



**United Way
Centraide**
Windsor-Essex County

Overcoming the Odds

Creating Possibility for Youth in Windsor-Essex



WINDSOR-ESSEX COUNTY

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CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

For the purposes of this report we define youths as those who are 17 years of age or less. Although we have strived to use data to match this definition in some cases it was not possible.

WINDSOR CMA AND LEAMINGTON CA

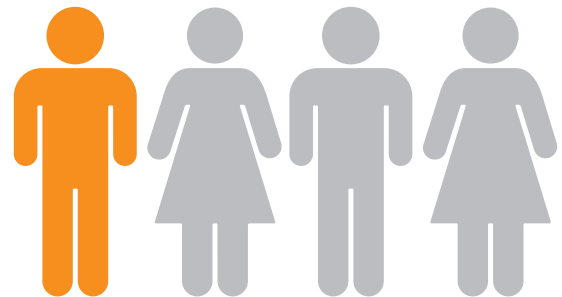
The Windsor CMA is made up of: Windsor, Tecumseh, LaSalle, Lakeshore and Amherstburg. The Leamington CA is made up of Leamington and Kingsville.

AFTER TAX LOW INCOME MEASURE

The After Tax Low Income Measure which is calculated at 50 percent of the median after tax adjusted income of households observed at an individual level. The measure is then adjusted by the number of members of the household to give the income threshold for the particular family size.

Introduction

In 1989, the House of Commons unanimously committed to end child poverty in Canada. In the 25 years since its passing, little progress has been made and the national poverty rate for children has risen from 13.7 percent in 1989 to 14.3% in 2011.ⁱ Although local youth poverty data for Windsor-Essex County from the 1980s is not readily available in 2011 our region featured a 24.2% youth poverty rate which is far worse than the provincial rate of 17.3%.ⁱⁱ Now in 2015, we still live in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, yet poverty and constrained opportunities remain obstacles to prosperity for many children and young people in Windsor-Essex County.



one in four
YOUNG PEOPLE
 in the Windsor CMA
 and Leamington CA
 live in **LOW INCOME**
families.

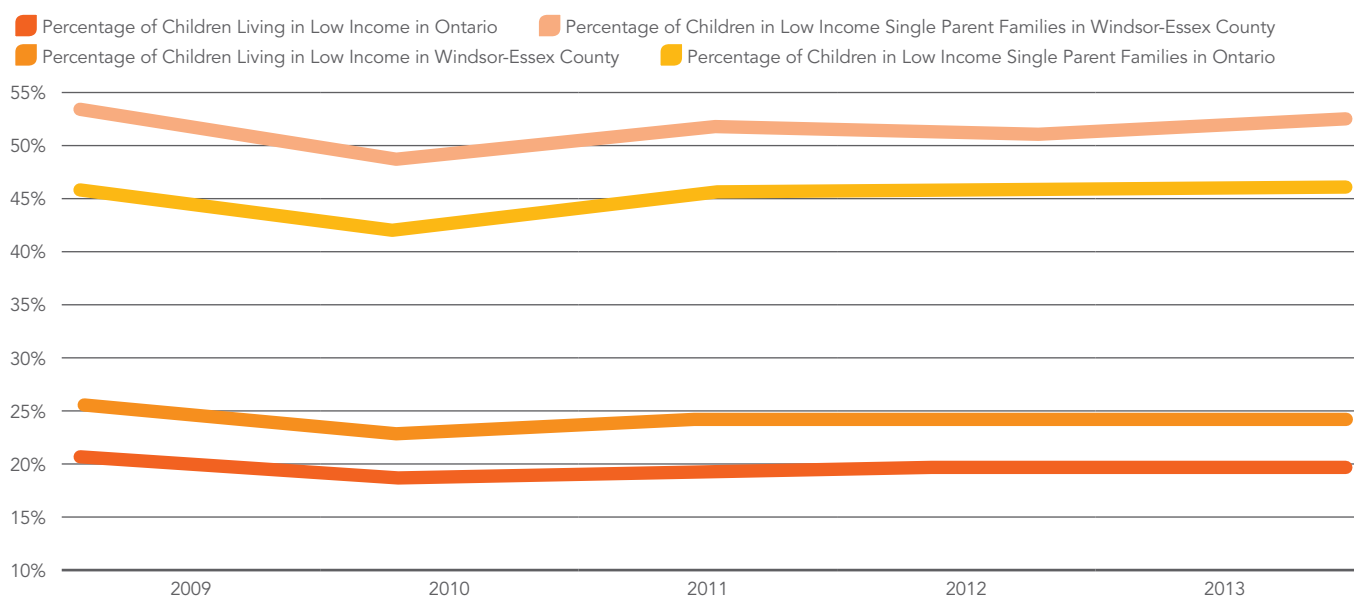
Despite periods of growth and contraction in our economy, prosperity has not been equally accessible to struggling families in the “good” times and they have been asked to give up the most during the “bad” times.ⁱⁱⁱ The result has been more children and young people are being raised in situations of low income and poverty. In 2014, United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County published the Cost of Poverty in Windsor-Essex County.^{iv} This report highlighted costs of poverty on society in our region and conservatively estimated that poverty costs Windsor-Essex County taxpayers \$450 million annually through increased policing, health care and social service programming costs as well as lost productivity and labour hours in the workplace. This report builds on this foundation and focuses on a critically important “at risk” population in Windsor-Essex County; our children and youth.

