

Child Witness Centre



Walking the Journey Together...

Fostering Healing, Hope and Wellbeing

Community Report
2018-2019

Child Witness Centre



Our Vision

A community where children and youth are safe, valued and heard, empowering them towards strong futures.

Our Mission

We provide support, education and advocacy for children and youth who are or may become victims or witnesses of abuse or crime. We are a team of specialized professionals who **walk with** children, youth and their families on their journey through the criminal justice process, helping them have a voice and fostering healing, hope and wellbeing.

We believe:

- children and youth have the right to be safe, valued, heard and supported.
- every child and youth has unique needs that deserve tailored support.
- more can be achieved by working together with our community partners.
- integrity, trust and respect are the foundation for lasting relationships.



This year we supported **5,630** young people and their families in Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County

1,396

children and youth experienced support, education and advocacy through the criminal justice process

1,034

parents and caregivers experienced support, education and advocacy and were better able to support their child or youth

3,200

Grade 8 students and their teachers were inspired and empowered through the Youth Symposium

2018-19 Board of Directors

Thank you to our Board of Directors for providing governance, guidance and support.

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Walking the Journey Together...

Fostering Healing, Hope and Wellbeing

This past year has been an incredible year for the Child Witness Centre — one in which we **walked with** an unprecedented number of children and youth who experienced abuse or crime and their families. Walking alongside us and making this journey with these young people possible were donors, funders, volunteers, community agencies and community members. Together, we have been able to ensure these young people had the information, support and advocacy they needed on their journey through the criminal justice system, helping them have a voice and fostering healing, hope and wellbeing.

In 2018-19, we journeyed with **1,396** young victims and witnesses and more than **1,000** parents and caregivers. Overall, we continue to experience an increase in demand for victim support services and sadly, again experienced significant growth of **23%** in demand for support and services specifically through the criminal court process across Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County.

Our ability to provide support, education and advocacy for young people and their families is made possible because of the incredible donors and funders who **walk the journey** with us each year. With the development of the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC) and our role as lead agency, we invited many more donors and funders to walk alongside us.

This year we were excited to celebrate a major milestone! In 2016 we launched our **Safe Hands-Strong Futures... Hearing, Helping, Healing** Community Campaign, with a goal of raising \$2 million. Through this campaign, we were able to move forward with the implementation of the CYAC as we secured the program funding needed to support the work in the initial few years. On March 5, 2019, at our annual Pancake Lunch, we were thrilled to announce that we had raised **\$2,043,119!** While this is an amazing accomplishment, with approximately **20%** of our funding coming from government sources for 2019-20, we will continue to build and rely on support from our community.

As we look forward to this coming year, we are excited about the opportunities ahead, and the growing collaborative approaches in the communities we serve. We are inspired to be part of the community focus, helping children and youth thrive and supporting their successful transition to adulthood.

Together we are the village and young people are our future. **Let's walk** with them and continue to encourage, support and guide them!

With Gratitude,



Lisa Allen
Board Chair



Laura Muirhead
Executive Director



Walking the Journey Together...

Through a Criminal Investigation and Beyond

Child and Youth Advocate Program – Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre

More than twice a day, a young person in Waterloo Region finds the courage to tell someone that they have experienced abuse.

Imagine...

- ... being a young person and learning that what someone you love was doing to you was wrong.
- ... **how scary it might be to talk about it to people you don't know.**
- ... coming to a comfortable place where you can talk about your experience with specially trained professionals.

In the past, the investigative process and the process of finding support could be intimidating, overwhelming and scary. Now in Waterloo Region, when a young person experiences abuse, we **walk the journey** with them and their family during the criminal investigation through the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC). The CYAC is a collaborative, child and youth friendly, best-practice approach for investigating allegations of abuse and supporting young people and their families through the investigative process and beyond.

In 2018, the collaborative leadership for the CYAC led a Strategic Planning process. With extensive consultation in the community, we developed a bold vision statement, expanded the mission and established strategic priorities for the next several years for which we are currently seeking funding. We are **Working Together...Hearing, Helping, Healing.**

The CYAC opened in May 2016 and as of March 31, 2019, there have been more than **1,500** child abuse investigations involving more than **2,300** young people and their families. The Child Witness Centre provides oversight of the CYAC, where since opening, our Child and Youth Advocates have provided uniquely tailored support for more than **1,000** children, youth and their families through an investigation and connected them to services in the community to help them begin to heal, regardless of whether charges were laid.

