

ABACUS aims to help more kids achieve their potential through education

HAMILTON – Putting more young Hamiltonians on the path to post-secondary education – before they even get to high school – is the focus of a new and innovative initiative from Hamilton Community Foundation (HCF).

Known as *ABACUS: Advancing Post-Secondary Access*, it focuses on children in the middle-school years (Grades 6 to 8), a pivotal point when they undergo significant developmental changes while also needing to make academic decisions that strongly shape their future.

“ABACUS is about helping more kids achieve their potential through education,” says Terry Cooke, foundation president & CEO. “For some children, the first steps toward post-secondary are often discovering it’s an option, and then believing it’s possible. ABACUS aims to connect them to the impact that college, university or the trades could have on the rest of their lives, and then set them on the course to get there.”

ABACUS is the result of three years of extensive research and community consultation by HCF. This work was funded by The Fairmount Foundation, the private foundation of philanthropist and Hamilton native, Heidi Balsillie. The findings spotlighted the importance of reaching children before high school, particularly those who face barriers such as low income, first-generation attenders and others typically under-represented in post-secondary. It also identified that financial assistance, such as bursaries, by itself is not enough.

“Deciding to continue studying beyond high school requires encouragement and information that allow youth to believe they could participate, and then the ability to follow up on these beliefs,” says Fiona Deller, of the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario, and the principal researcher and architect of ABACUS. “The more barriers they face, the more difficult this will be. Their motivation is affected by the influences of their community, their peers, their school, and their parents. Unlike many children whose parents attended post-secondary, not every child automatically sees it as part of their future.

“Somewhere during the middle school years, youth from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in post-secondary often consciously or unconsciously decide not to go,” adds Ms. Deller. “It’s too hard, too expensive, too unrealistic, too far, or they simply never consider it as an option.”

ABACUS aims to address that “tipping point” by assembling a variety of supports and motivations that address multiple barriers and point the student back toward thinking of college, university or trades education as possible and achievable. It is based on four “pillars” common to successful early intervention programs: academic improvement, mentoring, goal setting and incentives. Based on these principles, HCF is acting as catalyst and convenor to deliver a strategy with three key components:

- Granting to expand local agencies’ ability to provide four-pillar programming. The foundation has just made initial grants of some \$1.9 million over three years to support 19 initiatives delivering extracurricular programming, college and university visits, science, technology, engineering and math (“STEM”) programming and programs that specifically support Aboriginal and newcomers.
- Developing a pilot project called *Grad Track*, which involves intense support to a small group of students who are disengaging from school.
- Bringing together stakeholders to identify and address systemic barriers to post-secondary access.

The foundation’s focus on increasing high-school graduation rates and post-secondary access evolves from its experience in leading a community-wide effort to reduce poverty for more than a decade. It is a priority reinforced by residents in many of the neighbourhoods that were at the centre of this work. ABACUS represents a 10-year commitment from the HCF board to dedicate the majority of its discretionary funding to this issue, complemented with a 10-year commitment from The Fairmount Foundation.

“We know that prospective employees need post-secondary credentials to be competitive,” says Cooke. “Changing educational outcomes, especially those for whom the pathway is not straightforward, is a strategy we believe will improve the lives of individuals and help build the city’s prosperity.”

ATTACHED: Backgrounder
List of initial grants

-30-

CONTACT:

Terry Cooke, President & CEO, 905-523-5600 x 224; cell: 905-977-0450

Grace Diffey, Vice-President, Community Relations, 905-523-5600 x 260; cell: 905-518-4641

Hamilton Community Foundation has been working to drive positive change in Hamilton since 1954. We do this by helping people give in a way that has meaning to them and impact in the community, providing grants and financing to charitable organizations and initiatives and bringing people together to address priority issues that affect Hamiltonians.

BACKGROUND

ABACUS: Advancing post-secondary access

Overview

ABACUS aims to improve high school graduation rates and access to post-secondary, including trades and apprenticeship opportunities, by focusing efforts on Grades 6, 7, 8 and supporting the transition into high school.

Research

HCF conducted three years of research into post-secondary access strategies from across North America, and mapped Hamilton services to children from birth to high-school graduation and post-secondary options.

It identified key barriers to post-secondary access, common elements of successful programs and critical transition points from early years to adulthood. It also identified vulnerable and lesser-served populations in Hamilton,

The principal researcher was Fiona Deller, executive director of policy and partnerships from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Focus on middle school

Research identified that for students who face disadvantages high school interventions are not early enough.

