

**Kids & Community Hamilton:  
A Parent Readiness Project**

April 2008

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Social Planning Network of Ontario received funding in 2006 from Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program



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APPENDIX A: Kids and Community Survey

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Social Planning Network of Ontario received funding in 2006 from Human Resources and Social Development Canada's Social Development Partnerships Program to carry out a two year project in five pilot projects in communities across Ontario that would enhance social inclusion practice and policy related to supporting families with children. The project in Hamilton was designed to engage families with young children in a process that builds their capacity to support their children's learning and development and shapes strategies for broadening community support for welcoming and including all children. Hamilton, through the Social Research and Planning Council, elected to focus activity in east Hamilton, primarily the Riverdale community.

School readiness and smooth transition into school are major issues in the lives of marginalized children in their early years as a result of low income, disability, racial or cultural acceptance, or family status. As they contend with these distancing forces, parents struggle to support their children's growth and development.

The Parent Readiness Project focused on creating opportunities for parents to articulate their concerns surrounding their children's early development and learning needs, identify the ways in which they feel distanced from community, which may limit their children's ability to achieve his/her full potential now and for the long-term.

By facilitating a process to empower parents, it was intended that parents would develop skills and build relationships necessary to affect change to the short and long-term benefit of their young children.

Overall project objectives were identified as:

- i) To facilitate a process for increasing parents' capacity to support their children's learning and development.
- ii) To facilitate the building of community consensus on issues and actions aimed at developing inclusive practice and policy as it relates to supporting families with children under six years of age.
- iii) To promote a broader and deeper understanding of social and economic inclusion through analysis, education, advocacy, and action.
- iv) To implement, document, and disseminate learning from the project.

In east Hamilton members of the Riverdale CAPC Council provided a leadership role for the process. The committee is comprised of local residents and parents in the Riverdale neighbourhood of Hamilton.

The committee was formed to advise and assist in planning programs for families in east Hamilton but also undertakes community initiatives like tenant education nights, Riverdale Summerfest, and special holiday related events that assist local families. Over the course of this project several discreet initiatives have been successfully undertaken. In the early stages of the project community meetings were held to promote participation of parents from diverse cultures as volunteers in recreation programs for children. As employment issues emerged as a critical family concern community economic development initiatives were formed by parent teams. These resulted in business training sessions being provided to assist in establishing licensed home child care, micro-finance prospects identified and business development services engaged to assist in growing a fledgling cleaning cooperative.

The last seven months of the project also facilitated community planning and construction of playground equipment in Riverdale and finally the formation of a community based research team that worked through the community, household by household, to gather deeper insight into local social and economic inclusion issues. The following material provides a summary of the knowledge gained about community characteristics and issues.



## KABOOM BUILD DAY

## 2.0 THE RIVERDALE COMMUNITY

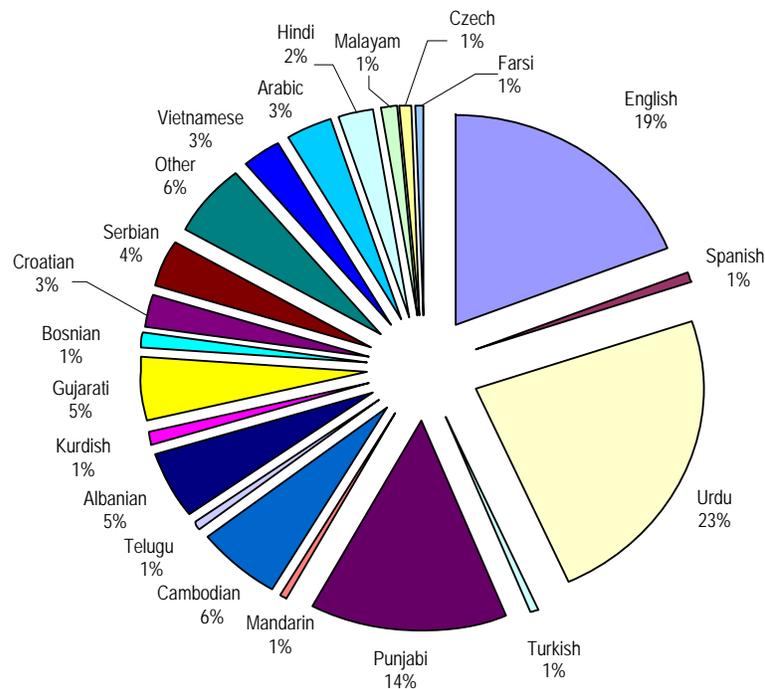
According to the 2006 census, more than one-quarter of the Hamilton population were foreign-born (25.4%). This represents the third highest proportion of foreign-born residents in Canada, surpassed only by Toronto and Vancouver.

Riverdale's<sup>1</sup> numbers are even higher than Hamilton as a whole. A small neighbourhood in East Hamilton, bound by Centennial Parkway, Barton and Queenston Road, is home to a vibrant and vital mix of citizens from around the world. 50% of the population is foreign-born.

