



**eccdc**  
early childhood community development centre  
Understanding the Early Years

## COMMUNITY FACTORS BRIEF – NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO

Excerpts from:  
Communities Survey (2002, 2005) - Statistics Canada

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a Government of Canada national Initiative aimed at helping communities better understand how their young children are doing physically, socially, and cognitively and how families and the community are supporting their children. The Initiative involves the participation of parents, teachers, schools, school boards, community organizations, and others interested in the well-being of children. Niagara Falls, Ontario is one of seven communities that have participated, since 2001, in the second pilot phase (UEY-II Communities). The other six communities are Hampton, New Brunswick; Montreal, Quebec; Dixie-Bloor of Mississauga, Ontario; South Eastman, Manitoba; Saskatoon, Saskatchewan; and Abbotsford, British Columbia.

As part of the UEY Initiative, Statistics Canada conducted two rounds of the Communities Survey in Niagara Falls, which was adapted from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY). The first cycle of data was collected in 2001-2002 and the second in 2004-2005, using the same instruments and data collection procedures. Human Resources and Social Development Canada (HRSDC) is producing a report that provides an update for the Niagara Falls Community, based on the analysis of these two cycles of data. This report will provide a portrait of kindergarteners in the Niagara Falls Community, in major domains of child development including physical health and well-being, cognitive skills, and behaviours. The report will also explore factors that may be related to children's developmental outcomes, by looking at changes in demographics, family processes, and community factors between 2002 and 2005.

This brief is based on preliminary analysis of the data collected in the Communities Survey, the early childhood developmental outcomes in Niagara Falls, and changes between 2001 and 2005 that are related to community factors such as socioeconomic conditions and use of resources.

The table below displays the average household income for families with young children in Niagara Falls, adjusted for the inflation factor<sup>1</sup>. It also presents the distribution of kindergarten children in Niagara Falls based on their families' income status. The income status was measured by dividing household income by the value of low-income cut-offs (LICO) as reported by Statistics Canada. Statistics Canada establishes these low-income thresholds or values by taking into account different urban and family sizes and updates these low-income cut-offs annually using the Consumer Price Index.

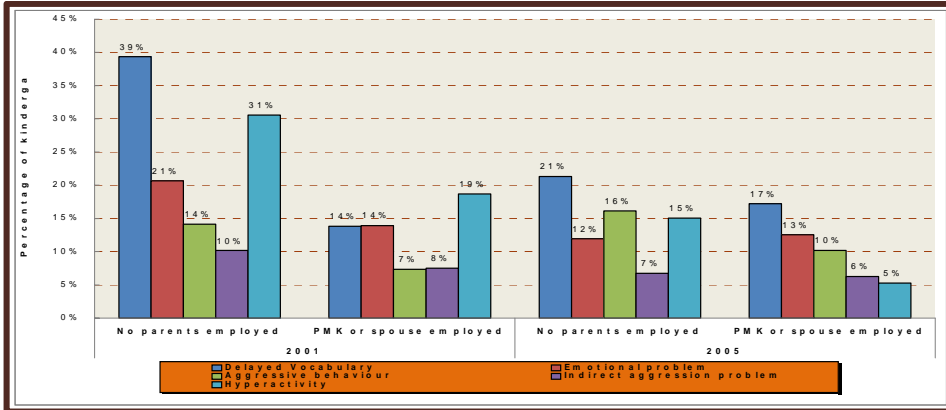
The average household income for Niagara Falls children, adjusted for inflation, had increased substantially between 2001 and 2005, by almost \$4,000. However, despite the sizeable improvement in the average household income for Niagara Falls families, the percentage of children living in low-income families remained high, at around 20%. Nevertheless, the economic well-being of Niagara Falls children still compared favourably with the average level across the UEY-II communities: between 2001 and 2005, the average household income in the UEY-II sample increased by more than \$5,000, yet the proportion of children living below LICO rose by one-third, from 22.4% in 2001 up to 29.

