

ALGONQUIN COLLEGE

External Relations and Strategy

# ASPIRE AC

## Empowering Youth to Thrive in Their Communities

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The Commonwell L.E.A.F. Program

Case for Support

**ASPIRE AC** is Algonquin College's access and inclusion initiative that helps youth and young adults facing barriers build the skills, confidence, and connections needed to pursue education, meaningful employment, and active participation in their communities. Through personalized coaching, mentorship, career exploration, and wraparound supports, ASPIRE AC empowers participants to overcome social, financial, cultural, and systemic barriers to success.

Serving Indigenous youth, newcomers, youth formerly in care, learners with disabilities, first-generation learners, and youth from low-income households, the program creates pathways to opportunity while strengthening community belonging and long-term resilience. Through partnerships with more than 40 community organizations across Ottawa and Eastern Ontario, ASPIRE AC connects young people with the resources, networks, and support systems they need to thrive.

A Commonwell L.E.A.F. investment would expand opportunities for youth to participate in mentorship, leadership development, life-skills training, financial literacy education, career readiness workshops, and experiential learning activities that build confidence and support successful transitions to post-secondary education and employment.

By helping young people develop the skills and resilience needed to achieve their goals, ASPIRE AC contributes to stronger, more inclusive communities where individuals are empowered to reach their full potential and give back to the communities in which they live and work.

## Why ASPIRE AC Matters

Many young people encounter barriers that can limit their educational and career aspirations, including financial instability, disability, family disruption, discrimination, social isolation, and a lack of access to mentorship and support networks. These challenges can make post-secondary education feel out of reach and reduce opportunities for long-term economic and personal well-being.

Through partnerships with more than 40 community organizations across Ottawa and Eastern Ontario, ASPIRE AC bridges these gaps by providing individualized, culturally responsive supports that begin before enrollment and continue throughout the learner's educational journey. By connecting youth to mentorship, resources, academic guidance, and community networks, the program helps participants build confidence, strengthen their sense of belonging, develop critical life and employability skills, and successfully transition into meaningful careers.

In 2025, ASPIRE AC engaged 345 new learners and the program is positioned to expand its reach and support more than 500 learners annually in the future.

## Who We Serve

ASPIRE AC supports youth and young adults facing barriers to educational success, including those who identify with one or more equity-deserving communities:

- Youth and young adults in and from extended society care
- Indigenous youth
- Racialized youth
- 2SLGBTQI+ youth
- Youth with disabilities and diverse learning needs
- First-generation post-secondary learners
- Newcomers to Canada
- Youth from low-income households and rural communities

Through partnerships with more than 40 community organizations, including the Children's Aid Society of Ottawa, Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre, Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, Youville Centre, and the Youth Services Bureau, ASPIRE AC conducts targeted outreach and provides coordinated supports to youth who are most likely to face barriers to educational participation and success.



*I will forever be grateful for ASPIRE AC. I am a Cree student at Algonquin College. I have been working with them for a while now. I got introduced to them by a counsellor from the Mamidosewin Centre. During that time, I was having difficulty with my program, I was struggling with a few courses. So, they helped me connect with a tutor from the peer tutoring centre, and sponsored me for the tutoring sessions. Also, my job coach helped me with my resume, cover letter, and building my profile on LinkedIn. Therefore,* ***ASPIRE AC has made my academic journey so much better.*** *I would definitely recommend this service to other students.*

**David Blacksmith, Student**

## Impact: Strengthening futures together

Survey results from ASPIRE AC participants underscore the program's measurable success:

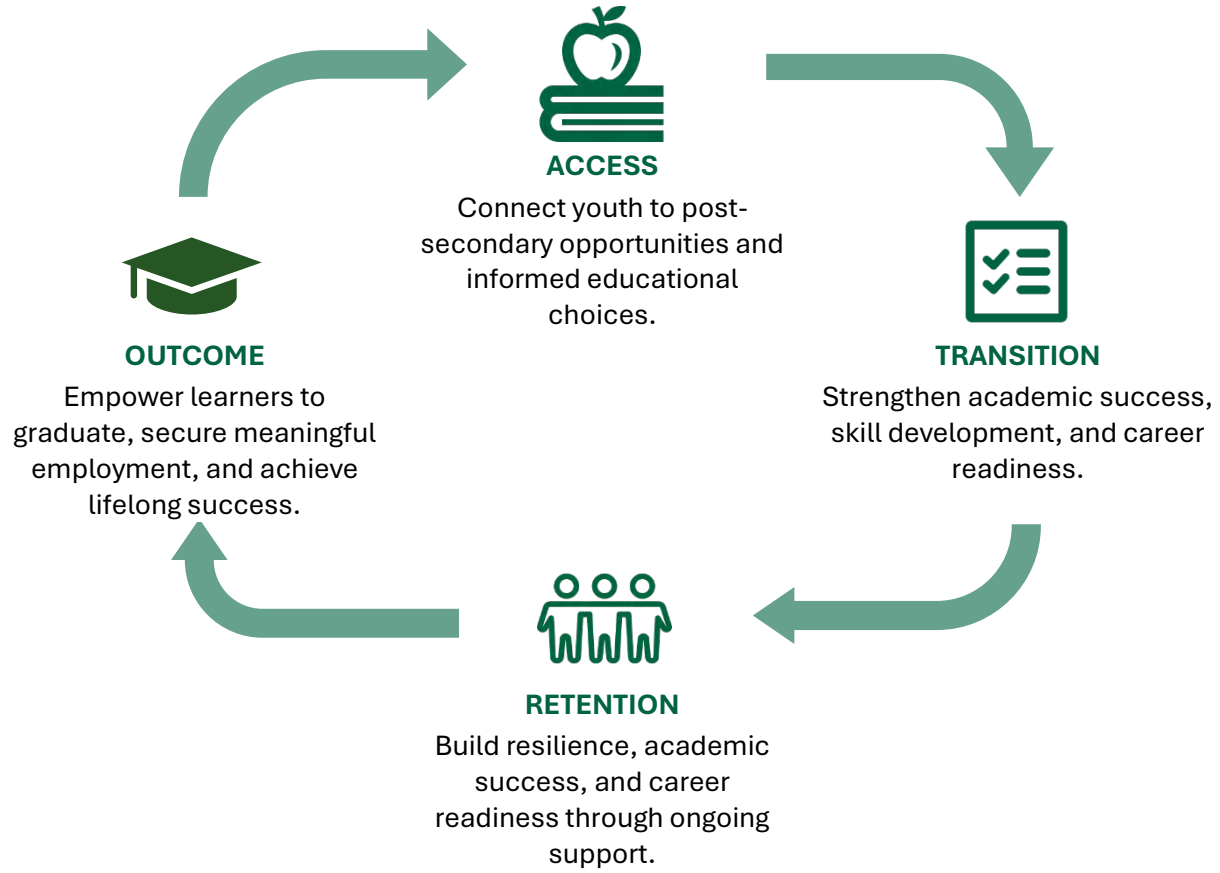
- 77% found significant value in transition coaching
- 78% benefited from mentorship services
- 80% valued job coaching and career readiness support