What's more, the percentage of *recent* immigrants is 22.18% in Riverdale, compared to 3.3% for Hamilton as a whole. In fact, close to 10% of all recent immigrants in Hamilton live in Riverdale.

The numbers at the local public school suggest that the community may be even more diverse than census numbers indicate: 18% of students have been in Canada less than 5 years, 81% of students speak a first language other than English and over 31 different languages are spoken by students. The 2006-07 kindergarten class alone speaks 16 different languages.

**First Languages Spoken  
at Lake Avenue School 2006-07**



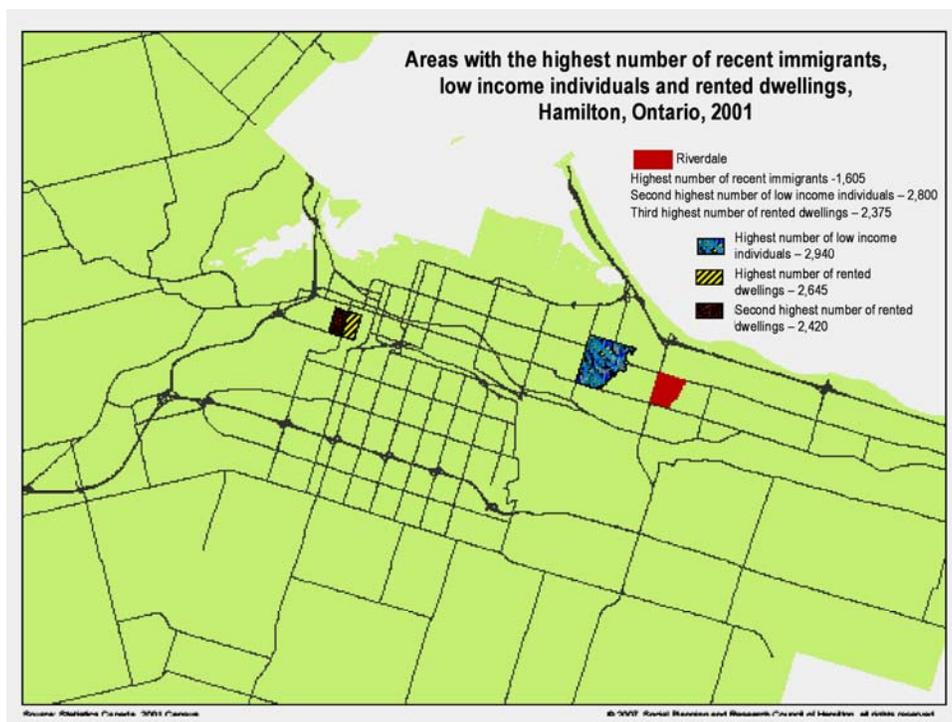
The Riverdale community is also distinguished by its changing population and high mobility rate. According to the 2001 census, the local population increased 10.3% over the preceding 5 years, compared to 4.8% for Hamilton as a whole. Riverdale also demonstrates higher mobility numbers within the community than neighbouring communities and Hamilton as a whole. These numbers are supported by the experience of the local school, which experiences a considerably above average in and out rate annually as students leave for and return from extended visits to their country of origin.

<sup>1</sup> From 2001 census data since census tract information from the 2006 census data was not available at the time of this report.

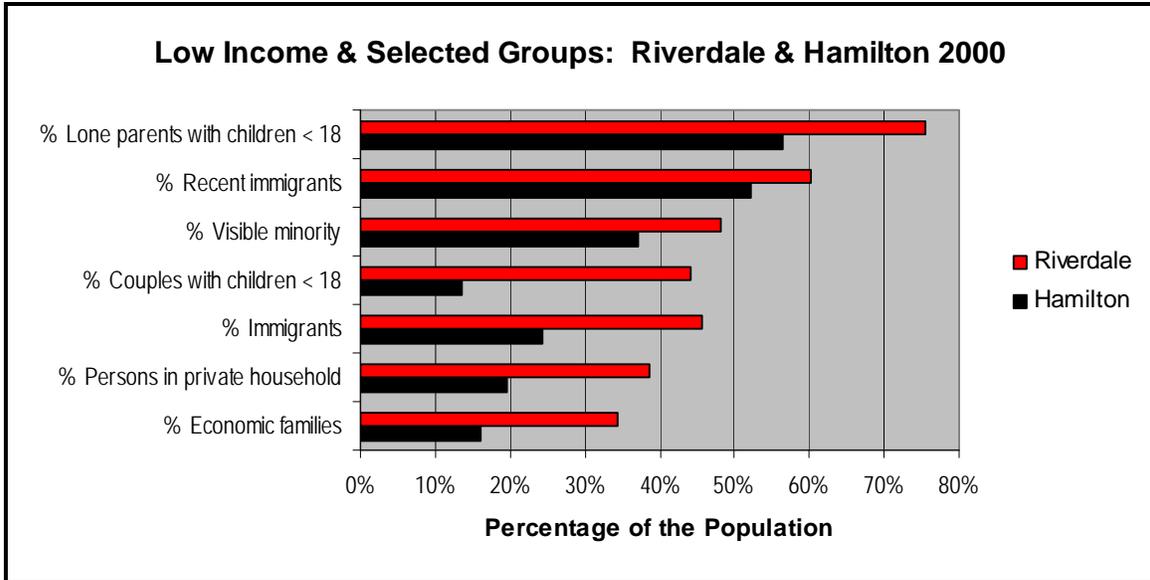
Average household income in Riverdale is more than \$20,000 lower than the average household income for Hamilton as a whole. Census data tells us there is a significant relationship between newcomer status and income:

