

# ENVIRONNEMENTS ARE QUÉBEC'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN GROWING UP IN?

*2019 Highlights*



OBSERVATOIRE  
des tout-petits

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et André Chagnon



## WHAT KIND OF ENVIRONMENTS ARE QUÉBEC'S YOUNGEST CHILDREN GROWING UP IN?

This document presents the highlights of the 2019 Portrait of Young Children in Québec. Prepared by the Early Childhood Observatory (*Observatoire des tout-petits*), the portrait describes the familial, physical and educational environments that young children are growing up in across the province. The following pages provide information on the indicators that have shown the most significant variations over the past few years, as well as those which currently represent the greatest cause for concern.

The report is available for consultation in its entirety, along with specific portraits for each of the 17 administrative regions of Québec, on the Observatory's website at [tout-petits.org/portrait2019](https://tout-petits.org/portrait2019).

# WHO ARE THESE 0-5 YEAR-OLDS?



In Québec, the total number of births went from:

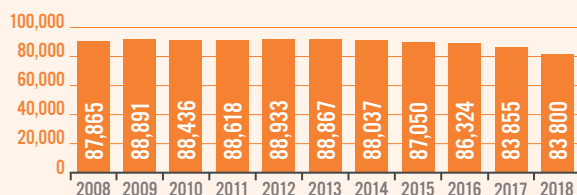
**87,865**  
in 2008

to

**83,800**  
in 2018

The number of births is currently lower than it was between 2009 and 2014, when it fluctuated between 88,000 and 89,000.

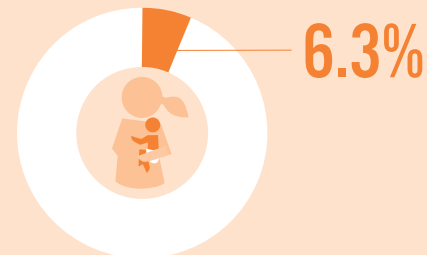
Annual number of births in Québec between 2008 and 2018



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec. *Registre des événements démographiques*. Provisional data for 2018.



The number of children between the ages of 0 and 5 living in Québec in 2018. Although this figure increased significantly between 2005 and 2010, it has stabilized over the past few years.



Although the number of births is on the decline in Québec, the very young currently account for a **larger portion of the population**, up from 6.1% in 2008 to **6.3% in 2018**.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec and Statistics Canada. Population estimates (January 2019 figures). Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.





# FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

## Gains

### SOCIAL SUPPORT

Parents with good social networks find it easier to balance their daily obligations. Kindergarteners living in families with poor social support are more likely to be developmentally vulnerable.

A relatively large number of parents of kindergarteners have good social support networks. Among children attending kindergarten in 2016-2017...



**90.5%** had parents who said that they had family and friends who helped them feel **safe, secure and happy**.

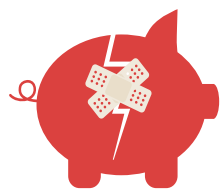


**91.9%** had parents who said there was **someone they trusted** to whom they could turn for advice.



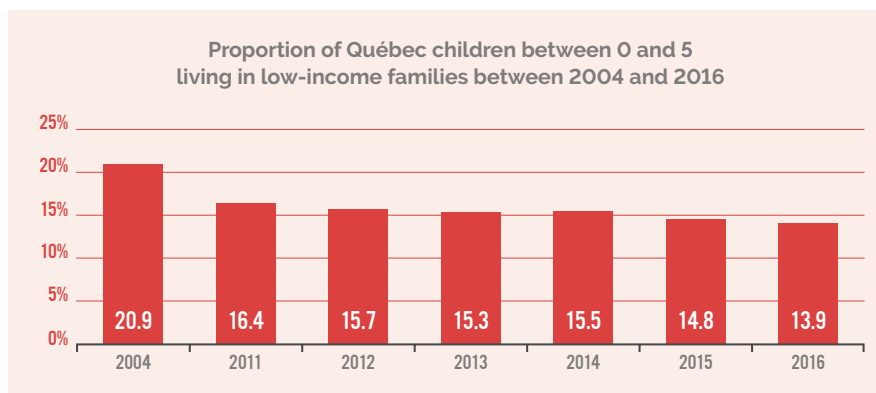
**95.4%** had parents who said they had **people they could count on** in an emergency.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec. 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



## INCOME

The proportion of young children living in low-income families declined from **20.9%** to **13.9%** between 2004 and 2016.



