

boards completed the EDI for over 5000 children across Waterloo Region. The results of the EDI show that our region is doing as well or better at preparing its children for school compared to other communities across Canada. However, there are significant gaps across neighbourhoods. There are areas where a significant number of children are vulnerable to developmental difficulties that may make it harder for them to succeed at school. The consequences of school success have lifelong implications that impact the individual as well as the community.

Conclusion

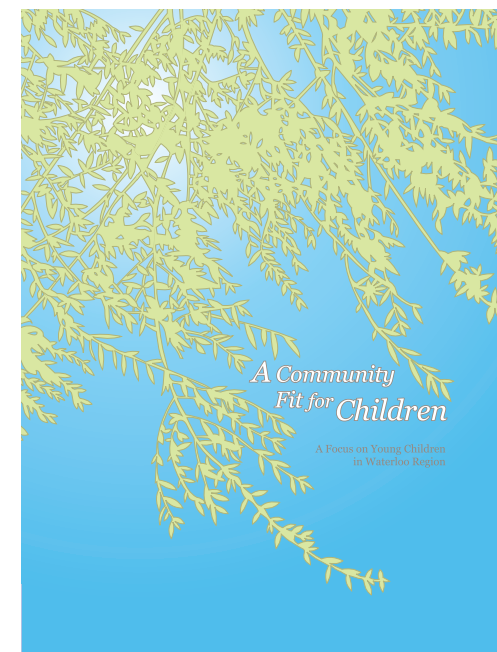
Overall, the data available are positive: young children in Waterloo Region are doing well compared to children in other Canadian communities and we should be proud of the assets available to families in the region. However, there is still much to do—there are areas where significant numbers of families and children are not doing as well. But the data suggest that as a community, we have the capacity to continue to improve the health and well-being of children and families.

Five Key Messages of the Report

- 1 Overall, young children and families in Waterloo Region are doing as well or better compared to other communities across Canada on the available indicators of child health and well being.
- 2 Not all children are doing equally well within Waterloo Region. There are significant differences on the indicators across neighbourhoods. We have the capacity to do better.
- 3 It is both beneficial and effective to invest in young children and their families.
- 4 All children in all neighbourhoods need supportive families and supportive communities.
- 5 It is important to collect and share local data on children and families allowing for evidence based planning and evaluation.



A Community Fit for Children A Focus on Young Children in Waterloo Region



Highlights of the Full Report

The Community Fit for Children report was produced by the Ontario Early Years Centres in partnership with the Provincial Government, the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region, the YMCA, the Region of Waterloo, and various community partners. This report shares baseline measurements for child development in this region with particular attention to individual neighbourhoods.

Because...
When we take care of our kids,
we take care of our future.

There are five audience-specific bulletins available bringing perspectives from parents, faith-community, youth, workplaces and community members/leaders (see www.united-way-kw.org, then click on "resources"). The full report is available for all audiences at www.earlyyearsinfo.ca

For more information about this project, contact the Alliance for Children and Youth of Waterloo Region by phone at 885-9562 or by email at forkidssake@united-way-kw.org





Purpose of the report

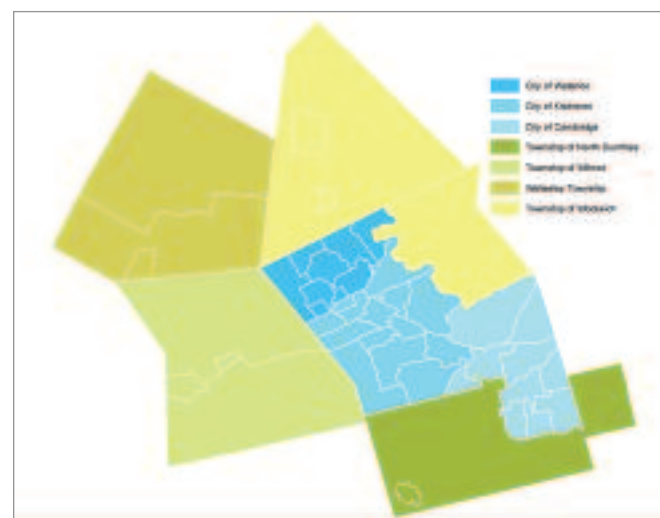
The Community Fit for Children report is a tool for all community members to help foster an environment where young children feel healthy, safe, and secure—an environment that nurtures positive growth and development. It presents research about young children and families in Waterloo Region to support planning and provide a foundation for action throughout the region.

The report is intended to:

- Serve as a resource for Waterloo Region's service providers, parents, social planning groups, neighbourhood groups, researchers, politicians, the business community, and other organizations.
- Share information related to healthy child development for neighbourhoods across Waterloo Region.
- Provide a foundation for action to support healthy child development in Waterloo Region.

A neighbourhood focus

One way the Community Fit for Children report shares information is by neighbourhoods. The report splits Waterloo Region into 45 different areas. While neighbourhood information shared in the report cannot tell the whole story about the individuals living in them, the report reveals that there are children and families who are doing well and those that are facing challenges across all neighbourhoods in Waterloo Region.



What do young children need for healthy development?

Positive external influences including family, community, and a safe and healthy environment equip children with a greater capacity for learning and development. In the report, information about how young children are doing in Waterloo Region is shared under four categories: family, community, health and safety, and early learning.

1. How are families doing in Waterloo Region?

Parenting Practices: We know that parenting practices have the most significant impact on a child's development. Unfortunately, the report reveals there is currently no comprehensive data available to tell us about parenting practices in Waterloo Region.

Economic Security: Compared to other communities across Canada, Waterloo Region's economy is booming. However, the report

reveals that, within Waterloo Region, there are areas where significant numbers of families are facing economic insecurity. These areas tend to have higher than average (Waterloo Region average) unemployment, more people without high school diplomas, more rental housing, more lone parent families, more low income families, and more households spending a large portion of their budget on housing. These challenges have a significant impact on the lives of children.

able to families with young children in Waterloo Region. The report divides the services into 4 categories: child-centred programs (e.g. child care and early learning programs); family-centred programs (e.g. Ontario Early Years Centres and programs and other parenting supports); community-centred programs (e.g. library and community centre programs for young children); and health and wellness programs (e.g. Health Babies Healthy Children and services for children with special needs). The CSI also highlights that there may be problems for some families in terms of accessing these programs; knowledge of programs, cost, distance to travel, and cultural appropriateness are some examples of barriers to access.

There are many programs and services available but they are generally organized in a system that can be difficult to understand and navigate. Some multi-service organizations like the Ontario Early Years Centres, Community Health Centres and the YMCA have taken positive steps towards bringing services for families together in a more coordinated fashion. Currently, however, these services are not close by for all families and children in Waterloo Region.



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2. How well are our communities supporting young children?

Research suggests communities that are more cohesive and engaged show more positive outcomes for children. Unfortunately there is little data available related to how supportive, cohesive and engaged neighbourhoods are in Waterloo Region.

The Community Service Inventory (CSI) highlights the hundreds of programs and services avail-

families and children in Waterloo Region.

3. How healthy and safe are young children in Waterloo Region?

The health information available tells us that most children in Waterloo Region are born healthy. Information related to age of mother, smoking during pregnancy, birth weight, preterm births, and intention to breast feed are shared within the report. The neighbourhood level data show that the indicators of child health vary across neighbourhoods. An area of concern for child health is poor air quality. There is a lack of local data related to both parent and child mental health and children with special needs. Local data related to child safety is also limited.

4. How ready are children to learn in school?

The Early Development Instrument (EDI) is a survey used to measure school readiness. In 2004, teachers in the Public and Catholic school