SEEKING BETTER OUTCOMES
FOR YOUTH IN HAMILTON

January 2011

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The City of Hamilton has as an aspiration "to be the best city in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and promote diverse economic opportunities". This vision should serve the youth of Hamilton well as it speaks directly to their interests as residents of the community well into the future. This report directs attention to the youth population in Hamilton who are in effect those children when they are at a critical transition point of their development into adulthood. Success through this transition will be an important determining factor for the remaining years of their lives. There is ample evidence to indicate that in Hamilton there are many, in fact too many, youth in the community who are facing significant challenges and under current circumstances may not find much success as healthy adults. This is a matter of concern for many in Hamilton now working diligently to make the city a prosperous, vibrant community with a good quality of life for all its residents.

Hamilton is not unique in this regard, many other major municipalities in Ontario have been examining similar conditions in their communities and have begun to shape plans for change. A catalyst to this effort was the release of the Ontario Government's Roots of Youth Violence report in 2008, followed by an initiative of United Ways of Ontario to establish a provincial framework for supporting the development of youth called 'Ontario Youth Matter'. Those initiatives concluded that the Provincial government and municipalities across the Province need to focus resources on the most disadvantaged populations in communities as conditions of poverty, racism, lack of decent housing, culturally insensitive education systems and limited employment opportunities were alienating and marginalizing youth in a worrisome way. Those reports then recommended that action be taken to improve social conditions, address poverty and racism, generate employment opportunities and establish a comprehensive youth policy framework to better coordinate the work of governments and community agencies.

There is a large youth population in Hamilton. The most recent census counts almost 70,000 youth between the ages of 15 and 24 living in the city. Many of them, about 14,000 youth are living in poverty. Many are leaving school early and many are finding it difficult to find work. Hamilton also has a culturally diverse population and not surprisingly, this diversity is reflected in the youth population as well. But the visible minority population has an even higher rate of poverty than the general youth population and for youth who are newcomers / immigrants to Hamilton, evidence indicates that they have the highest rates of poverty. In fact an analysis of the youth population in Hamilton confirms that they would appear to be suffering the same high rates of marginalized social conditions that exist in communities elsewhere in the Province and these conditions are known to foster violence, alienation and dysfunction amongst youth.

The profile of the youth population in Hamilton notes that the characteristics of this population are complex and varied. While many youth are meeting with success in their development, many are not and more research is needed to examine and better understand these trends in outcomes for the youth population in Hamilton.

Community services in Hamilton have been working together with young people to develop programs that address the healthy development needs of the youth population. These initiatives are good models of collaboration, are based on evidence and best practices, engage youth in their design and delivery and are proven to have a beneficial impact. This report identifies eight local initiatives that are projects noteworthy for their demonstration of best practices in promoting better outcomes for youth in Hamilton. Some examples describe in the report include:

- The Street Youth involvement Committee is a model of engagement practice that involves youth in peer education, local planning and mutual support for street involved youth.
- Youth Net Hamilton is a model for peer education to explore and learn about mental health issues and young people.
- The Positive Space Group Development project is a joint initiative of the Hamilton Wentworth District School Board and the Social Planning and Research Council that builds and supports the formation of positive space groups in schools to make schools more inclusive and safe spaces for queer youth.

- The Hamilton Crew for Action Against Tobacco is a youth driven initiative that raises awareness about the hazards of tobacco use for young people.
- The Hamilton Youth Voice Against Poverty is a stakeholder group of youth participating in the planning and action of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction that is focused on examining the experience of poverty and its impacts on young people.
- The Youth Outreach Workers Hamilton Program is a team of mobile youth support staff that connects youth to supports and services that relate to needs particularly with respect to homelessness, pregnancy and parenting.
- The Pathways to Education project supports youth from disadvantage neighbourhoods to stay in school The Threshold School of Building –Ready to Work program is an employment training program for at risk youth that uses real building projects to promote learning of practical and relevant skills.

These initiatives are detailed further in this report because they demonstrate at least two critical features of community response to youth issues: innovative programs are being developed to better aid and support marginalized youth in the community and these initiatives are still fragmented, experimental and produce benefits for only part of the population they are designed to reach.

This study has led us to learning about a series of critical youth issues in Hamilton that are important to better understand. These issues have a powerful influence on the healthy development of youth. Strategies for addressing these challenges better need to be developed.   Those critical issues are: discrimination, poverty, disconnection from family and community, early school leaving, mental health issues, substance use, homelessness and employment. These issues are often intertwined in the experience of youth. Difficulty with one of these issues will often lead or be related to another critical issue identified here. Youth are familiar with this inter-relationship as are community support and social service providers. Programs and resources which address these issues have been developed and many of those are noted or referenced in this report. The question remains: do they work in an integrated way to effectively respond to the struggles youth face and are they producing better outcomes for the youth population overall? This goal remains the target for improved community strategies to support youth in Hamilton.

Continued planning in Hamilton is needed to address youth issues. The planning process will need to be built on three critical foundations for community planning: to engage youth to build on their experience, knowledge and capacity to define effective strategies for change; to foster collaboration amongst providers and public institutions in the health, education and social service sectors and to plan for change using a diversity lens, as suggested by the recently released Framework for Human Services Plan for Hamilton. This will ensure that the required resources are directed to solutions.   This stage in our community's planning and development must acknowledge and respond to the increasingly diverse nature of our community. Strategies for change must take into account youth who are homeless, immigrants, parents, Aboriginal, urban, rural, disabled physically or emotionally, have sexual health and sexual orientation issues or are struggling with a sense of exclusion from their community for any reason.

The next steps for Hamilton should engage public, private and not-for-profit sectors in the articulation of a youth policy framework. This effort can align Provincial mandates with municipal programs and services to produce better outcomes for youth. At this local level strategies and actions can be defined that focus on neighbourhood. Increasingly public and voluntary sector interests are defining and committing to action with community residents at that level to effect change.

This report has been prepared by the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton in partnership with the United Way of Burlington and Greater Hamilton as a resource for addressing youth issues in Hamilton. It has been structured to focus current knowledge about youth issues drawn from literature, practitioners and youth that is available with a particular emphasis on research that has been reported on youth over the last ten years in Hamilton.   The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton has had extensive involvement over the past ten years with youth and these issues in Hamilton and so grounded the report in that experience along with knowledge from research and reports on youth issues. Those sources combined with insights drawn from the extensive network of local service providers, policy

makers and youth across the community have shaped this report.   The next steps in our local process require that the complexity of making change be acknowledged as we identify new targets for change and then continue working together to define and implement strategies to achieve those targets.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Youth in our society grow and develop in the context of family and broader societal conditions. When adults and youth can function in conditions in which they feel valued, safe and have opportunities for success, the prospects for healthy growth and development are good. When circumstances indicate the absence of these conditions there is a risk of isolation or alienation from society and responses that undermine the prospects for healthy development and social inclusion in community life. For this reason it is important for communities to understand and promote healthy community conditions and attend to risk factors such as poverty, racism, poor health, family breakdown and lack of opportunity which will otherwise contribute to undesirable behaviours and responses.

Adolescence is a complex developmental stage in the human experience. This stage is marked by asserting independence, reliance on social and peer supports and a time of intense identity formation. This stage can be filled with many challenges – challenges that are intensified by social forces like poverty, homelessness, violence. However, this time is also marked by high resiliency, creativity, and energy. Youth have a remarkable ability to face adversity and emerge to lead happy and productive adult lives.

Youth, as a community, are diverse. There are as many stories, experiences and identities as there are youth. The life of a 15 year old black woman is much different than a 19 year old white gay man. The intersecting identities, complex challenges and core strengths that are present in the youth community demand thoughtfully planned human services. Some youth have strong, well-developed social support networks; others are marginalized and socially excluded, often for reasons not of their own making.

The world for youth has changed. Rapidly increasing globalization, unprecedented technological progress, massive changes to economies and, therefore, employment sectors and a media that grows and changes all of the time are all factors that shape the local experience of Hamilton youth. For example, there has been a dramatic shift in the labour force in Hamilton. Many jobs have been lost in our traditionally strong manufacturing sector and to some extent replaced by an array of jobs across several sectors. Growth areas in local employment over the past twenty years in the Hamilton area have been in health care, educational services, scientific and technical services and construction. As a result youth are less clear about their future regarding employment. In addition, parents and people who provide services for youth are less clear about what lies ahead for young people.

These issues as they affect youth in Ontario have been extensively studied and reported recently by the Ontario government in the Roots of Youth Violence and Ontario Youth Matters reports. These studies have been clear in noting that there is cause for concern in the province and that risk factors important to the successful development of youth need attention and action. Recommendations stemming from these studies call for action on what are described as four pillars:

1. A repaired social context: addressing poverty, racism, poor housing, youth mental health, education, the need for supports for families and youth engagement, and issues in youth justice.
2. A youth policy framework: coordinated policies and programs for youth.
3. A neighbourhood capacity for empowerment and focus: strengthen communities through schools as neighbourhood hubs, resident engagement and stable funding for agencies that serve disadvantaged communities.
4. Integrated governance: coordinate work across the Ontario government and other levels of government to strengthen communities.

These issues are familiar to youth in Hamilton and are putting their successful and healthy development at risk. This is a matter of concern for youth, their families, service providers and others in our community. Because of this a great deal of work is currently underway to attend to youth and conditions affecting them, but as with other communities there remains a concern that we have not integrated this work into a coordinated strategy for action in Hamilton that results in improved conditions and outcomes. This report provides a summary and analysis of key demographic trends, an examination of critical social

issues for Hamilton and some of the related community actions underway to respond. It concludes with the description of important foundations for community planning that will contribute to better coordinated and integrated strategies across the community and with governments that can lead to solutions.

3.0 BACKGROUND

According to the latest Statistics Canada Census (2006) there are more than 69,000 young people between the ages of 15 and 24 living in Hamilton – nearly 14% of people living in our community are youth. We know that 21% or 14,410 local youth are living in conditions of poverty. This underlies nearly all of the complex needs identified by local youth.

Over the past decade many local reports have been written that focus on issues facing youth in our community. In addition to looking at youth issues generally, some of these reports focus on groups of youth that are more marginalized and, therefore, have more complex needs including street-involved youth, Aboriginal youth and newcomer youth. Our local community is rich in information and research on the needs of young people.

The Hamilton community has demonstrated strong planning based on sound research and identified models of good practice. Collaboration and systems planning are being used to respond to complex issues like homelessness, poverty and racism. Many of these local planning efforts have focused on youth. For example,

- In February 2006 the Hamilton Roundtable on Poverty Reduction (HRPR) announced that their initial efforts would focus on children and youth. Part of the reason for adopting this focus was that Roundtable organizers felt that it reflected the voice of the community.   The HRPR is a multi-stakeholder effort that focuses on developing local solutions to tackle poverty in Hamilton.

- The Street Youth Planning Collaborative is a group of five directors from agencies who work directly with street-involved and homeless youth. The group works collaboratively to do systems-level planning to ensure that young people have a seamless continuum of services to support their journey off the street.

These community planning initiatives are good local models of work being done in Hamilton through collaboration to address various dimensions of youth need. These organizations and sectors are doing important human service work with youth based on appropriate information necessary to design and deliver helpful programs and policies.

Integrating the Roots of Youth Violence report and Ontario Youth Matter initiative:

The Roots of Youth Violence Report (2008) is a comprehensive study commissioned by the Province of Ontario to better understand the root causes of increasing youth violence. The report describes a complex network of systemic challenges facing youth including poverty, racism and social exclusion. Input from the Hamilton community contributed to the development of that report most notably through a Neighbourhood Insight Discussion consultation that brought key informants together for a session held in a community center in Hamilton's east end. Local insights suggested a need for more focus on communities and neighbourhoods, sustainable, youth-friendly services and asset based interventions. Overall, the provincial report contains a set of thirty recommendations. At the core of the recommendations is a call for the Provincial government to commit to an agenda that focuses on the complex needs of young people in order to ensure the problem of youth violence does not worsen. One of the tenets of the recommendations is the need for local frameworks that build on the assets and competencies of communities.

The Ontario Youth Matter (OYM) is a movement that developed soon after the release of the Roots of Youth Violence report.   Spearheaded by the Laidlaw Foundation and supported by nearly 50 provincial youth serving organizations and funders – the Ontario Youth Matter initiative further articulates the need for local coordination and planning and calls for the eventual creation of a provincial Youth Policy Framework.   It describes the Youth Policy Framework as a plan that involves key stakeholders (including youth) in thoughtful, asset-based and coordinated service and opportunity development for young people.

Finally, United Way Toronto articulated the need for coordinated policy development in local communities to benefit youth. The report, *Youth Policy: What Works and What Doesn't?* (2008) describes the need for multi-stakeholder, multi-governmental investment and commitment to youth. Further, they challenge planners to resolve the tensions between responding to the unique needs of various sub-populations of young people (for example, homeless youth) versus creating fractured and 'siloed' service systems. They also describe the important distinction between traditional service provision and involving youth in decision making and planning.

Many of the ingredients necessary for a local strategy for better understanding and addressing the needs of youth in Hamilton are in place. Hamilton has assembled and made available the most recent statistical information on young people and highlights of that information are noted here. There is also a growing body of local literature that addresses youth issues. Hamilton also has several best practice initiatives for planning with and for youth that provide a model for community groups, organizations and human services that are developing new responses to youth issues locally.

This report builds on existing literature on local youth issues as it provides a comprehensive review of the last decade of local youth research. This report provides a synthesis of Hamilton's key learnings to date on youth and how to best work with them, while focusing on young people who face challenges in life that put them at risk of instability, unemployment, poverty and homelessness.

The ideal situation for the healthy development of children and youth is one where youth are supported through inherent systems such as families, communities, social networks and education. However, too often these support systems breakdown and put youth at risk for a number of challenges including poverty, homelessness, early school leaving, increased substance use and exacerbated mental health issues. Each of these challenges has the potential to inhibit a successful transition to an independent adulthood. It is when these support systems breakdown (and they do, for a myriad of reasons) that local community services provide that support role to youth. This report, therefore, is focused on young people who face a variety of systemic challenges and healthy social development.

3.1 Methodology

To develop this report we:

- Documented current local data on the population of youth and the issues facing them.

- Reviewed current literature on the foundations for good planning – youth engagement, collaboration and using a diversity lens.

- Completed key informant interviews with community stakeholders practicing good planning with and for youth.

- Conducted a focus group with the Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton[1] around understanding the service provider perspective on youth issues.

- Reviewed recent Hamilton-specific, youth-specific, community based research from 2000 – 2010.

- Reviewed local community assets – identified through local research and the Inform Hamilton database of service providers.

- Described different communities of youth through provincial, national and international research sources.

- Illustrated findings and issues through interpretations of a youth in Hamilton[2] and

---

[1] The Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton (YOWH) is a team who connects with young people in three different catchment areas, engaging and providing connections to needed resources. The YOWH team works collaboratively out of a variety of community-based agencies.

- Provided references to web based links to resources for further study and investigation.

This report gathers much of the knowledge of sectors and organizations in the Hamilton community who are working with youth in intentional planning processes around the development of programs and policies. Findings are reported in the following order:

1) *A profile of youth in Hamilton*: A social demographic snapshot of the local youth population using most recent data. This section provides important information on trends and a profile of key characteristics of the youth population in Hamilton.

2) *Critical youth issues:*   Priorities emerging from our local body of literature are detailed in order to enhance community planning. The last decade (2000 – 2010) of local, community-based research on youth issues has been scanned and organized to better understand our local definitions of issues, identified best practices, and community assets.

   There are a number of diverse communities of young people with unique life experiences, needs and human service implications. Where identified in our local literature, the issue as it applies to them is described to better understand how we can meaningfully integrate diversity into our planning conversations.

3) *Foundations for planning* – The three critical foundations of good planning processes are engaging youth in planning, meaningful collaboration, and using a diversity lens. These foundations should be present to ensure effective and meaningful programs and policies relate to youth.

4) *Summary and conclusions* – Next steps are identified and described.

---

[2] Cayla Ireland illustrated issues based on her experience in each of the critical issue domains described. She is a 19 year old high school student who has faced many challenges and actively participated in local processes to identify and respond to youth issues. Her contribution provides an interpretation and youth perspective to research findings.

4.0 PROFILE OF YOUTH IN HAMILTON

Hamilton's youth are a diverse and rapidly growing group. The following is a summary of some of the major demographic trends among Hamilton's young people, which allows us to examine how issues such as income levels, race, gender, age, and other variables shape our social world, and give insight to the barriers and challenges youth in the City of Hamilton face on a daily basis. Understanding the demographic and distribution patterns of youth, the different communities of youth and the various issues facing youth are critical for developing sound policies and programs. This snapshot of Hamilton's youth by the numbers tells us an important story. A full profile of youth in Hamilton through graphs and maps is available in Appendix A.

4.1 Youth in Hamilton: Population Characteristics

The youth community is growing, and most young people live in urban settings.

∼   In 2005, Hamilton's youth made up 13.7% of the total population – this is an increase of 6% from 2001. The youth population grew twice as fast as Hamilton's general population making young people one of the fastest growing population groups in the city (Chart 1).
∼   The majority of youth live in urban settings in Hamilton. There is a significant concentration of youth living in the central and north parts of the city.

Chart 1. Youth Population Growth in Hamilton, Ages 15-24, 2001 – 2005

	2001	2006
■ Total population	490,268	504,559
■ Youth population	65,290	69,280
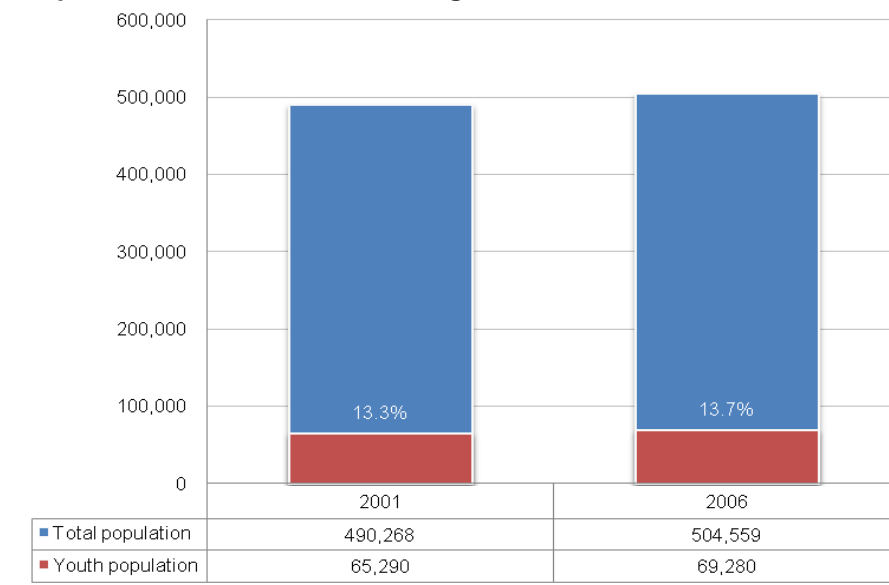
Education, Employment and Poverty

A significant number of youth are not attending school, are facing unemployment and live in poverty. Poverty is especially pronounced for newcomer and visible minority youth.

Chart 2. Workforce Participation Rates for All Youth and Low Income Youth in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2005

	Total participants in the labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Not participating in the labour force
■ All youth	46,040	39,320	6,720	22,805
■ Low income youth	7,600	5,890	1,700	6,810

Chart bar percentages:
- Total participants in the labour force: 66.5% (All youth), 16.5% (Low income youth)
- Employed: 56.7% (All youth), 15.0% (Low income youth)
- Unemployed: 9.7% (All youth), 25.3% (Low income youth)
- Not participating in the labour force: 32.9% (All youth), 29.9% (Low income youth)
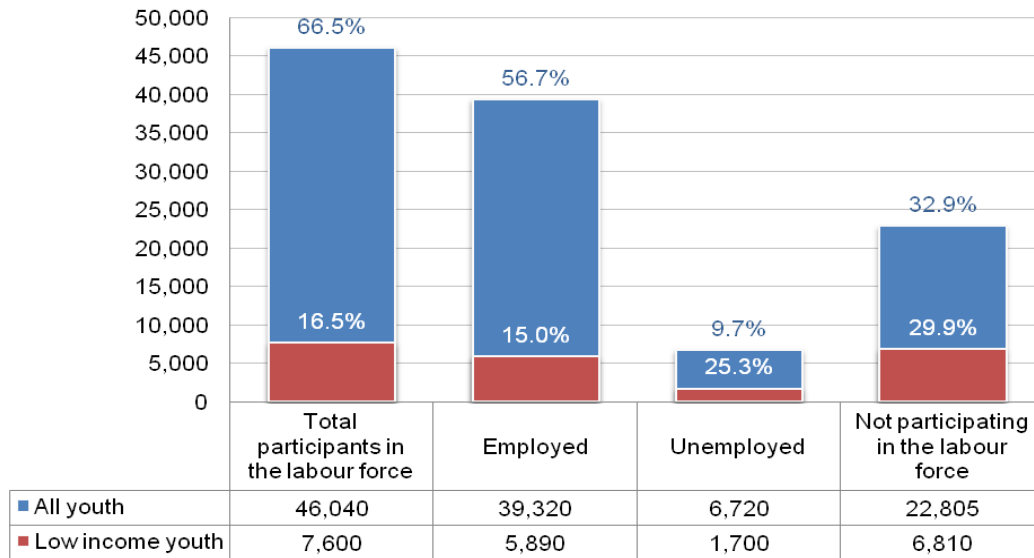
Note: The number of 'employed' and 'unemployed' youth are counted in the 'total participation in the labour force' statistics since these are youth who do or want to/could participate in the work. Those 'not participating in the labour force' are young people who cannot because they are in school, they are unable to work or they do not want to work.

Some key features of the youth population in Hamilton are:
- ~ 17% of young people 15 – 19 years old did not attend school in 2005.
- ~ 45% of young people 20 – 24 years old did not attend school in 2005.
- ~ Young men were more likely to not attend school than young women.

These measures of academic achievement are a matter of concern for educators and indicate an area for improvement for Hamilton.

- ~ The unemployment rate for youth is 14.6%, which is more than two times the unemployment rate for the entire population of the City of Hamilton.
- ~ One in four of Hamilton's low income youth are unemployed (Chart 2).
- ~ 21% of Hamilton's youth live in low income families.
  - o 55.2% of newcomer youth (arrived between 2001 and 2006) live in low-income families.
  - o 39.2% of the youth visible minority population are living in low income families.
  - o Slightly more female youth live in low income families.