These outcomes reflect ASPIRE AC's role in building resilient, empowered learners who are equipped to overcome personal and systemic barriers to education and employment.

## The need for investment

Post-secondary institutions across Ontario face growing financial pressures due to tuition freezes and reduced international enrollment, making targeted support for equity-seeking learners more critical than ever. Without dedicated funding, many learners risk losing access to the personalized guidance and community connections ASPIRE AC provides.

Investment in this project will:



## Budget

The current approved ASPIRE AC budget includes $246,942.85 for salaries, $18,094 for operating expenses, and $25,000 for administrative costs. These resources support the delivery of core services; however, they leave limited capacity for enhanced program development, participant resources, and access to technology. Funding from the Commonwell LEAF Grant for $50,000 would help address these gaps by supporting the creation of new educational materials, expanding access to assistive and learning technologies, and strengthening programming that helps youth overcome barriers to post-secondary education and employment. This investment would increase the program's reach and effectiveness, allowing more participants to access the tools, supports, and opportunities needed to achieve their educational and career goals.

| Category | Description | Amount |
|---|---|---|
| **Recruitment** | Youth outreach, recruitment, and engagement initiatives | $10,000 |
| **Participant Success Grants** | Financial assistance for transportation, supplies, certification fees, childcare, technology access, and other barriers to participation | $15,000 |
| **Technology & Digital Inclusion** | Loaner devices, assistive technology, and software | $5,000 |
| **Financial Literacy & Career Readiness Programming** | Workshops, guest speakers, financial wellness education, career planning, interview preparation, and leadership development | $7,500 |
| **Mentorship & Networking Initiatives** | Industry networking events and mentorship matching activities | $5,000 |
| **Experiential Learning Opportunities** | Community-based projects, applied learning experiences, and site visits | $5,000 |
| **Measurement & Impact Assessment** | Outcome tracking, participant surveys, impact reporting, and knowledge-sharing activities | $2,500 |
| **Total** | | **$50,000** |

## Building Resilience, Confidence, and Opportunity

At Algonquin College, we believe everyone deserves the opportunity to realize their full potential. Through ASPIRE AC's personalized, learner-centered supports, the program helps youth facing barriers to education build confidence, develop resilience, and strengthen the skills needed to succeed in post-secondary education, employment, and life.

By creating pathways to learning, fostering a sense of belonging, and connecting participants with mentorship, resources, and community networks, ASPIRE AC enables young people to overcome challenges and move forward with purpose. In doing so, the program not only transforms their futures but also contributes to stronger, more inclusive communities across Ottawa and the surrounding region.

**ASPIRE AC is more than a program. It is a catalyst for opportunity, empowerment, and lifelong success.**

Funding from **The Commonwell L.E.A.F. Program** will expand ASPIRE AC's capacity to support youth facing barriers to education and employment across Ottawa and Eastern Ontario. Funding will provide participant success grants, mentorship opportunities, financial literacy education, career readiness programming, leadership development, experiential learning opportunities, and technology supports that help youth fully participate in educational and career exploration activities. Through community partnerships, the program will connect participants with trusted networks, personalized guidance, and practical experiences that build confidence, strengthen resilience, and encourage long-term success. The project will help more young people develop the skills and supports needed to pursue post-secondary education, meaningful employment, and active engagement within their communities.

**"When young people are given the opportunity to aspire, they gain the power to achieve."**



At Algonquin College, we are committed to reducing barriers and empowering learners to transform their hopes and dreams into lifelong success. Through accessible, youth-centered supports, we help young people build the skills, confidence, and opportunities they need to achieve their goals and reach their full potential.

If you would like to learn more about ASPIRE AC and the impact of your investment, please feel free to schedule a call with:



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