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Background

The Jessica Martel Memorial Foundation (JMMF) is named after Jessica Martel, a young mother who was murdered as she tried to leave her abusive relationship. Jessica's death sent shockwaves through her community, galvanizing friends, family, and local leaders to take action and ensure that no one else would face violence alone or in silence. From its inception, community support and involvement have been at the heart of JMMF's mission to break the cycle of abuse.

As JMMF grew, it became clear that **reaching families early was essential to breaking the cycle of abuse**. In Sturgeon County and many rural areas, schools serve as the central hub of community life, connecting children, parents, and service providers. Recognizing this, JMMF identified **school-based programming as the key to prevention** and launched the Inspire Program in 2022, starting with a small cohort of girls.

The Inspire Program was designed as a trauma-informed, holistic program that nurtures social-emotional skills, healthy relationships, leadership, and cultural pride. Its early sessions focused on building trust, self-worth, and resilience among girls, providing a safe space to learn about consent, communication, and coping with stress. The program quickly gained recognition for its impact, winning the **2023 Purple Ribbon Award for Outstanding Youth Initiative**.

In September 2024, the **Inspire Program expanded to include a boys' cohort**, marking a pivotal step in JMMF's commitment to engaging men and boys in the movement to end GBV. This expansion is more than just a programmatic milestone—it is a catalyst for a broader cultural shift, empowering boys and young men as allies and future leaders in violence prevention. The mentorship model provides consistent, positive male role models, fostering empathy, emotional intelligence, and healthy masculinity.

Feedback from parents, teachers, and partners highlights significant improvements in leadership, empathy, emotional regulation, and well-being among participants.

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Next Steps

The Inspire Program is well-loved by the community, with JMMF receiving many requests to speak at additional schools or expand the program. JMMF has been developing an Inspire Program Manual so that other schools can offer their own version of the program.

The Inspire Program Manual will include curriculum on topics, including:

- **Understanding Gender and Power**: Definitions of gender, stereotypes, power dynamics, equality activities
- **Emotions and Empathy**: Recognizing feelings, building empathy toward others, storytelling
- **Healthy Relationships**: What makes a relationship healthy? Respect, communication, trust exercises
- **Boundaries and Consent**: Personal space, saying "no," asking for consent, practicing scenarios
- **Recognizing and Responding to GBV**: Forms of violence, bullying, harassment, how to seek help, how to be an active bystander
- **Leadership and Advocacy**: Standing up for others, designing mini-campaigns for kindness, peer leadership projects
- **Community and Social Change**: How young people can change harmful norms, creating posters or videos, celebration of positive actions

The Inspire Program Manual is currently in development, and subject to change. We anticipate that the manual will be available in fall 2025, with more details in late summer 2025.

The Inspire Program is funded through Alberta Arts, Culture and Status of Women. The Alberta government just released its 10-Year Strategy to End GBV. The strategy identifies that youth programs like Inspire are crucial tools to create healthier, more vibrant communities free of gender-based violence.

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