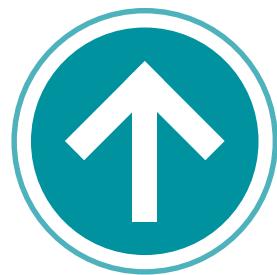




A Strategic Framework to  
Help Ontario's Youth Succeed



# Stepping Up



## **2014 Updates**

- i. Inventory of provincial programs and services for youth
- ii. Revision to Profile of Youth Wellbeing indicator  
“youth have used any illicit drug”
- iii. Addition of “updated 2014” to back cover

# Message from the Minister of Children and Youth Services

Our government wants Ontario's children and youth to thrive. We want them to be safe, healthy and happy, to succeed in school and to have the opportunities they need to grow into responsible, contributing adults.

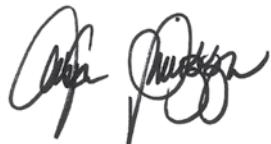
Our programs and services support children and youth to overcome mental health challenges, escape poverty, avoid conflict with the law, get jobs and successfully transition to adulthood.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, we know there is always more that can be done. That is why we are launching *Stepping Up – A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed*. It is a first-of-its-kind roadmap for Ontario that will help our government, and our partners, step up and do more.

*Stepping Up* strengthens our government's commitment to young people, identifies our priorities and will guide our decision-making. The development of *Stepping Up* is an excellent example of the benefits of collaboration. It builds on past consultations with youth and partners through the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence, *Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development and Ontario's Youth Action Plan*. It also reflects input from 18 provincial ministries, the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities, Dr. Alvin Curling, my Strategic Advisor on Youth Opportunities and co-author of the *Review of the Roots of Youth Violence report*, and partners in the youth-serving sector, including young people themselves.

*Stepping Up* is also a call for co-operation and action in all our communities for all of us to come together and work towards success. The report has the young person at its centre. It identifies 20 evidence-based outcomes and related indicators across seven themes that are important to Ontario's youth. To keep our focus on enhancing the well-being of our young people we will track these outcomes and indicators every year, and we will report annually on our collective progress.

I want to thank everyone who contributed toward this important framework. Together, we can ensure young people in our province get the support and opportunities they need to reach their full potential. The future of our province depends on it.



**Teresa Piruzza**  
Minister of Children and Youth Services

# Message from the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities

In March 2013, the Government of Ontario established the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities to engage youth, young professionals and community partners to ensure that young people have the tools they need to succeed.

The Council is made up of a dynamic group of youth and young professionals from a diverse range of cultures, communities and backgrounds. We work to ensure that programs and supports for youth reflect the needs of young people across the province. Although it is difficult to be fully reflective of the wants, needs and expectations of the voices of young people and their communities, we work extremely hard to connect with, listen to, work with and learn from Ontario's youth.

When we were asked by the government to review *Stepping Up — A Strategic Framework to Help Youth Succeed*, we did so carefully and thoroughly. We recognize the importance of this document and we believe that it can be a document that provides leadership to build a better Ontario for young people. The Council believes that this framework must inspire action – as it speaks to the realities that young people are facing in their communities. *Stepping Up* should be used a conduit for the transformation of how the province delivers the services and supports that make a difference for youth and their families.

The Council is very pleased with this framework and we feel that it reflects our insight and advice. In developing *Stepping Up*, the government is taking an important step to help youth succeed. By identifying the outcomes that matter to youth in Ontario today, the government has clearly outlined areas where young people are thriving and areas where more needs to be done.

The Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities feels strongly that for this important framework to have the desired impact, all partners must also step up to help youth be the best they can be. We invite community partners, young professionals and youth across the province to use *Stepping Up* as a roadmap to create opportunities to help all youth succeed.

We are all involved in supporting success for all our young people. The Council looks forward to walking the journey with you.



**Lekan Olawoye, Chair**  
Premier's Council on  
Youth Opportunities



**Chelsea Edwards, Vice-chair**  
Premier's Council on  
Youth Opportunities

# Table of Contents



---

PG 4	Welcome to Stepping Up
PG 10	Who are Ontario's Young People?
PG 15	Who is Involved in Supporting Young People in Ontario?
PG 18	Stepping Up: Framework Components
PG 23	A Sustained Commitment to Supporting Ontario's Youth

---

PG 25	Health & Wellness
PG 35	Strong, Supportive Friends & Families
PG 45	Education, Training & Apprenticeships
PG 55	Employment & Entrepreneurship
PG 65	Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety
PG 75	Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership
PG 85	Coordinated & Youth Friendly Communities

---

PG 93	A Sustained Commitment
PG 93	Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing
PG 98	Cross-Cutting Actions
PG 106	Moving Forward: Improving Outcomes for Ontario's Youth, Together
PG 109	Endnotes

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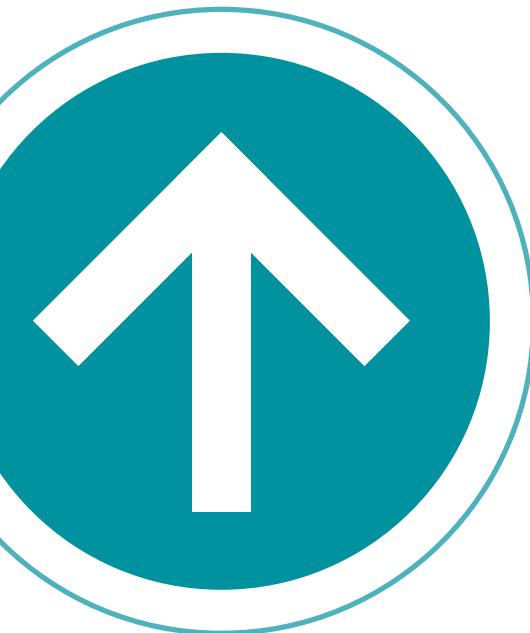
# Welcome to Stepping Up

**S**tepping Up establishes a strategic framework to help guide, focus and maximize our collaborative actions to support young people.

At its core is a set of 20 outcomes that can help us – service providers, foundations, community groups, governments, young leaders and families – better align our work with what research and youth themselves say is important for their success. It is a basis for our sustained, collective action in support of Ontario's young people.

This strategic framework defines what we believe matters most to our young people. It describes what we are already doing to support them and what we can accomplish by working better together. It does this by marshalling Ontario's research, data and programs from across 18 ministries and lessons learned from youth and community engagement to establish an overall framework to help youth succeed.

Stepping Up will help us to better align Ontario's efforts towards the needs of youth, inspire others to action and support us all to work better together under a common vision:



Together, we will support all young people to become healthy, safe, hopeful, engaged, educated and contributing members of their communities and our province.

# Why a Strategic Framework?

There are many individuals, organizations and communities involved in supporting youth in Ontario and it is easy for their work to become disconnected from each other.

Using this framework as a foundation, the Government of Ontario and its partners will broaden our collective understanding of youth. Our aim is to bolster the efforts of the many existing strategies, systems, agencies, communities, businesses and individuals who are already doing so much to make Ontario a great place to be a young person.

We want to use this strategic framework to establish a common lens for future discussion and cooperation, working together to accomplish things that are bigger than any one of us can do alone. Stepping Up provides a guide for decision-making, program planning and partnerships going forward. It will help us to better understand and monitor how Ontario's youth are doing over time. We are committed to supporting young people to thrive.

**When young Ontarians succeed, Ontario succeeds:** Young Ontarians between 12 and 25 years of age make up nearly a fifth of our population.<sup>2</sup> Educated, healthy, creative and resilient young people are critical to support the economic and social future of our province. We already know how important it is to invest in youth. Wiser, more informed investment choices in youth services will lead to a stronger overall economy and thriving society. By supporting positive youth development today, we are minimizing costs to our health care, justice, child protection and social assistance systems in the future.

**All young people have assets to be nurtured:** We know that some youth may be more vulnerable to experiencing multiple barriers and challenges in their lives. These include racialized youth, newcomer youth, Aboriginal youth, youth with disabilities or special needs, youth in and leaving care, francophone youth, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer (LGBTTQ) youth, youth living in rural and remote communities, youth from low-income families and youth in conflict with the law. It is in our collective best interest — and our responsibility — to provide these young people with every opportunity to succeed and fulfil their potential to contribute to their communities.



**Defining Youth.** It is important to note that the term "youth" may be defined and used differently across different settings.

For the purposes of this framework, "youth" refers to young people between **12 and 25 years**. Research has shown this to be a distinct, critical period of human development, where young people experience internal cognitive, emotional, social and physical developmental changes and establish new external roles, relationships and responsibilities.<sup>1</sup>

Although Stepping Up incorporates this broad definition of Ontario's youth, limited availability of data has required use of some statistics and research in this framework that focus on different age ranges and definitions of youth.



**Ontario youth need all hands on deck:** As young people transition through the stages of adolescence and early adulthood, they will connect with many different people, programs, organizations and systems – from teachers to mall security guards to health clinics. All of these interactions matter. Supporting young people to reach their full potential requires positive contributions across sectors and communities.

**We have a strong foundation to build on:** Across Ontario, there are many strong and dedicated individuals, programs, collaboratives and organizations that contribute positively to the lives of youth. Working together, we can further maximize these efforts. In addition, research on youth development has expanded in the last decade. New scientific evidence on adolescent brain development, for example, has changed our understanding of how youth process information and why they take risks.<sup>3</sup> These insights help us make better decisions on how, where and when to support youth to be their best.

## How did we get here?

**Stepping Up is part of Ontario’s ongoing work to support collaboration on positive youth outcomes. It draws on discussions with youth and our knowledge about youth development, along with the expertise of hundreds of dedicated organizations and community partners across Ontario who are making positive changes in the lives of young people every day.**

Stepping Up builds on Ontario’s past experience supporting early childhood development through the Best Start Strategy. It responds to recommendations from the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence report and continues the important work outlined in Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development and Ontario’s Youth Action Plan.

### The Review of the Roots of Youth Violence

Released in 2008, the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence report is a guiding document that provides information about the complex and often interrelated roots of violence involving youth. These include poverty, health and family issues, racism, and issues in the education and justice systems. More than 750 individuals were consulted in the development of the review, including community leaders, government representatives and youth. Stepping Up responds to the recommendation included in the review to develop “a comprehensive youth policy framework” for Ontario to provide direction for youth programming and “align programs to meet common goals.”<sup>4</sup>

## Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development

We know that when we understand how youth develop, we can provide supports and services that meet their needs. That's why the Government of Ontario created Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development. Released in June 2012, Stepping Stones was created in broad consultation with researchers, youth, community leaders and service providers. Stepping Stones provides a detailed look at the predictable stages of adolescence and young adulthood across the cognitive, emotional, social and physical domains of development, and the interrelated and interdependent nature of human growth in these domains (see figure 1). Stepping Stones describes what leading research and youth say about positive youth development, including how experiences during adolescence can shape future wellbeing.

**Stepping Stones describes how youth develop and the ways that individuals can support them. Stepping Up builds on this resource to identify the outcomes that matter most and how we can work together at all levels to ensure that young people thrive.**

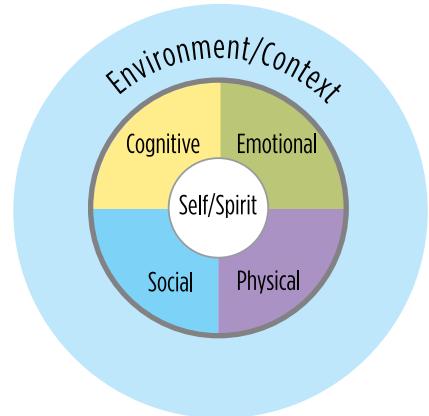
## Ontario's Youth Action Plan

Ontario's Youth Action Plan was released in August 2012 in response to gun violence in Toronto. It focuses on supporting young people living in underserved and disadvantaged communities to help them build their skills through outreach and enable them to positively contribute to their communities. It incorporates and responds to the feedback we received from youth and their families, community leaders, organizations that serve and support youth and community partners over a 30-day consultation period. Ontario's Youth Action Plan builds on investments and supports for youth originally developed through the 2006 Youth Opportunities Strategy.

## Ontario Youth Program Review

The government reviewed Ontario's portfolio of youth-serving programs, as a direct result of Ontario's Youth Action Plan. Completed in December 2012, the review looked at a cross-section of youth programs in Ontario to determine whether the government is doing the right things, delivering youth programs in the right ways, and serving the right young people. The review showed that Ontario's current portfolio of youth-serving programs goes a long way in supporting young people to succeed, and that there are also opportunities for improvements – such as increasing program capacity to serve diverse youth and increasing opportunities for youth engagement. The insights and lessons learned from the review are reflected in Stepping Up and will guide our efforts going forward.

**Figure 1:**



**Figure 1. Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development depicts the cognitive, emotional, social and physical domains of youth development as a circle which demonstrates that these domains are interconnected and that both context and a person's sense of self matter.**

## → Working across government.

The development of Stepping Up was a collaborative effort. Representatives from 18 ministries across the provincial government came together to lead the Ontario youth program review, to discuss the outcomes that are most important to Ontario's young people, and identify our priorities going forward. This is the first time such a comprehensive group has worked in partnership and committed to discussing the government's portfolio of youth programs in this way.

## Listening to Youth and Adult Allies

Stepping Up incorporates the voices of young people, service providers, researchers and other experts from the following recent initiatives:

- Through the development of Stepping Stones, we heard the perspectives of over 600 young people from across Ontario, including 25 young leaders who participated on a Youth Development Committee. This included engagement with Aboriginal youth through the [Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres](#) and the [Ontario First Nations Young People's Council](#). We also heard from researchers and experts on youth development.
- Through the [Youth Leaving Care Hearings and the Youth Leaving Care Working Group](#), we have heard from hundreds of youth with experience in care.
- Through the development of Ontario's Youth Action Plan, we heard from youth and their families, community leaders, organizations, and representatives of education, media, social service, business and justice.

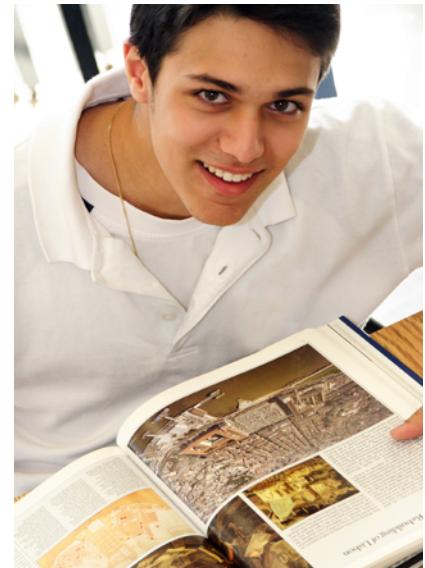
We have continued to hear from these voices, amplified by Dr. Alvin Curling, Strategic Advisor to the Minister of Children and Youth Services. Dr. Curling, a former MPP and Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, was one of the co-authors of the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence report and is an expert on the causes of violence among young people. Since his appointment as Strategic Advisor, Dr. Curling has met with many different individuals and groups in diverse communities to hear about the issues that matter most to Ontario's youth and their families.

In addition, Ontario has also established a new, permanent [Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities](#). The Premier's Council, announced in early 2013, provides a permanent voice for youth and young professionals on matters important to youth across Ontario. The initial members of the Premier's Council include representatives from diverse communities with diverse experiences. These Council members provided advice to support the development of Stepping Up to ensure it reflected youth perspectives from their communities.

## A Strong Provincial Foundation.

The following major provincial strategies and initiatives directly complement Stepping Up and have also shaped its development:

- [A Shared Responsibility: Ontario's Framework for Child and Youth Mental Health](#)
- [The Accent on Youth Strategy](#)
- [The Aboriginal Children and Youth Strategy](#)
- [The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario](#)
- [The Early Learning Framework / Best Start](#)
- Employment and Training Services Integration
- [The Foundations for a Healthy School Framework](#)
- [The Jobs and Prosperity Council](#)
- [The Long-Term Affordable Housing Strategy](#)
- [Moving on Mental Health](#)
- [Ontario Crime Prevention Strategy](#)
- [Ontario Immigration Strategy](#)
- [Ontario Education Curriculum](#)
- [Ontario First Nation, Métis and Inuit Education Policy Framework](#)
- [Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy](#)
- [Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care](#)
- [Ontario's Action Plan For Healthy Eating And Active Living](#)
- [Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#)
- [Ontario's New Approach to Aboriginal Affairs](#)
- [Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#)
- [Ontario's Social Innovation Agenda](#)
- [Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health and Addictions Strategy](#)
- [No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy](#)
- [Postsecondary Education Transformation](#)
- [The Safe Schools Strategy / Comprehensive Action Plan for Accepting Schools](#)
- [The Smoke Free Ontario Strategy](#)
- [The Student Success Strategy / Learning to 18](#)
- [Transformation of youth justice services in Ontario](#)
- [The Youth Leaving Care Strategy](#)





# Who are Ontario's Young People?



dolescence is recognized as a distinct developmental stage that occurs between childhood and early adulthood.

There are approximately 2.47 million young people between 12 and 25 years living in Ontario.<sup>5</sup> This represents 18.3 per cent of our province's overall population.

**There are many characteristics that distinguish Ontario's youth today. Broadly, our young people are:**

**An ever more important share of Ontario's population:** The proportion of young people in Ontario is declining. By 2036, youth aged 12 to 25 will make up 16 per cent of the population. Indeed, the share of Ontario's working age population aged 15 to 64 is shrinking (from 69.3 per cent in 2013 to 60.4 per cent in 2036). These trends mean that Ontario's prosperity rests on the shoulders of a smaller share of the population.<sup>6</sup>

**Well-educated:** Ontario youth have high high-school completion rates<sup>7</sup> and very high postsecondary graduation rates – the highest among the 30 developed countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.<sup>8</sup> Our young people also have strong skills in emerging fields such as technology, and social enterprise.



Youth aged 13 to 24 who identify as South Asian, Chinese, and African-Canadian represent the largest proportions of visible minority youth.<sup>11</sup>

**Culturally and geographically diverse:** Ontario is a large province that is home to one of the most multicultural and diverse populations in the world. More than one million of the province's young people 24 years and under – and nearly 26 per cent of youth aged 13 to 24 – belong to a visible minority group.<sup>9</sup> Approximately 19 per cent of youth aged 15 to 24 in Ontario are immigrants and 5.7 per cent have just arrived in Canada in the past five years.<sup>10</sup>

Young Ontarians also live in diverse communities across the province – including major cities, small towns, on reserves and in remote regions.

**Technologically connected:** The way young people spend their time and connect using technology and social media is changing the way they learn and process information, the nature of the relationships they have with friends and the ways in which they participate and express their opinions.

**Looking for ways to be engaged:** We know young people want to participate in decisions that will impact their lives. Overall, Ontarians aged 15 to 24 have higher rates of participation in community, cultural, recreational or school-related organizations and activities than the rest of the population.<sup>15</sup>

In 2010, 58 per cent of Ontario's youth aged 15 to 24 participated in volunteer activities, each contributing an average of 167 volunteer hours (that is an average of 127 hours more than the province's high school graduation requirement).<sup>16</sup> At the same time, we know that there are many youth in Ontario who are disengaged from their communities. These youth may face barriers to participation or may not feel that there are enough opportunities that relate to their interests.

**Preparing for challenging careers:** Today's youth are likely to work many jobs in their lifetime and even have multiple careers. Increasingly, youth are developing a wider set of interpersonal and creative skills to help them succeed in the modern workplace and drive the economy.<sup>17</sup>

**Facing health and wellness issues:** Research suggests that today's young people will not necessarily be healthier than their parents. Childhood obesity rates for Canadian children between two and 17 years have increased from 15 per cent in 1979 to 26 per cent in 2004.<sup>20</sup> Approximately one in five of Ontario's children and youth experience mental health concerns.<sup>21</sup>

**Taking longer to gain independence:** Research shows that, on average, the transition to adulthood has become longer and more complex than for previous generations. Many Ontario youth are staying in school longer, living at home for prolonged periods, and taking longer to marry and gain economic independence.<sup>22</sup> For some youth, these choices may have a cultural dimension.

**Living in busy families:** Changes in family structure over the past 30 years have impacted the ways that young people interact with their parents, siblings and extended families in the home. For example, single-parent families are on the rise. Families today lead busy lives, often with both parents working outside the home. For many families, finding time in their schedules to spend together is difficult.

