



Waterloo Region youth awarded \$70,000 to address local challenges

From an inclusive book club to a basketball court, 12 youth projects are building the Waterloo Region of the future.

WATERLOO REGION – Twelve projects by Waterloo Region youth receive \$70,000 in funding as part of the [Youth Impact Project](#) (YIP) by Smart Waterloo Region (SWRIL) and the Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region (CYPT).

On June 8, over 100 youth from 15 local organizations pitched their ideas to a panel of nine youth. The Youth Decision-Making Panel (“The Dragons”) decided which projects would receive funding to make their idea a reality. The Youth Impact Project looks to fund youth who are addressing local challenges which are identified through the 2023 Youth Impact Survey results. The funded projects include a focus on supporting youth mental and physical health, increasing feelings of belonging and responding to climate change and food insecurity.

“Young people are not only the leaders of tomorrow — they are the experts of today on the challenges that impact them,” said Karen Redman, Chair of the Regional Municipality of Waterloo. “There is no one better than our youngest residents to champion innovative solutions and build the resilient, vibrant Waterloo Region of the future.”

"It has been exhilarating to be part of the behind-the-scenes outreach, training, and engagement of the Youth Impact Project collaboration! By "training the trainers", including United Way staff, we are accessing innovative and compassionate ways to engage the youth of our community. Investing in the ideas of youth, to solve community challenges creates new avenues of inclusion and pathways of critical thinking. Experiencing the Pitch Party, the creativity and enthusiasm of 23 groups of youth, was so exciting. We can't wait to see how small grants will turn so many of these pitches into reality.", said Joan Fisk, CEO of United Way Waterloo Region Communities.

SWRIL and CYPT [announced the Youth Impact Project in March](#). With funding from the Region of Waterloo and United Way Waterloo Region Communities, SWRIL and CYPT established a \$70,000 fund to put directly towards youth ideas.

After two weeks of deliberation, the Youth Decision-Making Panel awarded funding to 12 projects. The projects that received funding are:

“Kairos” pitched by youth from Camino Health and Well-being. A six-week summer program for newcomers ages 14-18. The program will have trades and employment workshops, like working in a manufacturing class and creating resumes, so that newcomer youth and their families don't view university as their only option.

“Book-a-pedia” pitched by Tanitoluwa, Jason, Oke, Zino, and Phoebe from Nigerians in the Region of Waterloo. A book club designed to build a more inclusive community. This is a club where the stories bridge understanding and connection by focusing on books by racialized and Indigenous authors, they highlight diverse experiences and perspectives. Regular sessions will be held where youth can discuss themes such as identity, confidence, and resilience.

“YTCYC” pitched by the Youth Council from Langs. Soccer, snacks and shirts will be a free event for grades 1-5 in Cambridge at the Langs Gym. The event will include a free soccer tournament that will include 20 kids. The group would like to provide the kids with a free lunch, fruit smoothies and a free shirt.

“Dream Builders,” pitched by youth from the Somali Canadian Association of Waterloo Region. A summer program for youth aged 12-17 to address food insecurity and climate change through interactive cooking and gardening workshops. In this six-week program, they plan to implement hands-on learning workshops with two groups of youth. The group will also employ local post-secondary students with culinary and agricultural backgrounds.

“Churchill Basketball” pitched by Natu, Jasmin, Salar, Landon, Saif, Rabia, Teena, Abdullah, and Gurleen from Kinbridge Community Association. The group wants to renovate their outdoor basketball court, which is used by many schools and community members. The group has a plan mapped out that includes making connections in the community, engaging with contractors, assessing and planning, and holding fundraisers.

“Team Belonging” pitched by Niya and Hanan from Volunteer Waterloo Region. The welcoming table wants to encourage newcomers to their school group where they can combat hunger and discrimination to create a more welcoming environment. Many students go to school hungry and experience bullying. This program provides students with a safe space to work and also gain volunteer hours during lunch on Mondays.

