



## Health of Youth- Interim Report

### Youth in a Healthy Community

In addition to gender and culture, a healthy transition to adolescence and adulthood is greatly influenced by the home environment, support of significant others, school and community support and the media. Young people respond best to schools and communities that have high but achievable expectations and provide meaningful opportunities for them to participate in decisions and activities that affect their lives. Research suggests that older adolescents who have opportunities to help others, make major developmental gains themselves. Young people who are involved in leadership and vibrant communities are more likely to learn the civic and social skills they need to be fully contributing healthy adults members of the community<sup>(1)</sup>.

**20 % of Fort Erie's 2001 population are individuals aged 5-19 years**

### Health of Youth Team

The Community Health and Wellness' Health of Youth team's directive is to illuminate and interpret reliable, relevant information about the health of youth in Fort Erie, with the sole purpose of enabling decision making that will enhance/increase the likelihood of their healthy and safe development. The team's intent is to begin to gather the data that will allow us to describe "where we are", which will then provide direction as to "where we go from here".

### • Principle # 1 - Child Development

(Adapted from the Health of Canada's Children, a CICH Profile)

#### ➤ **Recognize sensitive points in the development of children:**

There are sensitive points in the development of children where risks may arise; opportunities may appear or interventions may be particularly effective. The risks, opportunities, and interventions will help or hinder children and youth, both in the present and in the future.

#### ➤ **Adopt a population-based approach that clearly recognizes the complexity and diversity of young people's lives:**

This approach includes everyone and has the potential to reach all children, youths, and families and still direct attention towards the most vulnerable, the most at-risk.

#### ➤ **Broadly define health to include both positive and negative indicators:**

Negative indicators report on how poorly children and youth are doing (e.g. number of children injured each year). Positive indicators look at how well children are doing (e.g. number of children, aged 5 or 6 years, are ready to learn). In building a well-rounded understanding of the health of children and youth, both negative and positive indicators are needed.

#### ➤ **Focus on critical issues:**

Critical issues drive policy development and decision-making; paying enough attention to the most vulnerable youth.





common denominator in how we frame our programs and services (asset building) we are able to develop an evaluation approach that helps us continue to improve, build, and leverage what we are doing in terms of gathering support, particularly from government and philanthropic funding.

**Fort Erie’s Youth**

The following is a ‘snapshot’ of the current status of Fort Erie’s youth:

1. Strong and diverse athletic programs for up to age 15
2. CARING and SAFE schools and neighbourhoods
3. High teen pregnancy rate: 24.88 out of 1000 live births in Fort Erie were in the age group of 15-19 years<sup>(2)</sup>
4. Large population of teens attending schools outside Fort Erie, e.g. Lakeshore (535 Fort Erie students attending Lakeshore, 2003)
5. Large population of lone parent families (16% of Fort Erie’s families)/low income families (2001 statistics available after May 13/03)
6. Significant portion of dedicated facilities and funds directed toward youth development and programs; many, however, work in isolation of each other
7. Few opportunities for unstructured time, e.g. skateboard park in Black Creek
8. Many people leave the community following high school and do not return

**Team Recommendations**

**1) Key Informant Interviews**

It is critical that the planned key informant interviews for this team be completed in

the near future as they will address many of the gaps/questions that surfaced regarding the level and quality of youth services and their impact on the health of youth. Questions will be framed to ask key community individuals that deal with the youth sector and to ask youth themselves, issues such as:

- transportation and its impact on accessing youth programs and recreation
- sources for youth to access direction regarding future planning (e.g. career); augmenting school-based Guidance programs
- accessing resources to enable the practicing of healthy behaviours e.g. sexual/reproductive health, sports health
- scope and contributing factors to youth being homeless in Fort Erie
- the impact on the community of the phenomenon of youth moving out of the community every day

**2) Centralized Information Source/Communication Medium**

Team members expressed concern that Fort Erie’s youth and many community members that are involved with youth do not always know the scope of available programs/opportunities in Fort Erie. Additionally, many facilitators of events are encountering barriers in communicating/promoting the existence of their event(s) and opportunities. The Team proposes that there is a need for an effective communication medium(s) whereby an information link between the youth of Fort Erie and other community youth coordinators of events is facilitated and enabled; a centralized information source or community calendar per se. Information Niagara’s soon-to-be “2-1-1”