Ninety-eight per cent of Canadian youth access the Internet and have email accounts.<sup>12</sup> Sixty-four per cent of Ontario female students, and fifty-three per cent of male students, in grades 9-10 report spending at least two hours every day chatting on-line.<sup>13</sup> Seventy percent of 12 to 29 year olds report spending time on social networking websites.<sup>14</sup>

Youth were hard hit in the recent economic downturn. Almost 45 per cent of all Ontario job losses from the 2008-2009 recession came from youth.<sup>18</sup> Today, Ontario's youth employment remains 96,600 jobs below the pre-recession peak in 2007 and the youth unemployment rate, at 16.9 per cent, remains considerably higher than in the pre-recession years.<sup>19</sup>

In 2011, 42.3 per cent of young Canadians aged 20 to 29 lived with their parents, compared to 26.9 per cent nearly two decades ago.<sup>23</sup>

Over the past 25 years, the number of one-parent families has steadily increased to 16.3 per cent of Canadian families in 2011.<sup>24</sup> Families are also reporting spending less time together. On a typical day in 2005, 34.8 per cent of teenagers aged 15 to 17 shared a meal with their parents, a significant drop from 63.7 per cent in 1992.<sup>25</sup>



# Understanding the Needs of All Youth

The majority of Ontario's young people are thriving. At the same, we know that many youth in Ontario face multiple barriers and need some help to reach their full potential. We recognize that some groups of youth have unique circumstances, challenges and needs and we want to acknowledge the individual strengths and voice they bring to this framework. These youth may need more targeted supports and opportunities to ensure they are able to succeed.

→ Reflecting a holistic perspective of youth, we want to acknowledge that some of Ontario's most vulnerable youth belong to more than one of the groups discussed here – and this can result in complex challenges and identities. In addition, we also know that personal characteristics – such as gender – can impact a young person's experiences across these areas.

**Racialized youth:** We know that racialized youth face challenges with marginalization, racism, employment barriers, education setbacks, and social and cultural isolation that can have a negative impact on their development. Racialized youth in Ontario have lower rates of employment and higher rates of poverty than the rest of the population.<sup>26</sup> They also face risks of racial profiling and discrimination in their daily lives, which can lead to disengagement and mistrust of public institutions.<sup>27</sup> We know that addressing racism and improving access to culturally-appropriate services and programs can often provide support to these youth.

→ As the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence states, “Racialized groups are highly diverse, and the manifestations of racism affect them differently... Racism strikes at the core of self-identity, eats away the heart and casts a shadow on the soul. It is cruel and hurtful and alienating. It makes real all doubts about getting a fair chance in this society. It is a serious obstacle imposed for a reason the victim has no control over and can do nothing about.”<sup>28</sup>

**Newcomer youth:** The needs and life experiences of immigrant, refugee and first generation youth are unique as they adapt to a new culture and environment in Canada. Youth who are new to Canada may speak English as a second language, may have past experiences with trauma, and may have extra responsibilities at home as they are often relied on to support their parents in navigating systems and services in their communities. Studies have also found that newcomers are more likely to experience discrimination when seeking employment.<sup>29</sup> Further, we know that “undocumented” youth (youth without immigration status) living in Ontario are especially vulnerable and are without access to many of the services needed to protect health and wellbeing.<sup>30</sup>

**Aboriginal youth:** There is great diversity among Aboriginal peoples in Ontario – including First Nations living on and off-reserve, Métis, Inuit, and urban Aboriginal populations – each having a distinct culture, history, and experiences. Aboriginal young people represent the largest and fastest growing population of youth across Canada. Almost half of the Aboriginal population in Ontario (43 per cent) is under age 24, compared to one-third (32 per cent) of the non-Aboriginal population.<sup>31</sup>

We know that some Aboriginal youth in Ontario face complex challenges relating to issues such as poverty, housing, and barriers to education and employment. Many youth and families also face social issues often resulting from the inter-generational effects of residential schools, such as cultural disconnection, mental health issues and addictions, and parenting challenges. We also know that many Aboriginal youth are looking towards a positive future for their children and grandchildren. Services and programs that are culturally based and holistic in approach are important to ensuring these youth can feel supported and connected. Aboriginal youth are working to support local social and economic growth, and want to lead their communities into a bright and successful future.<sup>32</sup>

**Youth with disabilities or special needs:** Many young people in Ontario are living with disabilities and special needs – including those who have physical or developmental disabilities, those with chronic conditions, those with a learning disorder and those who have difficulty seeing, hearing or speaking.<sup>33</sup>

We know that youth living with disabilities or special needs in Ontario have a lot to offer their communities. However, we also know that they face barriers and challenges relating to accessibility and social inclusion. These young people may be more vulnerable to abuse, living in poor housing, living below the poverty line, being bullied, and being unemployed. Gaining access to disability friendly environments plays an important role in supporting youth with disabilities or special needs to thrive.

**Youth in and leaving care:** In 2012, more than 8,300 children and youth were living in care in Ontario. Research shows that youth leaving care face more challenges in reaching the milestones of positive development, including completing education and gaining employment.<sup>37,38,39</sup> We know that some groups of young people are over-represented in the child welfare system, including Aboriginal youth. Approximately 68 per cent of children and youth in care are diagnosed as special needs and 93 per cent have been noted to have behavioural difficulties.<sup>40</sup> Studies have shown that the challenges that youth in care face have a profound impact on their ability to succeed in school (only 42 per cent of youth in care graduate from school by the age of 20).<sup>41</sup>

**LGBTQQ youth:** Ontario is home to many lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirit and queer young people (LGBTQQ) who have important perspectives to offer their communities. We know that LGBTQQ youth are more likely to experience discrimination, verbal assault and physical violence than their peers. We also know that LGBTQQ youth are more likely to face challenges with mental health, substance abuse and homelessness.

→ Ontario is developing a multi-year Aboriginal Children and Youth Strategy to transform the way services are delivered to children and youth. The strategy is being developed through engagement with First Nations, Métis, Inuit and urban Aboriginal partners. The strategy will seek to better meet the needs of Aboriginal children and youth by building community-driven, integrated and culturally appropriate supports. Recommendations from the [Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare](#) and former Ontario Aboriginal Advisor to the Minister of Children and Youth Services, John Beauchage, will inform the development of the strategy.

→ In 2006, 3.8 per cent of children and youth between 0 and 14 years of age in Ontario were reported as living with a disability that limited their daily activities.<sup>34</sup> Approximately 24 per cent of young people aged 5 to 14 with a disability are reported as having a chronic condition, 22 per cent have a learning disability, and about 14 per cent have a speech disorder.<sup>35</sup>

→ In July 2012, the Youth Leaving Care Working Group was created by the Minister of Children and Youth Services and the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The Working Group was given the mandate to develop an action plan for improving the Ontario child welfare system. The plan, “[Blueprint for Fundamental Change](#),” was released in January 2013.



**Francophone youth:** One in four francophones in Ontario are under the age of 25. Almost one in two young Franco-Ontarians live in Eastern Ontario, close to the Quebec border.<sup>42</sup> Young francophone Ontarians have expressed that they find it challenging to speak French in many situations, and that movies, television, music and the Internet can impact their language choices.<sup>43</sup> Maintaining a francophone identity can be especially challenging as youth leave home for school and as they enter the workforce.<sup>44</sup>

**Youth living in rural and remote communities:** In 2006, 14 per cent of Ontarians under 25 years of age lived in rural areas.<sup>45</sup> Rural and remote youth can face additional difficulties in accessing services, education, training and activities such as recreation due to distance and few public transportation options.<sup>46</sup> In addition, many of Ontario's rural and remote young people face the challenging decision to leave home and move to more urban areas of Ontario to seek opportunities for school and work.<sup>47</sup>

**Youth living in poverty:** In 2009, households where young people under 25 are the major income earner have the second highest rates of poverty in Canada (33.8 per cent).<sup>48</sup> In 2010, 13.8 per cent of all Ontario young people were living below the fixed Low Income Measure.<sup>49</sup> Evidence shows that young people living in poverty are at an increased risk for a wide range of physical, behavioural and emotional problems. The chronic stress associated with living in poverty can also adversely impact a young person's memory, concentration and ability to learn.<sup>50</sup> In a time when most young people are acquiring the skills and experiences needed for a healthy and stable future, a young person living in poverty is focused on meeting their day-to-day needs. The rising cost of basic needs, such as shelter, can make it almost impossible for many young people to save for things like tuition or pay down debt.

**Youth in conflict with the law:** Evidence shows that young people who have been in conflict with the law face a number of barriers and challenges as they age. Since the Youth Criminal Justice Act came into force in 2004, fewer young Ontarians are being brought into custody – but those that are tend to be the most high-risk young people. In addition, some groups of young people are over-represented in the youth justice system, including Aboriginal youth and African-Canadian youth. Youth who are or have been in custody tend to have poorer outcomes in areas such as education and employment. Recognizing the challenges these youth face can help us to better support them to live up to their potential.

# Who is Involved in Supporting Young People in Ontario?

**E**nsuring that Ontario's young people have what they need to succeed involves the efforts of many individuals, groups and organizations.

Programs, services and supports for youth currently available in Ontario are spread over a wide range of service sectors (such as education, justice, recreation, and private business) that each have different mandates and areas of focus.

As a result of the breadth and diversity of these sectors, we know that many programs and services for youth are developed independently with limited cross-sector collaboration. This means that many of Ontario's youth services are not as effective or efficient as they could be. Several recent reports<sup>51,52</sup> have argued that many youth-oriented services lack sustainability and that duplication, fragmentation and gaps persist.

Stepping Up has been developed to help break down these barriers across youth services by proposing an aligned and common purpose for those involved in supporting youth to succeed. This includes:

**The Government of Ontario:** The Ontario government provides many services that affect the daily lives of young people, such as education, health services, child welfare and services for youth with disabilities or special needs and their families. The government funds more than 150 programs and initiatives across 18 ministries that impact youth in some way. These services:



- Support academic achievement and create experiential learning experiences
- Address bullying and promote healthy relationships
- Encourage civic participation and community involvement
- Provide recreation opportunities and encourage healthy living
- Prevent youth violence and help youth feel safe in their communities
- Provide affordable housing and income support to those that need it
- Create opportunities for mentorship and connect youth to available services
- Prepare youth for employment and connect them to jobs and internships
- Provide technical skills and experience in occupations and trades
- Provide health care services and nutritional supports
- Identify, assess and support mental health and wellbeing
- Provide support for youth with disabilities or special needs

**Families:** Families – including blended families, foster families, extended families and chosen families – provide the basic necessities for youth to thrive. They play a critical role in creating a safe and supportive space for youth to develop. Families help youth to create and achieve their goals – beginning in childhood and continuing into adulthood. For youth in care, an extended network of guardians and caregivers may have the responsibility of meeting their needs and nurturing them to reach their full potential. The foundational support of families and caregivers is fundamental to positive youth development.

**Other levels of government:** Federal, municipal and regional governments and First Nations bands provide a range of important services and supports to youth, from immigration, affordable housing and employment supports to funding for public transit, libraries and recreation programming. These governments play extremely important roles in ensuring that services and supports for young people are available.



The [Laidlaw Foundation](#) invests in innovative ideas that support youth in becoming healthy, creative and fully contributing citizens. The foundation believes this vision can be achieved through youth and civic engagement, as well as the fostering of a diverse and socially inclusive society.<sup>53</sup>

**Foundations and philanthropic organizations:** Ontario is home to many private and community foundations and philanthropic organizations that invest in providing young people with a range of opportunities, programs and services. These investments can range from building safe youth recreational spaces to supporting aspiring young filmmakers. Many youth maintain long-term relationships with foundations and philanthropic organizations through volunteerism or local community initiatives.

**Public agencies and boards:** Ontario's publicly funded agencies — including school boards, children's aid societies and police services — have a big impact on the experiences of all youth in Ontario. These agencies are directly accountable to government and deliver some of the most important services in the lives of young people.

**Charities and community organizations:** Charities, not-for-profit agencies and youth-led local community organizations provide young people with a multitude of services, supports and activities — from local gyms to mental health services or education supports. Some are large, sophisticated charities that receive funding from multiple foundations and government ministries. Others are smaller organizations which may operate with minimal resources and in response to a direct need.

**Faith-based and cultural groups:** Faith-based and cultural groups play an important role in supporting young people to establish their identities and develop relationships outside of the home and school. Young Ontarians represent a wide variety of spiritual and cultural backgrounds and many see faith groups and cultural communities as important in their lives.

**Sport clubs, arts-based groups and other community associations:** When youth are able to participate in sports, arts, and other community activities, they have important opportunities to build skills, gain confidence and make connections to their communities. Many of Ontario's young people look to coaches, counsellors and peers for support and guidance.

**The private sector:** Many private businesses provide youth with employment and mentorship opportunities and funding for youth programs. They also provide important services that facilitate positive developmental outcomes. Many businesses play a direct role in supporting youth through partnerships with government or charities. Some promote youth employment, provide youth mentorship programs, or support youth with disabilities or special needs to participate in the workplace.

**Individual youth allies:** When young people are asked who they see as their allies, they are likely to talk about individual people who they know in their communities, like mentors, peers and community leaders. Professionals and front-line workers such as teachers, coaches, counsellors and outreach workers play an extremely important role in supporting young people to develop successfully into adulthood. Any individual can become a youth ally. It is about building trusting relationships with young people and providing space for them to flourish and grow.



# Stepping Up: Framework Components

**S**tepping Up is a strategic framework that outlines a common vision, guiding principles, themes and priority outcomes that have been developed to guide work in support of Ontario youth.

## Common Vision:

Stepping Up presents a strengthened, sustained commitment from the provincial government to support the success of all Ontario youth. Our vision is that:

**Together, we will support all young people to become healthy, safe, hopeful, engaged, educated and contributing members of their communities and our province.**

In order to achieve this vision, Stepping Up was developed to provide a platform so all those who are involved in supporting youth can come together through a common, overall approach. Although our specific individual contributions to supporting youth development may vary, we all have a role to play in ensuring that young Ontarians have the opportunities and skills they need to thrive.

Stepping Up reflects a holistic and ecological view of youth that considers the role individuals, communities, society and different systems and sectors play in youth wellbeing. It captures the many dimensions of youth development. In this way, Stepping Up is a first-of-its-kind framework for Ontario.

### Guiding Principles:

With this in mind, the following seven aspirational principles – grounded in positive youth development – were selected to guide the development of Stepping Up. Through consultation across government, and with young people and youth service providers, these principles have been proposed in order to provide a shared approach for our ongoing work together to improve youth outcomes.

They will influence the ways in which the Government of Ontario develops policies, designs programs and uses data relating to youth.

1. **A Positive, Asset-Based View of Youth:** The social, emotional, physical and cognitive competencies, along with the individual “self” or “spirit” that young people develop during the stages of adolescence and early adulthood prepare them for future wellbeing. We need to nurture these assets to ensure our collective success in the future.
2. **Targeted Support for Those Who Need It:** As a priority, we will focus on youth who need help and support to overcome the barriers and challenges to reaching their potential including: Aboriginal youth, youth in and leaving care, youth with disabilities or special needs, racialized youth, newcomer youth, LGBTTQ youth, francophone youth, youth living in rural and remote communities, youth from low-income families and youth in conflict with the law.
3. **Collaboration and Partnership:** Strong commitment, accountability and leadership from all youth allies are required to successfully support young people in Ontario. A key aspect of this will be working to break down barriers and strengthen connections between service providers, foundations, community groups, governments, young leaders and families at all levels.



4. **Meaningful Youth Engagement and Leadership:** Young people have valuable perspectives and can offer keen insight into issues that they face. They can also lead other youth and help them succeed. We will work collaboratively with youth and seek their input to better support them and empower them to lead.
5. **Diversity:** We know that adolescence is a period when young people develop their personal and social-group identities. We need to respect and foster the diversity of Ontario's youth. We can do this by ensuring the way we provide services is barrier-free, inclusive, and culturally responsive. This includes working with organizations that support diverse communities.
6. **Evidence-Informed Choices:** We will use and create evidence through research, evaluation and information from frontline workers that will improve the ways we support youth.
7. **Transparency:** With an open mind, we will listen to, and gather input from all stakeholders including youth, parents, different levels of government, communities, agencies and religious groups. We will consult our partners on what we are doing to help Ontario's youth achieve their highest potential, and explain why we are doing it.



## Themes and Priority Outcomes

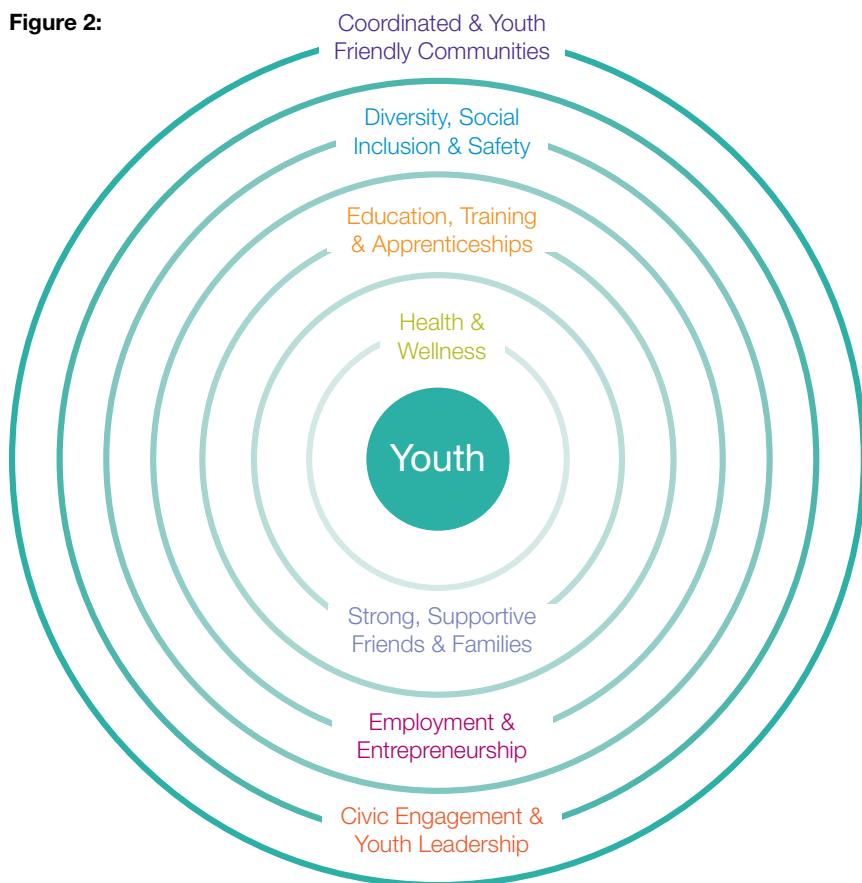
Under the guidance of these principles, and based on what research, youth and their allies say matters, Stepping Up is identifying 20 outcomes that are important for the positive development of Ontario's youth (please see page 22). These outcomes articulate what we need to achieve our vision and support youth to succeed.

The selection of these outcomes was based on evidence and represents our key priorities for young people.

The Ontario government is committed to focusing on achieving progress toward these outcomes as our priorities for youth. These outcomes will inform policy design and program development across Ontario ministries and through provincial agencies. It is our hope that all those who play a role in supporting youth will use them too.

To help readers navigate the story and rationale behind each outcome, we have organized the narrative across seven themes (Figure 2). These themes reflect key domains of experiences that support positive youth development.

**Figure 2:**



➔ It is important to recognize that individual characteristics and conditions – such as a young person's cultural background or the neighbourhood they live in – can impact their experience across all of these outcomes. Every young person in Ontario faces unique challenges and considerations as they negotiate their environments. Throughout Stepping Up, specific challenges and considerations for different groups of youth will be identified and discussed. These themes and the outcomes are interrelated and interdependent.

➔ **A holistic view of youth:** Figure 2 provides a representation of the theme areas of Stepping Up. These themes are based on an ecological model of development and a person-centred approach that is also consistent with Aboriginal ways of knowing. The young person is at the center of the circle – including their spirit / self as described on page 7. Important early interactions for youth include the smaller circles (their personal health and development, their family and friends). As they age, they grow to become members of the broader community (through education and employment, engagement and participation).

