



YAAACE

2022 YEAR IN REVIEW

Youth Association for Academics, Athletics,
and Character Education



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2022 Year in Review

A message from the Executive Director and Founding Director

It has been a busy year at YAAACE! We were able to secure and move into our new space at 45 Norfinch Drive in the Jane and Finch community. The classrooms have been customized and tailored to suit our needs and reflect the services and programs we continue to offer to students, families, and the larger community in a socio-culturally relevant and trauma-informed manner.

Our programs and services continued to expand after a return to in-person gathering was permitted by the provincial guidelines. We continued to offer our annual March Break camp and the Summer Institute focusing on academics, athletics, and expanded opportunities. We launched two new programs - TO Wards Peace and Peace Core New Narrative which focus on youth violence prevention and intervention using a community-driven public health approach. We have also entered numerous new partnerships with various stakeholders to strengthen our programs and services and ensure it remains affordable and accessible to the predominantly black clients, students, and families we serve. We also launched the Centre for Community Safety and Youth Violence to continue our work that aligns with YAAACE core values rooted in Awareness, Accountability, Advocacy, Action, and Access.

What has been made clear to us through the programs and services we offer is that students, clients, and families, particularly from racialized communities, need holistic supports to overcome the systemic inequities and barriers impacting them and where they live. We will continue to advocate for this!

We highly encourage everyone to check out our updated website (www.yaaace.com) to learn more about other programs and services that may support your needs.

We look forward to passionately continuing to serve the community.

With love, respect, and gratitude,

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad and Devon Jones



Devon Jones
Founding Director



Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad,
Executive Director

About YAAACE

Vision Statement

Founded in 2007 by Devon Jones, the Youth Association for Academics, Athletics and Character Education (YAAACE) is a community organization that seeks to engage children and youth from all communities – particularly those from marginalized and poor under-resourced communities through participation in year round comprehensive programming and activities. YAAACE's mandate is two-fold: to build capacity in all children and youth thus enhancing their capacity to become twenty first century learners and global citizens.

Mission Statement

YAAACE uses a social inclusion framework that enables participants to access opportunities, engage in academic activities, build self-confidence, and enhance self-identification. YAAACE's social inclusion framework is a socio-mechanism designed to impact the lives of children and youth so that they grow, learn, and play in a context that is responsive and supportive of their needs, interests, expectations and aspirations, thereby enhancing the likelihood of them becoming twenty first century learners and global citizens.

CORE VALUES:

Awareness **Accountability**
Advocacy **Action** **Access**



and heartbroken by their loss at such a young age, Jones recognized that children are largely influenced by their surrounding environments from an early age in terms of their identity development and decision-making.

When planning the design of the organization's logo, the colour purple was selected with a purpose to mitigate the turf war that was making children choose sides from an early age between Finch's south and north side. Jones selected purple for its neutrality and its symbolism for togetherness as red (south) and blue (north) united. It was intended to bring youth from both sides of the community into a neutral space where they can learn and grow together without worrying about turf confrontations. Since 2007, YAAACE has expanded extensively to offer a range of programs and services related to academics, athletics, character education, experiential learning, youth violence prevention, and employment.

YAAACE's Social Inclusion Framework

Mitigating the Opportunity Gap

YAAACE acknowledges that negative pull factors in the community such as exposure to violence, guns, and gangs driven by systemic inequities gravitate children and youth towards a lifestyle affiliated with risk-taking, poor decision-making, and false hopes.

In response, the Social Inclusion strategy seeks to mitigate risk factors in the community by surrounding children, youth, and young adults and their families with access to quality programming to offset exposure to negative pull factors.

The Social Inclusion team works with the various stakeholders to identify the most volatile cohort of students to ensure that they have access to academic support, recreational programming, expanded opportunities, comprehensive wraparound support, and cultural considerations of care and reflective services year-round.