According to 2013 tax filings data, approximately 19,900 children and youth in the Windsor CMA and Leamington CA lived in families who earn under the After Tax Low Income Measure (AT-LIM).

This translates to approximately 1 in 4 young people in our region living in low income families. Of greater concern are single parent families, in which over 52%, approximately 10,350 children are growing up below this poverty measure. For both measures, Windsor and Leamington data is far worse than provincial rates of 20% and 45% respectively.

The impact of the struggle of low income families on children was studied by Statistics Canada who found that family income plays a key role in overall childhood outcomes with income factors having strong impacts on a child’s cognitive, behavioral and physical outcomes as well as a lesser relationship with social development.^v The results of this study point toward children in low income families in our region being at a significant disadvantage compared to higher earning families. Although parents work hard to provide the best for their children, there is only so much that can be done when they are struggling to put food on the table or keep a roof over their heads.

Graph: Percentage of Children in Low Income Single Parent Families in Windsor-Essex County



Source: Statistics Canada. (2013) Table 111-0015 - Family characteristics, Low Income Measures (LIM), by family type and family type composition, annual (number unless otherwise noted). Data has combined Windsor CMA and Leamington CA for a regional total.

Neighbourhood Barriers

For many children and young people, poverty originates at home and the neighbourhood they live in. The neighbourhood that children live and grow up in has a major impact on their development and future potential. According to Statistics Canada, Windsor Ontario has the highest concentration of low income individuals living in low income neighbourhoods in the country.^{vi}

Neighbourhoods with high concentrations of poverty tend to see an exodus of wealthier individuals which often results in declines in neighbourhood housing values, businesses closing, schools and recreation facilities

“moth balled” leaving only those who can’t afford to move remaining.

Broader academic research, particularly from the United States, shows that children and youth growing up in these low income neighbourhoods face barriers that children and youth from higher earning areas do not face including: higher propensity to undertake risky behaviour (drug and alcohol use), lower school preparedness and poorer educational outcomes, fewer transportation options, less access to healthy food, a greater likelihood of being involved in criminal activity and higher likelihood of becoming a teenaged parent.^{vii}

Childhood Development, Parental Involvement and Family Dynamics

The World Health Organization (WHO) has identified that effective childhood development plays a vital role in mitigating social, economic and health challenges later in life.^{viii} Unfortunately poverty can be an obstacle constraining this development as it can prevent children from forming social attachments or having the economic capabilities to engage opportunities as they present themselves.

