

- ways to finish high school. Design flexible programs especially to suit young parents. Correspondence courses or on-line school make education accessible and more convenient; this allows youth to do school work around parenting responsibilities
- courses that are just for young dads to celebrate the unique way dads parent and to show them the benefits of parenting so they'll stay involved with their kids

### Thanks

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The authors wish to further acknowledge the many contributions that teens make to improving our communities and for enhancing the health and well-being of young children in Waterloo Region.



“Family communication is important. Do what you can to keep these lines of communication open.”  
 —teen



## Youth A Perspective Report

*This bulletin was developed for and by youth in Waterloo Region. It contains reflections and suggested actions to support the healthy development of young children.*

This is one of five bulletins developed for specific audiences to help connect people to the importance of the early years of life. We have provided *Highlights of the Full Report* to accompany these bulletins. The full report is available at: [www.earlyyearsinfo.ca](http://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](mailto:forkidssake@united-way-kw.org)



# Youth: A Perspective Report

## Introduction

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.

There is growing evidence that strong, supportive communities help nurture healthy child development. Friends, neighbours, community organizations, institutions, businesses, and other members of the community are powerful influences. Youth, especially, are powerful role models for younger children. Together we all can provide children with the early foundations that lead to success in school and throughout their lives.

## What we know

When we consider the role of the community during the early years of a child's life, we must remember that we all have the potential to influence positive growth. Youth contribute a tremendous amount of time and service to this community and, as such, to its social cohesion. They help strengthen the community with their values and interests, through volunteering and working directly with children, and are powerful role models for younger kids. Evidence suggests that when communities, including both social services and individual community members, experience strong social cohesion, young children will have more opportunity, even in the face of poverty and other disadvantages.

## How are youth providing a healthier community for younger kids?

**1. Role models in education and sports:** Youth help teach young children the importance of staying in school and getting an education. They also encourage young children to become and stay physically active. By staying in school until graduation, teens are setting a powerful example for younger kids who will then be more likely to stay in school. By finishing school, teens are likely to get better jobs, and eventually be better

prepared to care for their own children. Many teens volunteer to referee or assist in coaching sports for younger children. When children see teens active in sports they set an example to stay physically active.



"Helping young kids with their social skills to develop good friendships will help them get more involved in their community, stay out of trouble and encourage healthy active living."  
— Jordan, 17

**2. Environmental action:** Teens today have grown up in a culture of environmental awareness. They pass this enthusiasm for a healthy society on to children. Youth make up a large portion of public transit users and often bike or walk instead of operating pollution causing cars. In a region with poor air quality such as ours, these actions contribute to a healthier environment for children. Many youth organize and maintain school recycling programs or are part of programs that plant trees and pick up garbage.

**3. Babysitting:** Many teens babysit for friends and neighbours. Experienced babysitters know that:

- taking kids to the park to play is fun and provides opportunities to get active
- playing with others can help to build important social skills

- reading and making up stories together promotes creativity
- serving nutritious foods like fruit and cereal and encouraging good hygiene habits like brushing teeth help children's health and influence future habits

"Babysitting is an important job; you've got to have lots of patience."  
—Brit, teen

## Other actions teens could take for kids

- create 'stop smoking' groups where young people support each other to quit. This makes everyone healthier, but also keeps pregnant women and young children away from second hand smoke
- choose not to smoke around young children. This sets a community norm for kids and helps them abstain from smoking later in life
- share musical talents and play at benefit concerts that raise money for worthy causes involving children
- act as young ambassadors in promoting the value of volunteering, recreation and physical activity

"Teens do want to get involved in things, but don't always know how."  
—Nina, teen

## Special considerations for young parents

Youth identified a special need for our community to support young parents as much as possible. They said young parents need:

- financial support in order to raise their kids—good jobs and cheaper or discounted childcare would help a lot
- minimum wage to be raised to at least \$8.50/hour
- child care that is close by and available in the evening when young parents need a break or need to work shifts
- housing that is affordable and available where they can stay for a long time. Co-ops are good environments that are cheaper and have everyone helping out