

Our Youth Matter



**United Way of Regina Community Research Paper
September 2009**



United Way
of Regina

LIVE UNITED
GIVE CONNECT LEAD
Together, we are changing lives

Introduction

United Way of Regina is an organization that fosters innovation and creates real impact in the community. By facilitating collaboration, funding innovative projects and organizations, and working with partners to tackle old problems in new ways we hope to mobilize the community to improve the lives of all Regina citizens. Currently our work is focused on three priority areas; children, youth, and families. Inherent in these three priorities is our commitment to helping those in crisis, especially women and children fleeing domestic violence.

One of our strategic goals is to provide information to the community about each priority area that will provide context for our work and inform collaboration. Through these documents we hope to introduce the issues we are committed to in a local context, encouraging community dialogue and solution building.

This document will serve as a foundation paper for the youth priority area at United Way of Regina. Our work in this area is focused on keeping youth engaged in learning and helping them transition successfully to employment. United Way of Regina has chosen to examine the youth priority area using two different frameworks; the Developmental Asset model¹, and the Determinants of Community Well-being as adopted by the Regina Regional Intersectoral Committee.² We will present local demographic and statistical information on youth through these lenses and examine the issues of early school leavers and youth transitions to employment. This paper is intended to be a living document, changing and evolving as United Way of Regina mobilizes the community to take action on behalf of Regina's youth.

The United Way of Regina priority areas are rooted in the identified needs of the community. From March until November of 2003, United Way of Regina undertook extensive community consultations to identify priority social issues that would inform its strategic directions and investments. This consultation project, Regina Connects, built upon a prior comprehensive consultation with human service professionals



and organizations completed in 2002 (Building on Our Strengths). Regina Connects utilized a widely distributed survey, focus groups, and facilitated meetings to receive input from a diverse spectrum of citizens. Despite racial, gender, generational, and socio-economic differences the results of the consultation showed that as a community we are able to identify the same connected social priorities and areas of need.

Four community priority areas were established based on the results of Regina Connects:

1. Support for early childhood development (children aged 0-6 years), including support to parents and families of these children.
2. Support for youth and young adults to complete school and obtain the necessary skills to enter the work force.
3. Ensuring that families are stabilized through access to safe and affordable housing.
4. Ensuring support to allow people to overcome crises, particularly in the case of adults (mostly women) and children fleeing domestic violence and abuse.³

Following our adoption of the priority areas, three impact tables were convened to guide United Way of Regina, and the broader community, in pursuing new and innovative social change strategies. The impact tables consist of community stakeholders from all areas of human services including government, community based organizations, health services providers, and school boards. Each impact table has a specific focus which has been refined and distilled since its initial inception. The impact table focused on youth has been meeting since 2006.

Youth Population and School Enrollment

The population of Regina as of the last Canadian Census in 2006 was 179,246 people.⁴ The youth population (between the ages of 0 and 29) represents 41% of this total population.⁵ Important segments of the youth demographic are those residents who have self identified as either aboriginal or immigrant. The portion of the youth population who identified as Aboriginal totaled 14.5% of Regina's total youth population.⁶ Half of the total immigrant population of Regina is comprised of youth, and these young immigrants represent 11% of Regina's total youth population.^{7 8}

Two school boards, one public and one Catholic, serve Regina's youth. There are also twelve schools outside of the mainstream schools including alternative schools, private schools, French language schools, and schools with a specific religious focus.⁹ Regina has a large youth population and despite high student enrollment, unfortunately some youth still slip through the cracks. While school completion rates are higher for this generation than any other before it, some youth still drop-out, a problem that should never be minimized.

Drop-Out Rates & Trends

A "drop-out" is defined by Statistics Canada as anyone between the ages of 20 and 24 who is not attending school and has not completed high school. Drop-out is used interchangeably with Early School Leaver for the purposes of this document.

The national drop-out rate has been consistently declining for the last 15-20 years. From 1991 to 2005 the national drop-out rate fell from 16.7% to 9.8%.¹⁰ Rural drop-out rates generally remained higher than in urban and metropolitan areas at approximately 16.4% in 2005.¹¹

From 1991 to 2005 the drop-out rate in Saskatchewan fell from 16.3% to 10.7%.

The drop-out rate in urban and metropolitan areas fell even further to 9.4% while the small town and rural drop-out rate combined averaged 14.6%.¹² These rates correspond to a sobering number of students; 7,300 drop-outs provincially in the 2005 school year.

The gap between male and female drop-outs also widened during this time. Nationally, in 2005 the drop-out rate among males was 12.2% and only 7.2% for females.¹³ The proportion of male drop-outs increased from 1991 to 2005 from 58.3% to 63.7%.¹⁴ This trend does not indicate more males are dropping out, rather that less females are dropping out.¹⁵

The disparity between the male and female numbers is, in some part, linked to reasons for leaving school. Whereas male students are more likely to feel disengaged from school and wish to join the workforce, more than 15% of female drop-outs are attributed to pregnancy or parental responsibility.¹⁶

It is also important to note that while drop-out rates have declined the need for a high school education in order to secure employment has increased significantly during the same time period.

