



MCIS PRESENTATION

January 26, 2023

THE MENDING A CRACK IN THE SKY PROJECT

WHAT IS MENDING A CRACK IN THE SKY?

"If People Come Together, They Can Even Mend A Crack In the Sky"- Somali Proverb



Mending a Crack in the Sky(MCIS) is a three-phase community healing initiative that was developed to address youth violence in the greater Toronto area. The program was developed in partnership with Midaynta Community Services.

This dynamic program consists of a dedicated group of mothers who are passionate about creating safe spaces to heal and engaging in transformative community change and activism. The core group comprises Somali mothers who have lost their loved ones due to violence in the community.

The group also consists of additional community members and leaders who support the mothers in reaching their goals.

MENDING A CRACK IN THE SKY



Mending a Crack in the Sky (MCIS) has organized an unprecedented program to provide immediate support to youth and families impacted by gun violence.

- MCIS creates safe spaces to heal and leads a community healing action plan
- In response to the high rate of violence in the northwest neighbourhoods of Toronto, MCIS organized a Mothers' Healing Initiative in partnership with the Project Turn program to connect youth and the wider community to enhance their participation in safety efforts, connectivity, and gang violence prevention.

MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

The Toronto Police Service released the final report from their transformational Task Force on January 26th, 2017. The Transformational Task Force was created due to Toronto police recognizing that Service delivery needed to be updated to reflect the growing community in Toronto. As a result of the Transformational Task Force report, Midaynta Community Services was the only group in the community that pushed for the transformational task force to be more known in the community, and the motion for the MOU was pushed forward by representative Ken Jeffers.

At the July 2019 Toronto Police Board Services meeting, the Mending A Crack in the Sky, Mother Outreach Workers, presented to the board, outlining challenges that the Somali-Canadian community in the northwest part of the city is facing. Moreover, the group also presented opportunities for collaboration and innovation with Police Board Services and MCIS to work together to build trust and address key concerns and challenges. The group highlighted three core elements that they want to directly collaborate on: A) Transparency, B) Building Trust and C) Community Safety.

CORE ELEMENTS

The board approved a motion following this meeting that prompted the development of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The MOU was established to form an unprecedented formal and equal partnership between the board, TPS and Midaynta. The MOU was officially approved on December 16th, 2019 and officially signed on February 8th, 2020 at a formal ceremony hosted by Midaynta Community Services. The MOU term is in effect from January 1st, 2020 to December 31st, 2021. Due to Covid-19 the MOU has been pushed back for one more year, hence it is effect from January 1st, 2020 to December 31st, 2022.

Core Element One: Increasing Transparency and Understanding through the Service's Implementation of the Scorecard Initiative

Core Element Two: Building Trust through Integrated Collaboration with Divisions and Neighbourhood Community Officers (NCOs)

Core Element Three: Enhancing Community Safety through the Implementation of the Mothers Outreach Worker (MOW) Program

CORE ELEMENT UPDATES

CORE ELEMENT 1: SCORECARD

Core Element One: Increasing Transparency and Understanding through the Service's Implementation of the Scorecard Initiative

The purpose of the Scorecard initiative was to investigate the experiences and perceptions of policing amongst the Somali community.

Midaynta had reached out to the Munk School of Global Affairs regarding the survey portion. They have collected a series of previous surveys to build a baseline and collaborated with the Research and Ethics Board at the University of Toronto to see what the budget would look like. U of T received approval to start from the Ethics committee. The Munk School of Global Affairs will conduct interviews and focus groups with community members starting with the mothers.

With the lack of existing research into the Somali community and relations with the police, this Scorecard initiative seeks to examine closely how the Somali community in Toronto has been impacted through years of violence and trauma. This unprecedented research will provide future recommendations and evidence for necessary improvements in strategy through the focus groups and one on one sessions.

CORE ELEMENT 2: MCIS AND NCO MEETINGS

Core Element Two: Building Trust through Integrated Collaboration with Divisions and Neighbourhood Community Officers

Successes:

- The strengthening of the trust and relationship between the NCO officers and the community members. Learning about the various programs and services being offered in the divisions by the NCOs.
- Knowledge exchange occurs during these meetings.
- Sharing the latest news in the community with the NCOs and how we can improve the six Divisions (12, 13, 22, 23, 31, 32).