There is a strong correlation between success in employment and the incidence of low income. High rates of unemployment for youth provide some indication of the struggle youth find in the successful transition from school into the labour force.

- ~ Youth in Hamilton are more likely to live in female-led lone parent families, common-law couple families, or male-led lone parent families than other youth in Ontario.
- ~ Low income youth mostly live in the downtown core and north end of Hamilton.
- ~ There are pockets of poverty on the mountain and in the east end of Hamilton (see map 2).

The "Low Income Youth" map indicates varying concentration of youth living on low incomes. The dark shaded areas reveal evidence that the census tracts or neighbourhoods in the downtown area of the city of Hamilton have the highest concentration of low income youth. The map also serves as a useful reminder that moderate to high rates of poverty for youth occur in a great many neighbourhoods across the city.

Diversity in Hamilton

The youth community in Hamilton is diverse. This diversity is mostly situated in the downtown core; however the mountain, east and west ends of the City also experience diversity.

Chart 3. Select Youth Demographic Populations, 2005
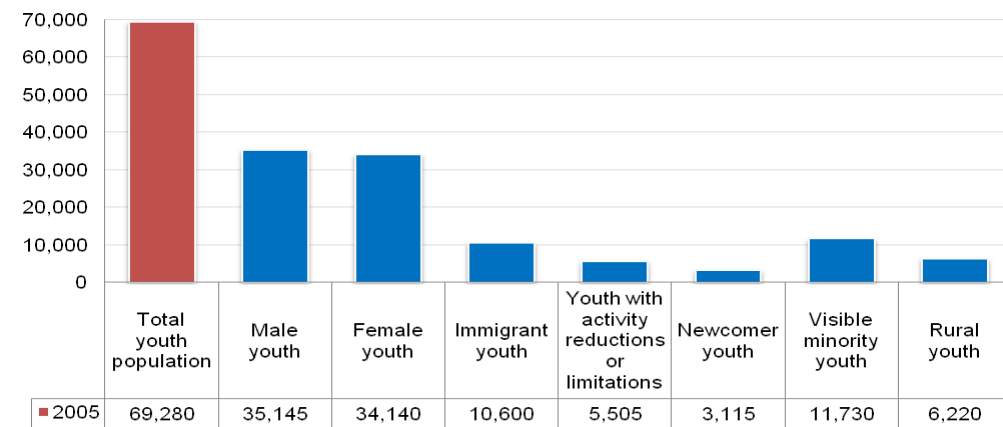
	Total youth population	Male youth	Female youth	Immigrant youth	Youth with activity reductions or limitations	Newcomer youth	Visible minority youth	Rural youth
■ 2005	69,280	35,145	34,140	10,600	5,505	3,115	11,730	6,220

- ~ Visible minority youth make up 16.9% of the total youth population.
- ~ Immigrant youth make up 15.3% of the total youth population.
- ~ Rural youth make up 8.9% of the total youth population.
- ~ Youth with disabilities make up 7.9% of the total youth population.
- ~ Newcomer youth make up 4.5% of the total youth population (Chart 3).
- ~ While there is a concentration of visible minority youth in the Downtown Core – there are neighbourhoods on the Mountain, in the East End and West End of the city that have high levels of diversity.
- ~ There is a high concentration of immigrant youth in the East End of Hamilton and on the Mountain.
- ~ Aboriginal youth make up an important community in terms of our planning efforts. However, because of complex identity and political reasons, the count of Aboriginal people is not always accurate.

Criminal Activity and Sense of Belonging

Young people are involved in less crime than they were five years ago, however, the incidents of violent crime alone have increased. Many youth feel a sense of belonging in Hamilton.

Chart 4. Youth Involvement in Crime for 2003, 2007, and 2008 in the City of Hamilton, Ages 12 – 17

	Youth involved in any crime	Young offenders charged with criminal offences	Youth involved in violent crime	Youth involved in property crime	Youth involved in drug offences
2003	3638	1393	741	1476	294
2007	3283	974	909	1359	328
2008	3186	827	1037	1234	353
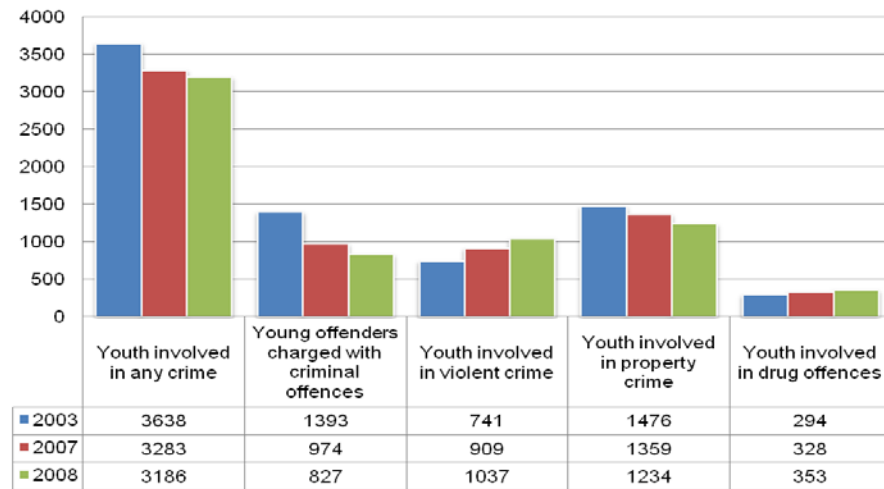
~ The overall number of youth involved in any crime has been reduced by 12.4% since 2005.
~ The number of youth involved in property crime has gone down 16.4% since 2003.
~ The number of youth involved in violent crime has risen by 39.9% since 2003 (Chart 4).
~ Most of Hamilton's youth reported having a "somewhat strong" sense of belonging to the local community.
~ A higher percentage of youth in Hamilton reported a "very strong" sense of belonging to the local community than youth in Ontario as a whole.

The data presented in this section tells us a number of different and important stories.   The snapshot of young people in Hamilton shows that the youth population is culturally and racially diverse, that the rate of poverty is high, education rates do not match the increasing training and education requirements for successful engagement in the labour force, the youth population is increasing as a portion of the total population but not growing uniformly across all neighbourhoods in the City.

This is a story that is complex, with many factors – some of which are positive and some of which are challenging. This profile allows us to integrate both the successes and the challenges facing young people into our planning processes. This profile also inspires further questions for consideration and research. Some questions remain that warrant further study. For example, we do not have a reliable forecast that examines the implications for a growing youth population on local City and social services. We do not have a good understanding of why young men are less engaged with education than young women. We do not fully understand why Hamilton has twice the provincial average of youth with disabilities and how we should be attending to this condition differently than other communities. For example, are there engagement strategies that we should develop and employ to better understand their interests and aspirations and how to achieve them?

We do know that violent crime by youth is increasing while all other forms of crime committed by youth are decreasing. There is some speculation that this is a reflection of increasing gang violence, but this hypothesis is not well studied or documented, nor are the conditions that must change to reduce this trend.   We also know that Hamilton youth are interested in work and becoming independent and self sustaining but not often having success with this goal. We could use better information about their barriers to this interest and improved strategies to more meaningfully engage youth in our workforce. At the neighbourhood level we have learned that youth feel a sense of belonging in Hamilton, in spite of negative experiences and in many cases, a significant struggle to be successful. Greater understanding of this positive orientation to community and how it impacts retention of young people in the local labour force is another question of some interest.

4.2 Summary of Profile and Issues

Hamilton has a large population of marginalized youth that are disadvantaged by high rates of poverty, high rates of unemployment and low rates of success in education at the secondary and post secondary school levels.

The marginalized youth population is heavily concentrated in the central lower city but there are some youth living on low incomes and resident in most communities across the city.

Additional research is needed to explore questions related to growing youth population needs and capacities; the population with disabilities; increasing violence of youth crime; attachment of youth to the labour force; and health related issues.

Evidence should be gathered and reported annually to monitor trends in health and social well being of the youth population as they compare to trends and outcomes in similar characteristics for youth in other major municipalities in Ontario.

5.0 HAMILTON YOUTH RELATED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND PLANNING INITIATIVES

Over recent years a number of community service program and planning initiatives have developed in response to the increasing awareness of and concern about the well being of the youth population in Hamilton. This concern has resulted in the development of a number of community responses and support system innovations that have been created to respond to risk factors and youth engagement in strategies to improve conditions. Several of these developments are described here to illustrate creative responses being advanced.

5.1 Homelessness - The Street Youth Involvement Committee

The Street Youth Involvement Committee is a seven-member youth engagement initiative of the Street Youth Planning Collaborative. This group of currently and formerly homeless youth brings lived experience and youth-specific advice to systems planning. A coordinator from the Social Planning and Research Council provides guidance and support to the group. This committee of young people meets once each month to share experiences and maintain a connection to the service system coordination and planning work being done by the Street Youth Planning Collaborative. In its early stages of development, this youth committee spent time building trust with an adult ally and getting accustomed to meeting and working on a regular schedule. Over time the group began setting its own ground rules and developing a recruitment strategy for new members.

The Street Youth Involvement Committee has participated in a variety of community development activities since its inception. They have visited street-involved youth agencies outside of Hamilton as a basis for planning locally, co-presented a National conference, developed an information pamphlet for educating other youth about pet care on a low budget, completed a letter writing campaign to local politicians on the needs of youth, spoken at local community events, supported the training of a seven person youth housing support team and been consulted by local planners and decision makers.

The Street Youth Involvement Committee is provided with food, bus tickets and a cash honorarium for participating in meetings. The group has taken part in an evaluation of the broader youth homelessness planning work in Hamilton and indicated that they feel the Street Youth Involvement Committee has contributed to changing the reality for homeless youth in Hamilton.

This Committee of young people provides Hamilton with a model for youth engagement in service planning processes. They provide direct feedback for service providers that comments on the strengths or deficiencies of programs designed to serve street youth. They have been particularly effective at bringing to the fore a greater appreciation for the experience and needs of those youth who are chronic users of shelter services with the result of services being developed to aid in transition to more stable and secure housing for youth and so improved prospects for healthy outcomes in the long term. Over the past year this translated into Youth Housing Support Workers assisting 150 youth to find and maintain housing apart from shelter services.

5.2 Mental Health - Youth Net Hamilton

Youth Net Hamilton is the local arm of a provincial initiative that employs peer education in the classroom to talk about mental health issues and young people. Youth Net is funded and run by Public Health Services in the City of Hamilton and strives to support young people aged 13-18 years old in conversations about mental health. Integrated into its core values, Youth Net engages young people in many aspects of planning.

Youth Net has three components to its program – a Steering Committee that oversees the work, organizes and hosts focus group discussions with youth on mental health issues and a Youth Advisory Team. Each component includes youth members. The Youth Advisory Team is a group of young people (aged 13 – 21 years old) who provide regular input on the entire Youth Net program and also informs

broader youth and mental health issues. The Youth Advisory Team meets once per month with an adult ally. The Youth Net focus groups are held in schools and led by trained Focus Group Facilitators. The Steering Committee is a group of adult allies, Focus Group Facilitators and Youth Advisory Team members who come together to engage in strategic planning and provide advice and direction to the program.

Young people engaged in Youth Net Hamilton are recruited through a wide variety of sources to help represent the Hamilton community at large. To encourage and sustain continued participation, they are provided with food and refreshments and the Focus Group Facilitators are paid an honourarium for their work in schools.

5.3 Discrimination - Positive Space Group Development

The Hamilton Wentworth District School Board in partnership with the Social Planning and Research Council (SPRC) worked together in 2008 to support and build Positive Space Groups (or Gay-Straight Alliances) for the purpose of making Hamilton's public secondary schools more inclusive and safe for queer youth. This initiative, developed in response to increasing issues concerning homophobia, incidence of mental health and suicide related to sexual orientation and the need for information on sexual health, is entirely dependent on the drive, direction and commitment of youth leaders in the schools. A manual, *Creating and Supporting LGBTQ Positive Space Groups in the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board* (2009), has been created to provide advice and direction to interested students, teachers and school administration and the SPRC continues to provide coordination support to this project. The project manual explicitly defines the ways in which the power and voice of students is supported and used to shape a Positive Space Group agenda for schools.

Through the 2009/10 academic year, the SPRC has facilitated relationship building and group development in nine local schools in cooperation with The LGBTQ Community Wellness Centre. Students are empowered to define the issue for their school, name strengths, identify potential challenges and develop a plan for moving forward to make the school safer and more inclusive.

5.4 Substance Use - Hamilton Crew for Action Against Tobacco

The Hamilton Crew for Action Against Tobacco (HCAAT) was formed in 2002 and has since been recognized for its innovative, youth-driven approach to raise awareness about tobacco use to young people. HCAAT uses creative, powerful mechanisms to deliver hard-hitting messages around the tobacco industry. Their website, HCAAT declares their intention to "motivate our peers to join the revolution and take down the tobacco industry".

HCAAT engages in activism in the community and on-line to deliver their strong messages. They have a significant web presence through Facebook, MySpace, Twitter and their own website.   Strong adult-allies work from principles of authentic youth engagement and young people themselves are trained to be peer leaders. Youth engagement in HCAAT is voluntary.

5.5 Poverty - Hamilton Youth Voice Against Poverty

The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction (HRPR) is committed to engaging a variety of community stakeholders to work toward the common goal of making Hamilton the best place to raise a child. One key stakeholder group is a youth contingent. Early on in its planning, the HRPR engaged a group of interested youth in the development of the Hamilton Youth Voice Against Poverty (HYAP). The group has spent its planning stages discussing the experience of poverty in Hamilton and its effects on young people.

With the desire to engage in a project, HYAP developed the idea for the 'Text for Change' event. In this action initiative, HYAP members approached people waiting for the bus at Limeridge Mall to talk to them about poverty in our city. The youth encouraged people to write down their comments pertaining to poverty. The young members of HYAP then engaged in conversations reflecting and analysing the comments submitted and developed a plan for using 'texting' technology at a subsequent community

meeting to encourage non-traditional dialogue about this pressing community issue. Their work along these lines continues.

5.6 Disconnection - The Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton Program

The Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton (YOWH) program is a team of mobile youth support staff that provide outreach in three designated Hamilton neighbourhoods – north, east and central. The team travels on-foot through their areas and connects with local youth aged 12-21 years old. They talk to resident youth, build relationships and provide connections to community supports and services. The YOWH team is a collaborative project of the Street Youth Planning Collaborative. Each worker is hosted by a community agency with an expertise in a particular youth issue (for example homelessness and pregnancy and parenting).

The team has a community development mandate. The workers role is to get to know the neighbourhood youth, their families, the communities and community supports in order to help young people articulate their needs and plan for their neighbourhoods. The YOWH workers use innovative and creative youth engagement approaches to have youth identify the issues in their neighbourhoods and shape solutions to those issues.

5.7 Early School Leaving - Pathways to Education

The North Hamilton Community Health Centre houses the innovative Pathways to Education Project – a project that supports youth from disadvantaged socio-economic neighbourhoods to stay in school. The approach of the program is fourfold – to provide academic, social, financial and personal support – in order to reduce incidents of early school leaving. The Pathways to Education Project is national in scope and Hamilton has been delivering the program for the past year. The north end neighbourhood was chosen because of its high drop-out rate of approximately 45% of students leaving school before graduation.

The Pathways program empowers youth to participate in creating their future. Youth who have graduated high school and who move on to post secondary education have vastly improved outcomes in terms of leaving poverty and unemployment. The Pathways program uses creative, innovative and practical approaches to ensure the success of young people.

5.8 Employment - The Threshold School of Building

The Threshold School of Building – Ready to Work Program is an employment training program for at-risk youth in Hamilton. The model utilizes low-ratio student to teacher mentorship in construction and trades training. Threshold uses real building projects as 'laboratories for learning' with the youth which promotes relevant and localized learning. The eight-week program has met major successes in its commitment to young people.

This project is unique because of its engagement of at-risk youth. They are working with traditionally under-employed or unemployable youth. Threshold provides skill-building around job-search techniques, preparing resumes, and getting ready for interviews.

6.0 EIGHT CRITICAL YOUTH ISSUES IN HAMILTON

Over the past decade research on youth in Hamilton has uncovered and clarified a number of critical issues facing young people. For the purpose of this tool, the top eight issues that are reported in our local youth-specific literature have been identified. A number of sources have been consulted to provide the most important information for planning – local literature, provincial/national/international research, a team of local services providers (The Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton) and local young persons. Each section defines the issue in our local context, recognizes best practices, lists local program, organizational, and network-level assets, and provides links and resources for further learning. Each of these issues is experienced differently by different communities of young people. Where present in the literature, we have identified how these communities are understood in our local context. However, gaps remain in our local knowledge of some key groups of young people including youth of colour, young parents, youth with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer youth. More research and engagement work is needed to better understand the challenges and appropriate actions to be taken to improve outcomes for these youth. The following section of this report summarizes critical youth issues in Hamilton as we understand them at this time.

"Unfortunately many teens struggle with poverty and I am one of them. I receive $525 a month from Ontario Works, $300 for rent and $71 for a bus pass to get to school. That leaves me with $154 for food for the month, shampoo, hygiene products, feminine products and more. So it's not a choice for me I have to go to the food bank every month. Many people don't know that I live in poverty because I stayed in school and most teens that live in poverty drop out unfortunately but I understand why. It's hard and it hurts your self-esteem going to school with no lunch, not being able to take certain classes because a cost is required. It is really not fair and makes you feel even worse about yourself because you need to have money to get an education which is why I believe a lot of teens who live in poverty leave school early.

There are many solutions to this issue. Schools should have resources available for student who cannot afford school supplies, or activity fees. Also there could be more resources available for teens to get basic need items so they have money for food and don't have to miss school to go to a food bank."
(Hamilton youth, 2010)

6.1 Poverty

Local Description of Youth Poverty

Incidence of Poverty

Young people face higher than average rates of poverty. Lack of education, lack of employment and a family history of poverty all contribute to an increased likelihood of being poor. In 2005, 21% of all youth in Hamilton lived below the Low Income Cut Off[3].

Some populations of young people face higher rates of poverty than others.

- ~ The distribution between male youth and female youth is relatively equal, though female youth have slightly higher rates of poverty (Chart 5).
- ~ Newcomer youth face the highest rates of poverty. While 34.4% of all immigrant youth live in poor families, 55.2% of youth who have arrived in Canada between 2001 and 2006 live in poverty.
- ~ Almost 40% of visible minority youth live in poor families.
- ~ While poverty is concentrated in the downtown and northern areas of Hamilton, there are pockets of poverty all over the Hamilton urban area.

---

[3] The LICO measure is a relative calculation as it is based on the percentage of income that individuals and families spend on the basic needs or necessities in comparison with the rest of Canadians. Some have called it a 'relative necessities' approach. (from the Glossary of www.socialpolicy.ca)

~ Homeless youth come from a variety of socio-economic families; however, once they are on the street they are all poor. Once a young person has been on the streets, experiencing poverty, it often creates additional barriers to attaining housing, education and employment[4].

~ Poverty is a reality for pregnant/parenting teens and their children. Not only are more of the women who get pregnant as teenagers from poor families, they are more likely to have children who will grow up and live in poverty[5].

Chart 5. Low Income Youth Population by Sex in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2005

	All youth	Female	Male
■ All youth	68,850	33,610	35,240
■ Low income	14,405	7,400	7,005
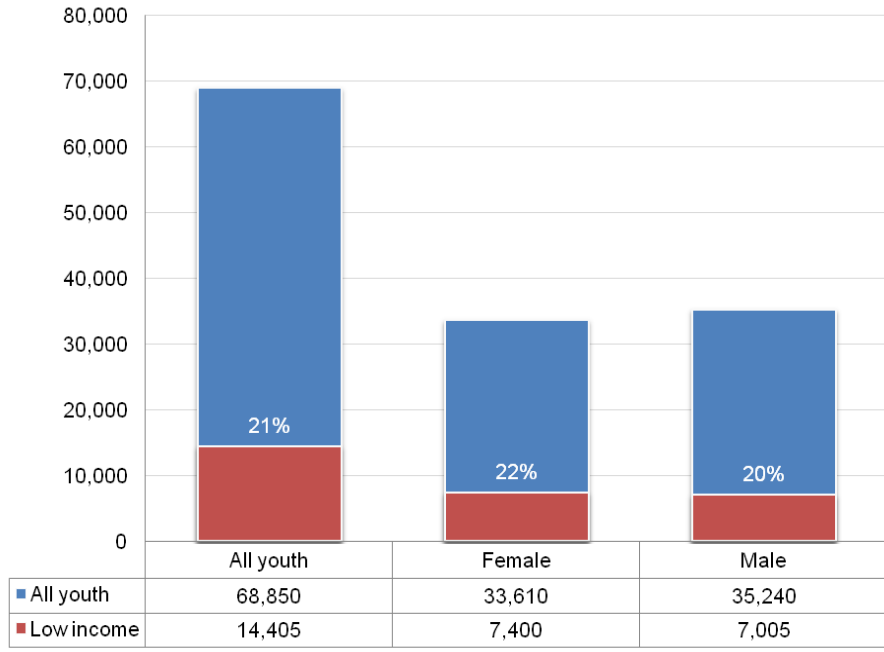
Impacts of Poverty

Living in poverty can contribute to a number of other complex struggles including criminal activity, violence, sex work, homelessness, and poor health outcomes. Beyond creating barriers to the attainment of basic needs such as food and shelter, poverty can create a sense of hopelessness and low self-esteem among youth. The Youth Outreach Worker Team identified poverty as a serious issue facing the youth they assist. Young people can experience poverty either in a family that is poor or independently. If an independent youth or youth in a poor family cannot afford adequate housing, food, clothing, transportation and school supplies, breaking the cycle of poverty is difficult. When a poverty crisis hits (loss of housing, for example) youth often no longer attend school, lose the capacity to effectively take care of themselves, or reach out to their peers. It can also leave marked impressions on a young person's self esteem. A Youth Outreach Worker noted that youth in low income neighbourhoods make efforts to hide their poverty: "they buy the nicest clothes, but they're going home to a poor family – trying to make people think, I'm not this way".