In 2018-19,

- there were **499** investigations involving **862** young people.
- Advocates supported **421** young people and **349** parents and caregivers.



Two-thirds of the young people supported by the Advocates are under the age of 12 and most often have a supportive caregiver, who we also support. We have found this year that the relationship we develop with teens can be especially critical in reducing their risk of falling through the cracks, supporting their ongoing capacity to seek help and begin to heal.

When young people come to the CYAC, they are met by a multidisciplinary team consisting of Waterloo Region Police, Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region and a Child and Youth Advocate from the Child Witness Centre. The Advocate has a unique role within this multidisciplinary team as their sole purpose is to support these children, youth and caregivers during and following the initial interviews.

Through the CYAC and the Child and Youth Advocate Program, children, youth and their parents and caregivers receive the support they need, when they need it, regardless of whether charges are laid – fostering healing, hope and wellbeing.

Advocates recently explained: "We do not have any authority or involvement in the decisions regarding the outcome of the investigation and can stay involved regardless of the investigative outcome. We have found this to be particularly helpful when it comes to our teen clients. We have the opportunity to build rapport which helps in gaining their trust and creating a supportive relationship. We later become a safe base they can return to when things become challenging as they navigate both the outcomes of the investigation and the impact of the incidents that brought them to the CYAC initially. We can stay involved for as long as they feel is necessary to assist them in cultivating other supportive relationships in their communities. We also find that, months after a file is closed, a teen may reach out seeking support when they are in crisis. We feel this demonstrates an established supportive landing base that teens feel comfortable turning to. We are privileged to walk with our clients during their journey towards wellness, regardless of how long some of those journeys may take."

"When a child decides to tell someone that they are being abused, they are the ones who see their fears about the consequences of telling often come true. They are the ones who have to tell their experience to strangers. While we can't take away the painful process that is the reality of being a child victim, we can walk with them, helping them and their family endure it and heal."
– Meagan Copland, Child and Youth Advocate Program Manager



October is Child Abuse Prevention Month. On October 30th, 2018, the Child Witness Centre, together with Family and Children's Services of Waterloo Region and Waterloo Regional Police, dressed in purple, hosted the Community Corner and dropped the puck at the Kitchener Rangers hockey game to build awareness around the issue of child abuse and the support provided through the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre.

Walking the Journey Together...

Through the Criminal Court System

Child Witness Program

More than 10 young people become a victim or witness of crime in our community every week.

Imagine...

- ... that you were a young person who had to testify in criminal court because you were either a victim or witness to abuse and/or violence.
- ... that the accused was someone you know.
- ... the deep and lasting impact this could have on a young person and their family if they weren't supported through the process.

The criminal court system is complex, adversarial and is not designed to meet the needs of children or youth. They can be re-victimized by the system, which can exacerbate and/or induce mental health symptoms (Nevada Law Journal, 2016).

When criminal charges are laid, either through an investigation in the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC) or through other police units in Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County, young people and their families are referred to our Child Witness Program, where our specialized Caseworkers provide uniquely tailored support, education and advocacy through the criminal court system.

Going to court can be an anxious and difficult time for children, youth and their families and we **walk with them** on that journey. We provide a child and youth friendly, trauma-informed response for children and youth (under the age of 18) and their families, ensuring that they are informed, supported and feel included in the criminal court process. This helps to minimize the impact of the potentially adverse childhood traumatic experience, while fostering resilience. By providing support and guidance also to parents and caregivers, they feel more equipped to support their child or youth. When children and youth feel heard and more supported, they are better able to move on with their lives.

In 2018-19,

- we supported **975** young people and **685** parents and caregivers.
- the demand for these services increased by **23%** and has more than doubled in the last four years.
- youth now represent almost **75%** of the young people we support through criminal court.

The journey through the criminal court system can last anywhere from **3-36** months depending on the nature and prosecution of the case.

