



# Social Return On Investment (SROI) Case Study: Youth Matters Program



## Fast Facts

Aspen Family and Community Services Network Society (Aspen) supports the development of people's core strengths to help them deal with challenges and create a better life for themselves and their families.

### 2008 Program:

- 18 programs offered to Calgary children, families and communities.
- 5399 clients served, of which 3279 were children or youth under the age of 21 years.
- 64 volunteers provided 4693 hours of time in 784 volunteer opportunities.
- 95% of clients reported incomes less than the low-income cut-off (LICO).
- 87% of clients surveyed felt engaged by Aspen services.

**SROI Overview:** Youth Matters provides support for "at risk" youth (13-21 yrs.) who have a history of addictions, criminal behaviour or poor decisions and made a commitment to making positive and healthy lifestyle choices.

**SROI Average:** 1 : 11:72

### Contact:

Katharin Pritchard  
(403) 219-3477  
klpritch@aspenfamily.org  
[www.aspenfamily.org](http://www.aspenfamily.org)

**"You helped me and didn't ignore me. You helped me when my mom wasn't there!"** - A participant in the Youth Matters Program

## Program Background

Calgary youth are faced with very difficult choices and decisions early in life. These include decisions about drug use, positive and negative peer involvement and learning to accept oneself as a unique and individual person.

Such choices can be made easier when youth have access to someone who will listen, be a positive role model and offer links to supportive networks.

The Youth Matters Program supports at-risk youth living in North Central and North East communities within Calgary. Youth Matters offers crisis support, positive group activities, opportunities to develop leadership skills and education about healthy living.

Youth Matters staff connect with schools and youth-friendly organizations in order to engage youth who are experiencing difficulties. Staff provide one-on-one individual support as well as group programs.

The needs expressed by the youth involved range from requests for support in dealing with addiction to support to avoid repeated criminal behaviour. Other youth require information on how to access secure housing or an adequate supply of food. Many of the young people involved in Youth Matters are struggling with low self-esteem, the impact of being bullied and having a poor body image. Many have histories of addictions, criminal behaviour and have experienced unhealthy relationships.

## Social Value Created

Youth involved in the Youth Matters program are often isolated and in need of social and life skills. Many have a history of drug use and of criminal behaviour. Without positive role models and support, these youth are at high risk of returning

to negative behaviours they would otherwise choose to avoid.

Many young people struggle to feel comfortable within their peer group. They may participate in high-risk situations in order to fit in and to have a sense

of belonging. Some become bored and get involved in risky behaviours in order to create a feeling of excitement and challenge in their lives.

Youth Matters participants acquire new skills and abilities that assist them to make smart and informed decisions about relationships, employment opportunities, schooling and housing. These youth become connected to each other, connected to supportive adult relationships and to alternative, positive activities and resources. This results in stronger connections to a positive social network as well as a sense of belonging and ownership.

## Youth Matters Program Clientele

Throughout 2008, 28 youth were supported by a one-on-one relationship with a member of the Youth Matters team. An additional 126 youth were involved in group programming.

Participants fall within one of three profiles. The first profile typically includes five to six youth annually, who have been identified as gifted.

**Theory of Change**  
If at-risk youth are engaged through activities and diverse opportunities they learn to connect with each other, adults and their community which increases their ability to manage risk and create and maintain positive changes in their lives.



# SROI Case Study: Youth Matters Program

These youth struggle with interpersonal relationship issues, depression, loneliness, school issues (underachieving/ boredom) and low self esteem. Youth Matters' staff engage these youth by providing a listening ear and activities to challenge their minds and eliminate feelings of loneliness and boredom.

The second profile of youth engaging with Youth Matters are those struggling with or recovering from addictions and/or criminal behaviour. Youth in profile two have a history of police involvement and often need crisis support

in order to have secure and stable housing, adequate food, transportation in order to access school, etc. Youth in profile two represent more than 50% of the youth seeking one-on-one support with Youth Matters staff, annually.

