



King's University College social work students able to help more families as TD Bank Group makes three-year commitment to support and expand SAFE program

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London, ON - More struggling families in the London, Ontario area will have access to free online counselling through the [Support and Aid for Families Electronically \(SAFE\) program](#), thanks to a \$43,000 grant from TD Bank Group (TD).

TD's donation supports the growth of the SAFE program, which is operated by students enrolled in the Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Work programs at King's University College.

Launched in 2021 as a pilot program to assist families within the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), SAFE provides immediate intake and counselling to families who are struggling. It offers valuable mental health services at no cost, with no wait times, no cap on sessions, and with the convenience of virtual delivery.

With this support from TD, King's will continue this vital program and expand it to include parents and caregivers of children and youth enrolled within the London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB), as well as school referred youth with more significant needs.

"In today's changing world, adolescents are facing heightened challenges across many aspects of their daily lives, and their physical and mental health has never been more pressing," says Keri Kowalski, District Vice President, London District, Greater Ontario Region, TD Bank Group.

"Through the TD Ready Commitment, our corporate citizenship platform, we are proud to support programs like SAFE that provide equitable access to care when it's needed most and create opportunities for young people across the region to reach their full potential."

"We are grateful to be working with the SAFE program to strengthen pathways to mental health care for LDCSB students & families," says Andrea Harvey, Mental Health Lead LDCSB. "The compassion, care and continuity shared between our school social workers and SAFE fosters healthy community connections and therapeutic relationships."

“In our third year of the SAFE program, I am immensely grateful for the tremendous support of our community partners and their trust in this program,” says M.K. Arundel, Coordinator of Field Education for the King’s School of Social Work.

King’s has more than doubled their student cohort to 20 students and has expanded the practicum to include a September start in order to meet demand and offer continuity of service to families through to the end of July annually.

Students have supported families dealing with a wide range of challenges, including domestic violence, mental health concerns, addictions, social, emotional and behavioural issues with children, and parent coping and stress reductions strategies.

In addition to relieving pressure on community agencies unable to serve families in need due to long wait lists and other challenges, Arundel says that SAFE provides Social Work students with significant learning opportunities.

“SAFE offered a practicum in a direct practice setting and ultimately provided me with an incredibly fulfilling and diverse learning experience,” says King’s MSW 2022 graduate, Lauren Wilton. “During my practicum, I grew independence, confidence, and a range of clinical skills with the support of my peers and supervisor.”

Wilton says that many families expressed gratitude for SAFE and the support, strategies, skills, and new-found perspectives they gained through their counselling journey. “Families appreciated having quick access to an effective source of emotional support, helpful strategies, and a non-judgemental person to lean on,” she says.

Her observations are supported by preliminary SSHRC-funded research conducted by the School of Social Work, which found the SAFE program brought about positive changes in parents’ mental health, stress reduction, and child behavior at home and in the classroom. This January, Arundel and SAFE Lead Researcher, Assistant Professor Dr. Jane Sanders, were invited to present their findings at the International Conference: Society for Social Work and Research (SSWR) In Phoenix Arizona.

“Our students come away having honed their professional skills while supporting parents in their efforts to manage the plethora of family stressors,” says Arundel, who hopes that the SAFE program can become a model for helping to build up families across Ontario, and beyond. “Our children, families and broader community all benefit from this collaborative effort.”

About King’s

King’s is a public Catholic University College that provides general and honours degree programs in the liberal arts, social sciences, management, and a master's degree in social work. It is positioned in the top rank of institutions of higher learning in Canada for the high quality of its teaching faculty and student experience. Institutionally autonomous, King’s is academically affiliated with Western University, and King’s graduates receive a Western University degree.

King's is open to students of all faith backgrounds, with its community centered on the values of social justice, equality and the education of the whole person.

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