Introduction

Waterloo Region is embarking on an exciting journey to become the benchmark community in Canada for child and youth well-being. The Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region has made incredible strides convening people and organizations around a shared vision for children and youth in the region. The work of the Planning Table is establishing a new standard for understanding child and youth wellbeing, collaborating across organizational boundaries, and for involving children and youth in decisions around their wellbeing.

Building on this work and the work of Wellbeing Waterloo Region, the Region of Waterloo has been shortlisted for the Canada-wide Smart Cities Challenge, with a focus on healthy children and youth. An extensive network of partners are aligning around this ambitious goal, including UNICEF Canada.

On June 12th, the Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region brought together 174 participants to explore the obstacles to wellbeing children and youth face in this region. This included youth, parents, and representatives of child-serving organizations.

Participants worked in groups to identify obstacles in each of six priority areas, using a consensus building approach that combined and extended individual's ideas to a set of overarching themes. Unpacking and exploring the many factors that prevent us from moving the needle on child and youth well-being is an important first step in improving. By better understanding the problem from the perspectives of those involved, we can develop better solutions. Clearly defining problems provides a crucial foundation and a common understanding for child- and youth-focused initiatives in Waterloo Region moving forward.
Our Vision

**Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region**

Happy, healthy children and youth today and tomorrow.

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**UNICEF Canada | One Youth Goal**

Make Canada the best place in the world for kids by 2030.

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**Waterloo Region’s Smart City Challenge Statement**

We will become the benchmark community in Canada for child and youth wellbeing by using early intervention, youth engagement and a connected-community framework to create adaptive, data-driven programs and scalable learning technologies that improve early child development, mental health and high school graduation rates.
“If faced with the opportunity to talk with adults, take it. You can preach about student voice all you want with other students, but nothing’s going to get done without adults. You have to work with adults.”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT, PROBLEM MAPPING SESSION
Six Priority Areas

The goal of the day was to map the problems that prevent us from improving child and youth well-being in six priority areas:

- Bullying
- Early Childhood Development
- High School Graduation
- Literacy
- Mental Health
- Sense of Belonging

This report provides a description of each priority area, a capture of the obstacles identified, an overview of youth involvement in the process, and a summary of themes that emerged across the priority areas.
Youth Involvement

The Children and Youth Planning Table recognizes the importance of involving youth in problem definition and in ongoing efforts to tackle challenges in the six priority areas.

Youth participants were recruited in partnership with the three school boards with high schools in Waterloo Region (Waterloo Region District School Board, Waterloo Catholic District School Board and Mon Avenir). Youth involved in Carizon’s Pathways to Education were also asked to participate, if interested and able. In total, sixteen youth attended the problem mapping sessions.

One of the major takeaways from the day was the impact of having youth participation. Youth and adult participants alike shared a desire to have more youth in attendance at future events. While the youth turnout was lower than desired, it provided an excellent base to build from, and the value of having the youth perspective was very clear. Youth participants had ideas for increasing the level of youth engagement, including hosting events in schools, involving university students and grade 7 & 8s, and recruiting youth delegates to have conversations with their peers and report back. Outcomes from this event will be able to inform future strategies for recruiting youth participants and help grow a network of involved youth.

“Have more experiences like this for students. When we’re given that opportunity, it’s really valuable”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT, PROBLEM MAPPING SESSION

COMMENTS FROM YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

“I’m hopeful that you, as adults, are willing to look at youth and take our voice, because you invited us all here and are listening. Honestly, I wouldn’t expect that because you’re so busy with your own lives.”

“Youth and adults have been able to identify similar problems. If we weren’t on the same page, it would be very difficult. Although there’s some misunderstanding, it’s great that we’re able to find common understanding.”

“When I realized that you guys, as faculty members, are willing to hear our voice instead of pushing us aside, you guys want to take in what we’re saying, really appreciate it and acknowledge it, I feel hopeful.”

COMMENTS FROM ADULT PARTICIPANTS

“I’m hopeful because we have such strong youth presence. And you [youth] are articulate and say what needs to be said and challenge us, and we’re grateful you took the time to be here today.”

“As a result of today, with the youth present and seeing their impact, I hope that we as service providers will be more intentional in including youth voices in our service planning and in our programming.”

“We are all here together today talking about these issues that everyone faces—not just youth—and we have the presence of youth and adults trying to move forward on these issues.”
“We came to the realization that everyone, no matter what job you’re doing or why you’re here, you have a part in developing the future. We can all make these slight differences to change things for the better.”

YOUTH PARTICIPANT, PROBLEM MAPPING SESSION
Problem Mapping the Six Priority Areas

A Problem Map is a visual depiction of all the contributing factors within a problem space, including sets of problems, symptoms, and root causes. It’s an important first step in unpacking the many elements of complex social problems like improving child and youth wellbeing. Spending time to explore the problem at the outset of a project ensures problem-solving efforts are focused, saving time and energy. For this ambitious, ten-year-long initiative, developing a deep, holistic, and child- and youth-informed understanding of the problem is vital.