Best Practices for Responding to Poverty

The solutions to youth poverty begin before a person hits young-adulthood. Prevention of poverty through supporting families in early childhood learning and development are critical. Once a child hits adolescence, there are still important practices that can lift them from poverty including:

---

[4] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[5] Gender and Health: Collaborative Curriculum. From genderandhealth.ca

- ✓ Encouraging and supporting completion of secondary and post secondary education. One quarter of adults living in poverty did not complete high school[6].
- ✓ Ensuring access to factors that support good health including healthy food, safe and affordable housing, and primary/mental health care.
- ✓ Fostering opportunities to engage in recreational activities. Recreation can help build self-esteem, positive social encounters and promote good health.
- ✓ Supporting young people to become engaged in meaningful, living-wage paid employment.
- ✓ The use of income support programs (indexed to the cost of living) to support the completion of high school and the transition to the workforce.[7]

Hamilton's Local Assets for Responding to Poverty (please see the Education and Employment sections for more information)

- ✓ Ontario Works
- ✓ The Living Rock Ministries
- ✓ The Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board runs an Anti-Poverty Initiative which aims to ensure nutrition, clothing and accessibility (transportation, field trips, etc.) for all students.

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Poverty (please see the Education and Employment sections for more information)

- ✓ The 25 in 5 Working Group
- ✓ The Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction
- ✓ The Youth Serving Agencies Network

Useful Links

Do the Math Campaign (Ontario); www.dothemath.thestop.org

PovNet (Canada); www.youthconnect.ca/main/english/index.html

---

[6] Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction. Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. 2006
[7] Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and Canada Without Poverty

6.2 Early School Leaving
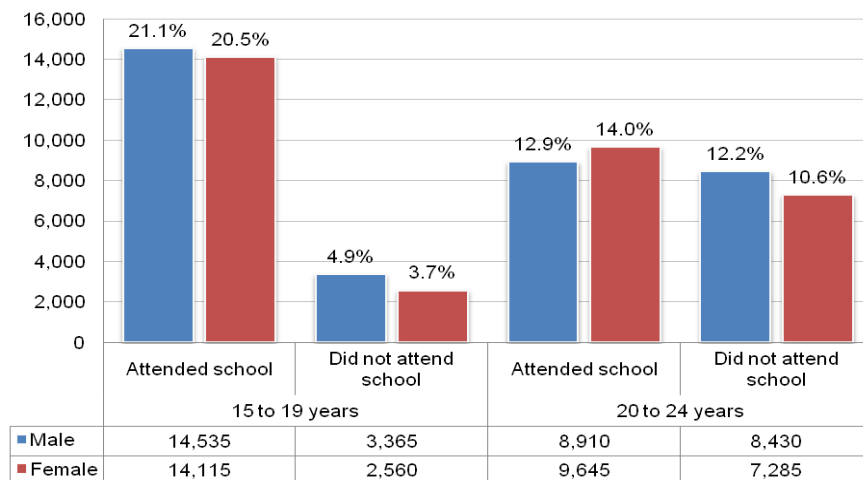
Local Description of Early School Leaving

Youth School Drop-Out Rates in Hamilton: A Critical Issue

In the area of education, local research has focused on the issue of early secondary school leaving and its impact on the future well-being of young people. It is identified that youth who do not complete high school are the most likely to fall short of their potential. The YOWH team recognized early school leaving as one the most important problems facing the youth they work with. Oftentimes young people "don't see school as important and drop out because the work is too tough". One worker told a story of a youth who had been deemed a trouble-maker in his class. When he went to access help, the teacher did not take him seriously.

"I believe poverty is a major reason for teens leaving school early. But I also believe family conflicts arising can distract a teen from their normal priorities and schedule of everyday life. When I dropped out of school it was simply because I was depressed and gave up, I figured what is the point I have no family to impress anyways, I am always depressed because I feel like an outcast so why go? And I gave up just like that. But luckily for me my school Orchard Park actually cared about me and knew I was smart no matter how many problem I had, they did everything they could to help me succeed.

Teens that are at risk of leaving school need someone to talk to who actually cares and there are people out there who do but we certainly need more. What a lot of teens don't know is that there actually are people out there who care." (Hamilton youth, 2010)

Chart 6. Youth School Attendance in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 19 and 20 – 24, 2005

	Attended school	Did not attend school	Attended school	Did not attend school
	15 to 19 years		20 to 24 years	
Male	14,535	3,365	8,910	8,430
Female	14,115	2,560	9,645	7,285

In Hamilton, the percentage of youth leaving school early is higher than that of the province. Research on education indicates that:

~ Statistics Canada reports that of youth aged 15 to 24 in Hamilton, 38% were not attending schools, compared to 35% for Ontario as a whole in 2006.
~ High school dropout rates in HWDSB and HWCDSB are around 30% (Chart 6).
~ 67 % of grade 9 students who entered HWDSB in 2000 graduated in 5 years. This is less than the 72% of this cohort who graduated provincially.
~ Young men are more likely not attend school than young women[8].

Links between Education and Employment

---

[8] Moving Forward: Employment Programs for Youth at Risk in the City of Hamilton. Sarah Wayland. 2006

Young people who leave school without graduating comprise approximately 30% of the Hamilton youth population and are described as 'youth at risk' because "they tend to fare worse in every single important life outcome compared to those who acquire more education[9]".

Young people who do not complete secondary school:

  ~ Have lower earnings
  ~ Are more likely to be unemployed
  ~ Are more likely to depend on social assistance and other programs
  ~ Are more likely to experience incarceration
  ~ Have more accidents, poorer health and shorter lives
  ~ Are less engaged in their communities
  ~ Are more likely to become homeless
  ~ Have lower levels of tolerance[10].

Local research on youth reveals that employment prospects are positively impacted by education levels to a much higher degree than working experience. A person with a low level of education will not improve their job prospects unless they pursue additional education. Overall it is identified that "education, skills development, and school completion are closely linked to employment chances and income. Both primary and secondary education systems are key to the success of our children and youth[11]".

Early School Leaving – Homeless Youth and Aboriginal Youth

Research on street-involved youth reveals that this population experiences more difficulty in school and had higher rates of early school leaving. Evidence reported by the Living Rock, a youth serving agency in Hamilton, suggests "…that 10% of youth accessing the service had completed grade school or less[12]." Once youth are homeless, it becomes difficult for them to succeed in school due to a lack of stability, regular food and a place to sleep. Many street-involved youth who are enrolled in school attend alternative education programs because they are more flexible.

In terms of Aboriginal youth, local research reveals that early school leaving is a critical issue for Aboriginal youth as they have a higher incidence of non-completion of high school than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. According to Statistics Canada, 37% of Aboriginal men aged 15 years and older had less than a high school education compared to 25% of the Hamilton population. Understanding the complex historical oppression and legacy of residential schools is important to consider, some challenges identified for Aboriginal youth staying in school are:

  ~ Teen pregnancy for female youth
  ~ Lack of family engagement
  ~ Lack of equity of resources for Aboriginal alternative programs
  ~ Lack of policy support at the Board level[13]
  ~ Lack of Aboriginal guidance counselors in the City of Hamilton[14].

Some of the reasons young Aboriginal people feel disconnected from school include racism, lack of Native languages offered and lack of education about cultural identities[15].

---

[9] Same as above.
[10] Moving Forward…
[11] Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction. Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. 2006
[12] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[13] Aboriginal Youth and Education Opportunities in Hamilton and Elsewhere: A Consultation and Best Practices Review. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2009
[14] Hamilton Aboriginal Youth Barriers. Buddy Martin and M. Trudeau. 2003
[15] Hamilton Aboriginal Youth Barriers…

Best Practices for Responding to Early School Leaving

✓ Greater flexibility in the high school curriculum – there is a current emphasis on preparing students for post-secondary education that is alienating students who are not following this path. Suggestions for curriculum changes include vocational-oriented alternatives, apprenticeships and work- study combinations. These program alternatives may contribute to the prevention of youth leaving school early[16].

✓ A comprehensive approach to assisting youth to stay in school – factors such as poor nutrition, a lack of affordable and safe housing, a lack of access to transportation and low income are barriers to progress that need to be addressed in order to encourage secondary school completion[17].

✓ Prevention strategies geared toward keeping youth in school – examples include "neighbourhood based youth intervention and outreach, mentoring, and incentives to keep youth in school and involved in sports, recreation and social activities[18].

Local Assets Related to Early School Leaving

✓ Strengthening Hamilton Aboriginal Education (SHAE)
✓ Transitions Day Treatment/ Classroom
✓ Learning, Earning and Parenting (LEAP)
✓ Affiliated Services for Children and Youth
✓ Dawn Patrol Child and Youth Services Inc: Bridge Program
✓ Native Youth Advancement with Education Hamilton (NYA:WEH)
✓ Notre Dame House School
✓ North Hamilton Community Health Centre – Pathways to Education
✓ St Martin's Manor – Day treatment program
✓ Grace Haven – Day treatment program
✓ Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board – Wilma's Place
✓ Hamilton Wentworth District School Board – Alternative Education
✓ Salvation Army, Routes Teen Centre - Focus
✓ School Advocacy Hamilton
✓ Settlement and Integration Services – Globe Youth Centre
✓ Settlement and Integration Services – Settlement Workers in Schools Hamilton

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Early School Leaving

✓ Hamilton Aboriginal Education Council
✓ School Age Solutions
✓ Building Bridges between Youth (SISO, the Board of Education and Schools)

Useful Links

Hamilton Wentworth District School Board & Catholic District School Board (Hamilton, ON)
www.hwdsb.on.ca/
www.hwcdsb.ca/

Conseil scolaire de district du Centre-Sud-Ouest (South Central and South Western Ontario)
http://www.csdcso.on.ca/csdcso/

Conseil scolaire de district catholique Centre-Sud (South Central Ontario)
http://www.csdccs.edu.on.ca/

---

[16] Moving Forward…
[17] Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child…
[18] Youth Scan Preliminary Report. City of Hamilton. 2006
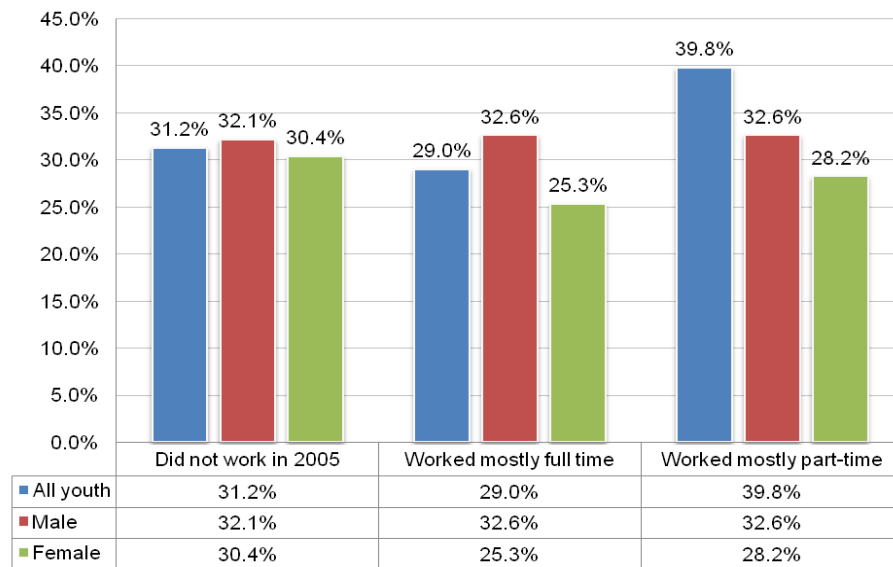
6.3 Employment

Local Description of Youth Employment

Employment is an issue that matters to youth. According to the YOWH team, "all youth want to figure out how to get a job". However, many youth are either unable to find work or are working in "day to day jobs that are unstable where they might not always get paid". According to Statistics Canada, the unemployment rate for youth in Hamilton is two times that of the entire population of the City. Youth are more likely to be engaged in part time (39%) rather than in full time work (29%) and young women are more likely than young men to work part time jobs (Chart 7). Youth who live in low income make up more than 16% of the total workforce – this is important because it means that young people are more likely to engage in work if they live in poor families.

"Finding employment is hard for many teens because there are only certain hours a teenager who is in school can work. Also if a teen is on Ontario Works there is only so much money they can make before it gets deducted. So a lot of teens who are on Ontario works and go to school don't bother looking for employment because with school and employment it takes up their whole day and in the end they really have not made that much extra money. With their whole day being consumed by school and work they have no time for friends and social life which could lead to early school leaving. Why not just work and receive Ontario works instead of going to school which you don't get paid for so you still have time for socializing.

I think teens that are in school and receiving Ontario Works should be entitled to a little more money for school supplies and more. Mothers who are on Ontario Works receive school start up money for their children but teens who are in school and on Ontario works don't receive it. How is that fair to us we need school supplies, too? Because we don't have parents were not entitled to it, isn't that why most teens are on Ontario works in the first place because they don't have their parents to support them?"
(Hamilton youth, 2010)

Chart 7. Youth Work Activity in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2005

	Did not work in 2005	Worked mostly full time	Worked mostly part-time
■ All youth	31.2%	29.0%	39.8%
■ Male	32.1%	32.6%	32.6%
■ Female	30.4%	25.3%	28.2%

Diverse Youth and Employment Outcomes

Newcomer youth (those who have arrived in Hamilton between 2001 and 2006) are less likely to be employed or participating in the labour force than other youth.

Youth of colour face lower than average rates of participation in the labour force than the general youth population, however, they face approximately the same level of unemployment.

There is one population of youth that fares better in Hamilton's workforce.   Youth in rural communities have far higher participation in work than urban youth.

Youth who are street-involved and homeless face many barriers in becoming employed since they tend to lack the education, training and stability necessary to meaningfully engage in the workforce. Additionally, as a young person with a precarious housing situation, it is extremely difficult to maintain employment; for example, getting adequate sleep while staying in a shelter environment is difficult.

Aboriginal youth are another group who are struggling to enter the workforce[19]. Local research identified that Aboriginal young people who graduate do not have tailored support services to help them enter the workforce. This is combined with systemic racism and negative stereotyping which creates further barriers to young Aboriginal men and women finding and maintaining good jobs[20].

Changing Workforce Characteristics

There are two core changes happening in our local workforce that particularly impact youth – an increasingly multi-generational environment and changes to our employment sectors.

The Multi-Generational Workforce

The workforce has changed dramatically over the past couple of decades. What makes the current reality unique is that for the first time ever four generations of people are now in the workforce. This has implications for the modern/post modern work practice, style, management and organization of work.

For a comprehensive description of the four generations in the workforce (Traditionalists, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y), please see *Making "Them" Work: MAXimizing your Multi-generational Workforce* at www.htab.ca/uploads/download/file/112/Making_Them_Work_Brochure.pdf.

The characteristics of the current cohort of youth include: the desire for independence and creativity in their work, the need for a sense of community and a high level of comfort and skill with technology. While all of the generations bring important strengths to their work, lack of understanding and communication can create a work environment that does not foster those strengths. Any planning around youth employment must factor in the reality of youth entering a workforce where they are often misunderstood.

In conversations held with youth in 2008, the Hamilton Training Advisory Board found out that young people today multi task[21]. Concepts of time, place and space have shifted in all of our lives due to globalization and young people today understand, engage with, and see the world differently. This can be seen in the changing nature of social interaction, social networking, and communication. However, it has also been shown that they want to have an impact (sense of connectedness and social responsibility) in the world. They want flexible work hours – the traditional 9 to 5 day no longer exists. Youth value variety in tasks and are more concerned with how work fits into life rather than life into work. As a result, they want a relaxed work environment and do not want to be bored. The manufacturing jobs of days past are alienating and these jobs are less in demand among today's youth in Hamilton than in previous generations.

Hamilton's Changing Employment Reality

Much attention has been paid to the decline of the manufacturing employment sector globally and this has had major impacts on Hamilton's industrial base.   Industrial labour demand is waning but other

---

[19] Newcomer and Aboriginal Youth Running Away From Home: Prevalence and Issues, Nabila El-Ahmed and Rosemary Aswani. 2008
[20] Aboriginal Youth and Education Opportunities in Hamilton and Elsewhere: A Consultation and Best Practices Review. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2008
[21] Dreams and Expectations: A Report on Conversations with Hamilton Youth on Work and Careers. Jodi Orr. 2009

sectors are growing. The employment outlook is not bleak for youth in Hamilton today. The aging workforce will see retirements opening positions up through the next ten years. The sectors with most opportunity for growth include sales and service, clerical, health and social science, education, governmental and religious services[22].

Best Practices for Responding to Youth Employment Needs

- ✓ Pre-employment programs work well with young people. Important facets of good pre-employment programs include life skills development, group work, meaningful opportunities to experience work, incentives and the ability to graduate to different stages and the opportunity to build social supports[23.]
- ✓ Effective employment programs have the following characteristics: good relationships with employers, a location that is accessible by public transit, an intake process that is continuous, a sustainable program and a program that regularly undergoes evaluation[24].

Local Assets Related to Youth Employment

- ✓ YMCA Careerworx/Career Cruiser
- ✓ Living Rock Ministries – Tri Rock Program
- ✓ The Globe Youth Centre
- ✓ Employment Hamilton
- ✓ Mohawk College – Job Connect
- ✓ Dundas Community Services, Youth Employment Services
- ✓ Flamborough Information and Community Services, Youth Employment Services
- ✓ Threshold School of Building

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Youth Employment Issues

- ✓ The Youth Employment Network
- ✓ Hamilton Executive Director's Aboriginal Coalition

Useful Links

Youth Opportunities Ontario (Ontario)
www.youthconnect.ca

---

[22] Charting Hamilton's Labour Market: Past, Present and Future. Hamilton Training Advisory Board. 2010
[23] Moving Forward…
[24] Same as above.

6.4 Disconnection from Family, Community, and Services

Local Description of Youth Facing Disconnection

What Causes Youth Disconnection?

Adolescence is a complex life stage. Youth are on the cusp of independence and adulthood - it is a time that requires support and positive connection. Many young people reject or are rejected from areas of support such as families, schools, communities and services for a variety of reasons. The literature suggests that disconnected youth have worse outcomes than those who are well-connected to support systems. Our local research identifies lack of engagement in three critical areas – in families, in community, and with social services. At the Listen Up! Forum, a gathering of more than 100 youth and service providers in 2006, this lack of engagement was identified as the most pressing issue concerning Hamilton's youth.

Some factors that contribute to disconnection include:
~ Family poverty level
~ Family structure
~ Parental unemployment
~ Welfare receipt
~ Parental education – lacking high school diploma
~ Age – older youth
~ Race/ethnicity – non-white.[25]

"With many teens I believe this is where the problems begin, but the problems and this issue can occur at a younger age, for me it was at the age of thirteen. After my mother passed away and my father became addicted to drugs I was left with the option of going to a foster home or a group home and to me that did not seem like great support. At the age of thirteen or fourteen students cannot receive Ontario Works they will just be placed where ever there is an opening and I don't think that is fair especially when it is not the teens fault they're in that situation. By putting teens in a group home it can make them more vulnerable to be influenced by the wrong people. Also teens most likely will not be going to or staying in school and most will probably develop a substance use problem. It really is just a chain reaction going downwards, and it happens very fast.

There should be resources available for all teens that do not have their families to support them. There should be living amenities available that are not so influenced by people in the public. Also I think there should be counseling or therapy provided for teens who struggle with lack of family support." (Hamilton youth, 2010)

Impacts of Disconnection

Young people who are disconnected from their families, their community and youth service providers tend to have a number of negative outcomes including poverty, early school leaving, mental health and substance use issues, criminality, young parenthood, and lack of employment[26]. Additionally, major family conflict and abuse is the foremost pathway for youth becoming homeless. Serious family conflict can occur for a number of reasons including addictions, neglect, homophobia in the home, and conflict with the law. Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) is a severe form of this family conflict and has major implications for the healthy development and transition from youth to adulthood.

---

[25] Youth who are "Disconnected" and Those That Then Reconnect: Assessing the Influence of Families, Programs, Peers and Communities. Hair, E., Moore, K., Thomson, L., McPhee-Baker, C. and Brown, B. 2009.
[26] Youth who are "Disconnected"…

Unique Factors for LGBTQ, Newcomer, Aboriginal and Pregnant/Parenting Youth

LGBTQ youth face unique circumstances in terms of family conflict when homophobia and heterosexism are present at home. One estimate conservatively suggests that in the USA, 20% of homeless youth are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer - this despite the fact that LGBTQ youth make up just 10% of the general youth population. They are overrepresented[27].

Newcomer youth face unique issues in terms of family conflict. This intergenerational conflict occurs when a young person becomes acculturated quickly to the North American society while the parents do so more slowly. This can result in:

- ~ Misunderstanding of a young person's experiences
- ~ Youth caught between two different cultural norms
- ~ Pressure on the young person to conform to cultural and religious practices
- ~ A shift in family power as the youth takes on more responsibilities (for example, youth may have to act as an interpreter, negotiating systems such as banking and immigration for the family)[28]

Aboriginal youth are often mistrustful of mainstream service providers and organizations. This is built on a complex history of colonization and a complicated relationship to local, provincial and federal government. In a focus group for a local report, Aboriginal youth explained that "running away to a shelter would be the last option because of lack of trust[29]." However, urban Aboriginal youth expressed a close connection and desire for increased connection to their cultural identities and communities.

Finally, it has been identified that many young parents do not access community services. Fear of judgment and rejection is the critical reason that young women do not access services to support them through their pregnancy and parenting experiences.

Best Practices for Responding to Disconnection

Fostering engagement and connection in youth is not just about getting them to get along with their family, getting them into the doors of service providers – it's about empowering young people to increase their self-esteem and confidence so that they can start to connect to supports:

- ✓ Meaningful engagement in decision making and planning
- ✓ Prevention – meaningful, relevant engagement in school with a focus on transition to employment – school to work programs
- ✓ Presence of caring, supportive, consistent adults
- ✓ Participation in the arts can be transformative. Youth engaged in the arts feel more connected to their community and themselves. It can be a low-threshold tool for engaging youth in conversations about complex issues, it can connect youth to a service or community and improves the overall self-esteem and engagement of youth[30]
- ✓ Low threshold engagement. Young people need opportunities to engage with service providers in ways that are not overly-programmed. Open-access services allow youth to build trusting relationships with workers who may be able to provide support in a variety of domains.

