

2018

# Rural Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Assessment

North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich Townships



This report was prepared in partnership with:



**Youth and Young Adult Wellbeing Assessment  
North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich  
Townships  
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# Acknowledgements

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We acknowledge and thank Kyle Wagner who provided research support for this project.

The Wellbeing Survey was distributed throughout North Dumfries, Wilmot, Wellesley and Woolwich Townships. We want to thank all of our community members who participated. We also thank all of the focus group participants and key informants for sharing their perspectives on wellbeing with honesty and respect.

The data entry and analysis was supported by student volunteers: Ben Drung, community volunteer.

Finally, we want to thank Kristine Alison and Rebecca Pacheco with the Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries (SPCCND) for their collaboration and for providing a demographic profile for the report.

# Introduction

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The Region of Waterloo is a regional municipality consisting of three cities and four townships, providing a mixture of rural and urban town centres. The cities include Waterloo, Kitchener, and Cambridge. The four townships include Wellesley, Woolwich, Wilmot, and North Dumfries. The population trends report for Waterloo Region 2011 to 2016 identifies that there was a higher level of growth compared to the cities with the exception of Wellesley Township. North Dumfries experienced the highest level of growth of 9.4% followed by Woolwich Township with 8% growth and Wilmot Township with 6.9%. Waterloo Region grew 5.5% over the same time period. Additionally, the rural townships have experienced growth in the younger population groups from 2011-2016. Waterloo Region had a growth rate of 5% among those 0-19 years and this compares with rates of 38.3% in Woolwich, 29.1% in North Dumfries, 24.3% in Wilmot and 11% in Wellesley. The change in population of 20-29 year olds varied. Waterloo Region had a growth rate of 11.8% while North Dumfries saw a 35.3% increase, Wellesley grew by 9.6% slightly less than Waterloo Region. Woolwich Township declined by 10.9% and Wilmot declined by 0.7%.

The 2014 Community Wellbeing Assessment for Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot, identified a growing number of children and youth living in the rural townships. The report identified that there were fewer youth and young adults who completed the online survey compared to adults and seniors. The focus groups identified some concerns in several of the wellbeing domains. WCHC has identified youth aged 14-18 years as a priority population across their geographical catchment area. To be able to more fully understand the needs of youth and young adults and to understand the experience living in the rural townships WCHC has led this assessment to compliment the previous Community Wellbeing Assessment completed in 2014.

Woolwich Community Health Centre (WCHC) conducts a community assessment every 4 to 5 years as part of its strategic planning cycle. The most recent Community Wellbeing Assessment was completed in 2014. This report used the Canadian Index of Wellbeing as a framework to identify the needs and strengths of rural residents. Youth and young adults were less represented in this report due to lower survey response rates although there was some response from this age group in focus groups. WCHC identified youth within the strategic priorities for the organization following this report.

This assessment focuses on all 4 rural townships in Waterloo Region and provides a more detailed and comprehensive snapshot of the perspectives of youth and young adults. This assessment will be used by rural organizations and the Rural Realities Network to further understand the needs of youth and young adults.

# Methodology

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The steering committee of partner organizations worked together to identify the information which is most significant to know about youth and young adults in our rural community. This process was led by Kyle Wagner MPH candidate who presented a review of provincial and local statistics. He also prepared a review of the literature of some of the key issues that were identified in recent wellbeing assessments. The steering committee prioritized questions for the survey questions based on the key issues identified in the review of past assessments and review of the literature of factors affecting the health and wellbeing of youth. Each agency promoted the on-line survey to their community connections. The survey was circulated by agencies and youth on social media.

The agencies identified opportunities to conduct focus groups across the 4 townships. Facilitating these focus groups was shared among all of the organizations. The focus groups all used a similar format which included a short video clip on wellbeing and then use a “sense making” approach to receive feedback on key issues. We presented one or two early results from the data on each key issue and then asked the participants to comment on the result. We asked if the result was accurate from their perspective and what the context of the result is in their community. We ended each group with a couple of open ended questions such as “Do you see a positive future for yourself”, what supports you and what stands in the way.

There were 116 electronic Rural Youth and Young Adult Community Wellbeing Surveys collected. There were prizes for participating in the survey. We offered 3 Xbox prize packs and 3 pairs of tickets to a Blue Jays game. The survey data was analyzed using survey monkey. Narrative responses were summarized and grouped according to themes. Overall 12 focus groups were conducted over a 3 month time frame across all 4 townships. The groups were planned, with input from the steering committee, to attempt to hear from a wide range of age groups across the four townships. Specific cultural groups were also included.

While this data is not statistically representative (it did not use a random sample of the community) it does reflect the community’s opinions and provides some additional detail to supplement the survey data. The survey responses represent a higher percentage of female respondents with 66% of survey respondents being female. The survey was promoted to all of the township residents, however, there was a proportionally higher response rate in Woolwich Township (26.8%) compared to Wellesley Township (31%), Wilmot Township (22.5%) and North Dumfries (5.6%). Approximately 10% reported being part of a farm household. A large majority reported living with parents (80%), followed by living with a

partner (14%) and a small number living alone (1.4%) or living with friends (1.4%) and living in the care of others (2.8%). The average of age of respondents was 18.7 years.

Focus groups were conducted in each of the 4 rural townships and included focus groups with youth 14-18 and young adults 19-29. In total 9 focus groups were held with approximately 90 participants. Groups included: youth councils in Wellesley and Ayr; drop in groups in Wilmot and Woolwich,, secondary school classes, early years programs in both Wilmot and North Dumfries Townships and a group of young adults who access services at Woolwich Community Services.

All data was analyzed and presented in a summarized format to protect the privacy of individuals who participated in the assessment. The survey results and the focus group results are reported according to each of the 6 domains.

## Section A:

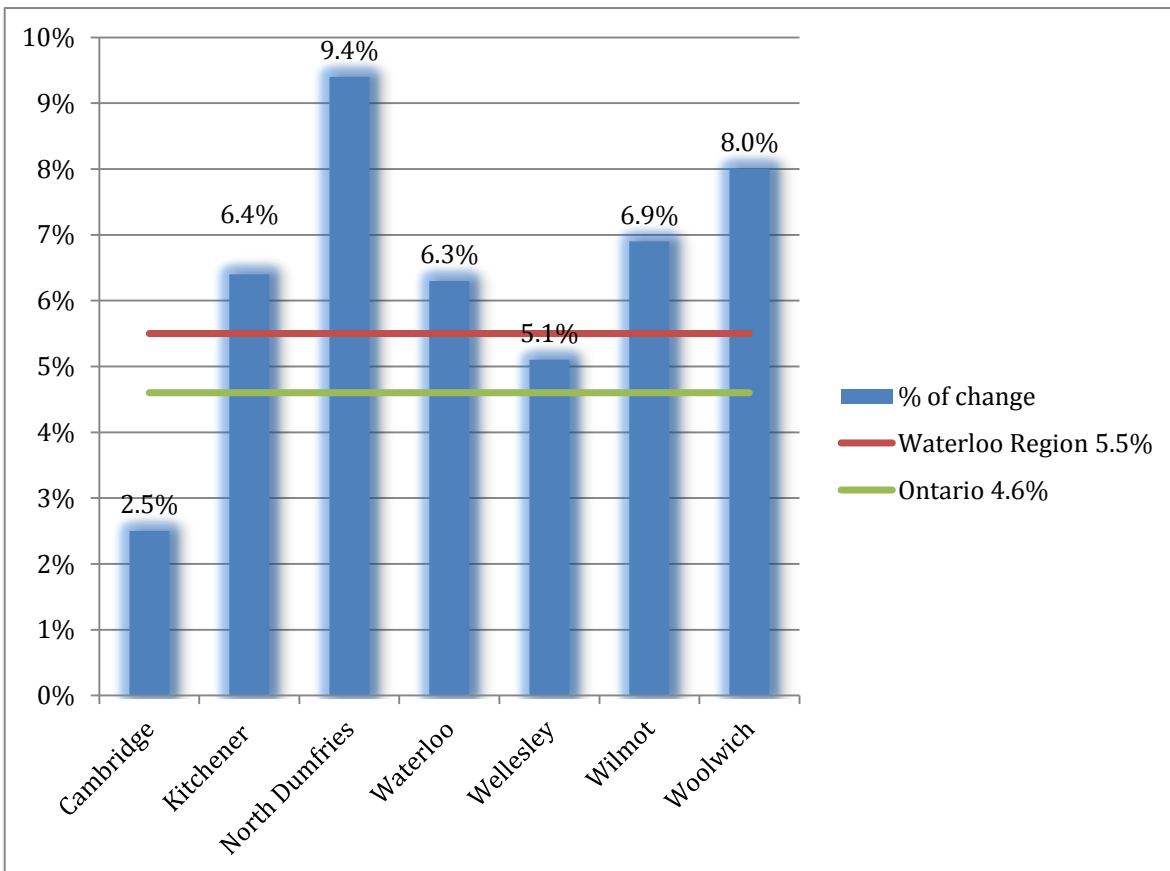
# Demographic profile of the rural townships of Waterloo Region

This profile provides a demographic snapshot of the rural townships of Waterloo Region: North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. This information is gathered from the release of the 2016 Census of the Population conducted by Statistics Canada. Waterloo Region is provided as a comparison for the townships, and is featured in the graphs using a lighter shade of the colour indicated in the legend.

Waterloo Region is situated in southern Ontario and surrounded by three Great Lakes: Ontario, Erie and Huron. It consists of both rural and urban centres made up of the cities of Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, and the townships of North Dumfries, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich. The region is 1369 square kilometers in size and has a population of 535,154.

### Population Trends

#### Population Growth Rate Waterloo Region 2011 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

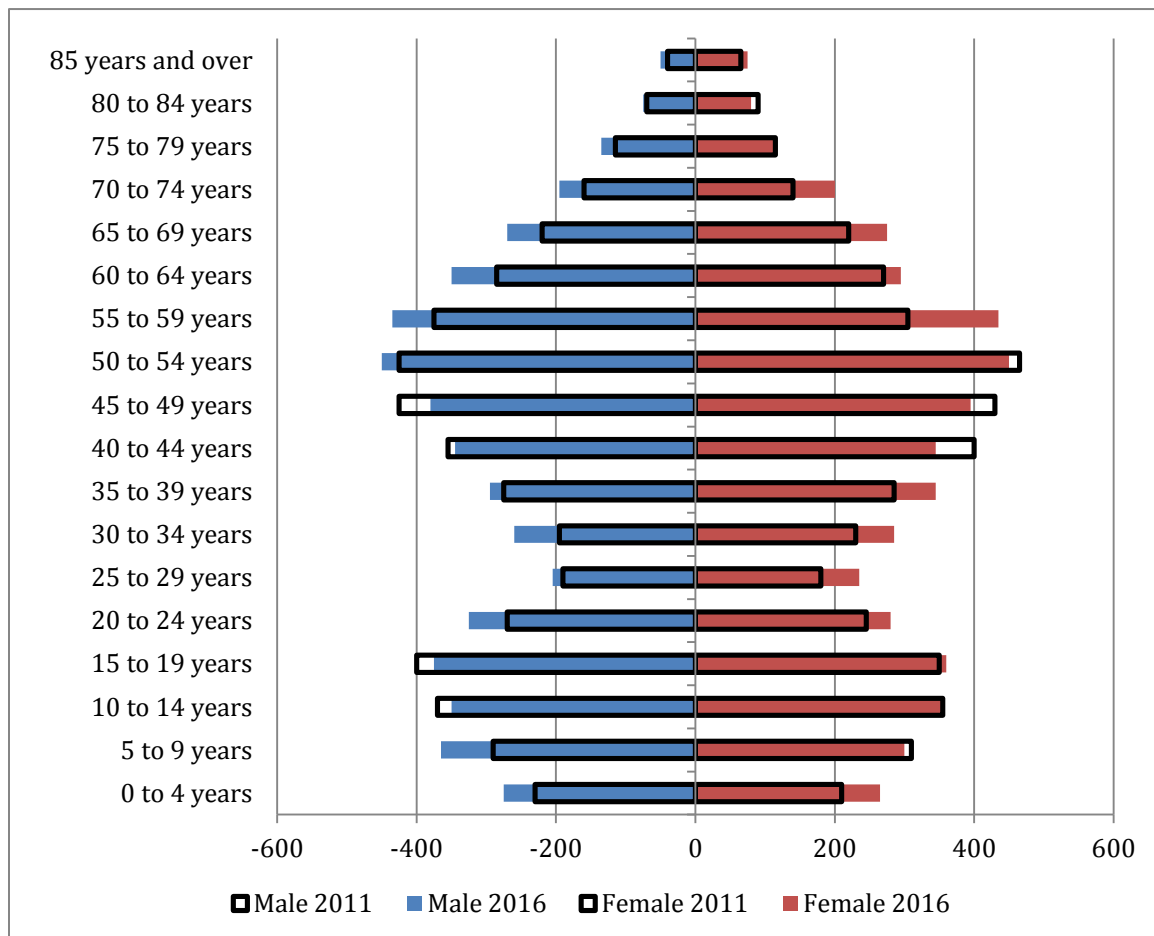


- In 2016, the Census population of the Waterloo Region was 535,154; a growth rate of 5.5% which exceeded both the provincial (4.6%) and national (5%) growth rates since the previous census.
- The Region of Waterloo's annual estimate of total population for year-end 2016 was 583,500. This number is based on the Census population, plus an estimate of full-time post-secondary students, the Census undercount (those who were missed from the Census) and population growth from May to year-end.
- North Dumfries had the highest growth rate in the region between 2011 and 2016 at a growth rate of 9.4% followed by Woolwich (8%), Wilmot (6.9%) and Wellesley (5.1%)
- All townships had a larger rate of growth when compared to the provincial rate (4.6%) and national rate (5%)

### Population by Age Group

The population pyramid reveals different growth rates among the various age groups and between males and females. The age distribution profile shows the overall age distribution of the population from the 2011 Census and the 2016 Census.

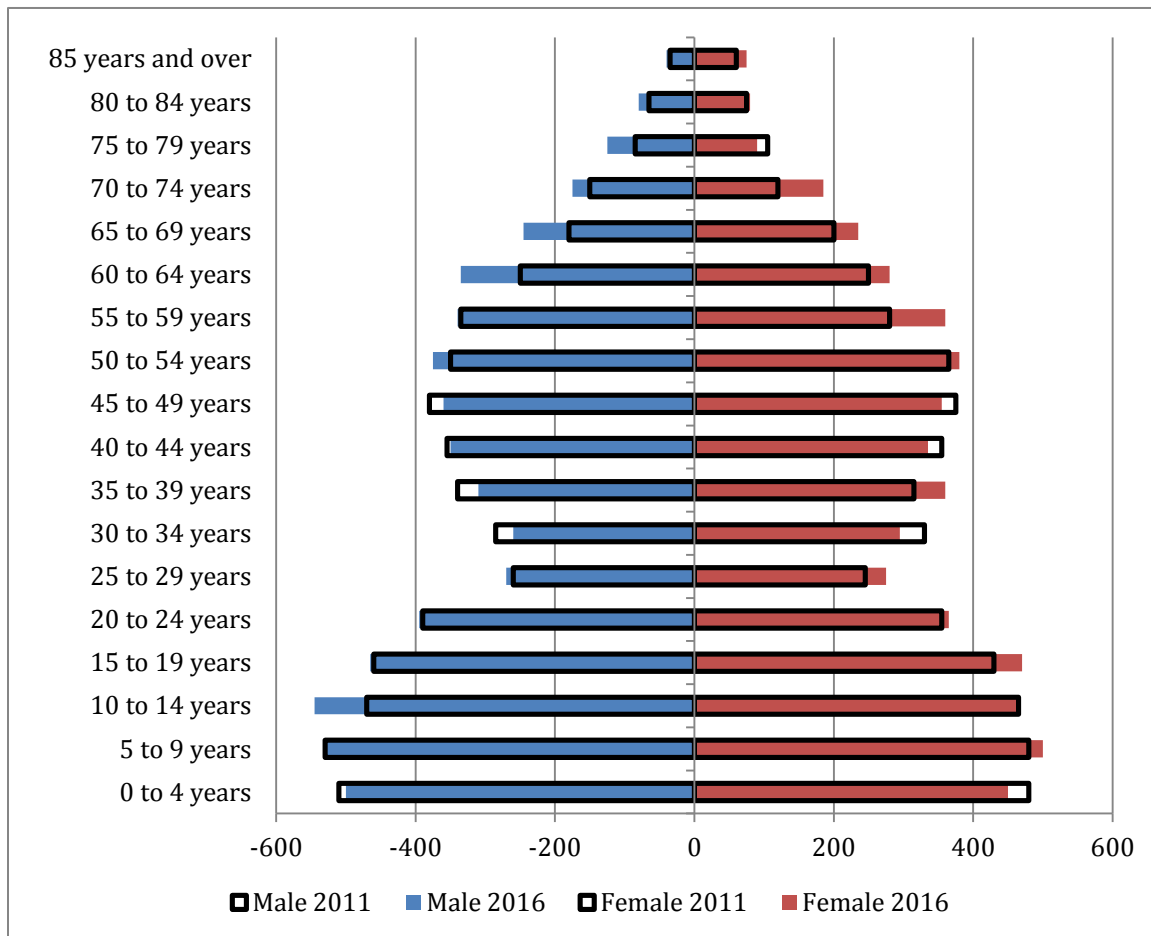
#### North Dumfries Population by Age Group 2011 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, with a population of 10,215, the most populous age group in the Township of North Dumfries was the 50-54 age group at 895 residents
- Since 2011, the fastest growing age group was the 55-59 year-old age group, as it added 190 residents, followed by the 30-34 year-old cohort that added 110 residents in 2016
- The slowest growing population was the 45-49 year-old cohort with a 9% decline
- The median age in North Dumfries was 41.7, down from 42.1 in 2011, which means the population is getting younger

