



Poverty and child/family outcomes in Niagara

August 2007



**OPPORTUNITIES
NIAGARA**
A community-based strategy
to reduce poverty and enhance
quality of life

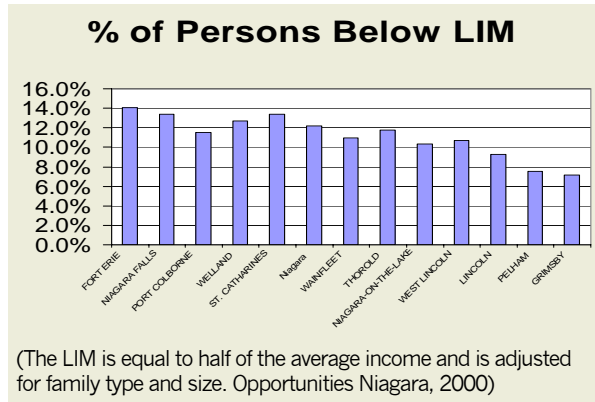
eccdc

early childhood community development centre
Understanding the Early Years

Poverty and child outcomes in Niagara

1. Poverty and early learning and development

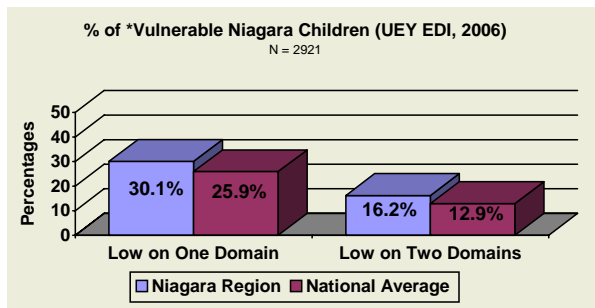
12,790 children under the age of 18 in Niagara live in low-income households. This places 15.6% of all Niagara residents in that age group (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).



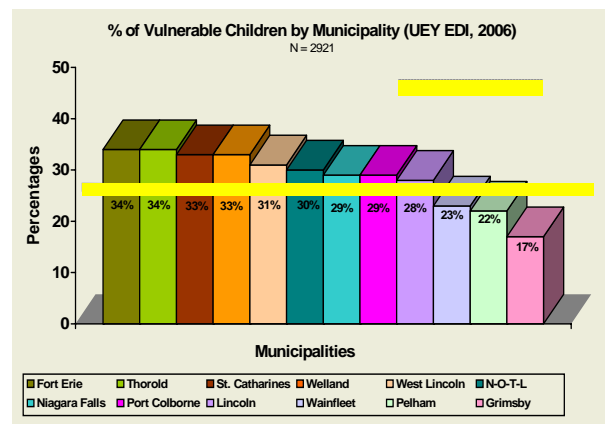
This chart demonstrates that:

- the lowest percentages of people below the LIM average for the Niagara Region are in Lincoln, Pelham, and Grimsby, and
- the highest percentages of people below the LIM average for the Niagara Region are in Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Welland, and St. Catharines.

Higher income is almost always associated with better outcomes for children. Increases in income at very low-income levels are particularly important for the youngest children (Phipps and Lethbridge, 2006).



- On average, 1 in 3 children were identified as 'vulnerable' in the Niagara Region on the Early Development Instrument (EDI) and this was above the national average (UEY, 2006).
- Grimsby and Pelham, the municipalities with the lowest percentages of persons below the LIM, were the only municipalities in the Niagara Region that had smaller proportions of children that were classified as 'vulnerable' compared to the national average and other areas in Niagara (UEY, 2006).
- Fort Erie, Thorold, St. Catharines, and Welland were the communities with the highest rates of children who were 'vulnerable' (UEY, 2006). They are also communities with higher percentages of persons below the LIM (12-14%).



Municipalities with children who scored (UEY, 2006) **below the national averages:**

- for Physical Health & Well-Being (2/12): Fort Erie and Port Colborne
- for Emotional Maturity (1/12): Fort Erie

* The Early Development Instrument (EDI) provides a measure of children's school readiness across five developmental domains: Physical Health & Well-Being, Social Competence, Cognitive & Language Development, Emotional Maturity, and Communication Skills & General Knowledge. When a child scores below the 10th percentile on one or more of the five developmental domains they are considered to be 'vulnerable' and it is often associated with the likelihood of having difficulties in school (Offord, 2006).