The idea is to ensure students and clients we serve have access to a caring adult -- whether a teacher, coach, caseworker, or mentor -- at all times in a 24-hour cycle, particularly outside of school hours on weekday evenings and weekends where



YAAACE uses a Social Inclusion Framework as an operational framework for implementation of its programs and services.

there is the greater risk for exposure to violence. The partnerships YAAACE has created and sustained with various stakeholders over the years ensure that the costs for using programs and services are low so the opportunities remain accessible and affordable.

The prevention and intervention strategies offered through YAAACE programs and services are based on trust and the larger goal of minimizing the opportunity gap to provide students and families we serve, many racialized and from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, with viable alternatives to guns, gangs, and attrition.

The cover features a maroon background with a large circular inset showing two students writing on a whiteboard. In the top left corner, there are three colored circles (green, yellow, purple) above the text 'Spirit of Math.'. In the top center, there is a circular logo with a building and the text 'VAN PRAAG LAUREL UNIVERSITY'.

**ADDRESSING
THE SOCIAL
DETERMINANTS OF
LEARNING:**
THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE
CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP
FOR RACIALIZED UNDER-RESOURCED
COMMUNITIES

**FEBRUARY
2022**

PREPARED BY:
Dr. Ardavan Elzadirad, Sally
Abudlab, and Brice Baartman

-Link to the final report: <https://www.communityschoolinitiative.com/final-report>

Community School Initiative (CSI) Report and Symposium

Link to research website which includes resources for educators, parents, students, and community partners and policymakers:

<https://www.communityschoolinitiative.com/>

The Community School Initiative (CSI) offered evening and weekend supplementary academic support to residents of the Jane and Finch community. CSI is a partnership between YAAACE and for-profit enterprise Spirit of Math (<https://spiritofmath.com/>). It delivered a structured math curriculum to students in grades two to eight aged 8 to 14 years old at a subsidized cost supported by a team of caring adults including parents, coaches, and teachers.

Spirit of Math has been operating for 35 years and typically offers their structured math curriculum to high-performing and gifted students in kindergarten to Grade 11 as a private service. They serve over 11,000 students across 40 campuses in twenty cities in North America and Pakistan.

The foundation of the Spirit of Math curriculum is based on four elements:

- Drills
- Problem solving
- Core curriculum; and
- Cooperative Learning.

These elements as a collective create a multi-layered experiential learning experience that aims to develop well-rounded students.

CSI was offered as a 9-month (36 weeks) program. The cost of the program was subsidized at \$100 per person, so families got access to it at the fraction of what it typically costs at \$3000 as a private sector service.

CSI began with in-person programming, moved to remote delivery due to COVID-19 restrictions in alignment with public health guidelines, and transitioned to a hybrid model to support families and their various circumstances. YAAACE students had access to the Spirit of Math curriculum with slight adjustments.

Students attended the weekend learning session on Saturdays for 2 hours followed with a 1-hour remote weeknight drop-in session to get extra help. Students were assigned to a grade based on their skills and knowledge identified via diagnostic testing. YAAACE teachers were trained and supported by Spirit of Math instructors to deliver the curriculum.

Bi-weekly check-in meetings were hosted between YAAACE teachers and Spirit of Math staff to discuss identified challenges and how to support students. Students were assessed weekly through homework assignments, math drills, tests, and a final exam.

Approximately 100 students participated in the CSI including 5 staff from Spirit of Math, 8 Ontario certified teachers, 8 YAAACE coaches, and other staff hired by YAAACE to be part of the student support team. The support team would assist teachers in their classroom.

It is important to note that many of the staff had direct community connections with families in the program. Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) educators were hired to represent the cultural identities of the students. YAAACE typically hires the same small group of educators to deliver its educational programs throughout the year such as the March Break camp and the Summer Institute to create continuity of care and establish trust with students and families. Coaches served as mentors as part of the program, working collaboratively with the teachers to keep students accountable, motivate them, and facilitate transfer of life skills from the classroom to sports and the larger community.

