

programs, quality preschool programs, and quality child care programs also help children get ready to succeed at school.

The community can help support parents to prepare their children for school and develop literacy skills by providing community services in settings that are rich with literacy opportunities.



“My three year old really benefits from child-centred facilities at the local library and the Early Years Centre. She looks forward to the interaction with other kids her age and likens the programs offered to the kind of teacher/student dynamic she imagines takes place in school. The programs have actually made her impatient to start school.”

—Brent, parent

Actions parents can take to support healthy child development

Waterloo Region is doing very well in supporting healthy child development, but there are areas that could benefit from better supports for children and families. One of the messages of this report is that everyone can support healthy child development. Below are some ideas of how you can support the health and well being of children and families in your community:

- Read, Sing, and Play with your child every day
- Connect with other parents, particularly new parents, and offer support where it's needed
- Learn as much as you can about what kids need at their current ages
- Give your children lots of support and approval
- Take care of yourself—connect with others and the community. You will take better care of your children if you take care of yourself
- Ask for parenting advice and support when you need it from other parents or service providers
- Talk about your values and priorities with your children and model them in your actions
- Participate in community activities and events with your child



Parents A Perspective Report

This bulletin was developed for and by parents 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



Parents: 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.

A child's family is the most significant influence on his/her life. The kind of care that children receive from parents and caregivers affects brain development, which, in turn, has a life long influence on health and well being.



"Parents need a way to learn about services that are provided in the community. We need to know what's available. Maybe we could have a day at school to help us learn what's out there."

—Fred, parent

What we know

First of all, young children depend on their families for a loving, caring environment. Children also rely on their families to provide healthy food, suitable shelter, and to meet their basic needs; unfortunately not all families have enough income to do so. One aspect of this report was to monitor how well Waterloo Region's families are doing economically. The report shows that we live in a region with a strong economy, and that indicators such as unemployment rate, family income, level of education, and percentage of income spent on housing place us at a better than average level when compared to other Canadian communities. However there are still

significant differences on these indicators across neighbourhoods in Waterloo Region. An unacceptable number of families are living on low income and we can see consistent differences across neighbourhoods in terms of indicators of child development.

We believe that as a community we can do better than this.

What does this mean for children, youth and families?

The report has four sections focusing on indicators that relate to child well being: family, community, health and safety and early learning.

Family

Parents who monitor behaviour, respond to children's needs, encourage independence, and use a fair approach enable children to do and be their best. Children who experience positive attention and nurturing from parents are more likely to:

- demonstrate positive and helpful behaviour
- finish high school and achieve academic success
- succeed in the labour market

Community

In addition to organized community services and programs, community also refers to extended family, neighbours, friends, and workplaces. Everyone that comes in contact with a young child has the potential to influence that child's development.

There are many programs and services for children and families across Waterloo Region. However, there may be challenges for families in knowing about or accessing these programs and services.

Health and Safety

Parents are entrusted to ensure that their children are healthy, safe and secure. They have identified that our community could be more supportive in this endeavour. Access to child care for infants and toddlers is one area that could be enhanced.

"Recently a co-worker was trying to plan for child care for her new baby for when she returns to work in a year. She thought she was ahead of the game by calling months ahead of time but the child care centres she called said she would be added to a long waiting list. They told her she should have called and gotten on the waiting list as soon as she was thinking of getting pregnant!"

—Nancy

Another area of concern is the quality of the air we breathe. In 2002 the number one cause of emergency room visits for children aged 0-6 in Waterloo Region was respiratory illness.

"This community has so many positives and is so safe, that it seems a shame that our air quality is so poor. We need to do something about this—pressure our leaders or something. Except for our jobs, we are actually considering moving away just so we offer our two children better air to breath."

—Marcie, parent of two children under age 5

Early Learning

Children are constantly learning. Their brains are developing rapidly and their development is strongly influenced by what they take in from their surroundings. This is especially true for very young children. There is good evidence to show that when children begin school ready to learn in that environment, they are better equipped to benefit from the educational activities provided there—and they tend to build on these early successes as they grow.

Parents play a very big role in helping their children to become 'school ready'. One of the most powerful things parents can do to prepare children for school is to read to them every day—starting when a child is as young as possible. Participating in parent-child drop-in