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Media Release

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On National Child Day, Our Kids Network Draws Attention to the Importance of Hearing the Thoughts and Opinions of Children and Youth

As Canada prepares to mark National Child Day on November 20, Our Kids Network (OKN) calls on the Halton community to support the vision established in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of the Child, that all children be treated with dignity and respect.

Now, more than ever, it's important to give young people the opportunity to have their voices heard and to be active participants in their communities and the decisions that affect their wellbeing.

"As we get ready to mark National Child Day, it's important to keep in mind the unique environment our kids are navigating as we continue to feel the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic," says Christine Hartley, executive director of Our Kids Network. "We need to hear their voices and understand their needs when it comes to health care, social supports and mental health challenges. The vision of Our Kids Network is to see all children and youth thrive. With our partners, we work to lift up our young people and protect their right to be heard."

The team at OKN is preparing the data compiled through the Halton Youth Impact Survey earlier this year for release early in the New Year. The community-led survey received an overwhelming response, with more than 2,500 children 9 to 18 years-old from all corners of the region participating. The information, which will be shared with OKN's community partners, youth themselves, and the public, will help shape programming and supports for young people, and ensure that initiatives are designed to meet the needs of local children and families.

Elisabeth Wells, OKN's research and knowledge mobilization manager, notes that the survey demonstrates the ideals of National Child Day, not only in the information it has collected and how it will be used, but also in the ways it provides opportunities for youth engagement and leadership.

"There's a lot of great information there that will be valuable in supporting youth and it gives us a nice snapshot, especially during COVID, of how our youth are doing," she says, adding that the survey also engaged some young people who may not always be heard, such as Indigenous, LGBTQ2+, and newcomer youth, and youth living with chronic illness and disability. "It gives us valuable information that professionals who work with children and youth can use to better support them and meet any needs or challenges that are being felt and experienced by our young people."

Joudie, a Milton teen who has been involved with OKN since 2020 and contributed to the survey as a youth ambassador, was excited to work alongside young people throughout the region to engage their peers. "It was an amazing thing we were able to do," she says of the survey. "We will be able to understand what youth are struggling with and what we can work on to help. Halton has a diverse population, and not everyone has access to resources to speak out about the problems they're facing."

Tanvi, a 17-year-old Oakville resident, says that being involved with a diverse group of people through OKN has been a valuable experience. She encourages local organizations to continue to involve young people when planning programs and events that affect youth, and to give them opportunities to lead. “As a member of the Halton Youth Initiative, I get the autonomy to lead and grow as a person, with other youth. I get to be the one who helps plan and participate. I’m making a difference and growing as a person. Youth are interested in having a much more active role in making an impact on their community.”

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Our Kids Network is a Halton-wide partnership of organizations and agencies serving children and youth. For more information, visit ourkidsnetwork.ca.

For more information on National Child Day 2021 visit

<https://nationalchildday.org/>

<https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/national-child-day.html>

<https://www.unicef.ca/en/blog/5-ways-celebrate-national-child-day>