Select Group	Incidence of Low Income
Total Population	20%
With immigrant status	24%
Recent Immigrants (< 5 years)	52%
With visible minority status	37%

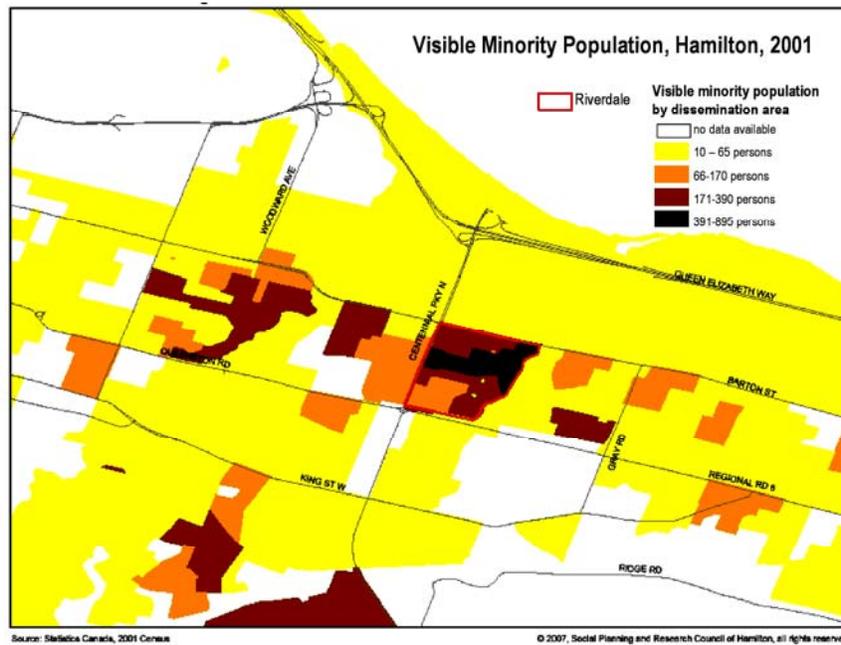
When we look at immigration, income and rented dwellings, Riverdale has the highest number of recent immigrants, the second highest number of individuals living in poverty and the third highest number of rented dwellings of all Hamilton neighborhoods:



Riverdale has a higher percentage of lone parent families and couples with children living in poverty than the city as a whole. Family sizes tend to be larger. It also has a higher percentage of immigrants and visible minorities living in poverty.



Riverdale has the highest number of visible minorities in Hamilton.



### **3.0 WHAT COMMUNITY MEMBERS SAID**

Over the course of the Kids and Community project a number of discussions were held and documented. Through these discussions several key themes emerged. Overwhelmingly, participants told us that their ability to parent to the best of their ability is affected by a variety of external factors. These included:

#### **3.1 Employment**

As noted previously, the community of Riverdale has a very high percentage of the population who are relative newcomers to Canada. As such, many residents experience frustration accessing work, especially with the recognition of international skills, experience and credentials.

Many program participants (25%) have completed university yet are unable to find work. They cite lack of recognition of foreign credentials, Canadian work experience and references as primary barriers. They can't help but wonder about an immigration system that prioritizes educated immigrants but fails to recognize their credentials or provide supports to them reaching their potential as contributors to the Canadian economy. Many have experienced the vicious circle of being asked for Canadian work experience in order to get a job. Others are working low paid menial jobs despite impressive qualifications and experience from their home land. Resulting frustrations can result in tension and conflict in the home and less than optimal parenting.

#### **3.2 Housing**

Eighty four (84) percent of Riverdale residents live in rental accommodation. Rents are higher than the average Hamilton rent: \$651 in Riverdale compared to \$627 city wide, despite the fact that Riverdale has the 2nd highest percentage of low income individuals in Hamilton. There is also a high vacancy/turnover rate.

Landlord tenant issues abound. Residents report lack of heat & hot water, pests and frequent elevator breakdowns, but seem reluctant to take legal action. Advocates speculate that newcomers to Canada are not always aware of their rights under the Landlord Tenant Act or the process through which they can make complaints. Those that are aware of their rights may be reluctant to pursue them based on experience with government in their countries of origin or difficulty communicating with the Property Standards Office.

