

Creating A Child and Youth Friendly City: What Does It Mean?



A Review of Child and Youth Friendly Policies and Practices From Other Cities

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Executive Summary

The Plan for the Social Well Being of Surrey Residents, adopted by Council in 2006, identifies “Creating a Child and Youth Friendly City” as a priority. The purpose of this report is to provide information on what is meant by Child and Youth Friendly along with examples of what Surrey and other cities are doing to promote the healthy development of their youngest residents. It serves as background research for the development of a City of Surrey Child and Youth Friendly Strategy.

There is no “one model” for a Child and Youth Friendly City. It is a combination of policies and programs that are framed around the needs of children and youth. UNICEF defines a Child Friendly City as a “local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children’s rights ... it is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policy, programs and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all” (www.childfriendlycities.org).

For the purposes of this report, the review of Child and Youth Friendly policies is divided into three subject areas:

Child and Youth Friendly Decision-Making

A Child and Youth Friendly City ensures decisions are made in the best interests of young people and honours the voices of children and youth. Other cities support Child and Youth Friendly decision-making by actions such as:

- Encouraging the direct participation of children and youth in decision making.
- Consulting with children and youth on issues that affect them.
- Collecting data about children and youth in order to make informed decisions.
- Assessing the impact of decisions on children and youth.
- Supporting inter-departmental co-ordination on child and youth issues.
- Developing the capacity of municipal staff to effectively engage youth in decision making.

Child and Youth Friendly Urban Environments

A Child and Youth Friendly City is designed to provide a physical environment that supports the developmental needs of children and youth. Other cities have created Child and Youth Friendly urban environments by:

- Land use planning that encourages the development of vibrant and sustainable communities.
- Designing communities that allow young people to experience age-appropriate independence.
- Housing and neighbourhood design that provides children and youth with the spaces they need to play.
- Transportation options (walking, biking & transit) that discourage the use of cars.
- A built environment that invites young people to partake in a wide variety of play activities both in parks and playgrounds and in the public realm.

Child and Youth Friendly Civic Services

A Child and Youth Friendly City provides recreation, library and cultural services that are framed around the developmental needs of children and youth. Other cities have created Child and Youth Friendly civic services by:

- Ensuring services are inclusive and accessible to children and youth, including children from a diversity of families.
- Providing services and programs that specifically respond to the developmental needs of early childhood, middle years and youth.
- Supporting unique civic initiatives such as Youth Awards, Youth Friendly Business Awards or community grants.

Introduction

Approximately 107,000 children and youth between the ages of 0 and 19 years are growing up in Surrey. The Plan for the Social Well Being of Surrey Residents, adopted by Council in 2006, identifies Creating a Child and Youth Friendly City as a priority. The plan recommends undertaking:

a process towards developing policies that will assist in ensuring that child and youth friendliness is one of the key objectives pursued in the decisions about the continuing development and services delivered by the City.

This report was written to provide a knowledge base for the development of a Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy for the City of Surrey. Based on a review of available research and reports, this document provides an overview of basic principles and approaches, along with examples of what other cities are doing to create a Child and Youth Friendly City.

What is a Child and Youth Friendly City?

There is not a single model for a Child and Youth Friendly City. It is a combination of policies and programs that are framed around the needs of children and youth. UNICEF defines a Child Friendly City as a “local system of good governance committed to fulfilling children’s rights ... it is a city where the voices, needs, priorities and rights of children are an integral part of public policy, programs and decisions. It is, as a result, a city that is fit for all”

Fundamentally, a Child and Youth Friendly City requires a shift from thinking in terms of addressing deficits and problems to building on the strengths and assets of young people.

Benefits for All

Communities that are Child and Youth Friendly are environments that are good for everyone.

