

# Let's Talk About Poverty

## THE URBAN POVERTY CONSORTIUM OF WATERLOO REGION

POVERTY FACT SHEET SERIES - FACT SHEET #7

NOVEMBER 29, 2000

"In recognition of work done in the community related to poverty, the Urban Poverty Consortium seeks to build and extend new and existing efforts on poverty, to raise awareness, share information and data and to catalyze further action on poverty."

### Young and Poor

... Some of the people in my high school are incredibly harsh and very mean. They say: "Oh, you're on welfare, you stink, don't hang around with me." It's hatred towards anybody that doesn't have money. Hatred.[1]

### Youth and Poverty

In this Fact Sheet Series, we have been looking at some subgroups of people in poverty. Another one of these specific groups is the "youth". While there are many definitions of youth, the term is used here to refer to people aged 15 to 24. In Canada, youth, especially those who live in cities, are among those most likely to live in poverty.<sup>[2]</sup>

In the Waterloo Region, almost 20% of all young people aged 15 - 24 live in poverty, as defined by Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-off (LICO). The LICO is adjusted for community size and measures the amount of money needed to live and participate as a Canadian citizen. Although the LICO is not meant to be a measure of poverty, it does provide a good indication of how many Canadians are living in financially difficult circumstances. Usually, a person or family is considered to be living in poverty if their income falls below the LICO.

Table One

### Low Income Cut-offs for Waterloo Region

Family Size	Monthly	Annual
1 person	\$1,244	\$14,694
2 persons	\$1,555	\$18,367
3 persons	\$1,934	\$22,844
4 persons	\$2,342	\$27,650
5 persons	\$2,617	\$30,910
6 persons	\$2,893	\$34,168

Source: Statistics Canada, Low Income Cut-offs, Cat.No.13-551-XPB, January, 1997

Many youth living in poverty do not fit into social assistance guidelines. Approximately 15% of the social assistance caseload in the Region of Waterloo are clients between 16 and 24 years of age, although that does not include the youths under 18 who are living with their families who are receiving assistance.

### Who are the youth living in poverty?

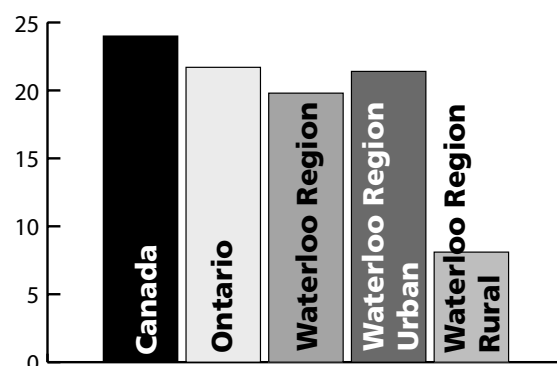
Youth live in conditions of low income both due to family poverty and personal situations. Many young people between the ages of 15 and 24 live with their parents. If the parents are living in poverty, so are their children. As well, many young adults have children of their own. Youth also live separately from their parents: as workers in the labour force, as students, and on the streets. According to Statistics Canada, single persons under 25 have the highest risk of poverty, compared to all other groups. Over 60% of single people under 25 had low incomes in 1997.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Young Adults in Families

Two-thirds of all young women 20-24 years of age, and three-quarters of all young men 20-24 were living with their parents in 1996.<sup>[4]</sup> Living with parents is one of the ways that youth can manage unemployment, low wages or low incomes while attending school.

Some young adults also are parents themselves, and these families face a very high rate of poverty. Families with two parents who are under 25 faced a low income rate of 39.2%, but when they were headed by single-parent mothers under 25, they had a shockingly high poverty rate of 91.3%.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Poverty Rates for Youth, 1996.



Source: Statistics Canada, 1996 (Custom Tabulation)

## Student Poverty

*There are just so many potholes — for example, students without proper gym shorts get marked absent. But for the few high-school-aged teens who get welfare because of abuse or overcrowding in the home, proper gym shorts can be expensive. No shorts, no clean attendance record. And no clean attendance record, no welfare.<sup>[11]</sup>*

Education plays a critical role in eradicating poverty. However, young people living in poverty have greater difficulty in succeeding in school, due to lack of support, inadequate diet and limited access to educational resources.

Some students living in poverty are still in high school. In Waterloo Region, more than 200 secondary school students are receiving direct social assistance. Students under 18 can get social assistance only if it is judged impossible for them to remain at home.