Overall, CSI aimed to minimize the achievement gap by creating access to academic opportunities that are accessible, affordable, and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive with consideration for systemic barriers impacting community members living in the Jane and Finch neighborhood.

The efficacy and outcomes of the CSI was assessed through surveys with parents (n=33), students (n=33), and teachers (n=4), and a focus group with seven teachers delivering the curriculum. Findings related to the themes of holistic and culturally relevant programming and access to structured programming indicate that community partnerships such as the CSI effectively mobilized during the pandemic to minimize the achievement gap by creating access to academic opportunities that were affordable and socio-culturally relevant, sustaining, and responsive with consideration for systemic barriers impacting families living in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. As part of knowledge mobilization and dissemination, a research blog was created (communityschoolinitiative.com) to share resources and findings with the larger community and various stakeholders.

Link to the final report: <https://www.communityschoolinitiative.com/final-report>

As part of the knowledge mobilization, a symposium was hosted to share the final report with the public in association with the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. We hosted various discussions with different panelists on building resilient communities by addressing the social determinants of learning. Panels with community members, students and parents within the CSI, school board trustees, and ministry and academics were held throughout the day.

Check out the YouTube videos below for the full highlights from the morning and afternoon sessions of the symposium.

Link to the symposium recordings:

<https://www.community-schoolinitiative.com/blog>

Join the discussion **Symposium**

THE COMMUNITY SCHOOL INITIATIVE:

CLOSING THE OPPORTUNITY GAP FOR RACIALIZED & UNDER RESOURCED COMMUNITIES

PRESENTERS:

- DR. ARDAVAN EIZADIRAD**
Faculty of Education,
Wilfrid Laurier University
- DEVON JONES**
Founding Director of
YAAACE & TDSB Educator
- SALLY ABUDIAH**
Factor-Inwentash
Faculty of Social Work
University of Toronto
- BRICE BAARTMAN**
OISE,
University of Toronto

FEBRUARY 26TH 2022
45 NORFINCH AVE., NORTH YORK

SCHEDULE 10AM - 3:30PM

- 10:15 AM** Executive Summary, Findings & Recommendations
- PANEL DISCUSSIONS:**
- 11:15 AM** Community Perspective
- 1:00 PM** Students and Parents
- 2:00 PM** Leadership Panel
Theme: Mitigating Root Causes of Systemic Barriers for Teaching and Learning

To Register: [community-schoolinitiative.com/blog](https://www.community-schoolinitiative.com/blog)

LAURIER **Spirit of Math** **LAILAW** **Ontario**

Sharing of the Report Findings (April 2022)

Laurier EdTalks recording from April 27, 2022:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNGGTAO0NXs&t=1448s>

Infographic from two webinars hosted with Community-Based Research Canada:

<https://www.communityresearchcanada.ca/webinars-2021>

https://www.communityresearchcanada.ca/_files/ugd/36eba7_5231c8a6cb8f4969a8fe66951e0cd42a.pdf

TO Wards Peace Launched

The northwest region (Blackcreek and Rexdale) was chosen as the pilot location to launch TO Wards Peace - a data-based violence prevention initiative with Toronto Police Services and the FOCUS program, a best-in-class initiative led by the City of Toronto, United Way Greater Toronto. A Situation Table model is used to bring together agencies from different sectors weekly to coordinate and provide targeted wrap-around approaches to support individuals and families who are in Acutely Elevated Risk (AER) situations (situations with extremely high probability of harms or victimization).