The third profile represents the largest group served (126 youth in 12 groups). Typically meeting in groups arranged at their school, profile three youth have been identified by teachers or school counsellors as needing extra support to work through peer relationships, build self-esteem, figure out family issues, etc.

## Case Study— Social Value Created: Youth Profile One (Gifted Youth) / Trudy

The following is a snapshot of a typical profile one youth along with an overview of how involvement in Youth Matters creates social value.

Trudy is a young female diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyper-activity Disorder (ADHD). Her grandmother is a remarkable woman who fought the legal system to gain custody of this gifted youth as Trudy's parents had many problems with drug and alcohol addiction.

Prior to living with her grandmother, Trudy had been in and out of foster homes, which left her with little self-esteem and serious anger management issues. Trudy's social interactions often ended with her lashing out and swearing at her peers. She treated her teachers the same way, resulting in so many suspensions that she was close to being expelled from school.

Trudy's grandmother contacted Aspen Youth Matters Program for assistance as she became increasingly uncomfortable with Trudy's behaviour as well as less

confident that she could parent Trudy effectively. If the situation had not improved, chances were high that Trudy would once again be living within the foster care system.

Trudy accessed one-on-one support by the Youth Matters support worker. She initially met with the support worker once a week, where she began to share and process the issues she was dealing with. He invited her to a Youth Leadership Group at the local junior high school where Trudy met other students and started coming out of her shell. Youth Matters supported Trudy in participating in a variety of leadership exercises and her involvement in extra-curricular activities started to increase including a regular swim program, figure-skating and involvement in a theatre production.

Through partnerships with other organizations, Aspen connected Trudy to new and rewarding experiences. She now has healthy self-esteem, many positive peer and teacher interactions and is no longer at-risk of being expelled from school. Her grandmother is now comfortable with her behaviour. There is little risk that

Table 1:

Gifted Youth: Social Value Calculation (2008 - 5 Youth)						
SROI Indicators Included:	Indicator code	\$\$ value per change	% of co-hort experiencing this change.	\$\$ value re: co-hort	Notes	
1	Avoidance of Police Time	CSP	\$2,052	40%	\$4,104	\$342 per hour, assumed 2hrs*2 youth * 3 incidences avoided
2	Avoidance of Youth Court Appearance	J1	\$1,275	40%	\$2,550	assumed 1/yr, two incidence avoided
3	Avoidance of Police in Court	J9	\$319	40%	\$638	assumed appearances in court avoided
4	Avoidance treating undiagnosed mental illness due to stress of isolation	H19	\$1,447	20%	\$1,447	walk-in clinics, counselling avoided, etc.
5	Avoidance of one (short) search for a runaway youth	J8	\$1,912	20%	\$1,912	minimum cost of a police investigation
6	Part-time earned income	F19	\$6,336	80%	\$25,344	assumed 15 hrs/week @ \$8.80 * 4 youth
7	Foster care avoided	CSP	\$24,090	20%	\$24,090	avoided possibility long-term care @ \$66/day (annually), one youth
<b>Social value created annually (5 youth)</b>					<b>\$60,085</b>	
<b>Total annual investment (5 Youth)</b>					<b>\$35,000</b>	
<b>SROI ratio:</b>					<b>1.72</b>	

Trudy will return to foster care in the future.

Gifted youth like Trudy typically represent 25% of Youth Matters one-on-one clients. Youth Matters assists these gifted youth to discover their passions and to take an active role shaping their own futures.

As a result, Youth Matters prevents gifted but troubled youth from entering the mental health system because their depression and loneliness has been addressed. Through their involvement, these gifted youth learn to develop their personal support systems, thereby increasing their ability to handle adversity into the future.

CSP = Citable source in process, currently from reliable source.

ICI = Individual Case Study Indicator, the data collected for this indicator is specific to this case study



# SROI Case Study: Youth Matters Program

## Social Value Created: Youth Profile Two (Avoiding Criminal Behaviour/Addictions) / Joe

The following is a snapshot of a typical profile two youth along with an overview of how involvement in Youth Matters creates social value.

Joe was a troubled adolescent of 12 years of age. He was known to police due to repeated criminal behaviour and had spent time in jail on two separate occasions. Joe was on house arrest awaiting time in court as a result of being required to face additional charges.