# Stepping Up: A Strategic Framework to Help Ontario's Youth Succeed

## Common Vision

Together, we will support all young people to become healthy, safe, hopeful, engaged, educated and contributing members of their communities and our province.

## Guiding Principles

A Positive, Asset-Based View of Youth

Meaningful Youth Engagement and Leadership

Targeted Support for Those Who Need It

Diversity

Collaboration and Partnership

Evidence-Informed Choices  
Transparency

## Themes

### Health & Wellness

## Priority Outcomes

- 1 Ontario youth are physically healthy.
- 2 Ontario youth feel mentally well.
- 3 Ontario youth make choices that support healthy and safe development.

### Strong, Supportive Friends & Families

- 4 Ontario youth have families and guardians equipped to help them thrive.
- 5 Ontario youth have at least one consistent, caring adult in their lives.
- 6 Ontario youth form and maintain healthy, close relationships.

### Education, Training & Apprenticeships

- 7 Ontario youth achieve academic success.
- 8 Ontario youth have educational experiences that respond to their needs and prepare them to lead.
- 9 Ontario youth access diverse training and apprenticeship opportunities.

### Employment & Entrepreneurship

- 10 Ontario youth have opportunities for meaningful employment experiences.
- 11 Ontario youth have the skills and resources needed to develop a successful career or business.
- 12 Ontario youth are safe and supported at work.

### Diversity, Social Inclusion & Safety

- 13 Ontario youth experience social inclusion and value diversity.
- 14 Ontario youth feel safe at home, at school, online and in their communities.
- 15 Ontario youth respect, and are respected by, the law and justice system.

### Civic Engagement & Youth Leadership

- 16 Ontario youth play a role in informing the decisions that affect them.
- 17 Ontario youth are engaged in their communities.
- 18 Ontario youth leverage their assets to address social issues.

### Coordinated & Youth-Friendly Communities

- 19 Ontario youth have access to safe spaces that provide quality opportunities for play and recreation.
- 20 Ontario youth know about and easily navigate resources in their communities.

## A Sustained Commitment to Supporting Ontario's Youth

→ Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing

→ Cross-Cutting Actions

# A Sustained Commitment

## to Supporting Ontario's Youth

**B**uilding on the framework components, Stepping Up also includes a renewed commitment from the Government of Ontario to supporting the wellbeing of Ontario's youth.

### Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing

In addition to establishing a common vision and principles and articulating our priorities for youth, the Government of Ontario is making a commitment to provide a picture of how Ontario's youth are doing.

For each of the 20 outcomes discussed in Stepping Up, one or more indicators have been selected to assess the experiences of youth. These indicators are presented at the end of each outcome section. As a whole, the indicators presented in Stepping Up provide a strong basis for us to understand how youth are doing in Ontario and to monitor changes in their experiences over time. The indicators presented throughout Stepping Up have been selected based on available data about youth in Ontario. In some places, you may find that the indicators do not perfectly measure all aspects of each outcome – this is due to limitations in the availability of research and data. As new data becomes available, we will continue to enhance the indicators used in Stepping Up to be sure we can tell the most complete possible story about how youth are doing.

Collectively, the outcomes and indicators presented in Stepping Up have been compiled together to form the Profile of Youth Wellbeing (pages 96-97) which will be used as a resource to describe and monitor the overall state of youth wellbeing in the province over time. This profile provides a platform for ongoing, evidence-based dialogue about changes related to the priorities and outcomes. As a part of the Profile of Youth Wellbeing, the Government of Ontario is committing to present an annual update on the wellbeing of youth in conjunction with future Poverty Reduction Strategy Annual Reports. Although the profile does not describe the experiences of individual youth, it provides the questions that we can ask young people about how they are faring. Through ongoing annual reports on youth wellbeing, the Province will consider the different experiences that specific groups of young people may be facing.

### Cross-Cutting Actions

In order to support progress toward our desired outcomes for youth, the Government of Ontario is committing to a number of cross-cutting actions. These actions focus on setting the conditions for success and maximizing the efforts of all those who are working to support youth. We want to do a better job of identifying needs, monitoring progress, enabling innovation and supporting effective practices. We recognize that there are a number of areas where changes are required across sectors in order to facilitate progress. In order to establish these foundations for success, we are committed to:

- Each of the following theme sections in Stepping Up includes:
  - An explanation of why the theme is important to youth and to Ontario
  - A snapshot of what is happening in the lives of young Ontarians
  - A description of the government's priorities, based on evidence about what youth need to succeed
  - An outcome associated with each priority, together with indicators that will be tracked within the Profile of Youth Wellbeing to assess that outcome
  - An overview of provincial initiatives and steps being taken to support youth in achieving these outcomes.

1. Provide sustained, positive-oriented leadership
2. Focus on the needs of marginalized youth
3. Support collaboration, local planning and partnership
4. Increase youth voice in design and delivery of services
5. Increase capacity to better serve diverse and marginalized youth
6. Support research and evaluation
7. Provide updates and information on the wellbeing of Ontario's youth

See page 98 for more information on these cross-cutting actions.

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: **The New Mentality**

The New Mentality is an initiative of Children's Mental Health Ontario that seeks to improve the health and wellbeing of children and youth in Ontario. The New Mentality provides opportunities for youth leadership and youth voice within mental health agencies and the system at large. The New Mentality partners with local agencies to host New Mentality Groups across the province led by youth. Together, youth leaders and their "Adult Ally" hold student conferences around their community to combat stigma, create public awareness, and share their stories of treatment and recovery.

### The Halton New Mentality Group and Reach Out Centre for Kids

Over a three-year period, the Halton New Mentality Group, working in partnership with the Reach Out Centre for Kids (ROCK) published and distributed a magazine, gave presentations to schools and community groups, and initiated an annual conference to help students implement school-based mental health groups.

"In 2010, I attended my first New Mentality conference. I knew immediately I wanted to join so I could help raise awareness of mental health and stop the stigma

associated with being mentally ill. As a facilitator, I have worked with such amazing people at The New Mentality and ROCK. Together, we have definitely left an impression and have initiated change in Halton. Young people who have attended one of our conferences or picked up our magazine have all said such positive things. It just goes to show that youth can make a change, be it big or small.

"The New Mentality is something I take pride in. It has made me realize that this is what I love to do and has made me want to pursue a career with youth mental health and addictions." – *ROCK Youth Leader Aatayna*

"The New Mentality supports youth voice in the mental health system.

ROCK has been involved with The New Mentality for about five years. As an Adult Ally, I love to see the creativity, enthusiasm and energy of the young people I work with. They are all highly motivated and eager to get involved. This past fall, they worked very hard to plan a successful conference in Halton. There was a positive atmosphere at that youth conference, with everyone in the auditorium feeling connected and comfortable talking about mental health.

"The New Mentality enables us to connect with our community to have meaningful conversations about what matters."

– *Kelly Giuliani, ROCK Adult Ally*



Growing Up  
Healthy and  
Strong

Outcomes # **1 2 3**

# Health and Wellness

In order for Ontario's young people to reach their potential, we need to engage and support them to be physically and mentally healthy, emotionally resilient and able to make positive lifestyle choices.

Health and wellness  
matters to young Ontarians:

A healthy lifestyle in adolescence enables cognitive, social and physical development and can lead to a healthier adult life. Youth who are emotionally resilient can build positive social skills and relationships. Healthy young people also tend to participate in a wide range of opportunities that support their development.

And it's important  
for Ontario:

Healthy physical, social, emotional and cognitive development allows young people to develop the skills they need to become positively engaged and contributing members of our communities. Having healthy young Ontarians will also help minimize demands on health care and can provide long-term benefits for communities.

# Snapshot of Youth Health and Wellness in Ontario

## Health care costs are rising:

Ontario's health care system is facing unprecedented fiscal challenges. Economists have forecasted that without significant changes, our health care spending will consume 70 per cent of the provincial budget within 12 years.<sup>54</sup>

**Youth could be healthier:** Research suggests that today's youth will not necessarily be healthier than their parents.<sup>56</sup> Studies show that just seven per cent of Canadian children between six and 19 years are getting a recommended hour of exercise per day.<sup>57</sup> Health challenges such as childhood obesity increase risks for chronic issues such as hypertension, diabetes, heart disease and kidney disease.<sup>58</sup>

**Many young people face mental health challenges:** Young people between 15 and 24 years are more likely to report experiencing mental illness and/or substance use than other age groups.<sup>61</sup> A recent study showed that the risk for mental health

challenges increases between 16-17 years and 18-21 years, especially among females.<sup>62</sup> It is estimated that 15 to 21 per cent of Ontario's youth and children are affected by a significant mental health problem or mental disorder.<sup>63</sup>

**Some youth face barriers to good health:** Marginalized groups – such as newcomer youth, Aboriginal youth or young people living in poverty – tend to experience a higher number of barriers to good health. Some youth living in poverty may not have access to safe drinking water, nutritious food, primary medical care, opportunities to participate in sports and recreation, a safe place to live or the same enriching life experiences as their peers. Many youth with disabilities or special needs, including those with physical, developmental, communication, learning and neuro-developmental disabilities, regularly face additional and complex health challenges.



## Statistics



Twenty-five per cent of Ontario's health care costs are due to preventable illnesses. Nearly half of all cancer deaths in Ontario are related to tobacco use, diet and lack of physical activity.<sup>55</sup>



As youth age, they are more likely to be considered overweight or obese and less likely to report being physically fit.<sup>59</sup> Seventy-five percent of obese children grow up to become obese adults.<sup>60</sup>



A recent study found that one-quarter of youth reported feeling depressed in the past year. One in ten Ontario youth admitted to feeling suicidal or wanting to inflict self-harm in the past year.<sup>64</sup>



Canadians in the lowest income group are three to four times more likely than those in the highest income group to report fair to poor mental health.<sup>65</sup>



## Support youth to be physically healthy

Supporting young people to be physically healthy is one of the best ways to support positive development. Good nutrition and physical activity is vital to a young person's growth, development and wellbeing. Youth who eat well and participate in regular physical activity are more productive and focused at school, and tend to have improved academic achievement. As young people age, they take on more responsibility for their health including dental care, personal hygiene and diet choices.

### Important aspects of promoting physical health for young people include:

→ It is recommended that children and youth between five and 17 years spend one hour each day doing some sort of moderate-to-vigorous form of physical activity, like riding a bike or playing basketball.<sup>69</sup>

#### Encouraging healthy habits:

Healthy habits formed early in life are key protective factors against chronic disease and lay the foundation for a healthy adult lifestyle. Regular exercise helps fuel optimal growth and supports positive pro-social activities. Research shows young people involved in activities such as team sports are more likely to have higher grades in school and to graduate from postsecondary education.<sup>66</sup> Making healthy, nutritious food choices during adolescence is also important and supports brain development while

decreasing the risk for heart disease, cancer, diabetes and obesity.<sup>67</sup> As young people become more independent in choosing what they eat, we know they benefit from a strong awareness about nutrition and access to healthy food. Lastly, ensuring youth get enough sleep is important for them to grow and perform in daily routines. Keeping healthy sleep patterns can be challenging for youth as the physical changes associated with adolescence can cause them to feel awake late at night and have difficulty waking up in the morning.<sup>68</sup>

**Providing positive options:** Enabling healthy choices in youth is best achieved when the healthy choice is the easy choice. Communities need to be empowered to support healthier choices where young people live, work and play.<sup>70</sup> Creating supportive environments in communities involves many partners, including government, local agencies and organizations, businesses, urban planners, educators and individuals.

**Focusing on the social determinants of health:** Social determinants of health refer to an individual's personal living conditions and experiences in society that impact their health and wellness. Taking social determinants into consideration can help in understanding why some young people are healthier than others.<sup>72</sup>

### Improving access to health care:

Having access to primary, preventive health care is an important component of physical health. Although many of Ontario's young people have access to a regular primary health care provider, youth in lower-income neighbourhoods are less likely to have a regular family physician<sup>73</sup> and often rely on Community Health Centres or walk-in clinics for their primary care. Additionally, youth in rural or remote communities may face barriers to accessing services including lack of transportation or availability of providers. Ensuring that youth regularly visit care providers, and have dental checkups, annual physicals and other paramedical services when needed, can mitigate long-term health challenges.

As of September 2011 school boards in Ontario are required to ensure all food and beverages sold on school premises for school purposes meet government nutrition standards. The nutrition standards apply to all food and beverages sold in schools including cafeterias, vending machines and at special events.<sup>71</sup>

In 2002, York University developed a model to identify 14 social determinants of health: Aboriginal status, Disability, Early life, Education, Employment and working conditions, Food insecurity, Health services, Gender, Housing, Income and income distribution, Race, Social exclusion, Social safety net and Unemployment and job safety.

### Outcome we want:



Ontario  
youth are  
physically  
healthy.

### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who are a healthy weight



Proportion of youth who are physically active



Proportion of youth who consume at least five servings of fruits or vegetables daily



Proportion of youth who did not visit a doctor in the past year





## Support youth to be mentally well

Adolescence is a time of increased vulnerability to mental health problems.<sup>74,75</sup> Youth face a number of transitions in different areas of their lives that can be difficult and sometimes overwhelming. For youth who face bullying, have body image challenges, or who have disabilities or special needs, this period can be especially difficult. Supporting positive mental health in adolescence can lead to better long-term life outcomes.

### Components of supporting mental health include:

➔ In Canada, suicide is the second leading cause of death, after accidents, for young people between 10 and 34 years.<sup>77</sup> Suicide rates increase among adolescents between 12 and 18 years.<sup>78,79</sup> Suicide rates are five to seven times higher for First Nations youth than for non-Aboriginal youth.<sup>80</sup> Suicide rates among Inuit youth are among the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average.<sup>81</sup>

**Supporting youth to develop resilience:** Families, friends and schools all play an important role in teaching youth to identify the factors that put them at risk — such as stress, peer pressure and challenges with self-regulation. Research shows that youth who learn adaptive emotional regulation strategies are able to maintain good relationships, grades and overall wellbeing.<sup>76</sup>

#### Intervening early:

Addressing mental illness involves recognizing the signs of emotional problems, and intervening early to reduce further risks. Despite the fact that mental health problems affect one in five young people, data from 2002 indicates that fewer than 25 per cent of children and youth with mental health problems receive specialized treatment.<sup>82</sup> Identifying mental health needs as early as possible is important to ensure youth receive high quality support.<sup>83</sup> This involves designing and delivering services in an inclusive and accessible way.

**Reducing Stigma:** Many factors can contribute to mental health problems, including genetic influences, brain trauma, severe life stress, substance use, or family history.<sup>85</sup> We know that some of Ontario's youth are more vulnerable to mental health challenges. Immigrant and refugee youth, for example, may have past experiences with trauma that requires specific intervention.<sup>86</sup> Youth from racialized and Aboriginal communities who live with mental illness may be more likely to access services that are youth-friendly,

culturally sensitive and culturally based. Promoting awareness, equity and diversity helps to reduce stigma around mental illness and ensures that young people are able to get the support when they need it.<sup>87</sup>



→ Seventy percent of mental health issues have their onset in childhood and adolescence.<sup>84</sup>

→ Schizophrenia is a chronic, severe mental illness that affects an estimated one out of 100 Canadians.<sup>88</sup> Individuals with schizophrenia often experience the onset of symptoms in young adulthood – in the late teenage years for males and the mid-20s for females.<sup>89</sup>

### Outcome we want:



Ontario  
youth feel  
mentally  
well.

### How we can tell:

⬇️ Proportion of youth who are experiencing symptoms of anxiety/depression

⬇️ Proportion of youth who are experiencing elevated psychological distress

⬇️ Proportion of youth who had serious thoughts about suicide in the past year.



# 3

## Understand and address risk-taking

All teenagers take risks as a normal part of growing up. Curiosity and yearning for novel experiences present tremendous opportunities for positive development,<sup>90</sup> self-exploration and growth.

### Supporting youth to take healthy risks includes:

**Supporting growth and independence:** Supporting young people to make positive choices means helping them build on their personal strengths and try new things in safe ways. Positive, pro-social and pro-developmental risks can take the form of sports, pursuing artistic abilities, volunteer activities, travel, making new friends or simply becoming more independent. Research shows that positive risk-taking, such as travelling or working abroad, can result in social, emotional, behavioural, intellectual, and moral development in youth.<sup>91</sup>

**Helping youth to see the consequences of unhealthy risks:** As young people seek out new experiences, they may be introduced to unhealthy activities and unsafe behaviours. Life stress, negative influences, a lack of information, and lack of positive alternatives can increase the likelihood of youth participating in unhealthy activities (things like tanning beds, smoking, unsafe sex, drug use and driving under the influence).

- ➔ Some risk-taking behaviour is influenced by age and gender – with older youth more likely to engage in unhealthy behaviours than younger youth.<sup>92</sup> Male youth are less likely than females to perceive behaviours such as riding in a car with an impaired driver or smoking as a “great risk.”<sup>93</sup>



We know that for some youth, participating in unhealthy risk-taking behaviour can lead to challenges with addiction, illness or injury. We also know a young person's ability to anticipate the long-term consequences of their actions is still developing in adolescence.<sup>94</sup> This means that youth may need support from adults to discuss and understand the consequences of risks they take.



→ In 2011, about 13 per cent of young people reported in the [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey](#) that they had a potential drug use problem.<sup>95</sup>

→ Overall teen pregnancy rates fell in Ontario by 18 per cent (from 32.1 to 26.4 per cent) between 2003 and 2010 – but some Ontario regions, especially rural and sparsely populated areas, witnessed increased rates.

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth make choices that support healthy and safe development.

#### How we can tell:

- ↓ Proportion of youth who smoke cigarettes
- ↓ Proportion of youth who have recently consumed excessive alcohol
- ↓ Proportion of youth who have used any illicit drug
- ↓ Proportion of youth who have had a sexually transmitted infection



## What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

### Open Minds, Healthy Minds: Ontario's Comprehensive Mental Health & Addictions Strategy

Announced in June 2011, the strategy aims to improve mental health and wellbeing for all Ontarians and calls for a more integrated and responsive child and youth mental health system in which we:

- Provide fast access to quality services for children and youth with mental health and addictions issues and their families
- Identify children and youth with mental health and addictions needs — and intervene early
- Close critical service gaps for vulnerable children and youth

Years 4+ of the Strategy will build on its success and include a focus on youth addictions.

### Promoting Life-skills in Aboriginal Youth (PLAY)

PLAY is helping over 4,500 Aboriginal youth in Ontario improve their health, self-esteem and leadership skills through participation in workshops, youth-led events and intergenerational sports and activities.

First Nations communities are also benefiting when their young people participate in PLAY. Through the program, Aboriginal communities are connecting and communicating with one another at different levels. In addition, 35 full-time jobs for Community Mentors in participating communities have been created.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support health and wellness for youth:

- Aboriginal Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Child Nutrition Program
- Aboriginal Health Access Centres - Healthy Eating and Active Living (HEAL) Program, Smoke-Free Ontario (SFO) Program, Diabetes Prevention Program
- Aboriginal Mental Health and Addictions workers
- Aftercare Benefits Initiative (new!)
- Autism - Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) -based services and supports
- Autism - Connections for Students
- Autism - School Support Program
- Autism - ASD Respite Program
- Autism - Transition Supports
- Autism - Grant Assistance Program (GAP)
- Autism - Potential Programme
- Child and Youth Mental Health Services
- Children in Need of Treatment (CINOT)
- Children's Treatment Centres
- Community Aboriginal Recreation Activator (CARA) program
- Community Capacity Building
- Concussion Policy (new!)
- Daily Physical Activity in Elementary Schools
- Foundations of a Healthy School Framework
- Healthy Communities Fund, Program and Partnership streams
- Healthy Smiles Ontario
- Healthy Schools Initiatives
- Immunization - School Age Children and Youth
- Increased Mental Health Supports for Youth in Post-Secondary Education
- Integrated Transition Planning for Young People with Developmental Disabilities
- Leave the Pack Behind
- Mental Health and Addictions Nurses in District School Boards program
- Moving on Mental Health
- No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy
- Northern School Fruit and Vegetable Program
- Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care
- Ontario's After School Program (ASP)
- Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres - Urban Aboriginal Healthy Living Program
- Ontario's Narcotics Strategy
- Ontario Sport and Recreation Communities Fund (OSRCF) (new!)
- PLAY (Promoting Life-skills for Aboriginal Youth)
- Pharmacy Smoking Cessation Program
- Public Residential Treatment Program for Eating Disorders (new!)
- Quit the Denial Campaign (new!)
- Responsible Gambling Council Ontario
- Sabrina's Law (An Act to Protect Anaphylactic Pupils)
- School-Based Tobacco Use Prevention Pilot
- School Food and Beverage Policy
- Simplified Access to Respite (new!)
- Skin Cancer Prevention Act (Tanning Beds), 2013 (new!)
- Smoke-Free Ontario Strategy
- Smoke-Free Ontario School-Based Tobacco Use Prevention Pilot
- Student Nutrition Program (expanded)
- Tele-Mental Health Services
- University of Toronto Problem Gambling Council
- Wasa-Nabin Urban Aboriginal Youth Program
- YMCA Youth Gambling Awareness Program
- Youth Suicide Prevention Plan (new!)

