Aboriginal youth don’t have the same dreams as other Canadian youth. They don’t dream of becoming doctors and lawyers. Many don’t even dream of finishing high school.

- The Honourable Justice Harry LaForme, Ontario Court of Appeal

DARE TO DREAM

BREAKING BARRIERS & BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Dare to Dream is an innovative justice education and outreach program for First Nation, Métis and Inuit youth aged 11 to 14. We engage Aboriginal youth at a critical time in their development, and challenge them to live up to their potential by making sound choices for today and setting positive goals for the future.

Through our collaboration with Aboriginal leaders, the legal community and like-minded non-profit organizations, CLA-ACE is providing Aboriginal youth with meaningful opportunities to expand their understanding of the justice system, develop critical thinking and leadership skills, and to “dare to dream” about graduating from high school and pursuing a law-related career.

CLA-ACE understands the value and impact of mentorship: we are breaking down barriers by building relationships between Aboriginal youth and the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal legal community.

“Aboriginal youth don’t have the same dreams as other Canadian youth. They don’t dream of becoming doctors and lawyers. Many don’t even dream of finishing high school.”

- The Honourable Justice Harry LaForme, Ontario Court of Appeal
RATIONAL

As the fastest growing demographic in Canada, Aboriginal youth have a key role to play in Canada’s future. Yet high school graduation rates of Aboriginal youth are half that of the non-Aboriginal population. In fact, the Assembly of First Nations has found that a First Nation youth is more likely to go to jail than to graduate from high school.

The accessibility of the justice system for Aboriginal people in Canada is a significant concern. Several studies have shown that Aboriginal people, including youth, are overrepresented at every stage of the criminal justice process, yet are underrepresented in the administration of justice in Canada. In Ontario, despite making up only 2.9% of their demographic, Aboriginal boys aged 12-17 make up almost 15% of male admissions to penal youth facilities. Similarly, the representation of Aboriginal girls in the same age is ten times compared to their percentage make up in their age demographic in the province.

Research indicates that the most vulnerable age group to criminal justice processing is between 15-24 years of age. While the reasons for this are complex, the lack of culturally appropriate educational programming and supports, coupled with the effects of racism and the devaluation of Aboriginal cultures and identities are widely recognized as significant barriers.

“As a Metis lawyer, I was so glad to have the opportunity to connect with our Indigenous youth. It was both inspirational and rewarding.”

- Jude Daniels, Sr. Legal Counsel, Energy, Operations & Engineering Law at TransCanada

“I was so impressed with the thoroughness and precision in which the Dare to Dream team brought the students from A.E. Cross and Vincent Massey Schools to the court house for their mock trial project. As judges we understand the importance of any program that teaches our young citizens about the court’s role in the Canadian justice system. This is of mutual and greater importance when the young participants are from our First Nations community. We gain a better insight into Aboriginal culture and, it is our hope, that the students gain more understanding of this part of the justice system.”

– The Honourable Justice Bryan Mahoney, Calgary Court of Queen’s Bench
While legal education is beneficial at any age, we believe that engaging youth early, between 11 and 14 years of age, will bring them much-needed education and awareness to assist them in making positive choices for their futures. Dare to Dream provides the opportunity for Aboriginal youth to learn about the positive and constructive elements of the justice system, as well as shows them that the system is available for their protection. By structuring the program through mentorship with established lawyers and students, the program challenges prevalent stereotypes of the inaccessibility of lawyers and the legal system.

Dare to Dream “humanizes” lawyers and law students, allowing the youth to see themselves in those roles.

Dare to Dream provides the opportunity for youth to learn about the justice system in small groups led by one volunteer lawyer or law student and through experiential learning activities like the mock trial, courthouse tour, law firm tour, etc. We begin each activity with a smudging ceremony and play icebreaker games to help the students feel comfortable. In addition to teaching the youth about the mainstream justice system, we also emphasize the importance of incorporating Aboriginal practices in the justice system, such as the use of sentencing circles, Eagle feather on the witness stand, etc.

