



**IMMEDIATE RELEASE FOR
SUICIDE PREVENTION MONTH AND WORLD SUICIDE PREVENTION DAY (Sept 10)**

SafER Space: A Human-Centred Approach for Advancing Child & Youth Mental Health in ERs

Toronto, September 8, 2022 - Myles Ahead, Advancing Child & Youth Mental Health ("Myles Ahead"), has developed an innovative framework, with a transformation toolkit, called SafER Space. It reimagines Emergency Rooms (ERs) to better serve the growing needs of young people turning to the ER while experiencing mental health distress.

Myles Ahead was founded in 2019. It is a registered national charity **created in memory of Myles Kulperger who died by suicide at the age of 11 in 2018**. After losing her son, Leslie Kulperger was compelled to translate the challenges she faced, trying to help Myles during his life, to create meaningful system-level changes. Roughly 70 percent of mental health challenges begin during childhood or adolescence. Parents/caregivers are increasingly turning to ERs to support their children and youth who are in a mental health crisis – making ERs often the first point of contact for families trying to access mental health support.

Unfortunately, the **risk of suicide more than doubles after a young person has had an adverse ER experience related to mental health**. "Systems to support mental health are woefully oversubscribed and underfunded, leading to challenges finding support, long waitlists, and many people turning to ERs when experiencing mental health distress. My traumatic experiences with Myles in the ER revealed that they are not as well equipped to help young people in mental health crises as I had imagined they would be," says Leslie.

- ER visits, related to mental health, aged five to 24, increased by 75 percent between 2006 and 2018 in Canada
- The number of youths in hospital after a suicide attempt tripled over a four-month period during the first pandemic lockdown
- Suicide is the leading health-related cause of death for young people in Canada
- For more than a decade, Canada has had the third-highest youth suicide rate of all OECD countries

In keeping with Leslie's mission, **SafER Space embraces a co-design process and phased approach so that hospitals can readily integrate evidence-informed best practices into their planning processes**. One component within SafER Space's framework recommends including trained Peer Support Workers – people with their own lived experience of recovering from crises – as members of the ER team. According to Dr. Scott Zeller, a world leader in acute mental health treatment supports in the United States and one of several experts consulted and contributing to the development of SafER Space:



"Peer Support Workers are worth ten times their weight in gold. By leveraging their own personal lived experience with mental health challenges, Peer Support Workers are able to more immediately relate and provide compassionate support for patients in mental health distress." SafER Space's framework presents an opportunity to better serve patients in mental health distress, and to better support ER employees who have been facing unprecedented challenges over the past few years.

SafER Space is also about the look and feel of the ER – making simple changes and design features – that help create a calm and supportive environment.

"When I saw the design vision for what a patient consult room could look like in the SafER Space framework, it blew me away," Marlo Miazga, President of Bristow Global Media shared, **"A space like this would have been a game changer for my child in their visit to the emergency room.** Its thoughtful design and therapeutic details suggest that the adults in the room believe that their mental distress is a crisis...and that help is on the way. It would have immediately de-escalated our situation and supported us to make better choices for our child's care. We all would have felt safer and not like we had done something wrong." Marlo's child, Mars Miazga-Kaufman, died by suicide in November of 2020.

And, SafER Space is about an integrated system so that families have the information and linkages they need when they leave hospital. Integrating mental health supports within the ER's triage and discharge processes can be lifesaving. "My daughter, Breana, died within 4 days after being discharged from the ER. I cannot emphasize the importance of this enough," says Martha McGroarty, **"If there had been continuity of care for my daughter Breana, I believe that would have made all the difference and she would be with us today."**

**THIS IS AN EMERGENCY.
THE TIME TO ACT IS NOW.**

About SafER Space:

SafER Space is a framework that **reimagines Emergency Rooms (ERs) to intentionally and holistically serve the mental health needs of children and youths** who have turned to ERs in times of a mental health crisis. Developed with evidence-based research and a continuous-improvement approach, SafER Space consists of a scalable framework with a transformation toolkit for implementation and sustainment. The framework and toolkit include **practical guidelines and considerations for mental health supports, processes, and interior designs for hospitals' co-design of their ERs, to embody elements that soothe, comfort, and promote feeling safe.** Myles Ahead will be working with strategic partners to help mobilize the implementation of SafER Space's framework in hospitals throughout Canada, prioritizing ERs within children's hospitals.



Myles, aged 11, proudly sitting beside one of his masterpieces.

About Myles Ahead:

Myles Ahead is **dedicated to bridging gaps and scaling evidence-informed practices** that prioritize timely access to appropriate mental health supports and services for children and youth, both clinically and in schools. Myles Ahead's goal is to prevent child and youth suicide; to achieve this, Myles Ahead focuses on researching and developing initiatives to advance practices within the following **three focus areas**: Mental Health Systems; Education / School-Based; and Life Promotion / Suicide Prevention.

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