There is a notable similarity between principles of Child and Youth Friendly Cities and sustainability. Authors have observed that a society that places children’s needs at the centre must always look to the future and make provisions for it, therefore sustainability puts the child at the centre. Roger Hart wrote that, “If children were carefully considered and involved in the planning process, cities could become more environmentally and socially sustain-

At a Glance: Children and Youth in Surrey

- 27% of Surrey’s population is 19 years and under.⁽¹⁾
- 23% of children under 6 are living in poverty.⁽¹⁾
- 30% of children entering grade one in Surrey are assessed as being vulnerable in terms of readiness to learn.⁽²⁾
- 83% of Surrey students graduated from high school.⁽³⁾
- 47% of aboriginal students in Surrey graduated, an increase from 38% the previous year.⁽³⁾

References:

1. 2006 Census
2. Human Early Learning Partnership (2006) UBC
3. Surrey School District (2006/2007)

UNICEF defines a Child Friendly City as a community that respects and puts into practice the rights enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. It guarantees the right of all young citizens to:

- Influence decisions about their city;
 - Express their opinion on the city they want;
 - Participate in family, community and social life;
 - Receive basic services such as health care, education and shelter;
 - Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation;
 - Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
 - Walk safely in the streets on their own;
 - Meet friends and play;
 - Have green spaces for plants and animals;
 - Live in an unpolluted environment;
 - Participate in cultural and social events; and
 - Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.
- (UNICEF 2004)

able” (2005).

Child friendliness does not imply that children require their own city but it does imply that children are recognized as citizens that are a part of the entire city. Children should not be socially isolated (www.childfriendlycities.eu/?id=143).

“The state of the young in any city is the litmus test for the city’s level of sustainability and vibrancy.”

Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN HABITAT

In This Report

In this report child and youth friendly city policies and practices are organized into three areas:

- 1. Child and Youth Friendly Decision-Making:**
Young people’s interests being considered and voices being heard in decision-making, and the direct involvement of young people in civic affairs.
- 2. Child and Youth Friendly Urban Environments:**
Designing a City that physically supports the developmental needs of children and youth.
- 2. Child and Youth Friendly Civic Services:**
Framing civic services around the developmental needs of children and youth.

“Rather than a permanent label or brand, child friendliness is above all a constant ambition that a city continuously endeavors to achieve.”

(<http://www.childfriendlycities.eu/?id=143>)

There are numerous examples of actions that cities around the world are taking to create a Child and Youth Friendly City, some of which are included in each section.

Throughout this paper the term “young people” is being used to refer to both children and youth.

- “Early Childhood” is used to refer to children aged 0-5 years.
- “Middle Childhood” is used to refer to children aged 6-12 years.
- “Youth” is used to refer to young people aged 13 to early twenties.



Decision-Making in a Child and Youth Friendly City

This section of the report explores strategies to:

- Encourage the participation of children and youth in civic issues
- Support the inclusion of young peoples' interests, needs and perspectives in decision-making

ENCOURAGING THE DIRECT PARTICIPATION OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The meaningful engagement of children and youth is consistently identified as being an important component of a Child and Youth Friendly City (McNulty 2004). The benefits of young people's participation in municipal decision-making to children and youth, city staff, and the community itself are well documented. There are many strategies available to increase the direct participation of young people.

➤ **Creating and Supporting Youth Councils**

Youth councils can serve the city as a whole, a city department, a specific civic facility, or a specific initiative. With proper support from city staff, a youth council can fulfill a variety of functions including information gathering, advisory or "hands-on" project based roles.

➤ **Supporting Youth Representatives on "Adult" Committees**

Youth can be included on adult committees if the young people are properly supported with training and mentorship. Adjusting some practices to accommodate young people's participation is also necessary, such as the time and location of a meeting (Hamilton 2007).

Three examples of youth participation in Surrey:

The Surrey Leadership Youth Council (SLYC) is an initiative of the Planning & Development Department (Social Planning) and Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services (Community and Leisure Services) to develop a model for engaging youth in social and community planning.

The Surrey Youth Council (SYC) is a city-wide Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services youth council. Its goals include uniting a diverse range of youth in the community in an effort to offer broader opportunities, empowering youth and allowing them to contribute to society in a variety of work, making youth activities more fun, and making youth more active.