“Project Astraeus” pitched by Aabjosh, Josh, Abbas, Hamza, and Marcus from GreenHouse. This group wants to build a network to empower connections and foster solutions to real-world problems. There will be chapters of community or school members who will create a solution to a real-world issue while fostering hands-on learning in STEM.

They will provide a complementary launch kit tailored to the chapter's unique solution. At the end of each fiscal period, an annual conference will be held where chapters will showcase their project, prizes will be given out, and they will be able to connect with innovators in the industry.

“Summer Youth Market” pitched by Chloe, Dichhen, Emraan, Natalie, Hillary, Sri, and Miqdad from Kitchener Youth Action Council. A market where youth can sell their goods and services to the community. This group will be fundraising for a local organization called OneRoof, a local, non-profit organization that supports youth who experience homelessness. The group has already connected with the City of Kitchener to see who can run the market at Victoria Park.

“Empowering Newcomers” pitched by Leen and Victoria from Kinbridge Community Association. A beauty program that teaches young women about hairstyling and aesthetic techniques while also sharing insights into topics that are important for young newcomer women, like self-care and confidence. The program encourages a sense of belonging and empowerment while also building community.

“Voices4Youth” pitched by Ali, Ali, Ekrema, Wal, Omar, and Harith from Adventure4Change. A drop box in the community to collect anonymous ideas from people who have ideas about what should be done to help the community. The group also wants to have a media platform where they can interview key members of the community to see what the community needs most to determine how they can help be part of the solution.

“Youth-Led Circles: We Are the Future” pitched by Bill, Billy, Sri Vatsa, Xavier, Ana, Angela, Arsema, Marmawit, and Mhret from Kitchener-Waterloo Multicultural Centre. This group’s goal is to provide safe spaces for newcomer youth who may experience discrimination in the community and provide them with a space they can feel comfortable in. Sessions will include mental health sessions, environmental sessions, and cultural diversity so youth can learn about the other cultures in the region.

“Youth Fun Fest” pitched by Anna, Harsimar, Peace, Tijesuni, and Aisha from Social Venture Partners Teens. A youth fun fair for all KW youth that will include carnival games and more. It will take place outdoors in a local park in early September near the beginning of school as a warm welcome. They are planning on having local performers, booths for youth led vendors and food trucks to bridge the gap between the community and youth.

SWRIL and CYPT will showcase each of these youth groups and their projects on social media in the coming weeks. Follow them on Instagram and Twitter at [@smartwatregion](#) and [@cyptwr](#) to see how the projects come to life. You can also learn more about the projects at swril.ca/yip.

About Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab

Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab (SWRIL) was originally Waterloo Region's entry into the 2019 Smart Cities Challenge. After months of public and stakeholder engagement, Waterloo Region decided the challenge most important to them was healthy children and youth. Although they didn't win the competition, SWRIL survived based on generous funding from area municipalities and the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation. SWRIL has engaged over 5,000 young people through the lab's youth-led projects, pilots, and experiments. [Learn more about Smart Waterloo Region Innovation Lab and their projects.](#)

About the Children and Youth Planning Table of Waterloo Region

The Children and Youth Planning Table (CYPT) is a member-driven partnership with over 65 Voting Member Organisations across Waterloo Region. The CYPT works to improve the well-being of children and youth through a system of coordinated and effective services that are supported by capacity building initiatives. Recognizing the complex challenges and issues related to the well-being of children and youth, the CYPT operates through a collective impact model seeking to promote the shared vision of "Happy, healthy children and youth — today and tomorrow."

About United Way Waterloo Region Communities

United Way Waterloo Region Communities believe that every person in every community deserves the opportunities, access, and connections they need to build a good life – regardless of their income, the neighbourhood they live in, or their social identity. Thanks to generous donors and partners, United Way WRC is privileged to collaborate with people, non-profits, and businesses to empower multiple innovative, impactful, and measurable solutions. United Way WRC fights local poverty by building and strengthening a network of local non-profit organisations that function as the region's social safety net.

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