This section of the report presents a problem map for each of the six priority areas. The language used in each problem map reflects how participants chose to communicate the obstacles they identified, edited for clarity where necessary.

The group identified obstacles in six priority areas.

Bullying  
Early Childhood Development  
High School Graduation  
Literacy  
Mental Health  
Sense of Belonging

Preliminary Indication of Priority:

Easiest  Hardest  Biggest Impact
Bullying comes in many forms and can include emotional and psychological as well as physical violence.

Bullying can affect physical and emotional health, both in the short term and later in life. It can lead to physical injury, social problems, emotional problems, and even death. Those who are bullied are at increased risk for mental health problems, headaches, and problems adjusting to school. Bullying also can cause long-term damage to self-esteem. Children and adolescents who are bullies or bullied are at increased risk for substance use, academic problems, and violence to others later in life.

What is preventing us from stopping bullying in Waterloo Region?

- Ineffective Response
- Entrenched Belief System
- Turning a Blind Eye
- Community Inaction
- Dehumanization
- System Breakdown
- Lack of Meaningful Connection
INEFFECTIVE RESPONSE

- Loss of control—victims have no viable response
- Lack of confidence in authorities (school admin, parents, police services, management)
- Fear of retaliation
- Victim shaming and peer pressure
- Anti-bullying student leaders may be culprits

ENTRENCHED BELIEF SYSTEM

- Lack of understanding of bullying behaviours, power dynamics
- Not understanding the variations of bullying
- Lack of a clear definition
- Stereotypes and labels
- Cultural and generational barriers
- Our own biases

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY

- Lack of accountability and responsibility
- Awareness
- The by-stander effect
- Lack of restorative justice options
- Invisibility (no one sees it)
- Nothing done in the moment
COMMUNITY INACTION

- Lack of parental collaboration (community support)
- Social inequity
- Understanding root causes (culture, home life, unknown)
- Emphasis on reactive vs. proactive
- Lack of protective factors (e.g. self-regulation, attachment, initiative)
- Not understanding cultural differences

DEHUMANIZATION

- Hiding behind anonymity
- Celebrating bullying role models
- Lack of empathy
- Social media makes it easy
- People are self-absorbed
- Lack of a compassionate society
- Do parents know what to look for? (signs and symptoms)
- “ISMs” (racism, ageism, etc.) and othering
- Sense of entitlement

SYSTEM BREAKDOWN

- Feels too big/complicated to solve
- Lack of best practices
- Lack of ownership
- Zero tolerance policies
- Lack of resources (knowledge, physical resources, policies)
- Lack of system leadership
- Confidentiality agreements
LACK OF MEANINGFUL CONNECTION

- Lack of face-to-face communication (e.g. reliance on tech)
- Lack of offline social networks
- Understanding self-worth
- Not supporting both bully and victim
- No sense of community, belonging
- Lack of social skills
Early Childhood Development

The early years—from conception to age six—have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health.

Children develop at an astonishing rate in the early years. They are impacted by early experiences and relationships that help guide healthy cognitive, emotional, and social development. Investing in the early years has a direct impact on economic, social, and health outcomes for both individuals and society. Children who are prepared to learn as they enter school are more likely to meet demands and benefit from educational activities. This sets the stage for success in many other areas of life.

What are the obstacles to healthy early childhood development in Waterloo Region?

• Systemic Lack of Representation
• Skewed View of the Child
• Children and Youth Are Not a Political Priority
• Families are Overwhelmed with Competing Demands
• Scarcity in Research and Knowledge around Prevention
• Barriers to Needed Services
• Childhood is Seen as a Womans’ Issue
• Family Stressors
**Systemic Lack of Representation**

- Lack of diversity in policy makers
- Lack of culturally inclusive, safe spaces
- Real or perceived barriers to services (e.g. fear of losing child, stigma of asking for help)
- Lack of trust with “the system”

**Skewed View of the Child**

- Culture of perfection or competition amongst parents
- Health concerns—mental and physical
- Fear of risky outdoor play
- Parental awareness of childhood wellbeing
- Children seen as commodity for the future (looking at kids in terms of what they will become, not what they are right now)
- Lack of life experiences—youth contributions dismissed because they lack experience
- Negative view of child capacity

**Children and Youth Are Not a Political Priority**

- Poor understanding of the importance of the early years
- Waitlists for all services
- Government structure has short term focus
- System doesn’t reach all families
- Lack of equity and opportunity
OVERWHELMED WITH COMPETING DEMANDS
- Lack of caregiver/child interaction (technology)
- Busyness of families
- Lack of family-centred approach
- Healthy balance with technology
- Prioritization of time
- Over-reliance on technology

SCARCITY IN RESEARCH AND KNOWLEDGE AROUND PREVENTION
- Emphasis on reactive vs. proactive programs and services
- Basic needs not being met
- Lack of understanding of trauma-informed approaches
- Lack of knowledge of child development
- Lack of high quality local research to inform
- Lack of measurable outcomes

