



What else would we like to know?

- In future reports, it may be helpful to include an additional income variable. The gap between the most economically advantaged and disadvantaged in neighbourhoods may be an important indicator and predictor of outcomes
- Faith communities may need more information about the needs of specific ethnic and cultural communities, and the degree to which those communities find that their needs are met, than can be provided by this report
- The contribution faith communities make to low-cost space for social programs has not been quantified. Given the general absence of alternative low-cost social program space in neighbourhoods, this information may be important for ensuring future security of locally accessible programs.

to consider how to use the limited resources available to faith communities to provide support across the spectrum

- For those faith communities that are sponsoring refugees, the involved congregations can consider whether they can take a longer term role in supporting families who are raising children

Thanks to the members of Interfaith Grand River for input into this report.

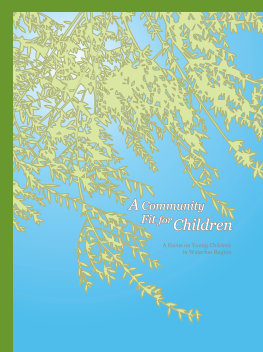


Faith Communities

A Perspective Report

This bulletin was developed for and by faith communities 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



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



Faith Communities: 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.

The report has particular relevance for faith communities because supporting families and children, regardless of their defined faith, is their central concern. Faith communities have a unique contribution to make; they are well positioned to contribute to understanding the concept of positive parenting and social cohesion within the varied contexts of the different cultures that they serve. In addition, faith communities are one of the few groups that consistently offer intergenerational gatherings, thus enabling children to have a fuller sense of their surrounding community.

What we know

According to the report, we are doing better than most communities in Canada in supporting healthy child development. This region has hundreds of support services and programs. Yet, by breaking down the data by neighbourhood, we can see consistent differences across neighbourhoods in terms of child outcomes.

Faith communities play a critical role in supporting social cohesion and developing social capital. This report clearly illustrates that faith-based facilities are already present where community need is highest. However, the impact of faith communities on social cohesion and family well-being may be undetectable within neighbourhoods because these communities, and even individual congregations within these communities, draw their membership and provide support across much wider geographical areas.

How are faith communities supporting children and families?

Congregations play a critical role in neighbourhood-based service provision. Faith communities often act as the primary providers of low-cost, accessible space for important family services such as day care, pre-schools, mom and tot programs, and a variety of government funded social programs. Places of worship are most often situated in residential neighbourhoods where they are readily accessed by members of the community. Faith communities are the place where newcomers to Canada, as well as long time Canadians in need, will often turn when they first seek support. They are the one social institution that is visible and accessible in nearly every neighbourhood.

Anecdote

I arrived at a local church one day to begin setting up for a class that I regularly taught. At the door I found three women, all recent newcomers to Canada, and all from a shared ethnic background and refugee experience. All three had recently moved into a local apartment complex as part of the settlement process. As they discovered their mutual need for additional supports, the three set out in their own neighbourhood, seeking the nearest building that clearly served a faith community. They walked to this location together, on the shared understanding that the faith community was the place to seek social supports.

—a member of Interfaith Grand River

What other actions can faith communities take to support children and families?

- Faith communities can play a central role in reducing aggression in society through faith teaching, which often includes developing an understanding of the aggression cycle and promoting tolerance and understanding
- Faith communities can formulate definitions of positive parenting with attention to cultural variations
- Faith communities can recognize and develop their role in supporting families through semi-

nal moments—such as marriage, birth and death—but expand that role to include more formal support and education in positive parenting

- Members can consider ways in which they can support each other across the lifespan. For example, seniors can be an important resource in enabling positive parenting for young families
- Faith communities can evaluate services to families that are delivered in their facilities, separating faith-based from secular, and fully understand the role they play in access to services within their neighbourhood, community and region. It will be equally important



“Faith communities play a crucial role in nurturing and supporting families with children. This report is an excellent tool that can aid them in this task, as it contains a wealth of useful information including available resources for families in Waterloo Region and data on the well-being of young children as measured by specific indicators that are well defined, easily understood and broken down by neighbourhood. This report can help faith communities identify areas of need where they may wish to focus their energy and attention while building on existing strengths in the community.”

—Doris Martin, House of Friendship