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: Big Brothers and Big Sisters

**Big Brothers Big Sisters** is a not-for-profit organization that provides mentors to children and youth in need of additional positive adult support. Mentors serve as role models, teaching by example the importance of giving back, staying in school, and building positive relationships with family, friends and community. Each time a young person is paired with a mentor, they are supported to grow into a successful, thriving member of their community. It's something the staff, volunteers and donors of Big Brothers Big Sisters help bring about every day with pride.

### Ashley Boudreau's Story...

**I**n Grade 3, I had a wonderful teacher named Mrs. Halls. Not only was she a caring, wonderful and patient teacher, she taught me how to read and write despite my learning disability. When Mrs. Halls took a job at a different school, I was sad because I wasn't going to see her anymore. My sadness was replaced with utter joy when I received a call from Big Sisters — informing me that I had been matched with Mrs. Halls as a mentor. I will never forget that day. Someone chose me and advocated for me, and has continued to do so ever since.

"I spent my summers picking strawberries, doing crafts, singing songs, going to Canada's Wonderland, and chatting about anything on my mind. I was even given the opportunity to go to camp through Big Sisters. I finished high school and soon after decided to attend college for Nursing. I was 18 years old, legally an adult, and Big Sisters kept me under their wing. They provided me with financial support on several occasions and moral support and always ensured that I was doing well.

**"Big Sisters is not just an organization, it was my family.** A family that gave me more than my own family was capable of giving me. I know I am not just a Little Sister. I am strong. I am deserving of all things in life. I am unconditionally loved and supported. Big Sisters gave me more than a friend once a week for few hours; they gave me a life that I otherwise wouldn't have. It is easy to say that I would not be who I am today or where I am today without Big Sisters." – Ashley Boudreau



**Supporting  
young  
Ontarians  
to grow and  
thrive**

Outcomes # **4 5 6**

# **Strong, Supportive Friends and Families**

The evidence is clear: young people need adults in their lives who care about them, encourage them and believe in them. All young Ontarians should have caring families and adults to turn to when they need guidance — and those adults should have the resources needed to support youth.

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**Friends and Families  
matter** to young Ontarians:

Studies show that youth who are supported by at least one consistent, caring adult have an easier time developing their identity, empathizing and regulating their emotions.<sup>96</sup> Having positive, accepting peer relationships also supports their development.



**And they're  
important for Ontario:**

Young people who have access to caring adults and peers have the strong, supportive foundation they need to believe in themselves, pursue positive opportunities and contribute to their communities.

# Snapshot of Young People's Friends and Families in Ontario

## The Ontario family is changing:

The definition of family in Ontario has evolved in recent generations. Family households in Ontario include those who live alone, single parents, remarried couples, parents in different households, step-children and step-siblings, friends, foster parents, grandparents, extended families and same-sex partners. Married-couple families have decreased over time, while common-law couples quadrupled between 1981 and 2011.<sup>97</sup> Family size has shrunk over time, with an average of 2.9 people per family.<sup>98</sup> Increasingly more young adults are still living at home.

## Families are spending less time together:

Many families have one parent at home; others may have two

parents working full time. Some parents hold more than one job, or work long hours. Young people are busy, too. They are often engaged in a variety of activities in their schools and communities. All these factors make it much more challenging for families to spend quality time together.

**Young people interact with others in new ways:** Technology continues to change the way young people interact with friends and family. Ninety-seven per cent of Canadian youth between 12 and 17 years report texting at least weekly to communicate with people in their lives, including their parents.<sup>101</sup> Nearly 60 per cent of all teens send and receive text messages with friends daily.<sup>102</sup>



## Statistics



Statistics Canada reports that the number of one-parent families has steadily increased over the last 25 years to one in four Canadian families in 2006.<sup>99</sup>



A 2007 UNICEF study found that Canada ranked 18th of 25 countries for young people “eating main meals as a family several times a week,” and 23rd of 25 on “having a conversation with a parent several times a week.”<sup>100</sup>



Canadian youth, aged 18 to 24, spend more time and visit more pages on social networking sites than any other age group. Children and youth up to 24 years account for a third of all videos watched online in Canada.<sup>103</sup>



## Support strong families and guardians

We know that parents and guardians play a primary role in the healthy development of young people.

**Important aspects of the role of parents and guardians for young people include:**

**Supporting them so they are equipped to provide basic needs:**

Young people rely on parents, extended family and caregivers to provide safe places to live and healthy food to eat. As youth age and begin to enter the workforce, they begin to be able to provide for themselves, but many still count on support from family. We know that for some families, providing basic necessities is not always easy. Low-income families may be worried about their ability to make ends meet. Families of young people with complex disabilities or special needs may face additional challenges providing them with the extra support they need. Families living in rural and remote communities may have difficulty finding and affording good quality housing options.

**Building their capacity to promote positive development:**

Parents and guardians have a primary influence on young people's attitudes towards school, learning and future success. Studies have shown that young people with supportive parents, schools and communities — whatever their income or background — are more likely to earn higher grades, have a stronger sense of identity and self-efficacy, and have an easier time empathizing and regulating their emotions.<sup>105</sup> In addition, parents and guardians teach young people many important life skills — such as how to resolve conflicts, open a bank account, write a resumé, or do the laundry — which support them in navigating a range of life experiences.

➔ Affordable and safe housing is fundamental for families working to provide basic needs to their children and youth. Having a stable and affordable home is a foundation to gaining meaningful employment, raising kids, and developing stronger communities.

➔ As of 2006, more than one in ten young people lived in low-income families.<sup>104</sup>



Newcomer parents and guardians may need extra support to understand and connect with the environment in which their youth are growing up. Best practices recommend that parents become involved with their youth's learning, so that the entire family can be engaged in the cultural exchange. Parental involvement breaks down the cultural barriers, and helps them recognize and accept the society in which their youth develop.<sup>106</sup>

**Helping them to find additional support when it is needed:** Parents and caring adults are usually the first to notice any issues in the life of a young person — and are the first line

of support when they are in trouble or need a tough question answered. Providing parents with a clear way to get information helps ensure that youth get the help they need. In addition, providing parents of youth with opportunities to receive help themselves (such as through counseling for at-risk parents and families, or respite services for families of youth with disabilities or special needs) can ensure that they have the tools and capacity to be better role models.

We know that sometimes families experience complex challenges and sometimes they break down. Helping at-risk youth who are

vulnerable due to challenges with their parents or guardians to find support is important. This will ensure they are able to successfully transition to adulthood.

→ A large majority of Ontario students between grades 7 and 12 report getting along very well with their parents.<sup>107</sup>

→ On any given night in the City of Toronto, it is estimated that approximately 1500 – 2000 young people are homeless.<sup>108</sup>

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth have families and guardians equipped to help them thrive.

#### How we can tell:

↓ Proportion of families who live in deep poverty and are struggling to afford housing

↓ Proportion of caregivers who can't afford to feed their families balanced meals

↓ Proportion of children and youth who live in low-income households



## Improve young people's relationships with caring adults

We know that all Ontario youth need at least one single, consistent, supportive, caring adult in their lives. The relationships youth build with adult and peer role models can play an important role in determining their choices in the future. Mentors can help build skills and increase a young person's self-efficacy, build morals and positive values, set attainable goals, and provide direction in achieving their goals.

→ In its final report, the Youth Leaving Care Working Group highlighted the importance of Youth in and leaving care having access to peer-mentors who have been in care or adult mentors from the community through formalized mentoring organizations that meet their individualized needs.<sup>113</sup>

→ A recent study by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health found that young girls with a mentor were four times less likely to bully, fight, lie or express anger than girls without a mentor.<sup>114</sup>

### Supporting young people's relationships with caring adults involves:

#### Increasing access to caring adults:

Many young people are able to find role models in their homes or through their personal networks, social groups, or activities, but we know that this is not always the case. Some young people may not have available parents, guardians or extended family to turn to, or may prefer to turn to other adults who provide a mentoring role different from their mothers and fathers. These youth may find role models through their broader communities, schools and

workplaces, perhaps a teacher, employer, counselor, program provider or friend.

Evidence shows that all youth, whether they are at-risk or not, benefit from having a mentoring relationship with a non-parent adult.<sup>109</sup> Establishing and maintaining a relationship with a mentor has been shown to support positive development for youth who don't have strong relationships with other adults.<sup>110</sup> Both personal mentors and



mentorship programs for at-risk youth have been found to improve outcomes<sup>111</sup>. Studies of mentoring programs have found that mentors from a similar social background are often most successful in supporting at-risk youth.<sup>112</sup>

#### **Building the capacity of caring adults to better support youth:**

Adult allies and mentors benefit from having a strong understanding of the developmental needs of young people, and access to resources that help them make the most of their relationships. Studies show that providing realistic expectations,

screening, high-quality training, and ongoing monitoring and support for mentors are best practices to increase the effectiveness of mentorships.<sup>115</sup> Adult allies need to listen effectively to youth voicing their needs and concerns, in order to support youth in the appropriate manner. Creating a safe space for youth to express themselves is a common first-step. Allies need to recognize the impact that they and other adults, including parents, have in the safe space.<sup>116</sup>

- ➔ Adult allies have been described having the following characteristics:  
Accepting youth as partners and meaningful participants; Creating a space for youth to feel comfortable and respected; Using youth-friendly and accessible language; Not assuming that youth only know about “youth issues”; Including youth in decision-making; and Actively listening to youth.<sup>117,118</sup>

#### **Outcome we want:**



Ontario youth have at least one consistent, caring adult in their lives.

#### **How we can tell:**

- ⬆ Proportion of youth who have at least one parent who usually knows where they are
- ⬇ Proportion of youth who do not get along with their mothers
- ⬇ Proportion of youth who do not get along with their fathers



## Promote positive peer relationships

Developing a sense of self-identity and gaining the skills necessary to form healthy and close relationships is a key part of adolescence. As a result, friends play an important role in a young person's life.

**Components of supporting positive relationships and friendships include:**

**Providing spaces and opportunities for youth to interact in positive ways:** Having positive, trusting relationships with friends supports young people to develop their social identity, learn how to form and maintain healthy relationships, and gain independence from their families and caregivers. Supporting these relationships involves providing positive, pro-social opportunities for young people to connect in safe environments. Safe places for young people to go can include community hubs, drop-in centres, recreation facilities, libraries, and many other public

areas that are inviting and accepting of young people.

**Helping youth to develop pro-social relationships and interpersonal skills:** Young people often place strong value on input from their peers. They identify their friends as being important influences on their identity. Despite the importance of these bonds, not all young people have strong skills and healthy approaches to their relationships. Youth living with disabilities or special needs, such as young people with Autism Spectrum Disorder, may face additional barriers to

➔ Friends often play an important role in motivating young people to study harder in school, volunteer for community and social services, and participate in sports and other productive endeavours.



developing positive relationships with peers. Encouraging healthy boundaries and skills can be challenging as technology now enables young people to be in constant communication with their peers across more environments than in the past. Young people can learn social skills and adopt healthy attitudes toward relationships through positive experiences and role models.



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#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth form and maintain healthy, close relationships.

#### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who feel lonely



Proportion of youth who have someone they are comfortable talking to about problems



Proportion of youth who have family and friends who help them feel safe, secure and happy



# What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

## Youth Leaving Care Strategy

The Ontario government released the [Blueprint for Fundamental Change](#) report in 2013. In partnership with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. The report details how youth living in the care of children's aid societies can be better supported to succeed. In response, Ontario has: increased the minimum financial support for youth in care aged 18 to 21; provided a monthly \$500 allowance for youth aged 21 to 25 previously in care and enrolled in OSAP-eligible education or training programs; enhanced caregiver training; and funded 50 new youth-in-transition workers and mentorship opportunities.

## Child Care Respite

The Government of Ontario funds respite programs for families of children with disabilities or special needs who need a temporary break from the physical and emotional demands involved in the day-to-day care of their child. The [Out-of-Home Respite](#) program provides up to seven days of respite per year for families of a child with multiple disabilities or special needs. [Enhanced Respite Funding](#) grants are also available for families of a child who is medically fragile and/or on a technological device 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that encourage strong, supportive friends and families:

- [Admission, accueil et accompagnement policy for French-language schools](#)
- Alternative Dispute Resolution Program
- Child Wellbeing and Prevention Initiatives
- [Children's Aid Societies](#)
- [Continued Care and Support for Youth \(CCSY\)](#)
- [Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative](#)
- [Enhanced Caregiver Training](#)
- [Enhanced Respite for Medically Fragile and/or Technology Dependent Children](#)
- [Family Mediation](#)
- [Increase to Minimum wage \(new!\)](#)
- [Local Poverty Reduction Fund \(new!\)](#)
- [Long-term Affordable Housing Strategy](#)
- [Mandatory Information Program](#)
- [Office of Children's Lawyer \(Independent legally-mandated representation of children and youth\)](#)
- [Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth](#)
- [Ontario Child Benefit \(increase\)](#)
- [Ontario Child Benefit Equivalent](#)
- [Ontario Works: LEAP \(Learning, Earning & Parenting\)](#)
- [Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy](#)
- [Out-of-Home Respite Services](#)
- [Parent Involvement Committees \(PIC\) and School Councils](#)
- [Parenting and Family Literacy Centres](#)
- [Parents Reaching Out \(PRO\) Grants](#)
- [Registered Education Savings Plans](#)
- [Renewed Youth Supports \(RYS\) Program](#)
- [Supervised Access Programs \(for Separated Families\)](#)
- Targeted Subsidies for Adoption and Legal Custody
- Young Parent Resource Centres
- [Youth In Transition Worker Program \(new!\)](#)
- Youth Leaving Care Strategy

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program

The Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program (OYAP) is a School to Work program that gives students the opportunity to work as apprentices in Grades 11-12, through the Cooperative Education program. Partnerships between school boards and employers, who provide the apprenticeship placements, are key to the success of the program. Students benefit from the opportunity to become registered apprentices and work towards becoming certified journey persons in a skilled trade, while completing their secondary school diplomas – and employers have the opportunity to train the skilled workers they need.

### Tiffany Sherri Caldwell's Story...

**T**iffany Sherri Caldwell is a welder apprentice registered with the Ontario Youth

Apprenticeship Program. In her second semester of Grade 12 at Saugeen District Secondary School in Port Elgin, Tiffany was accepted into a co-op placement at Bruce Power in the Central Maintenance Facility shop. Through the program, she was able to improve her welding

and successfully earn her welder certification. With the support of her parents, Tiffany was also able to improve her performance at school, and was awarded the 2009 Excellence in Manufacturing Award and the 2010 NAPA Automotive Award.

“My mom forced me to take a welding course in Grade 10, and the day I struck my first arc, I was hooked. My first project, a garden arbour that stands almost two and a half metres tall, was a great accomplishment. The second was a garden bench in a butterfly shape

that I designed. In my last year of welding, I designed and welded my own graduation rose bouquet. I also welded a boutonnière for my senior prom date. I wasn’t one of the most popular girls in school and spent my days in the welding shop. Imagine my surprise when I was crowned prom queen! A certified welder becomes prom queen! You will always miss 100 per cent of the arcs you do not strike, so — grab that stinger, flip the helmet, and strike that arc! Let those sparks of success fly!”

*– Tiffany Sherri Caldwell*



Realizing  
youth potential  
through  
education

Outcomes # **7** **8** **9**

# Education, Training and Apprenticeships

The current and future generations of young people in Ontario present great promise. Whether they can lead happy and productive lives as adults depends largely on what they experience in their school years and their first jobs.

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**Education, Training and Apprenticeships matter to young Ontarians:**

A strong education can help young people to become successful, confident, creative, active and informed citizens. Education also promotes positive development and builds self-sufficiency. We know that supportive learning environments are linked to student achievement, better paying jobs, and enhanced wellbeing.



And they're **important** for Ontario:

When young people have a strong education, they have an increased chance of getting a job, succeeding in the workplace, and becoming a community leader. Providing young Ontarians with access to a range of training opportunities to pursue their interests and skills enables them to contribute to their communities.



# Snapshot of Youth Education and Training in Ontario

## Ontario is making top grades:

Ontario's 15-year-old students are among the best readers in the world. In fact, Ontario's education system was ranked as one of the best in the world.<sup>119</sup> More and more of Ontario's youth are succeeding, graduating and moving on to postsecondary education. Ontario's high-school graduation rate has risen in each of the last seven years, going from 68 per cent in 2003-04 to 82 per cent in 2010-11.<sup>120</sup> We recognize that lifelong learning is as important as graduating to ensure that youth have the skills they need.

## Some youth face challenges:

While many of Ontario's youth are succeeding in school, we also know that racialized youth, Aboriginal youth, youth in and leaving care and some other marginalized groups of young people in Ontario have persistently poorer outcomes in education than their peers.

## Closing the achievement gap for students with special education needs: Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO)

achievement results for Grades 3, 6 and 9 students with special education

needs have seen significant increases since 2002-03. Ontario schools have made great gains in increasing student achievement and closing the gap for students with special education needs.

## The job market is shifting:

Shifts in Ontario's job market include a rise in service-oriented industries, and a greater need for young people in skilled trades. Seventy per cent of future jobs in Ontario are expected to require postsecondary credentials or be in management.<sup>123</sup> We know it is important to ensure young people are prepared with the skills to meet this demand.

## Education is evolving:

Technology-enabled learning is on the rise in our classrooms, bringing with it new ways for students and teachers to access information (Internet resources, online learning, electronic periodical indices, eBooks). Cooperative education and other forms of experiential learning (job shadowing, field trips, work experience, internships) have also become essential and commonplace in Ontario's education system.



## Statistics



Ontario was among the top-achieving jurisdictions in the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reading assessment of 15-year-old students. Internationally, Ontario was a top-scoring jurisdiction and nationally, Ontario was the only province to score significantly higher than the Canadian average in PISA reading.<sup>121</sup>



There is a persistent gap in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal high school completion rates among youth aged 15 to 24 (20 per cent in 2006).<sup>122</sup>



Ontario has 20 publicly funded universities and 24 community colleges that contribute to the development of Ontario's innovation economy through the education and training of a highly skilled workforce.<sup>124</sup>



## Ensure young people get the skills they need

Young people growing up in Ontario today need to develop a diverse set of skills to help them respond to the modern workplace and be prepared to adapt to future economic and social changes.

Supporting young people to get the skills they need includes:

### Continuing to invest in world-leading education:

Primary, secondary and postsecondary education is the most important aspect of skills building for Ontario youth. The skills, talents and ambitions young people develop through education and training will shape their path as adults and enhance the contributions they make to Ontario's future workforce and society as a whole. By continuing to support meaningful school-based learning, we can encourage youth to learn and develop a diverse set of skills and the competencies they need to succeed.

### Building 21st century skills:

Recent research has identified the following "Six Cs" as skills youth need in order to thrive and be leaders in the modern world: character, citizenship, communication, critical thinking and problem solving, collaboration and teamwork, and creativity and imagination.<sup>125</sup> Supporting young people to develop these key qualities can ensure they are prepared to excel and lead – this requires innovative thinking and an entrepreneurial approach to learning.<sup>126</sup>

- ➔ Youth learning to speak a second language is becoming more important in today's economy and can contribute to long-term financial success.<sup>127</sup>



**Providing opportunities for hands-on learning:** Experiential learning, mentoring and entrepreneurial education are becoming more common in education globally.<sup>128</sup> Experiential learning opportunities can help young people appreciate the relevance of what they are learning in school. By participating in activities such as job shadowing or taking

field trips where they can engage in hands-on learning, young people have the opportunity to connect with issues and ideas outside the classroom and build self-efficacy as they learn more about what they enjoy doing.