Engineering's **Salmon Habitat Restoration Project (SHaRP)** and **Surrey's Natural Areas Partnership (SNAP)** programs engage Surrey youth to participate in environment projects ranging from hands-on work like habitat restoration and stream improvement, to education and outreach at community events.



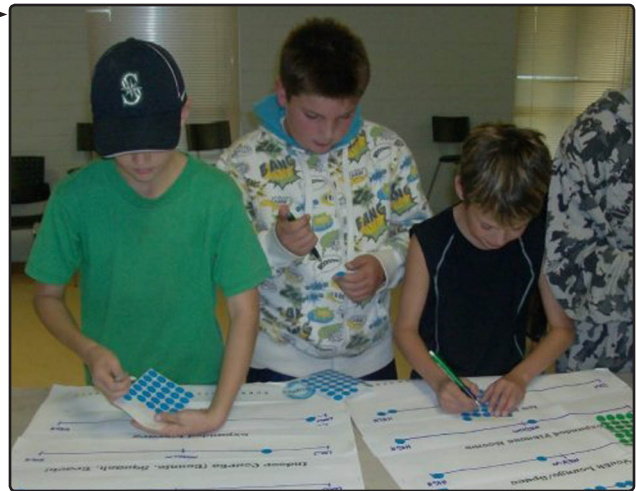
Members of Surrey Leadership Youth Council at Youth Speak Up! 2008 -an annual youth forum for Whalley Youth.

➤ **Holding Consultations with Children and Youth**

The UN Convention on the rights of the child includes the right of children and youth to be consulted on any issue that affects them (UNICEF 2004). Children and youth can be affected by almost any issue, so there is really never a wrong occasion to consult with young people (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005).

Information from young people is unique. Children and youth are the experts in their own lives, and their age and vulnerability gives them a special perspective on the community (Landsdown 2005).

Successful consultation events with young people use creative approaches to facilitate discussion, follow up with young people as to how the information was used, recognize the distinct populations of young people, and reach out to young people where they are.



Pre-teens in Whalley take part in an activity to identify their priorities for civic facilities in the community, as part of the consultation process for the City Centre Plan Update.

➤ **Building the Capacity of Children and Youth**

It is important to provide training and other opportunities to build the capacity of young people to participate. Young people do not always come pre-equipped with the skills to work in the complicated municipal environment, so it is important to prepare and support them.

➤ **Hiring Youth as Staff Members**

Young people's participation is not limited to being volunteers. Many municipalities hire young people as staff members to bring a youth perspective to activities such as program planning and projects.

The City of **Hampton, Virginia** created two part-time positions for youth in the City Planning Department. In this ongoing program, the teens were hired to work 15 hours a week for a two-year term. Highlights of the "youth planners" work has included:

- Developing a handbook to help businesses and officials become more "youth friendly"
- Working with the local transit agency to research better transportation options for youth.
- Working with the parks/recreation department to give ideas for youth events.
- Gathering information from peers.

(California Center For Community Participation 2005)

SUPPORTING THE INCLUSION OF YOUNG PEOPLE’S INTERESTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Following are examples of approaches that municipalities have used to assist in making decisions in the best interests of children and youth.

➤ **Convening a Coordinating Body Across City Departments**

An inter-departmental coordinating body can promote effective collaboration and information-sharing that supports the development of Child and Youth Friendly policies and practices (UNICEF 2004).

The **City of Edmonton** has a “Child Friendly Corporate Committee” with representatives from each City department who share information, identify emerging opportunities, and facilitate actions within their departments to make the City more child friendly.

For more information: www.edmonton.ca

➤ **Using Child Impact Assessments and Checklists**

Projects and policies can be put through a “Child and Youth Friendly” lens to identify ways to improve results for young people.

A Child Impact Assessment is a systematic process of assessing the impact that a decision will have on children and youth, before the decision is made (UNICEF 2004).