Educational Attainment in Regina

In 2006 the total population of Regina age 15 years and over was 145,415.¹⁷ The total population over 15 years of age with no high school or equivalency was 31,775, or 22% of Regina's total adult population.^{18 19}

Educational attainment also varies among different segments of Regina's population. There is a significant disparity in education levels between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents. The total Aboriginal population in Regina over the age of 15 in 2006 was 10,830.²⁰ The total Aboriginal population over 15 with no high school or equivalency was 4080. In other words, 38% of the total adult Aboriginal population has not completed high school, compared to 22% in the general adult population.²¹ Important to note as well is that the adult aboriginal population is significantly younger than the general adult population. The total Aboriginal population between 15 and 29 in Regina was 4840 in 2006, meaning half of the total adult Aboriginal population is less than thirty years of age.²² This is significant because it means there is a large, young, Aboriginal population in Regina, a large portion of whom have failed to acquire a basic education.

Why Do Students Leave School Early?

Despite a dramatic decrease in drop-out rates over time many youth in Regina still leave school early. Considering the overwhelmingly negative consequences, what pushes students to give up on their education? There are many risk factors which contribute to the likelihood a youth will leave school early. However, none of these risk factors have shown to be reliable indicators on their own. Rather, dropping out or leaving school early is often a process with escalating phases eventually triggered by some crisis or stress in a youths' life. Phases of this process can include:

Youth at risk of leaving school early will need the help of a comprehensive strategy designed to address all of their needs.

Through informed co-operation the community of service providers will need to work together to intervene in the lives of youth.

- Initial deviation from the social norm of school behaviour;
- Ceasing participation in school activities;
- Failing to identify with school values;
- Alienating themselves; and
- Finally, disconnecting from school all together.²³

This process can be accelerated and intensified for younger children if they are not enrolled in school for a significant length of time, after which it will be extremely difficult for them to re-engage in a meaningful way alongside students their own age. This situation is not uncommon for those families experiencing homelessness, hunger, or battling addictions. Studies also show that the younger a

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student is when they begin to experience drop-out risk factors, the less likely their chances for school success become. From a positive perspective though, each phase of disconnection from school represents an opportunity for intervention.

Two types of risk factors are identified as contributing to early school leaving; those that are highly alterable, and those that are not. One example of a factor that would be difficult to change is family structure. However, there are important contributing factors that are alterable, and represent further opportunities for intervention. These include: access to academic support and tutoring (especially outside of school hours); access to safe community recreation; access to mentors and positive adult relationships; a positive school environment and capacity to help highly transient and struggling students especially those who have fallen far behind their peers.

Factors that can positively affect a student's chance at success include:

- Relationship building;
- Routine monitoring of alterable indicators;
- Individualized and timely intervention
- Long term commitment of support;
- Persistent encouragement to learn; and
- Affiliation with school.²⁴

The challenge in addressing early school leavers is complex. Many children who leave school early or who are at risk of doing so will require a diversity of services for problems which are both separate and yet interconnected. Engaging in risky behaviour (consuming alcohol, taking illicit drugs, having sexual intercourse), health issues (hunger, diabetes), behavioural problems and mental health issues as well as learning difficulties and low literacy rates must often all be addressed with high risk youth. Unfortunately, services that help address these problems often act as competing priorities.²⁵ Behavioural research

on youth has shown that mental health problems, social problems, and health risk behaviours often co-occur as an organized pattern of adolescent risk behaviours. Using this reasoning, prevention and intervention measures which focus on a myriad of risk factors should have more positive outcomes than trying to deal with one issue at a time. Youth at risk of leaving school early will need the help of a comprehensive strategy designed to address all of their needs. Through informed co-operation the community of service providers will need to work together to intervene in the lives of youth.

Education and the Determinants of Community Well-being

The cycle of poverty remains the greatest barrier to student success. Unfortunately, students who are at high risk for leaving school early often face the very same challenges that are created by dropping out. Research indicates that children who grow up in a low income household are less likely to complete post-secondary education, limiting their earning potential and most likely ensuring they remain low income.²⁶

The fact that leaving school early can begin or continue a generational cycle of poverty is not surprising. Education, like income, is a reliable indicator of socio-economic status and health. Higher levels of education correlate to higher levels of income, better health, higher life expectancy, lower incidences of chronic conditions, and improved socio-economic status.²⁷ Essentially, leaving school early creates a dangerous catch twenty-two: without education individuals are more likely to be low income and unhealthy; likewise, unhealthy children living in low income families are more likely to leave school early, recreating the cycle of poverty and illness in perpetuity.²⁸

When certain Determinants of Community Well-being such as employment, income, housing, and food security are not present, students are far more likely to leave school early. Below, some of

these connections are illustrated with statistical and demographic information, showing how leaving school early can be both a symptom and a cause of the failure to satisfy certain Determinants of Community Well-being.

Employment & Income Consequences

Leaving school early or failing to complete high school has significant impact on an individual's ability to secure employment and earn a living wage. The unemployment rate in Regina in 2006 was 4.9%.²⁹ Among high school graduates this number fell to 4.1%.³⁰ Among those without high school or equivalency the unemployment rate was 8.4%.³¹ This doubling of the unemployment rate for drop-outs has remained the standard for some time throughout fluctuations in the economy, job market and unemployment rates.

