

- DID YOU KNOW?

- Niagara Region has one of the highest levels of immigration of any area in Canada. This includes a significant number of refugees. For the past three years, 5,000 to 7,000 refugees have arrived annually.
  - Niagara Falls was chosen as one of 12 communities to participate in the federal Understanding the Early Years research projects examining community impacts on early child development.
  - Welland and Port Colborne are designated as Franco-phone communities with approximately 12% of the population's 'mother tongue' French.
  - In 4% of homes French and Italian are primarily spoken at home, while English is mainly spoken in 80% of homes.
  - Brock University offers Child and Youth Studies undergraduate and masters programs.
  - Niagara College offers an Early Childhood Education diploma program.

Children are our most precious resource as well as our most vulnerable citizens. They represent our future. How, and what our children are doing now is an important indicator of what lies ahead for them as individuals. This also impacts the quality of life in our region.

NEXT STEPS

We invite you, the caring residents of the Niagara Region, to join us in celebrating in the areas where we shine and assist us in the areas where we want to grow. It is our hope that you will work with us at Early Years Niagara to expand and improve opportunities for Niagara's youngest citizens. We need our children to be healthy, active, happy and educated. A good life needs a good start.

The information contained in this document reflects the data provided by the various contributing organizations listed here.

Early Years Niagara Research Advisory Group	Early Years Action Group - Niagara	Contributing Organizations
<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>*Dr. Janet Killins, Consultant: Research, Assessment &amp; Evaluation, DSBN; Chair</li><li>*Anne Biscaro, Director: RNPHD</li><li>Fran Chandler, Research Ethics Officer: Brock University</li><li>Donna Dalglish, Coordinator: OEYC Niagara Falls</li><li>Mary Lou Decou, Medical Epidemiologist: RNPHD</li><li>Dr. Laura Del Cotto-Kaminski, Consultant: Research, Assessment &amp; Evaluation, NCDSB</li><li>Angela Di Nello, Coordinator: UEY</li><li>*Pat Heidebrecht, Director: Children's Services Division, RNCS</li><li>Chris Knapp, West Niagara Family Centre</li><li>*Tammy McCormick-Ferguson, Executive Director: ECCDC</li><li>Sandra Noel, Data Analysis Coordinator: OEY, RNPHD</li><li>*Judy Reid, Lead, Early Years Niagara: BEC</li><li>Allison Soave, Coordinator: Early Childhood Education Program, Niagara College</li><li>Kathy Thompson, Consultant: Early Years Staff Development, DSBN</li><li>Lori Walker, Research Ethics Officer: Brock University</li></ul></div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Dr. Robin Williams, Medical Officer of Health, RNPHD: Co-Chair</li><li>Margaret Andrewes, Co-Chair</li><li>John Armstrong, General Manager and Vice-President, Public Affairs: OEB International</li><li>Robert Bisson, Executive Director: Centre de Santé Communautaire</li><li>William Charron, Executive Director: FACS</li><li>Christine Graham, Program Officer, Curriculum: NCDSB</li><li>Ken Janzen, Manager: Niagara Credit Union, NOTL Commercial Business Centre</li><li>Margaret Jarrell, Executive Director: Adolescent's Family Support Service Niagara</li><li>Dr. Fran Owen, Associate Professor: Brock University</li><li>Ted Palmer, Executive Director: BEC</li><li>Dr. Dan Patterson, President: Niagara College</li><li>Vaino Raun, Manager: R.V. Anderson Associates Ltd.</li><li>Susan Reid, Past Co-Chair</li><li>Barb Sockovie, Executive Director: A Child's World</li><li>Art Wing, Chair: EYN Liaison Team</li><li>Gary Zalot, Executive Director: Niagara District Health Council</li><li>Linda Langston, Executive Director: Niagara Child and Youth Services</li></ul></div>	<div><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Business Education Council (BEC)</li><li>District School Board of Niagara (DSBN)</li><li>Early Childhood Community Development Centre (ECCDC)</li><li>Family and Children's Services Niagara (FACS)</li><li>Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB)</li><li>Niagara Regional Housing (NRH)</li><li>Niagara Regional Police Services (NRPS)</li><li>Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC)</li><li>Regional Niagara Community Services, Children Services Department (RNCS)</li><li>Regional Niagara Public Health Department (RNPHD)</li><li>Understanding the Early Years (UEY)</li></ul></div>

Canada

This snapshot is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program. "The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada".

Early Years Niagara wishes to thank all contributing organizations and individuals and the London, Ontario organization "Investing in Children".



2005 SNAPSHOT



BACKGROUND

Since 1998, Early Years Niagara (EYN), (formerly Early Years Action Group-Niagara Region) - an alliance of community members, agencies, and organizations has been dedicated to supporting the well being of children and families in the Niagara Region. EYN wants to make sure that the Niagara Region provides the programs, services and activities that create healthy, active, happy, learning children - a community vision where every child reaches their optimal potential. EYN believes parents, neighbourhoods, governments, businesses, community groups and the non-profit sector, all have a role to play in creating a culture that supports all children to get a good start in life.