BARRIERS TO NEEDED SERVICES
- Divides: economic, digital, access, literacy
- Stigma—embarrassment to accessing services and programs
- Affordable and available/accessible licensed childcare
- Lack of consistent funding
- Increasing needs, decreasing resources
**CHILDHOOD IS SEEN AS A WOMAN'S ISSUE**

- Not on Radar of policy makers, politicians, anyone without kids 0-6
- Lack of societal value for the early years
- Lack of qualified and experienced educators
- Gender bias (women's roles)
- Lack of support for professional development

**FAMILY STRESSORS**

- Lack of awareness of resources
- Too easy to make least healthy choice
- Poverty—lack of social housing, food insecurity, low income
- Intergenerational cycles—skills, literacy, poverty, parenting, etc.
- Literacy levels of parents
Learning opportunities give children and youth the space to develop a variety of skills and abilities.

Experiencing success in school is an important component of lifelong learning and overall wellbeing for children and youth. Health and living standards, in particular, are positively influenced by educational attainment—higher levels of education and income allow greater access to safe and healthy living conditions and other resources. High school completion is linked to future educational success, higher incomes, and a higher quality of life.

What obstacles do youth face in graduating High School in Waterloo Region?

- Lack of Foundational Support
- External Responsibilities of Students
- Not Meeting Students Where They’re At
- Lack of Understanding of Student Success
- Lack of Engagement and Inclusion
- Lack of Student-Centred Approaches
- Inadequately Supported Graduation Requirements (Academic and Volunteer)
- Lack of Understanding of the Implications of Programs on Sense of Belonging
BASIC NEEDS ARE NOT MET

• Lack of basic needs being met
• Lack of resources to ensure educational success
• Social determinants of health (housing stability, food security)

BASIC SKILLS ARE NOT DEVELOPED EARLY ON

• Lack of emphasis on the importance of early years
• Insufficient investment in the early years
• Limited math and literacy skills
• Learning time management

EXTERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF STUDENTS

• Personal obligations/conflicting priorities
• Economic challenges
• Range of external pressures (poverty, work, cultural values, “better” options)
• Lack of support to teenage parents—no available childcare
• Religious, cultural, parental expectations
LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENT SUCCESS

- Lack of a trauma-informed lens
- Lack of meaningful support—parents, caring adults outside school
- Educator lack of understanding of brain development
- Lack of flexibility in high school timetables (course conflicts, cancellations, minimum required credits)
- Lack of focus on student success vs. high school graduation

LACK OF ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION

- Language and cultural barriers
- Negative social environment (e.g. peer groups, neighbourhood, family structure)
- Lack of engagement
- Discrimination, lack of inclusivity
- Lack of diversity and representation
- Ongoing conflicts at school
- Lack of nimbleness to adapt to differences (in learning, in needs, in personality, in culture, etc.)
LACK OF STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACHES

- Lack of innovative pedagogies (ways of teaching)
- Didactic (lecturing, not interactive) approach to teaching limits participation and is not suitable for all
- Rigid school system
- Youth have a lack of opportunities to co-create their education
- Lack of student-centred learning
- YAWN! Content not being relevant
- School funding policy
- One size fits all policies
- Is the “value” of a high school education shared by everyone? Does it have to be?

INADEQUATELY SUPPORTED GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS (ACADEMIC AND VOLUNTEER)

- Lack of academic support
- Lack of resources to achieve mandatory 40 volunteer hours—recommended to get hours before entering high school, but youth aren't told about the requirement or supported to find volunteering opportunities at that time
- Unrealistic homework loads which deter students from finishing school

LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROGRAMS ON SENSE OF BELONGING

- Value of special ‘magnet’ schools vs. creating two populations and social inclusion issues
- Lack of meaningful connection
- Lack of mentorship opportunities (youth, adult, male role models)
Literacy means having the reading, writing, speaking, and numerical skills to effectively understand and participate in the world around you.

Literacy is strongly connected to wellbeing; Health Canada identifies literacy as a major determinant of health. Children who read or are read to are more prepared for learning when they enter school, have stronger language and social-emotional skills throughout their childhoods, and reap the benefits of these early skills throughout their lives.

Research has established a strong connection between literacy and economic security and wellbeing. Canadians with weaker literacy skills are more likely to be unemployed, work in lower-paying jobs and live in low-income households.

What's stopping us from moving the needle on low literacy rates in Waterloo Region?