There is also significant disparity in employment rates between Aboriginals and non Aboriginals in Regina. As previously stated, the percentage of Aboriginals without high school or high school equivalency is 16% higher than for non-Aboriginals in Regina. This gap is reflected in the 14% unemployment rate for Aboriginals in Regina in 2006, a full 10% higher than that of non-Aboriginals.^{32 33}

Even if early school leavers are able to find employment, low skill work is quickly becoming a thing of the past in our technology based world. Among OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) countries in the 1990's knowledge workers like scientists and engineers accounted for 30% of net employment growth and producing occupations experienced a decline in their real earnings of 2.5%.³⁴

The fact remains that there are very few jobs available to those with low literacy skills. There is also strong evidence of a relationship between literacy proficiency and labour market outcomes. Data show that the percentage of employed individuals was consistently higher among those



who had literacy proficiency at or above Level 3, the benchmark considered to be the minimum for an individual to cope in a complex knowledge-based society, than among those who scored below this benchmark. The relationship between literacy and employability appears to be especially strong for off-reserve First Nations in urban Saskatchewan.³⁵

A recent study of literacy levels in the Province of Saskatchewan found 70% of off-reserve First Nations and 56% of urban-based Métis in Saskatchewan scored below the Level 3 benchmark. The study also found the proportion of low-scoring adults was much lower among non-Aboriginals, at 37% in urban Saskatchewan. The report found that employment was significantly higher among those who scored at or above the Level 3 benchmark than those who scored below. In urban Saskatchewan, about 77% of First Nations at or above Level 3 were employed, compared with 55% of those who scored below. The pattern was similar in Manitoba.³⁶

Education level also has a significant impact on the income and net worth of Canadians. In 2005

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the average net worth of a Canadian family was \$148,350.³⁷ For those families with University degrees this number rose 62% to \$237,400.³⁸ However, for families who had not completed high school average net worth fell to \$92,433, over 100% less than those families who completed university.³⁹ Even families who only finished high school enjoyed significantly more net worth, averaging \$120,007.⁴⁰

The effect on income is even greater for lone parents who do not finish high school. In Canada in 2005, 63.6% of lone mothers who had not finished high school were low-income.⁴¹ Perhaps even more disturbing, 27% of lone mothers who did not finish high school but were working full time year round were still low income in 2005.⁴² This trend indicates a troubling cycle of poverty for teenage mothers who leave school early to attend to their families and do not return to finish their education.

Health Consequences

The cycle of poverty is a significant health problem in Saskatchewan, especially for youth. Poor health contributes to student absenteeism, ability to learn, and educational development. Many health conditions are directly correlated to socio-economic status; low income families are generally in poorer health than high income families. In Regina, 20.1% or one in five children live in poverty, well above the national average.⁴³

In June of 2007 the Regina Qu'Appelle Health Region released a study concluding there are significant health disparities between Regina's low-income and high-income neighbourhoods. They found that residents of Regina's five low-income neighbourhoods are:

- 3.44 times more likely to experience mental health disorders;
- 16.14 times more likely to attempt suicide;

- 4.32 times more likely to be hospitalized for diabetes;
- rate of Chlamydia is 5.19 times higher;
- rate of Hepatitis C is 21.51 times higher;
- 5.06 times more likely to have low birth weight babies; and
- 10.83 times more likely to have teen births.⁴⁴

Low socio-economic status, coupled with poor health, is proven to imperil a student's chance at success. The rate of substance abuse among youth in Saskatchewan also contributes greatly to their chances for school success and completion. A 2005 report on substance abuse in Saskatchewan found that:

- After declining for many years, substance abuse by young people is increasing;
- Multiple substance use is common among youth who abuse drugs;
- The rate of substance abuse is highest in the Aboriginal population and first use occurs at a younger age in this population;
- The abuse of solvents is more prevalent among Aboriginal youth; and
- One in five Aboriginal youth has abused solvents, with a third of users under age 15.⁴⁵

These studies indicate that the health of Regina's inner-city and low-income youth is in serious jeopardy. Health and socio-economic factors can put youth at risk of leaving school early, but they are not the only determinants. Inadequate housing, food insecurity and the prevalence of crime also contribute significantly to the risk of youth leaving school early.

Housing

Access to safe and stable affordable housing is essential to student success. The less students

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change schools the more likely they are to develop strong relationships with teachers, and the wider school community. Unfortunately, many Regina families do not enjoy stable housing, a situation that has worsened in recent years.

Core Housing Need is defined as the number of households unable to access housing that is affordable, in adequate condition, and of suitable size.⁴⁶ The most recent analysis provided by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) is based on the 2001 Canadian Census.⁴⁷ CMHC reports 7,400 core need households in Regina, representing 10.2% of all Regina households. Of these households 5,700 are renters and only 1700 are home owners. This means that 25.6% of all families renting in Regina are living in substandard, inadequate housing. There is also reason to believe that this number is rising. CMHC reports that between the 2001 and 2006 census the number of households in core housing need in Saskatchewan rose 9.9%. We can safely assume that at least some of this increase occurred in Regina. The incidence of Core Housing Need in Saskatchewan rose .03% in this time. The only other places in Canada that saw a rise in the incidence of Core Housing Need were the Northwest Territories and the Yukon. The Regina Homelessness Committee reports that most core need households are paying 30% or more of their income on shelter costs, a number that continues to rise as rents increase and the vacancy rate drops.

The Fall 2008 CHMC Rental Market Report for Regina states the vacancy rate in Regina's rental apartment stock fell to 0.5%, down from 1.7% the year before. Average rents increased \$87 monthly from October 2007 to 2008 and two bedroom suites increased an average of \$95 monthly in the same year. Regina now has the second lowest vacancy rate in Canada, tied only with Victoria and Vancouver B.C., and following Kelowna B.C. at 0.3%. The inadequate and often dilapidated rental housing stock in Regina, and especially in the inner-city, contributes greatly to the instability of low-income families and students.