---

[27] endhomelessness.org
[28] Newcomer and Aboriginal Youth Running Away From Home: Prevalence and Issues. Nabila El-Ahmed and Rosemary Aswani. 2008
[29] Same as above.
[30] Focus on Youth: Canadian Youth Arts Programming and Policy. Amanda Coles. 2007

Hamilton's Local Assets for Responding to Disconnection

- ✓ The Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton
- ✓ SISO - The Settlement Workers in Hamilton Schools Program
- ✓ The Hamilton Regional Indian Centre
- ✓ The Youth Housing Support Early Intervention Worker
- ✓ The Community Centre for Media Arts
- ✓ ReCreate Outreach Arts Studio

Useful Links

Catch Da Flava (Toronto, ON); www.catchdaflava.com/

Canadian Youth Arts Network (Canada); www.canadianyoutharts.net

National Youth in Care Network (Canada); www.youthincare.ca

Children, Youth and Families Education and Research Network (USA); www.cyfernet.org/

6.5 Homelessness

Local Description of Youth Homelessness

Housing insecurity and homelessness are a reality for many youth in Hamilton. Youth homelessness is defined in Hamilton as young people who "experience precariousness in their housing (marked by lack of affordability, inadequacy or being unsafe) or have no place to live and stay in homeless shelters, in abandoned buildings, in unsafe, crowded accommodations (flop houses) or outside[31]." It is difficult to count incidents of youth homelessness in our community since many young people are hidden and services that work with street-involved youth do not have linked data systems. However, we do know how many young people are staying in emergency shelters. This number does not arrive at the total number of young people in our community but it gives us a good preliminary picture.

"Many young mothers live in housing buildings because it is affordable and most young mothers only source of income is Ontario Works, also most young mothers don't have post secondary education so it is hard for them to get a job that will provide enough money for day care and all other cost to provide for a family. A lot of teens also live on the streets and are homeless and not always by choice. When you are kicked out of your house at a young age like I was your only options are foster care or a group home. Many teens would agree that is not a reasonable solution for someone who has already been through so much. As a result of having minimal options many young teens end up homeless.

I think there should be more resources available for young teens who are homeless. I know it's hard to think that a fourteen year old can live on their own and provide properly for themselves if the government did give them funding but I think that if someone at that age has already been through so much as to be in that situation why not give them the chance to make their life better?"
(Hamilton youth, 2010)

The Good Shepherd – Notre Dame House is the only youth specific emergency shelter in Hamilton. Data on shelter use from 2004 – 2008 illustrates some important trends in this population:

~ While the number of different youth has dropped, the number of admissions has risen. This could be attributed to a trend in which young people are accessing the shelter more often but for shorter stays.
~ The number of young men has dropped 10% while the number of young women has risen 10%. This could indicate a change in the face of homeless youth (who traditionally have been predominantly male).
~ Young people are not just staying in the youth shelter: an average of 479 youth (under the age of 21) stayed in emergency shelters for adults between 2006 – 2008[32].

Adult homelessness is not the same as youth homelessness. For adults, homelessness is generally caused by socio-economic factors – a job loss, a major illness, an emerging mental health issue – homelessness for adults occurs when they can no longer afford their housing. For young people, homelessness is caused almost entirely by major family conflict and breakdown. There are a number of reasons we can attribute to this breakdown including:

~ Abuse in all forms
~ Mental health issues (on the part of the youth or on the part of the parents/caregivers)
~ Problematic substance use (on the part of the youth or on the part or the parents/caregivers)
~ Major life event (death of a parent, pregnancy)
~ Homophobia in the home for LBGTQ youth

---

[31] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[32] HIFIS Data from Good Shepherd Youth Services, Notre Dame House 2004 - 2008

- ∼ Intergenerational conflict in newcomer families
- ∼ Poverty
- ∼ Early School Leaving
- ∼ Conflict with the law (on the part of the youth or on the part of the parents/caregivers)

Homelessness is a very difficult experience. Youth who are homeless are more prone to be victimized, to being hungry, to having poorer primary health, to having concurrent mental health and substance use issues and to facing emotional hardship[33]. We often identify the basic needs that homeless youth lack day-to-day but often miss that young people on the street are facing less concrete hardships including loneliness, shame, sadness and fear.

Diversity and Youth Homelessness – Aboriginal Youth, Youth with Disabilities, Young Parents and Youth in Care

There are a large number of Aboriginal youth who are homeless. Many of these youth are new to Hamilton and relocate from reserves. Others are urban Aboriginal youth –many of whom struggle to stay in school. Aboriginal youth, and in particular, male Aboriginal youth, have the highest dropout rate of any sub-population in the public school system. Aboriginal youth are most often faced with cultural disconnect, substance use, extreme poverty, mental health issues, inter-generational conflict, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, high drop-out rates from school, and literacy/learning disability issues [34]. The complexity of youth Aboriginal homelessness is recognized to fit into a broader context of a legacy of colonization[35].

Youth with disabilities face an added complexity in terms of access to housing. Many youth with physical limitations require modifications for assisted living. Contact Hamilton reports that the current waiting list for housing in the Developmental Services Sector includes approximately 600 families.

Young parents also face unique needs in terms of their housing. New parenthood is a time when peoples' natural support systems often step in to help. Many young moms do not have natural support systems and, therefore, fare well in supportive housing. Teenage led-families are also more likely to face discrimination when looking for housing.

Many of the young people who are homeless have been through the child welfare system. In a recent national report, 68% of the 700 youth consulted had previously been in care[36]. A number of reasons can be attributed to this phenomenon including trauma experienced from whatever preceded a child going into care, lack of stability in care (multiple placement settings), and lack of life skills development while in care. The Hamilton community has been working to foster partnerships between the child welfare and street-involved youth service sectors for the benefit of young people leaving care[37].

Best Practices for Responding to Youth Homelessness

- ✓ Prevention and early intervention strategies must be emphasized.
- ✓ Street-involved youth respond well to street-outreach services.
- ✓ Youth benefit from a multi-service approach to service.
- ✓ Services for street-involved youth need to be youth-centred, client-centred, accessible and flexible for youth wherever they are, whenever they might be ready.
- ✓ Youth need emergency shelter beds they can access easily if needed.
- ✓ Transitional housing with supports is an essential component of the re-housing process.

---

[33] Against the Odds: A profile of marginalized and homeless youth in BC. McCreary Centre Society. 2007
[34] Community Planning Assessment Phase Two. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2007
[35] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[36] Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions. Raising the Roof. 2008
[37] Building Collaboration Between the Child Welfare and Street-Involved Youth Service Sectors. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2009

- ✓ Services for street-involved youth should always look at mental health, suicide prevention and substance use and misuse.
- ✓ Approaching substance use and misuse among street-involved youth should offer help on a continuum of treatment options and should include harm reduction.
- ✓ Unemployment continues to be a critical issue causing poverty in youth and is even more pronounced for youth who are street-involved. Services with supports that address unemployment, lack of education and concrete skills are useful.
- ✓ Street-involved youth need alternatives to mainstream education.
- ✓ Sex is a big issue for street-involved youth; therefore they need to be kept educated and empowered to make safe and healthy decisions.
- ✓ Street-involved youth need accessible primary health services.
- ✓ Male and female youth have different experiences on the street. Service provision and policy responses must reflect gender diversity.
- ✓ With growing diversity in our communities, services for street-involved youth need to be responsive by creating spaces which value and foster diversity.
- ✓ Evaluation is an important component of addressing and reducing street-involvement among youth. Evaluation needs to happen at both the agency and community level. Services should implement evaluation models into their program design to ensure meaningful and effective service.
- ✓ An integrated policy framework is required to respond effectively to street-involved youth.[38]

Local Assets Responding to Youth Homelessness

- ✓ Catholic Family Services – St. Martin's Manor
- ✓ Good Shepherd - Notre Dame House
- ✓ Good Shepherd - Brennan House
- ✓ Good Shepherd – Angela's Place
- ✓ Living Rock Ministries
- ✓ Wesley Urban Ministries – Youth Outreach Workers – Hamilton
- ✓ Wesley Urban Ministries – Wesley Youth Housing

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Youth Homelessness

- ✓ The Street Youth Involvement Committee (Youth)
- ✓ The Street Involved Youth Network (Front Line Staff)
- ✓ The Street Youth Planning Collaborative (Directors)

Useful Links

Raising the Roof – Youth Works (Canada)
www.raisingtheroof.org/lrn-youth-index.cfm

The Homeless Hub (Canada)
www.homelesshub.ca

---

[38] From Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. A more detailed description appears on pages 19 – 24.

6.6 Discrimination

Local Description of Youth Facing Discrimination

According to recent research, youth in Hamilton are discriminated against in two ways – based on age and based on intersecting forms of oppression.

Age-Based Discrimination

Youth are stereotyped and discriminated against on the basis of their age and preconceived judgments. According to the Youth Outreach Workers Hamilton (YOWH) team, examples of discrimination based on age were witnessed with planning tables by not including young people, by police officers exhibiting disrespect for youth and by store policies that, for example, explicitly limit the number of youth allowed inside at a time. Discrimination impacts young peoples' lives. According to the YOWH team one of the most serious areas in which youth face discrimination is in housing. Young people are discriminated against by landlords and face difficulty in finding safe and affordable housing options.

Racism, Sexism, Socio-Economic Discrimination and Homophobia

The issue of age discrimination often intersects with other forms of oppression, namely racism, gender, sexuality, street-involvement, and socio-economic status. This is an important consideration given the level of diversity in Hamilton. Of the total youth population in Hamilton, 16.9% are youth of colour (Chart 8). The majority of visible minority youth are black (1 in 5) with South Asian, Chinese and South East Asian following behind. Youth identify feeling that they are "negatively portrayed as violent and aggressive in popular culture…stereotyping youth is still a big issue."[39] These perceptions are found to be persistent in Hamilton even though the majority of youth are active participants in their community and school.

> *"In my experience many teens face discrimination whether it is because of race, gender, social status, being a young mother or father, or simply because of their age because we are stereotyped as being rude and disrespectful. I experienced discrimination from family and society in general, because I didn't have my family and I lived on my own it was assumed that I would be pregnant and dropped out of school by the time I was 16. Now I am starting college and I have no children.*
>
> *I believe a reasonable solution for this issue would be to have a safe place in schools or recreation centre's where teens with the same issues can join together and talk about how they feel with each other." (Hamilton youth, 2010)*

Chart 8. Population of Visible Minority Youth in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2005

	Total population
Total youth population	69,280
Total visible minority youth	11,730
Low income visible minority youth	4,595

---
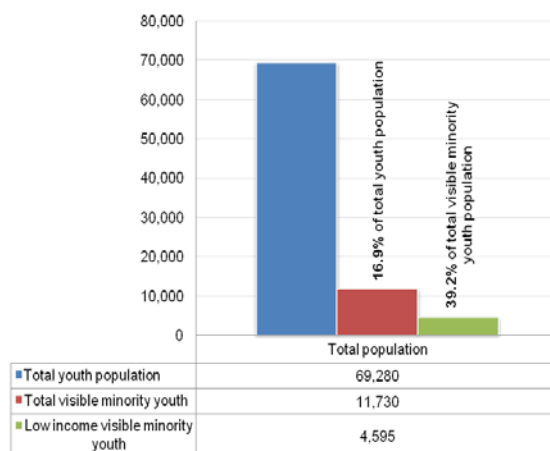
[39] Youth Scan Preliminary Report. City of Hamilton. 2006

The issue of discrimination was described by youth to include a variety of identities of youth, for example, "there is oppression (sexism, racism, and heterosexism/homophobia) in schools settings, mostly negative words and no one challenges it"[40]. Homophobia is a present reality for young people from the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) community. According to a youth participant from a local study, "every time someone new comes here I get worried – worried that they'll be uncomfortable 'cause I'm gay and worried about gay bashing."[41] Youth have talked to the YOWH team about fearing judgment. One example included a youth expressing reluctance to include his address on a job application out of concern that the employer would judge him for being from a low income neighbourhood.

Youth are discriminated against, but also sometimes participate in the discrimination. It is important to note that Hamilton youth also talk about their own transformations and efforts around anti-racism. One contributor to Monkey Biz (a local youth website) writes,

> *"Not even a week ago, I was just like other teenagers - making racist jokes. That is, until I noticed something about my everyday school lifestyle. Most students hung out with others from their own race, and almost every other sentence out of a person's mouth tended to be filled with racist jokes and mean words. Why did people at my school treat each other this way?"[42]*

Best Practices for Responding to Discrimination

- ✓ Social media and media art are powerful tools that encourage young people to share their stories and solutions to discrimination. Social media is any form of communication that happens in an online capacity through YouTube, Facebook, or Twitter. Media Arts is a genre of communication that uses digital technology including radio, video, photography, graphic arts, blogging, or podcasting.[43] Youth who engage in media arts have the capacity to tell powerful stories and share important solutions to issues around discrimination.
- ✓ Working from a youth arts framework can empower youth to unleash their creativity and ideas in a safe and accessible format that can be understood by others. Engaging in youth art also means recognizing the power of graffiti, street art and outdoor art as tools of expression.
- ✓ Peer Mentorship – the use of peer-to-peer mentorship is a successful way to youth recruitment to a program and keeping youth engaged in dialogues about racism and discrimination.[44]

Hamilton's Local Assets for Responding to Discrimination

- ✓ Non-Violence Now Project, Ontario Public Interest Research Group, McMaster University Chapter
- ✓ Anti-Racism Project – Living Rock Ministries
- ✓ Human Rights and Equity Office, McMaster University
- ✓ Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion

Hamilton's Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Discrimination

- ✓ Mayor's Committee Against Racism and Discrimination, City of Hamilton
- ✓ Online Sexual Exploitation of Youth
- ✓ The Hamilton Positive Space Collaborative

---

[40] Listen Up! Hamilton Youth Speak Out Report. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2006
[41] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[42] monkeybiz.ca
[43] catchdaflava.com
[44] Implementing an Anti-Racist Culture of Peace Among Street-Involved and At-Risk Youth. Laurie Trace. 2008

Useful Links

The Living Rock Ministries – Anti-Racism Guide (Hamilton, ON); available through Living Rock

Supporting Our Youth (Toronto, ON);www.soytoronto.org/

The United Nations Association in Canada; www.unac.org/yfar/The_Kit.pdf

Younger World Blog (USA); www.youngerworld.org

6.7 Mental Health Issues

Local Description of Mental Health Issues in Youth

Mental Health Issues Fall on a Complex Spectrum

Mental illness is defined as a broad spectrum of mental distresses, disorders, and illnesses. Experiences ranging from school performance anxiety and bullying, to attention deficit hyperactive disorder or schizophrenia and bipolar disorder are examples of mental health experiences included along the spectrum[45]. Just as there is a wide variety of mental health issues there are also a range of symptoms and experiences surrounding them. Personality, family life, socio-economic situations, and access to treatment are all factors which affect a young person's experiences of mental health. The local YOWH team described a broad spectrum of youth facing mental health issues that they encounter in their work, from those who have been diagnosed, are taking their prescribed medication and talk about their issues, to those who will not talk about mental health. Additionally, there is a lot of misunderstanding in the youth community about mental health – one worker described a group of young women who said they "don't believe in the 'lesser' mental health issues like depression and anxiety. They felt that people who talked about them were just 'losers'".
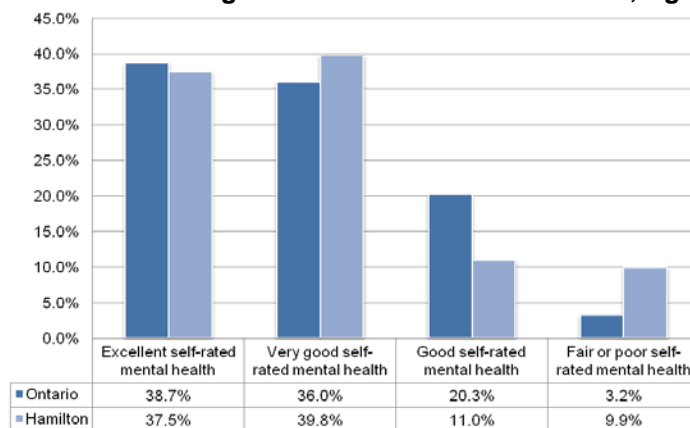
"Many teens may suffer from mental health issues, whether it is a simple learning disability or a chemical imbalance such as manic depression/ bipolar. For teens who suffer with mental health issues it is more difficult for them to comprehend a problem and break it down so they can understand it. My brother has an I.E.P which is an Independent Education Plan. He still sits in a classroom with everyone else but he needs individual teaching when it comes to more difficult topics. I believe that teens who suffer from mental health issues are more at risk of dropping out of school because they may not be getting the direct attention that is needed.

I think more schools need to be aware of the different learning types of different students. Not to say each student should have their own teacher but more resources could be available for the teens who are in need of them. Maybe even a specific class for students to go when they need help with something they cannot understand." (Hamilton youth, 2010)

The Local Picture of Youth Mental Health

When Hamilton youth are asked to self-report on their mental health nearly 40% indicate that their mental health is very good. However, more than twice the provincial average rate their own mental health as fair or poor (Chart 9).

Chart 9. Self-rated Mental Health Among Youth in Hamilton and Ontario, Ages 12 – 19, 2005

	Excellent self-rated mental health	Very good self-rated mental health	Good self-rated mental health	Fair or poor self-rated mental health
Ontario	38.7%	36.0%	20.3%	3.2%
Hamilton	37.5%	39.8%	11.0%	9.9%

---

[45] Review of the Roots of Youth Violence. Alvin Curling and Roy McMurtry. 2008

Additionally, we know that Hamilton's youth struggle in terms of accessing supports. The Ministry of Children and Youth Services revealed that Hamilton and Niagara have the longest wait times of any region in the province for young people accessing supports[46].

Unique Communities – LGBTQ Youth, Homeless Youth and Aboriginal Youth

In terms of specific communities of youth, LGBTQ youth face mental health issues more often and require different interventions. Most youth struggling with sexual identity issues experience mild to severe depression at some point and that approximately 1 in 5 LGBTQ youth will make a suicide attempt. The need for LGBTQ-specific counselling services was identified as essential for people during the coming out process[47].

Homeless youth also face higher than average rates of mental health issues, particularly in terms of depression, stress, anxiety, self-harm, and suicide. Recent studies of this concern in Hamilton have established that young people who are homeless and have mental health issues are more likely to use and misuse substances to cope[48].

Finally, Aboriginal youth are over-represented in statistics relating to mental health issues. Nationally, suicide and self-injury were the leading causes of death for Aboriginal youths. In 2000, suicide accounted for 22% of all deaths among Aboriginal youth (aged 10 to 19 years) and 16% of all deaths among Aboriginal people aged 20 to 44 years. There is not comprehensive local information on the experience and reality of Urban Aboriginal youth specifically[49]. More work is needed to identify ways in which traditional Aboriginal approaches to health and wellness can be used to aid in developing solutions for this population.

Best Practices for Responding to Youth Mental Health Issues

The Centre for Addictions and Mental Health has compiled a comprehensive set of Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion programs for Children and Youth. The list includes:

- ✓ Address and modify risk and protective factors that indicate possible mental health concerns.
- ✓ Intervene in multiple settings, with a focus on schools.
- ✓ Focus on skill building, empowerment, self-efficacy, individual resilience, and respect.
- ✓ Train non-professionals to establish caring and trusting relationships.
- ✓ Involve multiple stakeholders.
- ✓ Provide comprehensive support systems that focus on peer and parent-child relations, and academic performance.
- ✓ Adopt multiple interventions.
- ✓ Address opportunities for organizational change, policy development and advocacy.
- ✓ Demonstrate a long-term commitment to program planning, development and evaluation.
- ✓ Ensure that information and services provided are culturally appropriate, equitable and holistic.

More information on these guidelines can be found at www.camh.net/About_CAMH/Health_Promotion/Community_Health_Promotion/Best_Practice_MHYouth/index.html#guidelines

Local Assets Related to Mental Health Issues

There are two systems of mental health supports based on age. There is a children's mental health system (that serves children and youth 18 years old and younger) and an adult mental health system

---

[46] "Area Children Wait Longer for Mental Health Services" The Hamilton Spectator. Denise Davy. February 18, 2010
[47] Report on the Needs Assessment of the LGBTQ Community in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2007
[48] Addressing the Needs of Street Involved Youth and Homeless Youth in Hamilton. The Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[49] Canadian Mental Health Association. Aboriginal Peoples/First Nations Mental Health. 2007

(that serves people 16 years and older). The following list of mental health resources attempts to capture prominent local resources from both the children and adult sectors but is not an exhaustive list of specific community services.

For young people 18 years and younger:

Most mental health supports are accessed through our local centralized access point CONTACT Hamilton Children's and Developmental Services

Other children's mental health assets include:

- ✓ Banyan Community Services
- ✓ Hamilton Family Health Team: Child and Youth Mental Health
- ✓ John Howard Society of Hamilton Burlington
- ✓ Kids Help Phone
- ✓ McMaster Anxiety Disorders Clinic
- ✓ St. Joseph's Healthcare: Cleghorn Early Intervention in Psychosis Program
- ✓ The Good Shepherd Centre: Barrett Centre
- ✓ Youth Net Hamilton
- ✓ Additionally both local School Boards have mental health supports for their students

For young people 19 years and older:

IntAc is a centralized access point for a number of adult mental health services.

