



## A Profile of Child, Youth & Family Health in Grey & Bruce Counties

### Summary Report



## Background

The Grey Bruce Children's Alliance is a network of organizations that work together to offer a more seamless, integrated system of services and supports to children, youth and families in Grey Bruce. This Report is part of a comprehensive planning project called Measuring and Planning for Child and Youth Health. This was a two year project completed in 2010 with financial assistance from the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Report presents a summary of statistical information and research findings about children youth and families in Grey and Bruce Counties and their health. It is widely known that being healthy is much more than not being sick. It is an overall state of well-being. A number of factors contribute to children and youth being able to thrive and reach their full potential. These factors are referred to as the determinants of health and include social and economic factors, the physical environment, and individual behaviours and living conditions.

In this Summary Report, we have highlighted how children, youth and families in Grey Bruce are doing based on information related to many of the determinants of health. A much more detailed Technical Report, including all information sources, is also available from the Children's Alliance (see contact information on page 8).

**“...being healthy is  
much more than  
not being sick.”**

## Purpose of the Profile

- Provide information specific to Grey and Bruce Counties that will assist service providers and parents to identify areas of strength and vulnerability in the population of children and youth;
- Serve as a planning tool for service providers to consider opportunities to respond to areas of vulnerability, and;
- Provide a baseline of information to track changes over time.

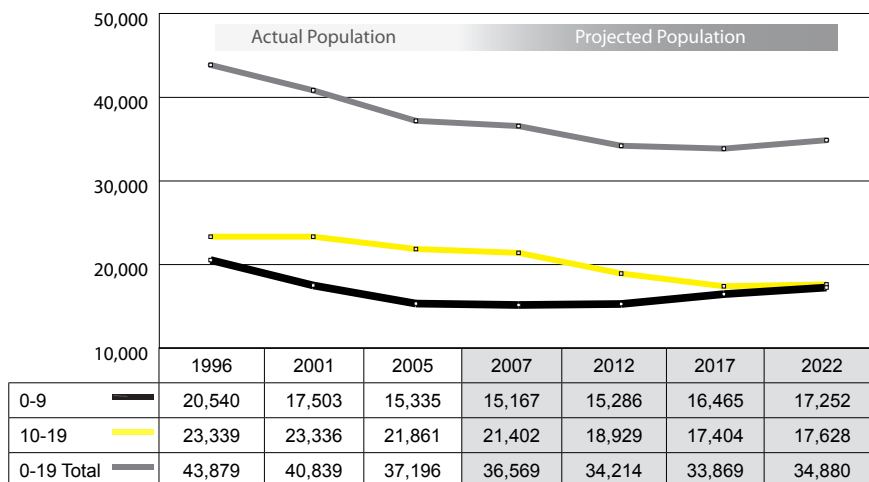
<sup>1</sup> A Vision for Children in Halton Region Report Card: Executive Summary provided a valuable framework for the preparation of this report card.

## The Number of Children and Youth in Grey Bruce: Past, Present and Future

In 2006, there were just over 37,000 children and youth (19 years of age and under) living in Grey and Bruce Counties. The number of children and youth in the two counties has decreased by 16% over the past 10 years from 43,879 in 1996. The decline has been most prevalent in the younger age groups (0-9). The older age group (10-19) has remained more stable. Over the 15 year period 2007

to 2022, it is expected that the child and youth population in Grey Bruce will decline slightly from 36,569 in 2007 to 34,880 in 2022. During that time period the number of younger children (aged 0-9 years) is expected to increase and the number of older children and youth (10-19 years) is expected to decrease.

Number of Younger Aged Children Expected to Increase by 2022



Sources:  
Actual: Statistics Canada Census: 1996, 2001 and 2006

Projected: Southwest Local Health Integration Network, intelHEALTH May 2008.

## Where Do Grey Bruce Children and Youth Live?

In 2006, the largest group of children and youth aged 0 to 18 years (4,732) lived in the City of Owen Sound. The remainder of the child and youth population lived in smaller rural communities dispersed across the two Counties.



Children and Youth Population by Municipality 2006 Canada Census Data

City of Owen Sound	4,732
Georgian Bluffs	2,231
Meaford	2,027
Blue Mountains	1,163
Chatsworth	1,617
West Grey	2,721
Hanover	1,355
Grey Highlands	2,286
Southgate	2,184
Grey County	20,316
Northern Bruce Peninsula	624
South Bruce Peninsula	1,602
Saugeen Shores	2,027
Kincardine	2,354
Huron Kinloss	1,744
Arran-Elderslie	1,702
Brockton	2,283
South Bruce	1,803
Bruce County	14,139

Note: Saugeen First Nation and Cape Croker First Nation are not represented in the above table as Census data specific to these communities is incomplete.