When a student moves or changes schools they often fall behind their peers in the curriculum, miss important content, and lose the relationship they had with the school community. Without intervention transient students often disconnect from school or leave the system completely.

Food Security

Food security is also essential to student success. Food security, nutrition, and diet quality all contribute to a student's development, ability to learn, and overall health. Food security is defined as a condition that "exists when all people, at all times, have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."⁴⁸ Food insecurity, the inability to access adequate, safe, nutritious and acceptable food afflicts a high percentage of children in Regina.

While food bank usage statistics are not the only way of predicting food insecurity, in Canada the

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high numbers are quite telling. Food bank usage rates have risen steadily since the inception of food banks in the 1980's, peaking in 2004 and 2005.⁴⁹ The Regina & District Food Bank distributes between 8,000 and 10,000 food hampers a month, the equivalent of 100 tons of food.⁵⁰ Many of the recipients of this food are children. Nationally, 38.7% of food bank clients are children.⁵¹ In Saskatchewan, 46.5% of food bank clients were children in 2007⁵², and the Regina & District Food Bank reports nearly half of their clients are indeed children.⁵³

When school age children experience food insecurity, especially inadequate availability of food, their academic development including reading and mathematics suffers.⁵⁴ Reading development is especially affected in food insecure female children, and the mathematical skills of food insecure children entering kindergarten develop significantly slower than those of food secure children.⁵⁵

Children from food insecure families face significant risks and barriers. These children were found to be five more times likely to attempt suicide, four times more likely to suffer from chronic low grade depression, almost twice as likely to have been suspended from school and were 1.4 times more likely to repeat a grade and to have significantly lower math scores.⁵⁶

Food insecure children, especially girls, are more likely to be overweight putting them at risk for adult obesity⁵⁷. Food insecurity in children is associated with grade repetition, absenteeism, tardiness, anxiety, aggression, psychosocial dysfunction and difficulty with social interaction.⁵⁸

Food insecurity in children results in impaired cognitive functioning and a diminished capacity to learn, lower test scores, and poorer overall school achievement.⁵⁹

Further, children who live in families who move from food security to food insecurity suffer the same setbacks.

Food security can play a major role in a student's ability to learn, participate in school activities, and even attend school on a regular and reliable basis. Just as unemployment, health problems and housing concerns can destabilize a family, food insecurity means student success is constantly at risk. Ensuring food security is a vital component of keeping kids in school and helping them to be successful in school and learning.

Crime

Crime can have a significant impact on the lives of young people. Whether youth are involved in crime, are the victims of crime, or simply live in a community made unsafe by crime, their chances at success can be affected. While crime rates, including youth crime rates have been declining, there are troubling trends in youth crime in Canada.

Overall, youth crime rates have declined in Canada over the last 15-20 years. However, the majority of the decline is in property crimes (which still accounted for 4 out of 10 youth crimes in 2006).⁶⁰ Both violent crime and drug related crime rates among youth have risen dramatically in recent years despite a slow continuous decrease in overall youth crime (4% decrease from 2005-2006).⁶¹

Violent crimes now account for nearly one quarter of youth crime.⁶² The violent crime rate among youth rose 30% from 1991 to 2006 while the violent crime rate in the general public fell 4% in the same period.⁶³ Likewise, the rate of drug offences among youth is double what it was ten years ago.⁶⁴ While the majority of youth drug crime is related to Cannabis, the proportion of crimes linked to cocaine and other drugs has doubled in the last ten years.⁶⁵

In Saskatchewan from 2005 to 2006 there were 1043 youth found guilty of property crimes, 511 youth found guilty of crimes against the person including 1 homicide and 150 major assaults, 31 youth found guilty of drug possession and



A class picture of the first CyberSchool students.

CyberSchool is a pilot project by Cornwall Alternative School funded by United Way. The pilot aims to help high risk student complete their Grade 10.

22 found guilty of drug trafficking.⁶⁶ All crime statistics consider youth to be persons between the ages of 12 and 17, in accordance with the Youth Criminal Justice Act.

Children and youth are also more likely to be the victims of crime than adults.⁶⁷ In fact, youth are more likely than adults to be the victim of physical and sexual assault.⁶⁸ Children also represent 33% of the victims of spousal violence. In Regina, the crime rate varies greatly from low-income to high-income neighborhoods meaning some children are at a greater risk of becoming a victim of crime. These are, of course, the same children who experience income and housing instability, food insecurity, and health disparities.

Transitions to Employment

Regardless of whether or not youth receive a basic education the transition to employment can be difficult. Education vastly improves one's chances of finding meaningful employment but for many the transition is still difficult. Youth today can take many different pathways to employment. The transition from learning to working is an important step towards self sufficiency that is more difficult for some than others. The barriers that exist to acquiring employment are quite similar to the educational barriers faced by many students and can include socio-economic status, stability, transportation, etc.

Recent studies show that the youth who are most likely to find success in adult life are those who take a break after high school and then return to learning to acquire post secondary education and training.⁶⁹ This challenges the belief of many who worry that youth who disengage from education after high school are less likely to return to school. However, not everyone has the ability or opportunity to continue their education at all. As a community, we hope that youth will enter the labour market. Unfortunately, many barriers to employment exist for some people. High school completion greatly increases an individual's chances for finding employment. Lacking this benchmark Grade Ten completion is considered the bare minimum for labour market participation in our technologically advanced and highly literate society.

