

Our Youth Matter



Executive Summary
September 2009



United Way
of Regina

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OUR YOUTH MATTER - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The United Way of Regina's youth priority area is focused on keeping youth engaged in learning and helping them transition successfully to employment. We approach this work using two frameworks; the 40 Developmental Assets, and the Determinants of Community Well-being. "Regina's Youth: Challenges & Opportunities", introduces these frameworks and presents demographic and statistical information on youth in Regina, as well as analysis of the various barriers to learning and employment youth face. United Way of Regina funds innovative and collaborative projects focused on youth, and some of these investments are also highlighted alongside our plans for the future.

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 of children and youth. 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.

In general, youth experience lower Asset levels than recommended. Low Asset levels correlate strongly with high levels of risk. For example, low Asset youth are thirty eight times more likely to be involved with illicit drug use than high Asset youth. Youth with higher Asset levels reap the benefits. Higher Asset levels are associated with many indicators of success including:

- Increased achievement in reading and math;
- Improved grades and test scores;
- Increased high school completion and enrollment in post secondary education;
- Greater expectations of personal success; and
- Less stress and anxiety

The Youth Impact Table sees the Developmental Assets as complimentary to the Determinants of Community Well being.

The Determinants of Community Well-being,

as adopted by the Regina Regional Inter-sectoral Committee, represent key economic and social conditions that can effect the lives of youth but are alterable through intervention. They include: income, housing, education, food security and early life among others. For many youth in Regina instability means many of these key determinants are not satisfied.

Staying engaged in learning and transitioning to employment is no easy task for many of our city's youth. Youth who experience housing and income instability, food insecurity and the numerous health problems exacerbated by poverty run a high risk of disengaging from school and failing to obtain the skills necessary to secure employment.

In 2005, the urban high school drop-out rate in Saskatchewan was 9.4%. The rate is higher among rural students and combined they correlate to 7300 drop-outs provincially in the 2005 school year. Young men are now dropping out at a higher rate than young women and the disparity between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal drop-out rates is significant.

In Regina, the unemployment rate for those without a high school diploma is double the average rate. There is a significant disparity between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal employment rates, a reflection of the higher Aboriginal drop-out rate. Early school leavers, especially single moms, who do find work are often unable to escape poverty, working long hours for low pay.

The cycle of poverty greatly effects the health of youth and their families. In fact, low-income and inner-city youth face startling risk; they are over twenty times more likely to contract Hepatitis C, five times more likely to contract Chlamydia, and sixteen times more likely to attempt suicide. The rate of substance abuse is much higher among low-income and Aboriginal youth putting their chances at success in serious peril.

Housing instability and food security are also serious concerns for youth in our city. Regina's vacancy rate is mirrored only by Vancouver and Victoria. Rising rental rates mean many

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families are forced to move often. Students who frequently change schools are far more likely to fall behind, jeopardizing their chances for academic success. The Regina and District Food Bank reports that half of their clients are children meaning even when students do make it to school many of them are hungry. Further, good nutrition is essential to learning. Food insecure children struggle with reading and math and are more likely to repeat a grade, experience anxiety and aggression, and have difficulty with social interaction.

United Way of Regina is committed to helping youth overcome these challenges so that all youth have a chance to succeed, becoming healthy, resilient, contributing adults. Three of our current investments are focused on this goal.

The Understanding the Early Years project is gathering data on the early lives of children in Regina with the end goal of creating an action plan for our city to ensure all kids are ready to learn when they start school. Through surveys, community dialogue, and education this project will help everyone in the community learn how we can best prepare our children for success from day one.

Cornwall Alternative School's Grade Ten Cyberschool class is helping high risk youth reach an important education benchmark. At Cyberschool, six students who were previously struggling in high school are now working on their grade ten curriculum online and in the classroom with a highly dedicated teacher. These kids are beating the odds with good attendance and good marks. Finishing grade ten will improve their odds of finishing school and of finding meaningful employment.

The Regina Work Preparation Center is reaching out to youth and local youth serving organizations to provide employment counseling and education in a variety of formats and environments. They are working to create a community network around youth employment in Regina, ensuring improved outcomes for youth employment.

Looking ahead, United Way of Regina plans to carry out a survey of Developmental Assets in Regina school children in grades four, six, eight and ten. The survey will act as a catalyst for community dialogue and education on Assets in youth, and will encourage new work to improve Asset levels in our community.

"Regina's Youth: Challenges & Opportunities" examines the issues affecting youth in our community in detail and considers what can be done to improve every child's chances for success. United Way of Regina will continue to seek out innovative solutions to the complex problems in our community because we know that together, we can change lives.