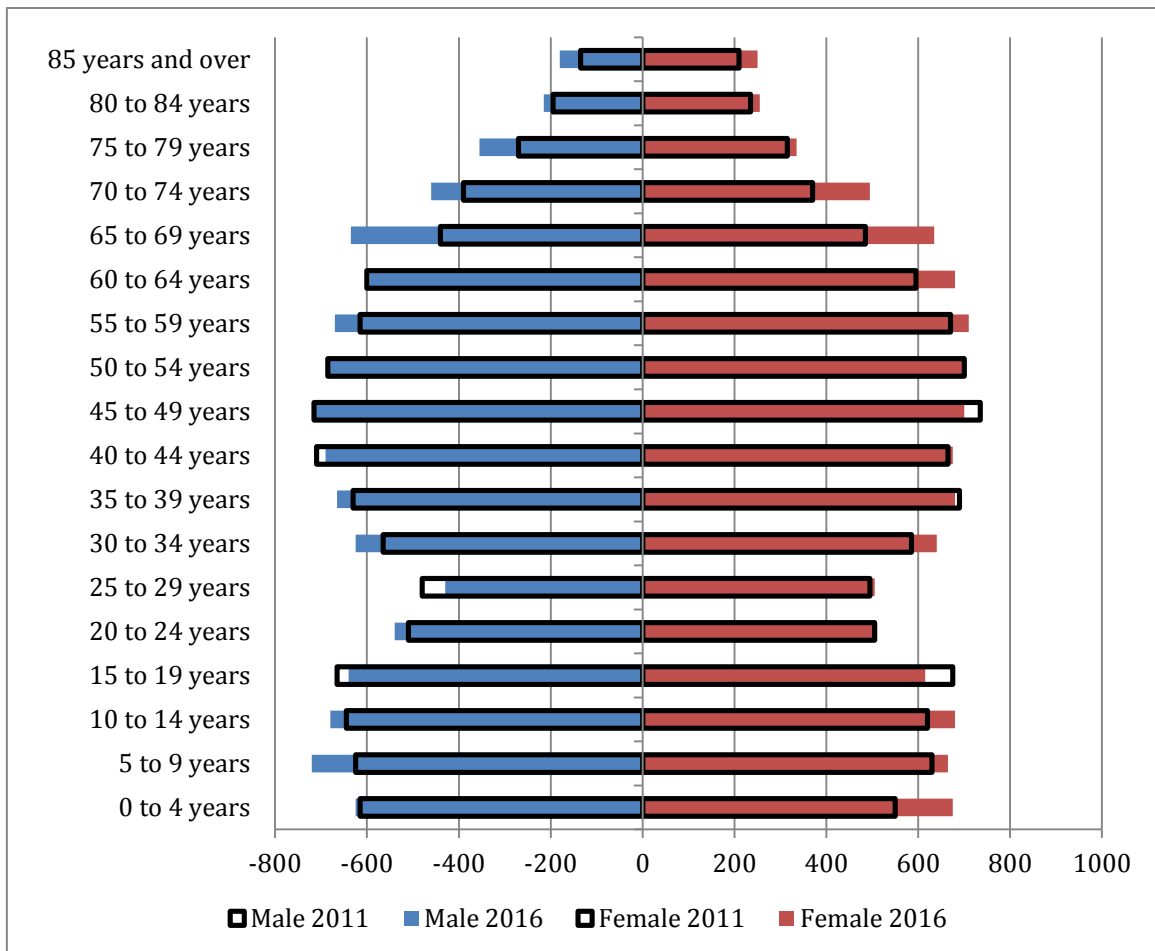
### Wellesley Population by Age Group 2011 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, with a population of 11,260, the most populous age group in the Township of Wellesley was the 5-9 age group at 1,035 residents
- The 10-14 age group had a 8% increase, while Ontario saw a 0.1% decline in this age group
- Since 2011, the fastest growing age group was the 60-64 year-old age group, as it added 130 residents, followed by the 65-69 year-old cohort that added 105 residents
- The slowest growing population was the 30-34 year-old cohort with a 10% decline
- The median age in Wellesley was 33.7, up from 32.3 in 2011, the population is aging slightly

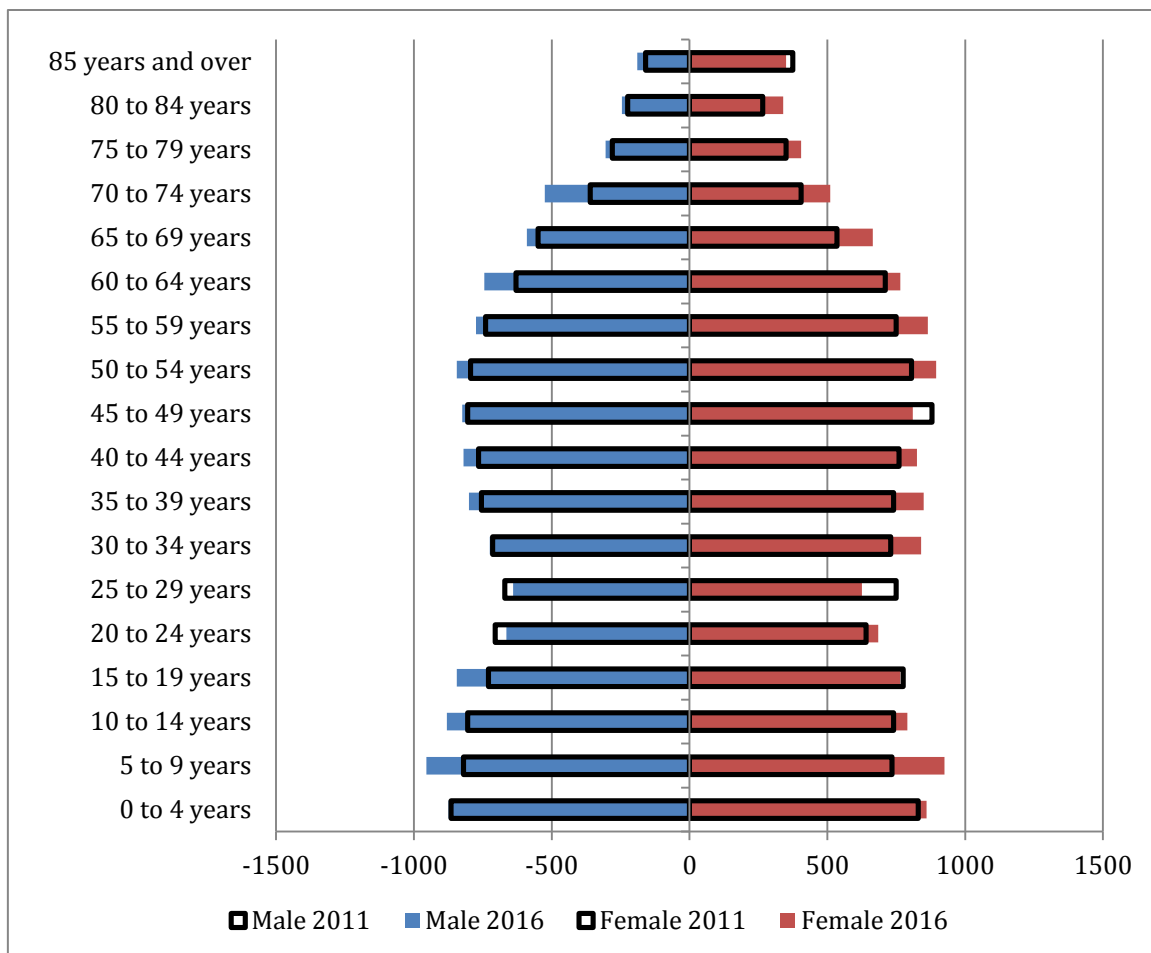
## Wilmot Population by Age Group 2011 to 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, with a population of 20,545, the most populous age group in the Township of Wilmot was the 45-49 age group at 1,415 residents
- Since 2011, the fastest growing age group was the 65-69 year-old age group, as it added 340 residents, followed by the 70-74 year-old cohort that added 195 residents in 2016
- The slowest growing population was the 15-19 year-old cohort with a 6% decline
- The median age in Wilmot was 41.7, up from the 40.4 in 2011, meaning the population is aging slightly

## Woolwich Population by Age Group 2011 to 2016

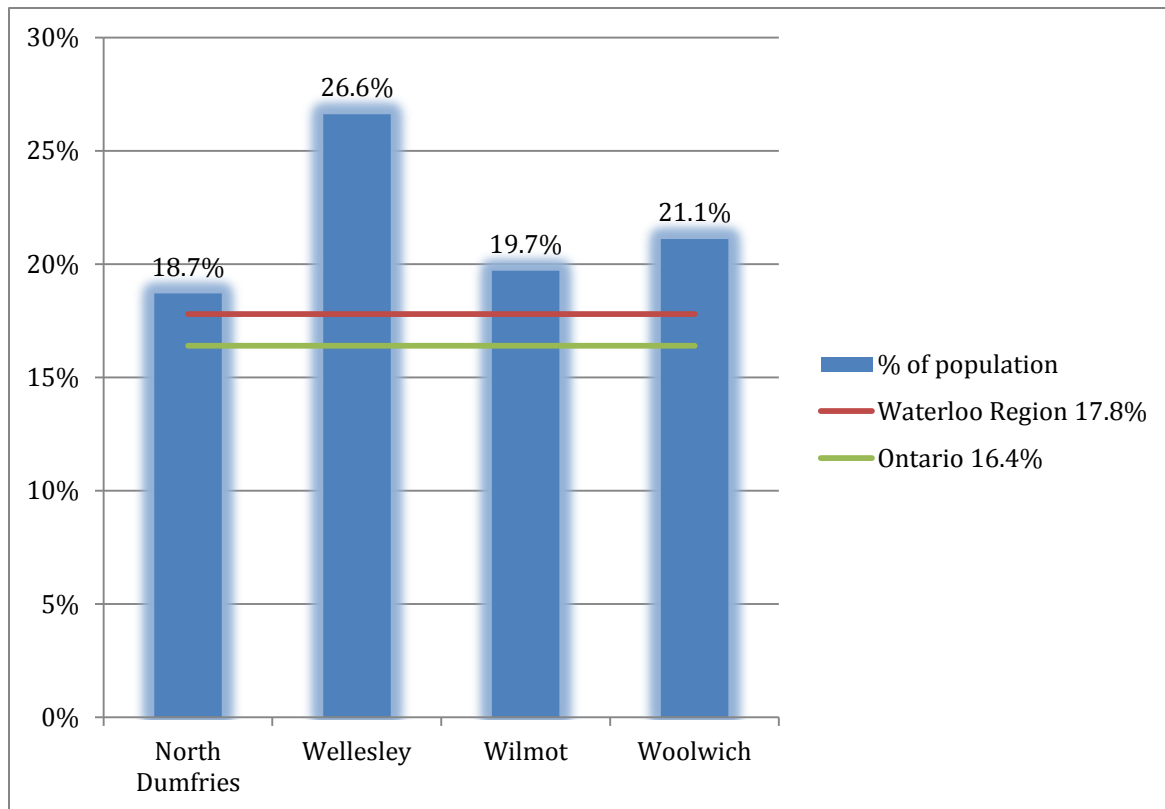


Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, with a population of 25,006, the most populous age group in the Township of Woolwich was the 5-9 age group at 1,880 residents
- Since 2011, the fastest growing age group was the 5-9 year-old age group, as it added 330 residents, followed by the 70-74 year-old cohort that added 265 residents
- In 2016, 21.1% of the population was 14 or younger, which is 4.7% higher than the provincial rate and 4.5% higher than the national rate
- The slowest growing population was the 25-29 year-old cohort with a 11% decline
- The median age in Woolwich was 39.4, up from 38.6 in 2011, meaning the population is aging slightly

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 and 2016 Census of Population

## Percent of Population Aged 0-14 in 2016



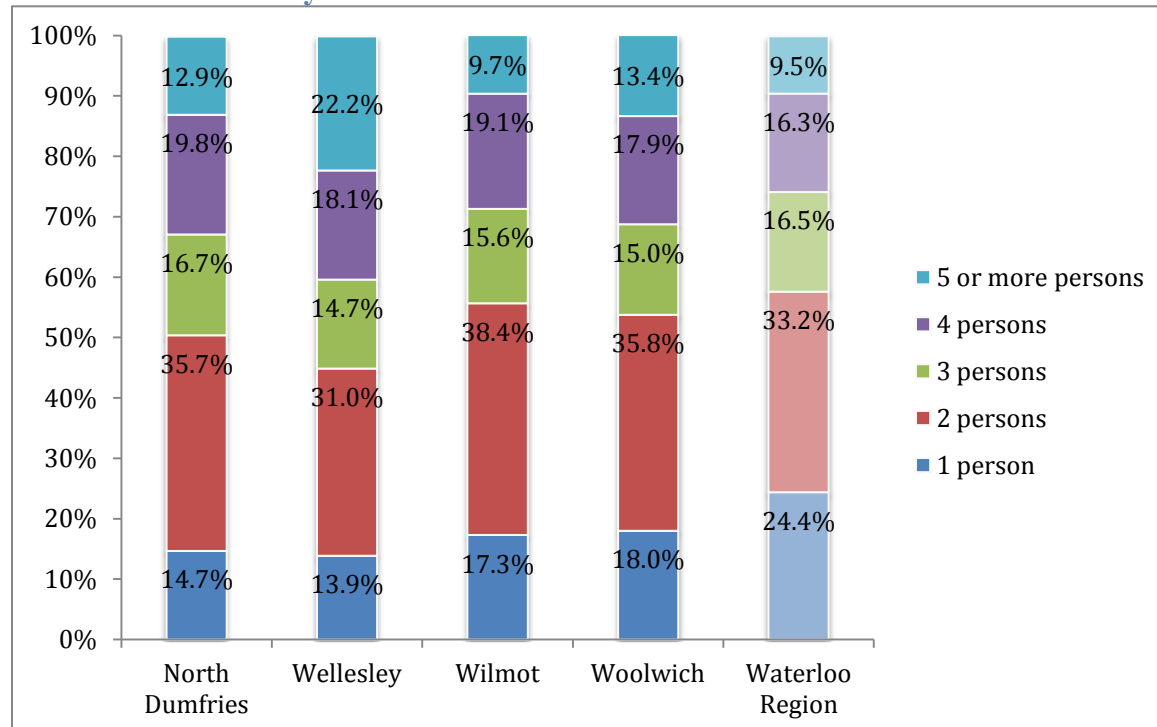
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- All four of the townships have a higher percentage of children aged 0-14 when compared to the region (17.8%), province (16.4%) and country (16.6%)
- In Wellesley, this represents 2,995 children birth to 14 years; In North Dumfries 1,910 children; Wilmot 4,055 children and Woolwich 5,285 children birth to 14 years.

## Household Structure

Statistics Canada defines a household as being composed of a person or group of persons who co-reside in or occupy a dwelling. The household may consist of a family group such as a census family, of two or more families sharing a dwelling, of a group of unrelated persons or of a person living alone. Household members who are temporarily absent on reference day are considered part of their usual household.

### Private Households by Household Size - 2016



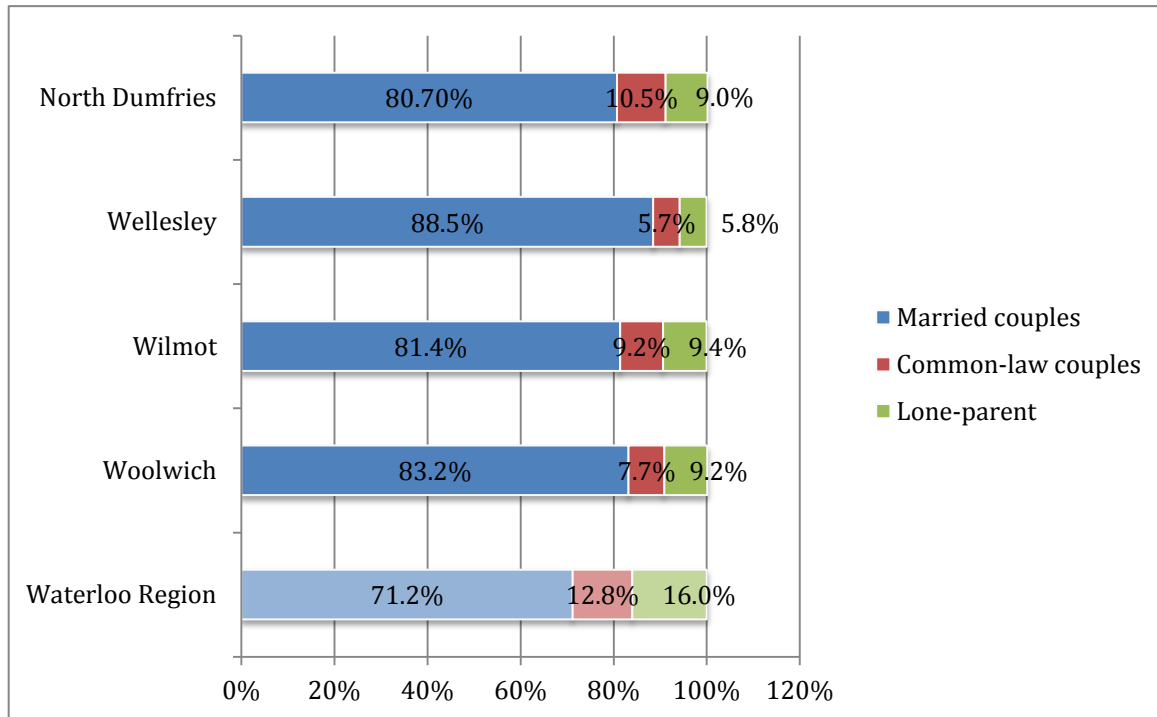
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, the most common household size in North Dumfries was the two person household; On average there were 2.9 people per household – no change since 2011
- In 2016, the most common household size in Wellesley was the two person household (31%); On average there were 3.4 people per household – no change since 2011
- Wellesley had the lowest rate of 1 person households (13.9%), which is 10.5% below the regional level, 12% below the provincial level and 14.3% below the national average.
- Wellesley had the highest rate of 5 or more person households (22.2%), which is 13.8% more than the national level
- In 2016, the most common household size in Wilmot was the two person household (38.4%); On average, there were 2.7 people per household – no change since 2011
- In 2016, the most common household size in Woolwich was the two person household (35.8%); On average there were 2.8 people per household – which was the same in 2011
- Woolwich had the highest rate of 1 person households (18%), which is 6.4% below the regional level, 7.9% below the provincial level and 10.2% below the national level

## Family Composition

The composition of families in the four townships has remained relatively stable over the last four years. Among the three family types, married couples remain the most prevalent group.