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#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth achieve academic success.

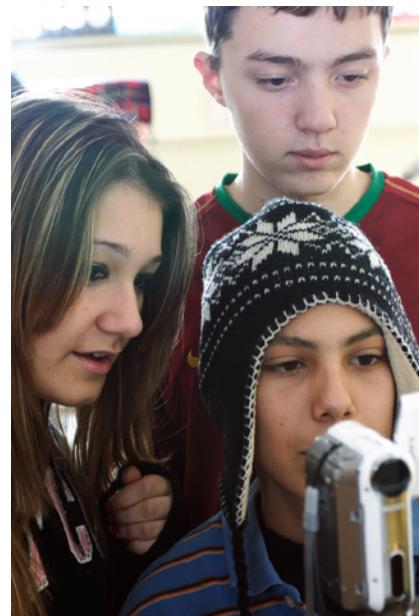
#### How we can tell:

↑ Proportion of English-speaking and French-speaking students enrolled in academic math who meet the provincial standard

↑ Proportion of English-speaking and French-speaking students enrolled in applied math who meet the provincial standard

↑ Proportion of high school students who graduate

↑ Ontario ranking on the Program for International Student Assessment Score Reading Achievement





## Reflect diverse learning needs in education and program pathways

Enhancing Ontario's strong education system includes focusing on increasing student achievement, closing achievement gaps among students and increasing public confidence. By embracing a culture of collaborative inquiry we can seek more effective ways of teaching and learning and support transitions for students.

Some important aspects of education that responds to young people's needs include:

**Accommodating different learning styles:** All students require support from educators, peers, families, and communities to achieve their full potential in learning. Research demonstrates that young people can have different learning styles and preferences, and that they are most engaged in learning when their particular interests, level of readiness and preferences are addressed.<sup>129</sup> By using differentiated learning strategies, educators can adapt to individual styles, strengths, goals and interests. Embracing the diversity of cultural learning styles through inclusive discussions,

teaching, and accommodation for religious backgrounds supports all youth to succeed.

**Responding to unique needs:** Students with special education requirements – such as young people with disabilities or special needs and young people who speak English as a second language (ESL) – may require accommodations or specialized educational services to meet their learning needs.

**Individual Education Plans** are created to describe students' individual strengths and needs and the special education programs and services they require.

→ Research on today's youth indicates that many prefer to learn by doing. They are more likely to prefer kinesthetic, experiential and hands-on learning, and are more likely to be adept at quick thinking and multi-tasking.<sup>130</sup>



**Harnessing technology-enabled learning:** Advances in technology have created new ways to access information and new opportunities for students to learn and interact with teachers and peers.<sup>131</sup> Technology-enabled learning can support youth to complete high school and enter postsecondary education or training.<sup>132</sup> For youth with disabilities, tools such as screen readers and speech-to-text software improve access, participation and outcomes.<sup>133</sup> Technology can also increase access for learners facing financial, personal or geographic barriers to school.<sup>134</sup>

**Re-engaging youth at-risk:** Students who drop out of school generally lack employable skills. Evidence suggests that at-risk youth who graduate also exhibit a similar learning gap when compared to dropouts.<sup>136</sup> School dropouts and at-risk youth require extra supports to re-engage them in learning. When youth face setbacks in their education and training, we know that they benefit from having access to flexible options to re-engage, recover credits and complete their schooling. Providing

a range of options for training in apprenticeships, college, university or on-the-job training helps to keep doors open for youth to pursue their interests and talents. Instilling a sense of ownership and a lifelong commitment to learning is just as important to future success as academic accomplishments.

→ **Ontario's E-Learning Strategy** is a digital educational platform that offers high-quality online courses for all students regardless of their location, learning ability or circumstances. Young learners have the flexibility to access class resources anywhere and anytime.<sup>135</sup>

### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth have educational experiences that respond to their needs and prepare them to lead.

### How we will tell:

↑ Proportion of youth in the Specialist High Skills Major program

↑ Number of students who have Individual Education Plans

↑ Proportion of high school course credits that are available through e-learning

→ Among the young adults who were followed by the Youth in Transition Survey, 55 per cent of those aged 26 to 28 who had left high school came back to complete their diploma. One-third moved on to postsecondary education.<sup>137</sup>



## Increase success in postsecondary education and apprenticeships

In today's labour market, more jobs require young people to have postsecondary credentials. Meanwhile, some sector councils that explore labour needs have identified skills gaps in occupations with an adequate supply of credentialed workers.

### Supporting young people's participation in postsecondary education and skilled trades includes:



There are more than 150 apprenticeship trades in Ontario's apprenticeship system.<sup>143</sup>

#### Supporting participation in apprenticeships and training:

With many of our skilled tradespeople – such as chefs, educational assistants, electricians and plumbers – approaching retirement, Ontario's apprenticeship system is a critical part of building a well-educated and highly skilled provincial workforce.<sup>138</sup> Apprenticeships provide youth with the opportunity to learn a skilled occupation by combining in-school training courses with paid on-the-job training.<sup>139</sup> Recent reports have identified a shortage of

workers in skilled trades and noted that although opportunities for training and apprenticeships exist, parents and students may not fully appreciate the opportunities that these credentials can offer.<sup>140,141</sup>

Supporting participation in apprenticeships and training includes improving access to apprenticeships for key groups, including newcomer youth, Aboriginal people and women. It also means supporting apprentices to complete their training and find the right jobs.<sup>142</sup>



**Broadening postsecondary success for at-risk youth:** At 65 per cent, Ontario's postsecondary education (including apprenticeship, college and university education) attainment rate is above the Canadian average of 64 per cent. The province has the second highest postsecondary education attainment rate among Canadian jurisdictions, trailing only Quebec for three consecutive years. Ontario also has the highest rate of college and university education among the 34 member countries of the Organisation for Economic

Co-Operation and Development (OECD).<sup>144</sup> However, we know that some young people have challenges accessing and attaining postsecondary education, for example, Aboriginal youth, youth with disabilities or special needs, youth from low-income families and youth who are the first in their family to obtain postsecondary education. These youth have relatively low rates of participation in postsecondary education<sup>145</sup> and may need extra support to reach their full potential.

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth access diverse training and apprenticeship opportunities.

#### How we can tell:

- ↑ Proportion of adults who have completed postsecondary education
- ↑ Number of youth served through the Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program

→ Approximately 29 per cent of first generation students whose parents have less than a secondary school diploma went on to higher education, compared to over 72 per cent for students whose parents had at least an undergraduate degree.<sup>146</sup>

→ There is a growing interest in work-integrated learning (WIL) as a model of improving effective transitions between postsecondary education and the labour market. Postsecondary institutions, students and faculty are increasingly recognizing the importance of workplace learning in graduates.<sup>147</sup>





## What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

### Student Success / Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM) program

As part of the Ontario government's [Student Success plan](#) to help more students graduate, get a job, start an apprenticeship, or move on to higher education, 38,000 students are currently participating in the [Specialist High Skills Major program](#). The SHSM program helps youth find out what they love to do early, so they can start working on landing the jobs of the future.

### Pathways to Education

[Pathways to Education](#) helps youth in low-income communities graduate from high school and successfully transition into postsecondary education. Embedded within local organizations — and dedicated to equality, inclusion and accessibility — Pathways addresses systemic barriers to education by providing a set of academic, financial and social supports to youth. High school drop-out rates in Pathways communities have been reduced by up to 70 per cent, and the rate at which youth go on to college or university has increased by up to 300 per cent.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support education, training and apprenticeships:

- [Aboriginal Education Strategy](#)
- [Access to Opportunities Strategy \(new!\)](#)
- [Access to Opportunities Strategy for Youth with Disabilities](#)
- [Accent on Youth Strategy](#)
- [Adult and Continuing Education](#)
- Adult Day School
- Alternative Schools
- [Alternative Secondary School Programs with Native Friendship Centres](#)
- Children and youth in care innovative program pilots
- [Co-op Diploma Apprenticeship \(CODA\) Program](#)
- [Crown Ward Educational Championship Teams](#)
- [Dual Credit Program](#)
- Education Programs in Care, Treatment, Custody and/or Correctional Facilities (Section 23 Programs)
- [Elargir L'espace francophone](#)
- First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework
- [First Nation, Métis and Inuit Policy Framework Implementation Plan \(new!\)](#)
- First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) re-engagement initiative ([new!](#))
- [Full-Day Learning for Four- and Five-year olds](#)
- Joint Protocols for Student Achievement ([new!](#))
- [Life After High School program](#)
- [Living and Learning Grant \(new!\)](#)
- [Ontario Access Grant for Crown Wards](#)
- [Ontario's E-Learning Strategy](#)
- [The Ontario Education Curriculum](#)
- [Ontario Focused Intervention Partnership \(OFIP\) Tutoring](#)
- [Ontario Student Assistance Program](#)
- [Ontario Youth Apprenticeship Program](#)
- [Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy](#)
- [Pathways to Education](#)
- [Pre-Apprenticeship Training Program Pan-Am Game Expansion](#)
- Primary and Secondary Education
- Post-Secondary Education
- Post-Secondary Education Fund for Aboriginal Learners
- [Post-Secondary Education Transformation](#)
- Re-engagement Initiative
- [School Within a College](#)
- [Special Education Programs and Services](#)
- [Specialist High Skills Major Program](#)
- [The Student Success Strategy / Learning to 18](#)
- [Student Success Teams](#)
- Summer Learning Program
- [Supervised Alternative Learning Programs](#)
- School Support Initiative (FNMI) ([new!](#))
- [Tutors in the Classroom](#)
- [Transportation Engineering Development Program](#)
- [Transportation Technician Initiative](#)

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: Jobs for Youth

### Rising football star and former Jobs for Youth participant from Windsor, Ontario

In 2008, Tyrone Crawford was supported by the Ontario government's Jobs for Youth Program, which provided 4,300 Ontario youth with summer jobs in summer 2012. Started in 2006, Jobs for Youth provides young people with job readiness training and support, paid employment placements for July and August, and post-employment support.

#### Tyrone Crawford's Story...

**A**fter graduating from high school in Windsor, Tyrone went on to become a defensive lineman while studying at Boise State University in Idaho. In 2012, Tyrone was drafted to the NFL as a third-round pick by the Dallas Cowboys — and it's his work ethic that is garnering his coaches' and fans' attention.

"When I went to work at The Border City Boxing Club as part of the Jobs for Youth Program, I found

out that boxers work REALLY hard. I also realized that kids in my neighbourhood were looking up to me as a role model. Working hard and giving back to my community are just some things I take pride in, and have carried on to my career in football.

"I'm from Windsor, Ontario. Like so many kids around my neighbourhood, my brother and I had to provide for ourselves the little things we wanted. That's why we joined the Jobs for Youth Program. I got a job at The Border City Boxing Club. I cleaned and vacuumed a lot. I would put the bag on sometimes and let the boxers take body shots at me.

Seeing what they could do was an eye-opener and it made me work a lot harder when it came to football.

"The Jobs for Youth Program gave me an opportunity to develop my organizational skills, work in a team, learn how to be on time — and all the other life skills that are necessary to become successful in life." – *Tyrone Crawford*



Youth  
employment  
matters

Outcomes # **10** **11** **12**

# Employment and Entrepreneurship

Ontario's young workforce is a key factor for success in today's global economy. We must work with employers and support our young workers to be safe, resilient, adaptable and highly qualified so they are prepared for employment across many industries, including retail, information technology, skilled trades and medicine.

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Youth Employment & Entrepreneurship matter to young Ontarians:

Studies show that having a job contributes to a young person's sense of identity, connectedness and wellbeing. Employment is also an opportunity to connect with others and develop the skills needed to contribute to society.<sup>148</sup>

And it's important for Ontario:

Young workers and entrepreneurs contribute to our economy and keep Ontario prosperous. They often lead the way in innovation and creativity when they start new businesses, contribute new ideas and share new perspectives. Ontario's economy benefits from the contributions of talented youth.



# Snapshot of Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship in Ontario

## The workforce is changing:

The demographic reality in Ontario is that our incredible pool of young labour talent — our province's competitive edge and the envy of many developed nations — is shrinking as an overall percentage of Ontario's population. At the same time, Ontario's baby boomers are aging. As our older workers retire, more demand will be placed on youth to bring their skills and talents to the economy.

**The Ontario job market is changing too:** Getting a job today as a young person involves tackling some unprecedented changes in job markets, infrastructure and technological advances. A secondary school diploma is a baseline necessity for youth in our society. More jobs today require some form of postsecondary education than ever before.

**Youth are often the hardest hit in tough economic times:** In 2012, Ontario's youth unemployment rate was 16.9 per cent, well above the national average of 14.3 per cent. The unemployment rate for young men was 18.4 per cent. Also, 9.5 per cent of Ontario's youth are not employed, nor are they in training (NEET) or pursuing an education.<sup>149</sup> Some young people are more at risk of unemployment than others — such as racialized youth, youth with disabilities or young people with a criminal record. These youth often face additional barriers to finding jobs than their peers.

**Many are embracing youth entrepreneurship:** A European study of attitudes about self-employment found that young people aged 15 to 24 thought they were more likely to start a business in the near future than older adults.<sup>150</sup> In 2000, nine per cent of small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada were owned by young entrepreneurs.<sup>151</sup> Seven per cent of youth-owned enterprises are knowledge-based, compared with four per cent of businesses owned by older people.<sup>152</sup>



## Statistics



Young men are more likely than women to be employed in the manufacturing and construction sectors. An overall decline in job opportunities in Ontario's manufacturing sector has had a negative impact on young male employment rates over the last decade.



## Support Youth Employment

Youth gain valuable life skills through their job experiences. Research shows employment is a primary platform for young people to improve their self-efficacy, build social skills and networks, gain self-confidence and develop self-regulation.<sup>153</sup> The relationships youth form at work with adults outside their family and school networks help influence their views and future role in society.

### Components of supporting employment experiences include:

→ In 2006, youth with disabilities aged 15 to 19 had an unemployment rate of 21.9 per cent compared to 15.9 per cent for those without disabilities. Similarly, unemployment among those with disabilities aged 20 to 24 was 15.1 per cent compared to 9.9 per cent for those without.<sup>155</sup>

Aboriginal youth also face poorer labour market outcomes when compared to the non-Aboriginal population in Ontario. Unemployment rates for Aboriginal youth are also significantly higher (21 per cent) than those for the non-Aboriginal population (14 per cent).

**Helping youth transition to the labour market:** When young people work, they learn the skills they need to grow up into effective adult workers. We know young people with prior work experience tend to have a smoother transition into long-term stable employment. Evidence also suggests that the quality of the employment and the amount of time youth are out of work are both important factors in determining success in finding sustained employment. Studies have also shown that taking a positive youth development approach supports success in supporting youth employment.<sup>154</sup>

Gaining hands-on experience during school through cooperative education or part-time jobs can provide youth with the opportunity to develop the employability and technical skills they need to work in the new economy. A number of additional supports can also help to prepare youth for work. These include career guidance in schools, outreach programs, career mentorship and job-search supports. In addition, employers can support youth employment by recognizing the contributions that young workers can offer and integrating youth into the workforce through first jobs.



**Broadening job access for at-risk youth:** For some youth, the transition to the labour market brings with it significant challenges. In fact, 46 per cent of Employment Ontario clients are youth.<sup>156</sup> Newcomers, visible minorities, Aboriginal youth and young males tend to have higher rates of unemployment than the general population.<sup>157</sup> Studies have found that racialized youth have significant gaps related to income and rates of unemployment.<sup>158,159</sup> High-school dropouts also have a difficult time finding work. Their unemployment rate is double that of other youth

between 20 and 24 years.<sup>160</sup> Early labour market attachment is important for youth with disabilities who are joining the labour force for the first time, as they face additional barriers to employment and to accessing the same personal and professional growth opportunities as their peers. Youth employment programs that seek to reach to the most marginalized youth should consider the barriers to employment that these young people may face (for example, requirements for criminal records checks).



#### Outcome we want:



Ontario  
youth have  
opportunities  
for meaningful  
employment  
experiences.

#### How we can tell:

- ↑ Proportion of students who are enrolled in co-op placements
- ↑ Proportion of youth who are in the labour force
- ↓ Proportion of youth who are not in education, employment or training
- ↑ Proportion of youth who are satisfied with their jobs



## Help youth develop skills for work and enterprise

Few young people today move from education directly into stable and long-term employment. And once they do start working, they will likely have a number of jobs in their lifetime and multiple careers.<sup>161</sup> Many young people begin working while still in school. They may shift back and forth between work and study for a period of time. Many will engage in further education or training even after moving into full-time employment, while others may hold a series of jobs before finding a good vocational fit.

### Components of supporting the modern workforce include:

**Preparing youth to have skills that match Ontario's labour market needs:** Emerging technologies impacting the labour market and the fast pace of change mean many of the jobs youth will have in the future do not exist today. Young workers need to be able to adapt to these changing needs by developing flexible, employable skills. The development of these skills can involve making strong connections between school and employment

to help young workers focus on building the skills they need for the workplace. Developing these skills also involves employers providing opportunities for young workers to build skills and develop their professional capacities. Recent reports have highlighted the important role of employers in this field and suggested that more can be done to invest in training for young workers.<sup>162</sup>

### Fostering entrepreneurial skills:

Young people can contribute to Ontario's economy and to social challenges by applying their creativity, perseverance, self-confidence and energy as entrepreneurs. Research suggests that entrepreneurship presents an important and growing opportunity for the economic security of youth.<sup>163</sup> Strengthening young Ontarians' awareness about the benefits of entrepreneurship has been highlighted as an important element to creating a globally competitive

and innovation-based economy.<sup>164</sup> The education and private sectors can play a strong role in developing a culture of entrepreneurship in Ontario.<sup>165</sup> Internships, experiential learning and co-op programs with the private sector can provide young people with crucial hands-on experience in being their own boss at an early age. In addition, supports for young entrepreneurs can help ensure that youth-led businesses and organizations are successful in the long-term.



### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth have the skills and resources needed to develop a successful career or business.

### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who are self-employed



Over 100,000 businesses are started in Ontario each year, with youth entering the marketplace at three times the rate of entrepreneurs over 45. Almost a third of Canada's youth-owned enterprises are located in Ontario.<sup>166</sup>



## Ensure youth work in safe and supportive environments

Youth thrive when they are safe and supported at work. In order for young Ontarians to develop successful careers, they need to be provided with opportunities in the workplace that are safe and allow them to learn. Workplace safety is especially important for youth.

**Creating safe, supportive work environments for young people involves:**

**Paying extra attention to the safety of young workers:** Research shows that youth may face more risks at work than older adults. Young male workers are more likely to be injured on the job. Studies have found this to be associated with the fact that they are more likely to be in high risk occupations and/or jobs involving a relatively high degree of physical effort.<sup>167</sup> Research shows

that being new to a job increases the risk of injury.<sup>168</sup> Youth often have short-term employment or multiple part-time jobs, so they're often new on the job and have increased risk. In addition, we know that the power structure within workplaces may dismiss young workers' concerns or lead teens to remain silent about their working conditions.<sup>169</sup>



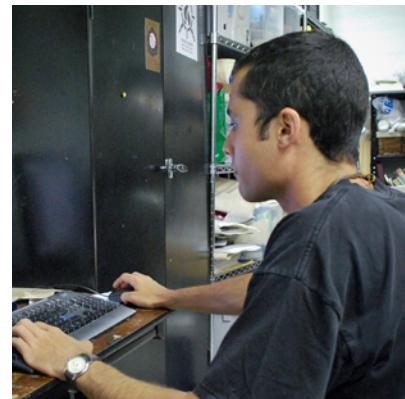
Workers who have been on the job for less than a month have a much higher rate of injury than more experienced workers.<sup>170</sup>



**Informing young people about their rights and responsibilities at work:** A safe and supportive work environment is one where young people know about their rights and responsibilities and are treated in a respectful, inclusive way. Young workers may need additional space and encouragement to raise concerns they have about conditions in the workplace. Providing thorough and effective on-the-job training, instruction and supervision protects the

health and safety of young workers. By providing a safe and supported work environment, employers allow youth to learn their rights and responsibilities as employees. Supportive environments also involve young workers being provided with opportunities to learn about how to resolve conflicts and negotiate – skills that will make them more career-ready in the future.

→ Young workers out of school with no diploma are three times more likely to be injured than those who have some postsecondary education, regardless of age, type of shift or hours of work.<sup>171</sup>



#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth are safe and supported at work.