The family provides the most significant influence on a child's development. Research indicates that the social and economic well-being of families is the most important determinant of health. Children who grow up in low income families experience a higher risk of health problems throughout their lives.<sup>2</sup>

Socioeconomic factors also influence the safety of the environments in which children and youth grow and play, particularly adequate affordable housing. First Nations, Inuit and Métis families disproportionately experience social and economic circumstances that threaten the health and well-being of their children and youth. Immigrant children and youth are also more likely to live in poverty than non-immigrant children and youth.



## How Socially and Economically Secure Are Grey Bruce Families?

### Strengths

- The level of education attained by adults in Grey Bruce has improved over the past ten years. In 1996, 39% of Grey Bruce adults did not complete high school. In 2006, that percentage had decreased to 28%.
- In 2006 the unemployment rate in Grey (5.2%) and Bruce (5.3%) Counties was below the Provincial rate (6.4%).
- In 2006, the majority of Grey Bruce residents owned their homes (Grey 88%, Bruce 83%). These proportions are well above the Provincial average of 71%.
- In 2006, the vast majority of Grey Bruce residents lived at the same residence as they did one year prior (Grey 88% Bruce 90% and Ontario 86%).
- Rent-Geared-to-Income Housing is available to families in Grey Bruce with limited financial means. In 2009, there were 372 Rent-Geared-to-Income (RGI) Housing Units for families in Grey County, and 158 RGI Units for families in Bruce County. Grey County also has 4 Affordable Housing Family Units and 8 Housing Allowance Family Units.
- Over the period 2003 to 2008, between 66% and 74% of adults surveyed in Grey Bruce reported that they felt a sense of belonging to the community. This is a statistically higher percentage compared with those from Canada, Ontario or other health regions with similar demographics.

### Vulnerabilities

- In 2005, the median family income for all types of families in Bruce County was \$56,190, Grey County \$51,482. These income levels were well below the provincial median of \$69,156. Female led lone parent families in the two Counties are well below the median for all family types (Grey \$30,605, Bruce \$33,206).
- In 2006, 28% of adults in Grey Bruce did not complete high school, which is above the proportion for all of Ontario (22%).
- In 2005, 7% of Grey Bruce children and youth (approximately 2,400) were living in poverty. (Based on Statistics Canada Low Income Cut Off.)
- Over the year December 2007 to December 2008, the number of Grey Bruce residents receiving regular Employment Insurance as a result of unemployment rose by 40% in Grey County and 54% in Bruce County.
- In Ontario, social assistance is provided to families with limited incomes through the Ontario Works Program or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). In Grey County over the period 2006 to 2008, the average monthly Ontario Works case load of families with children or youth under age 18 were relatively stable (443-461). In 2009 this average monthly case load increased to 540. In Bruce County this same case load decreased from 264 in 2006 to 217 in 2008. In 2009, the average monthly case load increased to 245. Over the period 2007 to 2009, the average number of children whose families were in receipt of ODSP ranged from 630 to 634.

<sup>2</sup> The Ontario Physicians Poverty Work Group "Why Poverty Makes Us Sick" Physician Backgrounder" *Ontario Medical Review* May 2008.