The **City of Edmonton** recently adopted a Child Friendly Edmonton Strategy, which contains the building blocks of a child and youth friendly city. Included in this policy is a Child Impact Assessment (CIA) tool.

A selection process decides which projects or policies need to undergo a CIA assessment. Program staff will comment on the impact of the program on children and youth by drawing on information from a wide variety of sources (staff expertise, focus groups with youth, etc). Recommendations are made as to how to improve the outcomes of the policy for children and youth, and the relevant decision makers choose whether or not to adopt the recommendations. (Yates 2005)

➤ **Collecting Statistics on Children and Youth**

Regularly collecting information on children and youth is useful for a number of reasons. It can provide evidence to help inform decision-making, evaluate child and youth friendly initiatives, and provide indicators to help track progress (UNICEF 2004; Play Works 2005).

Two examples of indicators that municipalities have developed include:

- The age at which children are given “license” by their parents to independently travel to school and back (Tranter & Pawson 2001).
- The distance of dedicated bike and walking routes, and the number of children and youth using them (Centre for Sustainable Transportation, 2004).

In 2001, 2004 and most recently in 2007 the **Greater London Authority** in England has published the State of London’s Children Report. It explores eight topic areas including child poverty and economic well-being, transport and road safety, and safe homes and communities.

A series of indicators were developed, and information and statistics were garnered from multiple sources, including but not limited to: direct surveys with children and youth, census information, and reports from government departments such as education and social services.

For more information: www.london.gov.uk/gla

➤ **Building the Capacity of Municipal Staff**

Training opportunities for staff members can help build understanding of the concepts of Child and Youth Friendly Cities, as well as the basics of working with children and youth.

Christchurch, New Zealand has created a training program for staff members in all departments. It focuses on the concept of children as stakeholders, and the importance of their views in decision-making in a wide variety of issue areas. This training educates staff who may not be accustomed to working with children.

For more information: www.ccc.govt.nz



Urban Environment in a Child and Youth Friendly City

The “Urban Environment” refers to the physical design and layout of the community. This section of the report includes information on policies and practices related to Child and Youth Friendly:

- Land Use Planning
- Housing
- Transportation
- Play Spaces

CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY LAND USE PLANNING

The physical form of a community influences the activities that take place in that community. Land use planning which creates “complete communities” forms the foundation of Child and Youth Friendly neighbourhoods.

In general, communities that isolate young people and restrict independent mobility are not Child and Youth Friendly. Isolation has a number of negative consequences. It discourages interaction and contact with the local neighborhood, increases exposure to the dangers associated with automobiles, and contributes to a sedentary life style for children and youth (Gleeson 2006).

Independent access to their neighbourhood is important for young people to develop physically and socially (Tranter & Pawson 2001; Hubsmith 2006).

Independent access:

- Leads to personal, intellectual and psychological development;
- Enables young people to access opportunities without being reliant on parents; and
- Is important to the community itself - communities without children suffer because they lack youthful liveliness, creativity, and diversity. (Malone 2006)



“If children see their environment as a portrait of themselves, we might ask ourselves what our local environments tell them. If children learn by observing and participating, what does their daily routine teach them about the adult world? Our current built form may leave children and youth wondering if they are wanted in most public places.” (Day 2007)

CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY HOUSING

Child and Youth Friendly residential areas are a combination of unit and neighbourhood design. Young people, especially very young children, spend a great deal of time in and around their home. The environment around young people's homes should be safe from traffic, pollution and other physical and social hazards (Cooper & Sarkissian 1986).

➤ Encourage Child and Youth Friendly Design

Housing can be developed to be more Child and Youth Friendly at both the unit and neighbourhood level. There are many design guidelines that are being put into practice, following are some examples.