Distribution of kindergarten children by household income, Niagara Falls and UEY-II Communities (percentage, 2001 and 2005)				
Household Income	Niagara Falls		UEY-II Communities	
	2001	2005	2001	2005
Mean (Dollars, inflation adjusted)	\$53,140.4	\$57,254.2	\$51,898.4	\$57,231.5
Below LICO	21.7	20.5	22.4	29.4
LICO to Less than 2 times of LICO	37.7	33.7	35.6	37.7
2 times of LICO to less than 3 times	25.1	30.1	24.3	20.6
3 times of LICO or above	15.5	15.7	17.7	12.3
Total Percent	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

\*Source: Communities Survey 2001-02 and 2004-05, Statistics Canada

Parents' employment contributes towards the family income, which can affect resources required for raising children. It has become increasingly apparent that two earners are often necessary to maintain the standard of living in the family. At the same time, parents' employment and work time can also directly affect children's health and educational outcomes. For example, working parents tend more than non-working parents to place stress on independence training for children, which can become a merit for children in learning activities.

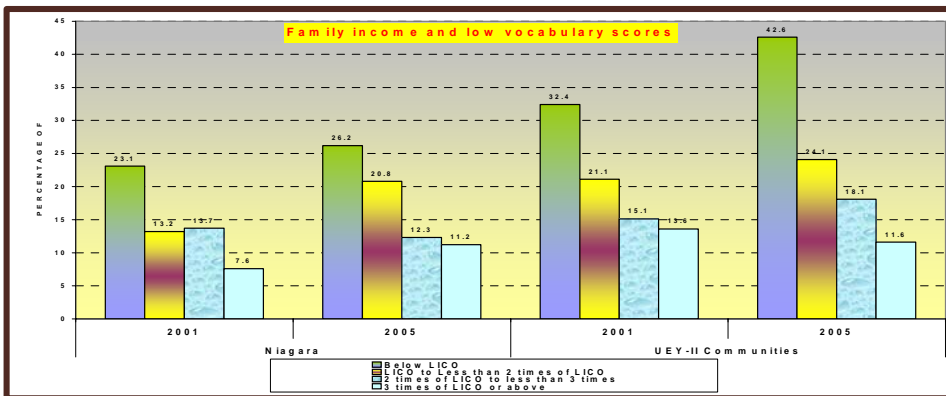
<sup>1</sup> The adjusted income is calculated using changes in the provincial inflation rates between 2001 and 2005. The inflation rate is measured by the ratio of Consumer Price Index between the two survey years, that is, the CPI2005/CPI2001. For Ontario, where Niagara Falls is located, this inflation rate is 9%. The adjusted household income in 2005 = estimated household income in 2005/(1+inflation).



**Parents' employment status and developmental outcomes of kindergarten children, Niagara Falls, 2001 and 2005**

The graph shows how parent's employment situation is significantly related to Niagara Falls children's cognitive and behavioural development.