Source: Statistics Canada, T1 Family File (T1FF), adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

Studies show that children growing up in low-income households are more likely to be vulnerable when they start school and that they obtain below-average academic results in grade one.

## EMPLOYMENT

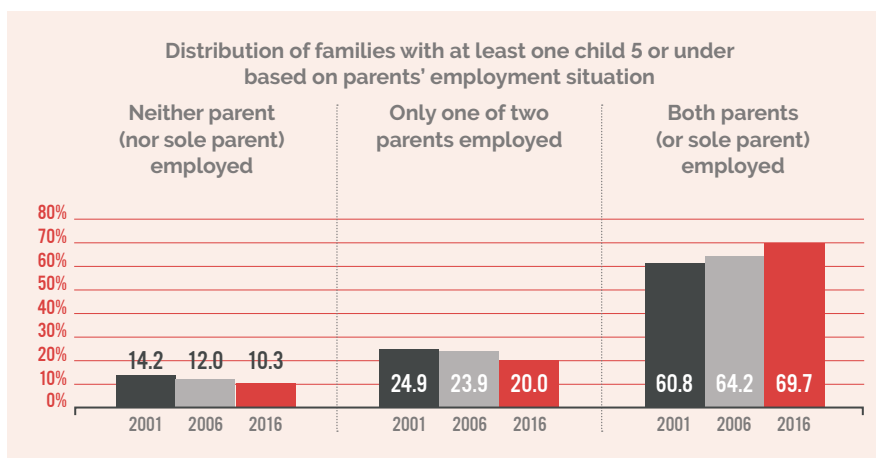


Between 2001 and 2016, the **employment situation** of Québec families with at least one child

5 years of age or under **improved**.

The proportion of families in which both parents (or the sole parent) was employed rose from 60.8% to 69.7%. During this period, it was the rate of maternal employment that showed the most significant increase.

This phenomenon may have the negative effect of increasing mothers' stress in relation to work-life balance, however.



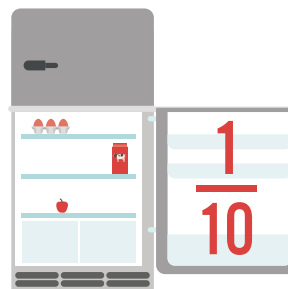
Source: Statistics Canada. 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses, adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

# FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

## Risks

### FOOD INSECURITY

Children who suffer from food insecurity are at greater risk of presenting delays in their cognitive, motor and neurophysiological development (amongst other things). Food insecurity is also a predictor of chronic diseases in early childhood.



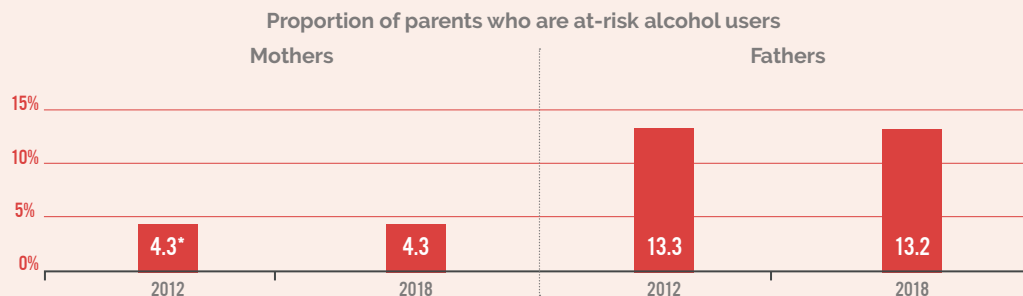
**10.4% of Québec households** with at least one child under 6 were in a situation of **food security** in 2015-2016.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), File Sharing. Adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

### ALCOHOL USE

The level of parental alcohol use is established based on parents' answers to three questions on their current consumption and seven question used to assess the possibility of alcohol dependence and the harmful effects of alcohol use on a scale of 1 to 5 (from "Never" to "Daily or almost daily"). A score of 8 or more is considered to indicate hazardous or harmful alcohol use according to the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT).

