Equity and Inclusion Lens

Diversity Snapshot

YOUTH

A City For Everyone
Une ville pour tous

Ottawa
Diversity Snapshot

YOUTH

We are leaders today, and pioneers of our future. Growing up in a rapidly changing world, we are faced with more choices than previous generations. We wish to be able to access services and actively participate in decisions that affect us.

1. Who we are ............................................................... 3
2. Contributions we make ............................................... 4
3. Barriers and inequities .................................................. 5
   1) Negative images .................................................. 5
   2) Multiple responsibilities ....................................... 5
   3) Transportation .................................................... 5
   4) Civic engagement ............................................... 6
   5) Safe places ........................................................ 6
   6) Access to information .......................................... 6
   7) Access to services ............................................... 7
   8) Employment and income ..................................... 7
   9) Support systems ................................................ 8
4. We envision – a youth-friendly city .................................. 9
   What can I do? ....................................................... 9
5. Council Mandates and legislation ................................... 10
6. What’s happening in Ottawa ......................................... 10
7. Relevant practices in other cities ................................... 11
8. Sources ............................................................... 11
9. Acknowledgements .................................................. 12

This document is one of 11 Diversity Snapshots that serve as background information to aid the City of Ottawa and its partners in implementing the Equity and Inclusion Lens. To access, visit Ozone or contact us at EILens@ottawa.ca.
1. Who we are

We are leaders today, and pioneers of our future. Growing up in a rapidly changing world, we are faced with more choices than previous generations had. As we form our identities, we are discovering new ways of participating in the world around us. We assume a variety of roles: student, sibling, friend, caregiver, employee, volunteer, team player and even parent. As youth in various communities throughout our city, we may struggle with these ever-evolving roles. Support, understanding and encouragement from those around us are important for our development as we transition from childhood to adulthood.

The age range in which we are considered youth varies. Generally speaking, we are considered youth from age 13 until we reach adulthood. The specific age at which we make this transition is affected by various factors, including family structure, cultural background, where we live, and whether we grow up in poverty.

As youth, we identify with many different groups and communities in Ottawa. The barriers and opportunities we face as youth reflect this diversity (SPC 2008-a). For example, if we grow up in the 25 per cent of families in Ottawa headed by a single parent, we are at a greater risk of living in poverty, which has far-reaching effects for the rest of our lives (SPC 2008-b). As Aboriginal youth, we may be isolated from our culture, or we may find strength in reclaiming it. As immigrant youth, we learn to bridge different cultures and values in our everyday lives.

IN OTTAWA

There are approximately 112,365 youth 10-19 years old.

16 per cent of the youth population are visible minorities.

16 per cent of the youth population immigrated to Canada.

Health index of youth has dropped due to a decline in their financial security.

16 per cent of youth 15-17, and 25.9 per cent of those 18-24, live on low incomes, compared to only 12.3 per cent of the general population.

75 per cent of households with children are two-parent families, and 25 per cent are single parent families.

81.5 per cent of single parent families in 2006 are female led.

67.6 per cent of all youth 15-24 in Ottawa participate in the labour market.

(SPC 2008-b; Institute of Wellbeing 2009)
2. Contributions we make

We enrich life in Ottawa by participating in music, theatre, sports and cultural activities. We break down the traditional barriers and embrace inclusive ideas, which will inform current and future generations. We set trends and create new lingo, are often up to date on current issues such as the environment, and are often the savviest about new media and technology. By challenging others to see things in new ways, we enlighten those around us and leave a legacy for future generations. We inspire others through our belief in a future where anything is possible.

As workers, students, consumers and volunteers, we contribute to Ottawa’s economy and community life. Many of the jobs we have are low paid, part-time, and unstable. Yet, they are often service-sector jobs, which other Ottawa residents rely on. We volunteer in our communities and families by providing unpaid work hours to community organizations and caring for children and the elderly. As Inuit, Métis, First Nations and immigrant youth, we can offer cultural and language interpretation for our elders.

“The majority of Aboriginal youth are not about to merge into the general population and disappear. They seek a place in society that affirms their value as citizens and as Aboriginal persons, and they are finding that embracing a personal vision of who they are and who they will become reconnects them with the wisdom of their Elders.”