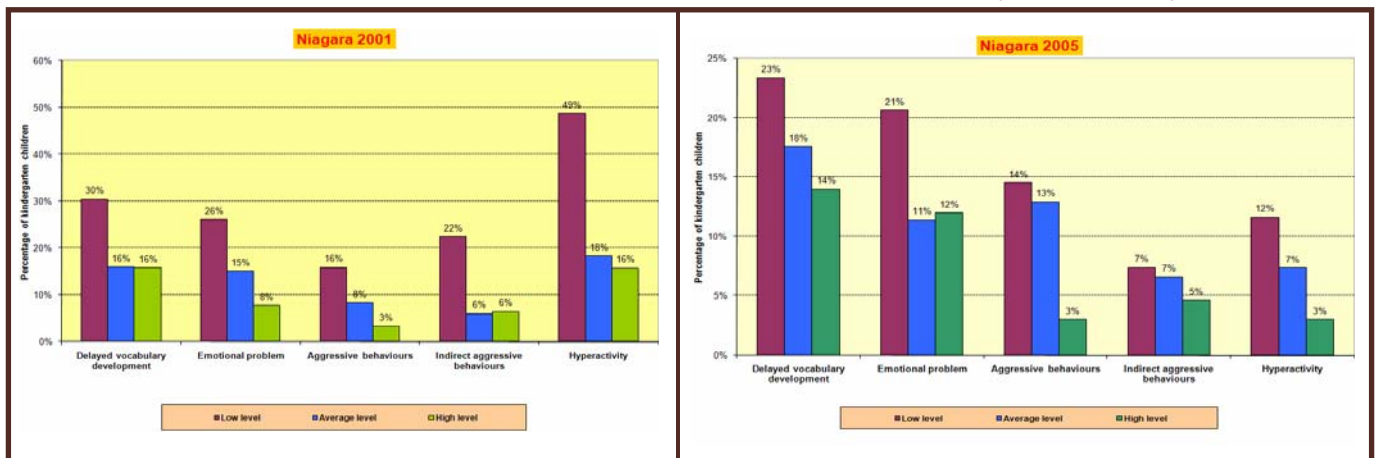
**Family income and low vocabulary scores, Niagara Falls and UEY-II communities, 2001 and 2005**



The graph shows how family income was also found to be associated with cognitive outcomes. The majority (above 80%) of parents in Niagara Falls had favourable opinions of their neighbourhoods as a great place for bringing up children, particularly in terms of neighbourhood safety and cleanliness, schools, and nursery schools. They also liked the fact that the community had many families with young children. Their neighbours also supported each other in a number of ways. However, about one in four parents did not think that their neighbours tended to deal with problems together.

families with young children. Their neighbours also supported each other in a number of ways. However, about one in four parents did not think that their neighbours tended to deal with problems together.

**Use of community resources and developmental outcomes of kindergarten children, Niagara Falls, 2001 and 2005**



The data in the graphs from both 2001 and 2005 surveys appeared to confirm a positive relationship between the level of community resource use and children's developmental outcomes. For instance, children in the high level user group were much less prone than the low-level resource user group to receiving low PPVT scores or displaying signs of problematic behaviours.

Less than one in five children in Niagara Falls used educational programs and services in the community on a weekly or monthly basis, with book clubs and reading programs being the most popular among the educational resources besides libraries. Many more children used their community's cultural resources, such as museums, plays, musical performances, sports events, and movies, but most of them used these resources only a few times a year. The rates of utilization of recreational facilities were the highest: around 70% of Niagara Falls children played in parks or play spaces at least weekly. Pools, both indoors and outdoors, were the next popular venues used by about 46% of children weekly, followed by recreational and community centres.

Considerably more children in Niagara Falls participated in unorganized sports than in coached sports (69% vs. 48%). About one-third were enrolled in dance, gymnastics, or martial arts classes. Even fewer (16%) took music or arts classes on a weekly basis.

Many parents reported in the community survey that they had difficulties accessing community programs or services. The three most common reasons, cited by parents in both 2001 and 2005, were 'not enough time', 'costs of the programs' and 'programs offered at inconvenient times'. Many (around 30%) parents also mentioned that they were 'unaware of programs available' or could not access these programs or services because they were only 'for older children' or there were 'not enough spaces'.

## **Summary**

The function of UEY projects is to provide community-specific information on:

- the development of kindergarten children;
- family and community factors that influence children's development;
- local programs and services for young children and their families; and
- local socioeconomic characteristics.

With this information, community organizations and individuals can identify gaps in services and programs for young children and their families and foster partnerships among community groups and individuals to make informed decisions about the best programs and services for young children to thrive.

For information on the availability of the full HRSDC community study for Niagara Falls, and other inquiries concerning the Understanding the Early Years, Niagara Falls project, please contact Glory Ressler, Understanding the Early Years Coordinator, by calling 905.646.7311 ext. 319, email [gressler@eccdc.org](mailto:gressler@eccdc.org), or visit the website at [www.uey.eccdc.org](http://www.uey.eccdc.org).