#### **3.3 Interactions with the School**

Interaction with the school system can often bring to light cultural differences regarding the role of parenting and the formal education system. 81% of the students at Lake Avenue Public School speak a first language other than English.

This presents challenges in their combined efforts to do their absolute best for the children.

Understanding and ongoing communication between home and school are critical – but affected by language and cultural differences. Parents and children bring different understandings of school, discipline and respect with them to the school. When teachers and parents express different ideas about right and wrong, children are more often than not caught in the middle.

Parents unfamiliar with Canadian food also receive mixed messages from the school system regarding health and nutrition. Pizza day can leave the impression that this is a healthy option. Children who take culturally appropriate food for lunch are often teased by peers.

### **3.4 Cultural Differences in Parenting Practices**

Parents struggle to understand Canadian expectations, norms and systems. Cultural differences regarding respect, discipline, food and a myriad of other factors influence their relationships with their children, schools and society at large. Since children tend to assimilate Canadian language and culture more rapidly than their parents, this can create communication gaps between parent and child, and may be perceived by the parent as lack of respect for parental authority or the traditions of the home.

Corporal punishment is not only acceptable in many cultures, but also often the primary parenting style for instilling discipline. This challenge can be exacerbated when first generation Canadian children act as interpreters of Canadian customs and expectations to their parents.

### **3.5 Personal Safety and Security**

Teen gangs and grow ops are prevalent. Community policing has increased in recent years, but the community still feels unsafe.

### **3.6 Accessibility and Use of the Community Centre**

Residents report little access to playgrounds for their children amongst the high-rises in which they live. In addition, residents repeatedly express frustration with 'muddy walkways' to both the local school and recreation centre.

While the facilities and programs at the recreation centre are acknowledged, accommodation for the large Muslim population in terms of curtains and separate swim times for women would also be appreciated.

### **3.7 Access to Services in General**

Lack of transportation and the concentration of services in the core presents an ongoing challenge to local residents. For mothers with young children, public transportation is not always a viable or affordable solution.

Residents and service providers alike report that the residents are not eligible to use the closest food bank, located in Stoney Creek, because they have a Hamilton address. Food available at food banks is often not culturally appropriate, impacting on the nutrition and health of some of our most vulnerable citizens.

Access to health care is also consistently reported as a significant issue.

## 4.0 THE COMMUNITY SURVEY



In the final phase of the Kids and Community project a community based research team was formed to undertake a door to door survey of neighbourhood residents. The research team was comprised of women who were primarily Riverdale neighbourhood residents, parents of young children and from diverse cultural backgrounds capable of communicating with residents in more than six languages. The survey interviews were designed to explore further the issues expressed in the consultations were representative of the community at large. In all, 415 interviews were conducted.

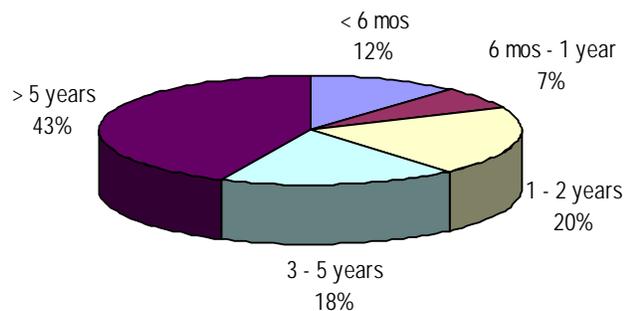
**From left to right - Tamara Douglas - Hana Hasan - Khitam Hassan - Shagufta Qureshi - Alison Miller - Clair Wilson - Tammy McDonald - Frieda Kim**

### 4.1 Respondent Profiles

#### 4.1.1 Length of time living in the Riverdale Neighbourhood

More than half the respondents had lived in Riverdale for less than five (5) years. More than ten (10) percent had lived there less than six (6) months and close to twenty (20) percent had lived there less than a year.

#### Length of Time Living the Neighbourhood



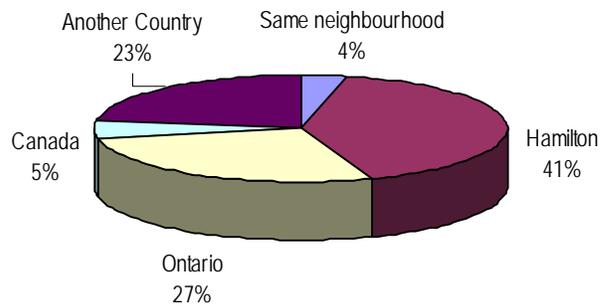
This indicates a higher mobility rate than either the City of Hamilton, or the province of Ontario (12.6% and 13.% of the populations respectively had lived at the same address for less than a year<sup>2</sup>), but is reflective of other data available regarding the neighbourhood.