- Relationships are Not Prioritized in Fostering Learning
- Personal Context of Parents and Families
- Misperceptions of Literacy
- Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty and Low Literacy
- Literacy is Low on the List of Priorities at Home and at School
- Lack of Consideration of Diverse Needs
- Literacy is a Life Long Process
RELATIONSHIPS ARE NOT PRIORITIZED IN FOSTERING LEARNING

- Lack of face-to-face interaction
- Lack of attachment (often due to parent capacity)
- Busyness of lifestyles
- Lack of awareness of pre-literacy activities
- Lack of knowledge of literacy milestones
- Lack of awareness of parents/caregivers as first teacher
- Competition for attention (between technology and face-to-face reading)

PERSONAL CONTEXT OF PARENTS AND FAMILIES

- Stigma (hidden issue)
- Unique challenges for ELL (English Language Learner) families
- Cycle of low literacy
- Lack of understanding of impact of low literacy
- Parents’ past experiences with literacy
- Lack of clear language in services
- Lack of representation in literature

MISPERCEPTIONS OF LITERACY AND ROLES

- Lack of knowledge of the connection between play and literacy
- Literacy is not seen as a family issue
- Sentiment that “It's just a school problem”
- Parent perception of literacy
- Understanding the importance of literacy in many forms
- Education system makes assumptions about parents’ literacy skills
- Changing definition of literacy
**Intergenerational Cycle of Poverty and Low Literacy**

- Not connecting literacy to other determinants (poverty, mental health, high school graduation rates)
- Disparity in school readiness
- Literacy is not sexy
- Low literacy among parents
- Intergenerational problem
- Poverty—inability to fulfill basic needs

**Literacy is Low on the List of Priorities at Home and at School**

- Impacts of technology (spelling, grammar, writing)
- Overwhelmed homes and classrooms
- Literacy is not identified as a priority
- Lack of awareness of community resources
- Lack of skills/resources in the educational system to support family literacy
- Competing curriculum demands
- No universally agreed upon definition (e.g. numeracy, digital literacy, physical literacy, media literacy, etc.)

**Lack of Consideration of Diverse Needs**

- Newcomers may not be school ready
- Multilingual population with English testing
- Unidentified hearing and vision issues
- Other pressing priorities
- Lack of assessment tools to capture accurate measures
- Conflating English as a Second Language (ESL) with illiteracy
- Attention spans and concentration seem lower
LITERACY IS A LIFE LONG PROCESS

- Limited understanding of early childhood literacy development
- Lack of access to programs and services
- Lack of access to support once out of school
- Inaccurate data and data collection methods to identify people who would benefit from literacy support after school
Mental Health

Mental health refers to the way we feel, think, act and interact with the world.

Youth with positive mental health are better able to cope with problems, stressors, and other difficulties. Children and youth with good mental/emotional health can understand and manage their emotions and the emotions of others. This contributes to building healthy relationships and the ability to cope with challenges.

What are the obstacles to moving the needle on child and youth mental health in Waterloo Region?

• Knowledge Barriers
• System Rigidity
• Societal and Social Expectations
• Uncoordinated System—Lack of Prevention and Planning
• Youth Needs are Not Heard
• Personal Readiness
• Lack of Process, Systems, and Solutions
**KNOWLEDGE BARRIERS**

- Lack of training and resources
- Intellectual barriers
- Stigma—stigma that stems from not viewing mental health as a health issue, but as something to “get over” or as a personal failing
- Lack of caregiver education
- Not understanding trauma
- Lack of awareness re: what is a mental health concern

**SYSTEM RIGIDITY**

- School system rigidity/silos
- Supports and access in school
- Limited access
- Not enough specialized services for dual diagnosis
- Too narrow in focus (e.g. services specific to diagnosis, viewing addictions as a separate issue)

**SOCIETAL AND SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS**

- Social media is isolating
- Societal pressures
- We’ve lost the village that surrounds our kids
- Lack of boundaries (social media)
UNCOORDINATED SYSTEM—LACK OF PREVENTION AND PLANNING

- Not addressing basic needs
- Family and community support
- Too many band-aid solutions
- Lack of coordinated early prevention
- Impact of adult mental health
- Poverty, toxic stress (toxic stress refers to children experiencing prolonged adversity without adequate adult support, which interferes with development)
- Lack of system ownership and knowledge

YOUTH NEEDS ARE NOT HEARD

- Parents as gatekeeper
- Cultural barriers to getting support
- Youth voice not valued
- Not seeing full value of youth perspectives

PERSONAL READINESS

- Lack of self-awareness
- Some people don’t want to help
- Stigma—some uncomfortable with potential label
- Lack of trust
LACK OF PROCESS, SYSTEMS, AND SOLUTIONS

- Unclear definition of children’s mental health
- “Mental health” is too broad
- Lack of public policy implementation
- Little long-term planning/support
- Lack of system leadership
- Difficult to access help and difficult process
- Lack of recognition and understanding of issues and services
- The waiting game

Lack of Process, Systems, and Solutions
Sense of Belonging

Having a sense of belonging means feeling valued, heard and included, feeling welcomed, and feeling like part of a community.

A sense of belonging is an important component of mental health and overall wellbeing. Feeling a social and environmental connection gives children and youth a sense of stability, helping them deal with challenges and uncertainty. Those with a strong sense of belonging are more likely to have social networks and be engaged in their community.

What’s standing in the way of us achieving a strong sense of belonging in Waterloo Region, especially for children and youth?