Joe was hanging out with an older crowd of disenfranchised youth to whom he was desperately trying to prove himself. He was not attending school, which often went unnoticed due to lack of supervision at home. Essentially, Joe was on a life path that was not likely to turn out well.

The Youth Matters program provided Joe with someone to talk to. Joe used his relationship with his Youth Matters support worker as an excuse to break ties with the older crowd who were a source of negative influence in his life. His support

**Table 2 (Youth in Crisis- 15 Youth in 2008)**

Crisis Youth: Social Value Calculation (2008 - 15 Youth)					
SROI Indicators Included:	\$\$ value per change	Indicator code	% of co-hort experiencing this change.	\$\$ value re: co-hort	Notes
1 Avoidance of youth incarceration	\$3,500	J7	40%	\$21,000	\$250 per day, minimum 2 weeks, 6 youth
2 Avoidance of youth court process	\$1,275	J1	40%	\$7,650	\$1,275 per process, 6 youth avoided
3 Avoidance of police presence in court	\$319	J9	40%	\$1,914	\$319 per need for police presence in court
4 Part-time employment	\$6,336	F19	80%	\$76,032	80% of 15 youth were able to get a part-time job.
5 Elimination of suicidal tendencies	\$8,878	H26	13%	\$17,312	assuming 2 youth avoided one further hospital admission each
6 Mental health improved and managed	\$2,894	H19	13%	\$5,643	2 youth improved mental health
7 Avoided need for 'lock-up' intervention as a result of involvement in prostitution	\$15,000	J7	13%	\$29,250	2 youth diverted from prostitution and 'lock-up' for one month - minimum cost is \$250/day.
<b>Social value created annually (15 youth)</b>				<b>\$158,801</b>	
<b>Total annual investment (15 youth)</b>				<b>\$35,000</b>	
<b>SROI ratio:</b>				<b>4.54</b>	

worker became an important positive female role model, in the absence of a mother or aunt able to provide a positive example.

Joe's probation officer and Youth Matters support worker worked with Joe to develop a plan to turn his life around. He enrolled in a Youth Matter's summer program that enabled him to complete 44 hours of community service. During this time he stayed out of the court system and did not break any laws, which improved his profile as a youth on probation.

Over the summer, Joe met peers his own age and developed some strong new friendships. In the course of completing his hours of community service, Joe developed valuable new leadership skills. He demonstrated his commitment to charting a new course for himself by staying in close contact with his Youth Matters support worker.

The Youth Matters program recognizes that youth struggling to overcome addictions and/or to leave a criminal lifestyle need

support in finding new friends and support systems.

This is not an easy task. For that reason, Youth Matters support workers are there to assist in a wide variety of ways, whether that be crisis support, basic needs support, recreational support or companionship and just listening.

In the course of their involvement in Youth Matters, young people discover their own strengths. They build personal resiliency, which increases their ability to cope and contributes to the development of a significantly more positive view of themselves and their own future.

## Social Value Created: Profile Three (Developing Positive Peers Relationships & Self-Esteem) / Sarah

The following are two snapshots of typical profile three youth along with a summary of how involvement in Youth Matters creates social value by working with youth of this profile.

Sarah is a 15 year old referred to the Grow Girls group by her mother. She had experienced significant parent/child conflict and abuse at home and was having difficulties at school as a result. Sarah had spent a couple of weeks in a care facility due to her home issues. She was being bullied and had been admitted to the hospital three times due to suicidal thoughts. Sarah was beginning to use illegal drugs as a coping strategy.

Involvement in the Youth Matters Grow Girls group assisted

Sarah to become more positive in her interactions with others and in caring for herself. Sarah now lives with her mother and they are attending counselling to work on their relationship.

Sarah gained the courage to apply for a job. She has acted responsibly and has maintained her employment. She now has new, positive friendships, volunteers regularly and remains completely clean of drugs. Her self esteem has increased dramatically.

Sarah says, "Grow Girls is a meaningful activity in my life. Youth Matters gives me someone to talk to and helps me achieve my goals".