<sup>2</sup> According to the 2006 Census.

#### 4.1.2 Previous Residence

Respondents were asked where they had lived before. Twenty three (23) percent indicated that they had lived in another country. This is consistent with census data that indicates a newcomer population of approximately twenty four (24) percent Hamilton-wide, but lower than census numbers for Riverdale. This may be indicative of immigrants moving to Riverdale from elsewhere in Hamilton or other locations in Toronto.

**Previous Place of Residence**

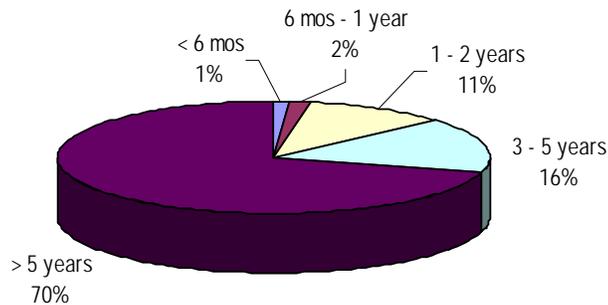


#### 4.1.3 Length of Time in Canada

Two hundred and fifty two (252) respondents indicated that they were not born in Canada. This represents sixty one (61) percent of all respondents. This is a higher percentage of immigrants than indicated by the 2001 census for the area (50%).

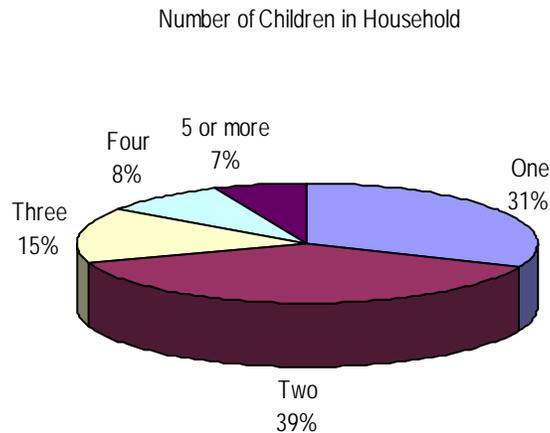
These respondents were asked how long they had lived in Canada. Responses indicate that most (70.6%) had lived in Canada at least five (5) years. This is consistent with the data above, suggesting some may have lived in another neighbourhood in Canada prior to moving to Riverdale.

**Length of Time in Canada**



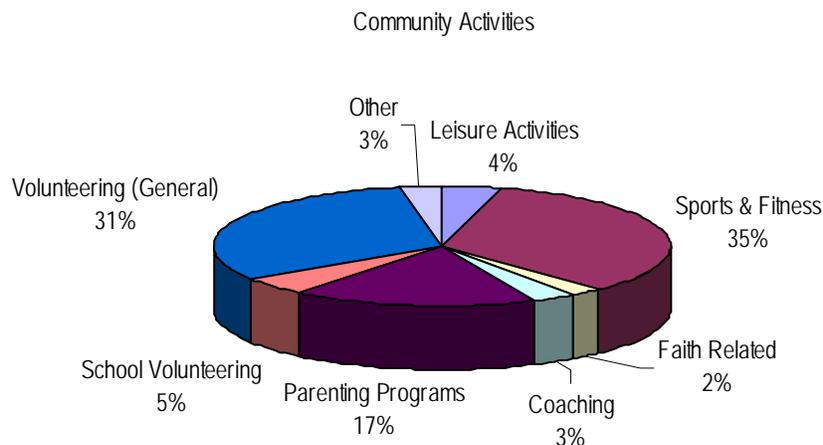
#### 4.1.4 Children Living in Household

Sixty six (66) percent of respondents indicated that there were children living in the household. The number of children per household ranged from one (1) through eight (8):



#### 4.1.5 Involvement in Community Activities

Seventy one (71) percent of survey respondents indicated that they were *not* involved in community activities. Of the twenty nine (29) percent that indicated they were, most were involved in sports and fitness activities, volunteering in general and parenting programs.