Unit Design

- A semi-private "buffer zone" (such as a porch) between family private space and public space allows for increasing levels of independence with age and also provides natural supervision of the area (Cooper & Sarkissian 1986).
- Sufficient storage space for the needs of a family -both in the unit and in the building (for bikes, strollers, etc).
- By using creative architecture, the design of the unit should provide for a variety of uses that do not conflict with each other (Furlong & Cunningham 2007).

Neighbourhood Design

- A distinct visual identity through unique design and clear markings are important to help children navigate their neighbourhood safely and independently.
- "Clustering" housing units can help to retain trees and greenspace, and family oriented housing units clustered together can keep noise from bothering neighbours (Yates 1995).
- Requiring a certain portion of housing in developments to be "family-friendly" can help ensure that there is sufficient supply.

➤ Encouraging Housing Design that Creates Space for Play

Children need outdoor play areas in the vicinity of their homes that they are able to reach by themselves. Large houses on small lots often do not provide the informal outdoor play environments that young people need as part of their healthy development (Yates 1995).

In 1992, **Vancouver BC** adopted guidelines for providing family housing in high-density areas. One quarter of the units needed to meet family friendly design requirements and have at least two bedrooms (that are suitable for families). These guidelines also stipulated that developers needed to contribute to public amenities such as child care and parks.

"High-Density Housing for Families With Children Guidelines" City of Vancouver



This photo shows a space that is conducive to being a play area in the vicinity of a housing unit. It is just outside of the kitchen, which provides a good opportunity for parental supervision.

CHILD AND YOUTH FRIENDLY TRANSPORTATION

The means of transportation that children and youth use affects their health and development. Car-based communities limit young people's independent movement, create health issues due to proximity to high traffic areas, reduce opportunities for spontaneous and unstructured play spaces, and contribute to lack of exercise (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005; Malone 2006; Tranter & Pawson 2001). A Child and Youth Friendly City reduces the need for motorized transport by providing and promoting the use of other transportation options (Tranter & Pawson 2001; Gilbert & O'Brien 2005).

➤ Encourage Walking

Creating communities in which children and youth can travel easily and safely by walking has health and social benefits. Major destinations which children and youth travel to can be studied to create "complete routes" that are safe from dangers (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005).

➤ Encourage Cycling

Cycling is another positive transportation option. It is low cost, promotes exercise and play opportunities, and increases the spatial range of activities that young people are able to access independently (Tranter & Pawson 2001).

A network of bike routes separated from traffic is ideal. When this is not possible, infrastructure such as cyclist controlled lights and bike-priority waiting areas at intersections is an option. (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005)

➤ Encourage Public Transit

Transit hubs should be as close as possible to public spaces and young people's activities.

Encouraging young people to use transit increases overall use so it supports better levels of transit service (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005).

Reducing the amount of transfers that children and youth need to take to get to their destination will increase safety and ease of use of the transit system (Gilbert & O'Brien 2005).



The **Safe Routes to School** program in the US is an initiative to encourage more young people to walk and bike to school. It is based on five components.

- Evaluation: Surveys are used to understand attitudes around walking and biking to school, and what changes will help;
- Engineering: Improvements are made to routes as a result of assessments and "walkabouts" to identify issues on routes;
- Education: A comprehensive educational component that teaches bicycle and pedestrian safety in schools;
- Encouragement: Providing incentives to walking and biking such as contests and events, such as a "bike to school day"; and
- Enforcement: Working with police to vigilantly enforce traffic laws around schools. (Hubsmith 2006)



PLAY AND BUILT ENVIRONMENTS

Play is a very important component of childhood development. Opportunities for play are encouraged in a Child and Youth Friendly City. Children and youth “learn by doing”, and play is the primary way that children become acquainted with their environment (Tranter & Pawson 2001; Furlong & Cunningham 2007).

“Play is any non-school activity that has elements of choice, leads to satisfaction, and encourages progressive learning and enjoyment.”
(Playworks 2005)

In a Child and Youth Friendly City play is not limited to playgrounds. Children and youth are able to play safely, spontaneously and freely throughout their community (Tranter & Pawson 2001, Walsh 2006). Children and youth need experiences that can only be found through participation in community life.