### Census Families in Private Households - 2016



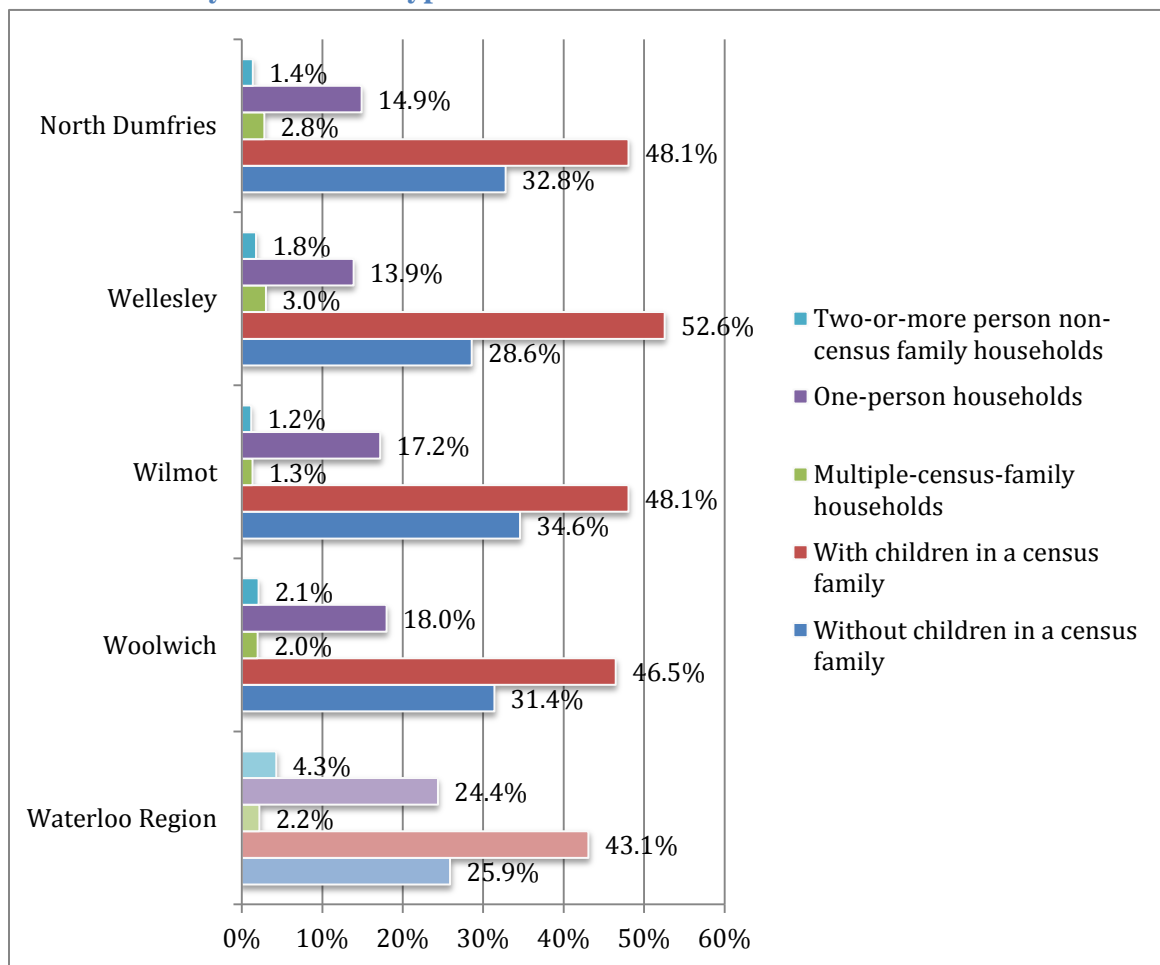
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- Wellesley had the highest rate of married couple families at 88.5% and the lowest rate of lone-parent families at 5.8%
- Wellesley had 17.3% more married couples than the regional average, 17.5% more than the provincial average, and 22.7% more than the national average
- In Canada common-law families in private households represent 17.8% of the family composition, almost 7% higher than the townships
- In the region, common-law couple families in private families represent 12.8% of the family composition while in Wellesley they represent 5.7%
- Waterloo region has 6.6% more lone-parent families than the four townships

## Private Households

According to Census Canada private household refers to a person or groups of persons who occupy the same dwelling and do not have a usual place of residence elsewhere in Canada or abroad.

### Private Households by Household Type - 2016

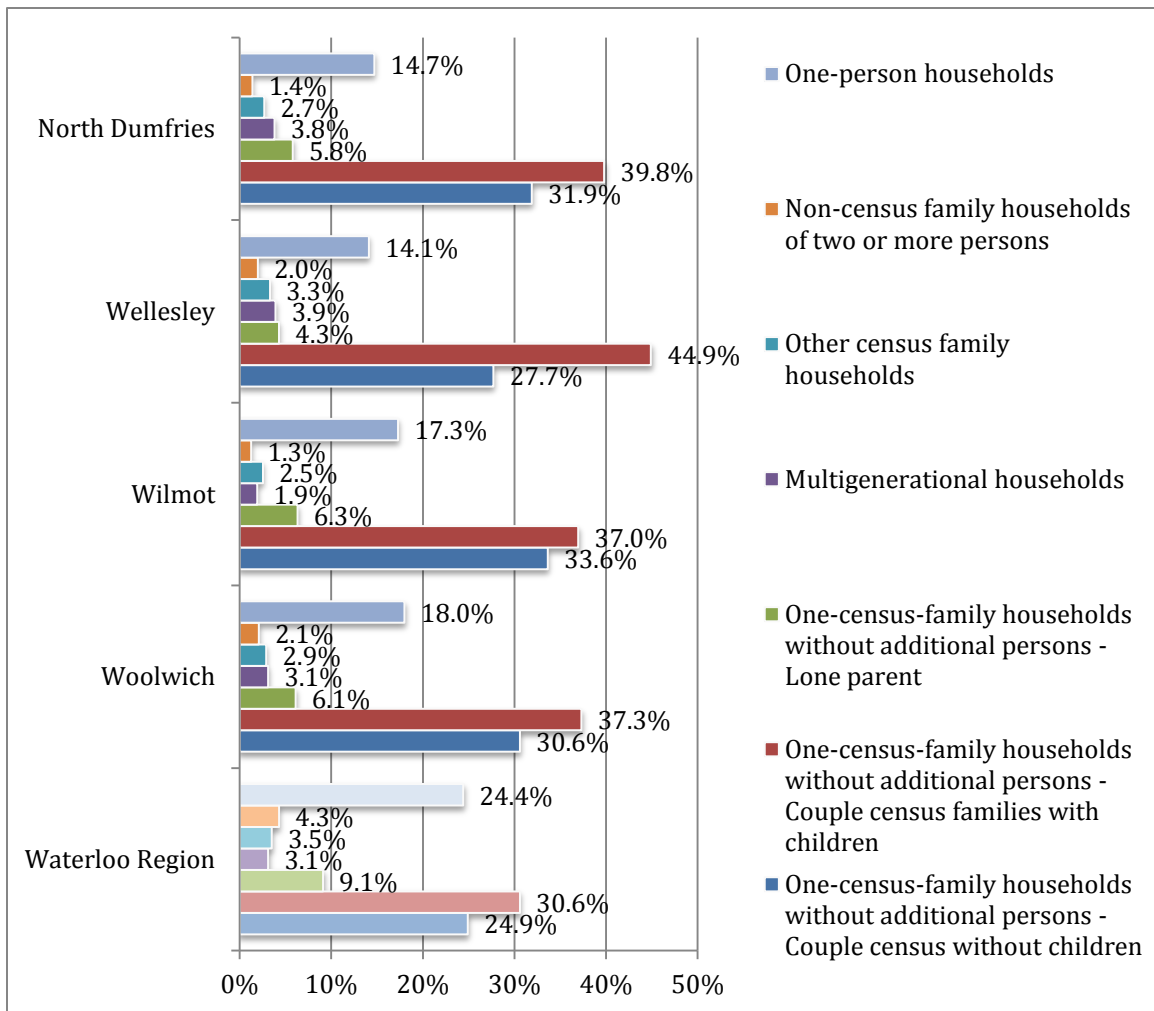


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- All four of the townships had a higher percentage of one-census family households with children than the region (43.1%), the province (42%) and the country (38.6%).
- All four of the townships had a higher percentage of one-census family households without children than the region (25.9%), the province (25.4%) and the country (26.9%).
- All four of the townships had a smaller percentage of one-person households when compared to the region (24.4%), the province (25.9%) and the country (28.2%).



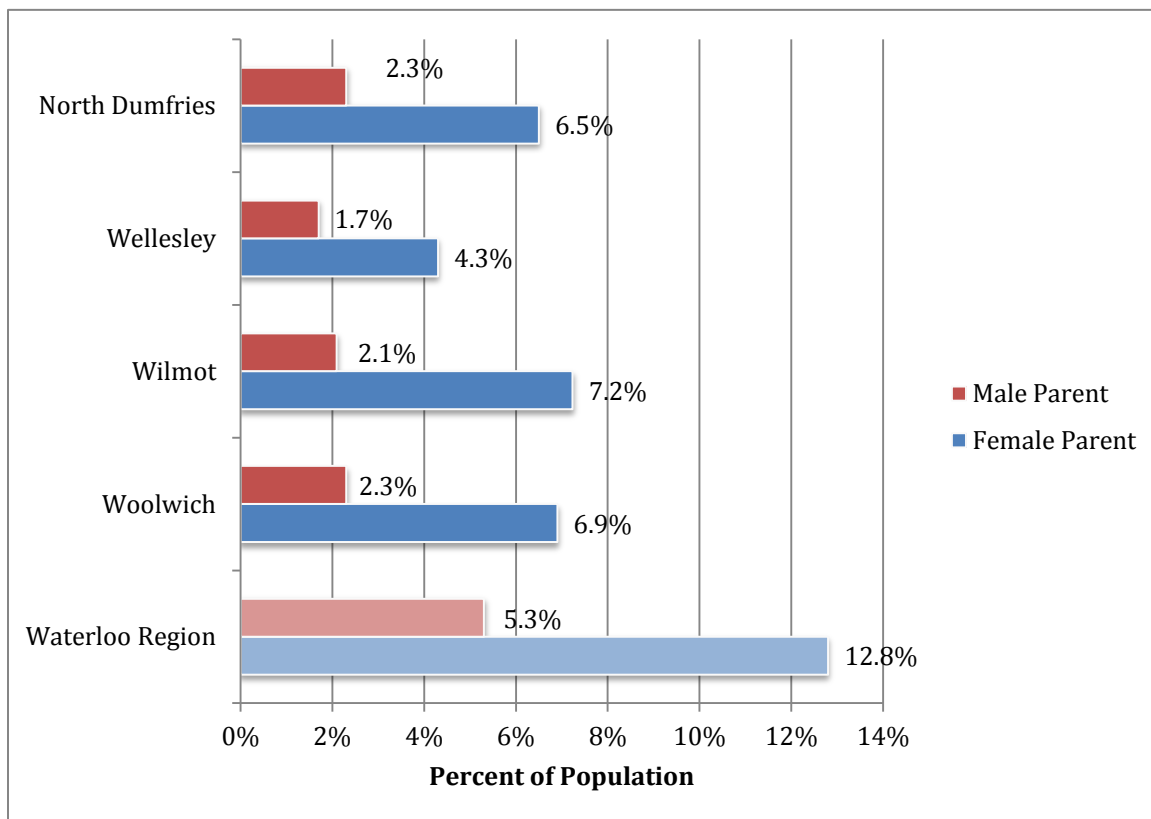
## Living Arrangements by Private Household



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- The townships had the highest one-census family households with children while the region had the highest percentage of one-person households
- North Dumfries had the highest rate of one-census family households without children
- Wellesley had the highest rate of one-census family households with children

## Lone-Parent Families by Gender in the Four Townships



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- Wellesley had the lowest rate of lone-female parents (4.3%) – more than two times the amount of male lone parent families in Wellesley (1.7%)
- Wilmot had the highest rate of lone-female parents (7.2%) – more than three times the amount of male lone-parent families in Wilmot (2.1%)
- The townships had a lower rate of lone-female parents when compared to the provincial rate (13.7%) and the national rate (12.8%)
- The townships had a lower rate of lone-male parents when compared to the provincial rate (3.3%) and the national rate (3.6%)

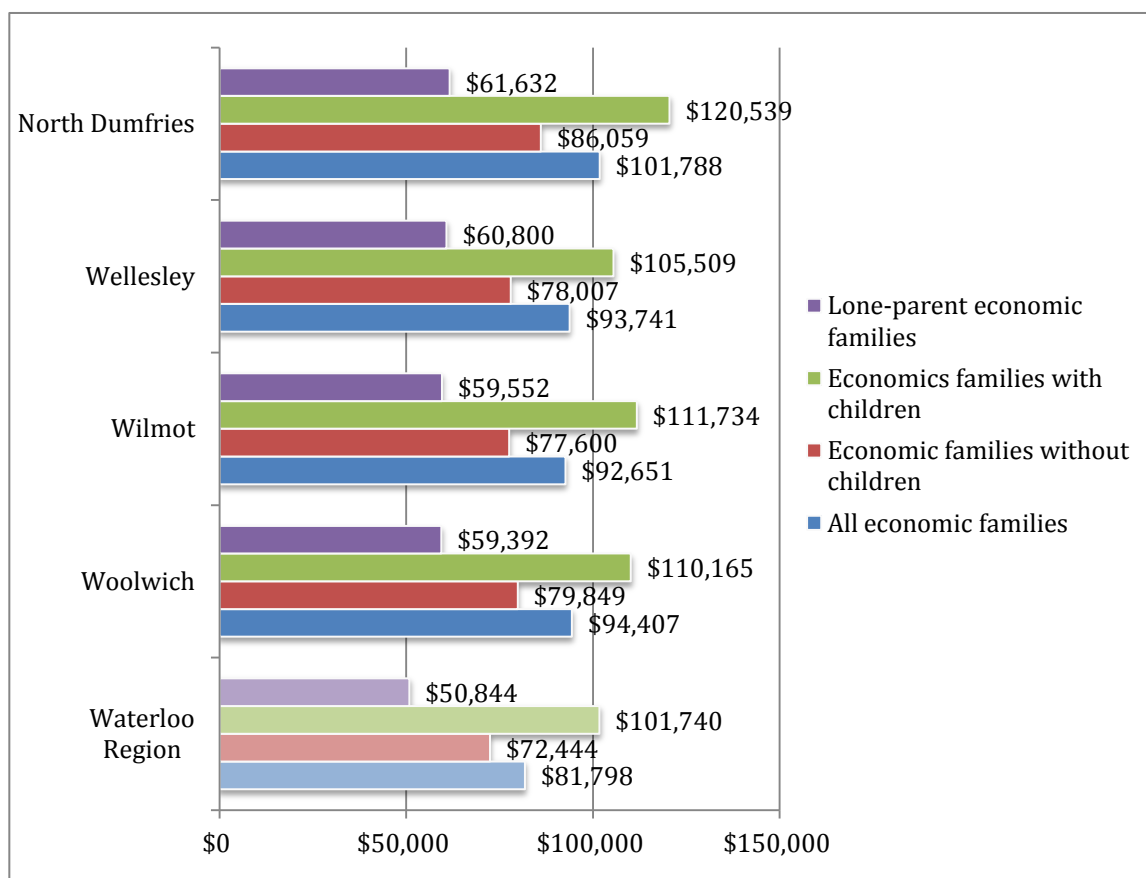
## Household Income

After-tax income is a measure of total income minus federal and provincial income taxes.

According to Statistics Canada, an economic family refers to a group of two or more persons who live in the same dwelling and are related to each other by blood, marriage, common-law or adoption.

The median after-tax income of economic families in Canada in 2015 was \$76,372, the median for couple-with-children families was \$96,608, the median for couple-only families was \$68,309 and the median for lone-parent families was \$48,856

### Median After-Tax Income by Family Type



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- The median family income was the highest for couple-with-children families in all cases
- The median income in all family types is higher in the four townships when compared to the region
- In all family categories, North Dumfries had the highest median income in the region

## Low Income Based on the LIM-AT

The Low-income measure, after tax, refers to a fixed percentage (50%) of median adjusted after-tax income of private households. The household after-tax income is adjusted by an equivalence scale to take economies of scale into account. This adjustment for different household sizes reflects the fact that a household's needs increase, but at a decreasing rate, as the number of members increases.

When the unadjusted after-tax income of household pertaining to a person falls below the threshold applicable to the person based on household size, the person is considered to be in low income according to LIM-AT. Since the LIM-AT threshold and household income are unique within each household, low-income status based on LIM-AT can also be reported for households.

