

# YOUTH

## Equity & Inclusion Lens Snapshot



# YOUTH

We are current and future leaders and trend makers of tomorrow. We wish to be able to access services and actively participate in decisions that affect us. We are the technological generation.

As such, we are constantly adapting to the ever-changing world around us.

1. WHO WE ARE	3
2. OVERVIEW OF YOUTH IN OTTAWA	4
3. CONTRIBUTIONS WE MAKE	4
4. BARRIERS AND INEQUITIES	4
Multiple Responsibilities	5
Transportation	5
Civic Engagement	5
Safe Places	6
Housing	6
Access to Information	6
Access to Services	7
Employment and Income	7
Support Systems	7
5. WE ENVISION: A YOUTH-FRIENDLY CITY	8
6. COUNCIL MANDATES AND LEGISLATION	9
7. WHAT'S HAPPENING IN OTTAWA	9
8. RELEVANT PRACTICES IN OTHER CITIES	10
9. SOURCES	10
10. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	11

This booklet is one of 11 Snapshots that serve as background information to aid in implementing the Equity and Inclusion Lens. To access them in an electronic version, visit the City of Ottawa Internal Site ([Ozone](#)) or the [Equity and Inclusion Lens webpage](#). Or the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) [Equity and Inclusion webpage](#).



**A City For Everyone  
Une ville pour tous**

# 1. Who We Are

We are current and future leaders and trend setters of tomorrow. We wish to access services and actively participate in the decisions that affect us. We are the technological generation. As such, we are constantly adapting to the ever-changing world around us. We balance a variety of different roles such as: student, sibling, employee, friend, caregiver, volunteer, teammate, and parent. We are part-time workers at retail stores, supermarkets and other minimum wage jobs, or starting careers in other work environments. We are engaged in our communities and active in a variety of sports and extracurricular activities.

The definition of youth is dynamic. Recently, youth have been categorized as being between the ages of 13 and 29. It is important to understand the age range because we have very different needs. Those of us who are 13-18 years old are navigating new schools, new relationships, first jobs, and remain dependent on our caregivers. Those of us who are 18-29 years old are transitioning into adulthood and are facing similar, but also different, barriers in regards to employment, education, a lack of affordable and accessible recreational services and housing.

For all of us, this time period in our lives is tumultuous, as we deal with heightened emotions and finding our own place in society. We have a unique view of the world and our contributions should be recognized. We easily adapt to the world because we are very flexible. Some of us are not self-sufficient and we depend on our parents and care providers. Others are navigating what it means to be independent. Empowerment, support, and an understanding of our development are needed to support our transition into adulthood.

As immigrant youth, we face barriers balancing our distinct cultures and newfound Canadian identity. As LGBTQ youth, we are careful in “coming out” to the public due to fear of alienation from family, friends, schools, and workplaces. As Indigenous youth from First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities, we may feel isolated from our culture, or find strength in reclaiming it. As Francophone youth, we may find it difficult to access an equal number of services in French as offered in English.

## INTERSECTIONALITY: COMPLEX, OVERLAPPING IDENTITIES

Each of us could identify with more than one group. It is this intersection, or crossover of identities of who we are that affects how we experience the city. This is called intersectionality. People’s lives are multi-dimensional and complex. Lived realities are shaped by different factors and social dynamics operating together.

For more info access the [Equity and Inclusion Lens Handbook](#) and [Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide For Municipalities](#).

## 2. Overview of Youth in Ottawa

The role of youth in the labour force, educational institutions, social movements and politics is key for the health of our city. In 2016, there were 991,725 residents in the city of Ottawa, 221,495 of them, or 22%, were youth, ages 13 to 29. Between 2011 and 2016, there was a decline in the number of youth ages 15 to 19, but every other age group of youth saw population increases. Youth, 20-24 years of age, experienced the fastest increase.

Migration, including youth newly arrived in Canada, and Aboriginal youth moving to the city, is credited as the key contributor for this high number of youth in the nation's capital. The increasing number of youth in Ottawa can play an important role in the well being of Ottawa in the face of a growing older population (Social Planning Council of Ottawa 2014).

## 3. Contributions we make

We enrich life in Ottawa by contributing to music, theatre, sports, fashion, and cultural scenes. As students, workers, and volunteers we contribute to Ottawa's economic, political, cultural, and social life. We are employed in jobs that allow us to connect with the community. We volunteer our time to create positive change within our communities.

We set new trends and invent new urban words used around the world. Our technological skills influence the ways in which social media platform services are implemented and used globally to advertise events, programs, and resources. We bring new ideas to issues and can help tackle challenges with creativity.