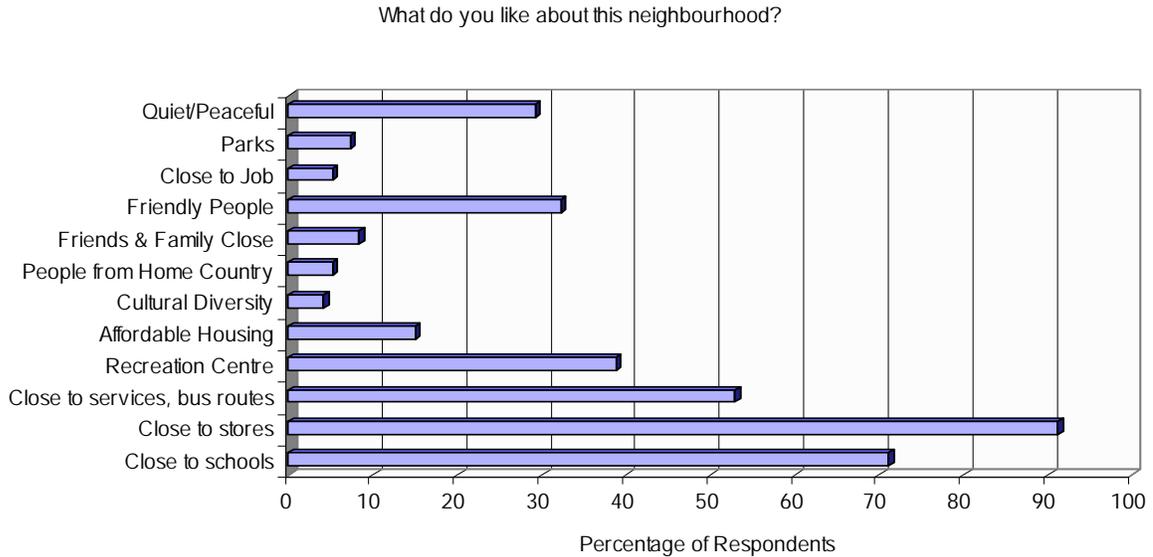


Motivations for participation included the opportunity to socialize and meet new people, helping others, helping or interacting with children, fun, skill development. The fact that activities were located close by was identified as an important factor by twenty (20) percent of respondents.

## 5.0 RESPONSES

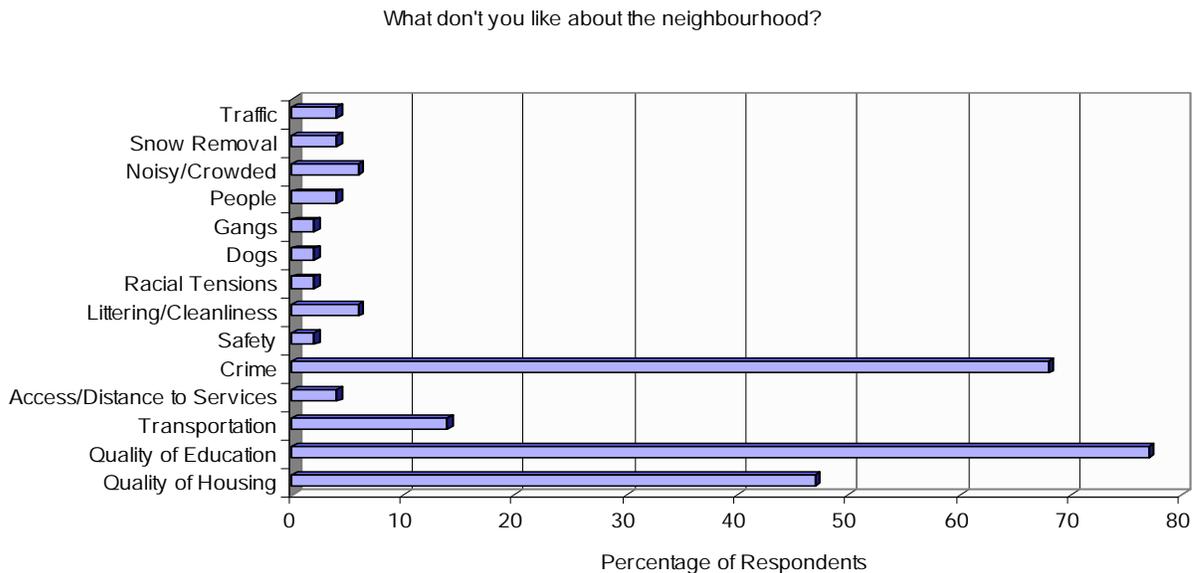
### 5.1 What Respondents Like about the Neighbourhood

Respondents were asked what they liked about the Riverdale neighbourhood. The overwhelming majority (91%) indicated proximity to stores was an attractive feature of the neighbourhood, followed by proximity to schools (71.1%), and proximity to services and/or bus routes (53%).