Additional local assets include:

- ✓ St. Joseph's East Region Mental Health Program
- ✓ St. Joseph's Community Psychiatric Services
- ✓ Cleghorn Program
- ✓ COAST (Crisis Outreach and Support Team)
- ✓ Centre De Sante Communautaire Hamilton-Niagara
- ✓ Mental Health Service Information Ontario
- ✓ Shalem Mental Health Network
- ✓ The Suicide Prevention Council
- ✓ Canadian Mental Health Association, Hamilton Branch
- ✓ Centre for Addiction and Mental Health
- ✓ Mental Health Rights Coalition of Hamilton
- ✓ Recovery International, Hamilton Locations
- ✓ Self- Esteem Network of Hamilton

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Mental Health Issues

- ✓ Shelter Health Network
- ✓ The Children's Service System Committee
- ✓ The Hamilton Addiction and Mental Health Network

Useful Links

Youth Net Hamilton (Hamilton, ON)
www.youthnethamilton.ca

Mind Your Mind (Canada)
www.mindyourmind.ca

The New Mentality (Canada)
http://www.thenewmentality.ca/

6.8 Substance Use

Local Description of Substance Use in Youth

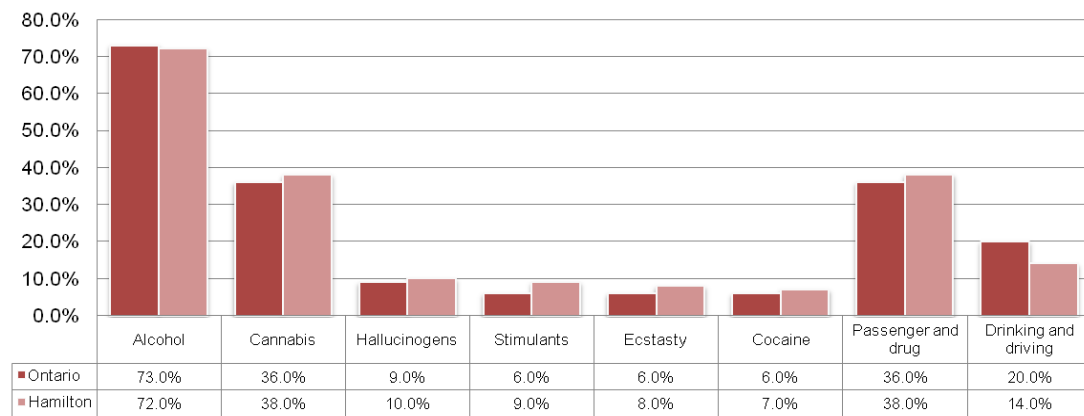*Hamilton Youth Have Higher Rates of Substance Use*

Substance use can be defined as the use of a substance or multiple substances which have a noted impact in a person's life, or which have negative effects in a person's life. Substance use and misuse are separate concepts from addiction. Addiction can be described as emotional and/or physical dependence on one or more substances. The YOWH team confirmed that substance use is an issue among the youth they work with – particularly cigarettes, marijuana and drinking. Marijuana use has become less taboo – to the extent that people will use out in public and youth will talk about using marijuana very casually.

Research demonstrates that youth in Hamilton are using substances at higher rates than the provincial average. In terms of smoking, 12.3% of youth aged 12 – 19 years old smoke daily or occasionally[50]. In terms of alcohol use, Hamilton youth are slightly above the provincial average in terms of how often and how much they drink alcohol. A total of 62.9% of Hamilton youth aged 15 – 19 years old have had at least one occurrence where they consumed 5 or more drinks in a single occasion within the past year[51].

> *"From my experience substance use is a problem with a lot of teens. With me and a lot of teens I know substance use was a result of family conflicts and lack of support. When a teenager cannot rely on their family to support them and listen to them they become rebellious and do things they wouldn't normally do like drugs or drink to get the comfort that they are not receiving from their family. By this happening the family conflicts get even worse and the teen may get kicked out or run away from home, which then would lead to poverty, leaving school and trying to find employment. It is a chain reaction going downwards, one problem leads to another and if someone isn't there to spot the first sign who knows how far the problem could go?*
>
> *Each high school should have a substance use councilor available for students to talk to when they need to. Guidance councilors are good but I don't think substance use problems are what they specialize in; they are more there to help you set your goal and decided what you want for your future. If you're suffering from a substance addiction you are going to want to talk to someone about your present problems not future ones." (Hamilton youth, 2010)*

Chart 10. Prevalence of Drug and Alcohol Use Among 9th to 12th Grade Students in Hamilton and Ontario, 2005

	Alcohol	Cannabis	Hallucinogens	Stimulants	Ecstasty	Cocaine	Passenger and drug	Drinking and driving
■ Ontario	73.0%	36.0%	9.0%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%	36.0%	20.0%
■ Hamilton	72.0%	38.0%	10.0%	9.0%	8.0%	7.0%	38.0%	14.0%

---

[50] Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0502: Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional. Statistics Canada.
[51] Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0502: Health indicator profile, two year period estimates by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional. Statistics Canada.

While alcohol is the most frequently used substance, we also know that Hamilton youth are more likely than the provincial average to use a wide range of drugs including cannabis, hallucinogens, stimulants, Ecstasy and cocaine. Young people are also more likely to be a passenger in a car where the driver has been doing drugs. However, Hamilton youth fall well below the provincial average when choosing to drink and drive (Chart 10).

Substance Use and Homeless Youth

Homeless youth face higher than average rates of substance use and this use is often in direct connection with mental health issues. The most commonly used drug on the street is marijuana. Street-involved youth have perceived that the culture on the street is a culture of use; that all of their peers are using drugs. Many youth find connection and camaraderie on the street by using marijuana, Ecstasy and drinking alcohol.

Best Practices for Responding to Youth Substance Use Issues

- ✓ Outreach works well for engaging youth in a range of conversations about substance use (from harm reduction to treatment).   This describes both reaching out to young people in the places and times they are available and developing relationships and partnerships with the services providers who are already working with youth.
- ✓ Youth respond best to staff who are youth friendly, client-centered, open-minded and non-judgmental about their substance use.
- ✓ The service providers who work daily with youth (shelter workers, teachers, outreach workers) have existing relationships with youth – these supports should be trained in issues related to substance use.
- ✓ Building trust with youth is crucial. This can be achieved through the aforementioned practice and participating in recreational activities with youth that are fun and non-threatening[52].
- ✓ Include a young person's system of supports, as the youth defines it, in substance use and treatment conversations (family, community, formal and informal supports). Youth do not exist outside of these systems and their use is impacted by them.
- ✓ Be holistic in considering options for youth.   Use approaches that nurture all aspects of the young person (emotional, mental, physical, etc.) and not just their substance use in isolation.
- ✓ Youth respond well to harm reduction. Harm reduction is "a continuum of treatment strategies that includes abstinence…harm reduction accepts small incremental change[53]."

Local Assets Related to Youth Substance Use

- ✓ AY- Alternatives for Youth
- ✓ CAMH- Centre of Addictions and Mental Health
- ✓ The Hamilton Regional Indian Centre
- ✓ De Dwa Da Dehs Nye>s
- ✓ John Howard Society

Local Collaboratives or Networks Responding to Youth Substance Use

- ✓ The Hamilton Addiction and Mental Health Network
- ✓ The Youth Drug Diversion Program

---

[52] Best Practices in Treatment and Rehabilitation for Youth with Substance Use Problems. Health Canada. 2001
[53] Best Practices in Treating Youth with Substance Use Problems. Ontario Youth Strategy Project. 2008

Useful Links

Youth on Drugs; http://youthondrugs.com/
Ontario Youth Strategy Project (Ontario) -- *Best Practices in Treating Youth with Substance Use Problems;* www.addictionsontario.ca/pdf/1855best practices in treating youth with substance use problems.pdf

7.0 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Hamilton is undergoing an important change - the youth population is growing, our traditional employment sectors are changing, and through deliberate immigration strategies, we are attracting an increasingly culturally diverse population. The human services sector is challenged to respond to these changes and mitigate the sometimes negative impacts of this transition.

Hamilton has a significant population of youth that are marginalized, disadvantaged and do not have good prospects for successful outcomes in their lives. A healthy social environment combined with appropriate community supports will make a significant contribution to improved positive outcomes for young people. We know that there are a great many challenges and issues that youth face in being successful. A scan of the last ten years of research and practice in Hamilton with youth has identified eight critical areas for a locally focused response. The critical issue areas are:

- ∼ Poverty
- ∼ Early School Leaving
- ∼ Employment
- ∼ Disconnection from family, community and services
- ∼ Homelessness
- ∼ Discrimination – in all its manifestations including ageism, racism, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, ethnicity and more.
- ∼ Mental Health Issues
- ∼ Substance Use Issues

It is important to note the complex interconnection of each of these items. Rarely does a youth experience only one of these issues in isolation. When engaging in planning, this interconnection must be considered. To develop effective responses to these conditions, it is critical to understand the social characteristics of the local community of youth, the diversity that exists within that age cohort, and the positive and adverse experiences that are critical to youth as they transition to adulthood. To develop the best strategies for support in response, youth, policy makers, service providers and planners must all be engaged in a process of sound and effective planning.

We have identified three key factors in good planning with and for youth through this study. Youth engagement, collaboration and using a diversity lens are all essential ingredients to framing and implementing effective strategies to support our youth population to be successful. These elements will be essential ingredients to the development of a youth outcomes strategy that is needed for Hamilton.

The planning framework or strategy should address the critical elements noted in this report for positive youth development. A successful strategy would identify and respond to youth needs and have influence in coordinating public policy.

To define young people on age alone is difficult. The population of youth in Hamilton is built on many complex identities and individual stories. In order to respect the diverse communities that comprise our local youth population, we identified ten different groups that are important to our local understanding.

- ∼ Young Women, Young Men and Transgender Youth
- ∼ Parenting Teens
- ∼ Rural Youth
- ∼ Youth with Disabilities
- ∼ Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Queer Youth
- ∼ Francophone Youth
- ∼ Homeless Youth
- ∼ Aboriginal Youth
- ∼ Ethno-racially Diverse Youth

~ Immigrant and Newcomer Youth

This report is a reference point for continued planning and community response. It builds on years of important work by very capable service providers, dedicated organizations, and the resilience and strength that characterize our local youth. The principles of youth engagement, collaboration and diversity planning challenge us to respond with carefully considered planning. Youth in the community have important expertise in these and so must be critical players in the process of defining the most appropriate and effective strategies for change.. Other community partners bring different perspectives and new resources that also contribute to the development of new strategies and solutions.

This report also notes that we do not have all the information that will aid us through a process of change. While our local community is rich with information, there are groups of youth and issues they face that we do not know enough about. Through this report several questions and gaps in knowledge have been noted. They need to be further investigated, studied and then added to planning conversations.

The next steps in our local process should be to encourage the sectors who engage with youth, to commit to a collaborative integrated planning process focused more pointedly on the full range of issues concerning the healthy development of youth in Hamilton and formulate a clear community plan, identifying new targets for change, and improvement in healthy outcomes for youth. This work must be deliberate and it will require resources and a well-facilitated community development process.

The future of youth in Hamilton is hopeful. Hamilton is renowned for its skill at innovation and collaboration. The challenge now is to match the energy of our young people with our capacity for coordination and commit to a process for change that will improve the health and well being of our youth population and over the longer term the well being of the entire community.

8.0 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Local Sources

Allevato, A. and Orr, J. (2003). *Needs Assessment: Supportive Housing for Parenting Teens Report.* Good Shepherd Non-Profit Homes Inc.

Aswani, R. and El-Ahmed, N. (2008). *Newcomer and Aboriginal Youth Running Away From Home: Prevalence and Issues.* St. Joseph's Immigrant Women's Centre.

City of Hamilton. (2006). *Youth Scan: Preliminary Report.*

Des Jardins, M. and Vengris, J. (2007). *Youth Engagement 101 for Community and Social Service Workers in Hamilton.*

Garcia, K. (2008). *Trying to Stay Afloat: Barriers Street-Involved Youth Face When Accessing Primary Health Care Services in Hamilton.* McMaster University.

Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion. (2009). *Inclusive Communities.* http://www.hcci.ca/documents/CommunityEducationSeries4_InclusiveCommunity.pdf

Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. (2006). *Making Hamilton the Best Place to Raise a Child: A Change Framework for Poverty Reduction.*

Hamilton Training Advisory Board. (2010). *Charting Hamilton's Labour Market: Past, Present and Future.*

Martin, B. and Trudeau, M. (2003). *Hamilton Aboriginal Youth Barriers.* OFIFC-GREAT.

Orr, J. (2009). *Dreams and Expectations: A Report on Conversations with Hamilton Youth on Work and Careers.* Hamilton Training Advisory Board.

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2005). *Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2006). *Recreation Access for Children and Youth of Hamilton's Diverse Communities: Opening Doors and Expanding Opportunities.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2006). *Listen Up! Hamilton Youth Speak Up.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2007). *Community Plan Assessment Phase II for Service Canada.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2007). *Report on the Needs Assessment of the LGBTQ Community in Hamilton.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2008). *Drop In Visioning Session Report Back.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2009). *Building Collaboration Between the Child Welfare and Street-Involved Youth Services Sectors in Hamilton.*

Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. (2009). *Aboriginal Youth and Education Opportunities in Hamilton and Elsewhere: A Consultation and Best Practices Review.*

Stevens, H. (2008). *Project Report: Beat the Streets*. Office of the Provincial Advocate or Children and Youth.

Trace, L. (2008). Implementing *an Anti-Racist Culture of Peace Among Street Involved and At-Risk Youth.* Living Rock Ministries.

Wayland, S. (2006). *Moving Forward: Employment Programs for Youth At Risk in Hamilton.* Hamilton Skills Development Flagship.

Sources from outside Hamilton

Canadian Mental Health Association. (2007). *Aboriginal Peoples/First Nations Mental Health.* http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/about_mental_health.asp?cID=23053

Chalifoux, T. and Johnson, J. (2003). *Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change.* Standing Senate on Aboriginal Peoples

Coles, A. (2007). *Focus on Youth: Canadian Youth Arts Programming and Policy.* Canadian Cultural Observatory.

Curling, A. and McMurtry, R. (2008). *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence.* Province of Ontario.

Frideres. J. (1998). *Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts.* Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada.

Hair, E., Moore, K., Thomson, L., McPhee-Baker, C. and Brown, B. (2009). *Youth Who Are "Disconnected" And Those Who Then Reconnect: Assessing the Influence of Family, Programs, Peers and Communities.* Child Trends: Research Brief.

Health Canada. (2001). *Best Practices in Treatment and Rehabilitation for Youth with Substance Use Problems.*

The Joint Centre of Research on Immigration and Settlement. (2000). *The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging Best Practices to Meet Those Needs.*

London, S. (1995). *Collaboration and Community.*

The McCreary Centre Society. (2007). *Against All Odds: A profile of marginalized and street-involved youth in BC.*

The McCreary Centre Society. (2007). *Not Yet Equal: The Health of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual Youth in BC.*

Ontario Youth Strategy Project. (2008). *Best Practices in Treating Youth with Substance Use Problems.* Ministry of Health and Long Term Care.

Prince, M. (2004). *Canadian Disability Policy and Context, the Region's Disability Action Plan, and Youth With Disabilities.* University of Victoria.

Raising the Roof. (2008). *Youth Homelessness in Canada: The Road to Solutions.*

Saloojee, A. (2003). *Social Inclusion, Anti-Racism and Democratic Citizenship.* Laidlaw Foundation – Working Paper Series on Social Inclusion.

The United Way of Greater Milwaukee. (2004). *Nonprofit Collaboration and Mergers: Finding the Right Fit.*

United Way Toronto. (2008). *Youth Policy: What Works and What Doesn't? A Review of Youth Policy Models from Canada and Other Jurisdictions.*

Wotherspoon, T. (2002). *The Dynamics of Social Inclusion: Public Education and Aboriginal People in Canada.* Laidlaw Foundation – Working Paper Series on Social Inclusion.

Youth Gender Action Project. (2009). *Trans Youth Accessing Health and Social Services.* http://www.ctys.org/documents/YGAP_Health.pdf

Websites

www.catchdaflava.ca
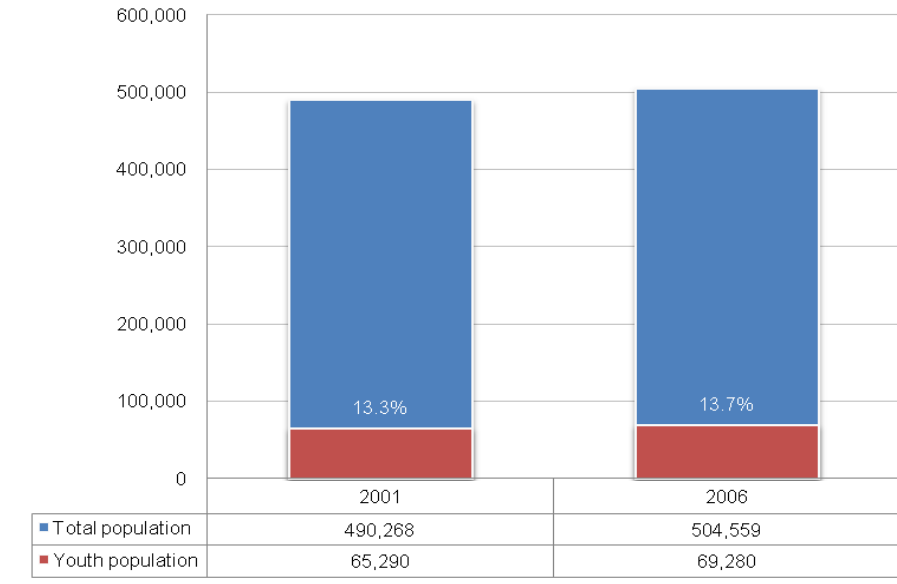
www.monkeybiz.ca

www.socialpolicy.ca

www.genderandhealth.ca

www.endhomelessness.org

APPENDIX A: Full Profile of Youth in Hamilton – Graphs and Maps

Chart 1: Youth Population Growth in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2001 – 2005

	2001	2006
■ Total population	490,268	504,559
■ Youth population	65,290	69,280

~ In 2005, Hamilton's youth made up 13.7% of the total population
~ In 2005, there were 6% more youth in Hamilton than in 2001
~ The youth population grew twice as fast as Hamilton's general population, which rose just 2.9%
~ Hamilton's youth are one of the fastest growing population groups in the city

Chart 2: Select Youth Demographic Populations, 2005

	Total youth population	Male youth	Female youth	Immigrant youth	Youth with activity reductions or limitations	Newcomer youth	Visible minority youth	Rural youth
■ 2005	69,280	35,145	34,140	10,600	5,505	3,115	11,730	6,220
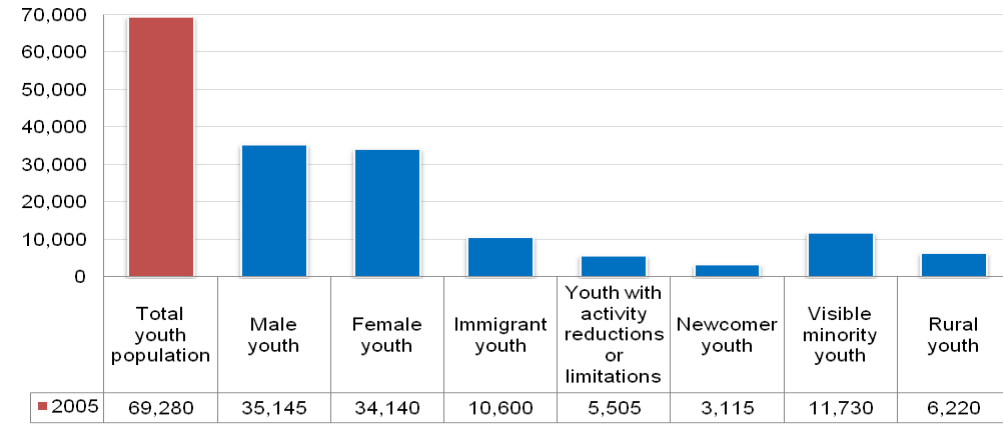
~ Male youth make up 50.7% of the total youth population
~ Female youth make up 49.3% of the total youth population
~ Immigrant youth make up 15.3% of the total youth population
~ Youth with activity reductions or limitations make up 7.9% of the total youth population
~ Newcomer youth make up 4.5% of the total youth population
~ Visible minority youth make up 16.9% of the total youth population
~ Rural youth 8.9% of the total youth population

Chart 3: Family Structure of Youth in Hamilton, Aged 15 – 24, 2005
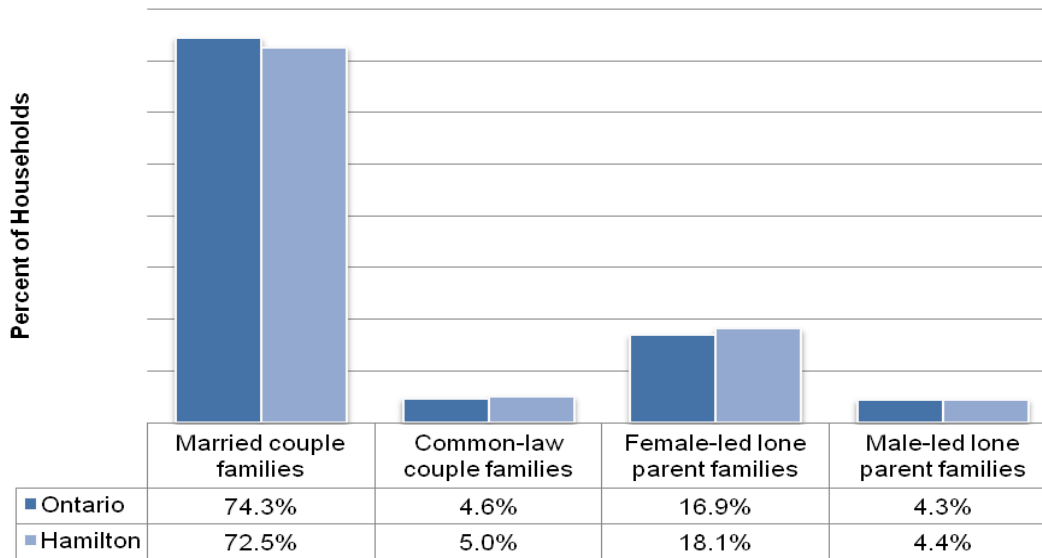
	Married couple families	Common-law couple families	Female-led lone parent families	Male-led lone parent families
■ Ontario	74.3%	4.6%	16.9%	4.3%
■ Hamilton	72.5%	5.0%	18.1%	4.4%

~   Youth in Hamilton are more likely to live in female-led lone parent families, common-law couple families, or male-led lone parent families than other youth in Ontario