Parents having a stable income source is a key element in maintaining a safe and healthy home life for children and young people. This income stability enables greater flexibility for parents to engage with their children which is a vitally important part of childhood development. There has been a wide range of research conducted on parental involvement and its positive relationship with children’s social and academic achievement; the vast majority of which points to a positive relationship.^{ix}

For many adults in our community, precarious work schedules and shift work limit the time they can spend with their families and children. A report from Statistics Canada found that those working “on call” or other shifts had significantly higher levels of dissatisfaction with work-life balance than traditional daytime workers. Lower income shift workers were found to be more

likely to suffer “role overload”, which is a stress related ailment connected to an improper work-life balance that can cause negative impacts on families as the parents forgo personal time, sleep and healthy meals to spend time with their children and family.^x

These findings support research out of Toronto by McMaster University, United Way Toronto and the Poverty and Employment Precarity Southwestern Ontario which examined precarious employment and shift work and its impact on household well-being and children. Based on their report they found that precarious workers were more likely to be low income, less likely to be involved in their child’s activities in or out of school, more likely not to be able to afford leisure or extracurricular activities for themselves and/or their children.^{xi} 1 in 4 workers in Windsor-Essex County are employed in shift work that doesn’t coincide with the traditional start of the workday. The impact of their inability to be involved and support their children, ties right back to the research showing that families whose children have stable home environments and involved parents are more likely to succeed academically and socially.^{xii}

Broken Homes & Youth Homelessness

Unfortunately for many young people in Windsor-Essex County, having a parent constructively involved in their life is out of the question. Between 2010 and 2014, the Windsor-Essex Children's Aid Society (CAS) undertook an average of 3,200 investigations annually of abuse, mistreatment and neglect in our region. As a result of these investigations and other referrals, CAS had an average of 609 young people under the age of 18 in their custody during the same period.^{xiii}

For a variety of reasons some young people fall through the cracks and end up homeless. Between January 2013 and June of 2015, 140 unique individuals aged 15-18 were housed at Salvation Army Shelter, the Welcome Centre Shelter for Women and the Windsor Residence for Young Men.^{xiv} Although the cause and duration of their stay varied the fact that so many young people found themselves in the position of seeking shelter is worrying, as many more are likely homeless but are getting by through various informal living arrangements such as sleeping on a relative or friend's couch. Unfortunately there are no local statistics readily available to illustrate this trend.

When a young person reaches 18 years of age, they are no longer considered a "Crown Ward" and become an adult. For those young people who have not been adopted, they find themselves "aged out" of many CAS programs. The Extended Care and Maintenance (ECM) program, provide these young adults with additional supports to age 21 including financial supports, medical and dental supports and a service worker to assist them if they are enrolled in school or employed as outlined in their ECM Agreement.

Over the last 5 years, CAS has supported between 70 and 113 young adults in the ECM leaving a large portion of youth who are left with little support.^{xv} Although there is no way to tell from the available data how successful those who are no longer able to use CAS services become, the number of unique homeless shelter visits in Windsor by the 18-24 age group between January 2013 and June of 2015 total 350 young people.^{xvi} It is expected with the implementation of the Housing First Strategy in Windsor-Essex County that better data on homelessness in our region will become available in the years to come.

BETWEEN
01/13 – 06/15
140 unique individuals
AGED 15-18
 were housed at
SALVATION ARMY SHELTER,
THE WELCOME CENTRE
SHELTER FOR WOMEN AND
THE WINDSOR RESIDENCE
FOR YOUNG MEN



Mental Health

Mental health of young people plays a critical role in their development and ability to integrate into the community. Approximately 70% of all mental health issues emerge in the adolescent years with early identification and treatment of these illnesses being vital to ensuring a good quality of life for young people as they move into adulthood.^{xvii} Without proper treatment, the young person risks sliding into a downward spiral with their illness which can result in stunted academic progress, involvement in criminal activity, a lifetime of poverty and extensive and costly psychiatric and medical treatment in the future.

Events at home and our community have a profound impact on youth mental health. In 2008, youth mental health referrals in Windsor Essex County increased by 50%.^{xviii} This increase was in lockstep with the regional economic downturn as over 10,000 automotive manufacturing jobs had been lost over the previous two years. A snapshot of youth mental health in our region can be taken from Maryvale Adolescent and Family Services which averages 320 children and youth admitted annually from Windsor Regional Hospital.