• Limited Access to Youth-Driven Activities and Resources
• Systemic Social Barriers
• Not Fostering In-Person, Meaningful Connections
• Lack of Trust and Respect by Adults Towards Youth
• We Don’t Prioritize Connecting to Build Relationships
• (Un)Intended Consequences of Inequity
LIMITED ACCESS TO YOUTH-DRIVEN ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES

• Not a kid-friendly society (lack of safe spaces for kids to play, hangout in the community)
• Lack of access to meaningful activities/resources
• Transportation isn’t affordable
• Lack of diversity and inclusiveness (e.g. in leadership, front line services)
• Not having a voice for choice
• Not understanding youth as capable and competent
• Youth-driven activities aren’t integrated
• Lack of knowledge of and access to resources
• Notion of success in school (kids can’t fail)

SYSTEMIC SOCIAL BARRIERS

• The ‘ISMs—it’s real (racism, ageism, sexism, etc.)
• Negative social media
• Lack of shared understanding, definition for sense of belonging
• Economic inequality
• Mental health and wellness
• Lack of data that tells us how different populations are faring

NOT FOSTERING IN-PERSON, MEANINGFUL CONNECTIONS

• Few opportunities for building meaningful relationships
• Lack of opportunity for intergenerational interaction
• It takes a power outage to draw people out
• Concerns about physical safety
• Concept that technology will solve the lack of healthy relationships
• Lack of meaningful mentorship
• Language barriers
• Lack of time outside in spaces that are safe for kids
• Lack of evidence showing how sense of belonging contributes to a better future
LACK OF TRUST AND RESPECT BY ADULTS TOWARDS YOUTH

- Youth voices not being heard
- Showing disrespect by ignoring us (e.g. neighbours)
- Stigma—fear of talking with youth
- Prejudice

WE DON'T PRIORITIZE CONNECTING TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS

- Lack of attention to family belonging
- Newness/unfamiliarity with Region (community, services)
- Time crunch (as barrier to relationship building)
- Fear of trying things out
- Lack of willingness to meet new people
- Not connecting with people who are new to the community (how and when)
- Transience of students (e.g. college, university)
- Lack of opportunity for development (skills, social skills)

(UN)INTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF INEQUITY

- Inequality between schools/boards
- Not being able to participate in school events, field trips, etc. for financial, religious, cultural or other reasons
- Discrimination
- Poverty (e.g. can't afford pizza day, so not part of group)
“You came in here and saw the different topics, you had your opinion on things, but by the end you might not see it the same way at all.”

PARTICIPANT, PROBLEM MAPPING SESSION
**Shared Themes**

“Looking at what other groups have done, I think there’s a lot of connectedness.”

Adult Participant, CYPT Problem Mapping Session

Many of the obstacles identified by participants in the Problem Mapping sessions were shared across more than one priority area. This might make it possible to move the needle in multiple areas by tackling one obstacle. In reflecting at the end of the day, participants were encouraged to look for common themes.

**The connections they identified between the six priority areas included:**

- The need for relationships and meaningful connections with people
- The need to hear youth voices and include youth input
- The need to address knowledge gaps—for both the general public and policy makers
- The need to start building skills and addressing needs in early childhood.
- The need to overcome service and system challenges around coordination, waitlists, prevention, communication and planning
- The need for a shift in societal values—to prioritizing women’s and children’s issues
- The need to acknowledge, reduce and overcome social exclusion—the way people are impacted by ‘isms (racism, ageism), poverty, trauma, etc.

**What were themes you saw come up across the priority areas?**

**COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS**

“Early childhood education kept coming up...if you’re not developing these things while you’re still young, in the future you’re not going to have those necessary skills...Although it will take a long time to integrate those things, if we start now, in the future it could have a big impact.”

“Face to face relationships. Engaging with other people one on one.”

“Differences and supporting those differences. These topics aren’t just one size fits all. It’s about respecting individuals as individuals.”

“Sense of belonging comes up across (six priority areas)...In the context of meaningful relationships, it’s finding its way across the board.”

“System level issues, and a lot of education and knowledge barriers that need to be addressed across all six.”

“Policy issues and societal values. The notion that policy plays an important role in shaping societal values, and policy can play a role in shifting the values that we’ve got today.”
What are the obstacles to moving the needle on child and youth wellbeing in Waterloo Region?

INTERCONNECTED PROBLEM MAP
Understanding the Interconnected Problem Map

What is the interconnected problem map?

The interconnected problem map visually shows the connections between obstacles in the six priority areas. Obstacles from each area were clustered together to create eight overarching obstacles—many of which touch multiple priority areas. In addition to this map, a deep dive into each overarching obstacle outlines possible causes and symptoms of that obstacle—including supporting information from local engagement with children, youth and families.

The interconnected problem map highlights the problems we might work on to move the needle on child and youth wellbeing in multiple priority areas. It gives a common framework for discussing where different services and initiatives may want to focus their efforts. Once validated with children and youth, it will serve as a foundation for all child and youth-focused work in the Region by identifying and describing problems that will have the biggest impact, if addressed.