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- for Communication Skills & General Knowledge (2/12): Port Colborne and Wainfleet

Municipalities with children who scored (UEY, 2006) **below the Niagara Regional averages:**

Physical Health & Well-Being (5/12)

- Welland
- Thorold
- Fort Erie
- Port Colborne
- West Lincoln

Social Competence (5/12)

- Thorold
- St. Catharines
- Niagara Falls
- Niagara On The Lake
- Fort Erie

Language & Cognitive Development (4/12)

- Thorold
- St. Catharines
- Niagara Falls
- Fort Erie

Emotional Maturity (3/12)

- Welland
- Fort Erie
- St. Catharines

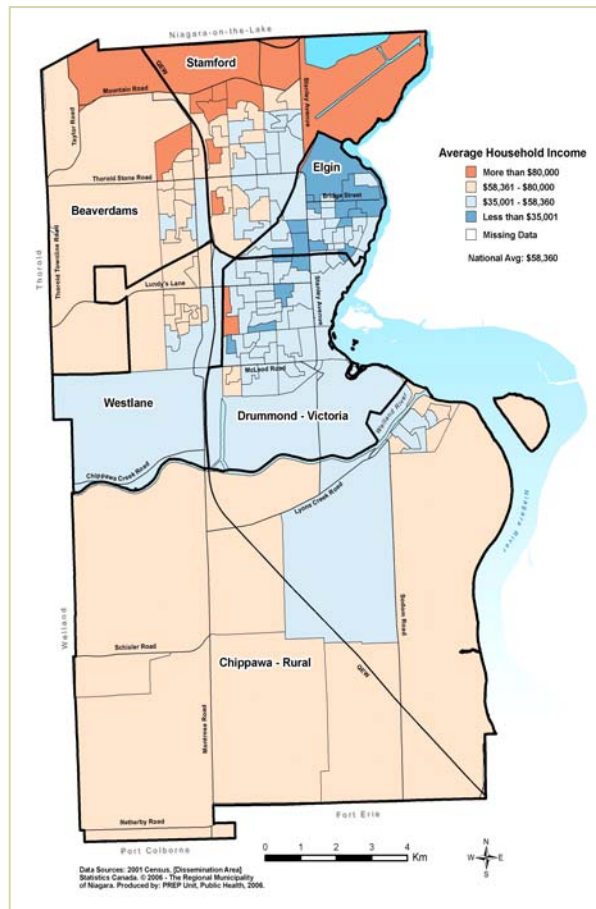
Communication Skills & General Knowledge (6/12)

- St. Catharines
- Niagara Falls
- Fort Erie
- Port Colborne
- Wainfleet
- West Lincoln

Municipalities that have higher percentages of persons below the LIM also had children who scored below the national and regional averages on some EDI domains (UEY, 2006).

In particular, children in Fort Erie scored below the regional means on all five readiness to learn domains. Fort Erie is one of the communities reported to have the highest percentages of people below the LIM (UEY, 2006).

The Niagara Region, like many places, has growing concentrations of high poverty levels in certain neighbourhoods within each of its twelve municipalities. This map illustrates the distribution of annual incomes across Niagara Falls (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census) with darker blue areas representing lower household incomes.



Quality of life for everyone who lives in the Niagara Region is affected by neighbourhoods where poverty is more pervasive (United Way & Canadian Council on Social Development, 2004).

The United Way of Greater Toronto and the Canadian Council on Social Development (2004) refer to this phenomenon as “Poverty by Postal Code” and children, youth, lone mothers, recent immigrants, and the elderly are usually over-represented in these neighbourhoods.