#### How we can tell:



Proportion of Workplace Safety and Insurance Board (WSIB) claims that are for youth employees



## What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

### Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy

The new [Ontario Youth Jobs Strategy](#) will invest \$295 million over two years to create job opportunities for about 30,000 young people, while promoting entrepreneurship and innovation.

### Focus on Youth Program

[Focus on Youth](#) provides summer employment and recreational activities for young people growing up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Over 100,000 youth in Ottawa, Toronto, Hamilton and Windsor have participated in recreation programs; and 5,000 youth have been employed through the program.

### Live Safe! Work Smart!

[Live Safe! Work Smart!](#) is a free, teacher-friendly, classroom-ready resource available to Ontario teachers to provide young people with safety education. Today, health and safety education is embedded in over 80 secondary school courses and throughout the elementary school curriculum.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support youth employment and entrepreneurship:

- [Aboriginal Entrepreneurship Program / Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative](#)
- [Aboriginal Law Summer Student Program](#)
- [Aboriginal Youth Work Exchange](#)
- [Business Plan Wizard](#)
- [Campus Linked Accelerators and On-Campus Entrepreneurship Activities \(new!\)](#)
- [Co-operative Education](#)
- Curriculum-based Tools for Elementary and Secondary Schools
- [First Nations Natural Resources Youth Employment Program](#)
- [Focus on Youth](#)
- [Future Entrepreneurs](#)
- [High School Entrepreneurship Outreach \(new!\)](#)
- [Increase to Minimum wage \(new!\)](#)
- [It's Your Job secondary school workplace safety video contest](#)
- [Jobs for Youth Program \(summer and after-school\)](#)
- [Live Safe! Work Smart! support and resources for teachers Grades: K to 12](#)
- [Ministry of Natural Resources Internship Program](#)
- [Municipal Finance Internship Pilot Program](#)
- [New and young worker health and safety enforcement blitzes \(May-August annually\)](#)
- [Northern Ontario Internship Program \(new!\)](#)
- [ODSP Employment Supports](#)
- [OPS Learn and Work](#)
- [Ontario Global Edge Program](#)
- [Ontario Internship Program](#)
- [Ontario Municipal Internship Program](#)
- [Ontario Network of Entrepreneurs](#)
- [Prevention Grants program](#)
- [Private Sector Jobs and Mentoring Program \(new!\)](#)
- [Rural Summer Jobs Service](#)
- [SmartStart Seed Fund \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Social Assistance \(Ontario Disability Support Program and Ontario Works\)](#)
- [Starter Company \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Stewardship Youth Rangers](#)
- [Strategic Community Entrepreneurship Programs \(SCEP\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Studio \[Y\] \(new!\)](#)
- [Summer Company \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\)](#)
- [Summer Employment Opportunities](#)
- [Summer Jobs Service](#)
- [Summer Jobs Service / Northern Summer Jobs Service \(new!\)](#)
- [TalentEdge Internship Program \(new!\)](#)
- [Toronto Employment and Social Services partnership](#)
- [Workplace safety and employment standards information embedded in Ontario curriculum](#)
- [Workplace safety enforcement programs and regulations](#)
- [WorkSmartOntario](#)
- [WorkSmart Campus post-secondary e-learning tool](#)
- [Youth Business Acceleration Fund \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Youth Entrepreneurship Partnerships program \(YEP\) \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\)](#)
- [Youth Investment Accelerator Fund \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Youth in Policing Initiative](#)
- [Youth Skills Connections, Community and Industry streams \(a Youth Jobs Strategy fund\) \(new!\)](#)
- [Young Workers Resource for Youth, Parents and Workplaces](#)
- [Young Workers Resource for Youth, Parents, Employers and Supervisors](#)

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: **Supporting Our Youth**

Supporting Our Youth (SOY) is a dynamic community development organization in downtown Toronto. Its mission is to create opportunities for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual and two-spirited youth and adults to build community together. SOY believes that our whole community benefits from greater investment in youth.

SOY develops activities with young people that build skills and capacities. It provides supports and increases access to adult mentoring. It is dedicated to all the young people who are seeking acceptance, appreciation and the place they deserve in the world.

### Javier's Story...

“ I

came to this country, with no word of English and no family. All I had was a head full of questions about who I was — and nowhere to go but an empty room. As an immigrant gay man, I thought no one would be able to answer my questions. One day, I found an email address for an organization called SOY that said it would be able to help me. I decided to

give it a try. I never thought that my simple (and almost hopeless) email would introduce me to people whose goal ever since then has been to make my life better.

“Today, they are my friends, and maybe the closest thing I have to a family. Thanks to all the SOY programs, I now have a place to express myself. I have met a person whose sincere intention is to be my friend – he’s my mentor now. I also have a place to live, thanks to SOY’s housing program. And even more

important, today I feel I’m ready to fight on my own. This would never have been possible if it hadn’t been for SOY.

“When I think about SOY, many words come to my mind: Effort. Hope. Life. And love. But none of them seem enough to describe the amazing things that the people in SOY are doing for our community.”  
– Javier



**Ensuring  
Ontario is  
a safe and  
accepting place  
for youth**

Outcomes # **13 14 15**

# Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety

Ontario is a vibrant mix of young people with diverse strengths, needs, abilities, perspectives and experiences. To realize the promise of this diversity, we must ensure that Ontario is a safe, inclusive and accepting place for all young people.

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**Diversity, Social Inclusion  
and Safety matter to  
young Ontarians:**

When young Ontarians are safe and supported at home, school, work, online and in their communities, they are able to develop successfully into adulthood. When they feel like they belong, young people are more likely to engage in their communities, social activities, teams and clubs.

**And they're important  
for Ontario:**

Supporting Ontario's young people to feel safe, included and accepted contributes to overall community safety. Social inclusion and safety are central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy that will secure our future prosperity and growth.



# Snapshot of Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety in Ontario

**Ontario is a world leader in multiculturalism:** Ontario is home to one of the most diverse populations in the world – most Ontarians can trace their roots outside of Canada.<sup>172</sup> Ontarians represent a diverse collection of ethnicities, ages, genders, sexual orientations, religions, languages, abilities, socio-economic status, and lifestyles.

**Many youth face barriers to being accepted and included:** Despite our strength in diversity, some youth still experience discrimination, including homophobia, racism, stereotyping, victimization and bullying. Some youth are more vulnerable than others. For example, newcomer youth face unique challenges with social inclusion and acceptance as they adjust to a new culture and often a new language. Youth with disabilities also face challenges obtaining accommodation of their accessibility needs.

**Aboriginal youth face challenges with social inclusion and safety:** We have heard that many Aboriginal young people - including those living both on and off-reserve – experience tension between their Aboriginal identity and their participation in broader culture. Culture-based

services and supports play an important role in helping those youth to navigate between cultures and, in turn, feel included and safe.

**Youth-related crime is declining:** Ontario's rates of youth-related crime and violent crime have been declining for the past four years and are well below the Canadian average.<sup>173</sup> At the same time, rates of youth violence and crime remain a challenge for some communities and neighbourhoods. More young people are now provided opportunities for rehabilitation outside the justice system, through diversion programming.

**Bullying affects many of Ontario's youth:** One in three students in grades 7 to 12 report they have been bullied at school.<sup>174</sup> Bullying outside of school is also common and can include online bullying or harassment. Ontario schools have stepped up efforts through early and ongoing intervention and supports aimed at addressing and preventing instances of bullying in Ontario. Bullying can have long-term impacts on both the person who is being bullied and also those that are bullies.





# 13

## Promote diversity and inclusion of young people

The goal of social inclusion is to give all young people an equal chance for participation in our society, no matter their ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, language, gender identity, economic status, age or disability status. It is important that all young people in Ontario feel included and accepted, especially by those who support their development.

### Supporting social inclusion for Ontario youth includes:

**Instilling respect for diversity and equity:** We know that social relationships and comparisons are important for young people as they develop.<sup>175</sup> Young people place importance on how their peers value and respect their differences. An experience with discrimination, harassment or stigma based on a young person's race, gender, sexual orientation and religious belief can cause them to feel rejected and disconnected from their communities. Systematic oppression and racism can impact

a young person's self-identity and life choices. We can promote diversity and equity by providing opportunities for Ontario's young people to develop an appreciation of and respect for the differences of others.

**Providing culturally-appropriate supports:** Research indicates that creating an environment that is safe and accepting and that allows youth to recognize their cultural strengths and differences supports positive outcomes.<sup>176</sup>



Ontario's programs, services, communities and institutions have an opportunity to support a sense of belonging by developing specific social inclusion and diversity policies for youth who are most at-risk. For example, youth who are new to Ontario may need support with identity development and language skills to ease their transition into society. Programs and services for Aboriginal youth that are culturally based are important to help youth build strong self-identities. Having decision makers and front-line workers who reflect diverse populations can provide better opportunities to

design and deliver programs that are relevant to young people.

#### Removing accessibility barriers:

Youth with disabilities, or special needs or mental health barriers have the same needs for participation as their peers. We know that some youth with disabilities face stigma and other barriers to education, work, services and opportunities that support positive development. While their disability may not impact their development, research indicates that the way in which peers and adults interact with youth who have a disability may affect the number and quality of their social experiences.<sup>177</sup>



The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act focuses on removing the barriers to opportunities for all Ontarians, including youth with disabilities. Five Accessibility Standards have been regulated under the Act to require organizations in Ontario to increase accessibility in key areas of daily living. Standards will result in more accessible customer service practices, information and communications, employment, transportation and public spaces<sup>178</sup>

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth experience social inclusion and value diversity.

#### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who feel a sense of belonging in their community



Proportion of students who have a positive attitude toward diversity at school





# 14

## Help young people to be safe to grow and develop

Wherever young people spend their time – including home, school, workplaces, teams, clubs, and online – they need to be safe. Having access to safe places to socialize impacts youth confidence, health and positive development.<sup>179</sup> A young person who feels excluded may begin to disconnect from society, which in turn can lead to higher-risk behaviour such as violence, alcohol and drug use. Some at-risk young people in Ontario may not have sufficient access to safe and nurturing environments.



In 2006, 31 per cent of lone parent households and 18.7 per cent of off-reserve Aboriginal households were in need of housing, compared to 14.5 per cent of Ontario households overall.<sup>180</sup> In the same year, 41 per cent of First Nation people living on-reserve in Ontario lived in a home requiring major repairs, compared to 6 per cent of Ontario households overall.<sup>181</sup>

### Helping Ontario's youth feel safe in their environments involves the following:

#### Promoting safety at home:

Being safe at home involves having a home environment that is physically healthy and clean. Ontario youth who are in need of safe housing may experience exposure to hazardous materials, lack access to safe water and food, or be homeless. Being safe at home also involves being free from fear of abuse or violence. Exposure to domestic violence at an early age can

have long-term effects on youth as they grow.

#### Promoting safety at school:

Feeling unsafe at school can involve exposure to violence – including gun violence, physical fights, abuse or bullying. Ensuring Ontario's schools are safe is important to so students can learn and be healthy. We know that feeling unsafe, such as when



being bullied, can impact academic achievement and lead to emotional challenges including risk of self-harm. Research suggests the most effective way to address bullying is through a whole school approach, where all members of the school community work together to create a safe, accepting and respectful learning environment.<sup>183</sup>

#### Promoting safety online:

Evidence indicates that young people are facing an increased risk of victimization through online activities.<sup>186</sup> As technology changes, young people can no longer rely on their home to be a safe place where bullies cannot

reach them. In addition, young people often share their personal information online through social networks, making them more vulnerable online.

#### Promoting safety in communities:

Having access to safe places to socialize impacts youth confidence, health and positive development.<sup>188</sup> Research shows that young people who witness crimes are more likely to commit crimes themselves, and less likely to achieve educational and employment success.<sup>189</sup> More Ontario youth can achieve positive outcomes when schools, communities and governments work together to ensure young people have safe places to go.

→ Studies suggest that children and youth exposed to domestic violence are more prone to exhibiting maladaptive behaviours, doing poorly in school, and extending violence into their adult relationships.<sup>182</sup>

→ Research shows that those who were bullies in childhood and adolescence are more likely to engage in aggressive behaviours later in life.<sup>184</sup> Children who bully others are 37 per cent more likely to grow up and commit crimes as adults.<sup>185</sup>

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth feel safe at home, at school, online and in their communities.

#### How we can tell:

↑ Proportion of youth who have a happy home life

↓ Proportion of students who have been bullied online

↑ Proportion of Ontarians who feel safe in their community

→ A 2007 Kids Help Phone survey found that over 70 per cent of respondents had experienced cyber bullying. Over half of the survey respondents said a safe place to report cyber bullying behaviour would encourage them to come forward and talk.<sup>187</sup>



## Support youth who are at risk of conflict with the law

Some of Ontario's young people – particularly Aboriginal, minority and racialized youth – face challenges and barriers that may increase their risk of coming into conflict with the law.

Supporting young people to avoid involvement with the justice system, make positive contributions to their communities, and get back on track if they face setbacks involves:



Youth outreach programs delivered by youth workers who share a lived experience with young people are more effective in keeping youth on track.<sup>191</sup> Sharing the same community allows these youth workers to easily identify and understand at-risk youth and provide them with relevant advice, information and help when they need it.

**Intervening early to support youth at risk:** Early intervention and crime prevention involves identifying and addressing young people's risk factors for participating in crime, as well as protective factors. Local communities can focus on minimizing risk factors, while building protective factors for a safer, stronger place for youth to thrive.<sup>190</sup>

**Using effective approaches to prevent crime:** We know that place-based approaches are effective in addressing the causes of youth violence, especially in neighbourhoods of concentrated disadvantage.<sup>192</sup> Youth in disadvantaged communities may experience multiple barriers to

success (such as poverty and racism) and benefit from programs targeted to where they live, including those that provide safe spaces for youth to go. Programs are more effective when they are delivered during important transition times in a young person's day (such as after school and in the evening). Research also shows that a multi-disciplinary collaborative approach that includes schools, public health bodies, police and community organizations works best in preventing youth crime in the community.<sup>193</sup>

**Improving relationships between communities and police:** We know that many youth and families,

especially those living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, do not feel they have positive relationships with police and law enforcement. Improving the important relationships between communities and police has been cited as a key step in reducing youth violence and addressing racism and discrimination in several key reports, including the 2008 Review of the Roots of Youth Violence.<sup>195</sup> Research shows that increasing efforts in community policing involves police officers attending and participating in community and school events, meeting with community members,

parents and youth to develop new approaches and solve problems in a collaborative way, and conducting positive-oriented outreach to racialized youth.<sup>196</sup>

**Supporting youth to get back on track:** When young people come into conflict with the law, they need to be held accountable for their actions. They also need to be provided effective programs and reintegration support so they can get back on track with their lives and reduce their chances of re-offending. A key component of reintegration is to encourage young people to make positive life choices.<sup>197</sup>

→ The Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services' [Crime Prevention In Ontario: Framework for Action](#) has identified factors such as prior behavioural problems, poor educational achievement, experience with abuse, poor peer influences, neighbourhood crime, poor housing and violent cultural norms as risk factors to participation in crime. Protective factors against participation in crime include having a positive school experience, a sense of self-efficacy, adequate parental engagement and supervision, positive peer influences, cohesive communities, and low social tolerance of violence.<sup>194</sup>

### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth respect, and are respected by, the law and the justice system.

### How we can tell:

- ⬇ Proportion of youth who participate in "antisocial behaviour"
- ⬇ Proportion of youth who police reported as committing a non-traffic related crime
- ⬆ Proportion of youth who believe officers in their local police force to a good job at treating people fairly

→ Over the last decade, Ontario's overall crime severity index has decreased.<sup>198</sup> Key drivers of this include the [Youth Criminal Justice Act](#)'s focus on crime prevention and addressing the underlying causes of a youth's behaviour, as well as the use of evidence-informed programs and services to reduce re-offending and address the needs and risks of special populations.<sup>199</sup>



## What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

### Safe, Inclusive and Accepting Schools

Ontario promotes diversity, social inclusion and safety in schools by building on the following strategies:

[Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Guidelines on Policy Development and Implementation](#) sets a vision for an education system where all students, parents and members of the school community are safe, welcomed and respected, and every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning.

The [Safe Schools Strategy](#) requires all schools to have bullying prevention and intervention policies and plans in place.

The [Accepting Schools Act \(Bill 13\)](#) requires all school boards to prevent and address inappropriate and disrespectful behavior, including bullying, discrimination and harassment, among students in Ontario schools.

### Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre

[Ge-Da-Gi-Binez Youth Centre](#), — meaning “spotted eagle” in the Ojibway language, is located in Fort Frances and is Canada’s first custody/detention facility built for Aboriginal youth in conflict with the law. Programming includes traditional teachings, Aboriginal history, ceremonies, as well as education, anger management and life skills.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support diversity, social inclusion and safety of youth:

- [Aboriginal Alternatives to Custody Programs](#)
- [Behavioural Management Program](#)
- [Bullying Prevention](#)
- [Child Victim / Witness Program](#)
- [Community Support Teams](#)
- [Developmental Services Ontario](#)
- [Drug Abuse Resistance Education \(D.A.R.E.\)](#)
- [Equity and Inclusive Education Networks](#)
- [Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy](#)
- [Funding for paraprofessionals \(Safe Schools Strategy\)](#)
- [Helping women flee domestic violence](#)
- [Intensive Support and Supervision Program](#)
- Internet Child Exploitation Counselling Program (ICE)
- [Improving Developmental Services \(Special Services at Home Program\)](#)
- [Ontario Crime Prevention Strategy](#)
- [Ontario Immigration Strategy](#)
- Ontario Provincial Police Knowledge, Issues, Decision, and Supports (KIDS) Program
- [Premier's Awards for Accepting Schools](#)
- [Probation Services](#)
- Proceeds of Crime Initiative
- [Programs for suspended / expelled students \(Safe Schools Strategy\)](#)
- Project Journey (Pikangikum First Nation) (**new!**)
- [Roots of Empathy](#)
- Safer and Vital Communities Grant
- Streets to Homes
- [Toronto / Provincial Anti-Violence Integration Strategy \(TAVIS / PAVIS\)](#)
- [Urban and Priority High Schools Grants](#)
- Walking the Path, Niigan Mosewak (and Pikangikum Medicine Wheel Youth Initiative)
- [Youth Justice Attendance Centres](#)
- [Youth Justice Committee Program](#)
- [Youth Justice Custody Services](#)
- [Youth Justice Reintegration Services and Diversion Programs](#)
- [Youth Opportunities Fund \(new!\)](#)

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres

The Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC) represents 29 Friendship Centres across Ontario. OFIFC supports Aboriginal youth-led activities that encourage equal access and participation in Canadian society and celebrates the Aboriginal culture.

OFIFC helps foster self-determination through youth leadership development in an environment that is accountable to youth. OFIFC promotes youth involvement in board governance, creates opportunities for participation in civic action and community development, and provides programs that promote education, economic development, children's and youth initiatives, and cultural awareness.

### Lorena Garvey's Story

“**T**he Friendship Centre is where I grew up. It's where I learned about ceremonies, language, and our elders. It also opened my eyes to the many challenges that exist within my Aboriginal community.

In my mid-teens, I co-founded my centre's Youth Council and attended many OFIFC youth forums. The OFIFC Youth Forums give young Aboriginal people like me a chance to use our voice in positive ways. We discuss our issues and concerns, like suicide, program

funding and addictions. And we also share our successes, like graduation rates, engagement practices and our fundraising efforts.

At the age of 19, I ran for the position of Regional Representative on the Ontario Aboriginal Youth Council (OAYC). I held that position for two years. That leadership role gave me the confidence to run for an executive position and sit on the OFIFC Board of Directors. Today, I work at OFIFC and with Aboriginal youth at local Friendship Centres.

The OAYC, the board, and the staff of the OAYC are my family away from home. They support me and encourage

me to go after my dreams — and that I can do whatever I put my mind to. I hope I am able to make a difference in a young person's life, just like the Friendship Centre did for me when I was growing up.