Problem maps are dynamic, living documents. They should be looked at as perpetual drafts, capturing the best understanding we have of the problem at a given point in time. With this mindset, they can always be iterated on as our understanding of the problem shifts, as new challenges emerge, and as progress is made.
How was this map created?

This interconnected problem map is a synthesis of the obstacles that emerged from the June 12th Problem Mapping Session. It was created by members of the Overlap team, using the same process that was applied in the Problem Mapping Session. The Overlap team explored the interconnections between obstacles in each of the six priority areas by taking obstacles titles from each area and clustering obstacles that built on each other. During this process, the Overlap team frequently referred back to the individual ideas that contributed to the creation of an obstacle title for context.

Once finished building clusters, the Overlap team examined the results from previous engagement with local children and youth. Themes, needs and ideas from these engagements were layered on top of the synthesized output from the Problem Mapping Session. This information is presented in the section “Support from Previous Engagement with Children and Youth”.

The Overlap team then proposed possible causes and symptoms. Using the input from the Problem Mapping Session and local engagement, the Overlap team hypothesized issues that contributed to the obstacle (possible causes) and issues that resulted from the obstacle (possible symptoms). For the purpose of this report, symptoms can be understood as indicators or signs the problem exists while causes are the underlying reasons why the problem exists. This information is presented in the section “Possible Causes and Symptoms”. These are preliminary hypotheses which will benefit from further validation with children and youth.
Which engagement results were referenced?

**Engagement with the Rural Realities Network and UNICEF Canada One Youth, on issues that matter to rural youth**
- Photographs of engagement materials during the Make Change Youth Action Workshop, 2018
- Themes that emerged from the 2018 Rural Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Assessment, in North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich Townships.

In collaboration with the Rural Realities Network, One Youth's Change Network brought together a group of 23 rural youth from ages 14-20, including youth from the Low-German Mennonite community. The youth responded to a set of themes that emerged from a wellbeing assessment conducted by the townships earlier that year. Both the themes and the responses from youth were incorporated into the interconnected problem map.

**Engagement with the Canadian Mental Health Association of Waterloo Wellington, on needs of children, youth and families dealing with mental health issues**
- Insights Report for Moving on Mental Health Wellington Dufferin, 2016

This project aimed to understand the specific experiences of children, youth and families with mental health needs in the Wellington Dufferin area, which is adjacent to Waterloo Region. Engagement included children, youth, young adults, parents and service providers and used methods such as ethnography, stakeholder labs, interviews, and surveys. Families who participated represented a wide range of experiences, including diagnoses and needs related to mental health, developmental disabilities, learning disabilities, substance use, concurrent disorders, and dual diagnosis. The themes and stories that emerged were incorporated into the interconnected problem map.

**Street Teams engagement with One Youth, on being a kid in Canada**
- Insights Report on One Youth Street Teams Survey on Childhood, 2017

Street Teams gathered people's perspectives on the experience of being a kid in Canada and their hopes for future generations. The Street Teams engaged over 300 people across Canada. 20% of respondents were from Waterloo Region. The themes and needs that emerged were incorporated into the interconnected problem map.

In addition, Overlappers were able to draw on more general experiences working in the problem space to inform their understanding—this includes work with the Early Literacy Alliance of Waterloo Region in the area of early childhood development, engagement with parents to inform the Parenting Now initiative with KW Counselling, community engagement with youth groups for local library strategic plans, engagement with KidsAbility stakeholders for a strategic plan, and future-focused Change Network sessions as part of work with UNICEF Canada.
Interconnected Problem Map

CHILDREN AND YOUTH LACK A SUPPORTIVE NETWORK FOR GROWTH AND SELF-DISCOVERY
- LACK OF MEANINGFUL CONNECTION
- FAMILIES ARE OVERWHELMED WITH COMPETING DEMANDS

SUPPORT SYSTEMS EXCLUDE MARGINALIZED CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES
- SYSTEMIC SOCIAL BARRIERS
- BARRIERS TO NEEDED SERVICES

STIGMA AND A SOCIETAL LACK OF EMPATHY DISCOURAGE CHILDREN AND YOUTH FROM SEEKING HELP
- DEHUMANIZATION
- COMMUNITY INACTION

YOUTH ARE LACKING LIFE SKILLS AND THEY WORRY ABOUT IT
- BASIC NEEDS ARE NOT MET
- BASIC SKILLS ARE NOT DEVELOPED EARLY ON

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH DON’T ACCOMMODATE THE CONTEXT OF THEIR FAMILIES AND LIVES
- INTERGENERATIONAL CYCLE OF POVERTY AND LOW LITERACY
- FAMILY STRESSORS

CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE NOT INVOLVED IN THE DECISIONS THAT AFFECT THEM
- YOUTH NEEDS ARE NOT HEARD
- NOT MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY’RE AT

OUR CARE SYSTEM STRUGGLES TO BE COHESIVE, TIMELY, AND WELL-INFORMED
- UNCOORDINATED SYSTEM: PREVENTION AND PLANNING
- LACK OF TRUST AND RESPECT BY ADULTS TOWARD YOUTH