(Castellano 2008)
3. Barriers and inequities

1) Negative Images
The majority of youth are responsible citizens. Yet, many find themselves treated according to stereotypes of immaturity and irresponsibility. When racial profiling of visible-minority youth takes place, it can contribute to alienation and conflict with the law. Young mothers may face discrimination, rejection from family, poverty and a lack of services geared towards helping them better their own situation and that of their child. While many Aboriginal youth are successful and active in the community, negative stereotypes of low educational attainment and substance abuse often impede their progress. Negative stereotyping contributes to Aboriginal female youth not being taken seriously when they are sexually assaulted or missing.

2) Multiple responsibilities
Youth juggle school, homework, extracurricular activities, social lives, volunteer work, family responsibilities and jobs. Youth with their own children must add parenting to these other responsibilities. Intergenerational challenges faced by all youth are compounded by the fact that immigrant youth are also bridging the gap between cultures. In addition, parents may rely on them to translate and interpret documents, or even for basic communication. Inuit youth, newly arrived to the city, also aid family members in navigating a new cultural environment. Having resources, services and activities in proximity to school and home makes them more accessible to youth who take on multiple roles and responsibilities.

3) Transportation
Many youth rely heavily on public transportation. Any delay or problem accessing public transportation has an impact on youth’s ability to fulfill their multiple responsibilities and commitments. Bus passes can be expensive even with a student discount, especially for young people on low incomes or new immigrants. Negative stereotypes can lead to youth receiving a different level of service from those providing public transportation.

Meanwhile, the majority of youth do not have a full driver’s licence, and many youth do not have access to a vehicle or the means to purchase one. Rural youth are often dependent on their parents for transportation as they have little, if any, access to public transportation, with rural routes having infrequent stops. When transit stops are isolated or not well lit, youth travelling at night for school, jobs or other activities often find themselves in unsafe situations. Female youth are less likely to participate in activities if they feel they cannot travel safely.

“Young women have historically been excluded from many sports, or relegated to the role of cheerleader or warming the bench, watching their male counterparts play. Even when participating in mixed-gender activities, many girls suffer harassment and abuse at the hands of male participants. A gender-responsive approach addresses the particular issues, problems and assets of girls and boys separately, beginning as early as age six.”

(Totten 2005)
4) Civic engagement
Municipal leaders regularly make decisions, shape policy and take action on issues that directly affect young people. Yet there are few formal outreach strategies to promote civic engagement of youth and include young people in the decisions that impact and affect their lives. Research indicates that including young people in community decision-making and planning helps build strong communities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, states that youth (0-18 years old) have a right to express their views freely and fully participate in all matters that affect them.

Many cities have adopted youth strategies that include mechanisms for receiving advice from youth on youth and larger community issues (See Relevant practices in other cities). Many youth are not of voting age yet, and their views are often not actively sought out in the decision-making of community initiatives, etc. This contributes to the feeling of not being a part of the community. When youth are recognized as equal members of a community and have a voice in the community’s decision-making, they can become engaged citizens of today and tomorrow.

5) Safe places
Youth need safe places to be and interact, but often have nowhere to go. Youth may face unsafe circumstances and conflict in the home, but most are not ready to find their own place to live. For example, GLBT youth who are ostracized in the home and school are at risk of abuse and bullying.

In the community, youth are often made to feel unwelcome by no-loitering signs and restrictions on how and where they can be. Parks often reflect the needs of young children, with their design not being geared towards youth. When low-income neighbourhoods are unsafe and have inadequate lighting or recreation areas, youth are at a higher risk of being exposed to criminal activity or avoiding recreation all together. Street-involved youth and youth experiencing homelessness are at risk of violence and theft. When youth can access affordable and safe places such as community centres to spend time in, it contributes to their healthy development.

6) Access to information
There is a wide array of services to assist youth in their healthy development, but it is often difficult for youth to inform themselves, or even know where to start. Outside of school, young people are often not aware of how to access information regarding their communities and services available to them. This is a particular challenge for youth at risk and street-involved youth, or youth experiencing homelessness, who may not be in the school system or have access to information in the home.