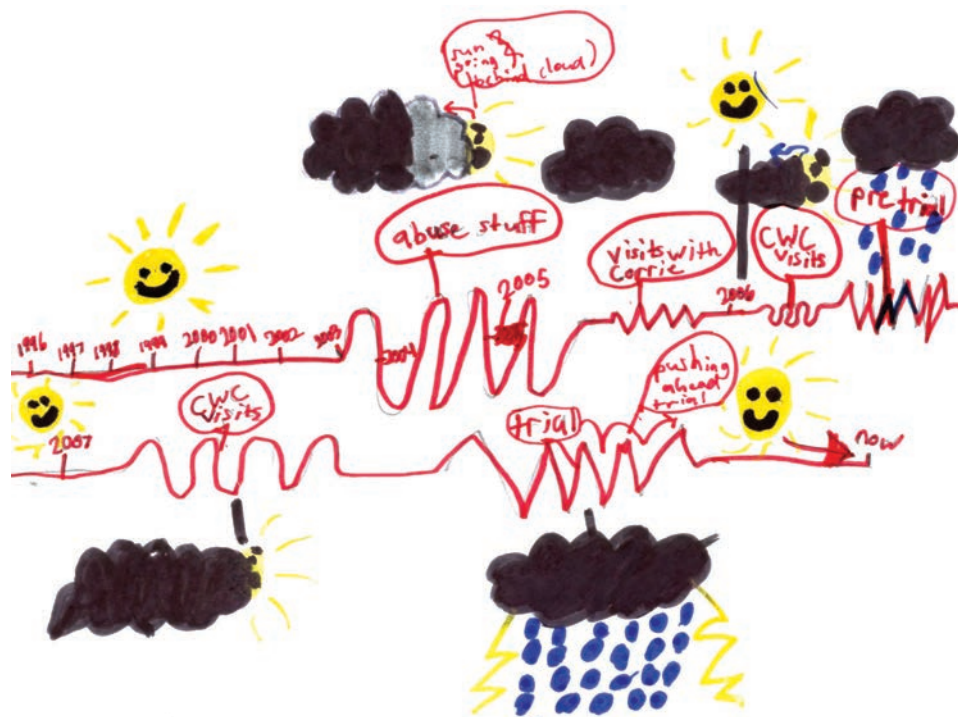
Young people and caregivers continue to affirm the value of **walking the journey** together. Some recent comments from parents: *“Having never been involved in this process before, it was extremely comforting to have someone explain the process moving forward and prepare us for the possible different outcomes rather than being unprepared or perhaps blind-sided.”* *“Aside from the advice and full support given, just being beside our daughter during the testimony provided courage and strength to speak.”*

For many young people, when they have been victimized, the crimes are often less about the act and more about the perpetrator exerting their power and control. As such, a key part of the journey is helping the young person to take back the power and control that they have lost. We help with this by providing information and ensuring that they are included in the process. We were very encouraged when a parent shared the following: *“information is power and by keeping us informed, my child felt like they took the power back”*. This is so critical to their ability to heal and move forward in a healthy way as they engage in building their own future.

While our work in the criminal justice process has most often been identified as victim support, with the increased focus and conversation around children’s mental health, it is important to understand how this work also contributes to the mental and emotional health of children, youth and their caregivers as they journey through the criminal justice process and beyond.

A Journey Through the Eyes of a Child

This image was drawn by a 9-year-old girl as she shared with the Judge her journey and the impact of the abuse she experienced – a long timeline, with many black clouds. The most telling though is the sunshine happy face at the end.



Walking the Journey Together...

Empowering our Youth to Strong Futures

Youth Symposium Program



"I feel inspired to be an even better person than I am now." – A Student

The Youth Symposium is a unique program engaging Grade 8 students in a relevant, accessible and entertaining way that supports their overall health and wellbeing. 2018 marked the 15th anniversary of our annual Youth Symposium, where we welcomed **3,200** Grade 8 students, and their teachers from across Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County.

This young audience heard some of Canada's most inspiring speakers share personal stories of resiliency, empowerment and citizenship. By **walking with** students, teachers and presenters, the Youth Symposium continues to grow in significance as its messages remain focused on the experiences and issues that are relevant to these young people in our community. It is a creative approach to enhance the education of our youth and encourages life-long, ongoing learning with a lasting impact on the students, while remaining accessible and affordable.

