

# Youth Engagement Strategy

2024-2027



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# Message from the Chief

On behalf of the Waterloo Regional Police Service, I am pleased to introduce our Youth Engagement Strategy (YES) for 2024-2027.

This strategy reflects our Service's commitment to working alongside young people to create a community where every youth feels safe, supported, and connected. Built on the voices of youth and the priorities of our community partners, YES emphasizes prevention, education, leadership, and belonging. It provides us with a roadmap to strengthen trust, create positive opportunities, and work together with young people to shape a safer and healthier future.

Youth are not only the future of our community - they are also vital contributors to its present. Through this strategy, we will foster meaningful relationships, invest in youth leadership, and ensure that every interaction with police is rooted in respect, empathy, and opportunity.

With the dedication of our members and the strength of our partnerships, the Youth Engagement Strategy will help create the conditions for public safety, resilient communities, and brighter futures for the youth of Waterloo Region.

## **Mark Crowell**

Chief, Waterloo Regional Police Service





**WATERLOO REGION**

# Community Safety & Wellbeing Plan

The Waterloo Regional Police Youth Engagement Strategy is closely connected to the principles and priorities of our Regional Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan.

Through collaboration with community partners, we are able to focus our efforts on meaningful diversion from the criminal justice system and towards resources based in early intervention, prevention and social development. This provides youth in our community with the ability to feel safe, cared for and have the ability to thrive.



Addressing Intimate Partner Violence, Gender Based Violence, and Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women



Combatting Hate



Addressing Mental Health Needs Together



Creating Safe and Inclusive Spaces

**01 Incident Response** Critical and non-critical response

**02 Risk Intervention** Mitigating situations of elevated risk

**03 Prevention** Proactively reducing identified risks

**04 Social Development** Promoting and maintaining community safety and wellbeing



# A Plan Designed for Waterloo Region

- WRPS developed the Youth Engagement Strategy to address rising levels of youth violence, mitigate adverse childhood experiences, and improve overall safety for youth.
- Each priority area of the strategy aims to improve youth outcomes and create the conditions for a safe and well Waterloo Region.
- The strategy reflects:
  - Our values of People, Partnerships and Professional Excellence
  - Two of our key goals: Our Commitment to Safety and Our Connections
  - Our Region's diverse communities through our Equity Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan





## Developing the Strategy



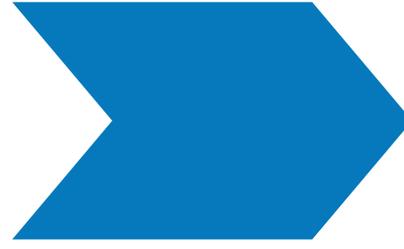
### Data Analysis

A comprehensive review of occurrences, charges, diversions, re-contacts, and adverse childhood experiences.



### Research

In-depth review of survey results and trust in policing from the Cops & Youth Program and the Youth Impact Survey.



### Youth Engagement Network

Engagement with a youth professional community of practice.



### Member Training

Youth Engagement training given to WRPS members in partnership with Camino Wellbeing & Mental Health.

# Reviewing the Youth Impact Survey

Lead by the Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region, the survey created more than 60 Calls to Action for the community across nine dimensions of wellbeing.

Of the 60 Calls to Action, 10 are directly relevant for the WRPS Youth Engagement Strategy and helped us to turn data into action.



**Children and Youth  
Planning Table**  
of Waterloo Region

## **#5: Belonging**

“Create more opportunities for children and youth that support young people.”

## **#41: Protected**

“Better address bullying in the community - this includes identifying the root causes of bullying.”

## **#60: Respected**

“Speak directly to youth and provide opportunities for youth to access the information in a way that works for them.”



# Early Adversity and Community Resilience

## Community Risk Factors

- Intimate Partner Violence
- Poverty
- Accessibility to drugs & alcohol
- Racial / Ethnic Discrimination
- Substance Misuse

## Community Protective Factors

- Access to Mental Health Services
- Safe, engaging after school programs
- Access to substance misuse services
- School based health promotion education
- Opportunities for youth to participate in sports and pro-social activities

The Waterloo Regional Police Service has an important role to play in reducing the impacts of early childhood adversity, preventing trauma, and promoting community resilience. Our ability to connect youth with meaningful resources, civic engagement opportunities, and create positive relationships to improve outcomes is a key priority of this strategy.

# Strategic Priorities



## Community & Youth Safety

Create the conditions in the community that contribute to safety, resilience and wellbeing.



## Education & Outreach

Investing in pathways and programs that will improve outcomes for youth.



## Leadership & Development

Sharing in youth-designed initiatives that facilitates community and civic engagement.



# WRPS Youth Engagement Strategy

2024-2027



## Education and Outreach

Invest in pathways and programs that will improve outcomes for youth.

- Public Safety Awareness
- Engaging Youth Online
- Youth Engaged & Community Connected



## Youth Leadership and Development

Sharing in youth-designed initiatives and facilitating community and civic engagement.