According to Elizabeth Carlyle, chair of the Canadian Federation of Students, most students live in poverty while they're enrolled in post-secondary education. The University of Waterloo and Conestoga College in our Region are among over 50 universities and colleges across Canada that have

### Youth in the Labour Market

*"You can't be motivated when you know there is no opportunity to work." 23 year old man<sup>[6]</sup>*

Although there are many factors associated with youth poverty, their low status in the labour market contributes to their high poverty rates.<sup>[7]</sup> The youth unemployment rate in October, 2000 increased to 12.9%, compared to 6.9% for the total Canadian labour force, and is much higher than the rate among other working-age groups.<sup>[8]</sup>

In 1998, teens' labour force participation rate was at its lowest point in 25 years.<sup>[9]</sup> Young Canadians are finding it harder to find employment. Many low-skilled and manual jobs often performed by young people are being replaced by jobs that need more technical skills. Youth who do find jobs usually receive low wages, and are often employed on a part-time basis, both out of choice (to continue their education) and out of necessity (only job available).

Teens in low-income families were less likely to have jobs than those in higher-income families, and teens in rural areas and small cities were more likely to have jobs than teens in large cities. Nearly one-third of full-time teen students have paid jobs, and the majority of Canadian teens earn less than \$200 per week.<sup>[10]</sup>

food banks or some sort of free food provision program for needy students. Students from Wilfrid Laurier University are directed to the foodbank at the University of Waterloo.

In Ontario, university tuition increased 140% between 1990 and 2000. Tuition fees here are the second highest in all of Canada.<sup>[12]</sup> Even though governments are emphasizing the need for individuals to take greater responsibility for lifting themselves out of poverty, they have been shutting the door on one of the best strategies for people to empower themselves, namely access to post-secondary education. Cuts in government funding for post-secondary education have resulted in a steep increase in financial barriers to get a post-secondary education, especially for students from low-income backgrounds who receive the least amount of financial help from their parents.<sup>[13]</sup>

*To get an education can be a challenge for the best of us, but add poverty to that mix and it becomes almost impossible. Where does the money come from to buy the books and pay the tuition fees? It comes out of the grocery money if your hunger for knowledge becomes as consuming as mine has. University Student<sup>[15]</sup>*



High tuition fees and the virtual disappearance of needs-based student grants in most provinces mean that fewer young adults from low-income backgrounds can pursue post-secondary education. Those who do will finish with huge debt loads.

According to the National Anti-Poverty Organization, low-income single parents, mostly women, seeking to participate in post-secondary education have been affected by a double whammy. On the one hand, Ontario has cut off social assistance to single parents enrolled in post-secondary education. On the other hand, the costs of financing post-secondary education have risen greatly. The combined result is to erect a very large barrier of debt in the way of low-income single parents seeking to improve their educational level as a way out of poverty.<sup>[14]</sup>

## “Street Kids”

*We are kids who have been tossed into a corner, whose opportunities were cut off, when we decided to save ourselves from our homes. Left too long to be forgotten about.*

*Teenaged girl<sup>[16]</sup>*

Waterloo Region has an estimated 1700 youth living on the street throughout the year.<sup>[17]</sup> Far too often, street youth are running from homes characterized by violence or excessive parental drug or alcohol use. Or they are leaving homes in where they were abused or neglected. In some cases, they are being told to leave their homes by parents or guardians.[18] Street kids are exposed to a wide spectrum of difficulties including unemployment, poverty, street crime, substance abuse, and teenage pregnancy.

It is hard to find help for youth living on the street due to lack of information, scarce resources and even unhelpful peers who look at new kids as unnecessary competition. Many of the solutions are degrading, such as combing through “dumpsters” and garbage cans for discarded food and engaging in prostitution. R.O.O.F. (Reaching Our Outdoor Friends), a Kitchener-based agency to help street youth, serves the Region of Waterloo and beyond by providing meals, clothing, prescription subsidies, laundry and shower facilities, counseling, and life skills training to homeless youth aged 12 and up. According to Executive Director, Bruce Milne, last year, over 17,000 contacts were made by R.O.O.F. with street kids. Argus Residence for Young People in Cambridge also provides emergency and transitional accommodation for 8 males and 10 females at a time, as well as life skills programs, follow-up services, meals, counselling and referrals to community services for youth of the Region.