NIAGARA REGION OVERVIEW

Niagara is Ontario's eighth largest municipality, spanning 1,851 square kilometres of mixed rural and urban territory.

There are about 4,000 babies born every year in Niagara. In 2004, we have approximately 30,000 children who are six years of age and younger.

In November 2002, the Niagara Children's Charter, based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, was developed. There are three versions of the charter: "Kid Style" written by grade four students, "Teen Style" written by grade nine students and an adult version. Regional Council and all 12 municipalities have unanimously endorsed the Charter which shows Niagara's commitment to our children.

Early Years  
NIAGARA

a Good Life Needs a Good Start

Visit us at [www.earlyyearsniagara.org](http://www.earlyyearsniagara.org)





EYN has produced this ‘snapshot’ of children aged 0 to 6 in the Niagara Region for several purposes: to create awareness of some interesting facts about young children in our Region; to confirm that as a region, a lot of good things are happening to benefit our young; and to encourage us to take action when and where we can to provide the best conditions for optimal child development.

Our success as a region will be measured in large part by our collective ability to mobilize our talents, expand our successes, and deepen our commitment around improving the life prospects for all the Region’s children. As we move forward, what better motto can we have for our children than ‘A Good Life Needs a Good Start’.

This ‘snapshot’ is a beginning and builds on previous reports produced throughout the Region. Colleagues within the Region involved in measuring progress of children have given us excellent guidance and advice. As well, we have attempted to reflect the questions and concerns of residents who care about the progress of our Region. Although not a baseline measurement, it will provide a basis for future comparisons. It is not a ‘rigorously’ completed ‘report card’ because the limitations of the information collected from many sources do not allow for that kind of measurement. However, it does highlight what young children in the Niagara Region are doing and how they compare in some areas to others provincially and beyond.

Most of all, we can see where we are doing well and where we might need to concentrate our collective efforts. As in other communities, we also recognize that not all children have equal opportunities for participation in many of the services offered due to economic disadvantages or other factors. However, this ‘snapshot’ is meant to give an overview of our Region’s young children as a whole.

## EARLY LEARNING AND CARE

### School Readiness

In 2002, a study of school readiness was conducted in the Niagara Region using the Early Development

Instrument (EDI). The EDI is a checklist of behaviour and development indicators designed to measure the outcomes of children’s early years as they influence their readiness to learn at school. The checklist is completed by Senior Kindergarten Teachers after several months of observation on five general areas of child development (physical health, social competence, emotional maturity, language & cognitive development, and communications skills & general knowledge).

In 2002, the EDI was completed for more than 3,500 Senior Kindergarten students across the Niagara Region. The results were pooled by classrooms and analyzed on a regional and municipal level. This offered insights on children’s strengths and difficulties as a group within a community context. Children who had difficulty in one of the five developmental areas measured by the EDI will not necessarily have problems in school, but children who struggled on two or more areas are at increased risk.

- The EDI found physical health to be a strength for Niagara’s children. Areas that indicated a need for further support were communication skills, emotional maturity, and age appropriate knowledge & understanding of the world around them.
- Of Senior Kindergarten students in the Niagara Region, 13% experienced difficulty in one of the five areas of school readiness defined in the EDI.
- The percentage of children who experienced difficulty in two or more areas of school readiness ranged from 6% to 21%, across all 12 municipalities.
- Children who attended at least part-time preschool scored higher on the checklist than those who did not in the areas of social competence and emotional maturity.
- In all five general areas of child development, those who attended Junior Kindergarten scored significantly higher than those who did not.

### Licensed Childcare

- In 2003, there were 6,333 licensed childcare spaces in Niagara Region, an increase of five percent from 2001. These spaces included 157 for infants, 594 for toddlers, 3,580 for preschoolers and 2,002 spaces for school aged children. Of the total population of Niagara’s children under 6 years of age in 2003, there was licensed child care space for 14% of children.
- Since 2001, there has been a 30% overall decline in licensed home childcare sites (from 194 to the current 129). This is due in large part to a growing gap between compensation rates and operating costs.
- In 2003, approximately 40% of licensed child care spaces were subsidized. The criteria for admission was simplified, and reduced the Placement List from over 900 to less than 100. As well, the Vacancy Management System Project which links all child care services that offer subsidized spaces with Children’s Services has reduced the placement time and maximized space use.
- In excess of 60% of the region’s labour force is employed in industries operating outside the traditional workday model. Many parents work shifts thus necessitating non-traditional hours of childcare. An increasing number of children access evening and weekend care.



### Ontario Early Years Centres and Family Resource Centres

Niagara’s children, their families and care givers access services and resources through Ontario Early Years Centres (OEYC) and Resource Centres.