“My advice to young people is: Show up! When you show up, you get to speak. You get to plan. People begin to trust you. Others will show up, too. Yes, there will be days when it's hard to love the world. But just find the things you love and keep going. Keep your friends and family close. They keep you humble, remind you where you came from — and what you are working towards.” – Lorena Garvey



Youth  
leading  
change

Outcomes # **16** **17** **18**

# Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership

Young Ontarians have a lot to offer their communities. We know that better outcomes are achieved when youth are heard and involved. It is important to ensure that all young people in Ontario have the opportunity to learn life and leadership skills so they can be engaged, contribute to issues they care about and participate in decisions that affect them.



**Civic engagement and  
youth leadership matter  
to young Ontarians:**

Civically engaged young people enjoy higher self-esteem and grades, and tend to be more physically active and committed to their friends, families and communities.<sup>200</sup> Actively engaged youth can also act as role models to their peers.



**And it's important  
for Ontario:**

Giving young people more of a voice in government, policy and decision-making builds their capacity while providing platforms for youth to lead change and take action. Youth participation broadens the discussion and enhances decisions about civic policies and programs.

# Snapshot of Civic Engagement and Youth Leadership in Ontario

**Ontario's young people are already engaged:** Youth in Ontario volunteer at a higher rate than any other group in Canada. They have higher rates of participation in community, cultural, recreational or school-related organizations and activities than the rest of the population – and many volunteer at rates far beyond the required 40 hours to graduate high school.

**Some youth volunteer less than others:** Some of Ontario's youth face barriers to volunteering. In 2010, only 43 per cent of newcomer youth between 15 and 24 years volunteered; this is 15 per cent lower than Canada's average volunteer rate.<sup>202</sup>

**Young people are engaging in different ways:** The Internet and social media have changed the way in which young people communicate. The more traditional forms of engagement – such as belonging to a political

party, voting in an election or attending a town hall meeting – are no longer how most young people participate in their communities. Young Ontarians may feel the greatest engagement when they are directly involved in community events and have opportunities to connect with others.

**Young people are digitally wise:** Young people rely heavily on digital technology and social media to access information and carry out social interactions.<sup>204</sup> Digitally wise youth take advantage of social media platforms such as blogs and wikis to participate in advocacy on social issues, develop and run charities, and raise funds for causes.<sup>205</sup> Digital technology creates powerful opportunities for youth to connect globally to complex and evolving issues, such as addressing climate change or supporting human rights.



## Statistics



Sixty-two per cent of youth between 15 and 24 years reported that they volunteered at some point in the past year, and 72 per cent said they had made a charitable donation.<sup>201</sup>



Voter turnout rates among youth are lower than among adults and have declined in recent decades when compared to the historical average. Over the past four federal elections, however, youth voter turnout rates have remained relatively stable.<sup>203</sup>



# 16



The 1989 United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that young people have a human right to be consulted about the decisions that affect their lives.<sup>208</sup>

## Support young people to be heard

We know that active youth participation in decision-making processes (such as through political or civic participation) is linked to improved outcomes in education, employment and overall health, as well as improved social skills and emotional development.<sup>206</sup>

### Supporting young people to be heard involves:

**Informing young people and others about youth rights:** Young people have a right to participate in informing the decisions that affect them. We know that most young people want to be involved in decision-making and have a voice on issues that are important to them. Respecting the rights of youth also includes understanding the individual and social factors that can limit young people's participation – such as social inclusion, education, employment and lack of availability and accessibility to opportunities.<sup>207</sup>

**Equipping youth voice:** The more capacity young people have, the more likely they are to participate. Education equips young people with cognitive skills that support active engagement and can foster a sense of civic responsibility. Having a sense of duty is one of the most powerful incentives for turning out to vote<sup>209</sup> and education makes a significant difference to whether young Canadians vote or not. The 2000 Canadian Election Study reveals that turnout in the youngest generation was almost 50 points higher among university graduates than it was among those who left school without a high school diploma.



**Creating opportunities for those less likely to participate:** We know that some youth are less likely to use their voice in traditional ways – such as through voting – than others. Aboriginal young people, for example, may not feel engaged in provincial or federal politics but may still have ideas about how policies and programs can better serve them and their communities. By creating more and flexible mechanisms for young people to have their say, we can achieve better results and ensure that decision-makers hear from more young people.



→ Youth are less likely to vote than adults – and some young people are less likely to vote than others.<sup>210</sup> Low turnout is found to be greatest among Aboriginal, ethnocultural and unemployed youth as well as youth with disabilities or special needs.<sup>211</sup> Rural youth have also reported barriers to electoral participation.<sup>212</sup>

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth play a role in informing the decisions that affect them.

#### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who voted in the last federal election



Proportion of youth who are unpaid members on a board or committee



## Provide opportunities for youth to be involved and lead

Youth engagement and youth-led initiatives provide a positive, proactive opportunity for youth to develop their identities, improve confidence, and increase their social and professional networks. Studies also indicate that when a young person is involved in their community, they engage in fewer risk-associated activities (such as alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, unsafe sexual practices, bullying behaviour and criminal activity).<sup>213</sup> Emotional problems, as well as problems at school, are also diminished when youth are engaged.

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**Supporting youth to be engaged in their communities involves:**

→ Research suggests that the time of day when we engage youth is an important factor in seeking their input. The hours between 3:30 p.m. and 6:30 p.m. are the best times to reach youth.<sup>215</sup>

**Engaging youth in ways that work for them:** To be effective, strategies to engage young people to participate and lead should reflect their availability, skills and interests. This may involve reaching out to youth at certain times of the day, or by using youth-friendly engagement tools such

as social media. Young people have reported that they are more likely to take advantage of opportunities to participate in a socially inclusive environment, where they can connect with peers with shared experiences and feel safe to express their views.<sup>214</sup>



### Ensuring young people know about opportunities:

Youth are much more likely to volunteer when they have been asked or invited to.<sup>216</sup> Taking advantage of youth friendly communication tools – such as online media – can help ensure youth know about opportunities. Youth have identified that keeping them informed and providing opportunities for feedback and expression is effective in strengthening their engagement.<sup>217</sup>

### Nurturing participatory values:

We can nurture young people's sense of civic responsibility by helping them to understand their assets and the ways that they can contribute. Young people who are civically engaged and have formed volunteer habits are significantly more likely to contribute to their communities in adulthood. Research has shown that a young person's participation in initiatives such as a youth council, a community service project or a conference can help them to build a sense of civic responsibility and also improve their knowledge of civic processes and government.<sup>218</sup>



Young people who had been active in student government during their youth volunteered at a significantly higher rate than those who had not been active (62 per cent versus 45 per cent).<sup>219</sup>

### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth are engaged in their communities.

### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who canvassed, campaigned and fundraised as volunteers



Proportion of youth who volunteered with schools, religious organizations or community associations



## Understand and harnessss the contributions of youth

Many of Ontario's young people have ideas on how they can be better supported to succeed. Research shows that the developmental changes taking place during adolescence enable inventive and innovative thinking.<sup>220</sup> We know that nobody is more knowledgeable about the challenges, goals and opportunities for young people than youth themselves. We also know that young people are interested in having a say and making contributions to areas of general concern to society, such as social justice, poverty and environmental sustainability.<sup>221</sup> Youth also need to see evidence that their voices and perspectives are not only heard but incorporated into decisions that affect them.



Studies indicate that youth in Canada are looking for more purposeful opportunities for participation. Youth have expressed that they want to be able to influence policy – not only in youth issues but also in areas important to society as a whole.<sup>223</sup>

### Making the most of young people's contributions involves:

#### Being receptive to youth ideas:

Individuals, communities and organizations should listen and respond thoughtfully to youth ideas, and collaborate with young people wherever possible to make change happen. Creating collaborative opportunities for youth to participate

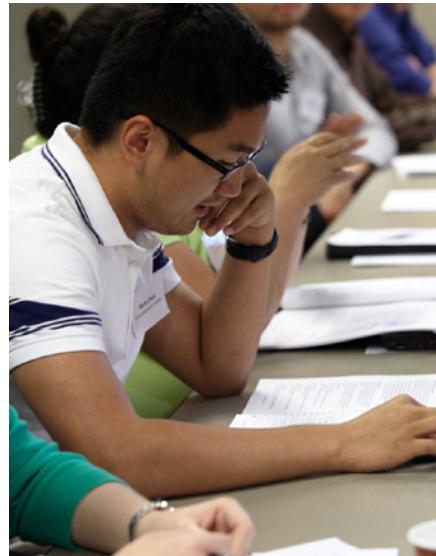
in decision-making in cooperation with adult allies is important to supporting long-term civic engagement and can help improve outcomes.<sup>222</sup> This approach will help us build stronger families, better schools, more effective programs, and more integrated communities.



### Supporting youth-led innovation:

Investing in youth-led innovation can have significant benefits for both young people and their communities. Youth-led innovation has been highlighted as an important component of building an innovation-based economy in Ontario.<sup>224</sup> Young people have a desire to address social problems, especially those that directly impact them, but also those that affect their

communities as a whole. Many young leaders are active in socially innovative projects and enterprises that work to solve long-standing social and environmental challenges through novel, collaborative approaches. Supporting youth-led innovation involves empowering more young people to lead and act as agents of social change in their communities.



### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth leverage their assets to address social issues.

### How we can tell:



Proportion of youth who started volunteering to help a cause they personally believed in



# What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

## 4-H Programs

4-H is a youth development organization with 6,000 members between 10 and 21 years. Members meet with 1,700 volunteers in clubs across Ontario to develop self-confidence, a sense of responsibility, and to learn leadership, problem solving and goal setting skills.

## Change the World: Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge

The Challenge kicks off annually during National Volunteer Week in April. Its goal is to encourage youth between 14 and 18 years to volunteer in their community and foster a lifelong commitment to volunteerism.

## Youth Advocacy Training Institute (YATI)

YATI is a program of the Ontario Lung Association that provides various training programs, interactive games, learning experiences, train-it-yourself guidebooks and multimedia resources to support self-advocacy, education and positive youth development.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support civic engagement and youth leadership:

- [40 Hour Community Involvement Graduation Requirement](#)
- [4H Programs](#)
- Animation culturelle
- [Change The World Youth Ambassador](#)
- [Change the World, the Ontario Youth Volunteer Challenge](#)
- [Elargir L'espace francophone](#)
- [Hilary M. Weston Scholarship](#)
- [James Bartleman Aboriginal Youth Creative Writing Award](#)
- [Lieutenant Governor's Community Volunteer Award for Students](#)
- [Lincoln M. Alexander Award](#)
- [Local Government Week](#)
- [Nishnawbe Aski Nation Youth Resiliency Program \(Girl Power / Wolf Spirit\)](#)
- [Ontario Medal for Young Volunteers](#)
- [Pan-Am Games Youth Volunteer Opportunities \(tuition\)](#)
- Parlement jeunesse
- [Passport Initiative and Passport Mentoring Initiative](#)
- [Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities](#)
- [Students as Researchers Initiative](#)
- [Student Voice, SpeakUp, Student Forums, Minister's Student Advisory Council](#)
- [Youth Advocacy Training Institute](#)

# Case Study



## Stepping Up: Youth-Friendly Communities

Formed in 2003, Play Works is a group of not-for-profit organizations – representing the areas of sport, physical activity, civic engagement, arts and culture, rural youth and recreation – who advocate for the importance and potential of play in the lives of youth. Play Works seeks to support the wellbeing of Ontario's young people by creating environments that support growth and development through play.

Since 2005, Play Works has recognized 40 Ontario communities as being Youth-Friendly. These communities have demonstrated best practices in helping youth to feel included, connected and celebrated:

### The City of Sault Ste. Marie: Community supports for positive youth development

**T**he Algoma District School Board and the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board collaborated to develop a "Voluntary Self-Identification Policy for Aboriginal Students" in cooperation with representatives from the North Shore Tribal Council, the Indian Friendship Centre and Métis Nation of Ontario. This policy allows the school boards to gather data and direct Aboriginal education programs toward healthy development, as well as provide those who choose to self-identify with effective, supportive programming.

### The Township of Rideau Lakes: Celebrating and recognizing youth

**A**local newspaper, The Review Mirror, recognizes youth by offering all youth-specific advertising and features free of charge. The newspaper regularly features various youth items, including weekly written contributions by local students and a "Lion of the Week" spotlight that focuses on one high school student's achievements in any area of school life. The "Spartan Scene," a column about student life, is written by a student who is chosen each year by his or her peers. A section of the newspaper is also dedicated to showcasing the graduating class of local high schools and their accomplishments and awards.

### The Town of Hanover: Helping youth feel comfortable in their own community

**T**he Youth-Friendly Business/Agency Program recognizes businesses that can be considered youth-friendly and encourages improvements in the way they relate to youth. One example is a local literacy agency that works with a local high school to provide a co-op placement for one high school student each year. The program's goal is to provide youth with opportunities for growth through employment, special pricing, recognition and more.



**Building on  
community  
assets**

Outcomes # **19** **20**

# Coordinated and **Youth-Friendly** Communities

Ontario communities want to see young people stay healthy, achieve academic success, feel safe, be engaged, and grow into successful adults. Achieving these goals requires coordination – individuals, organizations and communities need to work together to support youth.

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**Coordinated and youth-friendly communities matter** to young Ontarians:

Young people living in youth-friendly communities feel more supported, connected, engaged, valued and safe.

And they're **important** for Ontario:

Young people living in youth-friendly communities receive the coordinated supports they need to reach their potential and contribute to society.



# Snapshot of Coordinated and Youth-Friendly Communities in Ontario

**Ontario's youth service sector is fragmented:** The youth-serving sector in Ontario is made up of federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations governments, schools, health providers, community organizations and parents. In most communities, there is often no formal network that brings these sectors together and it can be challenging for families and

young people to identify available supports and services.

**Some communities are developing collaborative youth strategies:**

There are some communities across Ontario that have joined forces to create environments that support youth growth and development.



## Statistics



Research indicates that only 54 per cent of agencies that provide youth programs and services try to coordinate their activities with other agencies and organizations.<sup>225</sup>



Over the last eight years, Play Works Partnership's Youth-Friendly Communities Recognition Program has acknowledged the work of 40 communities that have taken steps to ensure their young people between 13 and 19 years have access to sport, recreation, drama, dance, music, the arts, volunteerism, leadership development, service leadership and/or civic engagement.<sup>226</sup>



## Support youth-friendly community planning

A youth-friendly community is one that is committed to supporting positive youth development through recreation and play, engagement and volunteerism, and accessible spaces. Communities that value, celebrate and recognize the accomplishments of youth support them to feel accepted and engaged. These communities encourage young people to take leadership positions within the community and involve them in decision-making.

### Supporting youth through friendly, inclusive communities involves:

**Making youth a priority:** We know that youth programs and services that support the development of young people positively benefit communities as a whole. Prioritizing youth means thinking about the services they most need and providing ongoing support to those that support youth. This can include ensuring that youth-specific community programming or recreation time is available. By ensuring sustainability in planning for youth programming and for community or youth-driven

organizations, young people can have consistent access to people and activities that benefit them.

**Recognizing youth needs:** Making communities youth-friendly involves thinking about the types of activities, services and support that matter most to young people – such as access to recreation, volunteer, leadership and learning opportunities. Increased academic, social, physical and emotional competence, reduced incidence of risky behaviours, reduced incidence of social exclusion,



fewer crime and mental health issues can be the benefits of community planning that is responsive to and inclusive of the needs of youth.<sup>227</sup> Making communities more inclusive and supportive of youth involves strengthening recognition of youth perspectives among community partners.

#### Providing youth-friendly spaces:

Youth benefit when they have access to safe spaces to grow, develop and connect with peers. Youth-friendly

spaces can include places such as malls, libraries, community centres, movie theatres, skate parks, cultural centres, drop-ins or after-school programs. Providing safe spaces for youth allows them to feel welcome and also benefits communities by making spaces safer and more inclusive. Ensuring that spaces are inviting for youth involves thinking about the needs and preferences of young people and including youth in planning and decision-making processes. This can include providing

accepting environments for youth who may feel isolated based on their sexual orientation, a disability or special need, their language or other factors. Studies have suggested that community “hubs” can provide important additional support for marginalized youth in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where safe spaces for youth are otherwise limited.

#### Outcome we want:



Ontario youth have access to safe spaces that provide quality opportunities for play and recreation.

#### How we can tell:

↑ Proportion of parents who feel recreation opportunities in their community meet their child's needs

↑ Proportion of youth who feel there are good places in their community to spend their free time





## Improve information and coordination of Ontario's youth services

Parents, family members, mentors, teachers, employers, doctors, nurses, volunteers, coaches, social service providers and others all play important roles in positive youth development. We envision Ontario communities as places where all young people have access to a continuum of supports to foster positive development.

### Improving coordination in Ontario communities involves:

#### Making it easier to navigate supports:

There is a lot of support available for young people across Ontario. We know that sometimes it can be challenging for youth and their families to navigate through the myriad of programs and find the right path to appropriate services and supports.

Research demonstrates that times of transition in a young person's life (for example, entering and leaving high school, or moving out of the family home) are especially important to their development, and

that effectively supporting youth to navigate transitions can help improve their success into adulthood. Some young people, such as youth with complex needs or youth who have lived in care, may need more support than others to transition out of children's services and into adult services. Some youth, including Aboriginal youth and youth in remote/rural communities who need to travel away from home for extended periods to access education or other services may also need additional supports to help them transition.



Given their connectedness to technology and social media, use of online resources may be a useful medium for youth to find the help they need. Several existing online directories (such as [Settlement.org](#) or [211ontario.ca](#)) are examples of this approach to service navigation.

**Enhancing collaboration across sectors:** All governments (federal, provincial, municipal and First Nations) as well as communities (schools, health services, community

organizations, the philanthropic sector and the private sector) have a role to play in working together to implement a collaborative, integrated system of services. A coordinated and collaborating youth-serving sector is one that provides a flexible, broad continuum of services and supports to meet the changing needs of young people through key age, developmental and educational transitions.<sup>228</sup>



#### Outcome we want:



Ontario's youth know about and easily navigate resources in their communities.

#### How we can tell:



Proportion of callers to 211 looking for community referrals who are young people



## What is Ontario doing to support these outcomes?

### Ontario's After-School Program

Ontario's After-school Program gives 18,000 students in Grades 1 to 12, who are living in priority neighbourhoods, the chance to participate in safe, supervised activities after school. The program leads to: increased physical activity, healthier eating, better grades, and less youth violence.

### Youth Outreach Worker (YOW) Program

YOWs help “hard-to-reach” youth and their families connect with services in their communities. There are 97 YOWs in Ontario in nine high-needs communities, including Windsor, Hamilton, Thunder Bay, London, Durham, Ottawa, Peel, York and Toronto.

### Community Use of Schools Program

To increase access to affordable youth programs in under-serviced communities, the Community Use of Schools Program provides funding to Ontario school boards so they can offer not-for-profit groups school space at reduced rates for use outside of regular school hours.

The Government of Ontario has a number of initiatives that support communities to be youth-friendly and coordinated:

- [Community Homelessness Prevention Initiative](#)
- [Community Use of Schools](#)
- Écoles-pivot
- Local Youth Collective Impact Program (**new!**)
- [Investment in Affordable Housing Program for Ontario](#)
- [Ontario's After-school Program](#)
- [Partnership Grant Program](#)
- [Special Needs Strategy \(\*\*new!\*\*\)](#)
- [Youth Outreach Worker Program expansion](#)
- Youth Research and Evaluation Hub Program (**new!**)





# A Sustained Commitment

**T**hrough Stepping Up, the Government of Ontario is renewing its commitment to supporting the wellbeing of Ontario's youth.

This commitment involves an ongoing effort to understand how young Ontarians are doing and to support them through effective, evidence-based, coordinated programs and services.

In order to meet this commitment, we have created Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing – a resource to describe and monitor the overall state of youth wellbeing in the province over time.

We are also committing to a number of Cross-Cutting Actions – that focus on setting the conditions for success and maximizing the efforts of all those who are working to support youth

## A Sustained Commitment: **Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing**

The Profile of Youth Wellbeing presents a set of 20 outcomes and 52 indicators, which were selected to create a picture of how young people are doing in Ontario.



Indicators for the Ontario Profile of Wellbeing were selected based on their:

- Relevance to the outcomes we want for Ontario's youth
- Regularity in data collection (annual or biennial)
- Representation of a large, stable youth sample
- Representation of Ontario's context
- Balance of the data's sensitivity to change and volatility

The outcomes in Stepping Up were selected based on research and consultations with stakeholders and youth. For each outcome, indicators were chosen as a proxy measure to assess and monitor the state of youth. Together, the outcomes and indicators represent our priorities for young people and our commitment to monitoring their wellbeing and development.