## 4. Barriers and Inequities

### NEGATIVE IMAGES

Negative stereotypes lead to an unbalanced public perception of the behaviours and attitudes of youth. The majority of youth are responsible citizens. Yet, many are unfairly treated as a result of the pervasive stereotypes that youth are immature and irresponsible. When racial profiling of racialized youth occurs, it contributes to alienation and in some cases, conflict with the law. Young mothers may face discrimination, rejection from family, poverty and a lack of services to help them better their lives. While many Aboriginal youth are successful and active in the community, perceptions of low educational attainment and substance abuse often impede their progress. Muslim youth are increasingly affected by islamophobia and the negative stereotyping of their religion in the media.

## MULTIPLE RESPONSIBILITIES

Youth juggle school, homework, extracurricular activities, employment, volunteer work, family responsibilities and social lives. Coupling school responsibilities such as midterms, exams, papers, and regular assignments with everyday responsibilities and life experiences can be challenging. Youth with their own children must add parenting to these other demands. Balancing these roles often leaves youth stressed and suffering from a lack of sleep, which can be harmful to their health.

Many youths face challenges bridging cultural and language gaps within their families and communities. Immigrant parents may rely on them to translate and interpret documents in addition to basic everyday communication. Indigenous youth who are newly arrived to the city help family members navigate their new cultural environment.

## TRANSPORTATION

Many youth rely heavily on public transportation. Delays or issues accessing public transportation can impact their ability to fulfill their responsibilities and commitments. Bus passes can be expensive (even with a student discount), especially for youth living on low incomes.

A majority of youth do not have a full driver's licence and many do not have access to a vehicle or the means to purchase one. Rural youth are often dependent on their parents for transportation as they have little, if any, access to public transportation. When transit stops are isolated or not well lit, youth travelling at night may find themselves in unsafe situations.

## CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Municipal leaders regularly make decisions, shape policy and take action on issues that directly affect youth. Yet there are few formal outreach strategies to promote the civic engagement of youth in the decisions that affect their lives. Research shows that the inclusion of young people in community decision-making and planning processes helps build stronger communities. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989, states that youth (0-18 years old) have a right to express their views freely and fully participate in all matters that affect them (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 12).

Many cities have adopted youth strategies that include mechanisms for receiving feedback from youth on a range of issues (See Relevant practices in other cities). Many youth are not of voting age and, as a result, their views are not actively sought out in decision-making processes at the community level. This can cause youth to feel as though they are not part of the community.

## SAFE PLACES

Youth need safe places where they can spend time and interact with others, but they often have few places to go. Although youth may face unsafe circumstances and conflict in the home, most are not in a position to find their own place to live. For example, LGBTQ youth who are open about their sexuality may be ostracized at home and school and are at a higher risk of abuse and bullying.

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

## HOUSING

Low-income families are sometimes afforded subsidized housing after waiting long periods for openings. When little or no choice is given in regards to ones living location barriers and inequalities may arise. One of the biggest challenges some youth face is the stigma attached to their neighbourhood and/or their housing situation. Youth can be bullied at school and be labeled as poor. This can have detrimental effects on a youth's social life, their ability to make friends, find employment and on their mental health. Youth emerging into adulthood find it difficult to find appropriate and affordable housing. They are forced to either stay with their families longer than they anticipated or rent a bedroom in a home with roommates. Renting a one-bedroom apartment is difficult when lacking financial security.

## ACCESS TO INFORMATION

There is a wide array of services to assist youth in their healthy development, but it is often difficult for youth to know where to get information. Outside of school, young people are often not aware of how to access information about available services. This is a particular challenge for youth at risk, street-involved youth, or youth experiencing homelessness that may not be in the school system nor have access to information in the home.

First Nations, Métis, and Inuit youth can feel overwhelmed by an urban environment and do not know where to find culturally appropriate services. Low-income youth may not have access to the Internet in their home. Newcomer youth may experience language barriers. Youth with disabilities may have challenges getting materials in accessible formats. LGBTQ youth may feel judged when asking for information about services. Information that is available via diverse mediums (print and digital) and in various locations (libraries, schools, websites, etc.) fosters the inclusion of all youth. Brochures, websites, social media and other information tools that are interactive, attractive and written in plain language can help youth access the information they need.

## ACCESS TO SERVICES

It is not only important that youth-friendly services exist in the city, but that youth have the means to access these services. Youth need to be able to get to services from where they live, study, and work or socialize – but this is often a challenge for many rural youth as transportation is limited.

Youth have greater access to services when they are:

- » Offered at flexible times (including non-school hours);
- » Close to where they live and go to school;
- » Flexible to accommodate those who have many responsibilities;
- » Affordable;
- » Culturally sensitive;
- » Safe;
- » Accessible via public transportation;
- » Accessible for those with disabilities.

## EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Paid employment enables youth to be financially responsible and to pay for their various needs. Many youth do not have the networks necessary to secure well-paying jobs and many of their jobs are low-paid, part-time and unstable. These jobs do not typically provide flexible schedules for youth who are juggling school, extracurricular activities and family responsibilities.