### Prevalence of Low Income Based on LIM-AT – Age Breakdown



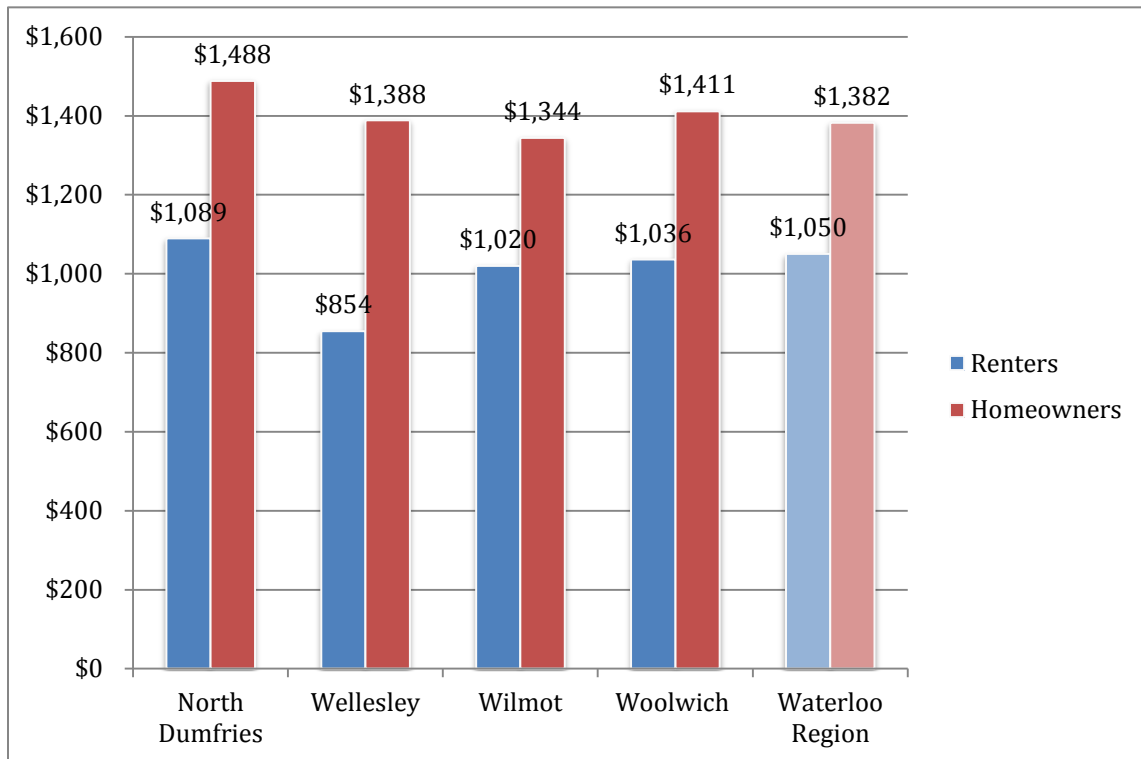
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- In North Dumfries, 4.2% of the population, or 420 people, live in poverty. Of these people living in poverty, 85 are under the age of 18.
- In Wellesley, 11.2% of the community live in poverty, which translates to 1265 people. 555 people living in poverty are under the age of 18
- 5.3% of the population of Wilmot live in impoverished conditions, which equals to 1,075 people, 315 of which are children under the age of 18.

- In Woolwich, 7.2% of the community, or 1,765 people, live in poverty. 600 of these people are under the age of 18.
- Although these numbers are not large, they represent the lives of real children who are living in poverty
- The province of Ontario had a higher percentage (18.4%) of children under the age of 18 living in poverty compared to all the townships

## Home Affordability

### Average Monthly Cost of Dwelling in the Townships

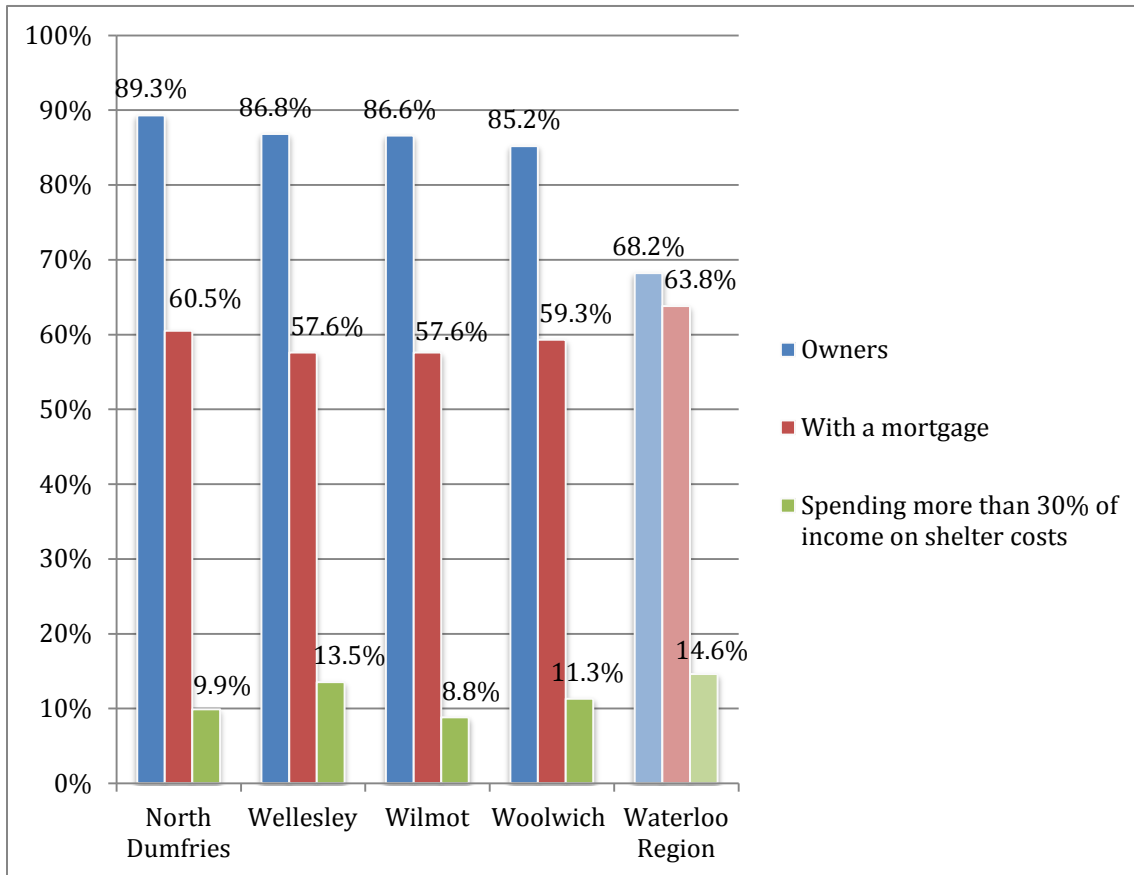


Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- North Dumfries had the highest average monthly cost for owned dwellings (\$1,488) when compared to the other townships, the region, the province and the country
- The average monthly cost of rented dwellings in Woolwich (\$1,036) and North Dumfries (\$1,089) were higher than the national average (\$1,002)
- The average monthly cost of owned dwellings in the four townships were higher than the national average (\$1,313)

To be considered affordable, a household should spend no more than 30% of its income on housing costs.

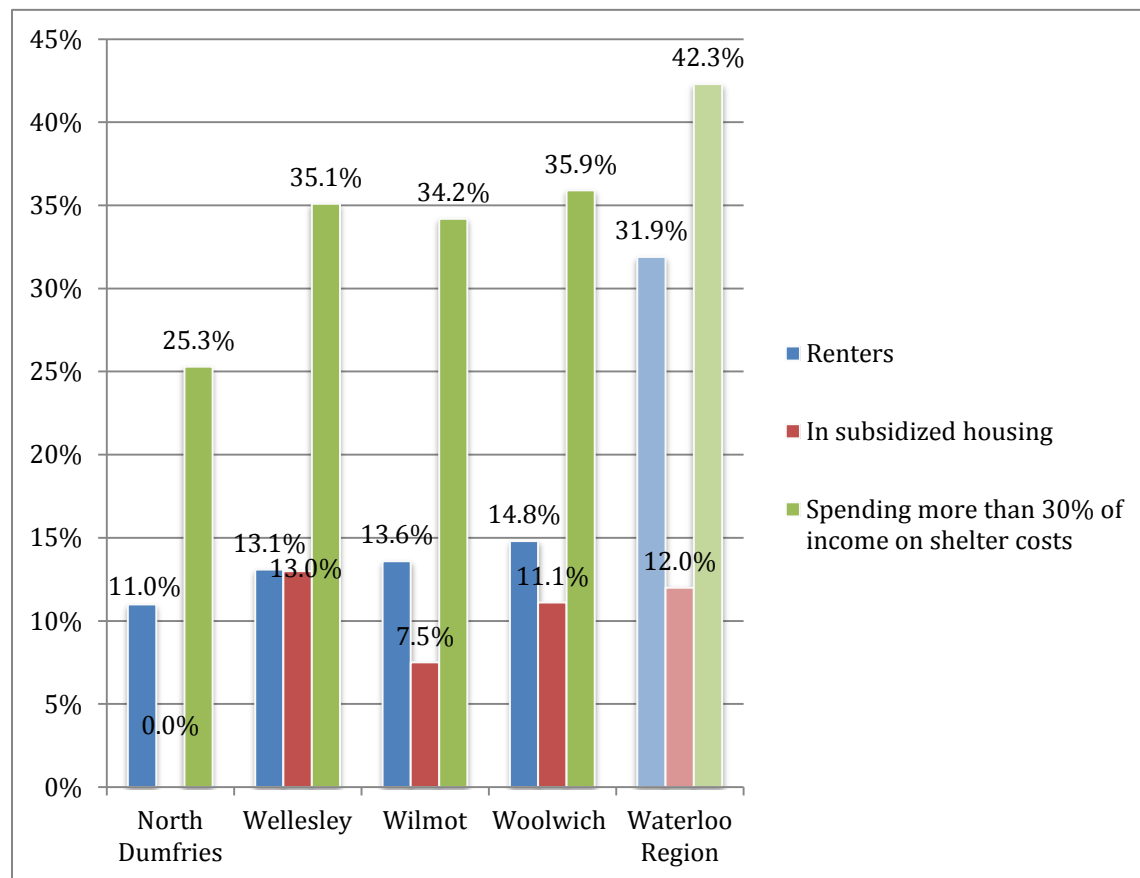
### Home Ownership and Affordability



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- All four townships had a higher rate of homeowners when compared to the region, however, they had fewer people with a mortgage and fewer people spending more than 30% on their income on shelter costs

## Rental Housing and Affordability



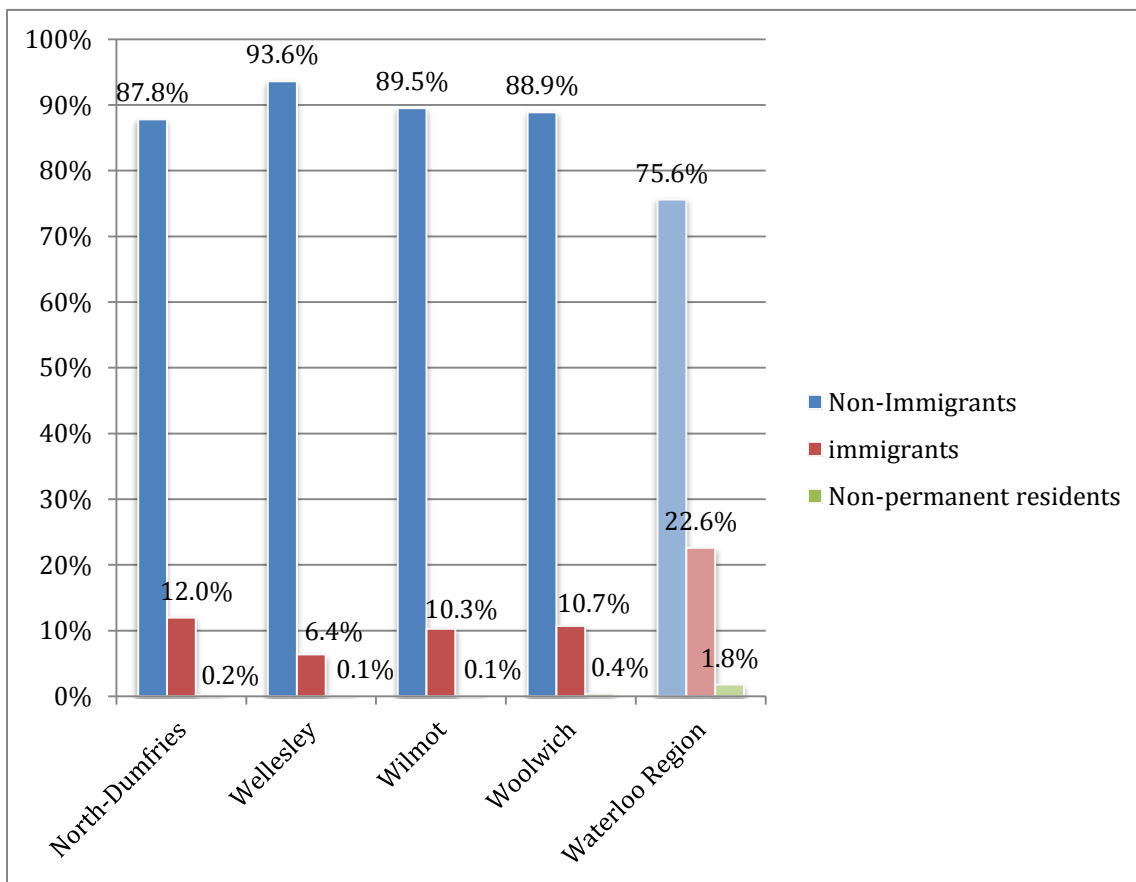
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- The region as a whole had a higher percentage of renters and renters spending more than 30% of their income on shelter costs when compared to the townships
- Significantly more renters than homeowners were unable to afford their rental unit and spent more than 30% of their income on housing costs. As a result, it is more challenging for renters who spend more than 30% of their income on shelter to save money to eventually own a home.

## Immigrant Population

Waterloo Region, which includes the four townships, has been an attractive destination for immigrants from all over the world. People can choose to live in a mid-sized city or in the countryside. The region is just an hour's drive from Toronto, and has a number of post-secondary institutions and a variety of sectors from manufacturing to high-tech industries.

### Immigration Status - 2016



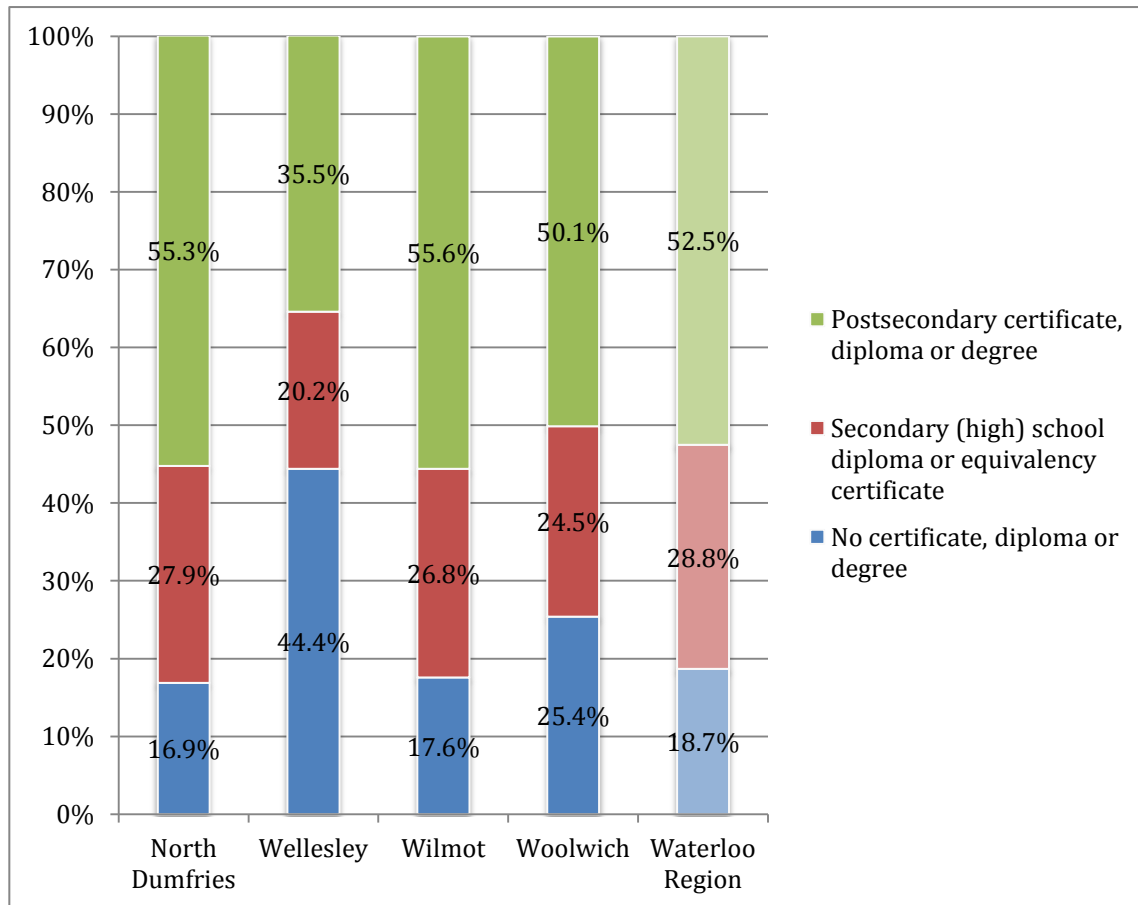
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- Ontario has the highest rate of immigrant population (29.1%)
- Ontario has more than double the rate of immigrations when compared to the four townships
- Waterloo region immigrant population (22.6%) is slightly higher than the national average of 21.9%