## Vulnerabilities continued...

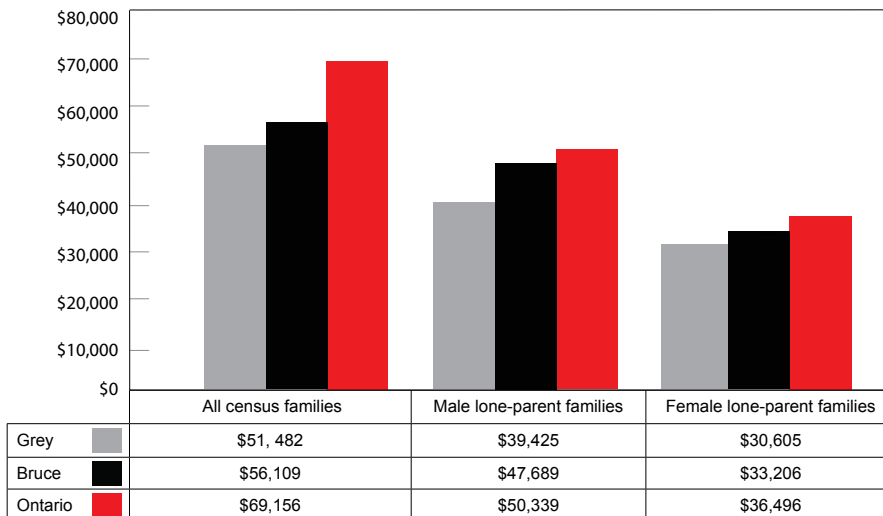
- The demand for affordable housing exceeds the supply that is available. An average of 279 families in Grey and Bruce Counties (Grey 224, Bruce 56) were on waiting lists for RGI housing during the period 2006 through 2008.
- Homelessness is a challenge for some youth and families in Grey Bruce. The number of people who were homeless or at risk of becoming homeless and accessed the YMCA Housing Support Program, has increased substantially. In 2006, 1,179 youth and adults accessed the service. By September 30, 2009, 1,602 people had accessed the service, including 95 youth.
- There are First Nations families living on or off reserves,

who may be at risk of marginalization, discrimination, and who may have limited access to culturally appropriate services.

- There are small proportions of the population who are visible minorities, recent immigrants, or Mennonite/Amish who may be at risk of isolation, marginalization, discrimination and who may have limited access to culturally appropriate services.

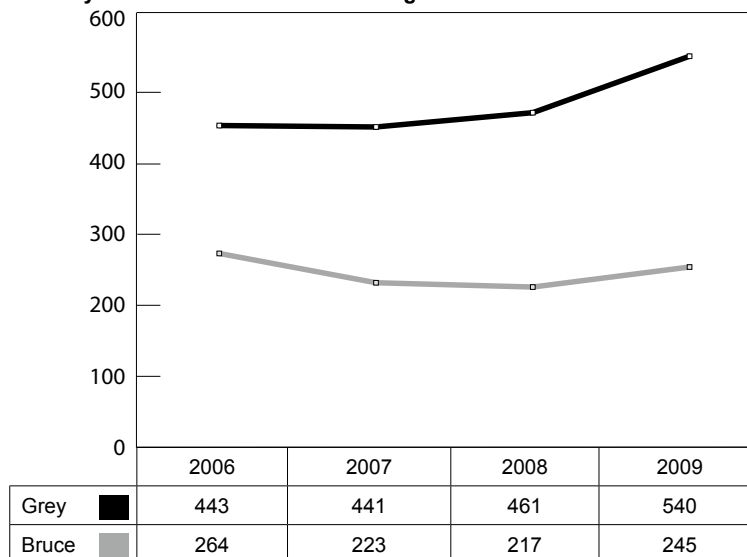


**Family Incomes in Grey and Bruce Well Below the Provincial Median in 2005**



Source: Statistics Canada (2006). Community Profiles, Income in 2006, Bruce and Grey County. Ottawa, Ontario, July 24th, 2009.

**Average Monthly Ontario Works Cases Involving Children or Youth on the Rise in Grey and Bruce Counties.**



Source: Grey County and Bruce County Social Services Departments, August 2009. Note the information for 2009 represents the average caseloads over the period January to June 2009.



## Birth

Babies born prematurely and/or with low birth weight (less than 2,500 grams) are at risk for poor health and development. High birth weight infants (greater than 4,000 grams) are at increased risk for many immediate and long-term health concerns including obesity.

The effect of the social environment on brain development and function in early life contributes to physical and mental health problems throughout life. Smoking during pregnancy is a known risk factor for unhealthy fetal growth and development. Drinking alcohol during pregnancy can result in serious health and development problems for children as a result of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) – a preventable life-long disability.



