

ACTION AREA: PROMISING YOUNG PEOPLE

Background:



Evidence shows that to become healthy and productive adults, children and youth need a specific set of skills, relationships and experiences to support their transition to different life stages. Children and youth with strong social and emotional skills are more likely to have fewer behavioural problems, experience less emotional distress (e.g. anxiety and depression), and exhibit prosocial behaviours. Youth who are engaged, and those with strong emotional and social skills, experience improved outcomes in education, health, income, and employment.

They are more physically active, exhibit fewer risky behaviours, are more likely to finish high school, and are more connected to family, friends, and community. Apart from these well documented positive outcomes, social emotional learning initiatives have also been shown to produce a significant economic return of \$11 per dollar invested.

Schools today are therefore looking beyond academics to integrate social emotional learning in the classroom, and employers are changing hiring processes, focusing more on the social and emotional competencies of candidates. There is also a growing recognition that youth who volunteer and take on leadership roles further sharpen their social and emotional skills. Currently in Ontario, though 58% of youth volunteer, many still face challenges to meaningful participation in their communities.

The **Promising Young People** Action Area is designed to foster the positive development of Ontario's children and youth so that they have a better chance for success in life. This is consistent with the research and priorities established by the Government of Ontario. OTF investments will focus on two Priority Outcomes: More children and youth have emotional and social strengths; and more youth are meaningfully engaged in the community.

Alignment with Government Priorities:

The Promising Young People priority outcomes are strategically aligned with the direction of the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services in supporting youth to successfully transition into adulthood. The investments made through OTF granting support the evidence-based outcomes identified in the Stepping Up report, contributing to the Ministry's strategic framework.

First Cycle Granting Highlights:

In this first granting cycle, OTF will invest in 52 initiatives totalling \$12.4 million to achieve the priority outcomes for this Action Area. These investments will support over 100,000 children and youth across Ontario.

Grantees have provided evidence for, and new approaches to, emotional and social skills development through engagement with the arts, increasing physical activity, improved literacy, and connecting with families, culture, and community. Outcomes that may also result from these grants include academic achievement, reduced recidivism, and prevention of violence and mental health issues.

One notable initiative is the "Aspire" program of **Safe City Mississauga**. Aspire is a one-on-one no-cost after school tutoring service for students in kindergarten through Grade 6 who live in under-serviced or at-risk Mississauga neighbourhoods. Evaluations conducted on the program indicate increased self-esteem, social connections, and academic achievement, as well as improved family relationships and behaviours such as initiative, self-regulation, and organization. These results have also been noted as contributors to violence prevention.