reduce grocery bills?" Annie Fournier's students suggested growing tomatoes.** The first year, they grew and sold 300 tomato plants.

The following year, **Annie asked her students if they wanted to explore beyond soil gardening, which led them to discover and adopt the Vireo hydroponic gardening project.** Determined, the teacher and her students embarked on a fundraising journey to make their dream a reality.

A project funded through collective effort

Funding was critical to the implementation of the Vireo Project. Since the hydroponic garden would be used by one class, Annie and her students had to raise all the funds themselves, showing unwavering determination. Here's an in-depth look at their journey:

Major grant: Annie presented the project to a former school principal who was connected to several regional organizations. Through her intervention, Moisson Vallée, a nonprofit organization working to combat food insecurity, donated \$9,000 via its "Better Eating" program, a decisive sum for the project's success.

OSEntreprendre challenge: Annie's class won the local and regional rounds of the OSEntreprendre Challenge, which highlights entrepreneurial projects across Quebec, and decided to invest the prize money in the Vireo Project.

Selling tomatoes: Growing and selling tomato plants raised a significant amount of money in the first year.

Christmas market: Students made and sold handmade products at a Christmas market, which added to their funds.

School support: At the end of the year, the school contributed the remaining necessary funds from budget surpluses.

Each step of this fundraising journey increased the students' pride and sense of belonging as they actively participated in the success of the project.



**“This is the best project of my career!
I found our class’s unique spirit with
the Vireo Project.”**

Annie Fournier, Teacher



An emotionally rich adventure

In January 2023, the Vireo hydroponic garden arrived in the classroom, marking a turning point in their education. **The students named their small business "Le p'tit potager de Sainte-Ursule" and created a logo.** The adventure began with growing lettuce. Motivated by a fantastic first harvest, **Annie's class organized open days for the school and the public**, with various booths explaining the garden and its equipment, hydroponics, tomato varieties, and a popular tasting booth.

That same year, **they produced herbs to make soaps for Mother's Day**, an activity so popular that they made more for the Young Entrepreneurs Market. Thanks to all these initiatives, **Le p'tit potager de Sainte-Ursule reached the regional finals of the OSEntreprendre Challenge** (picture on the right).

In its second year, **the class decided to prepare salads for the students who eat in the cafeteria** and made two harvests of different salads. **They also made a donation to Moisson Vallée** and promised to continue supporting this organization that helps others.



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**On a sensory level, students see, touch,
and taste new foods. Two years ago, no one
would have put lettuce in their sandwich!**

**The project extends beyond the school
walls, as many students have started
small gardens at home.**

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Learning differently through sensory experiences

The primary goal was to open the classroom door to invite other students to discover hydroponic growing and to motivate Annie's students to come to school for hands-on activities. **Projects with the garden allow Annie's students to work on their social skills, become more integrated into their school environment, and give back to the community**, especially by contributing to the local food bank and soup kitchen.



Annie Fournier observes the benefits of the Vireo Project on her students every day, and feels immense pride:

"Engagement, motivation, and pride are directly linked to the Vireo Project. The students are much more observant. When they come in the morning, they notice changes in the garden (the sound of the pump, the color of the substrate, the smells, the water level, etc.). They are also less shy around other students in the school.

They quickly become experts by using the garden and working with the Vireo digital platform. They feel sad when we've finished a harvest, and the lights go out. The drive to go above and beyond when doing a school-related activity... It gives them a desire to keep learning more."



Annie's advice to other schools

My wildest dream...a Vireo Project for every class! I want to tell others that it's possible! I believed in my students and have no regrets about the hard work behind the scenes. Other students tell me they can't wait to be in my class. To schools and classes that are hesitant to start, go for it!



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