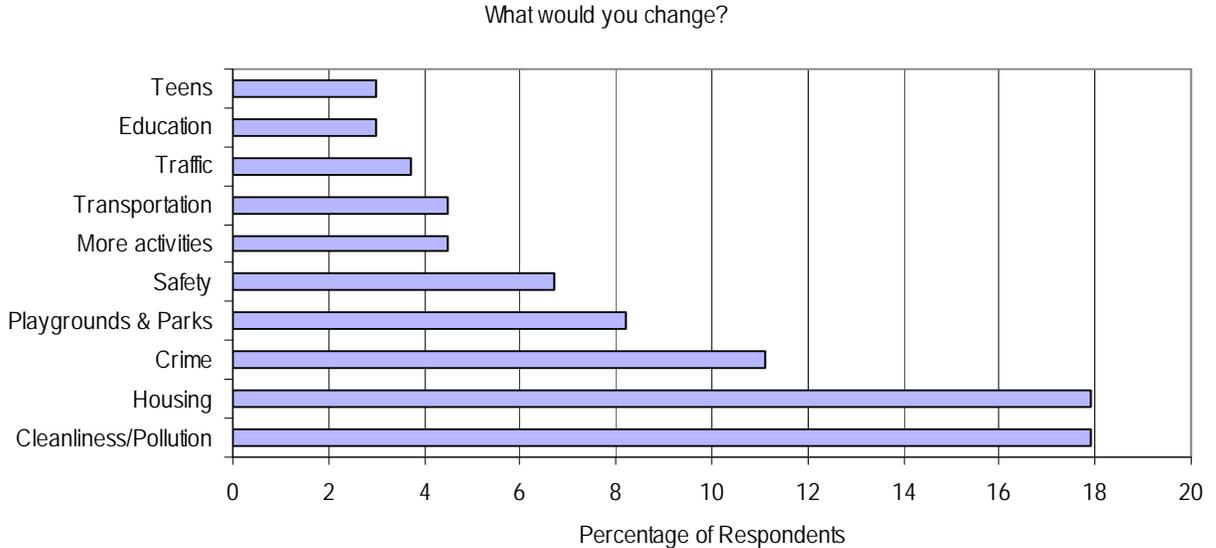
### 5.2 What Respondents Don't Like

Respondents were then asked what they didn't like about the neighbourhood. The most common concerns identified were the quality of the education their children were receiving (77%), neighbourhood crime (68%), housing (47%) and transportation (14%).



### 5.3 What Respondents Would Change

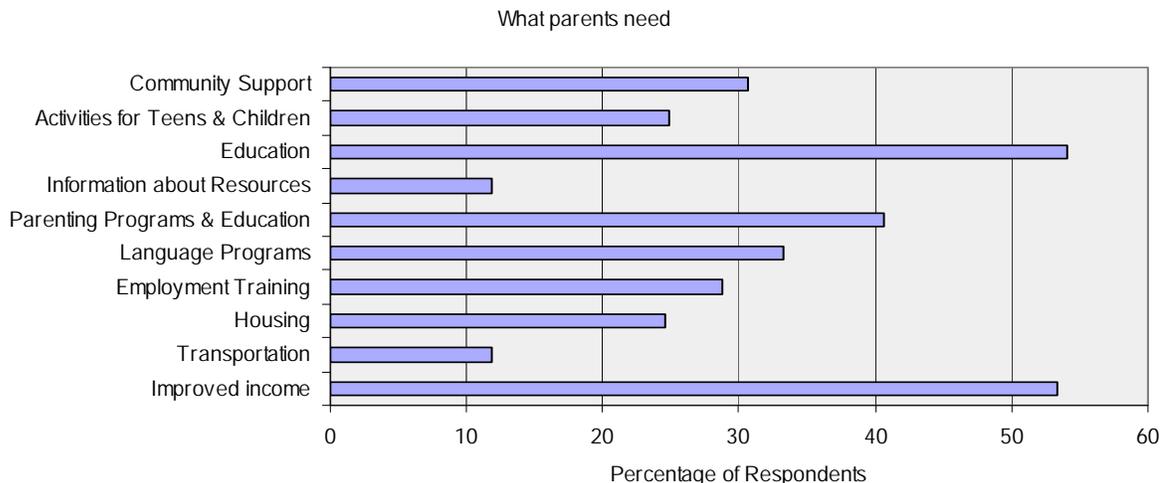
Similarly, when asked what they would change, respondents focused on cleanliness/pollution (18%), housing (18%), crime (11%) and the lack of parks and playgrounds (8%).



Other responses included: more programs and activities at the recreation centre, an improved walkway to the recreation centre and schools, improved sense of community, employment, health care, noise, parking, snow removal and service integration.

### 5.4 What Parents Need

Respondents were asked what they thought parents needed to raise their children to be the best they could be. Responses included education (54%), improved income (53%) and parenting programs (41%). Other responses included language programs, community support, employment training, housing, activities for teens and children, transportation and information about resources. Several respondents engaged in discussions regarding the need for parents to discipline their children.



## **6.0 SELECTED ACTIVITIES**

Over the course of the Kids in Community Project, the Riverdale CAPC Council collaborated in making several changes.

### **6.1 Employment**

The Riverdale CAPC Council formulated a plan to promote worker cooperatives for greater economic stability. The members discussed the business plan and cash requirements to form a cooperative. They remain keen to form a cooperative to improve their employment situation. A small group of parents have decided to form a janitorial services co-op since it will enable the members to work independently with no requirement or formal registration as a janitor. However they will undertake a formal short term training program as a janitor to learn the trade.