Between 2006 and 2012, the youth unemployment rate for 15 to 24 year olds rose by over 3 percentage points to 14.5 percent in Ottawa (SPC, 2013). Youth aged 15-24 who do not complete high school have significantly higher unemployment rates, which affect the opportunities available to them (SPC, 2013). When searching for employment, Aboriginal and racialized youth frequently encounter racism. Employers may assume they do not speak English even though they were born and raised in Canada.

Mentorship and partnership programs further youth engagement in the workforce. Youth-to-youth mentoring programs allow youth to be involved in the process of sharing and transferring skills to each other—empowering not only themselves but others. Ultimately, job creation tailored to the diverse needs of youth, increases income, independence and choices for youth.

## SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Youth is a stage of life when one's body, identity, and perceptions are changing. Developing and maintaining supportive relationships can be difficult in this context. For example, mental health issues are often first exhibited during adolescence. Unfortunately, such struggles may go unrecognized and unsupported due to lack of knowledge, supports and resources available to youth. Appropriate, affordable (or subsidized) and readily available support services enable youth to manage these challenges.

## 5. *We Envision: A Youth-friendly City*

- » Youth have a say and actively participate in decision-making that affects us.
- » The city fosters a sense of belonging. We never feel unwelcome in public spaces.
- » Youth-adult mentoring opportunities and partnerships are encouraged.
- » Youth-friendly and safe public spaces to play and interact exist throughout city neighbourhoods.
- » A variety of youth-oriented services are affordable and available – including health, employment, cultural, artistic, and physical recreation programs.
- » Youth across diversity can access services when they need them.
- » Public transportation is affordable and accessible to all youth. We have opportunities to participate in transit planning.
- » The contributions we make to our city are widely recognized.
- » Youth are encouraged and empowered to be involved in community decision-making processes.
- » There are opportunities for youth leadership in the community.
- » Jobs are available for youth related to their area of study.

### WHAT CAN ALLIES DO?

- ✓ **Imagine** being 16; recall what interested you in your spare time.
- ✓ **Keep in mind** that youth is a journey of discovery; some youth are quick to take risks while others are looking for constructive support before acting.
- ✓ **Ask yourself** if your policy or program makes any assumptions about the age of its clients.
- ✓ **Invite** a youth to comment on your work (See What's happening in Ottawa).
- ✓ **Ask** youth about what interests them in their community.
- ✓ **Consider** how a 14 year-old might learn about your policy or program.
- ✓ **Remember** that not all youth are the same.
- ✓ **Drop in** to a Community House to speak with youth about your policy or program.
- ✓ **And, if I am a youth**, I know that my knowledge and experience can enrich the city

Adapted from: Ontario Playworks Partnership 2014; UNICEF)



## 6. Council Mandates and Legislation

The City of Ottawa offers many services and initiatives geared toward youth. A [Youth Portal](#) was developed in 2014 to provide a one-stop shop to this information.

In 2012, the City's Mayor hosted a Youth Summit. Over 180 youth, aged 16 – 25, participated in discussion groups on topics including civic engagement, employment, entrepreneurship, safety, mental health and volunteerism. Youth were asked for their feedback on how the City can enhance and improve services for youth in these areas. A Youth Summit Action Plan (YSAP) was approved by City Council in 2013. As part of YSAP, the Ottawa Youth Engagement Committee (OYEC) was formed to act as a vehicle for youth engagement with the City. A new Youth Action Plan has been approved for the new Term of Council 2015-2018.

## 7. What's Happening in Ottawa

- » [Ottawa Youth Engagement Committee \(OYEC\)](#) – This committee is made up of youth aged 15-25 from a variety of backgrounds who meet monthly to learn more about City services, and advise City staff on the implementation of the Youth Action Plan.
- » [The Ottawa Child and Youth Initiative - Growing Up Great](#) – Recognizing the power of a collective advocacy and collaborative community planning and efforts, this initiative provides a platform for groups to work together to guide and influence public policy, systems and practices aimed at nourishing positive and healthy growth of children and youth in our community.
- » [CALACS](#) is a French organization that does sexual assault prevention and helps sexual assault survivors. They have great prevention and awareness workshops for youth.
- » The [Centre Psychosocial](#) has French mental health (and other) resources for families, including youth-specific programming.
- » [City of Ottawa Youth Zone Jeunesse \(YZJ\)](#) – Is an employment resource centre for youth between the ages of 16 and 30. It provides employment support services: employment assessment; pre-employment preparation; job coaching; employment action planning; and referrals to training and educational opportunities.
- » [Youth In Policing Initiative \(YIPI\)](#) – Is an employment program with the Ottawa Police Service for youth 15-18 years of age who are attending a secondary school program. The goal of the YIPI program is to give young people an opportunity to develop job skills while enhancing police and community relations.
- » [Youth Services Bureau Of Ottawa \(YSB\)](#) – Offers Youth Engagement Programs, in English and French, to support and provide youth with a strong voice both within the agency and the community at large.
- » [OCISO Multicultural Liaison Officer Program \(MLO\)](#) – This program facilitates the successful integration of immigrant children, youth and their families in Ottawa schools.
- » [Minwaashin Lodge Spirit Movers and Fire Keepers Youth Program](#) – This program provides Aboriginal youth with awareness, knowledge, information and teachings about Aboriginal culture, and promotes and initiates the development of healthy friendships and relationships