“Services for youth and their families need to pay particular attention to the needs of visible-minority immigrants, including the dynamics of identity and racialization… The increasing cultural diversity of children and youth in the city is an important factor for family policy makers, service providers and funders working with this population.”

(SPC 2009)
First Nations and Inuit youth, new to the city, can feel overwhelmed by an urban environment and not know where to find culturally appropriate services. Low-income youth may not have access to the Internet in their home; immigrant and refugee youth may experience language barriers; youth with disabilities may be challenged to read material. GLBT youth may feel they will be stigmatized when asking for information about services available to them.

Information that is available via diverse mediums can help foster inclusion of all youth. Brochures, websites and other information tools that are interactive, attractive and in youth-friendly language can help youth access the information they need.

7) Access to services

It is not only important that youth-friendly services exist in the city, but that youth have the means to access these services. Youth need to be able to get to services where they live, study, work or socialize – but this is often a challenge for many rural youth. For instance, Francophone youth in the west end of Ottawa experience a lack of access to French language services and recreation opportunities, and often must travel to the east end of the city to access these services.

Youth have greater access to services when they are:

➤ Offered at times when youth are not typically at school
➤ Flexible to accommodate youth who have many responsibilities
➤ Affordable
➤ Culturally sensitive
➤ Safe
➤ Accessible via public transportation
➤ Accessible for youth with disabilities
➤ Close to where youth live and go to school

8) Employment and income

Having a job helps people learn responsibility, and is necessary for many youth to meet their financial needs. Youth may not have the networks necessary to secure well-paying jobs, hence many of their jobs are typically low-paid, part-time and unstable. Many fee policies do not reflect the typically low incomes of youth and/or families, which excludes many youth from participating in activities in the community. These jobs do not typically provide flexible schedules for youth who are juggling school responsibilities, extracurricular activities and family responsibilities.

Youth 15-24 who do not complete school have significantly higher unemployment rates, which affects their choices throughout their lives (SPC 2008-b). Aboriginal and visible-minority youth frequently face racism. GLBT youth may face discrimination and negative attitudes which affects their ability to earn an income in the paid labour force. Employers often demonstrate assumptions that visible-minority youth don’t speak English even though they were born and raised in Canada. Therefore, job creation aimed at increasing youth
employment opportunities, and encouraging inclusive employment in Ottawa, increases income, independence and choices for our city’s youth.

9) Support systems
Youth is a stage where one’s body, identity and life are constantly changing. Developing and maintaining supportive relationships can be difficult in this context. For example, mental health problems are often first exhibited during adolescence. However, such struggles may go unrecognized and unsupported due to lack of knowledge, supports and resources available to youth. Appropriate, affordable (or subsidized), and readily available support services to assist youth are important in enabling them to manage these challenges.

Such services can include:

➤ Family support that meet both parent and youth needs (including teen parents)
➤ Health and mental health services
➤ Youth drop-ins where youth can interact with other young people
➤ Counselling and justice services

Support systems that surround youth may not be responsive to, nor reflect, where specific youth are in their lives. For example, coming out and discovering aspects of one’s sexuality are faced by GLBT youth, with school often being an uncomfortable place for them. Youth in foster care often lack stability and meaningful social relationships as a result of having to change homes frequently. Having at least one trusted adult in their lives, as well as a network of social supports and access to services, has a significant impact on a youth’s healthy development.
4. We envision – a youth-friendly city

➤ Youth have a say and actively participate in decision-making that affect us.

➤ The city fosters a sense of belonging. We never feel unwelcome in public spaces.

➤ Youth-adult partnerships are encouraged.

➤ Youth-friendly and safe public spaces to play and interact exist throughout city neighborhoods, not confined to one or two places.

➤ A variety of youth-oriented services are available – including health, employment, cultural, artistic, and physical recreation programs.

➤ Youth across diversity can access the services when they need them.

➤ Public transportation is affordable and accessible to all youth. We have opportunities to participate in transit planning.

➤ The value of youth and the contributions we make to our city is widely recognized.

➤ Youth are encouraged and empowered to be involved in community decision making.