➤ Encourage “Open-Ended Play”

Open-ended play is where the activity does not have a single purpose or outcome. It is naturally adaptable, challenges age related skill development, and expands children’s interests (Furlong & Cunningham 2007; Walsh 2006).

➤ Encourage Greenspace Available for Play

Children use greenspace for important types of play that cannot be found in other environments. In nature children can change their surroundings through activities such as building a fort, clearing the ground or building a dam in a stream. Outdoor play leads to important social, physical and cognitive competency development (Karsten & van Vliet 2006; Cooper & Sarkissian 1986; Malone 2006).

In urban centers children and youth do not always have access to wild areas. Some ideas include:

- Parks can be “roughed up” though preserving urban wilderness, using wild grass, and planting robust species (Walsh 2006).
- Preserving corners of developments or pieces of properties in a “natural” state provides children with access to a small amount of wild space (Yates 1995).



“Open-ended” play in action.



An example of a highly engaging playground can be found in **New York City**. The playground consists of a figure eight-shape landscape, with sloping wooden ramps that connect a zone of sand to a zone of water. A secure structure houses loose parts, including foam blocks, small boats and collections of tubings, elbows and gaskets for construction projects, all maintained and overseen by the play workers (staff members who encourage children to interact with the pieces).

www.nytimes.com/2007/01/10/nyregion/10play.html

Civic Services in a Child and Youth Friendly City

The City of Surrey provides a variety of recreation, cultural and library services to children and youth. This section of the report has information related to Child and Youth Friendly services. It includes information on:

- Inclusive and Accessible Services
- Age-Related Developmental Frameworks
- Civic Initiatives to Promote a Child and Youth Friendly Community
- Partnerships

INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE SERVICES FOR ALL YOUNG PEOPLE

A Child and Youth Friendly City provides equal access to appropriate services (UNICEF 2004). Accessibility can mean many things.

- Accessible locations: Young people are safely able to get to recreation services using a young person's means of transportation.
- Physically accessible: All young people, regardless of ability, are able to access services.
- Financially accessible: Lack of financial resources should not be a barrier to accessing civic services.
- Cultural barriers: Culture and language should not prevent participation in activities.
- Knowledge barriers: All young people and their families should know about available services, not just those connected into networks.
- Child and Youth Friendly barriers: services should be set up in a way that are welcoming and inviting to children and youth.

Surrey's Community Leisure and Services and Community Development Services programs integrate the needs of specific target groups who may face barriers to recreation and social activities. Some programs include:

- Adapted Skating Lessons (in partnership with Surrey Association for Community Living) to provide one-on-one support for individuals with special needs in an inclusive and fun atmosphere
- Chill Snow Boarding Program (in partnership with 2010 Legacies and corporate sponsors) to provide at-risk youth with an opportunity to learn life skills through snowboarding
- Greenbrook Club House (in partnership with BC Housing) to provide youth aged 6 to 16 at a housing complex in Newton, with a wide array of social and recreational activities that they would have not otherwise been able to access due to various economic and social barriers;
- Cricket Planning Workshops, a sport in great demand in the South Asian community.

(From Social Plan Annual Report 2007)



AGE RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL FRAMEWORKS

Research has identified three distinct developmental stages of a young person's life: the Early Years (0-5), Middle Years (6-12) and Youth (13+). Each of these stages is marked by specific developmental needs. These frameworks describe what "it" is that young people need to be healthy and successfully transition to adulthood.

The Early Childhood, Middle Years and Positive Youth Development Frameworks are useful for exploring the impact of programming or policy decisions on children and youth. Following are brief descriptions.

➤ **Early Childhood Development (0-5 years)**

Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a way of understanding how a child functions and learns in the earliest years of life. What happens during early childhood is very important because research has shown that it shapes an individual's health, well-being and competencies over a life time (Hertzman 2004).

