

# Go Local program raising grades and lowering drug use in Toronto schools

**HEATHER BUCHAN**  
for Metro Toronto



**EDUCATION** For too many Toronto high schools, gang violence, drug abuse and surrounding community poverty, are everyday issues that plague their students. Statistics show that the higher the incidence of violence and drugs, the lower the rate of graduation.

But two local charities — Free the Children and the Ron White Foundation — have partnered to change this through a program called Go Local.

Go Local was launched last September in 20 schools across the GTA that hold the distinction of being “at-risk,” meaning they’re under-served or have few student resources.

Sally Hakim, Go Local’s motivational speaker and facilitator, is herself a graduate of Monarch Park, one

**“A lot of the issues these students face are within themselves.”**

Sally Hakim, Go Local facilitator

of the high schools benefiting from the program.

“The great thing about this program is that we don’t tell (students) what they need to be passionate about,” says Hakim. “We go in and find out what they are passionate about within their community and find ways to tackle those issues. We’re planting seeds in their heads of what they would like to do within their community.”

Hakim is part of a team that offers seminars and workshops to students, mostly in Grades 10 and 11, deemed most at-risk.

During the pilot program at Monarch Park, Free the Children said rates of drug use declined, grades went up, as did

graduation rates and team spirit. And it was due to changed attitudes in students who had previously thought of themselves as writeoffs.

“A lot of the issues these students face are within themselves,” says Hakim.

Go Local is funded by the Ron White Foundation, which held the first annual White Knight Gala last May, to raise money for Go Local.

## On the web



- This year’s White Knight Gala will take place on May 27. For more information, go to [whiteknightgala.com](http://whiteknightgala.com) or [freethechildren.com](http://freethechildren.com).