## Education Levels

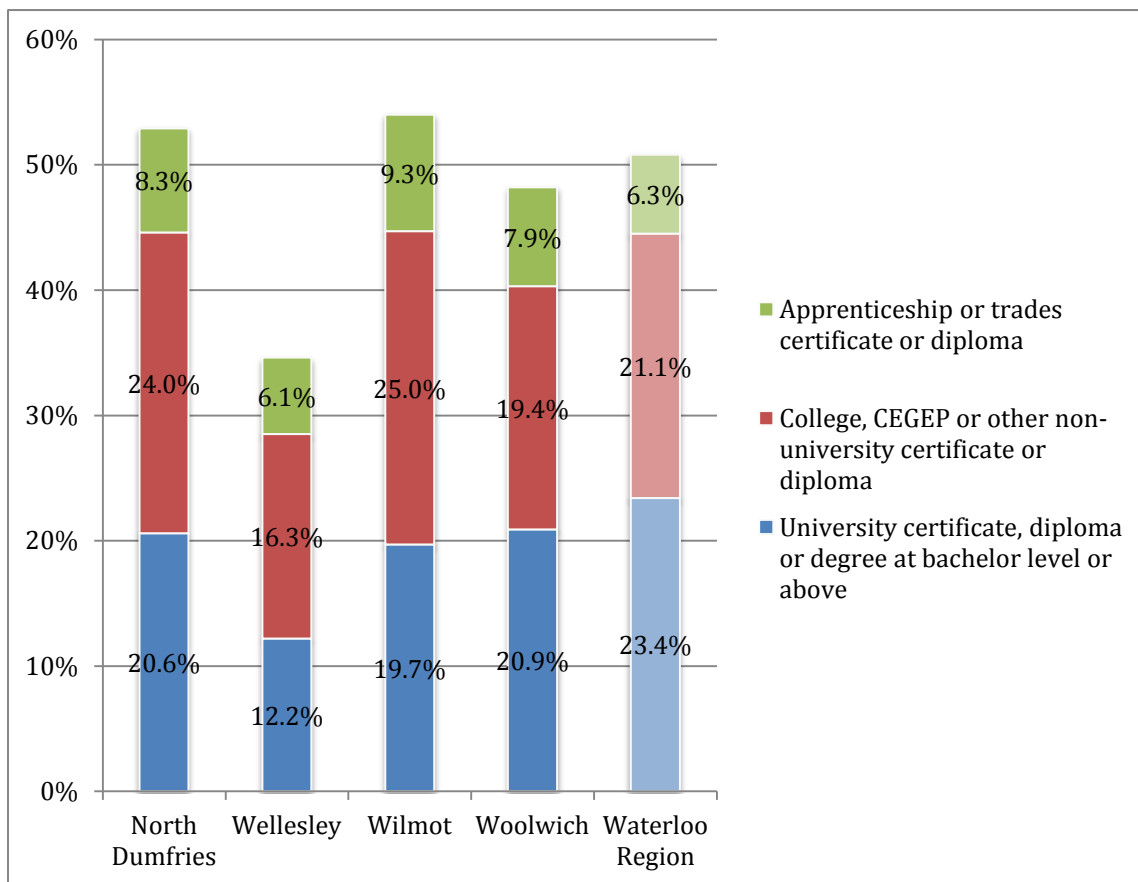
### Level of Education in the Townships, Population Aged 15+



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, 44.4% of the population in Wellesley aged 15+ had no certificate, degree or diploma. This is 26.9% higher than the Ontario provincial rate of 17.5%.
- In 2016, 55.6% of the population in Wilmot aged 15+ had a postsecondary certificate, diploma or degree. This is 3.1% more than the regional rate of 52.5%.
- The provincial rate of individuals in Ontario aged 15+ with high school diplomas or equivalent is 27.4%.
- The level of education in the townships has remained fairly consistent since the last census

## Breakdown of Post-Secondary Education in the Townships – Students 15+



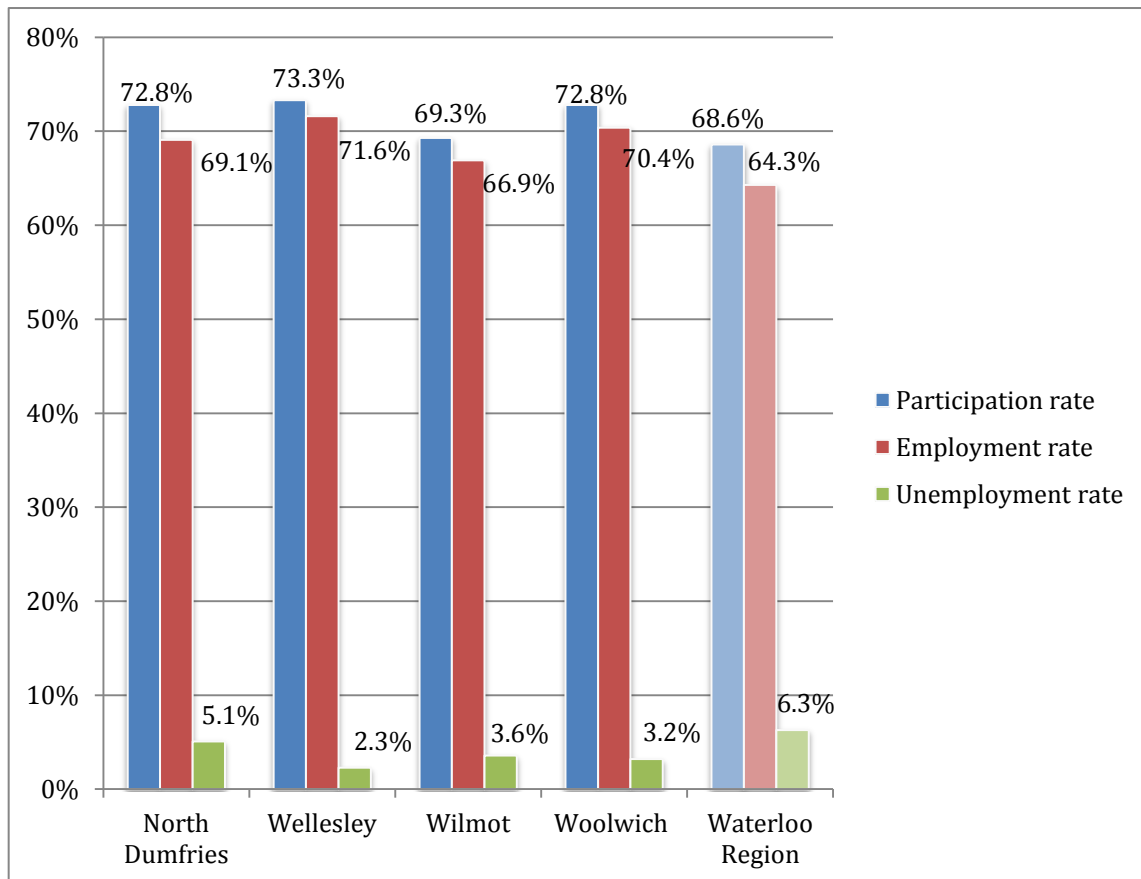
Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- In 2016, 12.2% of the Wellesley population had a university certificate, diploma or degree, which is 13.8% less than the provincial rate (26%)
- Of those aged 15+ in Wellesley, 16.3% have a college diploma, which is 3.8% less than the provincial rate (20.1%)
- Woolwich is the only townships that had a higher percentage of people who graduated from university than graduated from a college program

## Labour Force Participation

The labour force participation rate refers to the proportion of individuals of working age that are currently employed or seeking employment.

### Labour Force Participation Rates – 2016



Source: Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population

- All of the four townships have a lower unemployment rate than the provincial average (7.4%) and the national average (7.7%)
- All of the four townships have a higher participation rate than the provincial average (64.7%) and national average (65.2%)

## SECTION B: COMMUNITY WELLBEING

The wellbeing of youth and young adults was reported using the 6 shared goals of the Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region. These 6 areas of health and wellbeing are supported by the many stakeholders who work together to improve the wellbeing of children and youth living in Waterloo Region. The shared goals include:

1. Feeling valued and heard
2. Are safe and supported
3. Physical health
4. Mental health
5. Are lifelong learners
6. See a positive future for themselves

This section of the report will provide both survey data results and focus group and key informant comments that relate to each of these goals.

### 1.0 FEELING VALUED AND HEARD

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The Canadian Institute of Health Information identified that supportive relationships in the family as well as feelings of connectedness to school, community and peers are related to positive health outcomes and healthy youth development. In addition, these relationships may protect against potentially risky behavior and promote healthy behaviours. (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2005) Having a positive sense of belonging and actively participating in the community are two important factors related to feeling valued and heard.

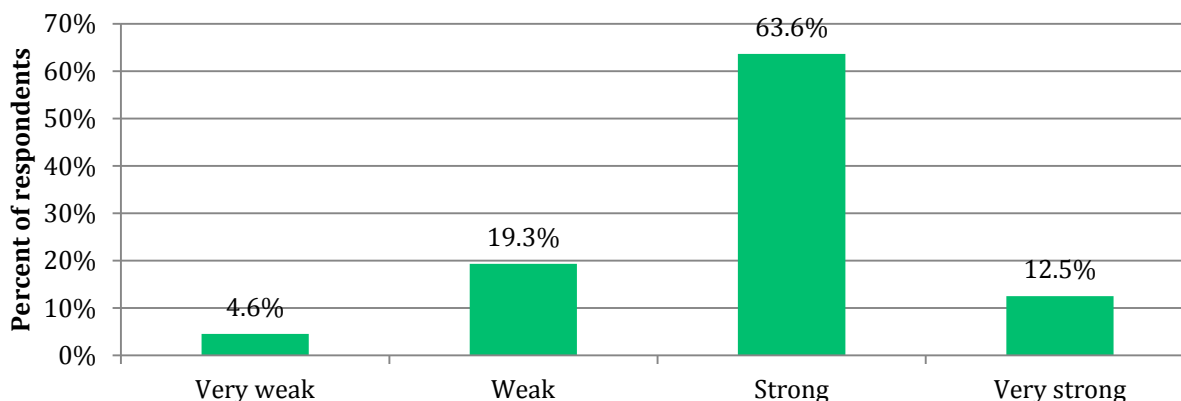
<b>Sense of belonging to their local community.</b>	Rural townships, Youth 12-19	72.9%
	Ontario, Youth 12-19 <sup>1</sup>	78.7%
	WCHC Wellbeing Assessment 2014 (all ages)	74%
	Waterloo Region Wellbeing 2014 (all ages)	55%

Respondents of the youth and young adult wellbeing survey reported a high sense of belonging to their community with a combined rate of 76.14%. The rate was slightly higher among young adults compared to youth. This rate is slightly lower than the Ontario rate based on responses to the Canadian Community Health Survey in 2014. When compared to rates in the WCHC Wellbeing Assessment, youth and young adults report lower rates of belonging compared to the general adult population living in Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot Townships but higher rates compared to the Region of Waterloo.

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<sup>1</sup> Stepping Up Report, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>

## How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?



### Focus Group and Key Informant

#### Comments and Discussion Highlights

##### Youth 12-19

- Youth reported a strong sense of belonging in most cases although there was some who felt less included. One youth reported *“I grew up in a city but moved to North Dumfries. I noticed a difference here; I’m a bit closer with everyone.”* While other youth had a different experience reporting *“My family lives in the middle of nowhere and we moved from Stratford so we’re not that well connected. Moving was a personal choice but now we aren’t well connected here but have a lot of friends in Stratford”* and *“It was harder to make friends when I moved in because everyone was already friends”*. Another youth noted that there were mostly young families in her neighbourhood and so it was hard for her parents to find common interests to make friends with new neighbours.
- Youth reported differing experience integrating into school. One youth who moved when she was 7 reported having no difficulties making new friends while another youth who moved at 10 years found school to have cliques and it was very difficult to integrate. Both youth reported that being a French immersion student separated them from the rest of the school community and it was challenging to feel a part of the broader school community. Finally, youth reported going through school with the same peers and many from elementary school. They saw this as an asset of rural communities but recognized the challenges for newcomers or those who are not welcomed into the social circles.
- When asked about youth’s desire to remain or return to the rural community, again there was a mixed response. Some reported *“After high school I don’t want to stay here because it is boring. “It’s always the same over and over again!”* Another youth reported *“I want to stay at home after high school, I don’t feel like I’m ready to leave the house yet.”*
- Overall, the participants valued the small and connected communities and support they felt in their community, family and friend groups. They also recognized the challenges of close knit communities especially for newcomers.

## Young Adults 20-29

- Young adults commented on how well they know their neighbours and that in a small town people are more welcoming. They acknowledged that there are factors that affect sense of belonging including personality traits and common interests. They said that “word gets around easier” in a rural community.
- The majority of participants agreed that by living in rural townships you are more likely to have a sense of belonging based upon the lack of anonymity that happens by living somewhere with a smaller population. To add to the opinion they stated that by having only two large grocery stores in Wilmot Township it brings people from Baden, New Hamburg, St. Agatha, etc. to them and you are constantly seeing the same people and becoming familiar with them.
- There are a large amount of family owned farms they are passed down through the generations a lot of time which causes families to settle in the community and make roots. By having families grow up here through multiple generations it is giving children and youth chances to grow up with their friends from a young age until they are starting their own lives.
- The high sense of belonging will never go away because it is part of the culture of a rural community and that it is a constant state of having connections in the community. Adding onto that point another participant stated that by having traditional festivals (ex. Mennonite relief sale, Fall Fair, ABC Festival) it helps bring the community together and helps make connections.

### *HAVING A VOICE AND OPPORTUNITY TO CONTRIBUTE*

<b>Volunteerism</b>	Rural youth and young adults who volunteered within the past 12 months	81%
	Ontario youth who volunteered <sup>2</sup>	69.3%

A large majority of youth and young adults report participating in the community. One way that youth participate in their community is through volunteering. Respondents reported a higher level of volunteering with 81% of respondents reported volunteering for a community organization or group within the past 12 months. The rate for youth 12-18 was higher at 84.1% compared to young adults. This rate of youth volunteerism compares with a rate of 69.3% of youth in Ontario that reported volunteering. On average rural youth and young adults reported volunteering an average of 85 hours in the past year.

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<sup>2</sup> Stepping Up Report, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>

## Focus Group and Key Informant

### Comments and Discussion Highlights

#### Youth 12-19

- If you know the people pretty well who are on the council then it's definitely easier and your opinion has a bit more value than if you wouldn't know them.
- I don't really think that councillors really care what 17 year olds have to say. I don't really think our local government gives us opportunities to express ourselves.
- You're more worried about the people who can vote, they wouldn't care about 17 year olds but now I'm of legal age to vote so shouldn't care about what I have to say?
- I think we need an older messenger to pass on the word for us, I don't think I'd be taken as seriously as an older person.
- Youth felt that they have more opportunities for involvement because of the close connections within the community.

#### Young Adults 20-29

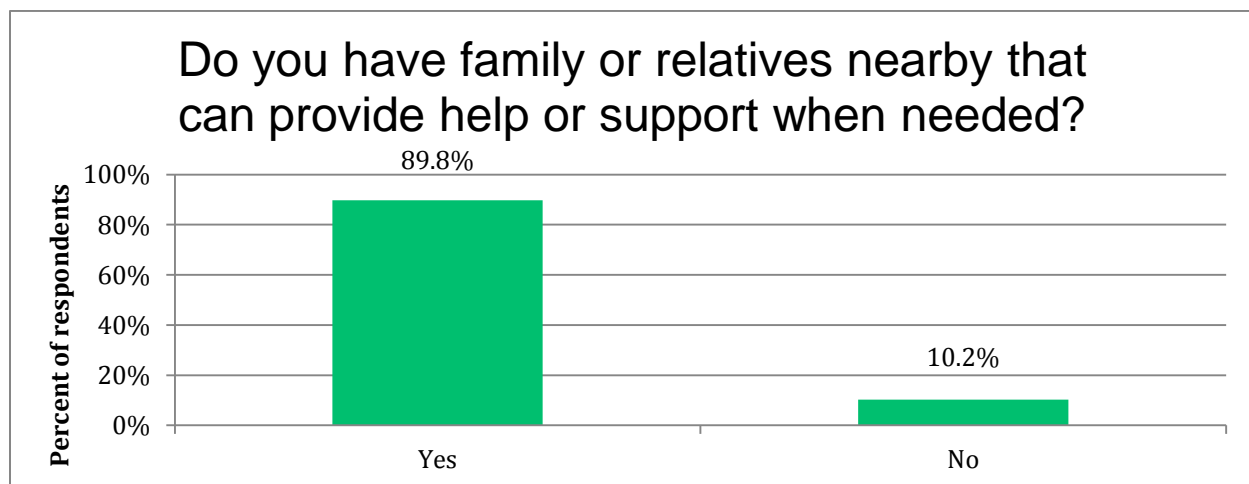
- There are opportunities to be included in decision making if you are willing to put yourself out there.
- There are opportunities to be on the committees but the participants do not participate on a committee. One participant previously sat on a committee in the community and said that while she was encouraged to join the older members were not accepting of her opinions. The group felt that this was because no one wanted to break tradition and because of that they ended being more close-minded to the opinions of youth and young adults in the community. The participants also agreed that a lot of people in the community have a fear of change when it comes to new or younger opinions. A young adult commented: "Life is change. It is easy as humans to get caught up in ourselves."
- The Ayr Moms Support Group noted that everyone helps and they have a Facebook group.
- The participants stated that there are numerous opportunities in the community to volunteer and they feel encouraged to go and volunteer with a number of places. However a couple felt that it is hard to volunteer due to their lives being at a point of change (Ex. School, moving) and that they feel like there is a catch 22 where they want to volunteer but have little to no time to do so.
- People's priorities have changed from job first and family second it has flipped to family being first and job/volunteering coming second. This has caused people to want to participate in events or festivals but do not want to take the time being a part of a committee in charge of running them.
- Due to the rising cost of post-secondary education the participants agreed that the majority of their free time was spent working trying to save money for their school fees and they had little to no time left to volunteer.

## 2.0 Are safe and supported

### 2.1 Being connected to a support system

Average number of people in your community do you know well enough to ask for a favour?	Waterloo Region youth and young adults	15.5
	WR CIW survey <sup>3</sup>	4
	Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot Wellbeing Survey <sup>4</sup>	19

Respondents had reported living in the community for an average of 14 years with this number being slightly higher in Woolwich Township (17.6) compared to North Dumfries (16), Wilmot (14.3) and Wellesley (11.3). When asked about support in the community a large majority of respondents had family or friends who could provide support as needed (85.6%) however, 14.4% responded that they did not have support from family or friends. This rate was slightly high for youth as compared to young adults.