There is a:

- **2 to 1 economic payback for investment in children aged 0-6 years (Cleveland & Krashinsky, 1998); and**
- **7 to 1 economic payback for at-risk children. This is even higher than for the whole population (Schweinhart, 1993).**

2. Social assistance and supports

Those on welfare were actually worse off in 2005 than they have been since the late 1980s... 1.7 million of our fellow Canadians are forced to rely on welfare; more than 500,000 of these people are children (National Council on Welfare, 2005).

- 3.20% of the Region's population receives Ontario Works social assistance (Regional Municipality of Niagara, Community Services Department, caseload statistics 2006 average).
- In 2001, over 25% of all family households in Niagara were paying 30% or more of their income for shelter (Regional Municipality of Niagara, Planning Department).
- There are 8,000 social housing units across Niagara and more than 4,300 applicants waiting for affordable housing (Niagara Regional Housing, 2002 Wait List Database).

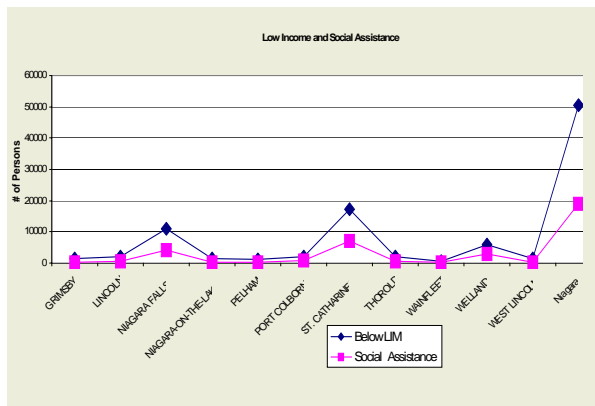
"The social and economic future of countries is increasingly being determined in their urban areas. Globally, the process of decentralization is shifting power and resources to cities and their citizens. . .

Two alternative scenarios are emerging: one of cities characterized by increasing poverty, social exclusion and decline; the other of inclusive cities characterized by equitable and sustainable growth" (Cities Alliance, 2001).

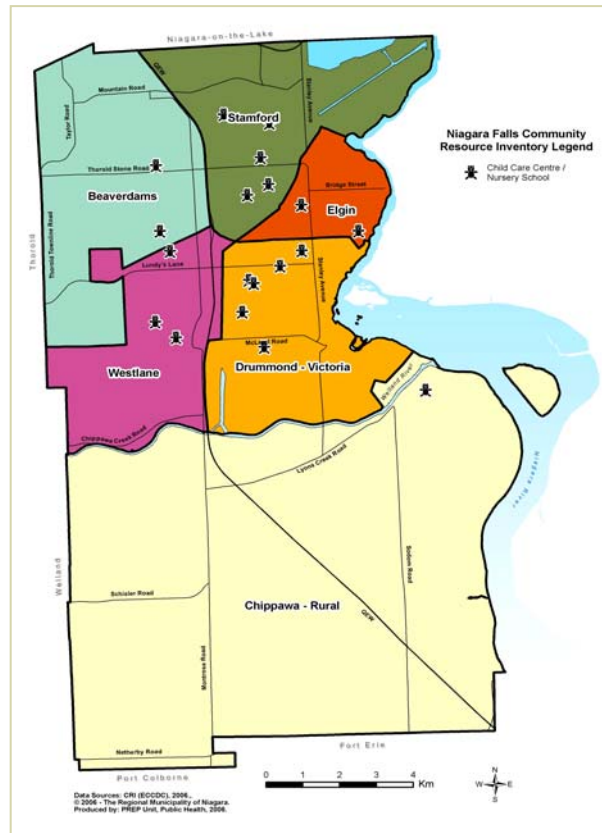
A Niagara Region Community Resource Inventory (UEY, Information Niagara, 2006) shows that:

- the majority of the social resources that would assist LIM families and their children were situated in the urban municipalities, such as St. Catharines, Welland, Niagara Falls, etc.; and
- access for families and children in the rural areas, such as Fort Erie, Wainfleet, West Lincoln, etc. may be a barrier to seeking out services.

A study of 10,600 Canadian children found that those who received high quality early childhood education enjoyed academic advantages that were apparent as early as grades one and two (National Longitudinal Study of Children & Youth, HRDC 1999).