These admissions only occur following a referral from a Child Psychiatrist who feels the child or youth is in danger of hurting themselves or is currently experiencing a major mental health crisis. In addition to these emergency services Maryvale also offers a day treatment program for students with mental health issues, providing a specialized classroom and learning setting enabling them to continue their education outside of a traditional school. Currently the program is at capacity with 88 students enrolled and along with their outpatient counselling services, a waitlist exists.^{xix}

In an effort to battle wait times for counseling, United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County was a leader in supporting the establishment of walk-in mental health clinics across our region that enable people of all ages to receive prompt and at times same day access to mental health professionals for counseling and support in our community. Since 2010, over 800 young people under the age of 24 have taken advantage of these walk-in clinics.^{xx} From these clinics, users are referred to other community programs or offered other intensive mental health supports. Unfortunately this is just a “drop in the bucket” as many more children and young people in our community continue to suffer in silence.



Hunger

The fact children and youth are going hungry in our community is particularly appalling given the abundance of food in Windsor-Essex County. When examining data from the Windsor-Essex Food Bank Association, they have reported that just under 8,000 children and youth received food support either directly or through their parents in 2014-15. Although this number has declined since 2012-13 from just over 9,000 young people, a partial explanation comes from the fact that families have been receiving larger food baskets over time, enabling them to go longer between food bank visits.^{xxi} Unfortunately, this data is only a snapshot of the broader food insecurity issues in our area as the Food Bank Association is only made up of 15 members and does not include several major food banks or the dozens of food cupboards available in the community.

Of course if children and youth are arriving at school hungry it is no surprise they struggle to achieve positive outcomes. According to the American Psychological Association, hungry children were significantly more likely to face isolation and social exclusion, receive special education, have poor grades and repeat a

grade, and is 7 to 12 times more likely to have conduct disorder issues, such as fighting, having trouble with the teachers, while in school.^{xxii}

As a means to combat this problem the Ontario Student Nutrition Program and Jumpstart Windsor- Essex offer a healthy snack or breakfast program to the over 20,000 elementary and secondary students in schools across Windsor-Essex County.^{xxiii} Although the total number of low income students served by these programs is not readily available and the scope of the program depends on the need within the specific school, the fact that the province and community organizations have blanketed the entire region with additional supports to ensure that children and youth are not going to school hungry is telling.

COATS FOR KIDS

The Unemployed Help Centre is also the community lead for Coats for Kids which in 2014-15 collected and distributed 4,224 Winter coats to needy children and youth in Windsor-Essex County .



Educational Outcomes

Hungry students don't make for productive learners. The clearest and best way to ensure that children and youth have the most opportunities in life is ensuring they receive a good education. There is a wide catalogue of research that shows the connection between poverty, mental health, broken homes and hunger to educational outcomes. This research suggests that those who are most vulnerable in our community are less likely to succeed in school.^{xxiv} The challenge that emerges is that education is one of the most potent tools to lift people out of poverty. Ensuring that those "at risk" youth can succeed is vitally important to their futures.

Unfortunately for our region, not only do we have more families living with low income we also realize lower educational outcomes than the provincial average. As a whole, 44.1% of the population in the Windsor CMA only achieved a high school diploma or lower. Further, though we have slightly higher rates of residents with trade certificates and college diplomas, our region also lags in the number of residents with university degrees compared to the provincial averages.^{xxv} A potential way to measure prospective future educational attainment comes from examining standardized test performance of students. Students attending schools in Ontario are required to participate in provincial standardized testing in Grades 3 and 6 for math, reading and writing; Grade 9 for math and Grade 10 for reading and writing as a part of the provincial literacy test which is a requirement to graduate from high school.