with other youth. The program supports and provides at-risk Aboriginal youth with ties to their culture through sacred teachings and by promoting holistic healing.

- » [Spectrum LGBTQ+ Community Youth Group](#) – This YSB program provides workshops, discussion groups, and art collaborations, as well as counselling services, peer mentoring, and primary care resources for LGTBQ youth in Ottawa. Spectrum allows LGBTQ youth to meet new people, engage in workshops and discussions, access services like showers, laundry, computers, telephones, get referrals, and have a safe space to hang out.
- » [Youth Net/Reseau Ado](#) – A mental health promotion program run by youth for youth, ages 13-20. This program gives youth community resources and uses focus groups to connect with youth in order to better understand their needs.

## 8. Relevant Practices in Other Cities

[Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities](#) presents a flexible approach to equity and inclusion and is adaptable to the diverse structures, contexts, and experiences of municipalities from across Canada. Flip through the different sections of this guide or visit [City for All Women Initiative \(CAWI\)](#) to find examples from municipalities across Canada.

## 9. Sources

- Social Planning Council of Ottawa. 2010. Profile de la communauté francophone à Ottawa. Ottawa, ON: Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
- Social Planning Council of Ottawa. 2014. Population changes in Ottawa based on the 2011 Census. Ottawa, ON: Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
- Social Planning Council of Ottawa. 2013. Youth Employment, Unemployment and Under-Employment in Ottawa. Ottawa, ON: Social Planning Council of Ottawa.
- Statistics Canada. 2017. Data tables, 2011 & 2016 Census. Ottawa, ON: Canada.
- Ontario Playworks Partnership. 2014. Good Practices Report. Toronto, ON: The Ontario Partnership for Active and Engaged Youth.
- UNICEF. 2004. Building Child-Friendly Cities. Florence, Italy. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Statistics Canada.
- Statistics Canada. 2015. Women in Canada: Immigrant Women. Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada.
- Stinson, J. 2004. Privatization of Public Services: What does it Mean for Women. Ottawa, ON: CUPE.
- Townson, M. 2009. Women's Poverty and the Recession. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.
- United Nation. 1993. Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Geneva, CH: United Nations.
- United Nations. 2015. Women in Politics: 2015. Geneva, CH: United Nations.

## 10. Acknowledgments

The Equity and Inclusion Lens is the product of a collaborative partnership between City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) and City of Ottawa.

The original Equity and Inclusion Lens Guide and Snapshots were developed from 2008-2010 by an Equity and Inclusion Reference Group and working groups focusing on each of the 11 equity seeking groups profiled in the Snapshots.

City staff and community leaders contributed their knowledge and insights in the creation of this Snapshot.

### CONTRIBUTORS:

Keri Abella, Hafsa Abdi, Habon Abdilahi, Esmā Abdullahi, Subeyda Abukar, Ashley Bowa, Meghan Brooks, Mike Bulthuis, Pixie Cram, Pauline Daling, Suzanne Doerge, Sumaya Egal, Amal Elmi, Jephthée Elysée, Marian Green, Aisha Hagi-Aden, Mohamud Hassan, Wen Jean Ho, Ladan Kaafi, Yumi Kotani, Christine Malone, Geneviève Nathalie Roberge, Sherry Wang, Aisha Warsame, Faduma Yusuf.

### ORGANIZATIONS:

Child & Youth Friendly Ottawa (CAYFO); City for All Women Initiative (CAWI); City of Ottawa; Kanata Chinese Seniors Support Centre; Ottawa Youth Commission and Child & Youth Friendly Ottawa (CAYFO); Pinecrest-Queensway Community Health Centre; Social Planning Council of Ottawa and Youth Ottawa; Ottawa Youth Engagement Committee; South Nepean Community Health Centre.

Photography: Nikkutai Folger

Photography: [www.ortega.ca](http://www.ortega.ca)

Graphic Design: [www.jwalkerdesign.ca](http://www.jwalkerdesign.ca)

All this was made possible thanks to funding from Status of Women Canada and the City of Ottawa which funded the City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) to engage in this important work.



Status of Women  
Canada

Condition féminine  
Canada