**13%** of fathers of children between the ages of 6 months and 5 years are **at-risk alcohol users**. This proportion is higher than that observed among mothers of children in the same age group.



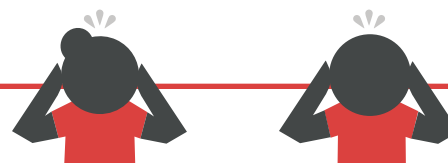
\* Coefficient of variation between 15% and 25%; interpret with caution.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.*

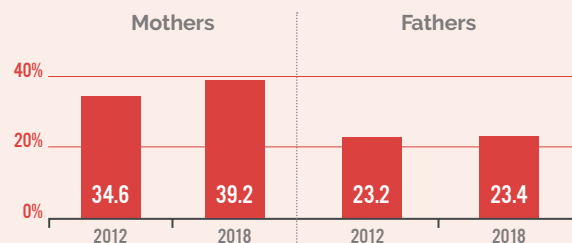
## HIGH STRESS LEVELS

Parents suffering from chronic stress can develop a negative perception of their relationship with their child, have difficulty managing their own emotions, have problems picking up on and responding to their child's distress signals, and lose confidence in their parenting skills.

**39%** of mothers of children between 6 months and 5 years of age present **high levels of stress** related to work-family balance, as compared to 23% of fathers. Mothers' figures have been **rising since 2012**, while fathers' have remained stable. It is interesting to note that, according to the *2015 Québec Survey on the Experience of Parents of Children Aged 0 to 5*, parents who are satisfied with the division of household tasks with their partner report lower stress levels due to conflict related to work-family balance.



Proportion of parents presenting high levels of stress related to work-family balance



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, *La violence familiale dans la vie des enfants du Québec, 2012 et 2018. Les attitudes parentales et les pratiques familiales.*



# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

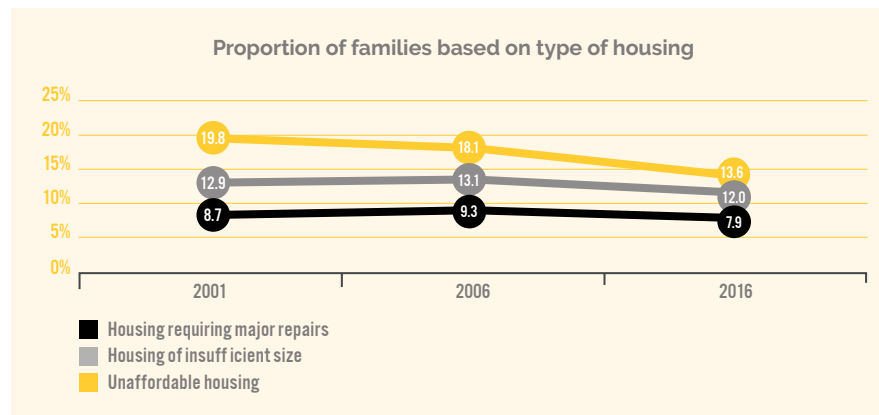
## Gains

### HOUSING



Children's housing situations improved

between 2001 and 2016, particularly with respect to unaffordable housing. **The proportion of children between 0 and 5 living in unaffordable housing declined from 19.8% to 13.6% during this period.**



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001, 2006 and 2016 Censuses, adapted by the Institut de la statistique du Québec.

The type of housing young children live in can influence their development. For example, high housing costs increase the risk of experiencing food insecurity and stress, both of which have a negative impact on development. Living in inadequate housing makes young children more vulnerable to developing cognitive, language or socio-affective disorders.

### NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFETY

**92.4%** of children attending kindergarten in Québec in 2016-2017 were living in a neighbourhood where they could play safely outside during the day.

Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.



# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

## Risks



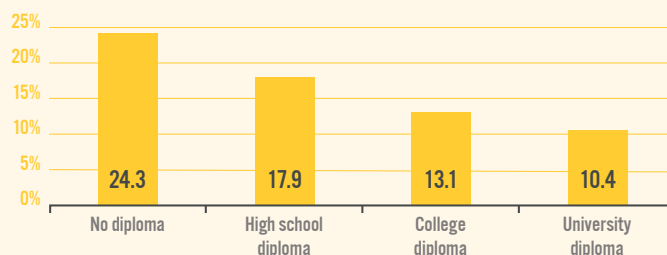
### UNSAFE NEIGHBOURHOODS

Parents' perception of how safe their neighbourhood is varies depending on their level of education and household income.

**24.3%** of children of kindergarten age whose parents do not have a diploma are living in neighbourhoods their parents consider to be less than safe.

The corresponding figure for children with at least one parent with a university diploma is 10.4%.

Proportion of children living in neighbourhoods considered to be less than safe based on the highest diploma obtained by one or other of their parents



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

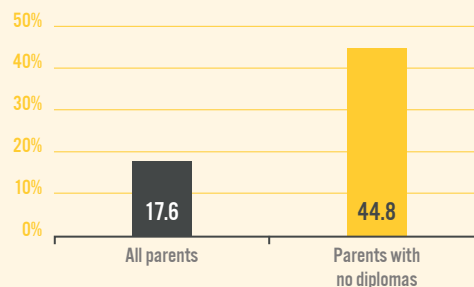
### MOVING HOUSE

**44.8%** of children in kindergarten in 2016-2017 whose parents did not have a diploma moved house twice or more during the five years preceding the study.

The corresponding figure for all the children in this cohort was just 17.6%.



Proportion of kindergarteners who moved twice or more in the previous 5 years based on family characteristics



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.







# EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

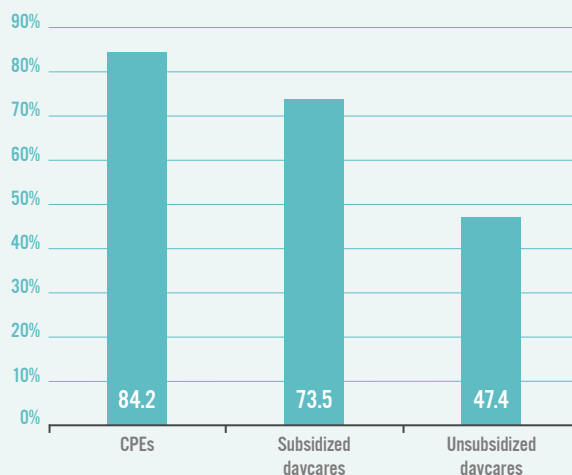
## Gains

### QUALIFIED EDUCATIONAL PERSONNEL



The proportion of educational personnel considered to be qualified working in educational childcare services **rose** between 2005 and 2015 from 72.1% to 84.2% in CPEs, and from 46.8% to 73.5% in subsidized daycare facilities.

Proportion of personnel considered to be qualified



Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005 à 2015*.

### TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

A strong proportion of educational childcare services offer activities designed to facilitate children's transition to school (helping them to gradually adapt to their new environment).

In 2014-2015, this program was offered by:



**83.8%** of CPEs



**77.0%** of subsidized daycare facilities



**74.7%** of unsubsidized daycares facilities

Source: Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2004 à 2015*.