"By the time children enter kindergarten, it is possible to identify the children who have not had secure, nurturing and stimulating early childhood experiences. They are less ready for school than other children –intellectually, socially, emotionally and physically."
-Dr. Clyde Hertzman

Early Childhood Development places a priority on "play based learning" – quite literally, learning through enriched play activities.

➤ **Child Care Services**

An affordable and quality child care system supports early development. "Quality" child care is based on the Early Childhood Development approach (Hertzman 2004). Local governments can facilitate the availability of quality child care by advocating to other levels of government, influencing the location and design of child care facilities, and encouraging the inclusion of child care centres in housing developments.

➔ In **Denver, Colorado** the Mayor's Office for Education and Children launched the "5 by 5" initiative in 2005. This goal of this program is to have children experience (at least) five cultural experiences by age five to "nurture the imagination and creativity of Denver's young children". This enriching experience promotes school readiness and a strong foundation for life-long learning. Participating cultural organizations include: the Denver museum, Ballet, Art museum, botanic gardens, theatre academy, museum of nature and science, libraries, zoo, aquarium and more.

For more information: www.denver-gov.org

➔ **North Vancouver, BC** is in the process of developing a Child Care Policy and Plan that will provide the overall framework and long-term direction for the City's role in supporting child care. In the draft document, the City's role in relation to a number of tools is discussed, including: community development practices, zoning bylaws, child care funding, advocacy and child care hubs.

For more information: www.cnv.org



➤ Middle Years Development (6-12 years)

The middle years are increasingly being recognized as an important developmental period during which key competencies are developed. Middle Childhood Matters: A Framework to Promote Healthy Development of Children 6-12 was published by the United Way Ottawa and describes a framework for encouraging positive development based on:

- Safe and Caring Communities
- Meeting Fundamental Needs
- Opportunity to Develop Competencies
- Stable and Nurturing Relationships

In a recent research report Middle Childhood Inside and Out, UBC's Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl found that in middle childhood:

- Out-of-home environments have an increasing influence on a child's development. It is a period where the child's connections begin to expand beyond home and school.
- Children at this age begin to spend more time with peers and friends.
- Connections to and supervision by parents remain very important to healthy development.
- Children who report higher levels of well-being are able to identify more adults in their community who they know care about them.

➤ Positive Youth Development

Positive Youth Development is a framework that views youth not as problems to be solved, but rather as assets to be developed (NCFY 2007). It is a shift described by Karen Pittman as:

“from thinking that youth problems are merely the principal barrier to youth development to thinking that youth development serves as the most effective strategy for the prevention of youth problems.”

Being free of problems is not enough to be fully prepared for adulthood; there are skills and life experiences that youth need for their healthy development. These life experiences are described as the “5 Cs” of Positive Youth Development: Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection and Contribution.



Middle years aged children at Surrey's Kids Conference.

The National Research Council of the Institute of Medicine in the United States undertook an extensive evaluation to determine which program aspects were most effective in promoting positive youth development. They found that program features that promote positive youth development include:

- Physical and psychological safety and security;
- Expectations for behavior as well as increasing opportunities to make decisions, to participate in governance and rule-making, and to take on leadership roles as one matures and gains more expertise;
- Emotional and moral support;
- Opportunities to experience supportive adult relationships;
- Opportunities to learn how to form close, durable human relationships with peers that support and reinforce healthy behaviors;
- Opportunities to feel a sense of belonging and being valued;
- Opportunities to develop positive social values and norms;
- Opportunities for skill building and mastery;
- Opportunities to make a contribution to their community and to develop a sense of mattering; and
- Strong links between families, schools, and broader community resources.

(Putting Positive Youth Development Into Practice: A Resource Guide)

CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships between municipalities and other community organizations are important because the lives of children and youths do not fit perfectly into any one stakeholder's sphere of influence. Young people's interests cross departmental, academic, professional, public, private and agency boundaries (Freeman 2006). A multi-agency approach is required to work towards a Child and Youth Friendly City.