SCHEDULE

Program Development (incl. program material tailored for each community) | Summer
FALL [Legal Education and relationship-building]
Volunteer Training for lawyers and law students | September
Session 1: Introductions of participants, students and nature of the program; discussion on law, legal system, and concepts
Session 2: Discussion of Mock Trial and review of fact scenario; Discussion and assignment of individual roles and responsibilities
Session 3-5: Preparations for Mock Trial
Session 6: Mock Trial and Sentencing Circle
Session 7: Cultural activity (i.e. Winter Solstice Feast)

WINTER [Youth Mentorship]
Session 1: Discussion on Civil Case (i.e. Defamation case involving Facebook)
Session 2: Overview of law-related roles/careers
Session 3: Visit to local law school / guest speaker
Session 4: Visit to local courthouse
Session 5: Visit to local law firm
Session 6: Evaluation and Celebration

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Program Goals

Our short-term objectives are to:

a) increase Aboriginal students’ knowledge about the justice system and careers in law;
b) develop the students’ critical thinking and leadership skills; and
c) to empower the students to begin articulating a positive vision for their futures.

The anticipated long-term outcomes are to:

a) increase the number of Aboriginal youth succeeding in school and graduating from high school;
b) increase the number of Aboriginal youth becoming leaders in their communities and schools;
c) increase the number of Aboriginal youth pursuing justice-related careers; and
d) decrease the number of Aboriginal youth involved in the justice system as subjects.

The Dare to Dream program also benefits both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal lawyers and law students. By providing an opportunity for lawyers to engage in youth justice education and mentorship, volunteer lawyers and law students will improve their own knowledge and competency in Aboriginal cultures, traditions, languages and legal principles.

"Dare to Dream was truly beneficial to our students. The program not only provided an educational component, but also a key cultural component that is emphasized in all First Nation, Métis and Inuit communities - relationships. The bonding that occurred between students, volunteers, and teachers enabled the program to go beyond regular justice education, and allowed the students to think positively about the law and their futures."

- Shane Cunningham, Learning and Diversity Learning Support Advisor, Aboriginal Education, Area IV, Calgary

"It is crucial for Dare to Dream to continue as I have seen the transformation in my students in both their self-esteem and understanding of law. These children are the future of our nation, and through their knowledge and understanding gained in the Dare to Dream program, the possibilities are endless in terms of the impact they can have on a nation."

- Sharla Niroopan, Grade 7/8 Teacher at the First Nations School of Toronto
"The students made me very proud. I will remember them for a long time. Indeed, they made me feel like I was home on my reserve and amongst my people. Dare to Dream is a terrific program, which I have no doubt will create new dreams in the students and I have every confidence that some of them will take it to heart. They are special young people and deserve the chance to go anywhere they want to in life. I believe they will. A big Chi Miigwetch to them and all the generous volunteers."

– The Honourable Justice Harry LaForme

Contact Information

If you are interested in volunteering in CLA-ACE’s Dare to Dream program, please contact:

Fallon Melander      Ashely King         Dana Martin        Johnna Van Parys
Policy Counsel           J.D. Candidate            J.D. Candidate                     Staff Lawyer
Legal Aid Ontario         University of Ottawa      University of Calgary           Legal Aid Saskatchewan
Toronto Coordinator      Ottawa Coordinator     Calgary Coordinator           Saskatoon Coordinator
Saskatoon Coordinator
spencef@lao.on.ca         aking093@uottawa.ca      themoderndana@gmail.com       johnna.vanparys@gmail.com

If you are interested in sponsoring and/or bringing Dare to Dream to your community, please contact Brittany Twiss, Executive Director of CLA-ACE, at btwiss@cla-ace.ca.

Thank you to our generous program supporters!

6. Rankin, Jim and Patty Winsa, “Unequal justice: Aboriginal and black inmates disproportionately fill Ontario jails, race data obtained under freedom of information paints a disturbing picture of black and aboriginal overrepresentation in Ontario youth and adult jails,” Toronto Star, March 31 2013, data sourced from Akwasi Owusu-Bempah University of Toronto Doctoral Candidate.