## Youth Issues

*“I want to do work that betters the world.” 17 year old youth<sup>[19]</sup>*

As the old saying goes, youth represent the future. However, many youth are in a cycle of ignorance, apathy and powerlessness and see few ways to participate in society. They also lack access to information and services.<sup>[20]</sup> Generally, youth living in poverty do not feel understood or respected. They express sensitivity to the negative attitudes community residents and businesses (restaurants, shop owners, mall security) demonstrate towards them.<sup>[21]</sup> Rural young people often feel isolated and have limited access to transportation and services.

*It's all about money. At my school, if you have money and the right clothes you are cool. People don't decide whether or not you are cool based on the sort of person that you are.<sup>[22]</sup>*

Youth feel tremendous pressures to participate in the consumer culture, which further isolates young people living in poverty.

## Consequences of Youth Poverty

### Health<sup>[23]</sup>

- 1/3 of all youth living in families who receive social assistance has at least one chronic health problem.
- The mortality rate of street youth is 13 times higher than for other youth, and they die from preventable diseases.
- Like other homeless people, street kids have problems related to lack of cleanliness, inadequate diet and exposure to the elements. Street youth are younger and still growing, so they are more vulnerable to these problems and to the violence, drugs, alcohol, sexually transmitted diseases and mental-health problems of life on the streets.
- There has been an increase in intravenous drug use, hepatitis and HIV infection among street youth who, despite being very sexually active — many work as prostitutes — usually have unprotected sex.

### Behaviour<sup>[24]</sup>

- Poverty is the major factor in youth violence. While most people living in poverty are not violent, the stresses of poverty are associated with much higher levels of violent crime.
- Many of the poorest teenagers are forced into begging, stealing, drug dealing and prostitution to make ends meet.
- Low income status is generally related to the abuse of illicit drugs and the development of alcohol-related problems among youth.
- As Figure 3 summarizes, poverty creates “rotten outcomes” for young adults.<sup>[25]</sup>

Figure 3:  
Summary of Outcomes of Poverty for Youth

### Poverty Creates “Rotten Outcomes” for Youth



**School failure**  
**Early pregnancy**  
**Alcohol and drug abuse**  
**Unemployability**  
**Long-term social assistance**  
**Violent crimes**  
**Feeling of hopelessness**  
**Physical and mental disability**  
**Victimization**  
**Health problems**

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## So What?

### A few points to ponder:

- According to a report on youth at risk prepared for the Ministry of Citizenship, Culture and Recreation of Ontario, youth want:
  - more competent leaders who are really interested in them and what they're doing
  - affordable, accessible facilities, such as: indoor skateboard parks, pools, gyms, and a place to hang out and talk.
  - counselling and support programs by people who care
  - more affordable computer and Internet access
  - to be treated with respect.
- In the last decade, volunteer rates among teens and young adults have increased significantly, providing many teens with valuable job-like experience. Do you have a job for a young adult?.
- The BC Provincial Health Officer has argued that child and youth poverty must be reduced by 80% to the level achieved in several European countries, for reducing health problems as well as economic inequalities.
- The needs of Canada's street kids cannot be addressed at traditional hostel facilities that were set up to help older, usually alcoholic, men. Street kids simply won't go there.
- Single parents in university and college are willing to go into very large debt to get an education and set a good example for their children.
- In a speech to the Empire Club last December, Hillary Weston, Lieutenant-Governor of Ontario, said "*There are*

*training and employment programs available, funded by all levels of government, but the problem is that most street kids are largely unsuited to traditional career development programs, even though they are resourceful and creative. Support should not come under the heading of charity, but rather be motivated by social entrepreneurship ~ transforming street kids from a community problem into contributing members of society, through investment in programs that foster the skills that will, in turn, build micro-businesses in our inner cities."*

- The "resiliency" of young people gives hope to efforts to reclaim street youth. Most young people, even those from the most disadvantaged circumstances, can, with the support of caring adults, move toward independence and adulthood.