The table below illustrates the five year weighted averages for the percentage of students maintaining provincial standards for the Public and Catholic Boards in Windsor-Essex County, as well as the province for comparative purposes. For the Grade 9 math, results are split between the Academic and Applied streams. The Grade 10 Ontario Literacy test combines both reading and writing components in their score.^{xxvi}

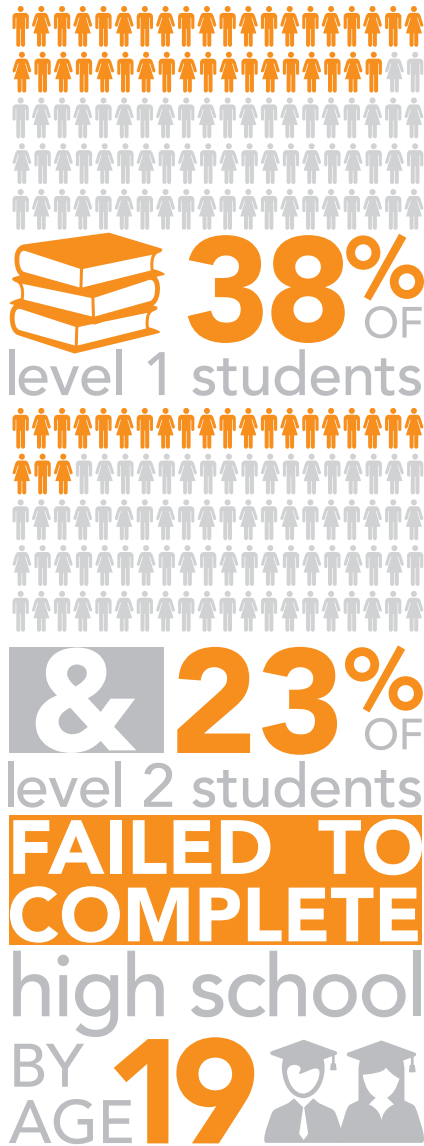
Table 1: Weighted EQAO results

GRADE	GREATER ESSEX COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD			WINDSOR-ESSEX CATHOLIC DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD			PROVINCIAL AVERAGE		
	READING	WRITING	MATH	READING	WRITING	MATH	READING	WRITING	MATH
3	61.8	69.2	65.2	65.6	77.2	70.2	66.2	74.8	68.4
6	73.2	69.6	56.4	73.8	74.6	60.4	75.4	74.2	57.8
9*	X	X	U=82.6 P=54.6	X	X	U=85 P=48.8	X	X	U=83.6 P=43.4
10	80.8		X	86.2		X	82.8		X

Note: The values above do not include any special education students or students who were exempted from their first attempt on the literacy test.

* Grade 9 mathematics testing is conducted in two streams, Academic and Applied.

U= Academic Stream Mathematics, P= Applied Stream Mathematics



The data in this chart represents students' meeting "provincial standards", which is a level 3 or approximately 70% or above. This does not mean that the student is prepared move onto a level of higher education. The combined weighted average over the 5 year period for literacy test scores in Windsor-Essex County is calculated to approximately 84.62%. This statistic indicates that, 15.38% of students, or 675 of the approximately 4,300 students who wrote the Ontario Literacy Test for the first time last year failed to meet provincial literacy standards. A number of studies that examined the link between Ontario Literacy Test scores and post-secondary enrollment have found clear correlation between students who failed to reach provincial standards on testing and students not moving on to post-secondary education. Of students who scored a level 1 or 2 on the literacy test, 38% of level 1 students and 23% of level 2 students failed to complete high school by age 19 and only 5.4% of level 1 students went on to University while 47% did not apply to post-secondary education.^{xxvii}

Based on the research cited above we can construct a model to illustrate the impact in Windsor-Essex County.¹

Table 2: Number of "At Risk" Students based on Ontario Literacy Testing Results

ASSUMING 675 "AT RISK" STUDENTS	LEVEL 1 LITERACY TEST STANDARD	LEVEL 2 LITERACY TEST STANDARD
At risk of not Graduating	256	155
Graduate but no Post- Secondary Education	197	94
Enrolled in some Post- Secondary Education	222	426

Of course there will be other students who achieve standards and choose not to complete high school or enter post-secondary education, but the students who fail to achieve basic standards are those who are also most at risk of slipping into a life of poverty. Although there is little way to tell the income status of these students from the data, high school graduation is a primary indicator for future earning potential. For those who do not move on to post-secondary education the risk of being trapped in the cycle of poverty or continuing the cycle that trapped their parents is real and for these young people, the cost that they face are significant.