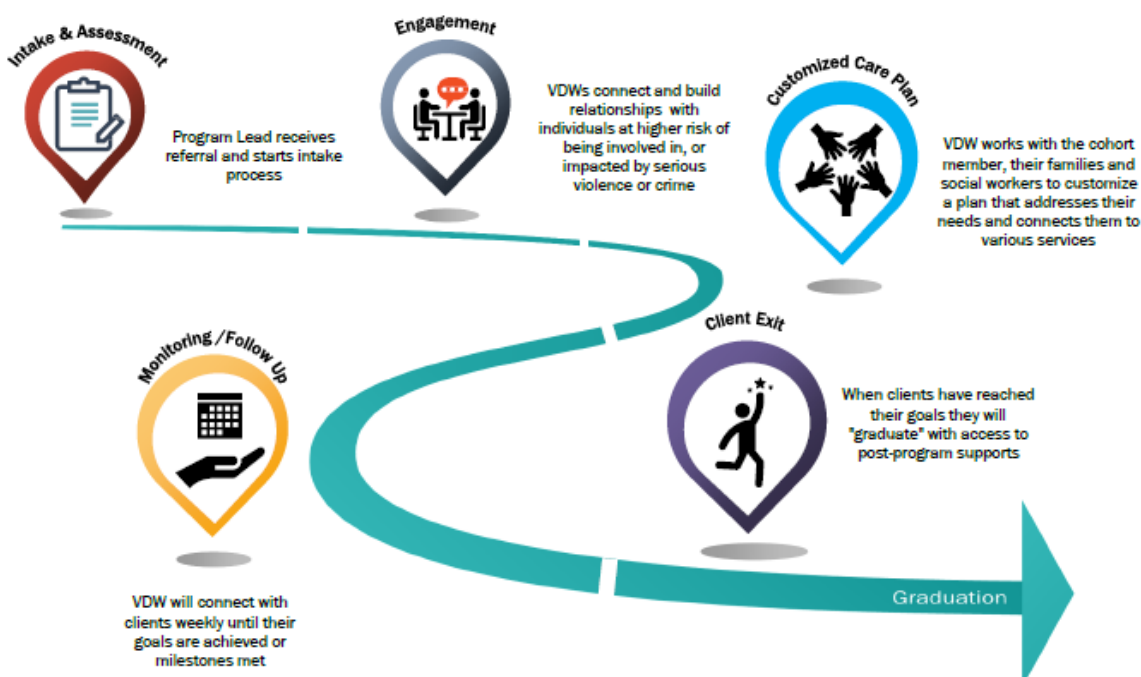
This data indicates significant escalation of gun related violence and community exposure to broader community violence in the northwest Toronto where approximately 23% of all shooting and firearm discharge incidents take place and 41% of the FOCUS AER situations are located.

TO Wards Peace Project (TWP) is a risk driven, community-centric interruption model that takes a public health approach to interrupting and in-

tervening in community violence. This model leverages the lived experience of affected communities to develop and implement effective community engagement approaches, innovative communication tools, social media strategies, and focused investment geared at violence prevention and interruption. The integrated approach combines community-based social media, and hospital-based violence interventions.

Black Creek and Rexdale Community Health Centre in partnership with YAAACE, Think Twice, City of Toronto, and other partners are overseeing the development and implementation of the program in Jane and Finch and Rexdale communities. The model features frontline risk intervention services led by Violence Disruption Workers (VDWs) who have lived experience and deep connections with community which strengthens their capacity to build rapport and constructively intervene in situations involving exposure to serious violence and crime.

Journey Map for how TWP Clients are supported:



Learn more at:
<https://www.toronto.ca/legdocs/mmis/2021/bu/bgrd/backgroundfile-162877.pdf>

<https://www.rexdalechc.com/health-care-services-youth-and-family-services-programs/to-wards-peace-youth-and-children-program>

Peace Core New Narrative Launched

Selected and funded as part of the Crime Prevention Action Fund by Public Safety Canada.

The program offers comprehensive services using a public health approach to mitigate the risk factors that impact involvement with violence and crime.

This multi-sectoral community-driven direct intervention project includes the following components: family support; learning and education training; case management; and employment training/support.