- Niagara’s OEYCs include four hubs, and numerous satellites, outreach programs and mobile locations.
- OEYCs and Resource Centres offer both client services, and supports and training, to those who provide care for children.
- In 2003, 9,695 children visited an OEYC representing a 25% increase over 2002. That same year 8,521 parents/caregivers visited an OEYC with their children representing a 21% increase over 2002.

## SAFETY AND SECURITY

### Neighbourhoods

A 2002 environmental assessment, completed on behalf of a federal research initiative funded by Social Development Canada (SDC), found that:

- Two-thirds of the areas observed were relatively clean.
- The appearance of private houses, public buildings and streets was generally in good condition.
- The majority (85%) of public playgrounds was in fair to excellent condition.
- A survey was conducted on behalf of the Niagara Regional Police Service between December 2000 and March 2001. Resident opinions and community recommendations for police services indicated that respondents felt a sense of security in their local communities. However, they felt less safe in downtown areas and parks during the evening hours.

### Family Economics

- Approximately 13% of families in the Niagara Region, compared to 15% across Ontario, were living below the Low Income Cut Off (LICO). This represents an economic measure that determines when a family tends to spend a significantly higher proportion of its income on the necessities of life - food, shelter and clothing, than the average family.
- According to 2001 census data, Niagara’s median household incomes are noticeably lower than the provincial average, \$47,224 in Niagara compared to \$53,626 in Ontario.

### Housing

- Niagara Regional Housing (NRH) owns and manages 2,636 units which are home to over 6,500 tenants. These tenants pay rent based on 30% of their household income. NRH has 34 family communities totalling 855 units throughout the Region. Within the family communities there are approximately 1,750 children, of whom 27% are between 0- 6 years of age.
- The need for rental assistance remains high with more than 4,000 households on the waiting list for social housing (June 2004). Based on a recent report, the number of new rental units built falls far below the projected need.
- One in three households in Niagara has an income of less than \$30,000. With an average price of \$231,000 in 2003, single detached homes are generally beyond the reach of households earning less than \$70,000.

### Child Protection

- In 2003, the Niagara Regional Police Child Abuse Unit investigated a total of 359 cases of abuse. Of these cases, 203 represented sexual abuse; 87 were classified as *other* including incidents of criminal neglect and unexplained injury; and 69 represented physical abuse.
- There was a decrease in the total number of Family and Children Services (FACS) admissions for children under the age of six from 221 to 191 from 2001 to 2003. Admissions are made as a result of child maltreatment or parental capacity investigations.
- The number of Crown Wards, children who are permanent charges of the Crown, under the age of six increased from 33 to 52 from 2001 to 2003.
- The number of discharges from FACS decreased from 193 to 151 from 2001 to 2003. The majority of these children were sent back to their families.



### Live Births/ Birth Weight

- In 2004, there were 4,040 live births in the Niagara Region. More than 98% of new mothers were visited by a Public Health Nurse within 48 hours following birth, thereby receiving expertise related to nurturing and caring for the new baby.
- In 2004, 41% of families (1,649) received a postpartum home visit by a Public Health Nurse. All families receive materials and offer of support through the Parent Talk Info Line.
- In 2003, 6% of babies born in Niagara were considered to be at low birth weight (weighing less than 2,500 grams or 5.5 lbs). This was similar to the provincial average. Low birth weight is a risk factor for infants, and a determinant of long-term health outcomes and learning difficulties.
- The average annual number of live births for mothers in Niagara between the ages of 15 and 19 was 200 babies (six percent of live births). The rate of teenage girls having babies has remained relatively constant over the last ten years in the Niagara Region.

### Immunization

- In 2003, 83% of Niagara Region’s children were fully immunized before they entered school. This represents an 80% increase from 2002. The provincial target is for 95% of children to be fully immunized before they enter school.

### Child Obesity

- In Canada, it is estimated that 20% of children are overweight. This is a threat to their future health. Currently, no statistics are gathered on obesity rates for children aged 18 years and under in the Niagara Region or across Canada on a regular basis.

### Child Hospitalization

- In 2003, there were 2,066 visits to emergency rooms due to falls by children under the age of six in Niagara. Like other jurisdictions, injury is a leading cause of death and disability during the first years of a child’s life.

### Dental

- In 2004, 983 children aged six years and under received dental treatment through programs offered by the Regional Niagara Public Health Department.

### Children with Identified Needs

- In 2003/04, 285 families (301 children) attended general workshops to promote healthy speech and language development. Of these workshops, 60 were training sessions for parents and 40 for professionals.
- For children requiring speech or language intervention, 2,100 children were assessed and/or received some form of intervention offered at 98 sites across 12 municipalities.
- The Ministry target is a maximum six month wait-time for speech and language intervention, while in Niagara there is a 4.5 month wait-time. The province also mandates that a minimum of 50% of referrals come from parents and in Niagara, 75% of referrals are made by parents.

## HEALTH AND WELLNESS