Chart 4: Knowledge of Official Languages in Hamilton, Ages 15 – 24, 2005

	English as the language spoken most often at home	English and French spoken most often at home	French as the language spoken most often at home	French as a first language
■ Percent of total youth population	90.7%	8.9%	0.1%	0.3%
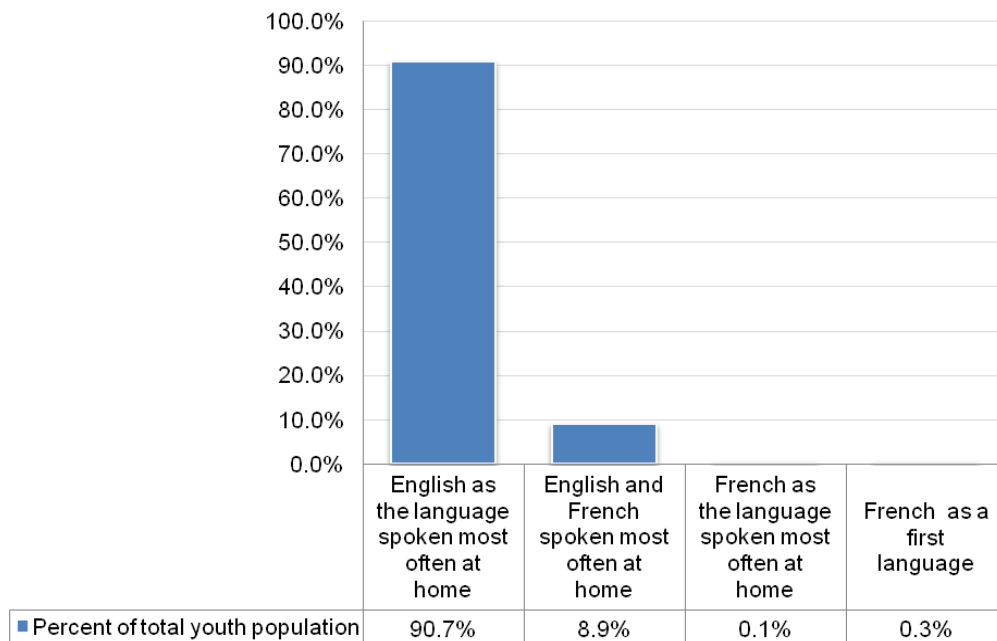
~   A total of 9% of Hamilton's youth speak French in their everyday life

Chart 5: Place of Birth of Hamilton's Immigrant Youth, 15 – 24, 2005

	Total number of immigrants	Asia and the Middle East	Europe	Africa	Caribbean and Bermuda	Central America	United States of America	South America
Population	10,785	4,535	3,910	830	495	440	295	260
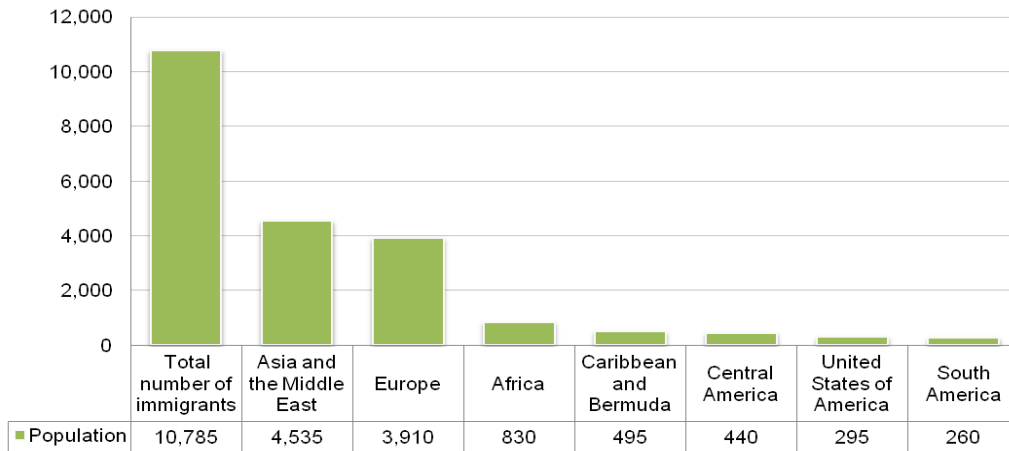
- ~ The largest population of immigrant youth in Hamilton were born in Asia or the Middle East, at 42%
- ~ The second largest population of immigrant youth in Hamilton were born in Europe

Chart 6: Population of Visible Minority Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

	Total population
Total youth population	69,280
Total visible minority youth	11,730
Low income visible minority youth	4,595

16.9% of total youth population

39.2% of total visible minority youth population
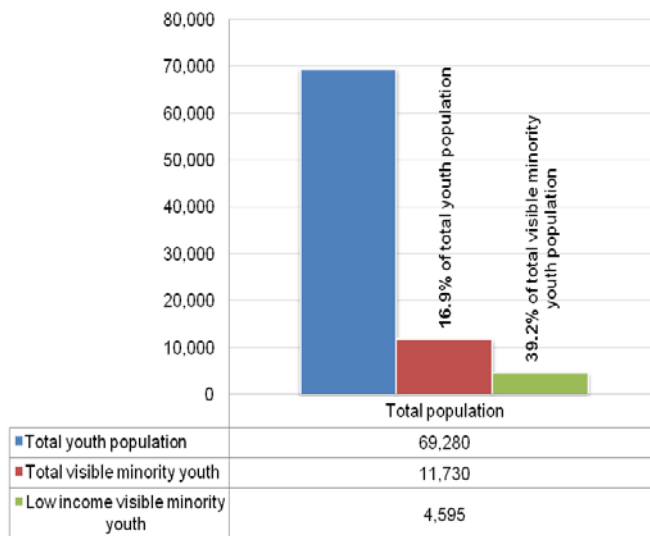
- ~ 16.9% of the total youth population in Hamilton are visible minorities
- ~ 39.2% of the youth visible minority population are living in low income families

Chart 7: Visible Minority Youth Population in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

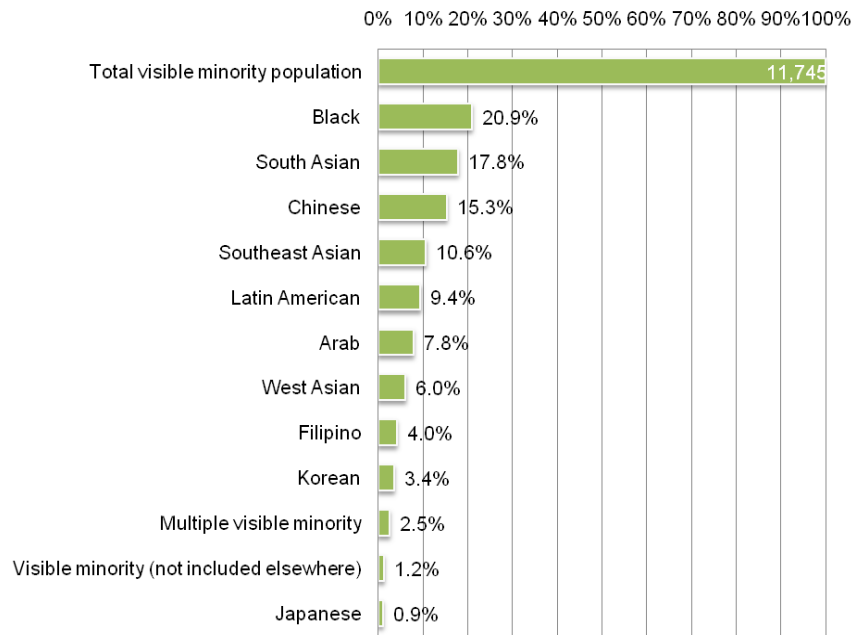|	Percentage
Total visible minority population	11,745
Black	20.9%
South Asian	17.8%
Chinese	15.3%
Southeast Asian	10.6%
Latin American	9.4%
Arab	7.8%
West Asian	6.0%
Filipino	4.0%
Korean	3.4%
Multiple visible minority	2.5%
Visible minority (not included elsewhere)	1.2%
Japanese	0.9%

Chart 8: Population of Rural Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

9.0% of total youth population

5.4% of total rural youth population

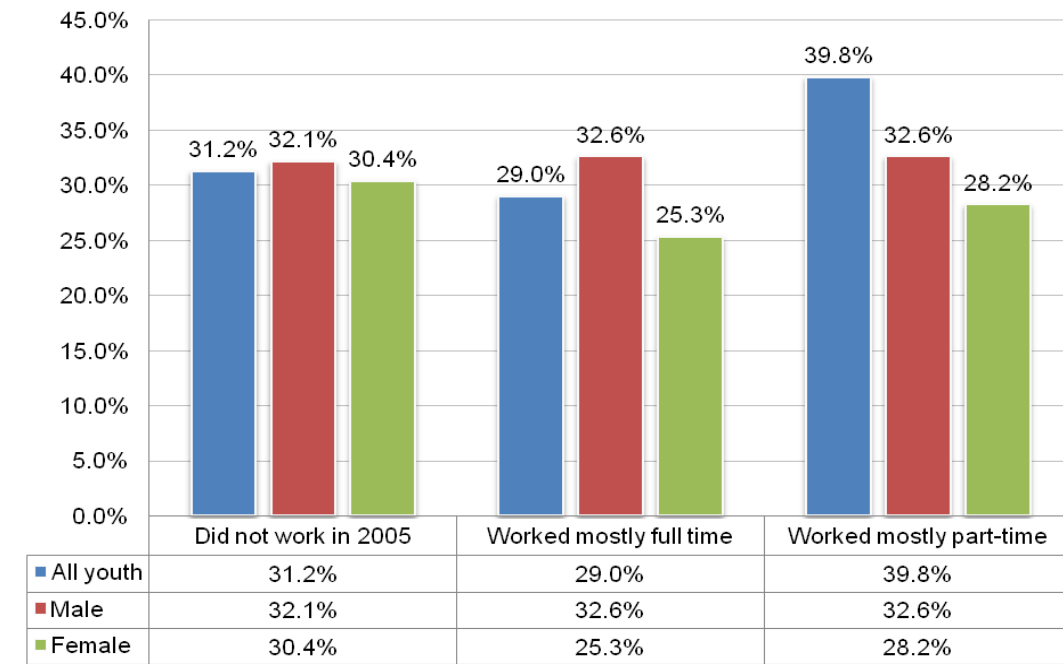|	Total population
■ All youth	68,850
■ Rural youth	6,220
■ Low income rural youth	335
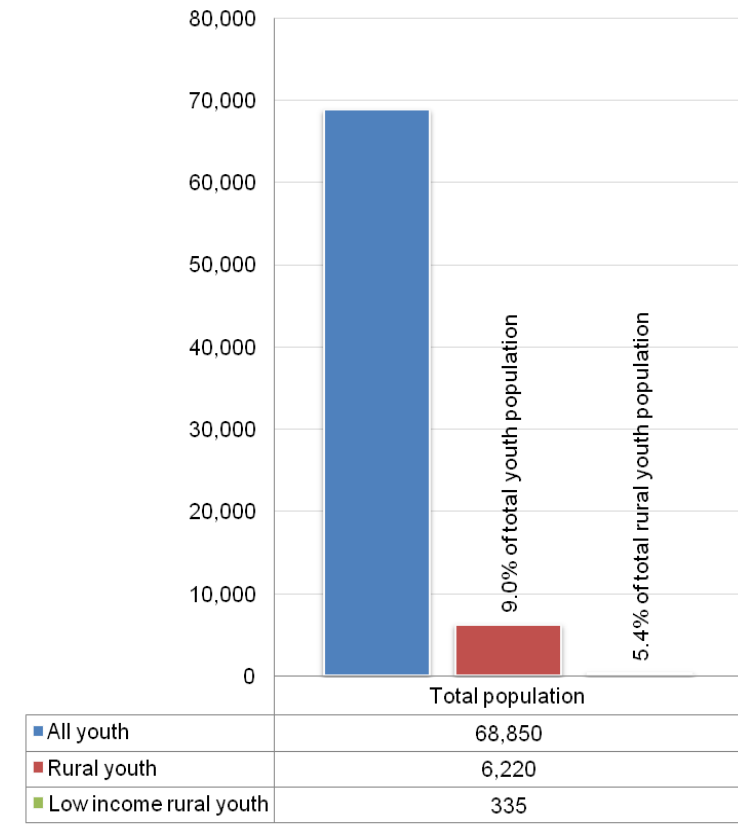
~ Rural youth make up 9% of the total youth population
~ 5.4% of rural youth live in low income families

iv

Chart 9: Youth School Attendance in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2001 – 2005

	Attended school	Did not attend school	Attended school	Did not attend school
	15 to 19 years		20 to 24 years	
■ Male	14,535	3,365	8,910	8,430
■ Female	14,115	2,560	9,645	7,285
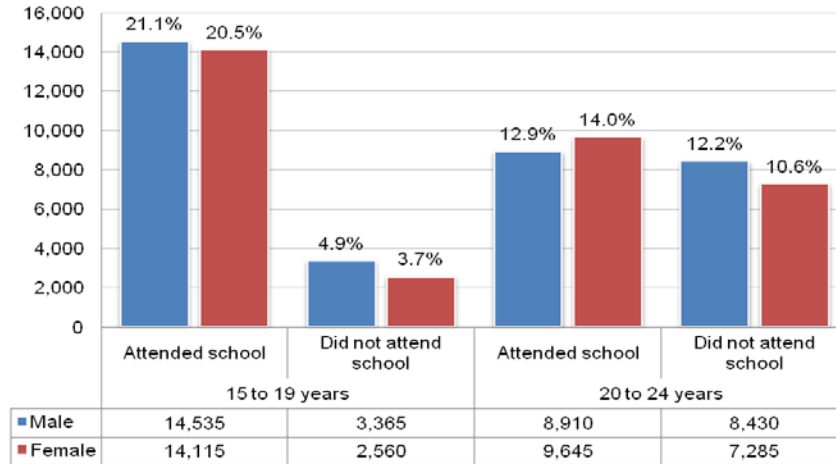
~ Females aged 15 to 19 were slightly less likely to attend school than males in that same age group
~ Females aged 20 to 24 were more likely to attend school than males in that same age group
~ In both age groups, males were more likely to have not attended school in the past year

Chart 10: Youth Work Activity in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

	Did not work in 2005	Worked mostly full time	Worked mostly part-time
■ All youth	31.2%	29.0%	39.8%
■ Male	32.1%	32.6%	32.6%
■ Female	30.4%	25.3%	28.2%

~ Most of Hamilton's youth (39.8%) worked part-time jobs in 2005
~ Male youth were more likely to work full-time jobs than female youth in 2005
~ Female youth were more likely to work part-time than full-time jobs

Chart 11: Immigrant Youth Labour Force Activity by Period of Immigration, 15 – 24, 2005

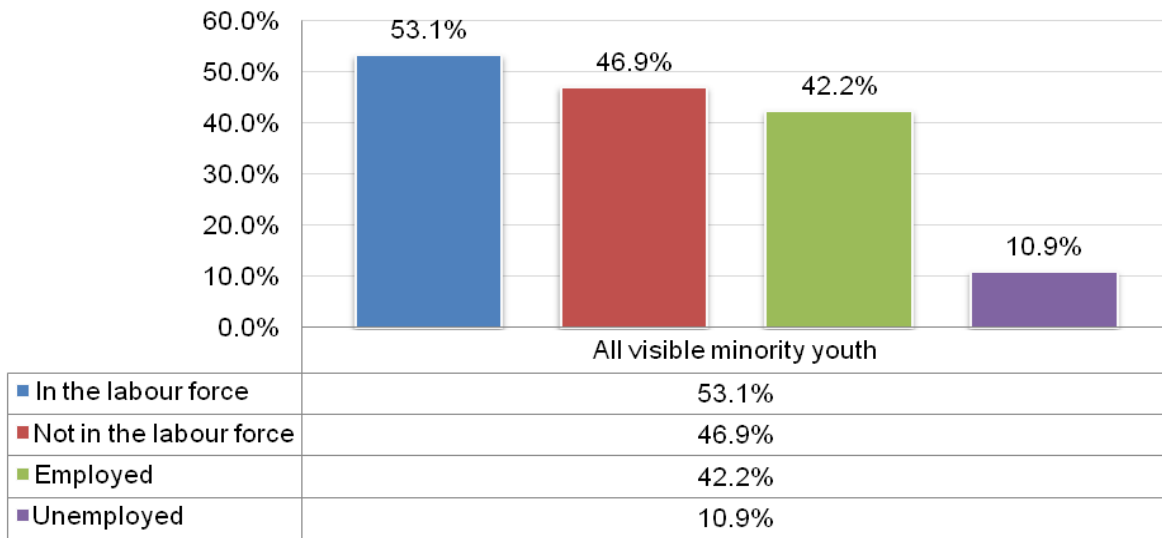|	In the labour force	Not in the labour force	Employed	Unemployed
Before 1991	71.0%	29.0%	63.4%	7.4%
1991 to 1995	65.6%	34.4%	54.6%	11.0%
1996 to 2000	61.2%	39.2%	50.2%	10.8%
2001 to 2006	47.8%	52.2%	38.4%	9.2%
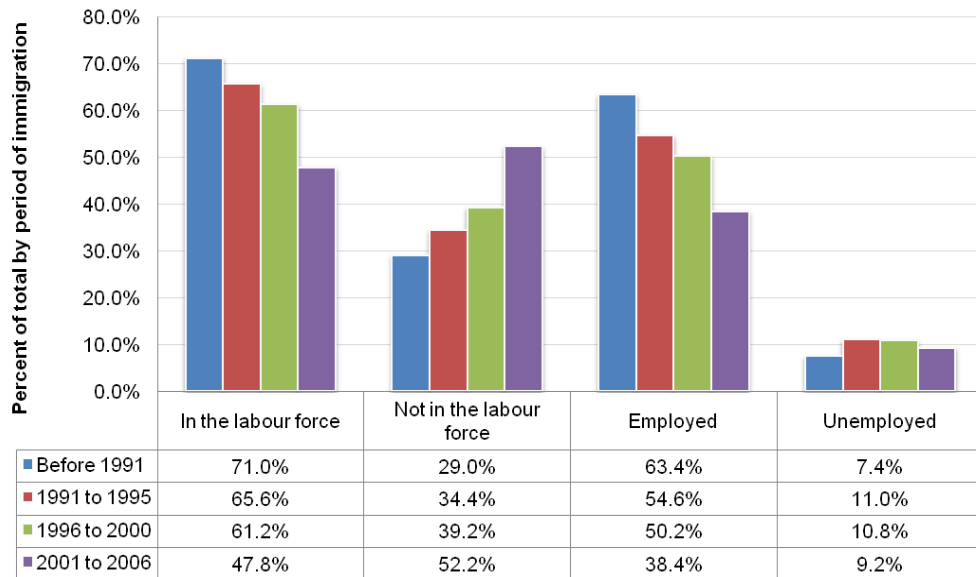
~ Newcomer youth (those who immigrated between 2001 and 2006) are less likely to be employed or in the labour force than other youth

Chart 12: Labour Force Participation Among Visible Minority Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

	All visible minority youth
In the labour force	53.1%
Not in the labour force	46.9%
Employed	42.2%
Unemployed	10.9%

~ More than half of visible minority youth are in the labour force, and 46.9% of them are employed

Chart 13: Labour Force Characteristics for Rural and Urban Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

|	In the labour force	Not in the labour force	Employed	Unemployed
■ All youth	66.8%	33.2%	57.0%	9.7%
■ Urban youth	66.2%	33.8%	56.1%	10.1%
■ Rural youth	72.9%	27.1%	66.5%	6.4%
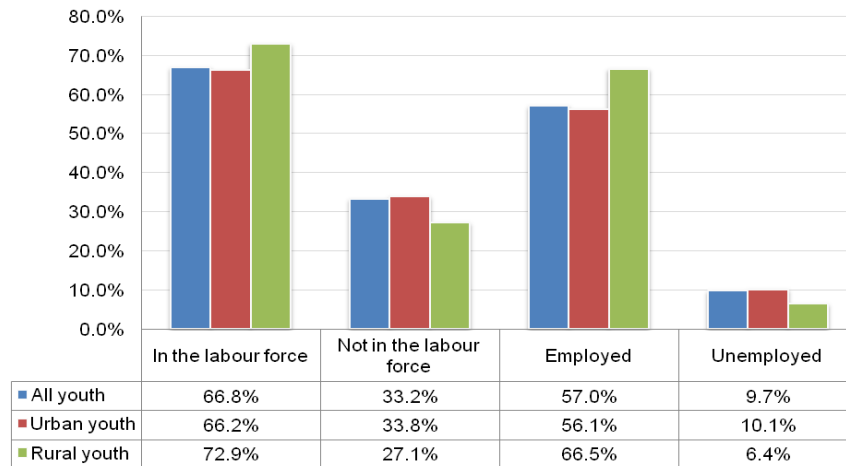
~ 72.9% of rural youth are in the labour force, a much higher percent than other youth demographic groups
~ Rural youth were more likely to be employed than any other youth demographic in 2005, and had a significantly lower unemployment rate

Chart 14: Low Income Youth Population by Sex in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005

	All youth	Female	Male
■ All youth	68,850	33,610	35,240
■ Low income	14,405	7,400	7,005
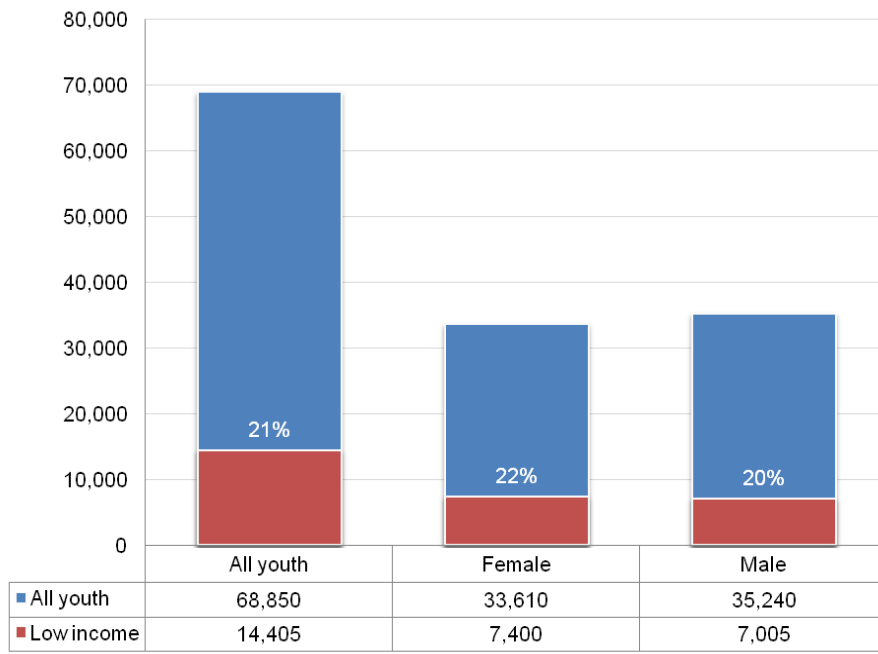
~ 21% of Hamilton's youth live in low income families
~ 22% of Hamilton's female youth live in low income families
~ 20% of Hamilton's male youth live in low income families