¹ Calculations for Table 2 are based on the findings of Brown, R., Maldonado, V., Wiggers, R. (2012). The Impact of High School Literacy on Post-Secondary Pathways, Ontario Education Research Symposium (OERS); workshop presentation. In their research they conducted a longitudinal study of OSSLT results and student eventual enrollment or lack thereof in Post-Secondary education. This research coupled with the research outlining the graduation rate (cited in endnote xxvi) for non-provincial standard students enabled the calculation of the number of students at each level.

Table 3: Income Comparisons to a High School Graduate based on Highest Level of Education Obtained in the Windsor CMA

HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION OBTAINED ^{xxviii}	AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS COMPARED TO HIGH SCHOOL	EARNINGS OVER 40 YEAR WORKING LIFETIME COMPARED TO HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATE
Less than High School	-\$ 856	-\$ 34,240
Trades or Apprenticeship	\$11,047	\$441,880
College Diploma	\$5,977	\$239,080
Some University	\$9,530	\$381,200
Bachelor Degree	\$17,132	\$685,280
Post Graduate University	\$26,450	\$1,058,000

Although there is little difference in mean income (\$856 annually) between those who do and do not successfully graduate from high school, their earnings significantly trail individuals who have some sort of post-secondary education. It shouldn't be surprising given the manufacturing orientation of our economy that those who go on to earn an apprenticeship and/or skilled trades' certificates earn significantly more locally than some post-secondary degrees. This means for a high school graduate a one year skilled trades certificate could potentially earn significantly more than a multiyear college diploma. For those 155 to 256 young people at risk of not graduating or moving onto post-secondary education, they are conservatively forgoing \$68.5 million in lost earning potential over the next 40 years of their lives.^{xxix}

This income is lost to all of society, resulting in forgone taxes to the city, province and federal government

including lost sales of homes, cars and consumer goods that could be supporting local businesses. This is money that could be going toward improving the quality of life for individuals and their children. As a result of this lost income, some of these individuals end up on social assistance meaning that society is literally paying the price for their failure to complete high school.

The local struggles with education attainment are not the fault of teachers and schools. Our educators are faced with the nearly insurmountable challenges of larger class sizes, increasingly diverse populations that learn in different ways and students suffering from a wider range of social, economic and mental health pressures than ever before. All while having fewer resources and less time with individual students. The results for these vulnerable youth of Windsor-Essex County are significant obstacles that risk trapping them in a negative cycle of poverty.



Action in our Community

Last year, United Way calculated that poverty conservatively costs the taxpayers of Windsor-Essex County \$450 million annually. The only effective way to lower this cost to society is to break the cycle that traps 1 in 4 low income children in the downward spiral of intergenerational poverty and ensure they have opportunities necessary to be successful in their lives.^{xxx}

United Way is striving to do its part in assisting young people overcome the challenges they face. Our newly launched program, On Track to Success, focuses on removing barriers to completing high school and obtaining a post-secondary education by providing academic supports, mentorship and financial assistance to low income “at risk” students in Leamington with plans to expand to neighbourhoods in Windsor. Across Windsor and Essex County, United Way supports free afterschool programs and individual and group mentoring programs that provide young people with positive role models; various academic and social supports which provide with parents’ piece of mind that their children are being supervised and supported in the hours after school.

This past summer United Way piloted a Summer Lunch Program in West Windsor that provided children who normally relied on school meal programs – with a free healthy and nutritious lunch to ensure that no child goes hungry when school nutrition programs are closed. Beyond these programs that directly target children and youth, many other United Way programs offer “wrap around” benefits to at risk young people by improving neighbourhoods, strengthening family connections, providing access to transportation and connecting people to volunteer opportunities to engage their community and assist them in building skills and networks.

Beyond United Way, the government and community have at some level, seen that action needs to be taken to combat the effects of childhood poverty. The Ontario Early Years Centres have become a hub of support for low income families and their children in our

community. With twenty-four locations around Windsor-Essex County, new and expecting parents can receive educational materials, access community supports and meet with childcare professionals while their children receive a healthy snack and participate in activities that encourage positive childhood development. Supportive programming like these early childhood development centres were identified by Dr. Fraser Mustard as vitally important, particularly for low income families, in ensuring that children have the best chance to reach their potential. Building off this premise, full day learning and kindergarten that was implemented by the Government of Ontario helps fulfill this mandate by preparing children for primary school.