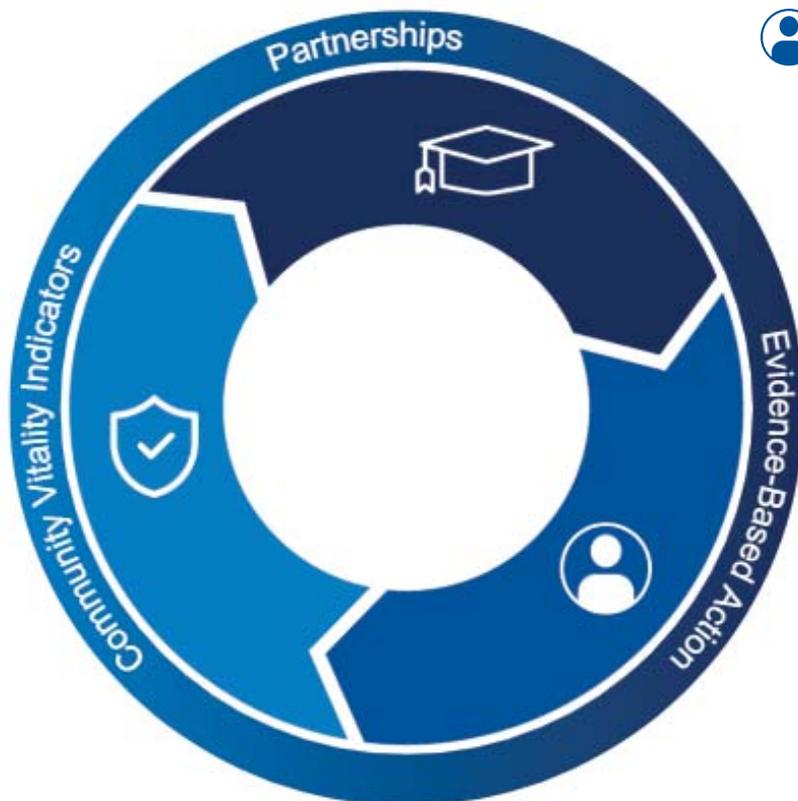
- Evaluate and grow existing programs
- Youth volunteer program
- Youth ambassador program
- Support youth-led initiatives



## Community and Youth Safety

Create community conditions that will contribute to safety, resilience and wellbeing.

- Community & Youth Engagement Officers
- YCJA Pathways to Diversion
- Prevention and Violence Reduction Initiatives





## Education & Outreach

### Engaging Youth Online

- WRPS website landing page designed specifically for youth, highlighting key information and opportunities

### Public Safety Programs

- Communicating key safety messages using police and partner data and information

### Youth Engaged & Community Connected Membership

- Prioritizing youth training for WRPS members and committing to involvement in local youth networks

Building trust and confidence in police is a significant priority for WRPS. Youth should feel safe in reporting issues to police or when seeking help. Ensuring that our outreach is intentional and meaningful, while also educating our membership around effective youth engagement, will provide the opportunity for youth and officers to share knowledge and develop common ground.



# Leadership & Development

## WRPS Youth Volunteer Program

- An opportunity to learn about community and complete volunteer hours while partnered with a WRPS member

## Evaluate and Grow Existing Programs

- A commitment to internal and external evaluations to
- guide investment and actions

## Youth Ambassador Program & Supporting Youth Lead Initiatives

- Provide connections and a platform for youth to contribute to WRPS
- Facilitate and partner with youth lead community initiatives

Creating the elements for Community Safety includes connecting youth with their community and building trust with local institutions. Strengthening these bonds creates accountability between youth and the community in which they live, and empowers them to be care takers and ambassadors for the Region of Waterloo.



# Community & Youth Safety

## Community & Youth Engagement Officers

- A dedicated unit of officers acting as a resource for partners, call response, school safety & complex youth investigations

## YCJA Diversion Pathways

- Streamlining the local diversion model to improve outcomes for youth, reduce re-contact, and evaluate our programs

## Prevention

- Reducing violence and recidivism using evidence-based programs
- Dedicated mental health & addictions resources
- Focus on early intervention

Creating an environment where everyone is safe and feels safe requires activating resources from across the community through a multi-sector approach to ensure the right help is available at the right time. Using several key initiatives, the Service will prioritize the safety of schools, their staff, students and surrounding communities.



# The Foundation

A consistent and measurable approach that values partnerships.



## Community Vitality Youth Belonging

Indicators that measure quality of life in relation to our community, perception of safety, security, protection and overall community engagement.



## Strategic Partners

Developing partnerships is a key to building trust, addressing complex issues from many angles and aligning our work to create Community Safety & Wellbeing.



## Evidence-Based Actions

The strategy will use contemporary research and local knowledge to promote public safety, support evaluated youth programming, change negative trajectories and improve outcomes.



# Data in Action

How do we measure performance?

- **Canadian Index of Wellbeing**
  - Community Vitality and associated domains
- **Canadian Index of Child and Youth Wellbeing**
  - Nine domains measured
- **Canadian Police Performance Metrics Framework**
- **Partnership with Measurement4Change**



[wrps.ca](http://wrps.ca)



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