CHILD AND YOUTH WELLBEING IS NOT A SHARED SOCIETAL PRIORITY
- CHILDHOOD IS SEEN AS A WOMEN’S ISSUE
- LITERACY IS NOT A PRIORITY

INTERCONNECTED PROBLEM MAP

LEGEND

- Bullying
- Early Childhood Development
- High School Graduation
- Literacy
- Mental Health
- Sense of Belonging

PRELIMINARY INDICATION OF PRIORITY:
- Easiest
- Hardest
- Biggest Impact

INSIGHT:
- YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN WATERLOO REGION IDENTIFIED A STRONG NEED FOR YOUTH TO EXPLORE THEIR INTERESTS IN A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT, AND TO PARTICIPATE IN MEANINGFUL ACTIVITIES.
- LACK OF ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION
- PERSONAL READINESS (TO ASK FOR HELP)
- LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPLICATIONS OF PROGRAMS FOR THE SENSE OF BELONGING

INSIGHT:
- THE NEED FOR IMPROVED SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL SKILLS, READING AND WRITING SKILLS, TECHNICAL SKILLS, FINANCIAL SKILLS WERE ALL IDENTIFIED IN ENGAGEMENT WITH LOCAL YOUTH.
- PERSONAL CONTEXT
- LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF STUDENT SUCCESS

INSIGHT:
- THIS IS THE ONLY CLUSTER THAT DIRECTLY INCLUDES OBSTACLES GENERATED FROM ALL SIX OF THE PRIORITY AREAS.
- INEFFECTIVE RESPONSE
- LACK OF STUDENT-CENTRED APPROACH

INSIGHT:
- THIS CLUSTER IS FOCUSED AROUND THE COMPLEX AREAS OF MENTAL HEALTH AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN EARLY CHILDHOOD. AS A SOCIETY, WE ARE STILL IN THE EARLY STAGES OF UNDERSTANDING AND LEARNING TO CARE FOR AND ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH.
- LACK OF CONSIDERATION OF DIVERSE NEEDS
- LACK OF STUDENT CENTRED APPROACH
Deep Dive into Each Obstacle
Children and youth lack a supportive network for growth and self-discovery

**Causes**

- Families are overwhelmed with competing demands (technology, busyness). Communities are organized in ways that stifle interaction and provide few spaces for youth
- Children and youth lack meaningful Relationships, mentors and role models
- Youth have limited access to interesting activities and resources
- Children and youth experience boredom, loneliness, low sense of value and lack of purpose

**Symptoms**

**Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families**

- Inclusion and Belonging: opportunities for children and youth to be part of a community and express themselves—theme identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need supportive adults in my life—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need opportunities to learn and try new things—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- A skate park for youth—idea generated during Rural Realities engagement, in response to lack of spaces to spend time with friends
- “We need a bus”— in reaction to the transportation theme during Rural Realities engagement
- “No free activities to meet people in the community”—youth participant during Rural Realities engagement
- I need access to resources and opportunities—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need to play outside—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- Healthy relationships: people to make children and youth feel special, quality time with friends and family, parents less overwhelmed—theme identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
Support systems exclude marginalized children, youth and families

Causes

- Discrimination is institutionalized over time, groups are systematically excluded
- People have entrenched beliefs, people act those out with discriminatory behaviours ("ISM's")
- Groups have unequal outcomes

Symptoms

Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families

- I need an inclusive world without discrimination—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need diverse role models—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
Stigma and a societal lack of empathy discourage children and youth from seeking help

Causes

- We don't prioritize connectedness. Technology and social media distance us
- We lack empathy for each other, we distance ourselves from the experience of others
- We don't act when people need support, we stigmatize people who need help
- People don't ask for help and suffer alone

Symptoms

Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families

- Impacts of Stigma, including denying a mental health issue because it feels so scary, not asking for help to avoid judgment, and not asking for help as a parent because of the risk of losing a child—theme from Moving on Mental Health Insights Report
- Online anonymous mental and sexual health service—idea generated during Rural Realities engagement, in response to lack of anonymity and fear of judgement by parents or peers
- Not accessing sexual health care due to stigma and fear of judgement—theme from Rural Realities engagement
- Not going to counselling because in a small town someone might find out—in response to mental health theme during Rural Realities engagement
- I need bullying to stop—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
Youth are lacking life skills and they worry about it

**Causes**

- Skills needed today are different than in the past (technological skills, social/emotional skills) and parents and schools aren't equipped to teach
- Youth aren't learning necessary life skills
- Some youth recognize they lack skills and feel stressed and overwhelmed. Others don't recognize until their shortcomings are made explicit
- Youth struggle with adulthood, because they aren't prepared

