



SAFE program expands services, launches website to increase support for families with counselling by King's social work students

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London, ON - The Support and Aid for Families Electronically (SAFE) program, which provides counselling support to families by King's Social Work students, has expanded to include both the Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB) and the London District Catholic School Board (LDCSB). As well, the counselling program has launched [a website](#) to provide easier access to its services.

About the SAFE program:

The Support and Aid for Families Electronically (SAFE) program is a free and virtual community partnership that helps families of elementary and secondary school students with counselling to address multiple stressors, including the ongoing impact of COVID-19.

The pilot project of the SAFE program was available to all families with a child in elementary or secondary school within the Thames Valley District School Board. "Given the success of the SAFE pilot program, we are excited to expand our service delivery to include the London District Catholic School Board as well as school-referred youth within our community," says M. K. Arundel, Coordinator of Field Education for the King's School of Social Work.

Expansion of the program has also meant the School of Social Work has more than doubled their student cohort to approximately 20 for the year in an effort respond to the increase in service demand. Additionally, they have adjusted their Practicum offerings to include a September start and a condensed block placement option from April to July to be able to offer continuity of service to families throughout the year. "This is a very exciting aspect of SAFE's expansion as it means more students are offered this valuable learning opportunity with which to hone their professional skills," says Arundel.

SAFE was established to help families that are challenged in many ways, including relational conflict, increased family stress and related coping strategies, emotional reactions and anxiety resulting in behavioural issues, increased addiction and mental health concerns, financial impact and grief and loss; these challenges have been exacerbated by the pandemic. SAFE also helps families navigate the system for other community resources.

Any family interested in the service should connect with their school's social worker. Youth, 12 to 17 years of age, can also access SAFE services with a referral from their school's social worker.

There is no cost for the program. London-area families can access online counselling through a secure video platform called AdraCare. The service is provided remotely, and there are no limits on the number of sessions families can receive.

SAFE is partially supported by King's alumni and by other donors to King's University College. The SAFE Program also thanks the [London Community Foundation](#) for supporting the pilot program with a generous grant through their COVID-19 Response Fund.

The SAFE Program and the King's School of Social Work

SAFE is staffed by King's students in the Master of Social Work and Bachelor of Social Work programs. They gain clinical experience and knowledge, under the direct supervision of Emily Carrothers, Campus and Community Social Worker. They also develop their professional skills through research efforts that will inform the future of social work practice more broadly.

SAFE offers "a rich learning experience full of relevant and meaningful social work knowledge acquisition," says Arundel. Social work students who are placed with SAFE gain experience in conducting intakes, facilitating workshops, developing resources, and offering counselling to parents/caregivers and youth who are referred to SAFE.

The SAFE project initially began in January 2021, with six King's Master of Social Work students and two Bachelor of Social Work students. Those students found it a valuable learning opportunity, giving them a chance to gain new skills in psychotherapeutic approaches, public engagement, community-based social work, research and knowledge mobilization.

Quotes:

M.K. Arundel, Coordinator of Field Education for the King's School of Social Work

- "The addition of the SAFE website is yet another advancement in the development of the program. As a hub, the site will provide program details and further student learning through engagement in program development by creating various resources for parents and caregivers to access as supplementary support to the counselling services offered."
- "Social Work students will have an opportunity to develop their professional visibility through research efforts that will inform the future of social work practice more broadly."

Ariel Seale, '22, and one of the original SAFE practicum students

- "To be a part of SAFE's service delivery team has been an exceptional learning experience. Social work students who complete their practicum with the SAFE program

can expect to learn a great deal about program development, clinical counselling, virtual service delivery, social work research, the value of supervision and peer support, and so much more. I believe that through this opportunity to work alongside families, we are contributing to a happier, healthier community.”

- “The value of the SAFE program to our community cannot be overstated. Parents and caregivers who have accessed the SAFE program report improvements in child behaviours, family life and mental health. But beyond that, they report feeling heard, validated and supported in a way they hadn’t been before.”

About King’s University College:

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 centred on the values of social justice, equality and the education of the whole person. Learn more about King’s University College at www.kings.uwo.ca.

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