Post secondary Education

In 2007 the Province of Saskatchewan completed a comprehensive review of post secondary education in the Province focusing on accessibility and affordability. The Review found that while post-secondary enrollment had been increasing in most other provinces, our public institutions have actually seen a slight decline in enrollments in the last few years.⁷⁰ The Review also found that while Saskatchewan has a high post- secondary participation rate, our completion rates lag behind the rest of Canada.⁷¹

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There are barriers to participation in post-secondary education in Saskatchewan, identified by examining the current population of learners. Students who are from a higher income bracket, who are female, who are non-Aboriginal, and whose parents have some post-secondary education are most likely to be participating in post-secondary education in our Province.⁷² This should not surprise us since we already know that male Aboriginal students of low socio-economic status are struggling most in primary and secondary schools.⁷³

To address issues of affordability and accessibility the post secondary education review recommends freezing tuitions, increasing access to student loans, helping students access the Provincial Training Allowance and funds earmarked for students of Aboriginal ancestry. It also recommends investing in career development services for high school students in high risk neighborhoods focusing on low income, Aboriginal, first generation post secondary learners, students with disabilities, and rural students.

Recent research suggests that governments, schools, and community service organizations must work together to provide comprehensive career development services for youth. The Canadian Policy Research Network found that in Canada, “there are pockets of promising practices that respond to youth needs, but a system of coherent and comprehensive services for youth and young adults, whether in or out of school, does not exist.”⁷⁴

This research on career pathways for youth found that young people would be well served by better career development services, especially those students with interests and learning styles that fall outside of the mainstream.⁷⁵ Saunders writes that career development, post-secondary education, and vocational training information are all decentralized and under used by Canadian youth. Partnerships, funding, and programming are uncoordinated, under funded, unsustainable

and under evaluated, making assistance in career planning difficult to find and understand for youth. Regina youth may soon need this higher level of career development support.

While Saskatchewan has enjoyed a very successful and inclusive labour market in the last few years, more challenging times may lie ahead. After rebounding from an all time low in 1997, the youth labour market hit record highs in Canada by 2004. In Saskatchewan and Manitoba youth employment rates were some of the highest in the country. In general youth employment grew in retail and food services for women, and in production, transportation and warehousing for men.⁷⁶ However, these generally low-skill, low-pay industries are often the first to experience decline in a recession, and the number of youth employed in Saskatchewan indeed fell 1.4% from 2008 to 2009.⁷⁷

Essentially, socio-economic factors can greatly affect the lives of youth. Without stable housing, safe neighborhoods, good health, a stable family income, and food security students are at a high risk of falling through the cracks. Over time, these students become adults who struggle with issues like literacy and employment, recreating the same conditions for their own families.

The Developmental Asset model offers one framework for addressing these issues on a community level. The information presented in this document suggests that leaving school early is both a symptom and a cause of poverty. The Developmental Asset Framework would suggest that dropping-out is also indicative of a deficit in Developmental Assets in youth

The Developmental Asset Framework

The Developmental Asset Framework developed by the Search Institute identifies 40 positive experiences and qualities - Developmental Assets - that all people have the power to affect in the lives

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of children and youth.⁷⁸ The Assets represent priorities for helping youth grow up healthy and successful.⁷⁹ Twenty of the Assets are external; interlocking systems of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectation, and constructive use of time. The remaining twenty Assets are internal: the commitments, values, skills, and identity that guide young people in their choices.⁸⁰ The Assets are spread across eight broad areas of human development which illustrate the positive things that youth need to grow up healthy and responsible.⁸¹

In general, youth experience lower Asset levels than recommended. In the 2003 Search Institute survey of 250,000 youth in 202 communities in 27 states in the U.S, the average Asset level among those surveyed was 18.6 out of 40, far below the recommended level of 31 to 40 Assets.⁸² Low Asset levels correlate strongly with high levels of risk. For example, low Asset youth are 38 times more likely to be involved with illicit drug use than high asset youth.

Youth who emerge from school with skills, confidence and supports in place will also be successful in the world of work. Inherent in the Developmental Asset philosophy is success for all children in school. Schools have direct impact on 23 of 40 Assets. Assets are also cumulative so increases in one area often indirectly impact on other Assets. For example: Asset # 18 – Youth Programs (Young person spends three or more hours in sports, clubs, organizations at school and /or in the community) is one of the Assets that is most directly correlated to academic success.

Research indicates that Asset levels may have a significant predictive capacity when it comes to academic success. “Student Asset levels are twice as important in predicting academic achievement as demographic factors such as socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender or family composition”.

The Commitment to Learning Assets are associated



with better results on numerous markers of school performance including:

- Increased achievement in reading and math;
- Better attendance and time spent on homework;
- Improved grades and test scores;
- Increased high school completion and enrollment in post secondary education;
- Less drug use, sexual intercourse and childbearing ;
- Fewer conduct problems;
- Greater expectations of personal success; and
- Less stress and anxiety⁸³

Longitudinal studies reveal that students from all racial/ethnic backgrounds with high levels of Assets (31–40) are 5 to 12 times as likely as those with few Assets (0–10) to be successful in school. In addition, low-income students who experience more Developmental Assets appear to be much more likely to do well in school than low-income students who do not experience many Developmental Assets.