## How Are Grey Bruce Children Doing at Birth?

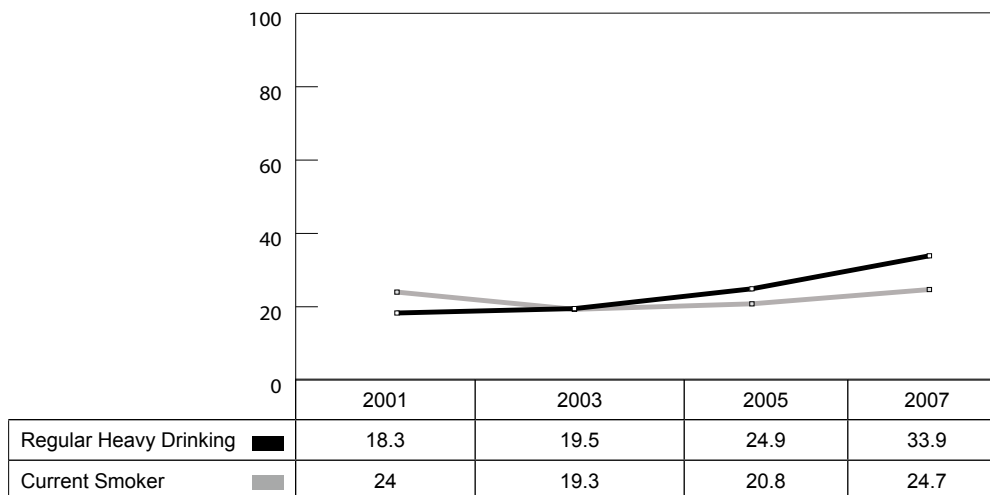
### Strengths

- Birth outcome data suggests that trends in teen pregnancy, multiple births and low birth weights are consistent with trends in other communities.

### Vulnerabilities

- Over the period 2000 to 2003, the rates of high birth weight babies were on average 25% higher in Grey Bruce compared to Ontario (all differences are statistically significant).
- Families are assessed at the time they give birth for various risk factors including violence, substance misuse, social isolation and mental health issues. They are then linked with community resources as appropriate. Over the period 2006 to 2008, about 450 families per year were identified as “at risk” and were referred to the *Healthy Babies, Healthy Children* home visiting program. In Grey and Bruce Counties, this number represents 40% of families screened, above the Ministry of Children and Youth Services standard of 25% of families.
- The rate of Grey Bruce residents reporting heavy drinking has increased significantly from 18% in 2001 to 34% in 2007. These results were significantly higher than rates in Canada, Ontario and other health regions.
- A study completed in Grey Bruce in 2004/05 found that the rate of fetal alcohol exposure in this neonatal population was estimated to be a minimum of 2.5% compared to estimated national rate in Canada of 1%.

Percentage of Adult Heavy Drinkers and Smokers Continues to Rise in Grey Bruce



Source: *Canada Community Health Surveys*, adapted by Grey Bruce Health Unit. Myatt, M. and Leffley, A., 2007.

## The Early Years (from Birth to Age 6)



“A child’s development before birth and during the early years affects health, resilience, learning and behaviour throughout that child’s life. Experiences in childhood influence how nerve cells form pathways in the brain which, in turn, affect language, literacy, memory, behaviour

Photo Courtesy of United Way Grey Bruce

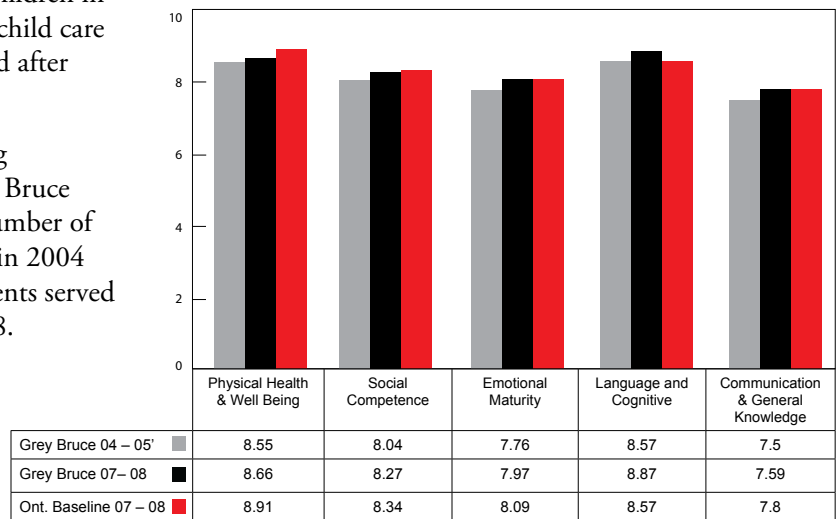
(including violence), mental health, and the capacity to learn throughout a child’s life.”<sup>3</sup> The Early Development Instrument is a survey that is administered by senior kindergarten teachers across Ontario to assess a child’s readiness to learn when entering school.