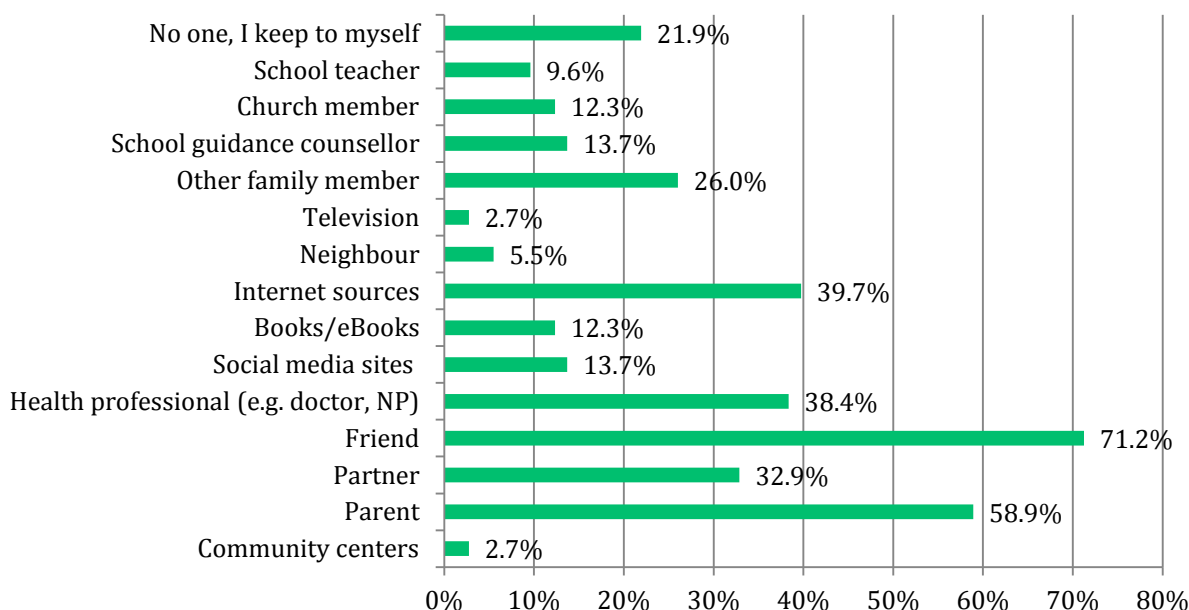
When asked about sources of support to discuss difficulties or health issues a large majority would access a friend as the first source of support (71%) followed by a parent (59%) and then would turn to the internet (40%).

<sup>3</sup> Wellbeing Assessment, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich Townships 2014, Woolwich Community Health Centre.

<sup>4</sup> Wellbeing Assessment, Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich Townships 2014, Woolwich Community Health Centre.



## Sources of support if having difficulties or have questions about my health



### 2.2 FEEL SAFE AND HAVE BASIC NEEDS MET

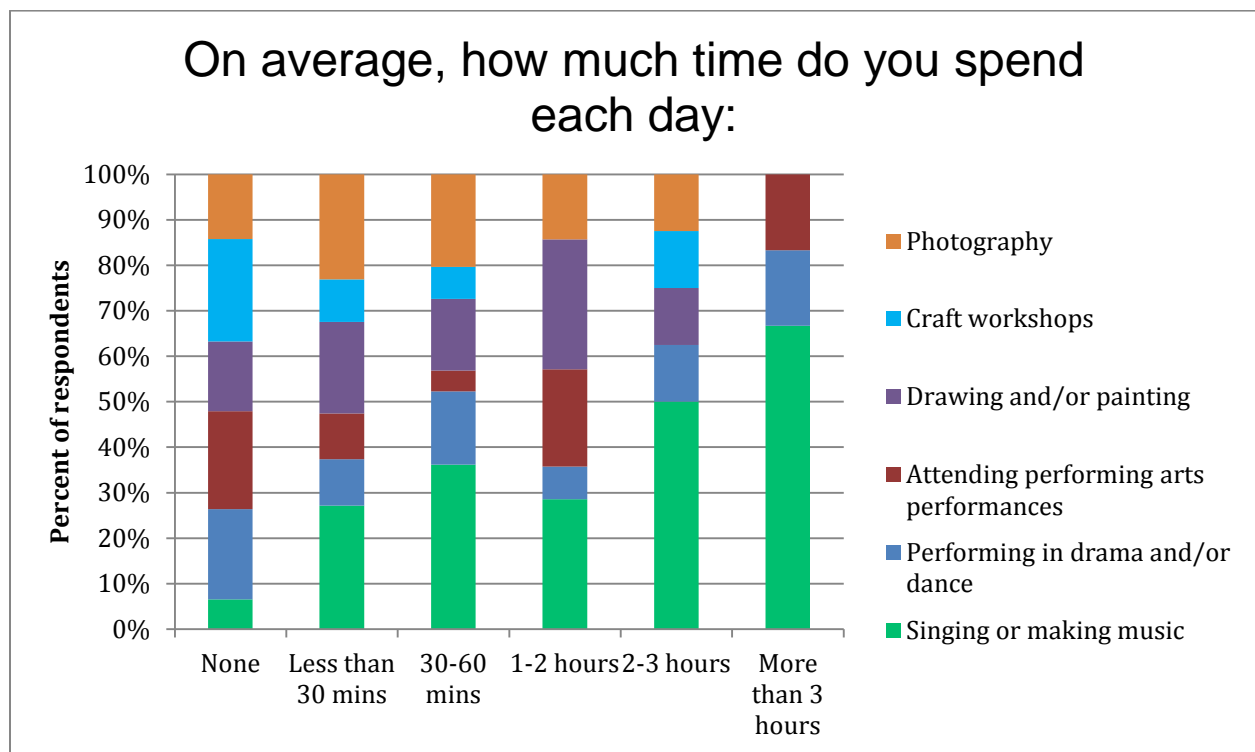
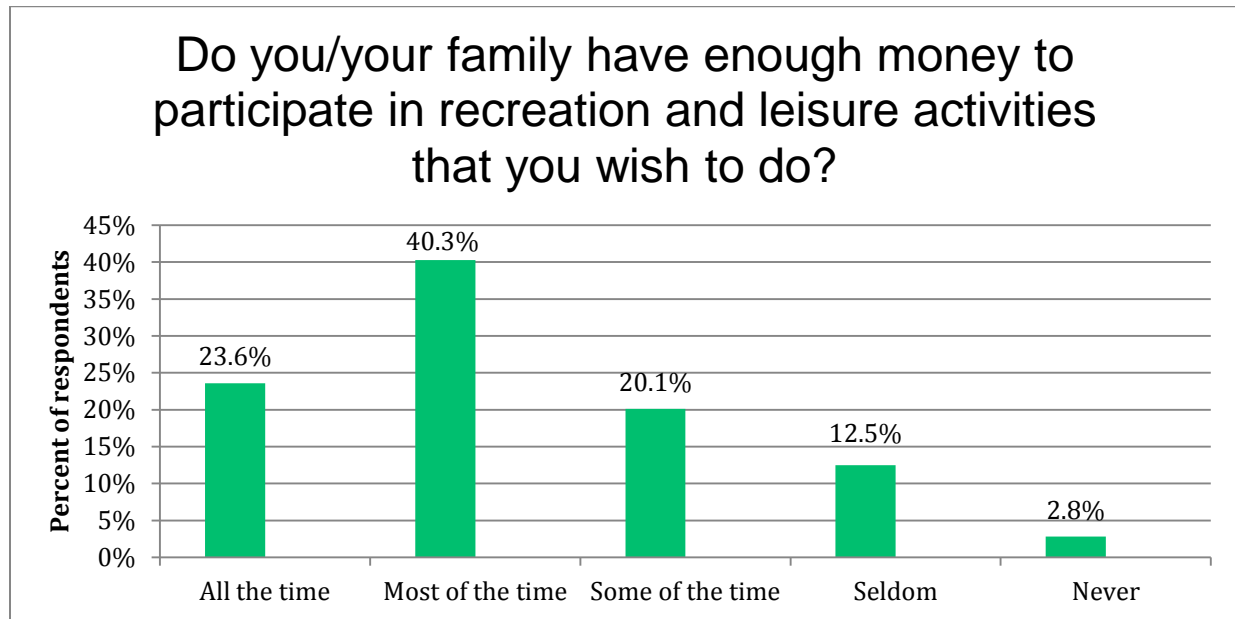
Children living in low income households	Ontario <sup>5</sup>	14%
	Waterloo Region <sup>6</sup>	7.8%

The rural townships have a higher household income compared with Waterloo Region. Although average incomes are higher there are families who struggle to meet their family's basic needs. These families might be more invisible in a rural community and may have greater barriers in accessing supports for their families such as subsidized housing, food support etc. When families struggle with income they often are not able to afford recreation and leisure activities. These activities are important for the healthy development of youth and young adults (and their children). Approximately 15% of respondents reported that their families are seldom or never able to afford recreation and leisure activities. Additionally, 36% of families have reported struggling to pay their bills at some point in the past year. This is important to not overlook as services are provided in rural communities. Recreation subsidies and support from Rural

<sup>5</sup> Stepping Up Report, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Region of Waterloo Children's Planning Table and Wellbeing WR Presentation, January 2018.

Family Outreach Workers are important services to help bridge this gap and enable all families to have access to recreation and leisure.



### Focus Group and Key Informant

#### Comments and Discussion Highlights

##### Youth 12-19

- Youth reported that they could ask family and friends for a favour. One youth reported “*in rural community family stays close. It is helpful and you see your family more often*”.

### Focus Group and Key Informant

#### Comments and Discussion Highlights

##### Young Adults 20-29

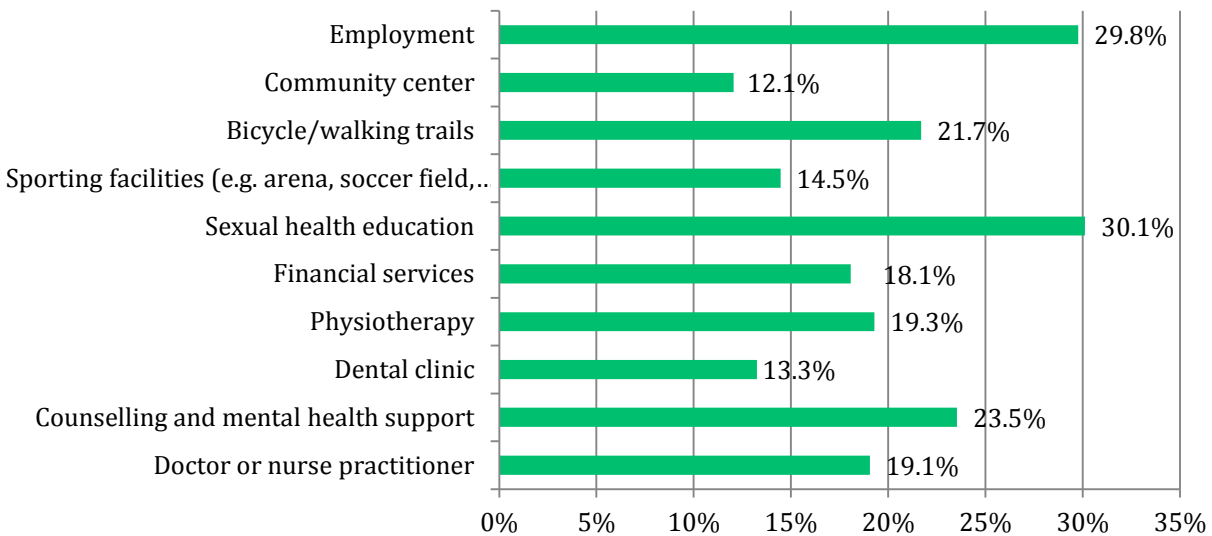
- Young adults reported having some challenges to have enough resources and time. They discussed that raising children takes a lot of time and then have little time to get to the gym. They also reported that many struggle to pay bills. They note that food prices have gone up and commuting requires money for gas.
- Many discussed the lack of knowledge on how to manage money, buy a house, pay bills, pay income taxes etc. and that this should be taught in high school. They saw this as an essential skill to provide for their families.
- Finally it was discussed that if youth can stay at home with your parents and save money this is an advantage so that you can get an education and save for your future. They noted that this was not cool years ago to live with your parents so you moved out in your late teens and early twenties but today things are so expensive so it is better to stay at home and save.

## 2.3 ACCESS TO RESOURCES

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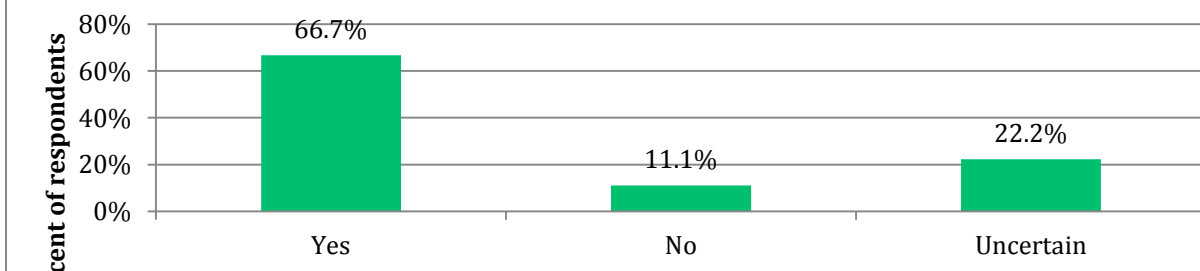
Respondents found that accessing sexual health education, employment services and counseling/mental health services were the most difficult in the rural townships. These services are important within this age group. From focus group discussions the barriers to access involved the rural location and lack of transportation as well as the stigma.

## Percent who experience difficulty accessing the following services



Rural youth and young adults have an additional challenge of accessing services due to the rural location, distance to some services and lack of public transit in all townships. There is a public transit route in both Woolwich and Wilmot Townships which provides greater accessibility. It was found that a public transit system is supported by this population.

## Do you support having a rural bus service within your township?



In addition, youth and young adults may use other forms of transportation to access services such as walking, biking or riding in a horse and buggy. 45.5% of respondents reported that they felt unsafe or somewhat unsafe cycling and 34.7% felt unsafe or somewhat unsafe walking. Since many youth and young adults use these forms of transportation it is important to recognize their concern about safety on rural roads and with population growth and increased use of rural roads this will continue to be an issue in future years.

2.0 Physical health

There are 3 main areas of focus in this goal area of physical health. Physical activity, health eating and sexual health are discussed. Within each of these areas we asked youth about their self reported health, access to services and barriers that prevent them from maintaining their physical health.

The research suggests that youth are at greater risk of adverse health outcomes that can extend into adulthood. High-risk sexual behaviour, psychosocial pressures, drug and alcohol abuse, and poor lifestyle choices place nearly half of all teenagers at moderate-to-high risk for poor health outcomes. (Brindis, Park, Ozer, & Irwin, 2002) We found that youth and young adults identified that they have access to services and most could identify health services available but also identified barriers to accessing those services. Understanding the barriers experienced by youth when accessing health services can help guide the development and implementation of programs and services that promote positive youth development through effective, appropriate, and youth-friendly support. These details are outlined in the focus group summary for physical health and sexual health.

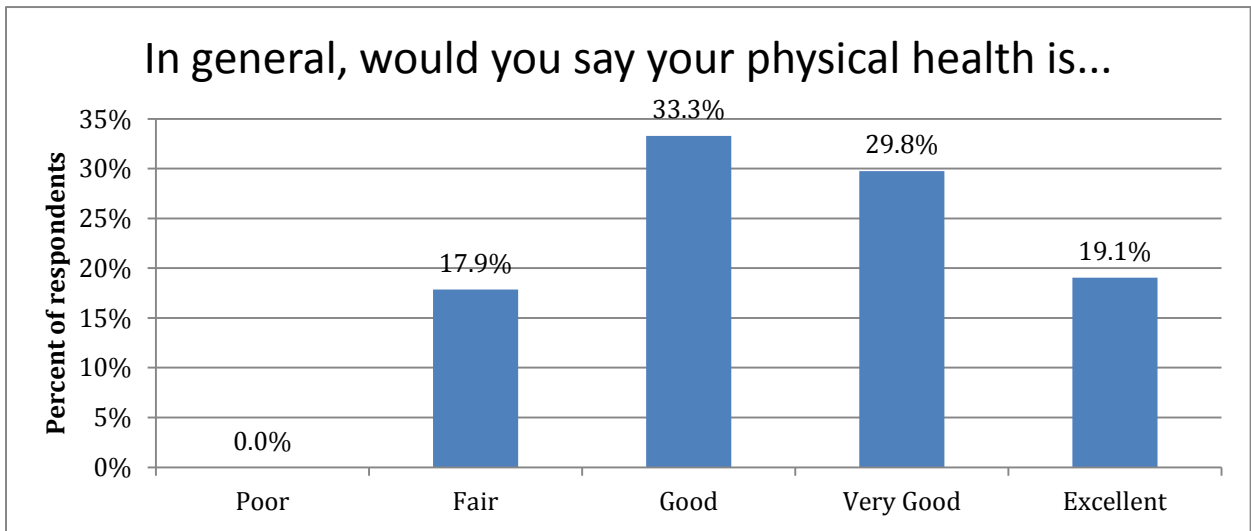
Youth report being slightly more physically active compared to Ontario youth. 73% of youth report exercising 3 or more times per week. This compares with Ontario youth, 68% who report being physically active. 75% of youth report having more than 15 minutes of physical activity each day.

Youth report being physically active	Youth report having more than 15 minutes of physical activity each day.	75%
	Ontario youth who reported that during their leisure time they were active or moderately active. <sup>7</sup>	68%

Among respondents, 52% of youth and 44% of young adults rated their physical health as very good or excellent. Youth and young adults were found to have moderate levels of physical

<sup>7</sup> Stepping Up Report, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>

activity. 68.2% of youth and young adults reported being physically active more than 3 times per week and 71.8% reported having more than 15 minutes of physical activity each day.



Among respondents, 28.6% of youth and young adults report eating 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables daily with an average of 4 servings per day. The rate for youth is slightly lower with an average of 3.5 servings per day. The Canada Food Guide recommends 7-10 servings per day for a healthy diet.

Servings of fruits and vegetables per day	Rural youth and young adults who consume 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables (2017)	28.6%
	Waterloo Region youth who consume 5 or more servings of fruits and vegetables (2013/14)	57.5%
	Ontario youth who consume 5 or more servings (2013/14)	42.6%

## **Focus Group and Key Informant**

### **Comments and Discussion Highlights**

#### **Youth 12-19**

##### **Access to sufficient and nutritious food**

- Youth reported that junk food is cheaper and easier to get. Some discussed the cost of healthy food at the grocery store but in the summer it is easier to eat healthier. One youth commented that Pfennings (local organic farmers) do a garden fresh box and this is helpful.
- Others reported that fruits and vegetables are easy to buy in the rural community but some reported that they don't like them. Conversely, some youth reported that they would choose the healthier option if offered.
- Having time to make healthy snacks is a challenge. Cafeteria at school is not conducive to eating healthy, we are more likely to eat French fries, pizzas
- One student said she is more likely to choose granola bars, chips (preference) over fruit
- Depends on how much parents buy, some ask parents to buy more healthy groceries. Some do their own grocery shopping – do not eat the same as their family (chose to be vegan)
- Healthy food is more expensive (in all areas)
- It takes time to prepare fruits and veggies, granola bars are easier in the morning
- Some food waste in their homes (can't eat fruit/veggies fast enough)

##### **Active living**

- Youth agreed that physical activity benefitted their mental health and there are lots of options to be active. One youth stated that she is an equestrian and it involves a lot of manual labour which helps keep her healthy.
- Youth identified that some sports cost a lot such as hockey.