Chart 15: All Immigrant Youth and Low Income Immigrant Youth by Period of Immigration in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005
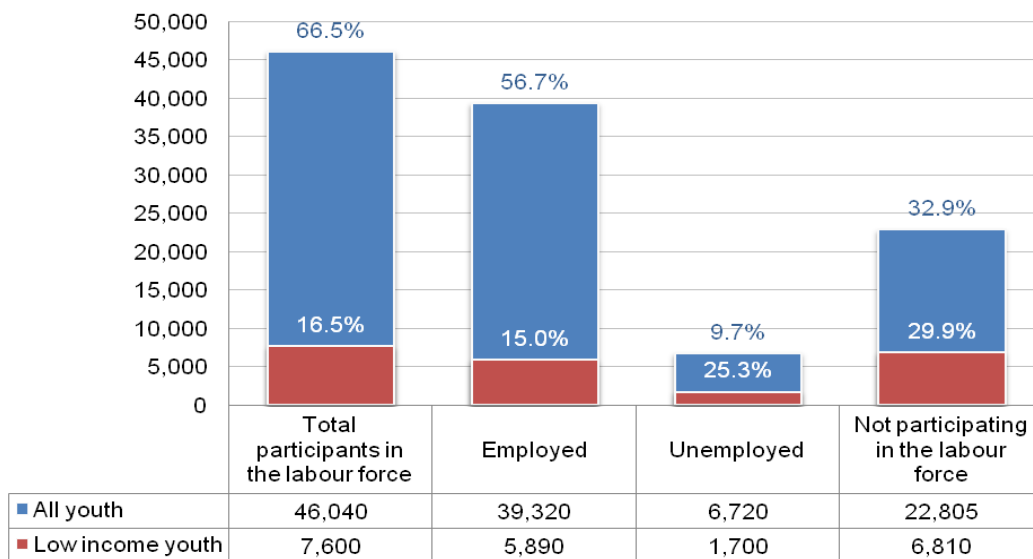
	All immigrants	Immigrated before 1991	Immigrated between 1991 to 1995	Immigrated between 1996 to 2000	Immigrated between 2001 to 2006
■ All youth	10,785	2,225	2,865	2,505	3,195
■ Low income youth	3,705	550	520	875	1,765

Chart labels: 34.4%, 24.7%, 18.2%, 34.9%, 55.2%
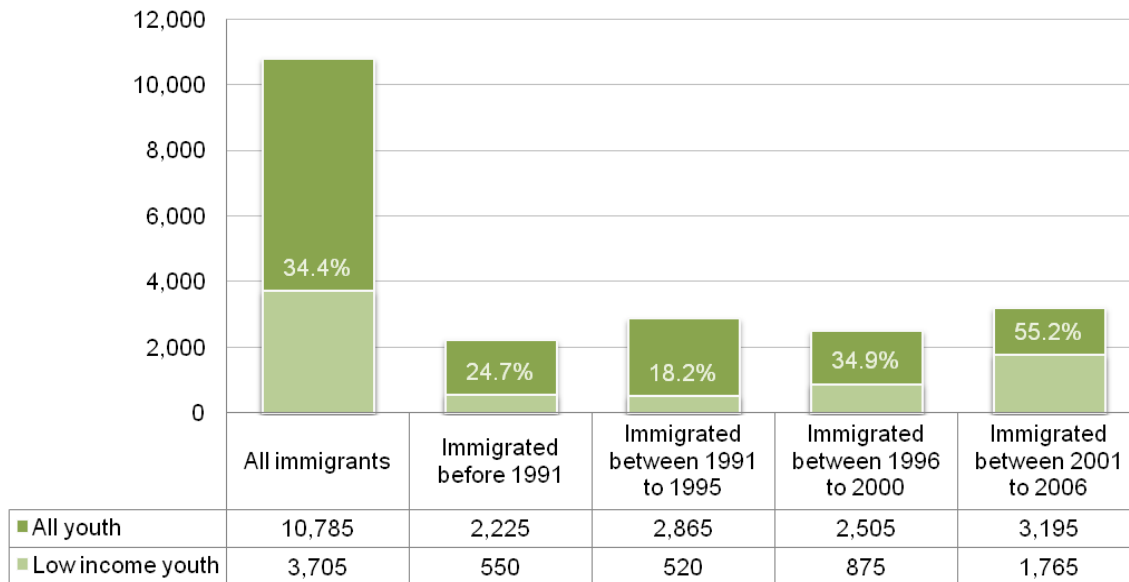
~   34.4% of youth immigrants live in low-income families
~   More than half of youth who immigrated between 2001 and 2006 (newcomers) are living in low income families

Chart 16: Workforce Participation Rates for All Youth and Low Income Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2001 – 2005

	Total participants in the labour force	Employed	Unemployed	Not participating in the labour force
■ All youth	46,040	39,320	6,720	22,805
■ Low income youth	7,600	5,890	1,700	6,810

Chart labels: 66.5%, 16.5%, 56.7%, 15.0%, 9.7%, 25.3%, 32.9%, 29.9%

~   The unemployment rate for youth is 14.6%, which is more than two times the unemployment rate for the entire population of the City of Hamilton
~   Low income youth make up 16.5% of Hamilton's labour force aged 15 to 14
~   One in four of Hamilton's low income youth are unemployed
~   66.5% of Hamilton's youth participate in the labour force

~ 32.9% of Hamilton's youth are not participating in the labour force
~ 56.7% of Hamilton's youth are employed
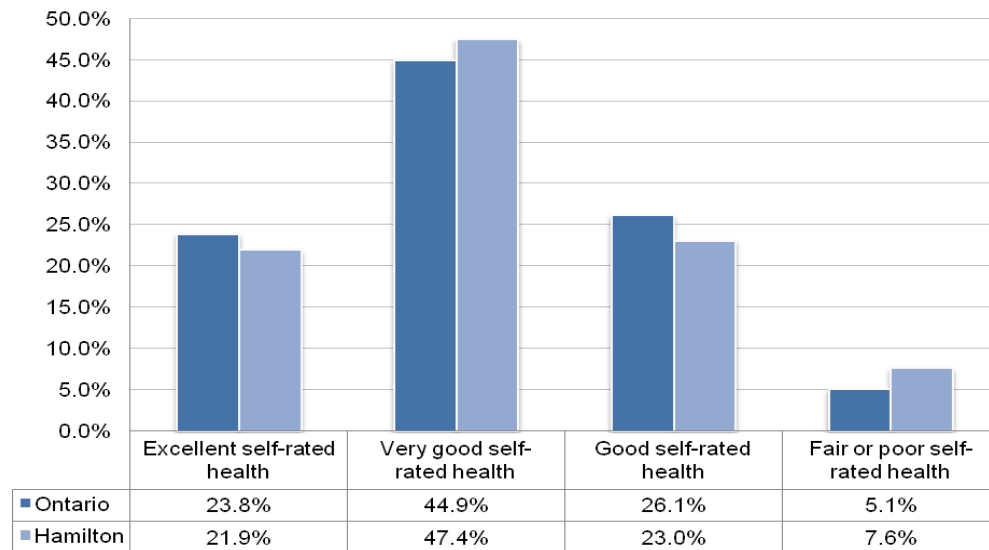~ 9.7% of Hamilton's youth are unemployed

Chart 17: Youth Sense of Belonging to Local Community for Hamilton and Ontario, 15 – 24, 2005

	Very strong sense of belonging to local community	Somewhat strong sense of belonging to local community	Somewhat weak sense of belonging to local community	Very weak sense of belonging to local community
■ Ontario	17.6%	53.7%	19.9%	6.5%
■ Hamilton	21.2%	44.4%	24.4%	
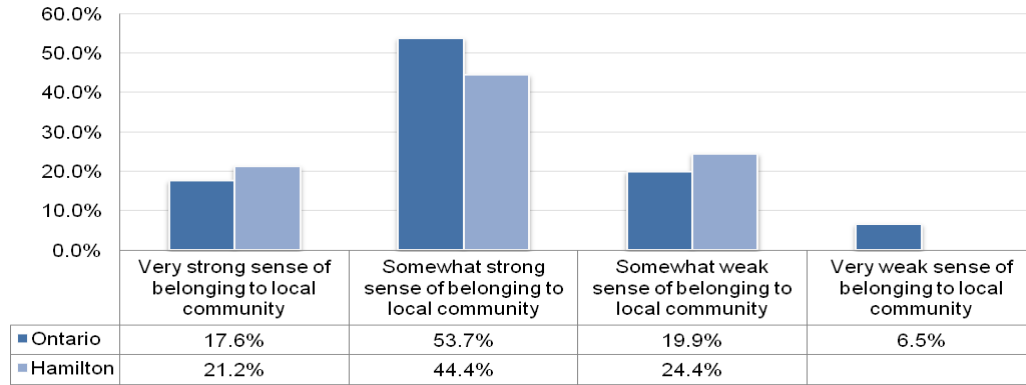
Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0390: Sense of belonging to local community, by age group and sex, household population aged 12 and over. Statistics Canada.

~ Most of Hamilton's youth reported having a "somewhat strong" sense of belonging to the local community
~ A higher percentage of youth in Hamilton reported a "very strong" sense of belonging to the local community than youth in Ontario as a whole

Chart 18: Self-Rated Health Among Youth in Hamilton and Ontario, 15 – 24, 2001 – 2005

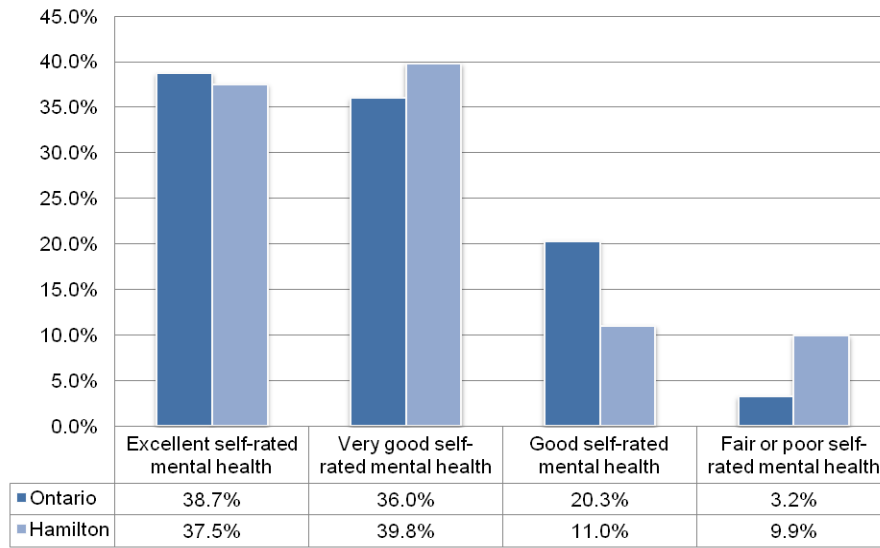|	Excellent self-rated health	Very good self-rated health	Good self-rated health	Fair or poor self-rated health
■ Ontario	23.8%	44.9%	26.1%	5.1%
■ Hamilton	21.9%	47.4%	23.0%	7.6%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0422 Self-rated health, by age group and sex, household population aged 12 and over. Statistics Canada.
* All data is based on the population within the City of Hamilton Health Unit

~ Most of Hamilton's youth rated themselves as being in "very good" health, and were more likely to do so than youth in Ontario as a whole
~ Hamilton's youth were more likely to rate their health as "fair or poor" than other youth in Ontario

Chart 19: Self-Rated Mental Health Among Youth in Hamilton and Ontario, 15 – 24, 2001 – 2005

	Excellent self-rated mental health	Very good self-rated mental health	Good self-rated mental health	Fair or poor self-rated mental health
Ontario	38.7%	36.0%	20.3%	3.2%
Hamilton	37.5%	39.8%	11.0%	9.9%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0321: Self-rated mental health, by age group and sex, household population aged 12 and over. Statistics Canada.

~ Hamilton's youth were three times as likely to rate themselves as having fair or poor mental health than youth in all of Ontario
~ There was a higher average of youth who rated themselves as having very good mental health in Hamilton than in Ontario as a whole
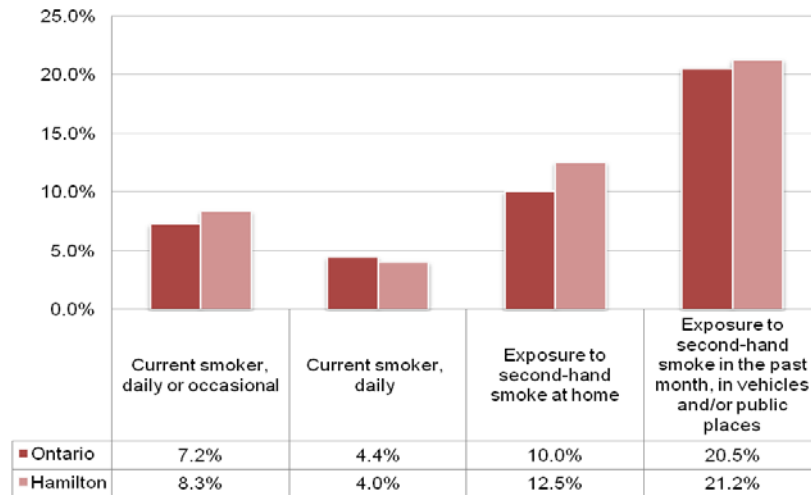
Chart 20: Access to a Medical Doctor in Hamilton and Ontario, 2007/2008
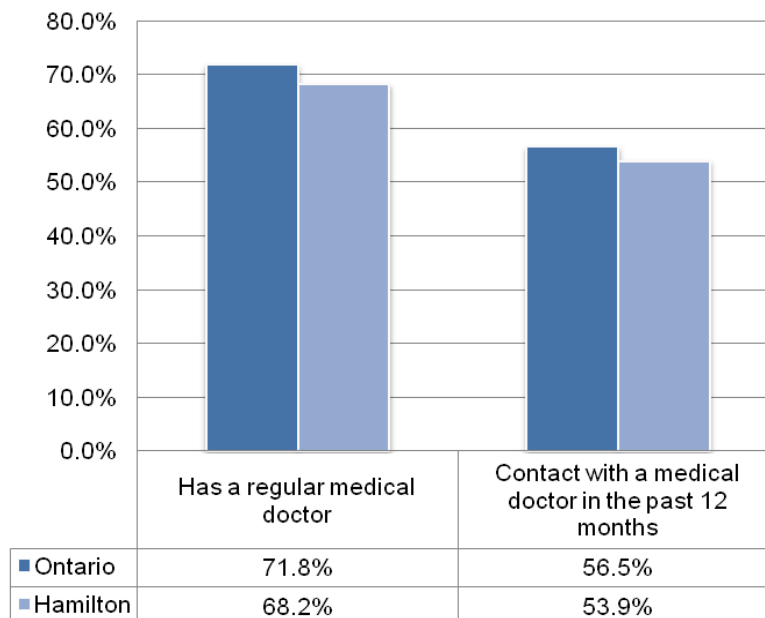
	Has a regular medical doctor	Contact with a medical doctor in the past 12 months
Ontario	71.8%	56.5%
Hamilton	68.2%	53.9%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0502: Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional. Statistics Canada.

~ Hamilton's youth are less likely to have a medical doctor than youth in the rest of the province
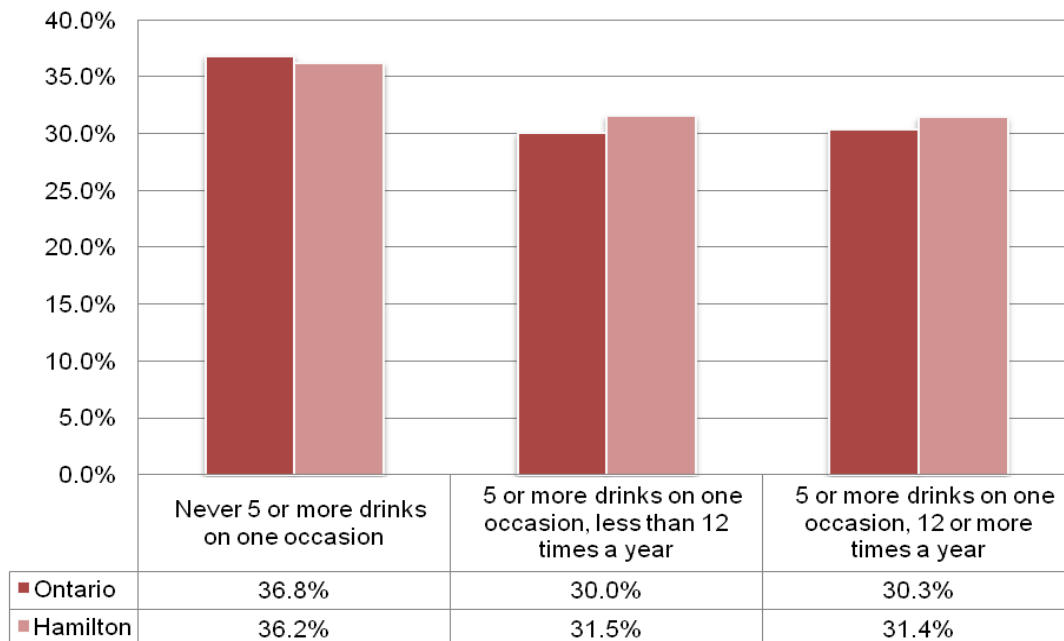~ Youth in Hamilton are less likely to have had contact with a medical doctor in the past 12 months

Chart 21: Smoking Among Youth in Hamilton and Ontario, Ages 12 – 29, 2007/2008

	Current smoker, daily or occasional	Current smoker, daily	Exposure to second-hand smoke at home	Exposure to second-hand smoke in the past month, in vehicles and/or public places
Ontario	7.2%	4.4%	10.0%	20.5%
Hamilton	8.3%	4.0%	12.5%	21.2%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0502: Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional. Statistics Canada.

~ There are a higher percentage of youth who smoke in Hamilton than in Ontario
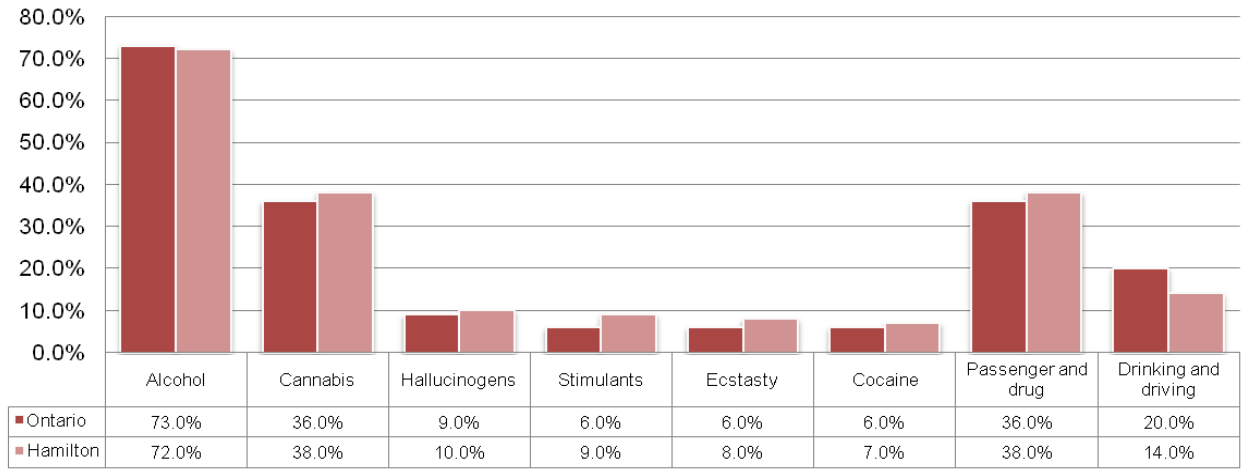~ More youth in Hamilton are exposed to second hand smoke than youth in the rest of Ontario

Chart 22: Frequency of Alcohol Consumption Among Youth who Drink, 15 – 19, 2005

	Never 5 or more drinks on one occasion	5 or more drinks on one occasion, less than 12 times a year	5 or more drinks on one occasion, 12 or more times a year
Ontario	36.8%	30.0%	30.3%
Hamilton	36.2%	31.5%	31.4%

Source: Canadian Community Health Survey. Table 105-0502: Health indicator profile, two year period estimates, by age group and sex, Canada, provinces, territories, health regions (2007 boundaries) and peer groups, occasional. Statistics Canada.

~ Hamilton's youth are slightly more likely to drink heavily than the provincial average

Chart 23: Prevalence of Drug and Alcohol Use Among 9th to 12th Grade Students in Hamilton and Ontario, 2005

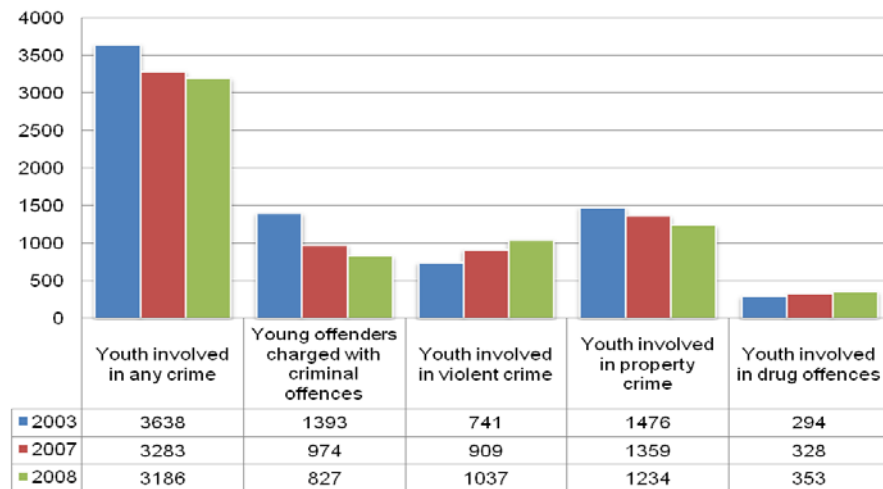|	Alcohol	Cannabis	Hallucinogens	Stimulants	Ecstasty	Cocaine	Passenger and drug	Drinking and driving
Ontario	73.0%	36.0%	9.0%	6.0%	6.0%	6.0%	36.0%	20.0%
Hamilton	72.0%	38.0%	10.0%	9.0%	8.0%	7.0%	38.0%	14.0%

Source: City of Hamilton Public Health Services, Healthy Living Division. Youth Alcohol and Drug Use in Hamilton. BOH07052. October 3, 2007.