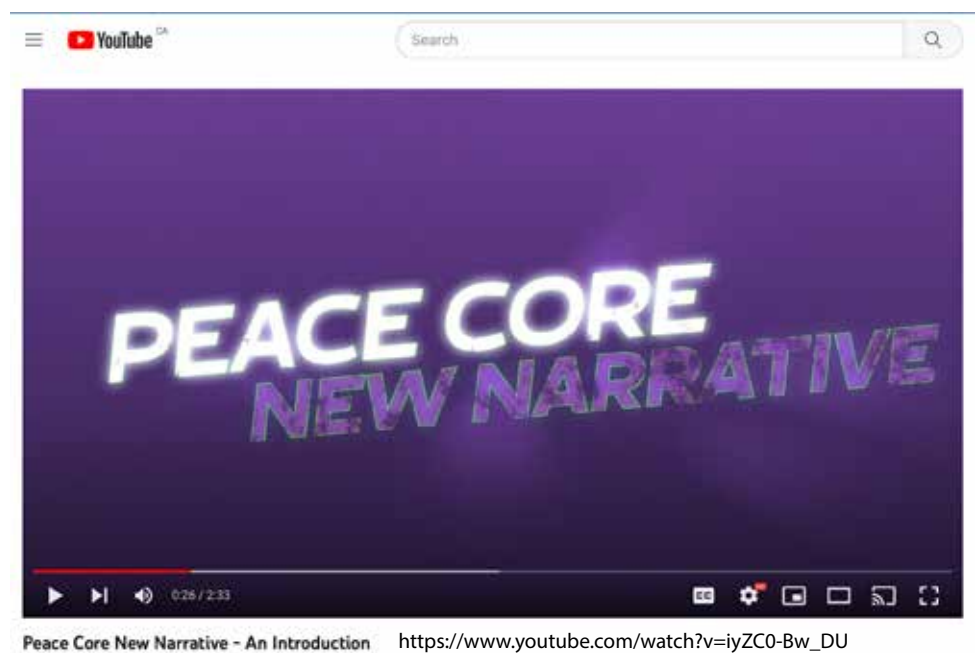
The focus of programs and services are aimed at violence prevention and intervention, particularly with racialized communities in northwest Toronto. The model features frontline risk intervention services led by Community Resource Engagement Workers (CREW) who have lived experiences and deep connections to northwest communities in Toronto.

CREW supports individuals who are impacted by the justice system (in the community, who have been released from incarceration, or are currently incarcerated),

to use their strengths in pursuing structure, promoting positive and healthy lifestyle choices, and building life skills.

By engaging and developing trusting relationships with clients, CREW will support the building of their capacity and skills, setting life goals, connecting them to a relevant and culturally appropriate spectrum of services, and shifting their views around community violence.

The key objectives are more effective reintegration and reducing recidivism.





Reflection from:

Brooklyn

Violence Disruption Worker (VDW)

Reflecting on being a part of TO Wards Peace has been an amazing experience. It has its ups and downs but I can truly say that I've had a lot more ups than downs. Being able to assist my community and others with their goals and aspirations is something that makes me smile and makes me want to come to work everyday. Even though we've only been around for almost a year, within the past months we have helped youth and families with jobs, businesses, and even provided counselling for those who needed it. As a VDW I know my role is to provide, understand, and help with a greater sense of direction so that my clients can achieve their goals and become a better person with improved conditions. I know it has only been almost a year but we have accomplished so much, and I know going into the next year the sky is the limit. This program will make a major impact not only in the south or the north of Jane but across the Greater Toronto Area.

Reflection from:

Araya

Community Engagement Resource Worker (CREW)

"I am new at YAAACE having joined the team in the role of a Community Resource Engagement Worker with the New Narrative program as of August 2022. One thing that resonates with me is the degree to which the staff as a whole and the leadership in particular are invested in the work that YAAACE does in the Jane and Finch community. Many of the staff have deep roots in the community with lived experiences with the issues they are advocating for. I'm excited about the upcoming visits to the Roy McMurtry Youth Centre as it is a great opportunity for outreach and to make a meaningful impact on the lives of incarcerated youth who are set to be released back into the community. As my caseload grows, I look forward to helping families by providing family, employment/education, and other supports to our clients."