##### **Access to services**

- They all thought there was a lot of opportunity to improve physical fitness
- Applejack fitness room often used
- Two skate parks – elementary kids felt the high school student took it over and that it was unfair
- A lot of students vaping at the skate park. Lots of loud music. "It's like the high school students are camping there. That's where they live."

## Young Adults 20-29

### Healthy eating

- All participants thought the number should be higher
- Foodland is expensive
- People eat out a lot (junk food)
- Of the four participants they did not eat the daily requirement of fruits and vegetables
- One ate 3 fruits/3 veggies, another lots of fruits, another no fruits or veggies, and the last person ate no fruits/but a few veggies.
- When asked what prevents them from eating more fruits and vegetables they responded: expensive, spoils easily, needs work in preparing, given to children before themselves.
- For the first question regarding what supports the participants' physical and mental health revolved around the statistic of people only having 3-5 servings of fruits and veggies. The participants were shocked to learn how much they should be eating on a daily basis. They felt that while they are eating fruits and veggies they did not remember how much they should be eating or what a serving size is.
- A second point was brought up that while someone is living on their own they may tend to eat a lot healthier options such as salads due to the low cost of majority of the ingredients but when they are at their parents' house they are eating the "meat and potato" meals that are very starch heavy.
- Another participant brought up the point that while some fruits and vegetables are fairly cheap others are very expensive and while we do have a huge access to amazing fresh produce a lot of people do not necessarily have enough money to purchase the amount that is needed for the recommended servings.

### *3.1. Sexual health*

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Youth have unique sexual and reproductive health needs compared to adults. Often, these needs are not adequately addressed, leading to poorer health outcomes. Youth have the highest reported rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Canada (PHAC, 2013). Youth may experience many barriers in accessing sexual health services. These barriers can be experienced prior to accessing services such as not knowing where a clinic is located, having to arrange transportation, not knowing the services offered or hours of operation etc. In addition, youth may experience barriers in entering the clinic if the atmosphere is not youth friendly, they feel they will be labeled or if there are long wait times. There might also be barriers in receiving services



such as judgmental attitudes of providers, risk of being judged, or embarrassed, unfriendly environment where they don't feel comfortable to share their concerns etc.<sup>8</sup>

### **Focus Group and Key Informant**

#### **Comments and Discussion Highlights**

##### **Youth 12-19**

- Some youth reported going to the internet for information but others were cautious about internet sites and wrong information. They also were concerned about the history on the computer.
- Youth reported that they didn't feel comfortable going to teachers for support.
- Youth reported that they didn't know there was a public health nurse or didn't know what her role was.
- One youth reported "I didn't know there was a school nurse". Another reported "the school nurse comes on Tuesday mornings".
- Youth reported that no one goes there. They reported that she gives away bags of condoms. They noted that students play with them and fill them with water. Some grade 9's take the condoms and no one cares but they think they're cool. Some take the condoms and sell them to students.
- Youth reported that the location of the nursing office is not ideal. "It is down a sketchy hallway with a boy's bathroom so if a girl goes down that hallway everyone knows where you're going". Some don't know when she is at the school.
- Youth were unclear about the role of the nurse. It works for you if you have a tummy ache on the day she is there. One youth noted "I bet half the school doesn't know what she's to be used for".
- If there's some way she could get more acquainted with the school students that would be helpful.
- Outside of school many felt comfortable going to their family doctor. One youth identified that their doctor can't tell my mom anything about me. Some youth thought it would be hard to make an appointment with their doctor as their parents would want to know where I am and it would be weird to tell them where I was without an explanation. Some had friends that would help take them to the doctors.
- When asked what would make these services more accessible they thought having doctors who are dedicated to youth. One youth noted "there are a lot of older people in my doctor's office". One youth noted "aren't there actual places that youth can go? We should build one here."

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<sup>8</sup> Bender & Fulbright (2013)

## Young Adults 20-29

- Sexual health education only available in the city and it is too far to go to access need services in rural community.
- One participant found that while cities are very open-minded regarding sexual education rural communities were more likely to be closed off when it comes to sexual and mental health education. This began a discussion on the fact that in high school sex education is not mandatory. One participant brought up the argument that she knew a family that had opted to not have their daughter get the HPV needle during school because they felt that if their daughter received it, it would encourage her to become sexually active or partake in dangerous activities. Another participant then brought forward the same argument regarding birth control which is now used to treat numerous things not just to prevent pregnancy.
- The participants found that by having the gym teachers at the school teach the sex education course there was no standard as to what each student was being taught. One participant mentioned that while she had learned male and female anatomy and had even watched a woman receive a pap smear her brother had only learned how to put on a condom. It seemed the boys were not learning any of the respect portion of the course or any of the mental health. This could simply be fixed by having trained professionals teach the course.
- The discussion then led to the topic of the younger children had their sexual health education course changed yet the older children in middle school and high school still have the old course. Especially in rural townships where it is believed that abstinence is the only option for sex education it would be beneficial to have the education services available yet due to the need for anonymity they would still be more beneficial in the city.
- Finally participants felt that universities and colleges should have mandatory sexual health education courses for students that would cover not only sexual health but also mental health. They felt that this would be extremely beneficial to the student population.

3.0 Mental health

Waterloo Region is not immune to the mental health challenges facing youth. Waterloo Region youth aged 15 to 19 years were significantly more likely than the overall Ontario population to report attempting suicide within the past year (1.2 versus 0.3 per cent) (Region of Waterloo Public Health, 2011b). Intentional self harm is the leading cause of death and injury-related hospitalization among youth aged 15-24 (Waterloo Region Public Health, 2011). In 2013, Waterloo Regional Police Service responded to 1,214 attempted suicides, a 12% increase from 2011 (Outhit, 2015). Between 2008 and 2013, there was a 57% increase in suicides by population in Waterloo Region, compared to a provincial increase of 14% (Outhit, 2015). Among students in grades 7-12 attending schools in the Waterloo-Welling Local Health Integration Network:

- 28.3% report psychological distress;
- 22.2% have visited a mental health professional;
- 26.3% report being bullied; and
- 31.5% report medical use of opioid pain relievers (Waterloo Region Public Health, 2011)

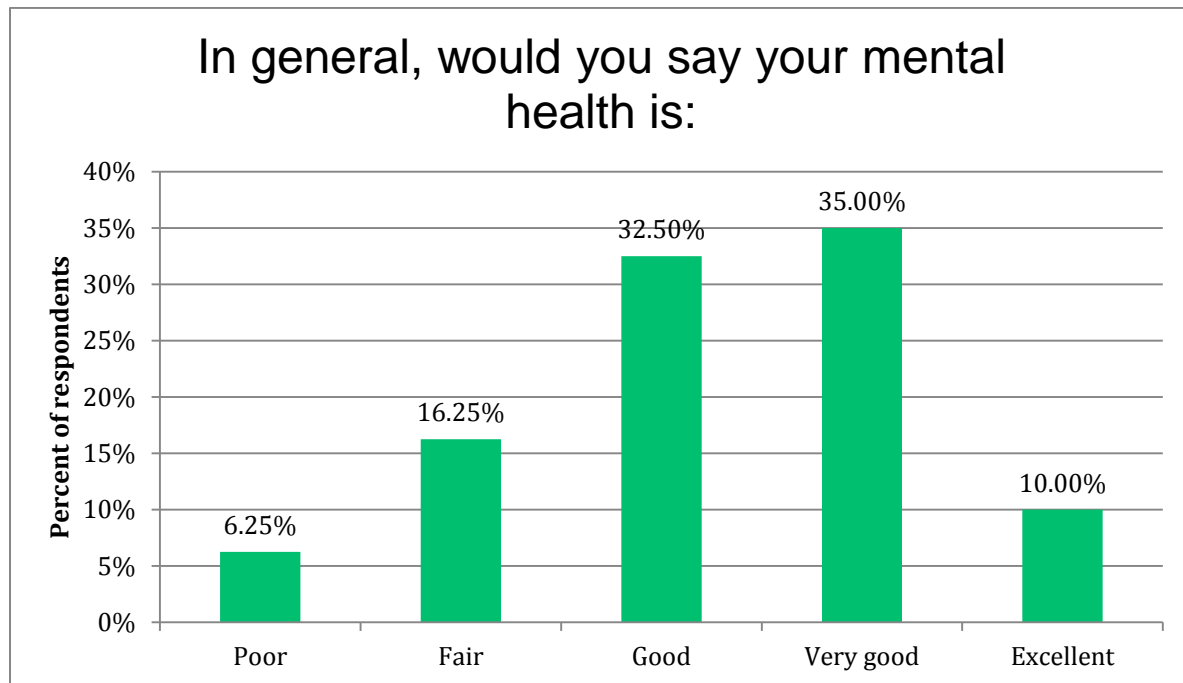
Youth residing in the Townships of Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich believe the following factors are contributors to self-harm: home life; poor relationships with parents; bullying; pressure to do well; boredom; low self-esteem and poor body image (WCHC, 2010). Youth and health care providers expressed concerns related to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia (WCHC, 2010). Youth residing in the Townships of Wellesley, Wilmot, and Woolwich report they felt stress associated with school and expectations, and LBGTQ youth may experience stress if they are not accepted in their community (Woolwich Community Health Centre, 2014). Furthermore, youth perceive a general lack of social inclusion due to a negative perception of youth in the community, and report decreased connections secondary to a lack of available programs and services (Woolwich Community Health Centre, 2014).

Rates of psychological distress were reported to be similar to rates in Ontario. While these rates are similar to provincial rates they also represent more than one third of youth.

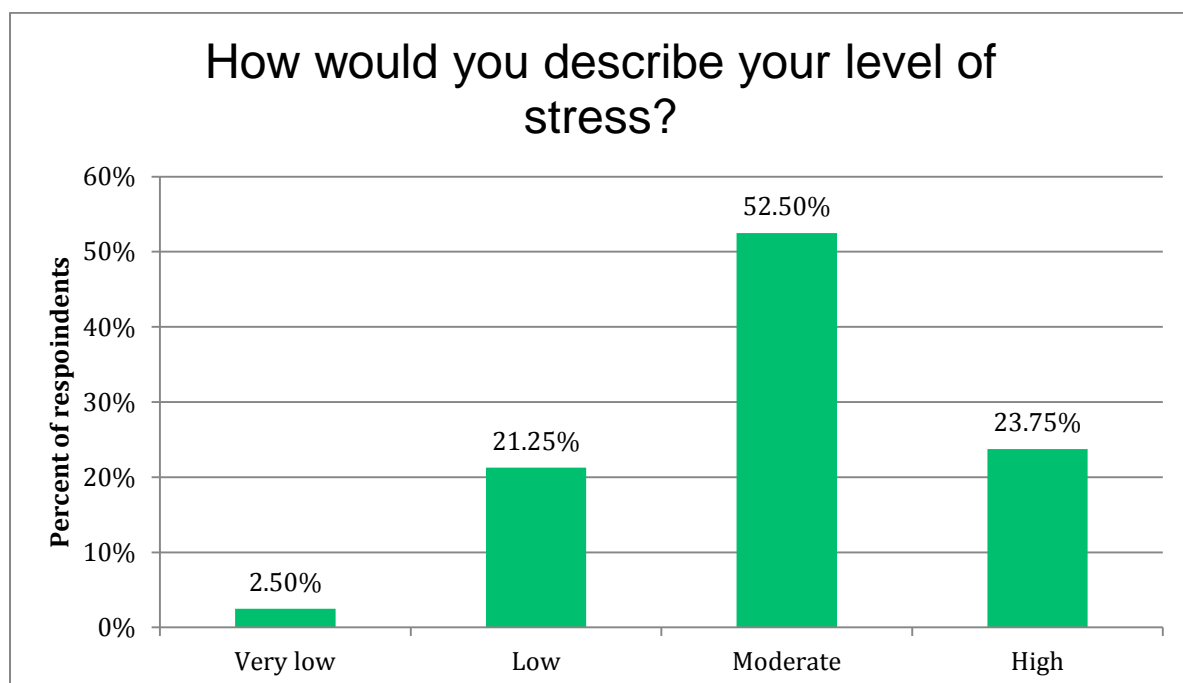
Percentage of youth who report elevated psychological distress including depression or anxiety.	Rural Youth 12-19	36%
	Ontario Youth <sup>9</sup>	34%

<sup>9</sup> Stepping Up Report, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2014. Retrieved at: <http://www.children.gov.on.ca/htdocs/English/documents/youthopportunities/steppingup/steppingup.pdf>

Youth and young adults who self reported their mental health as fair or poor represented 22.5% of respondents.



77.3% of your rated their stress level as high or very high.



8.75% of Youth and young adults report that mental health or emotional problem stopped them from doing their work, schooling or other usual activities in the past month. Another concerning result was the number of youth or young adults who had seriously thought about suicide or taking their own life in the past year. 14.1% had responded “yes”. This compares with the Ontario rate of 12.4% among youth 12-19. The rural rate for those 12-19 was 16.3%. When asked about where they find support the most common source was a friend followed closely by parent and then internet sources.

<b>Focus Group and Key Informant</b> <b>Comments and Discussion Highlights</b>	
Youth 12-19	

**Mental health**

- The self-reported rate of poor mental health sounds bad but sounds pretty accurate. (shared the Ontario rate youth rate of very good or excellent mental health).
- Some reported that it depends on the person and whether they have a good support system. Also a youth said that there’s a lot of fluctuation in my mental health”.
- Youth reported that cyber-bullying is something that happens and overall they felt that bullying is on the increase.
- When asked about why mental health is rated lower among rural residents youth responded that there’s a stigma in rural and everyone knows everyone to word spreads faster in rural.
- Increased school work in high school creates stress for youth
- Stress level depends on the time of year. From January to the end of June in Gr. 12 has been very stressful. You have to focus on all sorts of things for the future and then exams.
- Youth reported worrying about spending a lot of money to go to university or college and what would they are not successful.
- Youth reported that mental health problems can keep them from school or work. They said that their mental health can fluctuate depending on the circumstances.
- Some youth report high levels of stress due to high school not being semestered and some could have 8 exams in June. They felt pressures to be accepted to post secondary school and keep up marks. Parents have high expectations that youth felt this, however other youth felt no pressure from parents. They felt that time management is challenging to balance school, sports, jobs and that free time is limited. Most felt that they needed to know as early as grade 9 what their career path is. Most youth talked about the amount of homework and this was sometimes stressful.
- Living in a rural location increases stress because there are fewer jobs and not a lot of

career options, smaller friend group and its hard to leave your friend group after high school.

- Youth discussed bullying and the stress that this causes.
- More broadly, youth talked about societal stressors such as expectations being unrealistic, expectations around dating, wealth and physical appearance. They discussed the use of social media and how this perpetuates these expectations.

#### Mental health supports

- Youth talked about less to do in a rural area and less to keep busy. Cities can be a distraction from your own thoughts.
- Less sense of freedom, and less access to services unless you have a car
- Interfaith counseling was mentioned.
- Lack of bus access limits access to services
- Guidance counselors are too busy and don't feel comfortable talking to them.

#### Young Adults 20-29

- People want to move to rural areas to get away from stress
- Many North Dumfries residents drive to work, some to Toronto
- Lots of pressure (keeping up with the Jones')
- Lots of kids in sports programs; pace is go, go, go.
- Social media has changed the way people communicate; easy to misinterpret communication, people are open to cyber-bullying.
- Why is Mental Health rated as poor....
  - drug use huge problem. People use drugs because of boredom, peer pressure. Drug problem no worse in rural areas.
  - counselling is too expensive no matter what type of counselling addictions or relationship counselling
  - unhealthy relationships affect your mental health self-respect
  - some people born with depression
  - family problems, stress, debt, school all stresses that can lead to depression
- Did anyone access counselling in school setting?
  - never used it even though needed it, too much pride, lack of privacy, didn't know until later that what they were experiencing was anxiety, the stigma attached to mental health- that you feel responsible for your wellbeing and you have failed, too shy embarrassed to talk about it admit it.
- Young adults are stressed about careers, money. The thought of trying to buy a home seems out of reach. Young people have challenges balancing life with school, employment, time with family/friends etc. They worry about getting a reasonably paying job when done school.
- A lot of people, especially young adults, have the expectation put on them that they will have

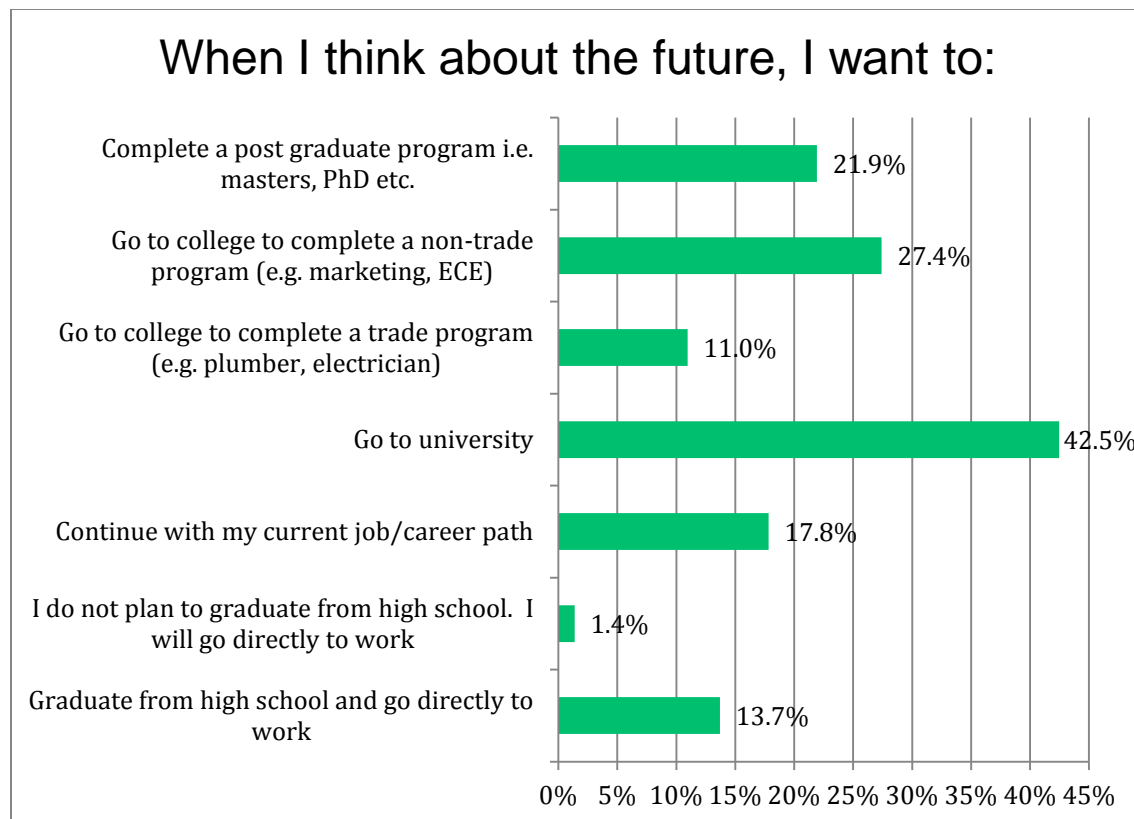
good grades, have a job, spend time with family and friends and while doing all of that you have to be happy while doing everything. The participants felt that this was not something new; stress has been evident in every generation it is just that now we are starting to feel the weight of it. One participant gave the example that her grandparents have been retired for years and are constantly stressed (ex. Having to clean if people are coming over and stressing over it). She felt that we growing up and passing to future generations the stress and pressure we have.