This data for Hamilton is based on a sample of 769 students from 15 schools in the City of Hamilton; the corresponding Ontario data is based on a sample of 5,794 students from 89 schools in the province.

- ~ Hamilton's youth, on average, were more likely to have tried drugs than youth in Ontario
- ~ 38% of Hamilton's youth have been in a vehicle where the driver had used drugs
- ~ Hamilton's youth are well below the provincial average for drinking and driving

Chart 24: Youth Involvement in Crime for 2003, 2007, and 2008 in the city of Hamilton, Ages 12 - 17

	Youth involved in any crime	Young offenders charged with criminal offences	Youth involved in violent crime	Youth involved in property crime	Youth involved in drug offences
2003	3638	1393	741	1476	294
2007	3283	974	909	1359	328
2008	3186	827	1037	1234	353

*Source: Hamilton Police Services. Youth Crime: 2008 Annual Report.*

- ~ The overall number of youth involved in any crime has been reduced by 12.4% since 2003
- ~ The number of youth charged with criminal offences has gone down 40.6% since 2003
- ~ The number of youth involved in property crime has gone down 16.4% since 2003
- ~ The number of youth involved in violent crime has risen by 39.9% since 2003

**Map 1: Distribution of Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005**
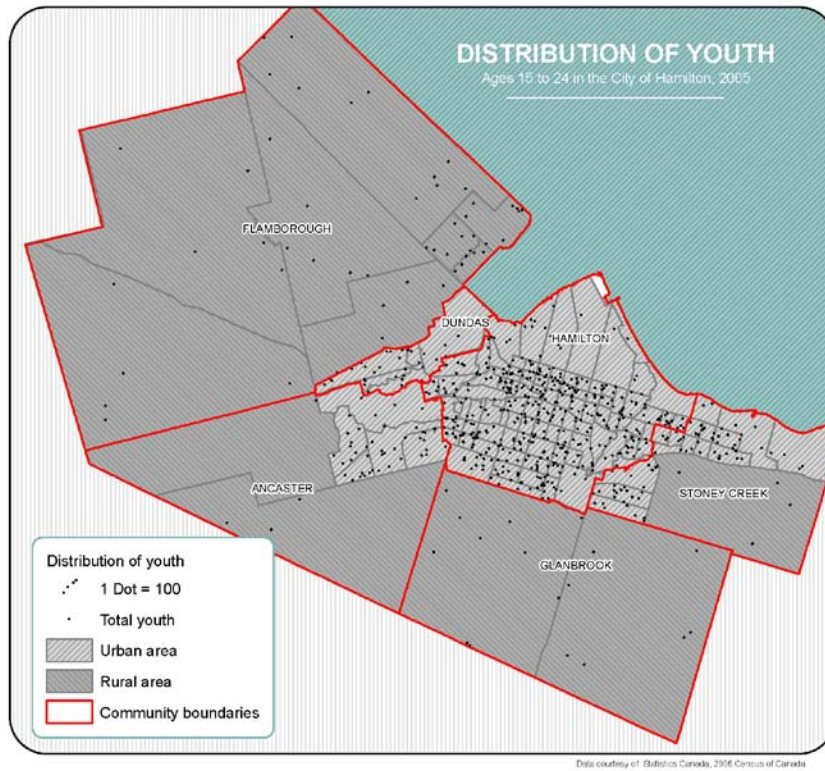
- ~ The majority of youth live in urban settings in Hamilton
- ~ There is a significant concentration of youth living in the Central and North parts of the City

**Map 2: Low Income Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005**
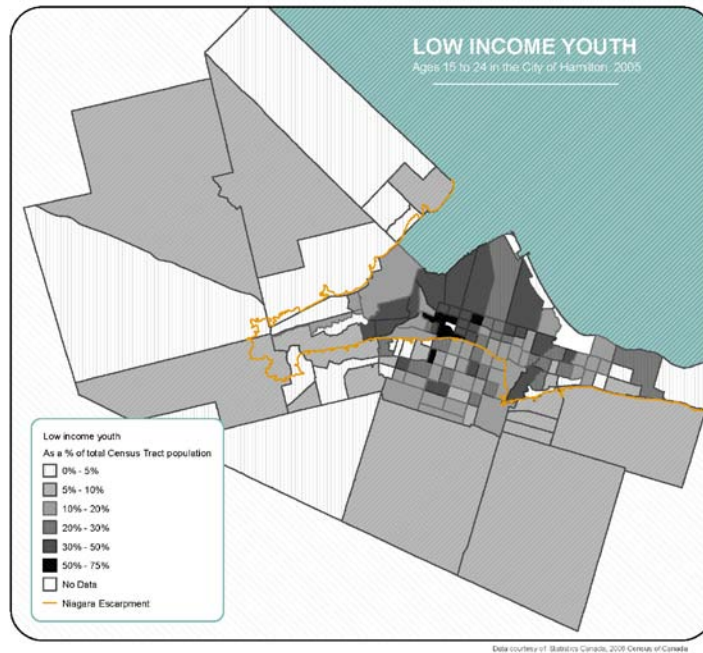
- ~ Low income youth mostly live in the Downtown Core and North End of Hamilton
- ~ There are pockets of poverty on the Mountain and in the East End of Hamilton

Map 3: Immigrant Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005
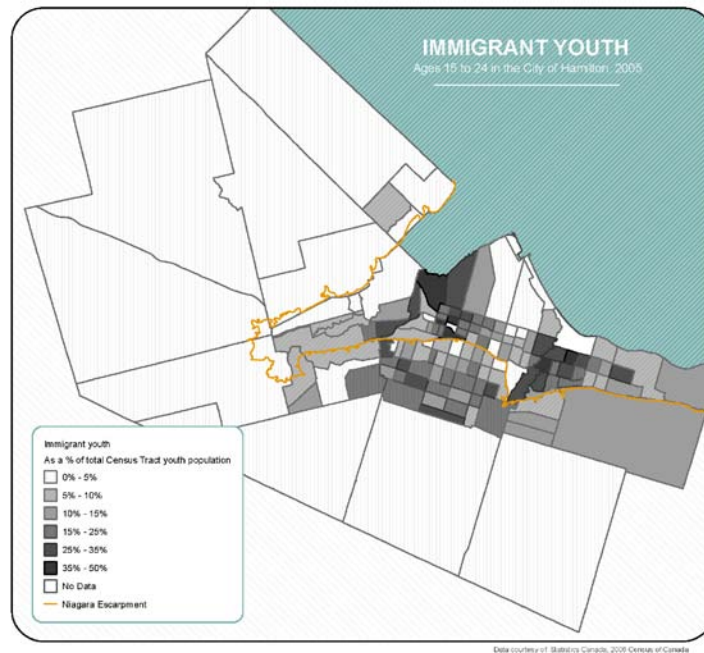
~ There is a high concentration of immigrant youth in the East End of Hamilton
~ The Mountain also has a lot of diversity in respect to immigrant youth

Map 4: Visible Minority Youth in Hamilton, 15 – 24, 2005
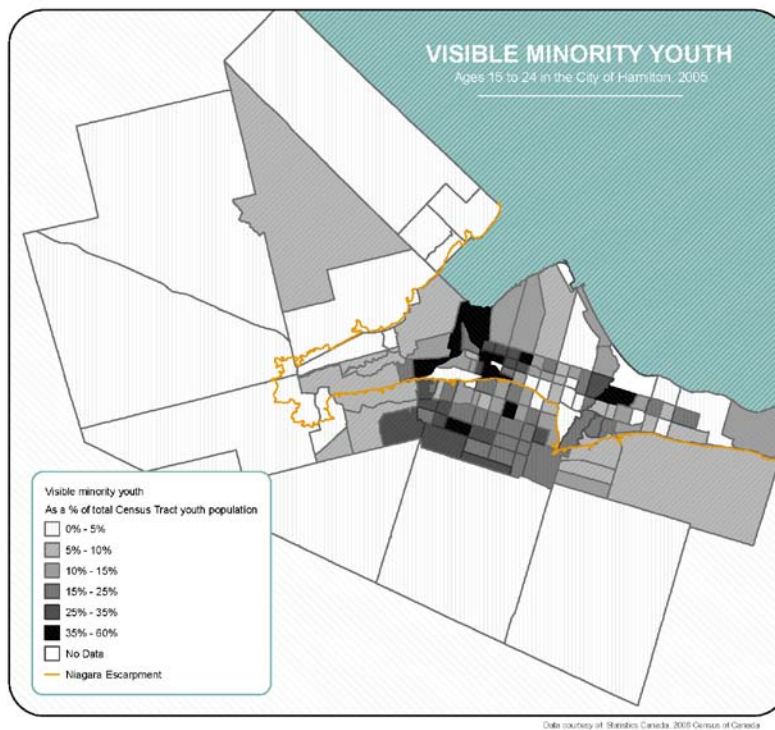
~ While there is a concentration of visible minority youth in the Downtown Core – there are neighbourhoods on the Mountain, in the East End and West End of the city that have high levels of diversity.

APPENDIX B: Foundations for Community Planning on Youth Issues

The Hamilton community has demonstrated a growing commitment to the principles of sound human services planning work. A culture of collaboration is gaining strength in our community. Clear evidence of this commitment can be seen in the recently released Framework for Human Services Planning in Hamilton Report released by the City of Hamilton. In addition, government and voluntary sector funders are calling for partnerships and collaboration on projects. Networks of organizations are enhancing their partnerships to maximize resources and practice good planning. Organizations are increasingly engaging youth and service providers are acknowledging the strengths and challenges in our growing diversity.

Three elements are crucial for moving forward on the development of effective, stable programs and policies to enhance outcomes for young people moving to independence: engaging youth in planning, practicing meaningful collaboration, and using a diversity lens when planning with and for young people. These elements of an effective community strategy are further described in this section to support program and policy planning designed to achieve results.

Engaging Youth

Youth engagement is developing and sustaining opportunities for the meaningful inclusion of young peoples' perspectives in planning and decision making. Youth can be engaged in a variety of ways – through leadership, development, civic engagement and organizing[54]. Roger Hart's *Ladder of Young People's Participation* helps us to understand the different (and the difference in value) between including youth in token ways (for example, having a young person sign off on a proposal but not be part of the full development) to youth-led, shared decisions with adults (where youth are providing the direction with the support of a caring, youth-friendly adult)[55]. For one youth, youth engagement means she can go to a meeting and feel comfortable voicing her opinion and not just thinking "okay, I'm at another meeting".

Youth engagement positively impacts youth, it positively impacts the adults who work with youth and it positively impacts the organization or service. To engage youth as part of planning discussions is critical as having a lived experience perspective increases capacity to make any new planning initiative more effective in its outcomes.

There are a number of effective engagement techniques to consider when developing a youth engagement strategy in a community or organization:

~ *Identify adult allies*. Adult allies are the people within organizations and sectors that support youth to bring their perspective and ideas to the table. They also encourage decision makers to join youth tables and help make change happen. Adult allies are adults that will respect young people, listen and partner with them in a genuine way.

~ *Create a youth friendly space*. Engage youth in places they feel comfortable. Friendly youth spaces are those where people are not rude and where youth are greeted in a friendly way. An adult ally is not necessarily someone who acts young, a youth space does not necessarily need to reflect youth culture (though, it is good if it does) – what is more important is an atmosphere of acceptance.

~ *Recruit young people*. Go to places where youth are and talk about the opportunity (schools, recreation centers, services for youth). Find young people who share diverse experiences and perspectives to make for a richer conversation.

~ *Provide Incentives*. Many young people who have an important perspective to share may face barriers in participation. Food, bus tickets and money are powerful motivators to recruit and

---

[54] Youth Engagement 101, Mike Des Jardins and Jennie Vengris, 2007
[55] Same as above

engage participants. For some youth, it is an opportunity to "save face" in front of their peers. Many adult allies do that work in a paid capacity, it is important that we extend that same respect to young people and their important capacities.

Effective Collaboration

Collaboration can be a powerful tool in planning with and for youth.   Definitions of collaboration describe problem definition, partner identification, acknowledging difference and common visions – "real collaboration is authentic working together across organizational boundaries toward common goals"[56].

Collaborative planning with youth has many benefits. Organizations that have engaged in this enhanced level of partnership recognize that it reduces duplication, decreases competition for funding, enhances problem solving, integrates services, increases program coordination, creates enhanced and systems level thinking across organizations and promotes increased sustainability. Youth would be able to access services they need in a seamless system as barriers are diminished. Additionally, gaps can be identified and in collaborative planning when a gap is identified there is a critical mass to develop possibilities to fill those gaps.

Collaboration is recognized to build strong systems of support but it is not always quick and may not be easy.   There are a few important considerations when committing to collaborative planning:

- ~ *Identify partners.* Collaborative efforts should be inclusive of all stakeholders who bring a unique perspective and have a vested interest in the particular planning topic.   Each partner needs to understand and define their role in the context of joint planning.   Additionally, each partner should be able to infuse the collaborative planning effort into their specific agency planning efforts. Collaboration does not end at the meeting.

- ~ *Balance inclusivity with size.* Smaller collaborative efforts have better success in realizing action oriented outcomes.   They include a broad range of perspectives in a way that still gets work done.

- ~ *Identify the process.* The most successful collaboration efforts will engage at the time of problem definition, charting the potential solutions and implementing those solutions[57]. This level of commitment to an issue takes time and additional communication.

- ~ *Commit to planning partnerships.* Collaboration, partnership, and coordination are often identified as requisite features of good funding proposals. These demonstrate that communities of interest are sharing information, leveraging resources and ensuring non-duplication of service. However, collaboration should not happen only in the event of a specific program initiative.   The most powerful, sustaining plans are those that are created as a routine feature of continuous community planning.

Planning with a Diversity Lens

Hamilton is an increasingly diverse community and our local youth reflect that reality. It is critical to note that there are individual and complex identities within the youth community, and even further, within the diverse communities themselves. Planning with a diversity lens is the recognition and "intentional consideration" of the difference, uniqueness, strength and need of each youth. It is about including this realization in the planning of all youth services. Planning for inclusion means paying attention to the tangible, concrete needs that people may have (for example, transportation, housing, employment) but

---

[56] Robert Harrington quoted in Non-Profit Collaboration and Mergers: Finding the Right Fit, 2004
[57] Collaboration and Community. Scott London. 2006

also considering the more abstract, but equally important, needs around feeling connected, empowered and a sense of belonging[58].

Planning with a focus on diversity has many positive benefits. It benefits youth from traditionally marginalized communities since it fosters inclusion but it also benefits the organizations, programs, and community at large.   If planning focuses on the people with the least power and the least access, it ensures that the initiative is accessible. Focusing on diversity advances the prospect of social inclusion. Social inclusion is not just about removing barriers to participation. It is a proactive planning approach that strives to create a community where everyone is able to participate, feel connected and make decisions[59]. Planning with a diversity lens is a critical factor in building social inclusion as it lends a richness of perspective, value, and input to each endeavour.

Diversity planning with a focus on social inclusion is critical in developing youth programs and policies. A few key factors in this planning include:

- ~   *Use methods that engage youth.* As described in the first section, efforts must be made to make planning processes relevant and inviting for youth.   Ensure that the planning environment is safe and youth-friendly and that activities include opportunities for fun and social engagement.

- ~   *Learn about diversity.* Learn about and respond to cultural practices, gender and sexual identity, and language or physical barriers that will have a vital impact on prospects for diverse populations.

- ~   *Be honest and transparent about power and privilege.*   Diversity planning and social inclusion is about acknowledging that power, privilege, oppression, and marginalization are real, complex factors in our society. These issues must be illuminated and challenged in the context of peoples' lived experiences[60].

- ~   *Do the research.* In order to practice sound diversity planning and inclusion, we need to know who lives in our community. Involve plans to identify and describe diverse communities of youth in Hamilton as part of the planning.

- ~   *Plan for continued involvement and action.* Too often groups of diverse youth are engaged in one-time, short-term, pilot projects. Consider how youth can continue to participate after research is generated, after funding runs out, or after an event is over.

Ten Communities of Youth in Hamilton for Planning Consideration

We have identified ten communities of youth in Hamilton who have unique identities, face unique barriers, and participate in any planning with and for youth. These groups of youth have complex experiences based on intersecting identities and various forms of societal oppression. This list is not exhaustive. The complete list would be much longer and more nuanced and complex. What follows is largely a description of the challenges and barriers, however, sound community planning and engagement should tap into their resiliencies as well. Each of these communities of young people exhibits hope, strength and creativity.

Young Women, Young Men and Transgender Youth

Gender is a complex social force in our communities. Young men, young women and transgender youth all face unique life experiences and unique challenges. Our society has very clear messages about how women and men behave, act, and interact.[61] Gender analyses often focus on the unique factors and

---

[58] Inclusive Communities. Hamilton's Centre for Civic Inclusion. 2009
[59] The Dynamics of Social Inclusion: Public Education and Aboriginal People in Canada. Terry Wotherspoon. 2002
[60] Social Inclusion, Anti-Racism and Democratic Citizenship. Anver Saloojee. 2003
[61] Trans Youth Accessing Health and Social Services. Youth Gender Action Project. 2009

challenges for women. However, young men and youth who are struggling with their gender identity or who want to transition face complex issues that need to be considered.

Youth of Colour

Young people who are visibly, ethno-racially diverse (identified by Statistics Canada as 'visible minorities') are a growing population in Hamilton. Youth of colour make up 16.9% of the total youth population in Hamilton and have a diversity of identities including (in order of prevalence) Black, South Asian, Chinese, Southeast Asian, Latin American, Arab, West Asian, Filipino and Korean. Young people of colour face discrimination, stereotyping and racism, all of which can have implications on education, employment, and self-esteem.

Immigrant and Newcomer Youth

Immigrant and newcomer youth are those young people who were not born in our community but now call it home. There is much diversity in this group – immigration status, country of origin, religious background and languages spoken all play a role in the experience of these young people. There are some challenges that are unique to this group including: conflicting identity formation forces in families and peer groups, potential language barriers, racism and stigma and mental health issues based on trauma[62]. The top three areas of origin of Hamilton's immigrant youth population in 2006 were Middle East and Asia, Europe and Africa[63]

Homeless Youth

In 2005 (our most recent count) the community estimated that at least 600 youth in Hamilton were experiencing homelessness and street-involvement. Homeless youth are characterized by family and housing instability, youth who either have housing that is very precarious, or who are absolutely homeless. Homeless youth are incredibly resilient and hopeful but they also face many complex challenges including concurrent mental health and substance use, engaging in risk-taking behaviours, stigma and judgment, lack of education and poverty[64].

Urban Aboriginal Youth

Aboriginal youth are at the top of many lists of negative statistics – lowest educational attainment, highest incarceration, high rates of suicide. For Aboriginal youth in urban centres, these factors are compounded by racism, alienation and the prevalence of gangs[65]. This current reality is based on a complex historical relationship with the Government of Canada that features discrimination and protectionism[66]. This history is relevant today and an understanding of Aboriginal youth is not complete without it. More positively, urban Aboriginal youth also have a rich cultural and spiritual tradition that is focused on healing and resilience. The urban Aboriginal community in Hamilton continues to work together to provide meaningful, culturally-centered engagement for youth.

Parenting Teens

Young parents demonstrate many strengths with a task that is demanding for anyone – parenthood. However, they also often face a complex variety of challenges that both precede and follow their pregnancies. These challenges include a history of trauma and abuse, child welfare involvement, limited positive social supports, housing instability and poverty.

---

[62] The Needs of Newcomer Youth and Emerging Best Practices to Meet Those Needs. The Joint Centre of Research on Immigration and Settlement. 2000
[63] Statistics Canada, 2006 Census
[64] Addressing the Needs of Street-Involved and Homeless Youth in Hamilton, Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton. 2005
[65] Urban Aboriginal Youth: An Action Plan for Change. Thelma Chalifoux and Janis Johnson. 2003
[66] Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: Contemporary Conflicts. James Frideres. 1998

Rural Youth

Young people who live in rural areas often get missed in local research and service planning. Our community is made up of both urban and rural areas – there are 18 Rural Settlement Areas in Hamilton[67]. Ten percent of Hamilton's youth population lives in a rural setting. While they often live in socio-economically stable families and have access to employment, there are a number of challenges that are unique to this group including isolation, lack of diversity and lack of transportation.

Youth with Disabilities

Young people who live with some form of disability have unique and complex issues. Disability is defined in Canada as "a condition or function judged to be significantly impaired relative to the usual standard of an individual or group. The term is used to refer to individual functioning, including physical impairment, sensory impairment, cognitive impairment, intellectual impairment mental illness, and various types of chronic disease."[68] Disability among youth is an important local consideration since the prevalence of Hamilton youth with disabilities is two times the national average (7.9% versus 3.9%).   Some of the challenges faced by this community include bullying, social exclusion, early school leaving and poverty.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Queer Youth

Youth and early adulthood is a time when many LGBTQ people "come out" (disclosing their sexual identity publicly). Young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and/or queer face a number of unique and complex challenges including pervasive homophobia and heterosexism, homelessness and higher than average rates of mental health issues and suicide.

Francophone Youth

According to the 2006 Census data, 9% of Hamilton's youth speak French every day. There are two different Francophone communities in Hamilton – those that have roots in Canada (especially Quebec, Eastern Ontario and Northern Ontario) and the growing population of French-speaking newcomers to Hamilton (from places like Africa and Europe). These two sets of communities may have very different needs[69].   Any current and future growth in the youth Francophone community would likely be from the newcomer and immigrant community.

The French Language Services Act from 1986 identifies Hamilton as one of 25 French Language Designated Areas in Ontario. This means that French-speaking young people can, by right, expect to be able to access services in their language[70].   While Francophone youth have higher than average rates of secondary school completion, young Francophone women have lower income levels than their male counterparts[71]. Additionally, Francophone youth have limited access to the services they can access because many services do not have the capacity to provide services in French.

---

[67] From the City of Hamilton website - hamilton.ca
[68] From the Disabled World website - disabled-world.com

[70] From the Office of Francophone Affairs website - ofa.gov.on.ca/en/flsa.html
[71] From the Ministry of the Attorney General website- attorneygeneral.jus.gov.on.ca/english/justice-ont/french_language_services/statistics/francophone_youth.asp