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Media Release

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Halton Youth Impact Survey Highlights Mental Health as a Priority for All Youth

Our Kids Network launches bulletin series to transform survey data into action

The numbers from the 2021 Halton Youth Impact Survey are in – and Our Kids Network is excited to move into the next phase of the project: transforming knowledge into action that will support child and youth wellbeing in our community. In the spring of 2021, 2,599 youth aged 9-18 across Halton participated in the initiative, which was implemented by OKN 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 [website](#). To support its community partners in translating the robust data from the survey into actionable decisions around policies, services, and programming, OKN will deliver a series of themed bulletins throughout 2022. The first bulletin, in May, focuses on [Youth Mental Health](#).

Mental Health Survey Highlights

Youth in Halton have spoken – and they are emphasizing mental health as a critical component of their positive development and overall wellbeing.

The [Halton Youth Impact Survey](#) provided 50 indicators that reinforce the need for community partners to consider child and youth wellbeing, their mental & physical health, community belonging, experiences in the community, their relationships and safety, among others. While the results were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the data reflects ongoing concerns surrounding mental health, such as differences in experiences across groups, inequities in accessing mental health services, and addressing the stigma that prevents open discussion around mental health challenges.

“The one thing that we can really say now is that mental health isn’t just a priority for some youth,” said OKN interim executive director Elisabeth Wells. “This is an urgent priority for all of our youth in Halton. We’re always playing catch-up for youth mental health, and results are telling us it’s really critical and it’s urgent.”

Among the survey findings:

- Just 3 in 10 respondents rated their mental health as very good or excellent. While there is no comparable direct national or provincial survey data, national numbers on self-rated mental health show 4 in 10 youth reported very good or excellent mental health in 2020, down from 6 in 10 in 2018.
- Inequities exist in mental health in Halton, a trend that is reflected across Canada. For example, girls are around 50 per cent less likely to rate their mental health as good or excellent, compared to boys. Of the 30 2SLGBTQ+ youth and non-binary youth who self-identified in the survey, only 13 per cent rated their mental health as very good or excellent. Youth identifying as Indigenous were more likely to report having a diagnosed mood or anxiety disorder.
- Geographic differences were a factor in the perceived mental health services in Halton. For example, youth in Halton Hills were less likely to rate the quality and accessibility of mental health services as good or excellent, compared to their peers in Oakville or Burlington.

- A high number of youth (31 per cent) were experiencing high levels of stress on most days. Again, girls and non-binary youth were more likely to report elevated levels of stress compared to boys.
- Youth also indicated that they were feeling under constant stress due to trying to accomplish more than they could handle in terms of schoolwork, and the pressure to succeed.

Listening and Taking Action

OKN invited youth to a virtual Data Party in November to discuss some of the mental health findings and how their peers, schools, communities, and youth-serving organizations could better support them around mental health. A key theme that emerged: youth want to see mental health normalized.

“One youth told us that talking about mental health should be the equivalent of talking about a headache,” said Wells. “If we can take one positive thing from the COVID pandemic, it should be the understanding that mental health isn’t just for some people; it’s critical for all youth and we need to start talking about it more.”

OKN is committed to working with its strong network of community partners to support youth wellbeing and mental health. “Halton is really, really fortunate,” Wells noted. “We have a strong history of collaboration and working together. We’ve shared some of these findings with our partners and they are committed to working together to create greater awareness of the findings and to work together with youth to generate some solutions that they would like to see happen.”

The aim of the data bulletins is to inspire conversation around the wellbeing of young people in Halton. Each bulletin is designed to guide discussion through a series of questions and ideas that will lead to discovery and meaningful action. Organizations will be prompted with three broad questions (Do the key findings support the existing policy or practice? In what ways do the key findings call for new policies or practices? Do the key findings identify potential gaps in programs or services?) before drilling down to finding solutions that work for their mandate in the community. Additionally, OKN is planning data portal workshops, more Youth Data Parties, and workshops and webinars specific to the survey themes and the diverse needs of respondents and the agencies that support them.

“We know every agency is different and every client base is different, and we would never presume to know the work that they do,” explained Wells. “Our goal is to facilitate a guided conversation to take them through a thoughtful process around how they can make the results meaningful for the work that they do.”

HALTON YOUTH IMPACT SURVEY BACKGROUND

The Halton Youth Impact Survey was administered in the spring of 2021 by Our Kids Network, working in partnership with UNICEF Canada, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Medavie Health Foundation. Halton is one of four communities across Canada invited to participate in the pilot project to implement a child and youth wellbeing survey that measures life under age 19 across a number of different dimensions.

Working with a support team of 25 Youth Impact Ambassadors and more than 40 local community partners, Our Kids Network’s goal was to create a survey that is truly by the community, for the community. In total, 2,599 young people aged 9-18 in 27 neighbourhoods across Halton participated in the survey, and the results yielded 50 new indicators about child and youth wellbeing. The results have been released into the OKN data portal and shared with community partners.

With a mandate to turn research into action, OKN is launching a series of themed bulletins that will be released throughout 2022 to highlight the findings of the Halton Youth Impact survey and support community partners as they make decisions about programming, initiatives, and policies surrounding child and youth wellbeing in Halton.