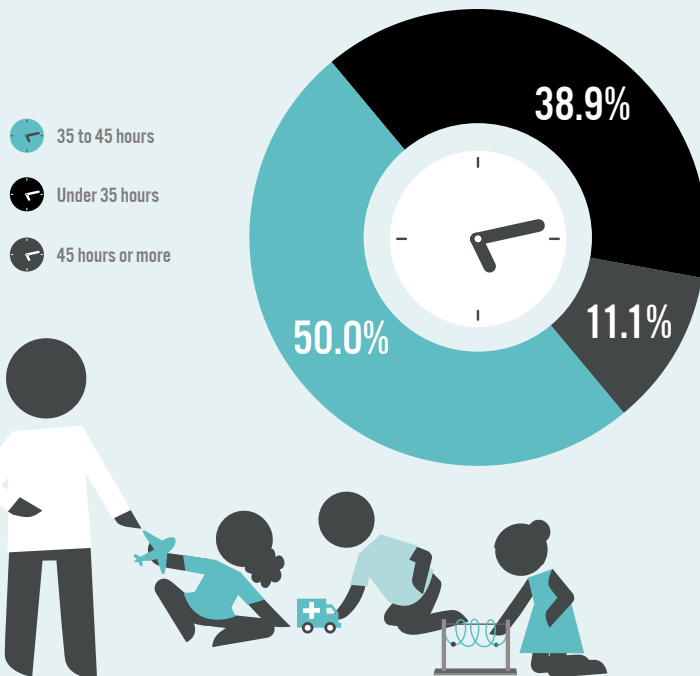
# EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

## Risks

### TIME SPENT IN CHILDCARE

**61.1%** of children had spent over 35 hours a week in childcare during their early years.

Distribution of kindergarteners based on the number of hours/week spent in daycare



Source: Institut de la statistique du Québec, 2017 Québec Survey on the Preschool Path of Kindergarten Students.

When the childcare service is of inferior quality and children are part of a large group, the number of hours spent in daycare is associated with behaviour problems. Studies conducted over the past several years in Québec and elsewhere around the world have shown that educational childcare services can have a positive influence on early childhood development, especially in the case of children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods. This beneficial effect has been observed in high-quality educational childcare facilities.

## COMPLIANCE IN CHILDCARE ESTABLISHMENTS



**Just 18.7% of unsubsidized daycares comply with the *Ministère de la Famille* regulation that requires two**

out of three educators to have the necessary qualifications, as compared to 90.6% of CPEs and 74.6% of subsidized daycares.

**Source:** Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2005 à 2015*.

**It is important to note that prior to August 31, 2012, however, only one out of three educators had to have formal training. After the regulation was changed, CPEs and newly established daycares were given five years to comply with the new requirement.**

## OFFICIAL ORIENTATION DOCUMENT

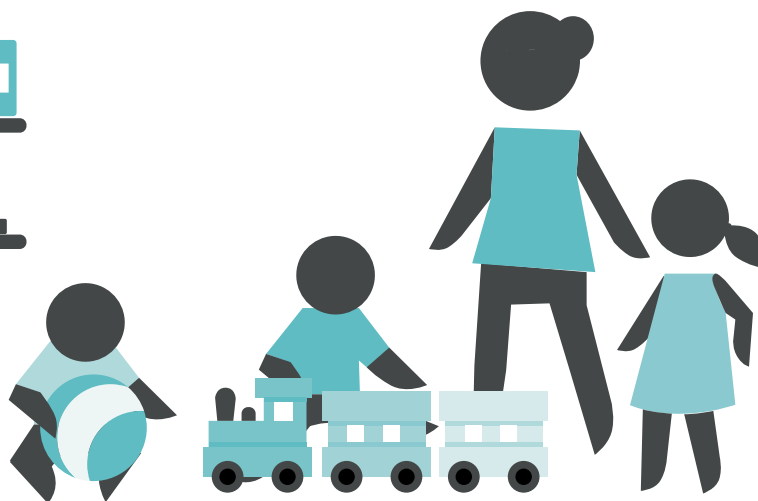


**Only 30.2% of CPEs, 24.9% of unsubsidized daycares and 22.3% of subsidized daycares make use of the official document that provides a framework**

for active play and motor development.