Grade 6, 7 and 8 represent a critical point when there are significant developmental changes that take place in a child's life, coupled with the transition to high school and the need to plan and prepare for academic decisions that affect future choices. It is an important time to address barriers such as academic preparedness, peer influence and self-esteem.

Locally, the middle school years are lesser served by focused programming than other age groups.

ABACUS: Advancing Post-Secondary Access

ABACUS is based on four pillars of successful intervention programs:

- *Academic upskilling:* programs/initiatives that support youth to obtain the necessary grades, skills, and self-confidence to succeed in middle school and move forward. Examples include afterschool homework or academic programs, computer literacy, aspirational and experiential learning and tutoring programs.

- *Mentoring.* Includes support and counseling through adult and peer mentoring, access to community role models, peer group activities and parental engagement. Examples include afterschool recreation and arts programs; social skills programs and parental engagement strategies.
- *Goal setting.* Helps students make decisions about their future through easy access to information about choices and requirements. Includes parental education initiatives, financial literacy, support in mapping choices related to high school courses and long-term career goals and eventually, applying for student financial assistance and post-secondary education. Examples include programs that raise aspirations to attend post-secondary education such as academic summer programming, time spent on college/university campuses and career planning.
- *Incentives.* Financial components that encourage students to participate in a program leading to post-secondary enrollment. Examples include bus tickets, meal programs, or program materials, as well as incentives which reward behavior, marks, etc.

The three program components are:

- Expanding local agencies' ability to create and deliver four-pillar programming. The initial grants of \$1.9 million over three years have just been awarded to 18 programs that have the potential to reach over 5,000 Hamilton children in Grades 6 to 8.
- Grad Track an ABACUS pilot project to deliver more intense programming to approximately 25 students who face multiple disadvantages and who are disengaging from school. It encourages student success through an educational coach, parental supports and incentives for program completion. It is currently under development.
- Bringing together stakeholders in Hamilton's education system to identify, examine and address issues, re-develop policies, and advocate for reducing systems gaps that prevent youth from continuing past high school. Knowledge arising from community granting will play an important role in identifying and addressing these issues.

A collaborative initiative

ABACUS is a collaborative initiative of Hamilton Community Foundation and The Fairmount Foundation, the private foundation of Heidi Balsillie, which funded the research.

ABACUS represents a 10-year commitment of the majority of the foundation's unrestricted funds – those funds which are granted at the board's discretion, to meet Hamilton's greatest needs – an investment of approximately \$10 million. A 10-year commitment has also been made by The Fairmount Foundation, in addition to contributions from other individual donors to help grow and sustain ABACUS over time.

For more information visit www.ABACUSatHCF.ca

	Organization / Program Name /Description	Grant
1.	<p>CEDAR - Bimaadziwin: Youth at risk program SPONSORSHIP BY METIS WOMEN'S CIRCLE</p> <p>Provides a culturally relevant learning program for Aboriginal students in Grades 6 to 8 who attend the feeder schools into the Sir John A. MacDonald NYA: WEH program. Program consists of a week-long lodge in the summer months with four pre-lodge workshops and four post-lodge workshops.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$40,000 Year 2 - \$40,000</p>
2.	<p>Empowerment Squared - Homework circle young scholars</p> <p>Academic mentoring and tutoring and goal setting for successful transition to high school and post-secondary education. The target population is primarily newcomer and minority youth.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$60,000 Year 2 - \$53,000 Year 3 - \$47,000</p>
3.	<p>Hamilton East Kiwanis Boys' and Girls' Club - Crown Point educational engagement</p> <p>Sessions twice weekly with hands-on experiential learning; homework help/literacy and math/science support, individualized mentoring, skill development and goal setting. Also included will be trips to high school and post-secondary institutions.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$60,000 Year 2 - \$60,000 Year 3 - \$60,000</p>
4.	<p>Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board - LEAD successful transitions</p> <p>Provides middle-school aged students in four to six Equal Opportunity schools with extracurricular and athletic activities, academic supports and social/emotional resources. Includes planned activities, workshops and special events. The initiative will be provided in partnership with Rising Starts, specializing in sports and supported by others such as IEC, Cathedral High School and the CYO. Activities will take place on Saturdays and during the summer.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$50,000 Year 2 - \$50,000 Year 3 - \$50,000</p>
5.	<p>Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board - Physical literacy and school attendance</p> <p>Before-school leadership development workshops for students in Grades 6 to 8 in Equal Opportunity schools. A nutritious snack is provided. The goal is to reduce absenteeism and ensure the students are ready to learn.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$30,000</p>
6.	<p>Industry Education Council of Hamilton - Hamilton code clubs</p> <p>Extracurricular code clubs for students in Grades 6 to 8. Additional supports and services will be available at other times at the new tech centre on the 4th floor of the Hamilton Public Library. Summer programming will also be offered.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$58,510 Year 2 - \$58,510 Year 3 - \$58,510</p>
7.	<p>McMaster University - McMaster Child Youth University in the city</p> <p>This is a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) initiative designed to provide on-campus and community-based interactive workshops for youth from challenged communities. Twenty different workshops will be delivered weekly from January to April. One hundred McMaster students will be trained in problem-based pedagogies and community engagement.</p>	<p>Year 1 - \$30,000 Year 2 - \$30,000</p>