Through Pathway to Potential funding from the City of Windsor and County of Essex, youth recreation subsidies are distributed to low income families to ensure their children have access to community sports, recreation and facilities. Supports such as these enable children to access programming their families would normally not be able to afford. These programs also provide opportunities to develop friendships and social connections while doing things that all kids want to do.

The Windsor Youth Centre offers “at risk” and homeless young people a safe “living room” when they have nowhere else to go. While at the centre, youth can get a hot meal, leads on job opportunities and most importantly a safe environment to build friendships and be what is most important, a young person. The announcement of plans for a new downtown youth centre at Harrison Memorial Church shows there is still much work to be done to support young people.

Windsor Pride and the Gay Straight Alliances in partnership with the school boards have committed themselves to ensure a safe environment for youth who are exploring their sexuality. The organizations not only help young people navigate a difficult time of their lives but they also offer resources to parents to help them better understand and hopefully accept their child for who they are.

WE-Tech Alliance First Robotics Program provides primary and secondary students with the opportunity to build robots and compete in an annual competition as a means to encourage them to enter the fields of math and science. The skills learned in these competitions are the same skills that are in high demand in our local economy and are vitally important to our future workforce.

These programs and many others are already helping to elevate young people in our community but more needs to be done, particularly by government. In February of 2015, a new motion that revived the Campaign 2000 goals was passed with near unanimity (1 vote opposing) in the House of Commons that reads:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should work in collaboration with the provinces, territories and First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities to eradicate child poverty in Canada by developing a national poverty reduction plan that includes:

- a. making housing more affordable for lower income Canadians;
- b. ensuring accessible and affordable child care;
- c. addressing childhood nutrition;
- d. improving economic security of families;
- e. measures that specifically address the unique needs of First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities; and
- f. measurable targets and timelines.^{xxxi}

It is time that governments of all levels fulfill their commitments and invest in the programs and infrastructure not only to battle child poverty but also the wrap around supports that truly give young people opportunities to succeed and to ensure that they do not become trapped by the shackles of poverty.





Conclusion

The proverb, “it takes a village to raise a child” couldn’t be truer. Despite the best efforts of parents, teachers and community groups; children and youth still face significant challenges to be successful and seize the opportunities that are available to them. We all need to do more to ensure that every child has the opportunity to grow up and become productive members of society without the fear of being trapped in a life of poverty.

Many of the challenges outlined in this report do not directly impede a young person chance of succeeding in escaping poverty. In fact, many children and youth succeed in spite of them. Rather, these challenges act as a negative headwind for those who are most vulnerable. For some young people who are born into disadvantaged situations, decisions their parents are forced to make due to economic realities can often create more barriers to their success and become the first bricks in the wall of social isolation and lack of academic achievement. These children lose the precious opportunity to learn, build resiliency and the networks that allow many other young people to succeed.

Over the course of a child’s young life these small bricks quickly build up: a missed homework assignment because the parent was working their second job and wasn’t home to help them; the stress and anxiety experienced when parents are fighting over a job loss; not having money for school pizza lunch days and being kept home from school; all leading to low grade attainment and a child feeling hopeless about their future and giving up on school. Each of these day to day occurrences is a block in a wall between the young person and their opportunity to succeed.

Our role as a community is to ensure that no child is doomed to this fate and that all children have the opportunity to succeed. The clearest pathway out of poverty for children and youth is through education. A proper education creates opportunities for both young people and our community as a whole. As these young people gain the knowledge and skills necessary to fill needed jobs in our region, they positively contribute to society.

We ask that you be an advocate for children and youth by supporting programs that place a child on the path out of poverty and onto success. Become a volunteer by mentoring a child. Use your time and talent to be a role model. Each hour volunteered and dollar given helps to remove, one brick at a time, the wall between a lifetime of poverty and an opportunity for children and youth to be all that they can be. Together we can improve the lives of young people and make our community a more prosperous and better place to live for everyone.

End Notes

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