



GUELPH MERCURY

Guelph among top 5 cities for families in Canada

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Guelph is among the most family-friendly cities in Canada, according to a new report by a Christian think-tank.

Canada's Institute on Marriage and the Family, a research arm of Focus on the Family Canada, gave an overall mark of 'A' to Guelph, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Kitchener.

The report graded Canada's 33 largest cities according to five criteria including community feel, education choice, cost of living, economic strength and family independence.

In addition to more general quality-of-life measurements like family income, green space and commute times, the report favours limited government intervention and traditional, dual-parent family structures.

"I was a little surprised to see Guelph as a top-five city," said report author Andrea Mrozek. "But we put all the information into a spreadsheet and calculate it, everyone is treated exactly same, and this is how it came out."

Guelph did well in all categories, scoring A's and B's nearly straight across the board.

But the city's top marks, by category, were earned in the report's family independence section, which awards grades based on the number of married parents, single parents and seniors living at home with family and unpaid hours spent on housework or family care.

Mrozek acknowledged the preference for families headed by two married parents is not a universally accepted value. But she said it's rooted in an academic consensus on what's best for children.

"The body of social science research shows that kids fare best when they live with married parents," Mrozek said. "It's something we want to track, bearing in mind that it's a positive for communities when parents stay together."

That point of view doesn't sit well with Karen Wendling, who teaches gender studies and philosophy at the University of Guelph. Wendling said the report offered "a very conservative outlook" that excludes many lesbian, gay and common law heterosexual relationships.

"They seem to believe you have to have two parents to have healthy psycho-social development. Obviously kids need role models, but there's no evidence to indicate that they have to live with those role models," she said.

Guelph's growing population and economy were other factors in the strong showing, and the city picked up points for its low homicide rate and low proportion of government transfer payments. Guelph's only 'C' came in the amount of green space, bike paths and community centres.

Mrozek said the report is designed to help families decide where they want to live the next time they move, and they can simply ignore categories if they don't find them useful.

"If you're a family, everyone is moving a lot these days, so you can look at the report and say here are the various attributes of different cities," she said.

You can access the report online at www.imfcanada.org/issues/canadas-top-family-friendly-cities

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