Publications and Knowledge Mobilization

Research as Advocacy and Activism

Below are various publications produced by YAAACE highlighting the efficacy of our programs and how we are advocating for policy change to address systemic inequities and barriers, particularly for racialized and low-income neighbourhoods. We see research as a form of advocacy and activism and will continue to mobilize knowledge based on the impact of our programs and services offered.

- “Ontario Can Close Students’ Access and Opportunity Gaps with Community-Led Projects” published on June 5, 2022 in The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/ontario-can-close-students-access-and-opportunity-gaps-with-community-led-projects-184301>
 - “Why We Need To Focus On Gun Violence As A Public Health Crisis” published on July 15, 2022 in the Toronto Star: <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2022/07/15/why-we-need-to-focus-on-gun-violence-as-a-public-health-crisis.html>
 - Peer Reviewed journal article titled “The Community School Initiative in Toronto: Mitigating Opportunity Gaps in the Jane and Finch Community in the Wake of COVID-19” written by Ardavan Eizadirad, Sally Abudiab, and Brice Baartman published in the special issue of the Radical Teacher journal focusing on the theme of “Teaching in a Time of COVID”: <https://radicalteacher.library.pitt.edu/ojs/radicalteacher/article/view/1080>
 - “To Resolve Youth Violence, Canada Must Move Beyond Policing and Prison”:
 - published on December 7, 2022 in The Conversation: <https://theconversation.com/to-resolve-youth-violence-canada-must-move-beyond-policing-and-prison-190825>
 - At the bottom of the article is a 30 minute podcast- created by The Conversation and on Spotify called “Don’t Call Me Resilient”- where Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad and Devon Jones were guests on the episode: https://dont-call-me-resilient.simplecast.com/episodes/https-the-conversationcom-how-can-we-slow-down-youth-gun-violence-194145-u2f_EZHZ
-

The Summer Institute (July and August 2022)

We served 135 students over the 7 weeks when we offered the 15th Annual YAAACE Summer Institute from July 5th to August 19, 2022.

The program ran on weekdays from 9am to 4pm and was led by a combination of Ontario Certified Teachers, community elders, and post-secondary students as tutors and interns at our location at 45 Norfinch Drive in the Jane and Finch community-Humber River Black Creek. A core aspect of our program was the focus on culturally relevant services and cultural considerations of care, particularly for Black students.

As a result, a majority of our tutors were Black or from racialized and equity-deserving backgrounds to reflect the students and the community we serve. We also offered

a unique program in partnership with TVO to support recently graduated Grade 8 students going into grade 9 as of September. A cohort of 15 students began a math course- MTH1W destreamed math- to mitigate the underachievement in numeracy impacting racialized and Black students.

Lastly, we also offered a leadership course for a cohort of 20 high school students focusing on life skills and capacity building. The group was visited by various guest speakers --racialized professionals from Fortune 500 companies-- and from the community.

Based on comparisons of diagnostic and summative assessments, there were improvements in numeracy, literacy, and leadership skills over the 7 weeks our programs and services were offered to students and their families.

On-Going and New Partnerships



Public Safety
Canada

Sécurité publique
Canada



SONY MUSIC



Visits



July 22, 2022
Minister of Public Safety,
Marco Mendicino



November 4, 2022
MCCSS Assistant Deputy Minister,
Dave Mitchell and
Ministry of the Solicitor General



December 1, 2022
TCDSB Director of Education,
Brendan Browne



December 6, 2022
Laidlaw Foundation

Planning for the Launch of the Centre for Community Safety and Roots of Violence

(Coming 2023)

The Centre for Community Safety and Roots of Violence is a community oriented national hub focused on the variables exacerbating violence which jeopardizes community safety and well-being of Canadians from coast to coast.

