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Media Release

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NEIGHBOURHOODS PLAY A KEY ROLE IN SUPPORTING YOUTH DEVELOPMENT *Our Kids Network is committed to creating opportunities for youth in Halton*

Our Kids Network is excited to release its most recent bulletin related to data collected through the 2021 Halton Youth Impact Survey. The third bulletin focuses on how young people in neighbourhoods across the Region interact with their community, with the aim of exploring the unique characteristics of each area and empowering professionals and organizations in Halton to transform the data into programming and supports that meet the specific needs of the youth they serve.

Young people in Halton have a lot to say about the community where they live – and when it comes to their own development and wellbeing, youth have a right to have their voices heard.

The [2021 Halton Youth Impact Survey](#) collected comprehensive data related to 27 neighbourhoods across the Region, and the ways youth interact with their communities. Young people aged 9-18 provided responses on topics related to the environment, public spaces, greenspaces, volunteering and civic engagement. Now, OKN is working to provide its community partners with the resources and tools they need to mobilize that information.

“At Our Kids Network, we really believe that strong neighbourhoods help children thrive, and research shows that neighbourhoods and communities play a really critical role in the healthy development of children and youth,” says Dr. Elisabeth Wells, interim executive director of OKN. “All of those unique features of the public spaces in our neighbourhoods – like greenspaces, parks, trails, beaches, community gardens – are really important because they support youth physical health, their ability to connect and come together, and community belonging.”

Further, adds Wells, youth not only have valuable opinions about how to strengthen their communities, but they also have a right to participate in the development of the programming that impacts them. That means local organizations need to provide authentic, meaningful opportunities to engage youth. OKN’s mandate is to collaborate with agencies and professionals to find ways to provide those opportunities.

Analyzing and delivering the survey information has been a complex task due to the size and diverse composition of the Region – from rural Halton Hills to Milton’s large population of newcomers, to the older, established settlement areas of Aldershot and Oakville. Some key findings include:

The Environment

Youth are passionate about issues related to the environment. While 27 per cent of survey respondents reported regularly engaging in activities to protect the environment, many of the comments indicated young people would like to see more community events such as neighbourhood cleanups. This, says Wells,

suggests the level of participation in this area could be even higher if more environmental-themed activities were offered.

Only 6 in 10 of survey respondents reported being satisfied with the overall quality of the natural environment in their community. One youth highlighted the need to preserve greenspace and noted their concern about the impact construction is having on air quality. “These comments speak to the driving need youth have to help make the world they live in a better place,” says Wells. “They know that it’s important not just locally, but all over the world. Our environment is in crisis.”

Civic Engagement and Volunteerism

In Halton, 76 per cent of respondents reported volunteering sometimes, often, or always in their community, with about 4 in 10 reporting that they do so on a regular basis. Civic engagement (i.e., activities such as signing a petition or participating in a demonstration) was higher in Halton Hills and Milton than in other areas of the Region. One youth commented: “I wish that my community had more groups and associations where we can connect, volunteer, and help the environment. I’ve never heard of such a group in my community.”

Wells, who helped facilitate a Youth Data Party to unveil the survey results last fall, was struck by the number of participants who reached out to thank OKN for organizing the event and asked where they could find additional opportunities to volunteer and contribute. She noted that Halton’s community of professionals needs to explore ways to take down barriers to youth participation and harness their ideas and creativity.

“They have a right to have their voices heard, but we need to make the space to have that happen,” she said. “They have so many great contributions that they want to make, and they want to be leaders in their community, but they face barriers to be able to participate fully. Otherwise, we’re missing out – adults, professionals, all of society – because they’re not being heard.”

From Data to Action

To transform the survey findings into action, OKN is working closely with partner agencies, including libraries, YMCAs, school boards, public health and parks and recreational departments, to share the information and provide tools and resources to start meaningful conversations about how to leverage the survey data. Data bulletins are sent out with guidelines on how to explore the findings and questions that aim to help professionals reflect on the survey information and how it affects their programs and services.

OKN has also launched the [Youth Volunteer Life Cycle Resource Toolkit](#). Based on work done by the Halton Youth Initiative, an OKN-led Trillium project from 2019-2021 that has evolved into the Halton Youth Voices Council, the toolkit provides partner agencies with strategies for recruiting, retaining, and recognizing youth volunteers, and includes resources such as a practice brief, videos, infographics, and tip sheets.

Feedback from local agencies on the survey results released to date has been positive. Thanks to a strong history of collaboration between OKN and its partners, Wells envisions a meaningful community conversation that takes youth involvement to a new level.

“Youth could be part of that conversation and see that the community cares about them and wants to include them and values their voice,” she said. “I don’t think that’s too lofty. I think we can bring a few community organizations together with some of our youth volunteers. I think it would be an amazing event.”

[Explore the HYIS Third Bulletin on Volunteerism, Environment, and Civic Engagement](#)

[Access the Youth Volunteer Life Cycle Resource Toolkit](#)

[Find out more about the Halton Youth Impact Survey](#)

About the Survey

In the spring of 2021, 2,599 youth aged 9-18 across Halton participated in the Halton Youth Impact Survey, which was implemented by Our Kids Network as part of a national pilot project led by UNICEF Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Medavie Health Foundation. Results from the survey were released in November 2021 and are available through OKN's [Data Portal](#). To support its community partners in translating the robust data from the survey into actionable decisions around policies, services, and programming, OKN has planned a series of themed bulletins throughout 2022.