- The participants all agreed that while they may never use trigonometry in life they would have liked to have learned how to do their taxes, how to pay rent, how to perform different interact transactions and many other things. One participant said that Waterloo Oxford recently offered a club where students could learn the life skills they needed and there was a large interest in it.
- Another cause of stress for the participants were teachers and older generations that have the mindset that feelings are not meant to be talked about and that they need to be bottled up. Participants all felt that if teachers checked in on a regular basis regarding the mental health states of their students it would help a lot of people. A second participant continued this conversation by saying that society is getting better at talking (Bell Let's Talk etc.) there is still a long way to go.
- The participants also agreed that while the schools tried to provide resources for students in regards to their mental health they were not actually addressing the problems that were causing the mental health issues. An example that was given was NASCAD in Halifax has a mental health café where students can go for free and talk to a trained professional while enjoying the free café.
- When the conversation was directed back to Wilmot Township the participants all agreed that while we do have counselling services available to us a lot of individual will forgo counselling due to the fact that everybody knows someone in the community and if you do not want people to know you are in counselling then it is nearly impossible to do it within Wilmot.
- Finally the participants agreed that while it is incredibly beneficial for the high school to host Interfaith once a week it is almost redundant because once school breaks for the summer the chance of the youth being able to see a counsellor is slim. Participants felt that I the school kept one room open in the summer for counselling it would benefit the student population greatly.

## 5.0 Are lifelong learners

Completion of postsecondary education	Rural Youth 15-24 who have completed post secondary education	16%
	Ontario youth 15-24 who have completed post secondary education	12.5%

Youth and young adults identified that they want to go to university with a high rate of 42%. Woolwich, Wellesley and Wilmot Townships have experienced a lower rate of residents with a high school diploma or post secondary school diploma/degree as compared to Waterloo Region in the past.





## **Focus Group and Key Informant**

### **Comments and Discussion Highlights**

#### **Youth 12-19**

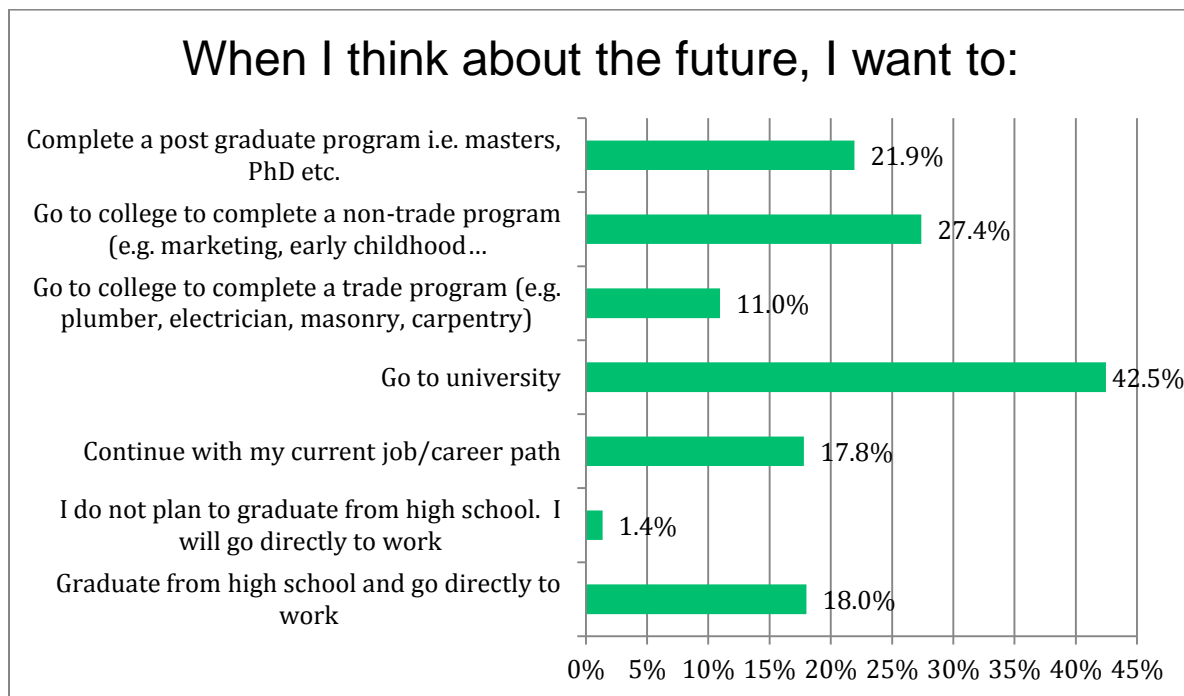
- These participants plan on attending post secondary and have thoughts around what they would study – robotics, computer programming, archeology
- Can get a better job if you go to post-secondary.
- Can make more money in this economy and overpriced houses.
- Money is a barrier to post secondary school attendance, especially if you live on campus. It's more expensive to live on campus than your actual program is.
- If you want to live at home you'd still need a car.
- You need the money to go to university and a lot of people don't have that money so I'm taking a year off. I have to pay for my phone bill and other things I want to do.
- Youth aren't quite sure how to budget.
- If I look at how much I've been paid and how much I've saved, it's very sad.
- And you have to pay the government too!
- I pay motorcycle insurance at \$100 a month. So yesterday I paid my deposit for college and insurance and I had to ask my parents my parents for help which I didn't want to do.
- Hanging out with friends and doing those things adds up. 'Oh, where'd my money go?!'
- What could help youth to become more ready? Having a class to teach you money management. There was a course, Personal Life Management, but it was open level and not U/C so I couldn't take it because it wouldn't count toward my post secondary application.
- The youth had a large discussion about post-secondary education and said that by having a degree they would be able to find better jobs that pay enough money to cover both necessities and wants. However when it came to talking about high school they had very strong opinions on the school choices. Since the youth are currently in French Immersion they would have to be driven into Kitchener-Waterloo to continue on because Waterloo Oxford does not offer it.
- As the discussion continued the youth agreed that more education meant more debt, which in some cases limits the education they are able to receive.
- Farming doesn't require a degree
- Mennonite families, less likely to continue on that path

- “In my family we have all graduated high school but for the longest time only a couple of my cousins and I were able to attend college/university. Now that the bus system has come to the town more of my cousins and my friends have the opportunity to go into Kitchener-Waterloo to pursue their education goals. I know many people who have had the money to pay for tuition but couldn’t afford housing which meant they wouldn’t have a way to attend classes.”
- There are lots of benefits of post secondary education such as increased confidence, benefits of meeting people with similar interest, learning together with others however there are barriers such as the time commitment, child care, transportation, high grades required and costs.
- It would have been helpful to have better information about post secondary programs while in high school. “I didn’t feel informed of what was out there as far as programs and choices of schools”.
- All the participants felt that by living in a rural township they are given career options that do not need a degree especially when it comes to family businesses that have been passed down through the generations. This is beneficial when not everyone is able to access post-secondary due to the lack of finances that they have and the lack of scholarships and awards for a lot of programs.
- Although it is easier to live in a rural township and work without a degree participants felt that they were looked down on which causes a mindset that if they have a disability or struggle with courses or are going into a trade they will not make it in life.
- Participants stated that they knew a lot of people who took a degree course because they felt that they needed it to move forward in life and a lot of university grads are in college courses now because they are unable to find jobs with their degree.
- Finally participants felt that teachers that live locally were more open minded to talking to their students about careers in the trade fields and a few felt that by taking time after high school and then entering into post-secondary it was preparing them more for their future and was taking a lot of stress off of them.
- Participants would like to see resources in the community regarding scholarships and how to find them and apply for them. They also felt that while there are a lot of scholarships for the majority of them you have to either be in every sport you could be or be in a lot of clubs which the majority of the student population does not have time for.
- Finally participants felt that students need to be looked at as a blank space when being considered for school, scholarships and OSAP. They need to not be considered based on their extracurricular or on their parents’ financial status because they may not be getting any help from their parents to pay for school.

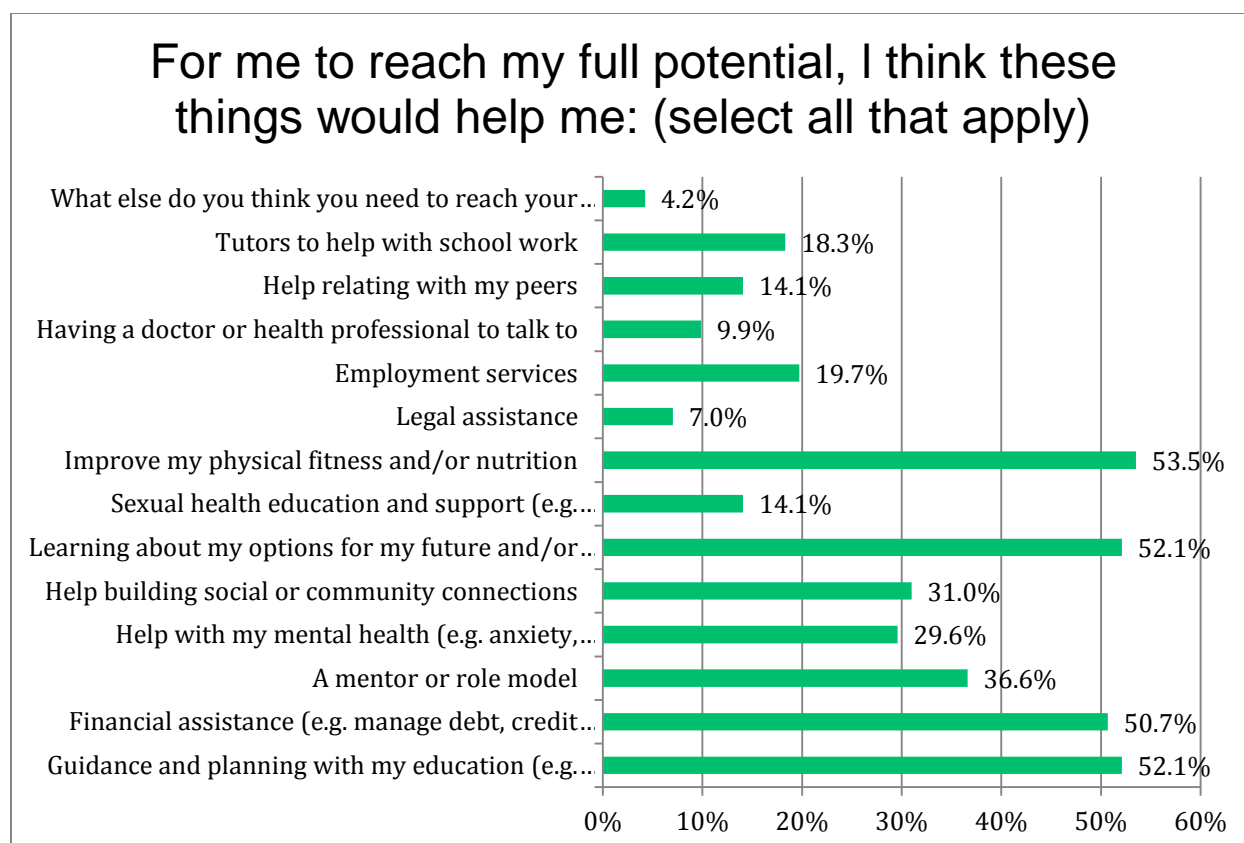
## 6.0 Can see a positive future for themselves

Number of youth without paid work, who are available to work and actively looking for work, 2011	Waterloo Region	18%
	Woolwich Township	3.8%
	Wellesley Township	6.1%
	Wilmot Township	8.3%
	North Dumfries	17.2%

A majority of youth and young adults were positive about their future. A majority want to go to university (42%) followed by going to college (27%) and completing a post graduate program (22%). Only 14% plan to graduate high school and go directly to work while 1% do not plan to graduate from high school.



Youth and young adults rated 4 things that would help them reach their full potential as: improving physical fitness and nutrition (54%), learning about options for my future and guidance and planning for my education (52% respectively) and financial assistance (51%). The lowest rated was legal assistance (7%) and talking to a doctor or health practitioner (10%).



## Focus Group and Key Informant

### Comments and Discussion Highlights

#### Youth 12-19

- Youth feel optimistic about their future in general. Many youth expressed that they are aware of their strengths and weaknesses. Many youth discussed their hopes and dreams for their education and future career. Some were disappointed that their preferred field of work was not supported by their family due to the lack of jobs in that particular job. Some discussed that parents have a lot of influence over future education decisions. Others reported that they are supported to follow their dreams and finding education pathways to reach their career goals.
- Youth talked about the importance of having a mentor and also viewed co-op experiences as very helpful to learn about what they want to do in life.
- When asked what would be supportive to help youth feel like they could reach their full potential they had many different opinions. One said that seeing more woman in leadership roles not only in the community but in the country helps influence her to work harder. The second said that having uniforms at school would help cut down on bullying and stress over a dress code which would give them more time to focus on their work and

not their clothing.

- One youth spoke up and said that she would like to see somewhere local where people can learn how to care for family members who have disabilities or mental illnesses. She then took the conversation further and said she would also like to see courses on how to handle trust funds for the family members.
- Many youth reported that they would like to return to their rural community after school. They were concerned with growth and feel that now it is a nice place to live.
- In conclusion, when asked about what things would help them reach their full potential, financial assistance was definitely in the top
  - Should be easier to get for students going on to further education
  - OSAP isn't fair, the calculation doesn't take into account if parents are not (can't) supporting

#### Young Adults 20-29

- Participants felt that if the careers course in high school was presented in a different way and in a later grade it would help students decide where they want to go in life. They also felt that the cost of education was so high that people are living semester by semester to afford school and sometimes won't know if they can afford to go back until the last possible moment.
- A final point that was discussed was the families in the area that have a "big name" and a lot of status are constantly looking down on others which is causing not only issues between families but can also cause mental health issues. However younger generations are no longer caring who has status in the community and are treating people as equals.

## SECTION C: HIGHLIGHTS AND OBSERVATIONS

1. The rural townships have experienced higher rate of growth from 2011 to 2016 with the exception of Wellesley Township. The rate of growth of the 0-19 year old age group from 2011 to 2016 is significantly higher in the townships with the highest rate of growth in Woolwich Township followed by North Dumfries, Wilmot and Wellesley.
2. There are many positive factors of being a youth or young adult living in the rural townships of Waterloo Region. The rural townships have numerous smaller towns and villages where people know each other and there is a high level of connectedness. Youth are also reporting that they volunteer more than provincial comparators. Young adults report knowing their neighbours. Both age groups commented on the welcoming attitude in small towns and the many events and festivals that bring people together. These results are evidence of a well connected community.
3. While average household income is higher in the townships compared to Waterloo Region, there are also families living below the LICO. This rate is lower than Waterloo Region. Families living with low income face challenges living in a rural location such as transportation costs and difficulty finding affordable rental housing. We noted that while the rate of those living below the LICO, 14% of youth and young adults seldom or never had enough resources to participate in recreation or leisure.
4. Physical health was reported to be very good or excellent by 52% of respondents. We noted that respondents report having more physical activity each day as compared to Ontario youth. However, respondents reported eating fewer fruits and vegetables compared to Waterloo Region youth. When we discussed this issue with youth and young adults the major barriers included cost, access in rural locations and busy lifestyles.
5. Access to sexual health was identified as an issue in most youth focus groups. The stigma of accessing services at school was the greatest barrier as well as some discomfort with accessing the primary health providers.
6. Self rated mental health was rated slightly poorer compared to Ontario rates for psychological distress and seriously thinking about suicide. Youth reported that the contributing factors include cyber-bullying, stress, living in a rural location and societal expectations.

7. While education rate for high school graduation and post secondary school diploma/degree are lower in the townships, we heard from youth and young adults an expectation to go to university (42%), to college (27%) and to complete a post graduate degree (22%). Overall youth and young adults talked about the importance of education and their plans to complete their education. The challenges that were discussed were the financial resources required for post secondary education and receiving guidance to assist in planning.
8. Overall youth and young adults were optimistic about their future. They could identify supports to help them reach their full potential, most valued living in the rural townships and the strong community connections that they experience.

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