**Symptoms**

**Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families**

- I need support with social and emotional skills—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need help managing life events—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need help learning skills—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need to be prepared for my career—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need support with dealing with drugs and alcohol—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- “This is not taught in school”, “We have the opportunity to get a job at a young age, but we aren't taught how to (e.g.) balance a cheque”—in response to the theme of managing money during Rural Realities engagement
- The Future of Technology: being prepared to use future technology and having a balanced consumption of technology—theme identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- “Having solid speech and language skills. Being able Understanding what the teacher and the other children are saying”—comment from youth respondent in One Youth Street Teams engagement
Services for children and youth don’t accommodate the context of their families and lives

**Causes**

- Many children, youth and families experience pressures like poverty, low literacy, working multiple jobs, being a youth and also a parent, and inadequate housing
- Systems involving children and youth are rigid and assume certain parental supports
- Children/youth and families can’t access services
- Needs go unmet and the cycle continues in the next generation

**Symptoms**

**Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families**

- I need my basic needs to be met—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need to be financially secure—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need a healthy family—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- Services models don’t match the complexity of real life—subtheme from Moving on Mental Health Insights Report
- Needs of a child are nested within the needs of a complex family—theme from Moving on Mental Health Insights Report
- Safety and basic needs: finances for shelter, food, clothing and recreation, a safe environment, supportive authority figures—theme identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- “You need a car to get to work, but a job to pay for a car”—in response to the theme of Money during Rural Realities engagement
## Children and youth are not involved in the decisions that affect them

### Causes

- Adults don't acknowledge the capacity of children and youth and the value of their contributions
- Adults don't know how to involve youth in decision-making and designing solutions
- There is a systemic lack of representation of children and youth's interests
- Children and youth aren't involved in decisions that affect them, and youth needs are not heard
- Systems don't consider the needs of children and youth
- Learning isn't student-centred and reflects a lack of understanding of student success
- Responses to bullying are ineffective

### Symptoms

- Youth needs are not heard
- Skewed view of the child
- Systemic lack of representation
- Lack of trust and respect by adults toward youth
- Lack of understanding of student success
- Lack of consideration of diverse needs
- Ineffective response
- Lack of student-centred approach

### Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families

- I need to be respected and heard—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- I need school to be better (material taught in class, program structure, placement of schools)—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- Freedom and independence: feeling that children are not viewed as individuals or taken seriously, and that opportunities for independence are limited by adults’ rules and controls—theme identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- “I like the fact that we get an input in the community. It doesn’t happen often.” comment from youth respondent reflecting on Rural Realities engagement
- “I'm not heard/listened to because I'm young”—comment on Feeling Heard theme during Rural Realities engagement
Our care system struggles to be cohesive, timely, and well-informed

### Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families

- A system built to manage crisis is not aligned with the needs of children and families—theme from Moving on Mental Health Insights Report
- “There’s a big grey area in knowing where to go for the right service. There are overlaps in what service providers offer”—comment from a service provider participating in Moving on Mental Health engagement
- I need to understand and manage mental health—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- “Too many people don’t understand the severity of anxiety/depression. We need to be heard”—comment in response to theme of Mental Health during Rural Realities engagement
**Child and youth wellbeing is not a shared societal priority**

**Causes**

- Child and youth wellbeing issues are experienced most by people who don’t hold power in society
- Child and youth wellbeing is not a top priority
- It’s unclear which one entity is most responsible or accountable (parents, schools, government, other services, etc.) and most entities are balancing multiple priorities
- Policies and systems don’t reflect the needs and wants of children and youth
- Children grow up with unidentified and unmet needs

**Symptoms**

**Support from Previous Engagement with Children, Youth and Families**

- I need the government to care more about kids—need identified through One Youth Street Teams engagement
- Schools feel like connectors and experts in services, but aren’t designed for this—subtheme in Moving on Mental Health Insights Report
What happens next?

These interconnected obstacles point to possible leverage points and connections between the six priority areas of the Children and Youth Planning Table. The map contains our best understanding of the problems at this point, which will benefit from ongoing validation with local children, youth, families and service providers. The next steps for evolving this interconnected problem map and using it to tackle challenges for child and youth wellbeing are:

Clarifying language and developing a common understanding

Before reaching out to children and youth, it’s important for the project team to seek clarity on the elements of the problem map (the interconnected obstacles framework, possible symptoms, and possible root causes). The goal is not to validate or invalidate, but to make sure any confusing language is identified and suggest revisions. Once there is shared understanding of the various facets of the problem map, each obstacle cluster can be summarized in plain language, and a plan developed for communicating with children and youth about these issues.

Creating data-informed problem statements

The next step is to re-write the obstacle titles as data-informed problem statements. This involves imagining what we might expect to happen if the obstacle were removed. Imagining what progress might looks like helps identify possible indicators that could be used to measure progress on solving that particular obstacle.

Validating by engaging with children and youth

Both clear language and data-informed problem statements will be instrumental in validating the obstacles, possible symptoms and possible causes by conducting ongoing engagement work—asking children and youth to contribute their perspectives to the problem map and identify any gaps or misunderstandings.
The Facilitation and Session Output have been developed collaboratively with Overlap Associates.

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