### Watch for another Upcoming Fact Sheet

Through the fall and winter of 2000, the Urban Poverty Consortium will be releasing an additional poverty fact sheet on the topic of:

- ✓ Sole Support Parents

Previous poverty fact sheets have covered the following topics and are available by contacting members of the Urban Poverty Consortium:

- ✓ The Poverty Gap
- ✓ New Canadians
- ✓ Persons with Disabilities
- ✓ Seniors
- ✓ Children

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## ~ For more Information ~

### Contact Members of the Urban Poverty Consortium of Waterloo Region

#### Opportunities 2000

Mark Cabaj 579-7586 x131  
[macabaj@bond.net](mailto:macabaj@bond.net)

#### Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo

Trudie Beaulne 579-3800  
[spckw@waterlooregion.org](mailto:spckw@waterlooregion.org)

#### Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries

Gloria De Santis 623-1713  
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[gterry@region.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:gterry@region.waterloo.on.ca)

#### Waterloo Region Social Services Department

Lynn Randall 883-2190  
[lrandall@region.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:lrandall@region.waterloo.on.ca)  
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## Resources and Initiatives – Fact Sheet #7

The following is a listing of some of the community resources available to people living in poverty in Waterloo Region. Please contact them for additional information on their various programs and services. Many of the community agencies operate through the efforts of their volunteers and welcome your support. In order to obtain information about other services in Waterloo Region, please call:

**Community Information Waterloo Region - (519)579-3800**

**Information Cambridge - (519)740-3030**

**Woolwich Community Information Centre - (519)669-5139/1-800-661-7918**

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### **Human Resource Development Canada**

Employment Centre  
409 Weber Street West  
Kitchener ON N7M 6B2  
Tel.: 1 - 800 - 277 - 9914  
TTY: 1 - 800 - 255 - 4786  
www.canada.gc.ca

### **Opportunities 2000**

35 Dickson Street  
Cambridge N1R 7A6  
Mark Cabaj  
Tel: (519) 579 - 7586 X131  
mcabaj@bond.net

### **Social Planning Council of Cambridge & North Dumfries**

24 Queen's Square  
Cambridge N1S 1H6  
Gloria DeSantis, Executive Director  
Tel: (519) 623 - 1713  
spccam@sentex.net

### **Social Planning Council of Kitchener - Waterloo**

68 Queen Street North  
Kitchener N2H 2H2  
Trudy Beaulne  
Tel: (519) 579 - 3800  
Fax: (519) 578-9185  
spckw@waterlooregion.org

### **The Working Centre**

58 Queen Street South  
Kitchener N2G 1V6  
Joe Mancini, Director  
Tel: (519) 743-1151  
Fax: (519) 743-9452  
genmail@theworkingcentre.org

### **Argus Residence for Young People**

P.O. Box 22041  
Galt Centre Postal Outlet  
Cambridge ON N1R 8E3  
Tel: 519-650-0452 (for young women)  
Tel: 519-623-7991 (for young men)

### **Youth Against Substance Abuse**

2-120 Main Street  
Cambridge N1R 1V7  
Julie Keagan, Administrator  
Tel: (519) 623-5986  
Fax: (519) 623-9660  
nayrx@on.aibn.com

### **Youth in Conflict with the Law**

Cambridge Place  
73 Water Street North, Ste. 3  
Cambridge N1R 7L6  
Tel: (519) 622-2442 Fax: (519) 622-8729

### **Reaching Our Outdoor Friends (R.O.O.F.)**

242 Queen Street South  
Kitchener N2G 1W3  
Bruce Milne, Executive Director  
Tel: (519) 742-2788  
Fax: (519) 742-5506

### **Government of Ontario Ministry of Labour**

Employment Standards Branch  
155 Frobisher Drive, Unit G  
Waterloo N2V 2E1  
Tel: (519) 885-5191  
Fax: (519) 883-5694

### **Mary's Place**

84 Frederick Street  
Kitchener N2H 2L7  
Lynn Hansen, Manager  
Tel: (519) 744-0120

### **Youth Against Substance Abuse**

Community Resource Village  
151 Frederick St., Ste. 200  
Kitchener N2H 2M2  
Tel: (519) 745-8308  
Fax: (519) 745-2569  
nayrx@on.aibn.com

### **Youth in Conflict with the Law**

235 Frederick Street  
Kitchener N2H 2M7  
Hugh Miller, Interim Executive Director  
Tel: (519) 745-6591  
Fax: (519) 745-1009

### **The Youth Housing Centre**

165 King Street East  
Kitchener N2G 2K8  
Sandra Watt, Program Manager  
Tel: (519)743-2460  
Fax: (519) 743-5111  
lyec@bond.net



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## ENDNOTES

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