## How Are Grey Bruce Children Doing During the Early Years?

### Strengths

- Licensed child care is available to over 2,400 children in Grey Bruce through home child care, licensed child care centres, half day nursery schools and before and after school programs.
- Ontario Early Years Centres offer early learning opportunities in multiple sites across Grey and Bruce Counties. Over the period 2004 – 2008 the number of children served increased from 2,669 children in 2004 to 3,039 children in 2008. The number of parents served increased from 1,705 in 2004 to 1,845 in 2008.
- Over the period 2004 – 2008 Grey Bruce children in Senior Kindergarten showed an improvement in average Early Development Instrument (EDI) scores.
- The Grey Bruce *Let’s Learn Kindergarten Registration* Program is a comprehensive process for entry to elementary school. Families are able to register their child early for kindergarten (at age 3) and at the same time have the child undergo growth and development screening. Families can be referred to available community resources if the screening suggests a need for intervention. Over the period 2003 to 2007 an average of 858 children participated in the Early Kindergarten Registration program, representing an average of 65% of the children eligible for Junior Kindergarten in Grey and Bruce Counties.
- Parents and young children in Grey Bruce considered at risk have access to targeted supports, such as the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program, Healthy Babies, Healthy Children Program, Cradle Link, Infant Development Program and Parent Mutual Ai

Average EDI Scores are Generally on Par with Ontario Baseline



Source: Offord Centre for Child Studies, 2008

### Vulnerabilities

- Despite the fact that overall results from the 2008 EDI survey were on par with Ontario, the following sub-domains were identified as areas where further improvement is needed given the proportion of Grey Bruce children considered at risk regarding readiness to learn for school:
- Gross and Fine Motor Skills
- Overall Social Competence
- Prosocial and Helping Behaviour
- Advanced Literacy
- Communication Skills and General Knowledge

<sup>3</sup> The Health Council of Canada, Their Future is Now Healthy Choices for Canada’s Children and Youth, June 2006, pg 8.

## School Aged Children and Youth (Ages 6 to 18)

Several factors continue to influence the health of children and youth as they grow and develop. Family, peer and community relationships, as well as the physical, social and cultural environments in which they

live all have an impact. Other factors influencing youth health and well-being include school, employment opportunities, physical activity and nutrition.

Photo Courtesy of The Sun Times Newspaper



## How Are Grey Bruce School Aged Children and Youth Doing?

### Strengths

- In 2008, 77% of youth in Grey Bruce aged 12-19 reported a sense of belonging to the community.
- Trends in the standardized reading, writing and mathematics scores for all Grade 3 and Grade 6 students tested within both the Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board (BGCDSB) and the Bluewater District School Board (BWDSB) over the period 2005/06 to 2007/08 have been similar to the Provincial averages for those years.
- Over the period 2005 – 2008 there was an increase in the number of children supported by Developmental Service agencies in Grey Bruce from 658 in 2005 to 754 in 2008.
- Over the period Jan. 1, 2005 to March 31, 2009 cases with significant clinical improvement after receiving child and youth mental health services through Keystone Child Youth and Family Services was well above the rate for both the Southwest Region and the Province.
- The Owen Sound and Area Family YMCA offers a Youth Employment Program to young people in Grey Bruce between the ages of 16 and 24 years. Over the period April 2007 to September 2009 the YMCA Program supported over 500 young people per year. The majority of the clients (74-77%) were employed three months after leaving the Program, with an additional 5-10% involved in education or training at that time.