Surrey's Community Schools Partnership is an excellent example of a partnership that has been developed to promote the healthy development of young people. Partners include the City, School District, provincial agencies, and non-profit organizations.

ADDITIONAL CIVIC ACTIVITIES

In addition to library, recreational and cultural services, municipalities can undertake specific projects or activities that promote the goals of a Child and Youth Friendly City. Below are some examples:

➤ **Hosting Child and Youth Friendly Business Awards**

A child and youth friendly business is one that:

- Enables parents and kids to shop together;
- Treats children and youth with respect;
- Has design features to promote accessibility of children and youth;
- Supports children and youth in the community; and
- Plays a positive role in the lives of children and youth.

Child and Youth Friendly Ottawa has a Child and Youth Friendly Accreditation Program that evaluates local businesses and services. Volunteers visit businesses to assess whether they are safe places for children, youth and families.

For more information: www.cayfo.ca

➤ **Instituting a Community Grants Program**

A community grants program is a tool that has been used by municipalities to encourage the development of a diverse range of youth-driven recreation opportunities.

Get Out! Push Your Boundaries was an initiative organized through **Vancouver's Youth Outreach Team** that gave resources to youth themselves to create recreation opportunities in their community. The project's goal was to increase levels of youth activity and engagement by encouraging their participation in the development, design and implementation of arts, sports, recreation and cultural activities. Get Out! provided small grants and support for youth to develop and implement their own ideas on how to get their peers more active through cultural or recreational projects.

For more information: www.vancouveryouth.ca

➤ **Hosting Youth Recognition Awards**

Some municipalities have awards to recognize the outstanding achievement of young people in the community.

Common Elements of Child and Youth Friendly City Strategies

Many municipalities have gone through the process of developing a Child and Youth Friendly strategies. There are a number of common elements in the development and implementation of an effective Strategy. These include:

➤ A Consultation Process

A consultation process helps to direct the development of a strategy, ensures that it meets the needs of the community, identifies actions that the municipality can take, and explores community strengths that can be incorporated into the strategy. Successful consultation processes include direct consultation with children and youth, as well as with community stakeholders.

Other useful sources of information to assess the needs of children and youth include survey data and reports from other agencies in the community.

➤ A Strategy Document

Child and Youth Friendly City Strategy documents include elements such as:

- Value statements and vision statements of a Child and Youth Friendly City;
- Goals and priorities;
- Programs or processes that will be implemented;
- Roles and responsibilities of involved parties; and
- A plan for review and evaluation of its implementation.

➤ Staff Support

Dedicated staff can have a number of roles in the implementation of a strategy, which include:

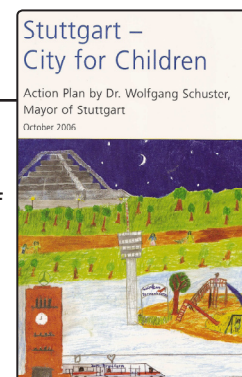
- Coordinating discussion between city departments;
- Implementing programs outlined in the policy;
- Reviewing and documenting the progress of implementation;
- Acting as an advocate for children and youth's interests; and
- Empowering young people to get involved in the implementation of the policy.

➤ Review and Evaluation

The ongoing evaluation of the implementation of a Child and Youth Friendly strategy helps to document its progress and identify successes and areas to improve on. In an environment of limited resources it is important that information exists that makes justifies the value of supporting and investing in Child and Youth Friendly policies and practices.

Examples of Child and Youth Friendly Strategies:

- Edmonton, Alberta: www.edmonton.ca/for_residents/CityGov/ChildFriendlyStrategy.pdf
- Stuttgart, Germany: www.stuttgart.de/sde/global/images/mdb/pub/10252/9879.pdf
- London, England: www.london.gov.uk/young-london/index.jsp
- Christchurch, New Zealand: www.ccc.govt.nz/Publications/Youthstrategy



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