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Kids with higher Asset levels show a significantly higher Grade Point Average (GPA) than those with fewer Assets.

A focus on growing Assets promotes academic success through:

- Promoting supportive and caring relationships;
- Increasing student motivation and engagement;
- Increasing the value that students attach to education;
- Increasing the effectiveness of student study habits;
- Strengthening social norms and expectations; and
- Increasing parental involvement and student achievement⁸⁵

The Asset Framework reminds us that success in school, as in life, involves positive, supportive relationships more than just programs. The Youth Impact Table sees the Developmental Asset Framework as complimentary to the Determinants of Community Well. Both serve as useful tools that can effect positive outcomes for youth.

Community Collaborations & Innovations Serving Regina's Youth

Youth require support and understanding throughout their development into thriving adults. United Way of Regina is proud to be a partner in three exciting projects underway in Regina that will improve the lives of youth from childhood into adulthood. The Understanding the Early Years Project will aid in the development of a comprehensive community strategy to support school readiness; Cornwall Alternative Schools' Grade Ten Cyberschool helps struggling youth successfully reach the important benchmark of

Grade Ten completion; and the Youth Employment Outreach Initiative at Regina Work Preparation Centre helps youth gain the practical knowledge and skills needed to secure employment. All three of these projects are both collaborative and innovative in their approach.

Understanding the Early Years (UEY) is a national initiative to study early childhood development in communities across Canada. UEY looks at how our community is supporting children 0-6 years of age and their families. The project will collect information about how well children are developing and their school readiness when they begin kindergarten. It will also gather information on services available to children and their families as well as community factors that affect the development of children. Following a variety of activities including a readiness to learn assessment of all Kindergarten students, a survey of families, and the creation of a directory of community programs for children and families in Regina, the UEY project will develop a community driven action plan for Regina.

Meanwhile, United Way of Regina is already invested in projects that are working to address the needs of our youth in learning and employment.

Supported by United Way of Regina's Tomorrow Fund, Cornwall Alternative School was able to launch Cyberschool in September of 2008; an alternative Grade Ten program for students struggling in mainstream schools in Regina. At Cyberschool, six students are working to complete their Grade Ten requirements through a combination of online learning from the Saskatoon Catholic School Division and classroom teaching supported by a very dedicated and effective teacher.

At Cyberschool, each student chooses which Grade Ten credits they want to work on. Their choices include English, Information Processing, Math, and Religious Studies. During their lunch hour the students have partnered with REACH (Regina Education and Action on Child Hunger) to work on their Food Studies 10 credit. The

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students prepare shopping lists and a budget, shop for their groceries and then learn to prepare nutritious meals, which they share together. Because of the flexibility, low student to teacher ratio, and opportunity for self-directed learning offered by Cyberschool, students who were unable to find success at a mainstream high school are completing Grade Ten with good marks, solid attendance, and new found confidence. Grade Ten is an important achievement for these students because it has become the absolute minimum level of educational attainment for many employers, and it ensures their ability to enroll in adult education at programs in the future..

Cyberschool is arming their students with knowledge, confidence, and practical study skills. Some of the students have even expressed a desire to finish high school and pursue post-secondary education, an exciting dream for youth who only months ago had given up on school. Hopefully, upon completion of Grade Ten at Cyberschool, students will be able to readjust to life at a regular school, finish Grade Twelve and transition to employment.

When youth begin looking for employment, the Regina Work Preparation Centre is there to help them. Many youth in the community will already know a friendly face at Work Prep through the Youth Employment Outreach Initiative (YEOI), another program funded by United Way of Regina's Tomorrow Fund.

The Youth Employment Outreach Initiative has taken a collaborative approach to reaching out to Regina's youth. The YEOI frequently visits a number of partner organizations including Rainbow Youth Centre, Cochrane Community High School, Street Culture Kidz , and All Nations Hope to give presentations on employment related subjects including everything from resume writing and interview skills to conflict resolution and reality therapy. The Youth Employment Outreach Coordinator also helps other community employment programs with client intake by assessing the employment background and needs of potential youth clients.

By engaging youth at school and in other community programs the YEOI Coordinator is building a relationship of trust and familiarity. The services of the Coordinator are available to youth year round so if they exit an employment program and still can't find work, or if a student wants to find a summer job when a school-to-work transition teacher is unavailable they can contact the Youth Employment Outreach Coordinator for help. Youth who have engaged with the Youth

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**Our Tomorrow Fund initiatives,
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Partners are working hard
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Employment Outreach Coordinator through one of the partner organizations know they can come to Regina Work Preparation Centre for one-on-one employment counseling, help writing a resume or doing a job search, or to learn interview skills. This important relationship means youth are able to access employment resources whenever they need them.

By nurturing partnerships with many different organizations the Youth Employment Outreach Initiative is building community capacity and creating a network of youth serving organizations in Regina. The YEOI is building capacity in all of their partner organizations by offering employment services to their youth clients. These partners are then free to use their capacity to help youth in other ways. The YEOI is positioning itself to become a hub for youth related programs, resources, and information in the community, a position it hopes to exploit in order to organize a community strategy on youth employment in Regina.