**Source:** Ministère de la Famille, *Rapport d'activités annuel des services de garde 2004 à 2015*.

**Although applying these guidelines is only one of the factors that can influence the quality of a childcare facility, we feel it is important to point out this fact.**



# SOMETHING CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S FAMILY ENVIRONMENTS

There are many possibilities for collective action that could improve young children's growing-up environments—solutions that have been shown to be effective in practice on the ground and in the scientific literature both in Québec and around the world. Here are a few examples:

- ▶ Action can be taken to improve the unfavourable economic conditions of some young children's families by providing financial support for financially disadvantaged families, focusing on regions or neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-income households. This type of assistance would also help to fight food insecurity.
- ▶ Offering parents of young children, including those who work atypical hours, work-life balance measures, is one way to help reduce parental stress. New measures could also be explored, such as allowing parents more flexible conditions when returning to work after a parental leave (working part-time, more paid days off for family responsibilities, flexible hours, working from home, etc.).
- ▶ Adopting strategies that integrate fathers into all policies, services and programs designed to benefit families with young children can increase fathers' involvement in their children's education.
- ▶ Promoting the *Alcochoix +* program among fathers could help those whose alcohol consumption prevents them from playing their role as a parent (low energy, poor concentration, aggressivity). The efficiency of similar programs has already been proven. Restricting the privatization of retail alcohol sales as much as possible reduces parents' at-risk alcohol use, especially that of fathers, as it limits easy access to various types of alcohol at convenience and grocery stores.



# SOMETHING CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE CHILDREN'S PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENTS

- ▶ Providing financial support for economically disadvantaged families would help to improve young children's living conditions, particularly when support is focused on regions or neighbourhoods with large numbers of low-income households.
- ▶ Investing in programs that provide affordable housing for families offers young children safe, supportive communities to live in while improving families' financial situations and reducing food insecurity. Increased rent supplements and more housing cooperatives would be equally beneficial.
- ▶ Stricter penalties for landlords who fail to respect housing sanitation regulations would improve young children's living environments. It would also help economically vulnerable families that are often forced to move frequently, which can affect the stability that is necessary for healthy development in childhood.
- ▶ Creating safe, accessible playgrounds in municipalities of all sizes would effectively improve the physical environments that young children are growing up in, particularly if the characteristics of different neighbourhoods are taken into account (rural, suburban, urban) and the general public is informed of the type and location of the playgrounds.



## SOMETHING CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE EDUCATIONAL CHILDCARE SERVICES

- ▶ Creating additional spaces in high-quality educational childcare facilities (4-year-old kindergarten and educational daycare) specifically for children from disadvantaged neighbourhoods with fewer services would be an excellent step to take.
- ▶ Supporting the efforts and quality of supplementary services for neighbourhood organizations, like drop-in childcare and *Organismes communautaires Famille* (OCF), is an effective way to help parents of young children who have difficulty accessing daycare services—newcomers, for example.
- ▶ Continuing efforts to ensure that all educational childcare facilities reach the objective of two qualified educators out of every three could help to improve the quality of educational childcare overall.
- ▶ Recognizing and facilitating educators' access to training would also improve the quality of services offered.
- ▶ Ensuring that educators have the support and the tools they need in their everyday work environment also helps to improve the quality of childcare services, particularly when educators are given access to a pedagogical consultant or information on best practices.
- ▶ Since young children spend an average of 35 hours/week in daycare, educational childcare facilities offer the perfect environment for encouraging healthy lifestyle habits. Initiatives like *Attention! Enfants en mouvement* make the most of that opportunity. This training program was developed in Laval to support childcare services intent on giving their young charges more opportunities for physical activity.





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The following documents are available for consultation on our website:



A comprehensive 64-page report presenting information on the entire province



Regional portraits for each of Québec's 17 regions, four of which have been translated into English: Montréal, Outaouais, Estrie and Laval.



Visuals for your presentations or social networks

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These documents are all available on our website at  
**[tout-petits.org/portrait2019](https://tout-petits.org/portrait2019)**

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It is also possible to consult the 2016 and 2017 Portraits.



These reports and all related documents are available on our website at the following addresses:  
**[tout-petits.org/portrait2016](https://tout-petits.org/portrait2016)**  
**[tout-petits.org/portrait2017](https://tout-petits.org/portrait2017)**

# OBSERVATOIRE des tout-petits

The mission of the Early Childhood Observatory is to help ensure that the development and well-being of Quebec's very youngest children has a place on the province's list of social priorities. In order to do so, the Observatory compiles the most rigorous data on 0-5 year-olds which it then disseminates to incite dialogue on collective actions in this area.

[Tout-petits.org](http://Tout-petits.org)



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