### Why a profile?

The Government of Ontario has developed this profile in order to improve understanding about how youth in Ontario are doing – and to help identify what issues we need to pay attention to in order to support them to succeed.

The profile extends Stepping Up's common language on positive youth development for government and the youth-serving sector by providing an opportunity for ongoing evidence-based dialogue about the priority areas.



The profile was not developed with the intention of assigning a degree of causality in changes to the indicators to activities inspired by Stepping Up. Changes to the indicators may reflect past investment and contextual conditions beyond our control. Likewise, the indicators have not been selected as an evaluative tool for Stepping Up itself, or for individual programs.

### How was the Profile developed?

The indicators rely on data that is currently collected on a regular basis. Publicly reported, Ontario population-level data was used where available and supplemented with data on government programs to respond to each specific outcome and round out the picture of youth wellbeing.

As the profile was created by curating the available data, its value is not found in the individual data points but in the picture that is created when all of the indicators are understood together. The overall portrait of young people in Ontario tells a unique story about a generation, a context and a trajectory of change.

### Working with what is available.

The indicator sources used in the profile have differences in populations represented, age demographics of the samples, data collection methodology and regularity of reporting. (Please see the Appendix for original data sources.) Many of the indicators are based on voluntary, self-reported surveys. Although this data provides an excellent opportunity to hear the voice of youth, not all voices are represented. For example, many of the data sources exclude First Nations youth on reserves and in remote communities.



## Considering the differences for marginalized youth

The main goal in creating the Profile of Youth Wellbeing has been to develop an overall picture of how all youth across Ontario are doing. By focusing on population-level indicators, we recognize that the story presented in the profile does not necessarily reflect the experiences of individual youth. Each data source used in the profile is limited by its sample, which in many cases under-represents the experiences of marginalized populations (such as Aboriginal youth or “undocumented” youth).

With limited data available to assess outcomes for youth, we readily acknowledge the methodological challenges in creating the profile. However, we believe the profile plays an important role in showing the overall status of Ontario’s young people - and we see it as providing a first, foundational step that can be used to demonstrate where the experiences of some groups of young people are very different from the rest of the population.

Each year, the province will publish an update on the Profile of Youth Wellbeing. As a part of this update, **we commit to digging deeper into the experiences of marginalized youth** – including Aboriginal youth, youth in and leaving care, youth with disabilities or special needs, racialized youth, newcomer youth, LGBTTQ youth, Francophone youth, youth living in rural and remote communities, youth from low-income families and youth in conflict with the law.

In addition, we believe that this profile plays a role in highlighting the need for more meaningful data about youth and identifying areas where current data is lacking. The profile will be improved as the data improves and new information emerges. We know that collaboration with partners in the sector will be important to improving data and monitoring on the profile.

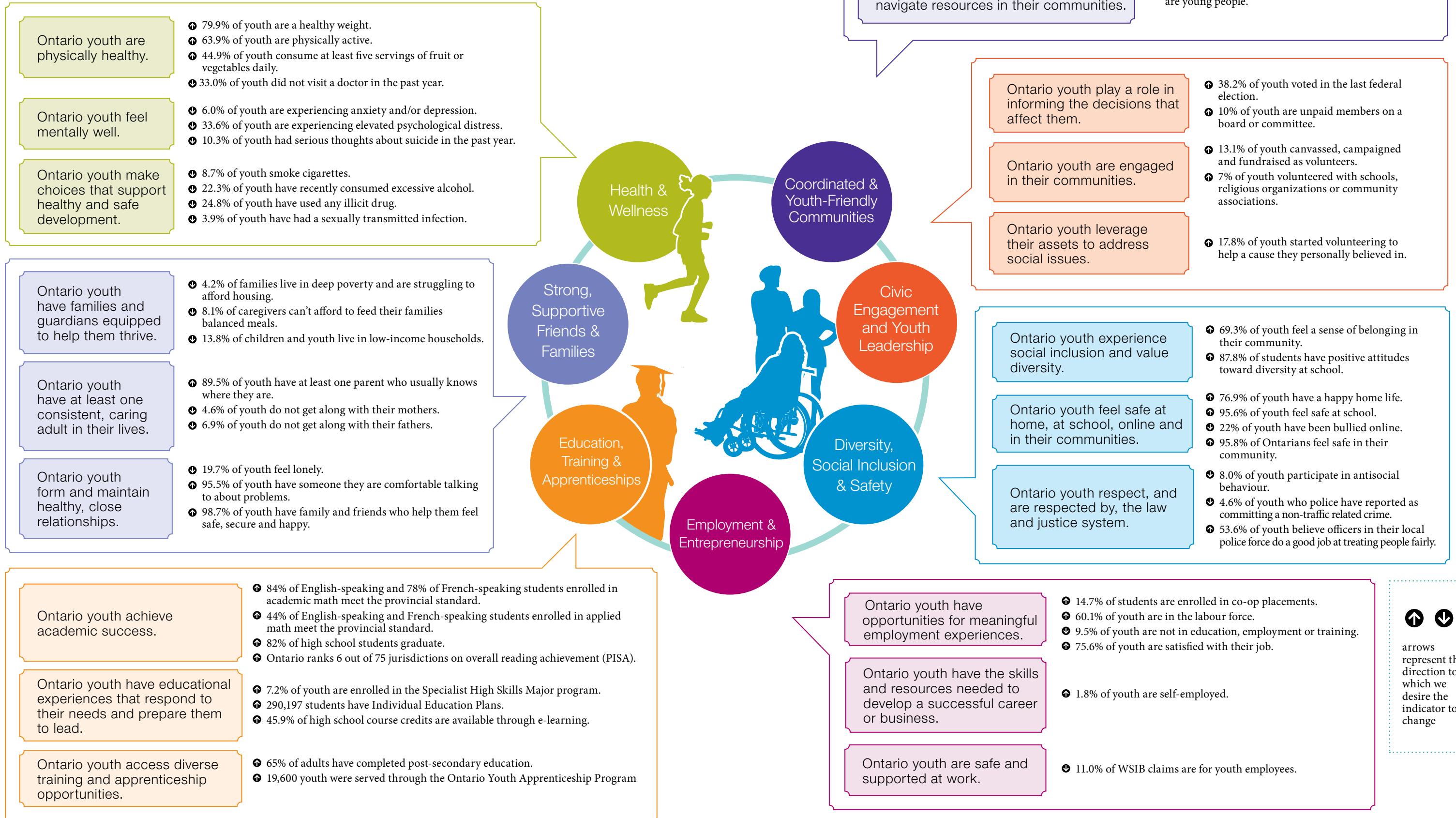
## A critical step forward

The profile is a statement; a commitment to paying attention to the wellbeing of young people. The outcomes provide an ideal reality that we hope all youth can experience. The indicators will allow us to know, each year, how many youth are getting closer to reaching that reality. Although the profile will not perfectly describe all youth in Ontario, it provides the questions we can ask the young people in our lives about how they are faring and what supports they need to develop and thrive.



As the Review of the Roots of Youth Violence Report notes, it is important to proceed with the best information that is available and then work to make improvements over time, rather than waiting for something better to emerge. The best should not be the enemy of the good.

# Ontario's Profile of Youth Wellbeing





## A Sustained Commitment: Cross-Cutting Actions

The Province of Ontario is increasing its commitment to working together with youth allies to support all young people to become healthy, safe, hopeful, engaged, educated and contributing members of their communities and our province.

Stepping Up has identified 20 outcomes that matter to the wellbeing of Ontario's young people. Through this framework, the Province of Ontario is renewing its commitment to youth wellbeing – and establishing these outcomes as priorities for action moving forward.

The guiding principles proposed through Stepping Up help to clarify how we will work towards achieving these priorities. They are:



- 1. A Positive, Asset-Based View of Youth**
- 2. Targeted Support for Those Who Need It**
- 3. Collaboration and Partnership**
- 4. Meaningful Youth Engagement and Leadership**
- 5. Diversity**
- 6. Evidence-Informed Choices**
- 7. Transparency**



Based on these principles, and in order to support progress towards the outcomes we want for our youth, the Province of Ontario is committing to the following cross-cutting actions, designed to create the conditions for success:

- 1** Provide sustained, positive-oriented leadership
- 2** Focus on the needs of marginalized youth
- 3** Support collaboration, local planning and partnership
- 4** Increase youth voice in design and delivery of services
- 5** Increase capacity to better serve diverse and marginalized youth
- 6** Support research and evaluation
- 7** Provide updates and information on the wellbeing of Ontario's youth



## Action ①

Provide sustained,  
positive-oriented leadership

**Sustained Leadership:** We recognize that supporting all of Ontario's young people to develop successfully is a complex and multi-faceted goal. Moving forward, we are committed to using this strategic framework to guide our actions and choices. We are also committed to using it to inform our partnerships with others to better guide mutual decisions and investments.

## Action ②

Focus on the needs of  
marginalized youth

**Developing relevant and innovative solutions:** Ontario will continue to see youth as a priority through investments in programs such as those made under [Ontario's Youth Action Plan](#) and the [Youth Leaving Care Strategy](#). The services and supports we provide to youth need to be flexible, responsive and relevant to the changing needs of all youth. We know cultural, social, economic and geographical factors specific to youth must be considered when developing youth programs.

*Youth Opportunities Fund.* We are launching a Youth Opportunities Fund to support the development of innovative projects in priority neighborhoods to help at-risk youth stay on track.



## Action ③

### Support collaboration, local planning and partnership

**Improving programs through cross-government coordination:** The collaborative effort to develop *Stepping Up* brought together representatives from ministries across the provincial government to talk about young people and the outcomes that matter to them in a holistic and comprehensive way. We learned a lot from working together and we are committed to improving collaboration across ministries to better serve youth.



**Establishing a Cross-ministry Working Group.** The establishment of a permanent working group – representing 18 youth-serving ministries – will fill a gap at the cross-cutting government level related to youth issues. Through collaboration with the [Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities](#), the working group will break down sector silos and address specific issues in youth-serving programs that were identified through the Ontario youth program review, as well as other issues as they emerge.

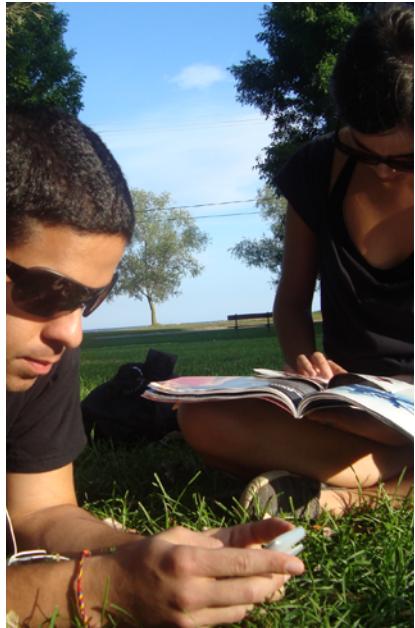
**Supporting sectors to collaborate:** Ontario communities have opportunities to improve outcomes for youth through the development of strategic plans and by forming linkages and improving relationships across sectors. We know that there are some communities already doing this work that we can all learn from. As announced in [Ontario's Youth Action Plan](#), the Ontario government will provide supports to promote collaboration across sectors.

**Cross-Sector Local Youth Planning.** Supports for local planning will help youth and those who work with youth to set priorities together, reduce duplication and enhance existing capacity and service provision in their communities. By bringing together representatives from governments, school boards, the justice system, private business, community agencies and young people themselves, youth planning tables will foster better alignment between program goals and result in lasting location-based solutions.



**Increasing opportunities for partnerships:** We will also work closely with partners in the private sector to increase opportunities for business to contribute to the wellbeing of youth and support at-risk youth to succeed in areas like employment.

*Private Sector Jobs and Mentorship Initiative.* We are partnering with the [Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance](#) to engage youth, employers, labour representatives, community leaders and governments to increase job, mentorship and entrepreneurship opportunities for at-risk youth in the private sector. We will look to identify immediate and long-term actions to overcome barriers that at-risk youth face when looking for, and starting, a job; attract the private sector to provide more job and mentorship opportunities; and encourage communities across Ontario to partner with the private sector to help at-risk youth succeed.



## Action ④

### Increase youth voice in design and delivery of services

**Fostering youth leadership:** Involving young people in decision-making supports their futures. Doing so across the province will help ensure the services and supports in which we have invested will maximize positive youth development and allow youth to achieve their highest potential. We will try to create opportunities for meaningful youth involvement in decision-making through the programs and services they access. We will build on existing efforts to engage youth (for example, the [Minister's Student Advisory Council](#) of the Ministry of Education, the [Feathers of Hope First Nations Youth Forum](#)).

As a first priority, the government will direct the [Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities](#) to work with program staff to develop a plan to increase youth engagement in service design and delivery.



*Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities.* First introduced in Ontario's Youth Action Plan, the Premier's Council on Youth Opportunities has been established to provide advice to government on how to support youth through existing programs, lead thinking on new directions, and apply a "youth lens" to decision-making. The Council has a membership of 25 youth and young professionals, and is now a permanent feature of the provincial government's approach to youth services.

**Supporting Youth-led Innovation:** We know that issues like poverty, social isolation and youth violence require innovative solutions and an all-hands-on-deck approach – and recognize that creative solutions are needed to tackle these "wicked" social problems. Youth is a developmental stage that supports inventive and innovative thinking. This period of creativity can be channeled to address pressing social problems when youth are supported to lead and empowered to act as agents of change.

## Action 5

### Increase capacity to better serve diverse and marginalized youth

**Ensuring that services are inclusive and culturally responsive:** Stepping Up has catalogued many programs and services for youth that are already provided by the Government of Ontario. We know that marginalized young people may not always feel comfortable accessing these services.

We know that, to be effective, Ontario's youth programs need to reflect and be responsive to the diverse needs and backgrounds of the young people they serve. We are committed to strengthen diversity in Ontario's youth programs to better reflect the composition of the communities they serve. This involves:

- i. Building capacity of service providers to better serve diverse youth
- ii. Strengthening outreach to youth through partnerships with culturally diverse grassroots agencies.

We will work with our partners to develop strategies in this area.



## Action 6

### Support research and evaluation

**Increasing knowledge of youth development:** Over the past few years, there has been an impressive increase in the quantity and quality of research in youth development and the supports required by youth to successfully transition to adulthood. This body of knowledge continues to evolve. It is important that we continue to embrace emerging evidence, innovative approaches and new knowledge — and to apply these in our work with youth. We will continue working to make this information more readily available to the people who are supporting the positive development of young people — whether they are youth, business leaders, caregivers, teachers, mentors, community planners, or policy-makers.

*Mobilizing Knowledge.* The government will continue to mobilize research on positive youth development, including Stepping Stones: A Resource on Youth Development, to increase understanding of youth development and invest in continuous quality improvement in Ontario's youth programming.

**Increasing linkages to research and evaluation:** There is broad consensus that youth services and supports across the province must do a better job of identifying their impact and that more focus is needed on the quality of services youth receive. We will share best practices and maximize positive youth development across the province. To do this, we will continue to research effective programs, identify best practices and leading strategies, and provide tools so we can all measure how effective our programs are.

*Supports for Research and Evaluation.* We are launching a plan to provide tools to support the measurement and evaluation by community programs and increase evidence on their effectiveness. This plan will support agencies delivering services to youth to tell their story, measure their impact and be guided by evidence.



## Action 7

Provide updates and information on the wellbeing of Ontario's youth

**Reporting on youth outcomes:** An important part of Stepping Up is to provide a set of outcomes and indicators around which we can align our work in support of youth. We will continue to pay attention to how youth are doing through monitoring of these outcomes and indicators. We will also ensure that we work with the sector to capture additional qualitative data related to the themes identified that may not be fully captured by the indicators. This will help us understand how youth development in Ontario is progressing.



*Tracking the Wellbeing of Youth.* Beginning in 2013, the Ontario government will report on youth outcomes each year by tracking Stepping Up's outcomes and indicators and the implementation of Ontario Youth Strategy initiatives.

# Moving Forward:

## Improving outcomes for Ontario's youth, together.

Stepping Up has identified 20 evidence-based outcomes that are important for the wellbeing of Ontario's youth. By articulating these outcomes, this framework identifies our priorities moving forward in order to guide decision-making and encourage coordination among those that are involved in supporting youth to succeed.

This framework has been created to help build on the good work that is already taking place across Ontario to help young people reach their full potential. Through the development of this framework, we have been encouraged to see that Ontario's youth have a strong foundation of services and supports. Those involved in supporting youth are doing many of the right things. Governments, communities, service providers and families across Ontario have accomplished a great deal already.

### **But there is much more we can do, together.**

By working together, we can improve the ways our supports are provided. We know that working in silos and without evidence-based information results in less effective services and programs for youth. That is why we need to build stronger, more effective partnerships in the sector and share successful models and practices that can help us develop better programs for youth. It is only by working together that we can move closer toward our vision: **to support all young people to become healthy, safe, hopeful, engaged and contributing members of their communities and our province.**



# We are inviting you to Step Up.

We are committed to improving outcomes for youth – and we want you to be involved. There is a role for every Ontarian – whether you are a young person, a parent, a teacher, a business owner, a policy-maker, a worker, a property manager, a health care provider, a police officer, or a social worker – to make this vision a reality. Stepping Up has been developed so young people, families, service providers, governments, philanthropic organizations, community groups and private businesses can identify the areas in which they can get involved in supporting young people to succeed.

Endorsing *Stepping Up* involves thinking about how the 20 outcomes articulated in this framework relate to you and your interactions with young people. We challenge you to find the outcome(s) that matter most to you and the ways you can support the wellbeing of Ontario's youth.

**What does this mean for me if I am a young person?** We invite you to take the lead and use your voice to contribute new ideas and fresh energy to addressing the challenges in your community. We know that you have a unique perspective and talents to offer. Think about the contributions that you can make to your family, peers, school and community, and what supports you need to accomplish them. Participating can help you develop your identity, skills and build your experience for the future. You can also help improve the effectiveness of youth programs and services for the benefit of other young people who need support.

**What does this mean for me if I am a caring adult, parent or guardian?**

We invite you to think about the role you play in the lives of young people – whether they are a part of your own family, your neighbourhood, or other members of your community. We know that the support that you provide to these youth as a role model can positively impact their development. We invite you to recognize young people's assets and take advantage of opportunities to support them through any challenges they may face. We also invite you to participate alongside youth in your community to share your ideas and contribute your skills and expertise to improving outcomes for young people.

**What does this mean for me if I am a community leader, a representative of a government, foundation or philanthropic organization?** We invite you to join us in a collaborative conversation about how we can provide better leadership to youth and their allies. We know that together we can improve the way that we make investments in youth, so they are more holistic and coordinated. We invite you to use the outcomes identified in Stepping Up to inform your strategic planning processes for young people. We also invite you to think about new ways to meaningfully involve youth in strategic planning and programming, and ways to embrace diversity in your organization.

**What does this mean for me if I am a service provider or front-line worker or an educator?** We invite you to think about how you can apply Stepping Up's guiding principles to enhance the effectiveness of your programs. We invite you to improve opportunities for youth to participate in the design and delivery of programs. You can encourage youth from diverse backgrounds to feel comfortable and accepted. We know that taking an asset-based view of youth involves understanding the developmental needs of young people. We invite you to join us in ongoing learning about youth development and to apply a holistic, evidence-based approach to the services you deliver. We also invite you to think about the role you play in your direct interactions with young people and recognize the important contributions you make to their lives as role models. Lastly, we invite you to make connections across sectors to broaden our collective impact for youth.

**What does this mean for me if I am a member of a faith-based or cultural group or other community association?** We invite you to think about the outcomes in Stepping Up and how they relate to the values you hold and the work you do. We know that young people benefit when they develop their identities through participation in social groups. We invite you to involve young people in planning and ask for their ideas on how you can best support them to succeed.

**What does this mean for me if I am a business person?** We invite you to think about yourselves as key allies in encouraging youth to succeed and to participate in supporting positive youth outcomes. We know that you interact with young people on a daily basis and influence their experiences in many ways. We invite you to make youth feel welcome and respected by creating friendly spaces and policies. We also invite you to invest in the skills, energy and talents of young people through employment and leadership opportunities, and to collaborate with us to invest in young workers today and in the future.

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