Looking Ahead

United Way of Regina knows that social change is brought about through collaboration, cooperation and innovation. Rather than competing for scarce resources, agents of social change must share resources, develop shared strategies, align priorities and work to serve the whole community effectively. Our Tomorrow Fund initiatives, like the ones mentioned above, as well as our network of Funded Partners are working hard every day to build relationships and partnerships that will help Regina's youth thrive. United Way of Regina impact tables are also working to identify positive strategies for youth.

The Youth Impact Table has begun an important collaboration with The Alliance of Asset Champions, a volunteer alliance of community members, community developers, parents, and teachers who are dedicated to raising awareness of, and furthering the 40 Developmental Asset

model of community building to benefit youth. Together with the Alliance of Asset Champions, the Youth Impact Table will work with Regina School Boards to undertake a Developmental Asset survey of Regina school children in Grades 4, 6, 8 and 10.

There is much to be gained by implementing the surveys locally. The survey data will provide us with baseline information on youth Asset levels in Regina. The survey will also create a forum for community dialogue about youth and Asset levels, and how we might raise Asset levels in our city. It is well established that kids with high Asset levels are significantly less likely to engage in risk than those with minimal Asset levels. Assets are also an important factor in successful transitions to work - Asset levels decrease as youth mature; as children leave school and prepare to enter the work force they have significantly fewer Assets to support them than earlier in life.⁸⁶ Armed with local information we may be encouraged to re-think how we engage with youth during their teenage years and how the Asset philosophies support young people as they prepare to transition from school to the world of work.

The anticipated outcome of the Asset survey in Regina is the identification of strategies that will improve Assets for youth. This knowledge will build on the work of the Understanding the Early Years Project and inform our work around learning and employment. We will continue to seek out innovative solutions to the complex problems in our community because we know that together, we can change lives.

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Appendix A

Search Institute's 40 Developmental Assets®

Search Institute has identified the following building blocks of healthy development that help young people grow up healthy, caring, and responsible.

External Assets

Support

1. Family Support - Family life provides high levels of love and support.
2. Positive Family Communication - Young person and her or his parent(s) communicate positively, and young person is willing to seek advice and counsel from parents.
3. Other Adult Relationships - Young person receives support from three or more nonparent adults.
4. Caring Neighborhood - Young person experiences caring neighbors.
5. Caring School Climate - School provides a caring, encouraging environment.
6. Parent Involvement in Schooling - Parent(s) are actively involved in helping young person succeed in school.

Empowerment

7. Community Values Youth - Young person perceives that adults in the community value youth.
8. Youth as Resources - Young people are given useful roles in the community.
9. Service to Others - Young person serves in the community one hour or more per week.
10. Safety - Young person feels safe at home, at school, and in the neighborhood.

Boundaries and Expectations

11. Family Boundaries - Family has clear rules and consequences and monitors the young person's whereabouts.
12. School Boundaries - School provides clear rules and consequences.
13. Neighborhood Boundaries - Neighbors take responsibility for monitoring young people's behavior.
14. Adult Role Models - Parent(s) and other adults model positive, responsible behavior.
15. Positive Peer Influence - Young person's best friends model responsible behavior.
16. High Expectations - Both parent(s) and teachers encourage the young person to do well.

Constructive Use of Time

17. Creative Activities - Young person spends three or more hours per week in lessons or practice in music, theater, or other arts.
18. Youth Programs - Young person spends three or more hours per week in sports, clubs, or organizations at school and/or in the community.
19. Religious Community - Young person spends one or more hours per week in activities in a religious institution.
20. Time at Home - Young person is out with friends "with nothing special to do" two or fewer nights per week.

Internal Assets

Commitment to Learning

21. Achievement Motivation - Young person is motivated to do well in school.
22. School Engagement - Young person is actively engaged in learning.
23. Homework - Young person reports doing at least one hour of homework every school day.
24. Bonding to School - Young person cares about her or his school.
25. Reading for Pleasure - Young person reads for pleasure three or more hours per week.

Positive Values

26. Caring - Young person places high value on helping other people.
27. Equality and Social Justice - Young person places high value on promoting equality and reducing hunger and poverty.
28. Integrity - Young person acts on convictions and stands up for her or his beliefs.
29. Honesty - Young person "tells the truth even when it is not easy."
30. Responsibility - Young person accepts and takes personal responsibility.
31. Restraint - Young person believes it is important not to be sexually active or to use

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alcohol or other drugs.

Social Competencies

32. Planning and Decision Making - Young person knows how to plan ahead and make choices.

33. Interpersonal Competence - Young person has empathy, sensitivity, and friendship skills.

34. Cultural Competence - Young person has knowledge of and comfort with people of different cultural/racial/ethnic backgrounds.

35. Resistance Skills - Young person can resist negative peer pressure and dangerous situations.

36. Peaceful Conflict Resolution - Young person seeks to resolve conflict nonviolently.

Positive Identity

37. Personal Power - Young person feels he or she has control over “things that happen to me.”

38. Self-Esteem - Young person reports having a high self-esteem.

39. Sense of Purpose - Young person reports that “my life has a purpose.”

40. Positive View of Personal Future - Young person is optimistic about her or his personal

Appendix B

Determinants of Community Well Being

Levels of well-being can be the result of things that are out of our control such as genetic and biological factors or chance occurrences but more often it is a result of key economic and social conditions which affect the well-being of individuals and communities as a whole and that we do have some control over or influence on. These key economic and social conditions are identified as the determinants of community well-being and include:

Income & Its Distribution

Research indicates that well-being improves with higher income. However, emphasis in the Determinants of Community Well-being is also placed on the overall distribution of wealth/income as well as the individual's earning power or transfers in kind (ex. consumption of public services such as health or education) because the highest levels of well-being of populations are found in those societies which are prosperous and have an equitable distribution of wealth (Health Canada).

