



Lawrence Heights

Host agency: New Heights Community Health Centres
12 Flemington Rd., Toronto ON M6A 2N4
Tel.: 416-787-1661

Program director: Owen Christopher Hinds

Boundaries: South: Lawrence Avenue West; East: Varna Drive & Cather Crescent; North: Rane Avenue; West: Flemington Road, Blossomfield Drive, Flemington Road, Allen Road South. Three addresses on Neptune Drive: 135, 145 and 155.

Area dropout rate: 43% (Toronto District School Board data).

First cohort size: Eligible are approximately 80 students currently in grade 9 (Toronto District School Board & Toronto Catholic District School Board schools).

Participation rate: 82.5% are registered and outreach continues.

Brief description

Lawrence Heights is a community of ethnic and linguistic diversity, predominantly newcomers and first-generation immigrants from East and West African countries, as well as Caribbean and Latin American countries. There are 1,080 family units and a high proportion of single-parent families. It is one of a number of Toronto communities affected by youth gangs and violent crime involving firearms over the past few years. Other youth issues include few links between the schools and families in the community (often because of language barriers), little to no after school programming, and high dropout rates, particularly for boys. The average household annual income is approximately \$15,000.

In October 2005, Toronto City Council designated Lawrence Heights as one of 13 priority neighbourhoods, requiring infrastructure investment and improvement of community services.

The Lawrence Heights Pathways to Education Program is offered through an alliance between United Way of Greater Toronto and Pathways Canada. Further, in addition to corporations, foundations and private donors, the Youth Challenge Fund has been a key funder for both the start up and implementation of the program, contributing significant funding over the next three years.

Why Lawrence Heights has a Pathways program

Youth and families express a range of barriers to academic success: being seen as “trouble-makers” and having the “zero tolerance” policy excessively applied against them; being seen as not trustworthy by teachers; and being left out of the decision making and communication loops about what courses they might take or schools they might attend. They also describe other challenges such as the lack of funds to get to the high school they want to attend or not having enough food to eat during the day; family responsibilities (e.g. care for younger siblings); community safety issues; teen pregnancy; and a lack of male role models and supports in their lives. Poverty is also described as a reason many lose hope to pursue a post-secondary education and see a lack of positive options for their future.

Important partnerships already exist in the community among the key agencies, including the Toronto Community Housing Corporation, the Lawrence Heights Community Centre, the Barbara Frum Library, the Youth Outreach Workers Group, the local inter-agency network, LHION, which has identified implementation of the program as a priority for the community, and Ryerson University. In addition, partnerships with high schools and elementary/middle schools in the Toronto District School Board and the Toronto Catholic District School Board have been established.

For more information about the community and the Lawrence Heights Pathways to Education Program, please contact:

Owen Christopher Hinds
Program Director, Pathways to Education Program
New Heights Community Health Centres
416-787-1676, ext. 306
Email: ohinds@newheightshealth.org

For more information about Pathways Canada, please contact:

Andrew Findlater
Director, Marketing and Communications
Pathways to Education Canada
Tel: 416-860-3706
afindlater@pathwayscanada.ca