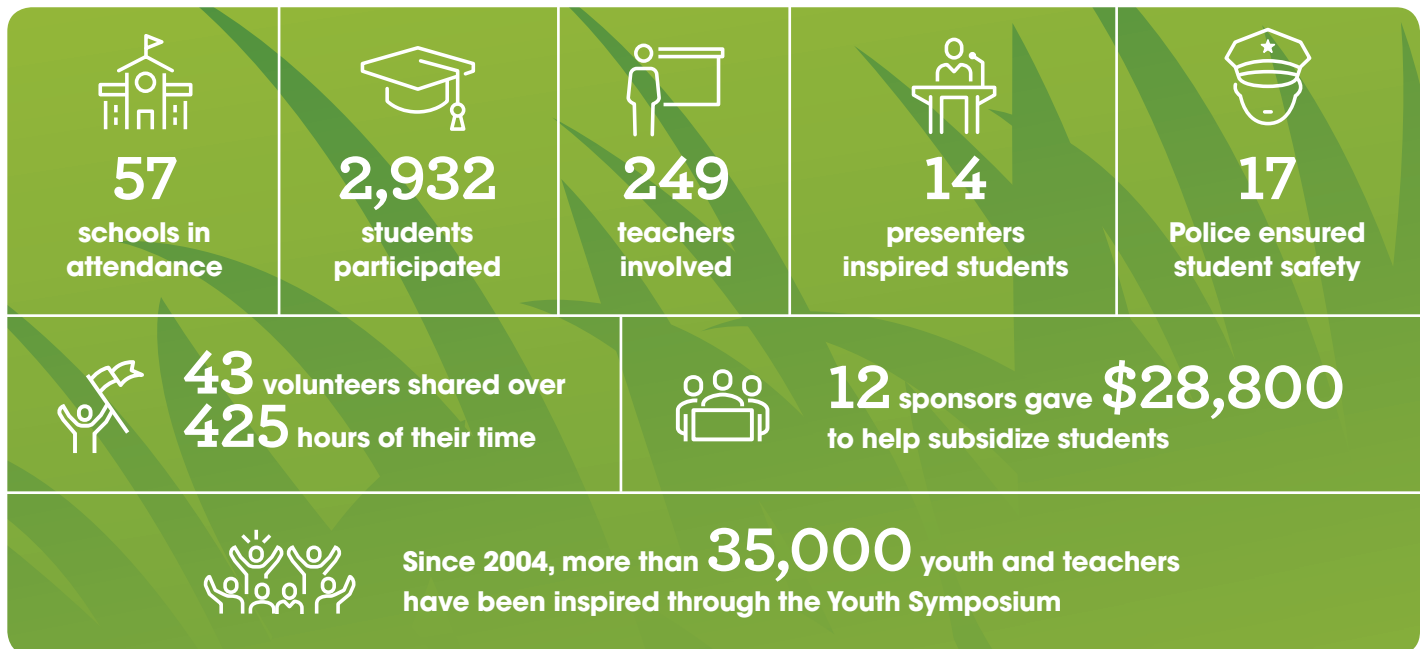
The Youth Symposium is strategically scheduled in April, reaching students as they prepare for high school and providing them with the information and tools needed to meet many of life's opportunities and challenges.

As Stu Saunders, one of our guest presenters, said:

"You will not find this calibre of program anywhere else in Canada for this age group."

Key Learnings from Students:

- Don't think about what you can't do, focus on what you can do!
- It's easy to make mistakes, but it's how we move on from them that truly says who we are!
- **Never let anyone hold you back – you control yourself!**
- It only takes one to make a difference!
- Smile in the face of adversity!
- Be stronger for having conquered the challenge!



"The speakers present on many levels – the kids pick up valuable messages, but there is so much for teachers too, which can be taken back and incorporated into individual classrooms and schools to spread the message even further." – A Teacher

Demand

Given the growing demand for this program in Waterloo Region, we have expanded the Youth Symposium held in Kitchener. In 2019, we offered this valuable program on two consecutive days and were able to involve another **1,000** students and teachers for a 3-day total of over **4,200**.



Walking the Journey Together...

with our Community

We live in an amazing community. Every day, our community *walks with us* and the young people we support. More can be achieved by working together, whether it be with:

- our core partners in the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre – Waterloo Regional Police and Family and Children’s Services of Waterloo Region.
- those we work with in the Justice system – the Police, the Crown Attorneys, the Judiciary.
- those who provide medical support, trauma treatment, counselling and mental health resources to the young people we support.
- those who supported fundraisers held for us: A Blooming Affair Fashion Show, Conestoga College Bachelor of Public Relations (Honours), the Steele Group and Pirates Hat Walk, Heartfelt Quilts, Magnet Forensics’ Bowling Fundraiser, Valentine Card Fundraiser, Waterloo Mattress Customer Appreciation Event and the 2018 Westmount Tradition Charity Doubles Tennis Tournament.
- the **388** donors who helped foster healing, hope and wellbeing.
- the **82** volunteers who provided more than **2,000** hours of service and support to the Child Witness Centre.
- the **650** people who attended, and the **45** food, event, table and media sponsors who supported our 21st annual Pancake Lunch at Bingemans.
- the many agencies we work with collaboratively at various tables across Waterloo Region, Guelph and Wellington County.