Employment & Working Conditions

Employment provides economic opportunities which greatly influence prosperity and well-being as well as social opportunities to build social capital, belonging and citizenship. The working environment also significantly impacts well-being because of job satisfaction and stress levels associated with working conditions (ex. job security, job status, physical conditions, work relationships, etc). Individuals who have more control over their work circumstances and less work-related stress have higher levels of well-being than those who don't.

Education

This refers to the stock of education, skills and experiences (knowledge) that we have accumulated over our lives. Generally, higher or more education/knowledge equates to greater literacy, a better job and higher income which results in increased coping/problem solving skills and greater prosperity for individuals, families and communities.

Social Safety Net

The support from families, friends and communities provides significant benefits that result from those social relationships and support networks and improves well-being of individuals, families and communities.

Housing

Housing is a critical component of the built environment. The core need of housing includes affordability, adequacy and suitability of accommodation which also addresses issues of safety and security.

Food Security

Food security exists when all community residents, at all times, have readily available and socially acceptable (i.e., purchase or grow) access to sufficient, safe, and nutritionally adequate foods for an active, healthy life from a sustainable food system.

Social Inclusion

Social inclusion describes the structures and dynamic processes that ensure equality among groups in society and that build social capital and cohesion. Social inclusion ensures that all groups or individuals are able to participate fully in Canadian life and no groups or individuals are marginalized or stigmatized.

Health Services Access

Quality health services are fundamental to health and well-being. Emphasis in this determinant is on ensuring equal opportunity to develop and maintain health and well-being through fair and equal access to health services.

Culture

Valuing cultural diversity has a positive impact on well-being and involves acknowledgement and appreciation of other cultural practices and languages.

Early Life

The early years are pivotal to a child's growth and development. Factors such as effective parenting and family functioning, nurturing caregivers, positive learning environments, good nutrition and supportive communities contribute to optimal child development and have a positive impact on long-term prospects for the individual, family and community.

Notes

¹For a complete list of the 40 Developmental Assets please refer to Appendix A of this document

²For a complete list of the Determinants of Community Well-being please refer to Appendix B of this document.

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⁵This equates to 73169 people. Ibid

⁶This equates to 10570 people. Ibid

⁷This equates to 6310 people. Total Immigrant population 14,730 Young immigrants are considered 24 and under. Statistics Canada, Ibid

⁸The current number of students registered with Regina Public & Catholic School Boards totals 29, 209. Within twenty five elementary schools, and five high schools the Regina Catholic School Board has 9800 registered students. The Regina Public School Board currently has 19,409 registered students attending forty eight elementary and nine high schools.

⁹Statistics Canada. “Provincial Drop-out Rates – Trends and Consequences”. (2005) [Online] Available: <http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/81-004-XIE/2005004/drop.htm>. Retrieved: Nov 5, 2008.

¹⁰Ibid

¹¹Ibid

¹²Ibid

¹³Ibid

¹⁴While female dropouts generally have higher grades than male drop-outs a Canadian survey called Youth in Transition indicates that half of all drop-outs had at least a B average prior to leaving school, and less than 5% reported grade averages below 50%

¹⁵StatsCan. 2006 Community Profiles, Regina

¹⁶Ibid

¹⁷Ibid This number includes all residents over the age of 15, therefore does not necessarily reflect our current high school completion rate.

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¹⁹Statistics Canada. “Aboriginal Population Profile, Regina, Saskatchewan” (2006) [Online] Available: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/aboriginal/Details/Page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CSD&Code1=4706027&Geo2=PR&Code2=47&Data=Count&SearchText=regina&SearchType=Begins&SearchPR=01&B1=All&Custom=>. Retrieved: Nov 4, 2008

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²³Conway, J. (no date) Children and Youth Mental Health Services: Evidence Based Practices and Current Saskatchewan Programs and Services. Unpublished. p 24

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²⁷Statistics Canada. Labour Force vs. Educational Attainment Data. (2006) [Online] Available: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/topics/RetrieveProductTable.cfm?TPL=RETR&ALEVEL=3&APATH=3&CATNO=&DETAIL=0&DIM=&DS=99&FL=0&FREE=0&GAL=0&GC=99&GK=NA&GRP=1&IPS=&METH=0&ORDER=1&PID=93615&PTYPE=88971&RL=0&S=1&ShowAll=No&StartRow=1&SUB=0&Temporal=2006&Theme=75&VID=0&VNAMEF=&VNAMEM=&GID=838037>. Retrieved: Nov 5, 2008

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²⁸Ibid

²⁹Ibid

³⁰StatsCan. 'Aboriginal Population Profiles' (2006), Regina.

³¹Employment rates are based on rates of participation in the labour market. The participation rate of Aboriginal peoples is also much lower than that of non-Aboriginals.

³²Organization for Economic and Co-operative Development. (2005) Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2005. [Online] Available: http://www.oecd.org/document/34/0,3343,en_2649_39263238_35289570_1_1_1_1,00.html.

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⁵¹Regina Food Bank

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