### Vulnerabilities

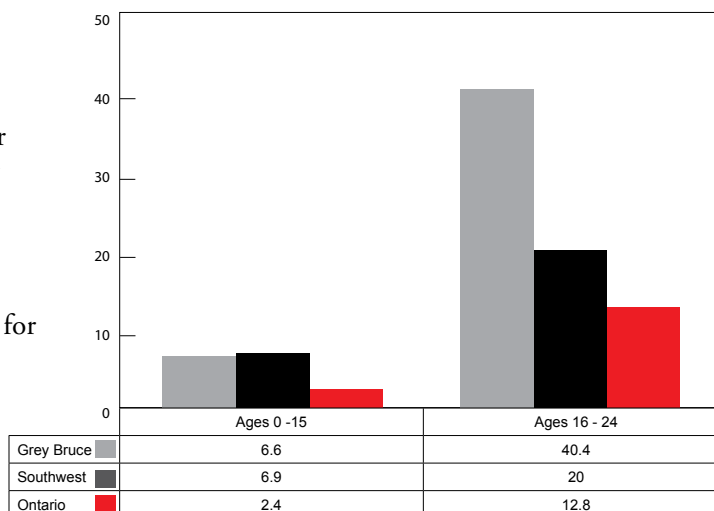
- Air or water quality may pose health risks to children and youth in Grey Bruce. Systems are in place to alert families when air or water quality is poor and precautions need to be taken.
- Studies conducted with students in Grey Bruce found that the height and body mass index are significantly greater than expected in this population and the prevalence of overweight is higher in both boys and girls.
- Only about one in four students typically consumes sufficient fruits and vegetables.
- 14% of secondary school students report getting no activity either in school or outside of school and at least one in four students spend 3 or more hours daily in front of a TV, computer screen or on the phone. The national recommendation is for two hours or less of these activities daily.
- In 2000, the results of a “mapping” exercise commissioned by the Ministry of Community and Social Services indicated that the expenditure for children’s mental health services in Grey Bruce was almost half that for Middlesex County. Although 10.6% of the children living in the Southwest Region at that time lived in Grey Bruce, funding for services for Grey Bruce children comprised only 6.3% of the total available funding.
- Youth report that Grey Bruce lacks employment opportunities for their age group.

**“Only about 1 in 4 students typically consumes sufficient fruits and vegetables”**

## Vulnerabilities continued...

- The geography of Grey Bruce is such that frequent motor vehicle travel is a necessity in the lives of most families. In 2000/2001 hospitalization rates in Grey Bruce due to motor vehicle collisions in the 0-15 year age group and the 16-24 age group were significantly higher than provincial rates.
- The number one killer of Grey Bruce teens is motor vehicle collisions. From 2000 to 2003, motor vehicle collisions were the cause of 79% (26 of 33) of deaths for youth aged 15-19 in Grey Bruce. This is significantly higher than the Ontario average of 31% and the national average of 35%.

Rates of hospitalizations for youth in Grey Bruce due to motor vehicle collisions significantly higher than the Provincial rate in 2001/02.



Source: Leffley, A (2004) Grey Bruce Health Unit Report adapted from Ontario Trauma Registry, Injury Hospitalizations 2001/02, Grey Bruce, Southwestern Ontario and Ontario.

## How Will the Report Influence the Work of the Grey Bruce Children's Alliance?

The information compiled in this Report and the more detailed Technical Report will serve as a planning tool for the Grey Bruce Children's Alliance to consider opportunities to respond to areas where child and youth health is vulnerable. The Children's Alliance has already recognized the significant impact that poverty has on the well-being of children youth and their families, which is reinforced by the information gathered for this Profile. The Alliance has been devoting considerable attention to this important issue. The implications of other information included in this report will be considered in the plans developed by the Alliance to guide its work over the next few years.

### Contact Us

For more information about the Children's Alliance, the information contained in this Report or a copy of the Full Technical Report contact Glenda Clarke, Coordinator at glenda.c@bmts.com or 519-370-0591.

### References:

- *A Vision for Children in Halton Region Report Card: Executive Summary* provided a valuable framework for the preparation of this Report.
- The Ontario Physicians Poverty Work Group "Why Poverty Makes Us Sick" Physician Backgrounder, *Ontario Medical Review* May 2008
- The Health Council of Canada, *Their Future is Now Healthy Choices for Canada's Children and Youth*, June 2006 p.8



Photo Courtesy Ontario Early Years Centre - Bruce-Grey-Owen Sound

### Alliance Partners

Adult Learning Centres: Grey Bruce Georgian  
 Bluewater District School Board  
 Bruce County  
 Bruce County Children's Aid Society  
 Bruce Grey Catholic District School Board  
 Bruce Peninsula Association for Community Living  
 Canadian Red Cross – Owen Sound Bruce Grey  
 Children's Aid Society of Owen Sound and Grey County  
 Community Living Owen Sound and District  
 Grey Bruce Health Unit  
 Grey County  
 Keystone Child, Youth and Family Services  
 M'Wikwedong Native Cultural Resource Centre  
 Owen Sound and Area Family YMCA  
 Regional Support Associates  
 Southeast Grey Community Outreach  
 Thames Valley Children's Centre  
 United Way of Bruce-Grey  
 The Women's Centre