Challenges :

- Trying to inform the community members the benefits of these division meetings and that they shouldn't have any worries or fear of attending these meetings for fear of being affiliated to the NCOs and MCIS for fear of the community to judge them.
 - They feel that partaking in these meetings can be a risk for them the community can view them as an ally to the police without understanding that these meetings provide a lot of benefits to the residents that they get equipped with various useful information that they can implement in their lives and in their communities.
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CORE ELEMENT 3: THE MOTHERS OUTREACH WORKER PROGRAM

Core Element Three: Enhancing Community Safety through the implementation of the Mother Outreach Worker (MOW) Program.

Success:

- The MOWs were able to outreach successfully to a number of community members and get them engaged in the work that they are doing.
- MOWs supported in the de-escalation and conflict resolution on multiple incidences through rapport build with NCO's through community engagement sessions with the 6 divisions which has helped to increase trust within the community.
- MOWs had the opportunity to facilitate speaking engagement in multiple different community, academic spaces.

Challenges:

- The MOWs are still operating as a volunteer group despite the excessive amount of work they have done. MOWs still find it difficult to support their own families and must also pay for other costs like transportation and expenses linked to their role.
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THE SCORECARD INITIATIVE UPDATES



Progress:

- Signing of the MOU gave the greenlight for the start of the Scorecard initiative.
- Meetings with stakeholders and community members to design a culturally sensitive and responsive research plan.
- Completion of design of the research project alongside the Munk School of Global Affairs
- We are currently recruiting Mothers Around the GTA alongside The Munk School of Global Affairs to share their experiences with the police.

Next Steps:

- Setting up dates for focus groups and one on one interviews being conducted by the research group at The Munk School of Global Affairs

TESTIMONIALS FOR THE MENDING A CRACK IN THE SKY PROJECT

TESTIMONIAL 1:

There was an incident that involved a family that had called police to report a missing child. When police arrived, 30 police cruisers attended the residence complex. When police approached the family dwelling, the police were able to identify some of the MCIS mothers who were also present providing community supports to the family. Subsequently, a mother from the (MCIS) group was able to intervene and provide translation services between police and the family. The MCIS collaborative approach and working relationships with NCOs and Police played a role in bridging the communication between both parties. The family had, prior to police arriving, mentioned that they did not feel comfortable talking to police because of past negative interactions. Despite these grievances, MCIS mothers provided the family reassurances that they have great working relationships with NCOs and ensured a respectful interaction would be experienced. Although language was a barrier, MCIS mothers through probing questions to Police and the family, was able to ascertain that the kidnapping was a false report. The child was safe and was with the grandmother. The allegation with respects to kidnap had stemmed from domestic dispute. The MCIS mothers also used the incident as a learning opportunity to educate the family about the risks associated with false reporting and how these kind of false reports take away from important community service calls.



TESTIMONIAL 2:



"Prior to working with the NCOs through the NCO community meetings I never had a positive relationship with the police. Whenever I interacted with the police, it was always a negative interaction. I was never comfortable meeting officers or getting to know officers, it was difficult to even start sitting in on MCIS meetings at the beginning. Initially, I felt that the officers were only there for information gathering but the more I attended, and the more I got to know the NCOs, I understood that they were there for us and to support us. "

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LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE



The work of the Mother Outreach Workers and the Mending a Crack in the Sky team has shown the clear need for the work being done in the community. This unprecedented model has been tested and proved to show the impact that it has had upon the Somali community and highlights the need to continue the program.

While the COVID pandemic did put constraints on the work able to be done in person in the community, the mothers worked tirelessly to help bring grief and trauma counselling and support to community members in need. This period of time also showed the determination of the MCIS team to follow through with their commitment to the goals of the MCIS project.

Looking towards the future, the work of the MCIS mothers will only continue to grow and expand as more connections are formed with not only the community and officers, but also with the greater African community and other stakeholders as well.

ASKS/RECOMMENDATIONS

1

Extend the MOU with MCIS for an additional two years.

2

Financial resources for the MOW program model

3

More community initiatives developed in partnerships with the NCO program in the six divisions



THANK YOU

HEAD OFFICE

2150 Islington Avenue, Unit 209
M9P3V4, Etobicoke, ON

Jane Hub Satellite Office:
1541 Jane Street, M9N2R3

Keele Hub Satellite Office:
1652 Keele Street, M6M3W3

EMAIL

info@midaynta.com

SOCIAL MEDIA

[@MidayntaYouth](https://www.instagram.com/MidayntaYouth)

CALL US

416-544-1992