



**FEATURE AGENCY**

## Safe City Mississauga’s Aspire: Tutoring and Peer Mentoring Program

Aspire is a place-based tutoring program focused on helping students develop and improve their academic and social skills. Since its launch in 2010, Aspire has grown to five locations across Mississauga in communities that are under-served or have limited meaningful after-school programming for children and youth (K-Grade 6).

More than 60 high school, college and university youth tutors volunteer their time weekly to mentor students. Aspire also helps youth develop an enhanced sense of self confidence and exposes them to positive role models.

*“...this is so much more than tutoring. We are providing these children with life lessons and life skills that they will carry with them for the rest of their lives.” (Zarmesh Amaria, Aspire Volunteer Tutor)*

### Measurement and Evaluation

Safe City Mississauga recently underwent an external evaluation process to capture the successes, learnings and outcomes of the Aspire program. Some of their key findings fall into the following themes:

- Capacity building for volunteer tutors – employability skills
- Relationship building with parents and parental in-



volvement

- Volunteer tutor support, training and recognition
- Community engagement and recruitment of Aspire students
- Program participation rates

Safe City Mississauga will use the evaluation data to learn what is working and where to make program improvements.

Interested in hosting an Aspire program in your neighbourhood? Agencies and organizations can apply to get involved.

For more information about this opportunity or questions about Aspire, contact Sheena Moya Chen, Youth Development Supervisor at [aspire@safecitymississauga.on.ca](mailto:aspire@safecitymississauga.on.ca) or 905-615-4155 X 4480 ; [safecitymississauga.on.ca/programs/aspire/](http://safecitymississauga.on.ca/programs/aspire/)

Thank you to Sheena Moya Chen for contributing this information to our newsletter.

**RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT**

## Using Technology to improve Services, Programs and Policy for Youth

Anyone working with children and youth knows how deeply rooted technology is in their culture. Technology use has become more than just a communication tool. Social media also offers youth a way to express themselves and can even contribute to their identity formation.

The national Children and Youth in Challenging Contexts Network (CYCC) recently released a report: *The Power of Technology: Improving Services, Programs and Policy for Children and Youth*. It summarizes current research and expert knowledge from practitioners in the field on effective strategies for

using technology to reach young people in challenging contexts for the purpose of improving their well-being and safety.

While more research and evaluation is needed to make recommendations, the report discusses how technology is being used by organizations globally to help nurture resilience, prevent mental health problems, and build a special place for vulnerable children and youth in their communities. ▶

## FEATURE RESOURCE

# Building Evidence into Practice: What can Organizations do?

The use of research to guide policies and practice in many sectors is increasingly important given limited resources and pressures to report service outcomes (1). Finding and using research evidence can be challenging. Not only is there limited time to review research; sometimes the research lacks actionable messages or doesn't seem applicable to the local context (2). Building an organizational culture that values research evidence and includes it in the **decision-making process** can help overcome these barriers.

Consider the following reflective questions at an upcoming team or leadership meeting. The questions will help you think about whether research evidence is valued in your organization, and what you might be able to do to start working towards building an organizational culture that values evidence (3):

- Do we lead by example and show how we value research use?
    - Is using research a priority?
    - Do we have committed resources?
    - Does our organizational culture value and reward continuous quality improvement?
  - Do our decision-making processes value or emphasize the importance of research?
    - Do we allow enough time in our decision-making process to include the acquisition and analysis of evidence?
    - Does leadership consider the feasibility of options presented through the analysis of research?
    - How are staff and stakeholders involved in the decision-making process?
- These questions come from the free tool **"Is Research Working for You? Self-**

**Assessment Tool"** (3). It can help organizations understand how research is being used, current capacity to locate and use research and next steps to consider.

Embracing evidence-informed decision making (EIDM) is a journey for organizations that can be done in small steps, with ongoing nurturing and attention to sustain the gains. The benefits of EIDM include the adoption of the most effective and cost-efficient interventions, careful use of limited resources and better outcomes for individuals and communities.

Please **contact us** if you need support or advice on getting started or sustaining your EIDM journey!

### References

1. Johnson, M. & Austin, M.J. (2005). Evidence-based practice in the social services: implications for organizational change. Retrieved from [March 24, 2014]: [calswec.berkeley.edu/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/EB\\_0705\\_2.1\\_EBP\\_Final-Feb05.pdf](http://calswec.berkeley.edu/files/uploads/pdf/CalSWEC/EB_0705_2.1_EBP_Final-Feb05.pdf)
2. Ungar, M. (2013). Strategies for Knowledge Mobilization in Community NGOs Working with Youth at Risk. A Toronto KTECOP presentation. (Toronto, Ontario). Retrieved from [March 3, 2014]: <http://www.ktecop.ca/2013/strategies-for-knowledge-mobilization-in-community-ngos-working-with-youth-at-risk/>
3. Canadian Health Services Research Foundation. (2005). Is research working for you? A self-assessment tool and discussion guide for health services management and policy organizations. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Health Services Research Foundation.
4. National Collaborating Centre for Methods and Tools (2013). Organizational change and capacity building for evidence-informed public health. Hamilton, ON: McMaster University. Retrieved from [March 18, 2014]: [nccmt.ca/registry/view/eng/183.html](http://nccmt.ca/registry/view/eng/183.html).

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## Using Technology to improve Services, Programs and Policy for Youth

The report presents a balanced analysis of both the opportunities and limitations of using technology to support young people at-risk and also offers youth-serving organizations a checklist to create, review or revise use-of-technology plans and policies.

Check out the summary and full report at [cycconetwork.org](http://cycconetwork.org).

How are you using technology to reach at-risk children and youth in Peel? What have you learned by using technology as a tool to reach out, educate or support youth? Share your story with us and others in the region by contacting us at [peelthinkshare@peelregion.ca](mailto:peelthinkshare@peelregion.ca).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Crime Prevention Conference

Theme: **"Sexual Violence, Social Media and Youth"**

Host agency: Safe City Mississauga

Date: June 17, 2014



### Youth Day Toronto

Date: July 20, 2014



## THE EDITORIAL TEAM

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