(Opportunities Niagara, 2000)



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Regional results overall showed that children who attended part-time preschool scored higher than children who did not (UEY, 2006).

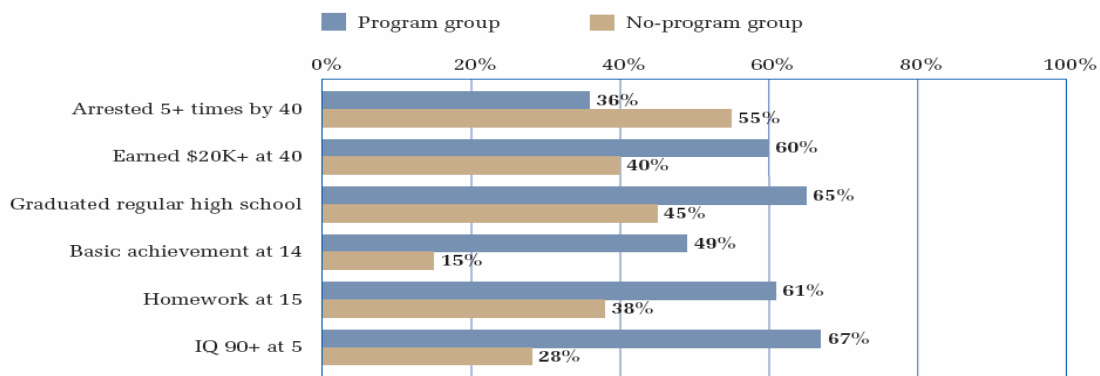
Scores in the Language & Cognitive Development and Communication Skills & General Knowledge domains were significantly higher for those who attended part-time preschool (UEY, 2006).

- In 2006, 4,521 children were supported through fee subsidy. At the end of 2006, there were 82 applicants (children) on file waiting for child care fee subsidy (2007/2008 Child Care Plan Update).

Diversity and inclusion

- Only 14% reported offering services in other languages.

Figure 1
Major Findings: High/Scope Perry Preschool Study at 40



“The major conclusion of the midlife phase of the Perry Preschool research study is that high-quality preschool programs for young children living in poverty contribute to their intellectual and social development in childhood and their school success, economic performance, and reduced commission of crime in adulthood” (High Scope Perry Preschool Study Through Age 40, 2005, p. 5).

From the 2005 Early Years Community Resource Inventory (Regional Municipality of Niagara) and preliminary findings from the 2006 Understanding the Early Years Community Resource Inventory:

Supports to parents/caregivers

- Only 4% surveyed offered services to parents/caregivers.
- A low percentage rate for utilizing the services was found.
- Of 22 programs that offered services to parents/caregivers, 91% did not offer on-site child care.
- Demand exceeded capacity among those with services for special needs, parenting/family supports, and counselling.

- Many of the associations or centres that support diverse cultures are located in Niagara Falls and St. Catharines with few, if any, in the smaller communities.
- Only over ¼ of the services reported physical accessibility and less than half had services for children with special needs.

Specialized programs and services

An overwhelming amount of health and wellness programs/services are located in St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, and Welland. Niagara-on-the-Lake, Wainfleet, and Port Colborne reported a lack of educational and literacy programs.

3. Growing gaps and the working poor

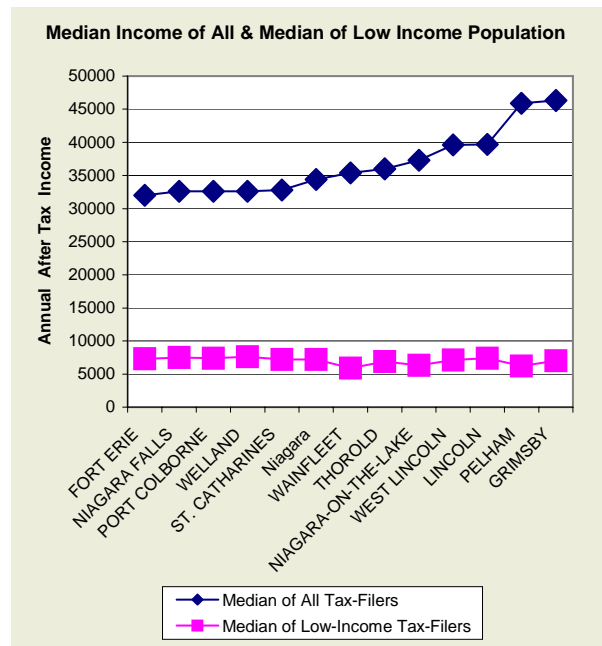
17.8% of the population of Niagara lives below the currently accepted poverty level (2002), an increase of 30% since 1996.