Members have also generated preliminary plans to organize a Cultural Interpreters' Cooperative since the Project Advisory Committee (PAC) had four members who were professional interpreters currently working for different agencies

A meeting was arranged for committee members with staff from the Ontario Cooperative Association (On Co-op) to decide on the type of co-op they should form (marketing co-op, workers co-op, producers co-op, etc) that would be most beneficial to them. A co-op staff member made a presentation about co-operatives in Ontario and also volunteered to provide support in developing the co-op bylaws and helping members to get in touch with other co-op ventures in the province.

Members also discussed the need to get some formal training in janitorial services. The only agency currently providing janitorial training in Hamilton is the Marty Karl Centre. An arrangement has been made through the Social Planning Research Council (SPRC) and the Marty Karl Centre to organize training for members interested in accessing professional training in janitorial services. The SPRC further supported this direction by submitting a proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation for funding to provide training to the co-op members interested in janitorial work and to other micro enterprise initiatives that may develop. The Ontario Trillium Foundation recently announced that the proposal has been successful and this new iteration of the project will begin shortly.

PAC members also discussed the plan to start a co-op to provide a cultural interpretation services to local agencies to generate employment opportunities for Riverdale parents. The parents continue to meet and discuss the feasibility of starting a cooperative venture.

### **6.2 Housing**

Members decided to organize a Tenant Action Committee for the neighbourhood so that any tenant with a problem (such as repairs or maintenance issue, or eviction) could approach the committee for help and support to file a complaint with the landlord or Landlord Tenant Board or to contact the legal clinic. The Housing Help Centre - Tenant Education Project (Tenant Helpline Project) helped organize the committee and provided information and resources. Forms developed by the legal clinics were provided to the members to file complaint to their landlords.

The Riverdale Tenant Action Group (TAG) decided to enlist more members and collect a token \$1 a month as membership fees from each member. The Tenant Action Group in Riverdale will address tenant issues in the neighbourhood by helping to make complaints to the City Housing on behalf of the tenant whenever necessary and helping connect the tenants to local Community legal clinics. The staff person from the Housing Help Centre - Tenant Education Project will be on site at Riverdale once a month. The Tenant Action Group will hold an election later this year to elect its officers for the year. Meanwhile the staff person will chair and organize the meetings of the TAG.

### **6.3 Education**

Resource material was provided to the parents about the rights of parents with children in school. Information about the school boards, school trustee and the complaint process was included in the resource material.

In order to improve the parent–teacher relations and communications, parents will explore avenues for translation of school communication in different languages, greater participation in school activities and committees.

## 7.0 CONCLUSION

The Kids in Community Project in Hamilton offered a unique opportunity to engage parents and community members in Riverdale in important conversations about what they need to ensure social inclusion of children in a neighbourhood defined by multiple risk factors. It also provided the medium to being a process of change – a process that will need to be nurtured and supported to ensure meaning, substantive and ongoing change, to ensure that some of the best and brightest of our next generation have the opportunities that will enable them to reach their full potential.



**APPENDIX A**  
**KIDS AND COMMUNITY SURVEY**

## KIDS AND COMMUNITY SURVEY – CAPC 905-546-4295

**Introduction:** Good morning/afternoon. We're from the CAPC project over at the recreation centre. We'd like to ask you a few questions about living and raising children in this community. It should only take about five minutes, but to respect your time and input, we are giving everyone who participates one of these vouchers for \$5.00 at Food Basics. The information collected will be used to report to decision-makers about what people in this community think is important. Are you interested in participating?

If yes, continue with the survey. If no, thank them for their time and wish them a nice day.

*To begin, we'd like to ask you a bit of information about yourself and your family.*

1. How long have you lived in this neighbourhood?
- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> < 6 mos        | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 – 5 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 mos – 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> > 5 years   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 years    |                                      |

2. Where did you live before?

*Probe: Were you born in Canada? How long have you lived in Canada?*

- |   |                                      |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> < 6 mos        | <input type="checkbox"/> 3 – 5 years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 6 mos – 1 year | <input type="checkbox"/> > 5 years   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1 – 2 years    |                                      |

3. Are there children living in this household? If yes, how many?
- 

4. Are you involved in any community activities? (volunteer at the school or with children's activities)?

- If yes:
- Which community/volunteer activities?
  - What do you like about it?

*Now we'd like to ask you about this community and raising kids here.*

5. What are some of the things you like about this neighbourhood?
- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Close to schools              | <input type="checkbox"/> Recreation Centre  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Close to stores               | <input type="checkbox"/> Affordable Housing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Close to services, bus routes | <input type="checkbox"/> Other:             |
6. Are there things you don't like?
- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quality of housing            | <input type="checkbox"/> Access/Distance to services |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quality of schools, education | <input type="checkbox"/> Crime                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation                |  |
7. What would you change?
8. What do you think parents need to raise their children to be the best they can?
- Improved income
  - Transportation
  - Housing
  - Employment training
  - Language programs
  - Parenting programs
  - Information about resources
9. Do you have any other comments?