Through a multi-sectoral interdisciplinary approach, the focus is on sharing best practices in violence prevention and intervention strategies. Using data, research, strengths-based approaches, community engagement, and policy evaluation and advocacy, the Centre will advocate against, bring awareness to, and take action to address the social determinants of violence and mitigate systemic barriers that reproduce conditions that gravitate people towards guns, gangs, and various forms of violence.

This Centre is committed to facilitating intergenerational collaborations, working with community organizations and agencies from various provinces and territories, all three levels of government, as well as the philanthropic, charitable, non-profit and private sectors as partners.

The objective of the Centre is to reduce violence nationally and support communities to thrive where all residents feel a sense of belonging and safety. As part of this strategy, the Centre will catalyze an eclectic consortium of stakeholders as a coalition to meet quarterly in a consultative and advisory capacity to identify current gaps in policies and practices and amplify the work and impact of the Centre.

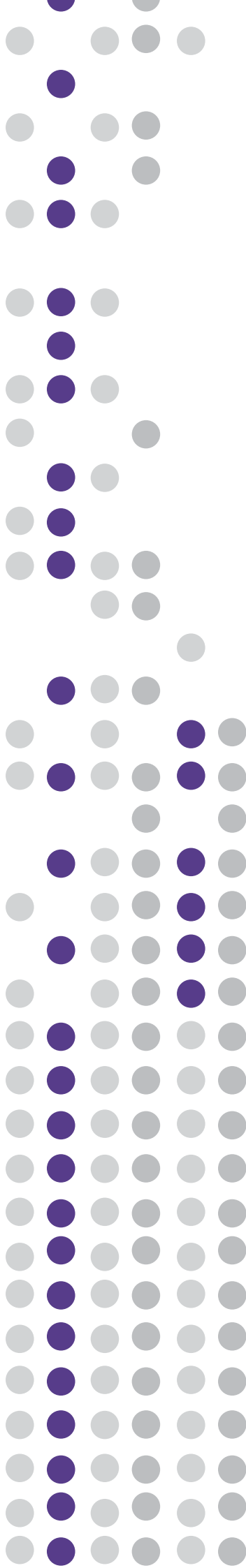
The Centre will be able to connect governments with community activists, frontline workers, researchers, practitioners, and advisory committees who are leading the grassroots work related to community safety and violence prevention and intervention. The national reach of the Centre will facilitate sharing of data and creating new collaborations which will lead to new research, publications, program evaluation, policy recommendations, and knowledge mobilization related to best practices in violence prevention and intervention strategies.

Overall, the Centre's objective is to create, facilitate, and mobilize a supporting ecosystem that prioritizes reducing violence in Canadian communities, particularly racialized communities impacted more intensely by systemic barriers.

Key pillars of the Centre and type of services provided and mobilized include:

- 1) Advocacy, Education, and Awareness: this involves creation of infographics, public service announcement videos, offering of workshops, and facilitation of multi-sectoral partnerships.
- 2) Research, Publications, and Program Evaluation: this involves hosting of an annual conference on Community Safety and Violence Prevention and Intervention in Canada, administering a national survey on community safety and youth violence, and program evaluation framework to help community organizations and agencies evaluate the efficacy and impact of their programs and services offered.
- 3) Policy and Knowledge Mobilization: this involves providing access to advisory groups and committees for various levels of government, creation of a multi-sectoral coalition that meets quarterly to identify current gaps in the system and provide recommendations for next steps, and sharing of best practices nationally related to violence prevention and intervention through various modalities that are accessible to the public.





Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education

Contact Info

📞 416.567.7994
✉ info@yaaace.com
📍 45 Norfinch Drive,
North York, ON
M2N 1W8