



PERTH COUNTY
Social Research &
Planning Council

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MEDIA RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Voices of Youth:

An Inventory of Programs and Services for Youth in Perth County

Stratford, Ontario - Youth – defined as ages 12-17 – make up nearly 10% of the population in Perth County. What do our communities provide for these young people in terms of programs and services?

The 'Voices of Youth' report recently issued by the Perth County Social Research & Planning Council provides an overview of 175 organizations delivering nearly 500 youth-focussed programs and services throughout Perth County. It's an interesting compilation of facts – there are eighteen facilities such as skateboard parks, drop-in centres or youth centres; seven Perth-focussed websites; many, many organized sports; and a disturbing lack of youth-focussed mental health and counselling programs and services.

'The accessibility of mental health and counselling support for local youth has been a concern for some time,' notes Kim Birmingham, a staff lawyer with the Huron Perth Community Legal Aid Clinic and a member of the Perth County Social Research & Planning Council. "The private services are not affordable for some people. There aren't enough of the public services and they all have long waiting lists."

Just over one-third of all youth services are located in Stratford – which also contains 36% of the total youth population in Perth County. Services in other parts of the County were also generally balanced to the size of the youth numbers in each community. Approximately 15% of programs and services are available year round. One-quarter of programs and services are accessible from all parts of Perth County.

During the course of the study, a number of informal talks were held with youth living throughout Perth County. They made a number of insightful observations.

"The COPE Program (alternative secondary school programming) is off-site and not strict enough. You can come and go as you please and you only have to complete 10 hours (or 2 lessons) per week. I'd like to be more inspired somehow."

"A lot of kids my age [14-15] are struggling with depression. [I] know people who cut themselves. It's cool to cut, but you know it's for real, not an *emo*, if they hide their scars."

"There are lots of artistic youth in Stratford. It would be great to have a place to show off [their work], like a gallery for teens."

Other areas of interest and concern explored in the 'Voices of Youth' report include shelter & basic needs, health care, youth justice & crime, and employment supports. Forty percent of all programs and services in the inventory are available at no cost.



There appears to be wide variation in interests and attitudes from urban to rural youth, but even more so from younger youth aged 12 and 13 to 16 and 17 year olds. Results suggest that existing programs and services are better at engaging younger youth, particularly during the summer months and school breaks, while not giving as much consideration to the needs of older youth.

The 'Voices of Youth' report contains a number of recommendations.

- More programs and services need to be directed to older youth (15+).
- More mental health and counselling services and facilities for youth are required in Perth County.
- An ongoing interest in physical activity should continue to be cultivated in children less than 12 years of age while insuring that cost is not a deterrent to participation.
- There is a need for non-programmed 'things to do' to capture the interest of less 'formally' active youth and of non-sports focused youth.
- Opportunities should be cultivated that allow youth and police officers to develop a deeper sense of understanding, mutual respect and trust for one another.

Copies of the 'Voices of Youth' report are available free-of-charge from the United Centre at 32 Erie Street in Stratford and from the PCSRPC website at: <http://www.perthcountyspc.ca/reports/YouthInPerthCountyNL.pdf>. They are also available at the public libraries in St. Marys, Listowel, Stratford, Mitchell, and Milverton.

The release of this report coincides with a second United Way of Perth County report *Listening for Change: Grades 7 & 8 Youth Speak Up* which was also released Friday

The Perth County Social Research and Planning Council, founded in 2004, operates under the umbrella of the United Way of Perth County with additional funding support from the Social Services Department of the City of Stratford, the County of Perth, and the Town of St. Marys. It is dedicated to the collection, analysis and distribution of information relating to social trends and issues within the county. This information is shared with service agencies and funding sources for their use in creating action plans and allocating resources. The council is directed by a steering committee consisting of representatives from various community organizations. See more at the PCSRPC website – www.perthcountyspc.ca

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