

Supports for Success

*Healthy Lives from
Birth to Employment*

Supports for Success is an initiative focused on developing a framework for a continuum of community-based supports to ensure healthy lives of children and youth from birth to employment.

Supports for Success will reimagine the way we organize our collective resources to increase opportunity and promote positive health outcomes for children and youth at critical stages of their life journey. Building on national and international evidence, Supports for Success seeks to bridge the gaps across systems, services and programs to enable children and youth to succeed.

About Supports for Success

In March 2016, Wellesley Institute invited Professor David Morris to share the results from his work *Community Capital: The Value of Connected Communities*. David Morris is a Professor of Mental Health, Inclusion and Community at the University of Central Lancashire and Director of the Centre for Citizenship and Community in the U.K. This work inspired a conversation amongst Wellesley Institute and our Wellesley Senior Fellow, Camille Orridge about inequality in the Greater Toronto Area and the impact on marginalized youth. This rising inequality at both the individual and the neighbourhood level has an impact on access to opportunities for our young people.

For the GTA, high levels of youth and newcomer unemployment is a very clear indicator that barriers to opportunity exist. These persistent barriers feed health inequities. We continue to shine a light on the important role that employment, community, education, housing and income play in our health.

Because there are believed to be gaps and a lack of integration of existing services and supports at the city and community level, opportunities for young people in our region to succeed are blocked. As a result, there are significant limitations to our ability to improve health with the current organization of our system of services and supports.

The Connected Communities approach is “one in which people are embedded within local networks of social support; in which social isolation is reduced and people experience greater wellbeing and other benefits from the better understanding, mobilization and growth of community capital in their neighbourhoods.” So together we asked, what would Connected Communities look like in Toronto? And how will that improve health and health equity in the GTA? It is from this question that Supports for Success emerged.

Collective Impact Approach

The collective impact approach involves diverse stakeholders coming together with a wrap around approach and a single set of goals with common measurement. This approach has been extended to address the gaps in health and social support that can act as barriers for children and youth as they transition from birth through to meaningful employment. Several initiatives in the U.S. use this approach to improve the lives of children and youth, like the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York City, Baltimore’s Promise, in Maryland and Strive Together Cradle to Career Network in Cincinnati, Ohio. Supports for Success looks to these approaches and others to learn about best practices for success.

Youth Advisory Group

Supports for Success has convened a youth advisory group that includes eight youth with lived experience of surviving challenging contexts and succeeding at achieving meaningful education and employment opportunities. They are advising the project vision, guiding principles, and informing the project design through their stories of supports which lead to success. The youth advisory group has representation of indigenous youth, youth who have grown up in care, youth whose families migrated as immigrants or refugees, youth with mental health issues, LGBTQ youth and they all represent different neighbourhoods in Toronto.

Making the Case for Change

Inequitable access to opportunities results in inequitable opportunities to be healthy (Toronto Public Health, 2015). The rising income inequality in Toronto at neighbourhood and individual levels, and the concomitant increase in families living in poverty has an impact on access to opportunity at neighbourhood, family and individual levels (United Way, 2015).

While there are many organizations doing exemplary work to address inequities in housing, education and poverty, the services and supports are often fragmented. Supports for Success wants to work together to reshape the way we support children, youth and families from different socio-economic groups.

Supports for Success wants to engage with communities to identify critical success factors that have made it possible for some children in marginalized populations to realize their full potential despite barriers and challenges.

The focus on these success factors provides the basis for a prevention approach. The foundations of this model will be rooted in identifying and bridging gaps with innovative solutions that provide a full range of supports at every stage of their life journey to ensure success.

The challenge for Supports for Success is to help bridge the gaps across systems, services and programs to take a collective approach to addressing the social determinants of health for children and youth to enable them to succeed. Collective approaches have emerged across the U.S. and in Canada as models for addressing entrenched health and social issues.

Supports for Success will be connecting with stakeholders from different communities to participate in this exciting initiative that is focused on driving integration of community services and networks for children and parents who need them the most.

Our Goals



To identify factors that contribute to successful transitions of children and youth through critical stages of development.



To develop a framework for supports and services that leverages successful models from various sectors to create a continuum of services that will address the social determinants of health.



To demonstrate the potential impact of targeted, comprehensive, and fully integrated services spanning the continuum of health, social and education sectors on health outcomes.



Want to know more?

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Supports for Success is a project of Wellesley Institute. Wellesley Institute works in research and policy to improve health and health equity through action on the social determinants of health in the Greater Toronto Area.

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