# SROI Case Study: Youth Matters Program

## Social Value Created: Profile Three (Developing Positive Peers Relationships & Self-Esteem) / Henry

Henry was 14 years old. Having lived in and out of foster homes for 5 years, Henry has difficulty with authority figures. This was affecting his time at school and had led to numerous suspensions from school. Henry began to participate in the Youth Matter's LEAD group being offered at his high school at the request of his guardian.

Henry had many new experiences that opened his eyes to a wide variety of issues that affected his community. When Henry expressed interest, LEAD connected him to activities that enabled him to get involved.

One of Henry's teachers observed Henry during a LEAD activity and remarked, "I would never have thought that Henry would have ever chosen to participate in a program like this." To the

teacher it was a welcome change. To Henry it was a new, positive chapter in his personal development that offered the potential for positive steps toward the future.

Grow Girls and LEAD are two of the many groups offered through the Youth Matters program. Both group-based programs support adolescents who are dealing with low self-esteem, poor body image and other social pressures, by offering them

opportunities to develop their own leadership capacity, employability skills and interests in volunteerism.

The foundation of the Grow Girls and LEAD programs is to engage youth in goal-setting in relation to their own personal achievements. They then develop new, positive relationships through a wide range of social/recreational activities. One success offers significant social value, **SROI of 1 : 28.64**.

**Table 3:**

Profile Three: Grow Girls - Social Value Calculation (100 Girls)					
SROI Indicators Included:	Indicator code	\$\$ value per change	% of co-hort experiencing this change.	\$\$ value re: co-hort	Notes
1 Child welfare avoided	CSP	\$86,870	20%	\$1,737,400	minimum of \$238/night in group placement annually (one youth)
2 Hospital stays avoided	H26	\$8,878	6%	\$53,268	one mental health related admission to hospital (one youth)
3 Working part time	F19	\$6,336	30%	\$190,080	working part time (one youth)
4 Avoidance of police intervention	CSP	\$342	15%	\$5,130	\$342 per hour, assumed 2hrs*2 youth * 3 incidences avoided
5 Avoidance of one (short) search for a runaway youth	J8	\$1,912	10%	\$19,120	minimum cost of a police investigation
<b>Social value created annually (100):</b>				<b>\$2,004,998</b>	
<b>Total annual investment in (100):</b>				<b>\$70,000</b>	
<b>SROI ratio:</b>				<b>28.64</b>	

Henry started coming to the sessions and immediately became interested in the LEAD program. He explored opportunities that offered the potential to meet new friends. Through LEAD,

## Conclusion

Youth Matters is a program focused on assisting Calgary youth to adapt and overcome challenging circumstances.

These challenges may be the result of the perception of being different or misunderstood, which contributes to debilitating feelings of isolation and loneliness. They might be caused by a desire to overcome an addiction to drugs or alcohol, yet without support few youth will be successful in overcoming addictions.

Many youth find themselves involved in criminal behaviour. They want to change the course of their lives, however, similar to those with addictions, these youth require support and clear alternatives to negative peer pressure. Ongoing peer pressure and group expectations are frequently a key contributor to criminal involvement at a young age.

A surprising number of youth are troubled by low self-esteem, poor body image and lack of confidence in their own future.

These youth require positive alternatives for socialization and group activities, in order for them to progress through the critical adolescent and teen years with a positive attitude, and skills and experiences that will enable healthy lifestyle choices.

Youth Matters addresses the needs of youth expressed above through one-on-one support, group programs and positive options.

A range of programs are available, in order to meet the varied needs of the youth involved.

Across the range of program investment and social value that results, the annual SROI of Youth Matters is **1 : 11:63**.

**Table 4:**

SROI Average: Youth Matters	
Annual SROI Ratios	
Gifted Youth	1.72
Crisis Youth	4.54
Grow Girls	28.64
<b>SROI ratio average:</b>	<b>11.63</b>

CSP = Citable source in process, currently from reliable source.

ICI = Individual Case Study Indicator, the data collected for this indicator is specific to this case study