The current accepted poverty level in the Niagara Region is \$28,800 for a family of four (2 children under age 6).

(Regional Municipality of Niagara, Planning/Public Health database; Statistics Canada Census 2001; Statistics Canada-LICO; Canadian Council on Social Development Data)

Incidents of low-income in families up by 15.1% (Regional Municipality of Niagara-Public Health Department database).

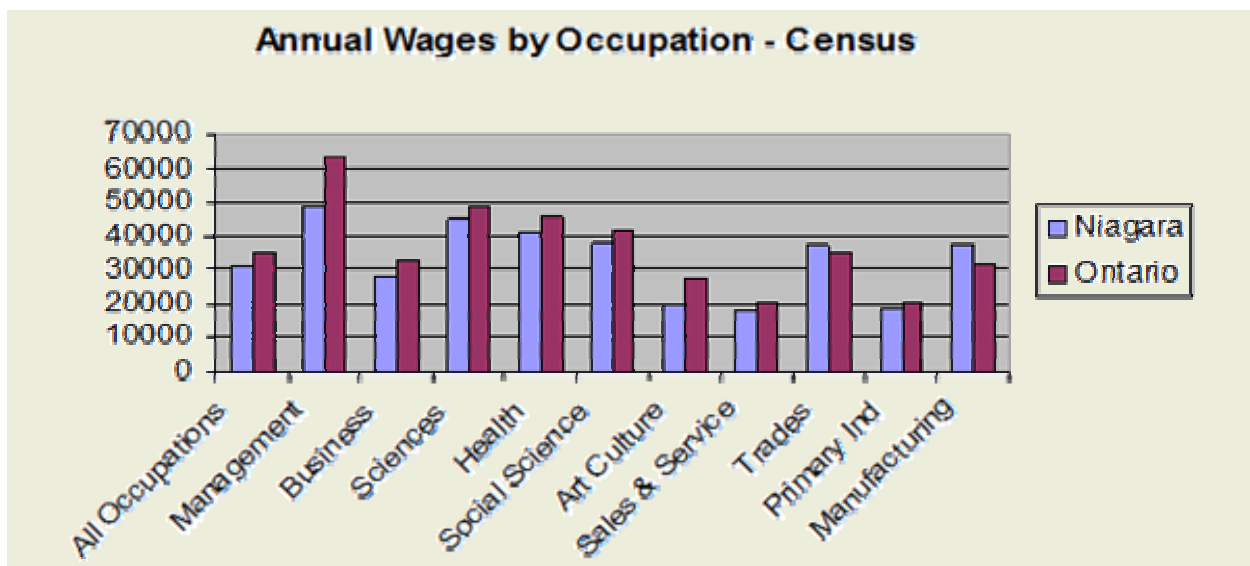
Note: Average household incomes and employment levels are being mapped for all 12 Niagara municipalities and their neighbourhoods and will be available in late May 2007.



(Opportunities Niagara, 2000)

Families with incomes of less than \$20,000 represent 15% of Niagara's workforce (Regional Municipality of Niagara-Public Health Department database).

The bar graph below illustrates the fact that Niagara lags behind the Ontario annual wage levels. Only Trades and Manufacturing exceed the provincial averages.