Over the past three years, **Social Venture Partners Waterloo Region (SVPWR)** has been *walking the journey* together with us. SVPWR is a philanthropic organization. Their network of engaged community members invests time, money, and professional expertise in local non-profits. Through their model of venture philanthropy, they seek to effect significant, long-term social change in our community.

They have helped us build our capacity, and grow OUR impact by expanding our strategic focus and helping us to strengthen our internal capacity ensuring that young victims and witnesses of crime are supported and can begin to heal. It has been a privilege to be a PARTNER and Investee of SVPWR. We are a stronger, healthier agency, and better positioned to leverage the everchanging landscape.

“From our first contact during the investee selection process to supporting the strategic growth of CWC, SVPWR staff and Partners were moved by the vital support and advocacy CWC provides for children and their families, and the depth of care they provide,” notes Rose Greensides, SVPWR’s Executive Director. “We saw their passion and commitment to helping children, youth, and families endure and heal after experiencing trauma and grief. SVPWR is proud to support the important work the Child Witness Centre does in our community.”



In 2013, when we began the work to establish the Waterloo Region Child and Youth Advocacy Centre (CYAC) and fill a gap in service by establishing the Advocate role as part of the CYAC process, our annual budget more than doubled. While we received seed funding from the federal government through the Department of Justice, we also launched our **Safe Hands-Strong Futures... Hearing, Helping, Healing** Community Campaign. Our campaign goal was to raise **\$2 million** which would give us the chance to move forward with the implementation of the CYAC and give us the program funding we needed to support the work in the initial few years.

On March 5 2019, we proudly announced that we had exceeded our goal with a grand total of: **\$2 million, 43 thousand, 119 dollars!**

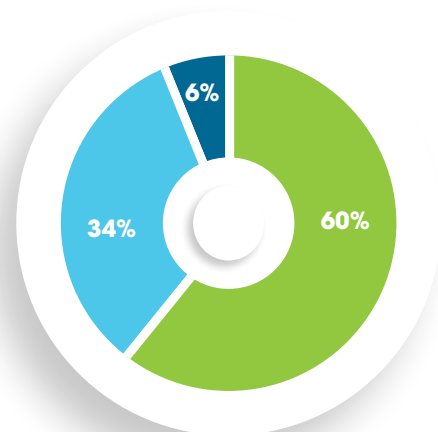


Our heartfelt thanks to the more than **350** donors who **walked the journey** with us through the campaign, opening their hearts and helping to ensure the futures of our young people! A special thank you to our nine Founding Supporters who together contributed almost **\$1 million**.

2018-19 Financial Summary

Revenue

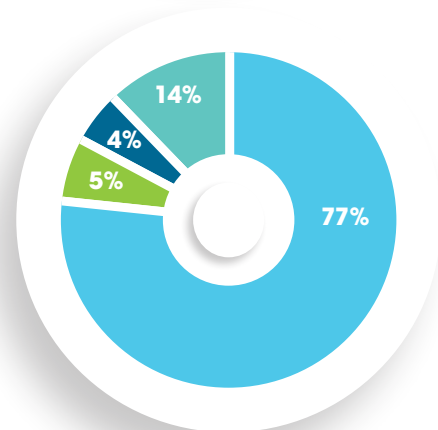
- Community Donations and Fundraising – **\$680,576 (60%)**
- Government* – **\$377,156 (34%)**
- United Way – **\$68,000 (6%)**



Total Revenue: \$1,125,732

Expenses

- Staffing Expenses – **\$871,782 (77%)**
- Direct Program Expenses – **\$58,070 (5%)**
- Resource Development and Marketing – **\$40,329 (4%)**
- Facility* and Administration – **\$154,011 (14%)**



Total Expenses: \$1,124,192 *Includes amortization

Excess of Revenue over Expenses: \$1,540



Department of Justice
Canada

Ministère de la Justice
Canada





Child
Witness
Centre

Creating a community where
children and youth
are *safe, valued and heard.*

“Young people are our future —
Let's encourage, support, and guide them.”

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