	Organization / Program Name /Description	Grant
8.	Mission Services of Hamilton - HOSTS A Monday to Friday afterschool homework and sports club for students in Grades 6 to 8 in the Gibson-Landsdale neighbourhood. The program is being offered in partnership with Mohawk College.	Year 1 - \$40,000 Year 2 - \$40,000
9.	Neighbour to Neighbour Centre (Hamilton) - Math success program An afterschool math tutoring program using JUMP Math as the basis of the lesson plans for Grade 7 and 8 students.	Year 1 - \$25,000 Year 2 - \$25,000
10	Niwasa Head Start Preschool - NYAWEH elementary Provides holistic indigenous programming for Aboriginal students in Grades 6 to 8 and assists with the transition to post-secondary education.	Year 1 - \$50,000 Year 2 - \$50,000 Year 3 - \$50,000
11	North Hamilton Community Health Centre - PATH program This program will provide preview days for Grade 8 students at least once per month for the school year. Each student will also participate in individual goal-setting to initiate individualized support and development with a goal of career readiness and a successful transition into high school.	Year 1 - \$60,000 Year 2 - \$60,000
12	Robert Land Community Association - Trades are the way Provides two afterschool programs for students and their parents in the Keith neighbourhood. The programs are Trash Trek Lego Robotics Build and Team Building through the Trades. This is a STEM initiative for students from three local elementary schools.	Year 1 - \$50,000
13	Royal Conservatory of Music - Learning through the arts - Hamilton To expand the number of students served through the Learning through the Arts initiative. LTTA provides arts-based activities delivered in classroom settings that are targeted to the needs of Hamilton's students.	Year 1 - \$50,000 Year 2 - \$50,000 Year 3 - \$50,000
14	The John Howard Society - ACHIEVES Support and programming for identified high-risk students engaging in anti-social behaviour. Program includes parenting workshops.	Year 1 - \$55,000 Year 2 - \$55,000
15	THRIVE (formerly Community Child Abuse Council of Canada) - Get ready Specialized support for refugee and newcomer youth in Grades 6 to 8.	Year 1 - \$48,345 Year 2 - \$48,345
16	Wesley Urban Ministries - Middle school program Programming and supports to middle-school-aged children at Dr. Davey School and at Victoria Park Community Homes at 155 Queen St. North (serving Hess St. School students).	Year 1 - \$55,000 Year 2 - \$55,000
17	Wever Community Development Committee - WAMM (Wever and MoMac) SPONSORSHIP BY ROTARY CLUB To cover the costs of taking Grade 7 students to McMaster for three days, and engaging with the McMaster Child and Youth University.	Year 1 - \$12,000 Year 2 - \$12,000

	Organization / Program Name /Description	Grant
18	YMCA of Hamilton/Burlington/Brantford - <i>Senior beyond the bell</i> To expand the YMCA Senior Beyond the Bell program to two additional sites. The program is offered three times a week and includes a recreational component as well as academic support.	Year 1 - \$50,000 Year 2 - \$50,000 Year 3 - \$50,000

	Year One (2015-16)	Year Two (2016-17)	Year Three (2017-18)	Total
Expand community capacity: initial granting	\$823,855	\$736,855	\$365,510	\$1,926,220