(Opportunities Niagara, 2000)

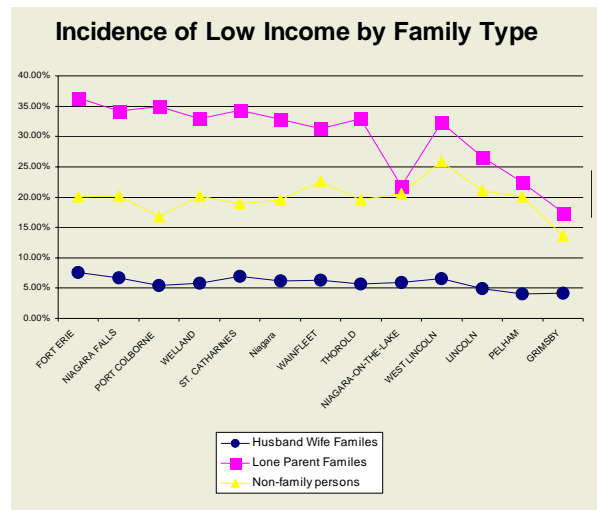
4. Vulnerable groups

Depth and pervasiveness of poverty is often associated with populations that have been identified as being vulnerable. Lone parent families with children are more likely to experience deeper and more pervasive levels of poverty (Welfare Council of Canada, 2001).

Of the 117,000 plus households in Niagara, 17,825 are single parent families of which 82% are headed by females (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).

The average size of lone parent families in the Niagara Region is 2.5 children and those below the low income cut-offs have an average income of \$23,100 per year (Opportunities Niagara, 2000).

St. Catharines, Niagara Falls, Welland, Fort Erie, and Port Colborne have the highest percentages of lone parent families (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).



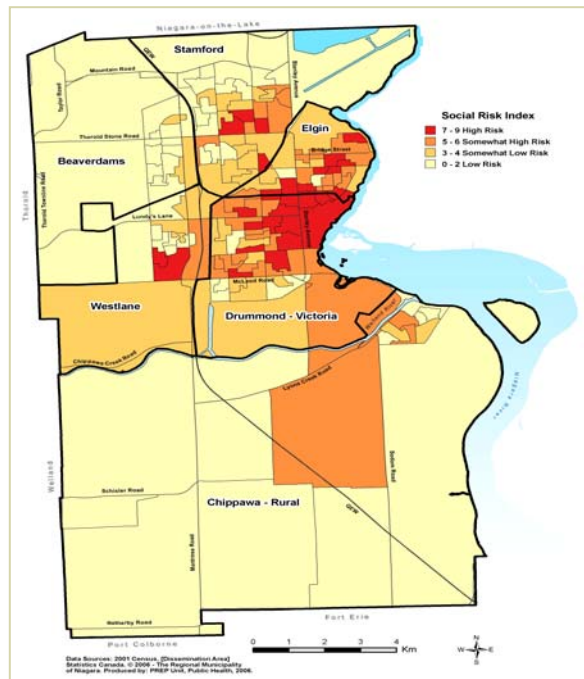
- Larger percentages of lone parent families have low incomes in Fort Erie, Niagara Falls, Port Colborne, Welland, and St. Catharines.
- Lower percentages of lone parent families have low incomes in Grimsby, Niagara-on-the-Lake, and Pelham (Opportunities Niagara, 2000).

Poorer educational performance on the part of the offspring of lone parents can be explained to a large extent by socio-economic disadvantage,

especially a lack of economic resources (Ringbäck Weitoft, Hjern, & Rosén, 2004).

Regional EDI results showed that the highest percentages of children who were vulnerable were associated with the communities that had higher percentages of lone parent families (UEY, 2006).

Generally the Niagara Region has a lower rate of lone parent families than the national average but within the neighbourhoods of the municipalities of Niagara, such as Niagara Falls, there are areas where more than 45% of families are comprised of lone parent families (Statistics Canada, 2001 Census).



Children in areas with high to somewhat high social risk were often associated with poor outcome measures on the EDI because more children scored below the national averages and were considered not ready and/or vulnerable for school learning in these neighbourhoods (UEY & OEYNR, 2005). Furthermore, the pervasiveness of high and somewhat high risk neighbourhoods may mirror the negative effects of deprivation (McCain & Mustard, 1999).



For additional information on poverty and child/family outcomes in Niagara or to obtain additional copies of this report, contact:

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