➤ There are opportunities for youth leadership in the community.

(Adapted from: Ontario Playworks Partnership 2008; UNICEF)
5. Council mandates and legislation

City of Ottawa Framework for Promoting Healthy Child and Youth Development – Endorsed by the community and City Council, has a vision of Ottawa as an inclusive city which encourages children and youth to meet their full potential.

CJOYC- Commission de la Jeunesse d’Ottawa Youth Commission – A municipal commission to provide a voice for youth and a connector between young people and the City Council. A partnership between Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa and the City of Ottawa. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

6. What’s happening in Ottawa

- **City of Ottawa Children and Youth Agenda** – fosters collaboration among community stakeholders and agencies to improve services to support the healthy development of children and youth. Began as a partnership between the City of Ottawa and United Way/Centraide Ottawa.

- **The Children and Youth Community Leadership Table** – a community-led forum comprised of decision makers in the child and youth sector to facilitate the implementation of City of Ottawa’s Children and Youth Agenda.

- **City of Ottawa Youth Zone Jeunesse (YZJ)** – an employment resource centre for youth between the ages of 16 and 30. Provides employment support services: employment assessment; pre-employment preparation; job coaching; employment action planning; and referrals to training and educational opportunities.

- **City of Ottawa Somali Youth Initiative** – a targeted employment service for Somali youth. Its success led to the expansion of the service to Canadian-born, visible-minority youth in general.

- **Youth Services Bureau** – offers Youth Engagement Programs to support and provide youth with a strong voice both within the agency and the community at large.

- **Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa (CAYFO)** – enables children and youth to act on their ideas and create a better Ottawa.

- **United Way Youth Action Panel** – advises United Way Ottawa on youth issues and provides workshops and information on youth engagement. Offers Youth Action Grants (up to $2,500) to any group of young people between the ages of 13-18 for a youth-run project in their community.

- **The Children’s Aid Society of Ottawa Youth Advisory Council (YAC)** – recognizes youth in care as important stakeholders in Ottawa and enables them to have advisory input into programs.

- **OCISO Multicultural Liaison Officer Program** – facilitates the successful integration of immigrant children and youth and their families in Ottawa schools.

- **Odawa Native Friendship Center’s Wasa-Nabin Youth Program** – provides urban Aboriginal youth (status, Métis, Inuit or non-status) between the ages of 13–18 with the support to make healthy choices.
• **The Love You Give** – This dynamic music video created by and for Aboriginal youth fuses traditional teachings and Pow wow dancing with rap and hip hop to teach youth about healthy relationships. Produced by Minwaashin Lodge.

• **Minwaashin Lodge** – Spirit Movers and Fire Keepers Youth Program – provides young women with the awareness, knowledge, information and teachings about Aboriginal culture. Promotes healthy friendships and relationships with other youth.

• **Pink Triangle Youth (PTY)** – a support group for gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, two-spirit, questioning and queer youth under 25 in the Ottawa area.

• **Youth Net/Reseau Ado** – a mental health promotion program run by youth for youth (ages 13-20). Bridges youth in need to resources in the community and uses focus groups to connect with youth.

7. **Relevant practices in other cities**

• Some Canadian cities have [UNICEF Child Friendly City](https://www.unicef.org) designation.

• Some Ontario cities have [Youth Friendly Community](https://www.ontario.ca) recognition.

• Greater City of [Sudbury](https://www.sudbury.ca) – Youth Initiatives For Kids Sake

• [Saskatoon](https://www.saskatoon.ca) – Kinsmen Activity Place (KAP)

• [Vancouver](https://www.vancouver.ca) – Civic Youth Strategy

• [West Vancouver](https://www.westvancouver.ca) – Civic Youth Strategy

• Other cities that have Youth Cabinets, Councils or Commissions: Edmonton; Gatineau; Saint John; [Toronto](https://www.toronto.ca).

8. **Sources**


• Castellano, Marlene Brant. 2008. “Reflections on Identity and Empowerment: Recurring Themes in the Discourse on and with Aboriginal Youth” in Horizons 10 (1).


• Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
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9. Acknowledgements

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