

PROJECT NOW FACT SHEET

On World Suicide Prevention Day, the Government of Ontario announced funding for Project Now, a new partnership comprised of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, Government of Ontario, Peel Children's Centre, Peel District School Board, Peel Public Health and Trillium Health Partners.

Project Now will focus its work in three primary areas:

HOPE: To foster hope and resiliency to reduce the likelihood of child and youth suicide in our community. Increase suicide prevention awareness and encourage children, youth and families to seek support when needed. Build and strengthen self-regulation and resiliency in children, youth, and families to support suicide prevention. Engage and empower our community to recognize children and youth at higher risk to enable identification.

HELP: To work with children, youth and families, to create a coordinated system of support that meets their needs. Provide easy to access support for all children, youth, and families at all times. Ensure evidence-based interventions are available. Provide treatment for suicidality and related risk factors including mental health issues, substance use, trauma, and family communication.

HEALING: To better connect as a community to support all touched by suicide. Build community connections to make transitions seamless for children, youth, families, and support networks. Promote continuous learning among community partners to improve outcomes for all. Support people and community to enable healing following a death by suicide.

Central to the project are individuals with lived experience, we all have a story and we all fight our own battles. Still, it is important to recognize the power of unity and coming together to help those struggling with their mental well-being. This is the story of Aisha, a fictional teenager whose journey shares significant resemblances to those we have seen as Project Now partners.

The Project Now partners collective call to action is to foster hope and resiliency, help coordinate access to care options, and support connections that promote learning and understanding about suicide. Working together to achieve these goals means engaging children, youth, and families who have been impacted by suicide. We can only challenge the status quo and make real change by working with those with lived experience.

Everyday, each partner works with children and youth and collective shared experiences. In order to move forward we had to identify what the current journey was for a youth and what we aspired it to be. Below is Aisha's story. Aisha is a fictional teenager and her journey is a compilation of stories we have heard, students we have supported and patients we have cared for.

Aisha's Path with the Current System

- Aisha suffers from depression and is bullied on social media after breaking up with her boyfriend. She doesn't know what to do. She reluctantly speaks with her teacher.
- The teacher speaks with the principal. Aisha meets with the teacher and principal together, followed by a meeting with her parents. She becomes increasingly distraught.
- The principal convenes a meeting with an in-school review committee, which leads to a referral to a social worker. Aisha meets with the social worker who suggests she see her family doctor for her anxiety and depressive episodes.
- Her doctor refers Aisha to a community care counsellor and is put on the wait list.
- The bullying and depression intensify and her scared parents take her to the Emergency Department, which is overcrowded and full of adults. There is nowhere else to go.
- She's sent home to await follow-up care, but doesn't receive it. She returns to the Emergency Department for self-harm and waits too long for service.
- She's admitted and medically stabilized, but is referred out-of-region—sixty kilometres away—for an inpatient mental health bed.
- Aisha is discharged and returns home to again await follow-up care. She has now missed significant school time, fuelling alienation and anxiety. She stops attending school completely.
- **Aisha ends her life at 14 years of age**

Aisha's New Path with Project Now

- Aisha suffers from depression and is bullied on social media after breaking up with her boyfriend. She doesn't know what to do. She reluctantly speaks with her teacher.
- The teacher speaks with the principal. Aisha meets with the teacher and principal together.
- Supported by the principal, the teacher works with Aisha on the mindfulness based stress reduction skills she has learned in class to help her understand the emotions that she is feeling (emotional literacy) and improve her ability (skill development) in what to do when stress arises.
- Improving mindfulness and resiliency skills help reduce Aisha's avoidance and maladaptive coping skills (reduce self-harm).
- Improved access to community based resources will build on the already established mindfulness skills with interventions such as mindfulness based cognitive therapy or mindfulness based dialectical behavioral therapy, both of which emphasize the elements of choice in how to respond adaptively to stress. In addition, tele-psychiatry and other mobile technology is used to identify and treat depression and anxiety.
- Because of this coordinated system, Aisha does not need to go to the hospital to access care, and does not wait for care, but has access to it where and when she needs it...in a school environment or in the community.
- She gets the help she needs, recovers and flourishes.
- **Aisha graduated grade 12 and is pursuing higher education in social work.**