

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Summary of Discussions from the Community Conversation KITCHENER - WATERLOO

DETAILS

THURSDAY, JUNE 15TH

Number of participants -121

Interviewer – Jane Humphries

Guest Speakers – Chief Bryan Larkin – WRPS, Mike Murray – Region of Waterloo, Fauzia Mazhar, Family and Children’s Services

WHY COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation, Wellbeing Waterloo Region, Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation and the United Way Kitchener Waterloo & Area partnered to host a series of four **Community Conversations**.

The goals of the Community Conversations were:

- To continue the recent momentum related to the latest release of the Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs® and other community priority focused discussions and work.
- To provide an opportunity for members of the community to provide input into the priority setting work of Wellbeing Waterloo Region.
- To discuss what wellbeing means to you!

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION GATHERED BE USED?

The information gathered from each of the four community conversations will be compiled with other input to help determine the priorities for Waterloo Region. The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation will also use the information in the next cycle of Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs® reports.

WHAT DID WE TALK ABOUT?

Each community conversation was structured in two parts. The first part featured a conversation with community leaders from Waterloo Region, which set the stage for the second part, where the participants were invited to have a conversation with others at their table.

The following questions were asked by a volunteer facilitator at each of the tables:

- What are the things that make living in Waterloo Region great for you and your community?
- What gets in the way of wellbeing for you and your community?
- What can you do for yourself or for your community to improve wellbeing?
- What do you think is the most important priority to focus on in order to improve wellbeing?

A volunteer scribe recorded conversations and the results are below.

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WHAT DID WE LEARN?

The following are the major themes that were discussed at this community conversation. The actual responses of participants from each discussion follow in the subsequent pages:

- 1. The Role of Higher Education:** Higher education is highly valued and seen as contributing to community vitality but also impacts economic conditions in both positive and negative ways. This ties into a feeling of innovation and economic growth (or change) which is highly valued.
*"The universities. It creates an atmosphere of innovation and learning."
"Youth unemployment is major. Over educated, and completely lack of opportunity. You come out of university and there are no opportunities."*
- 2. Collaboration (Between Services and Groups):** The need for various social services, organizations and community groups to collaborate and work together in order to create well being is a strong theme. This ties into the treatment of marginalized groups such as the people living in poverty, people with addictions and people with mental health issues.
"If you think about complex challenges, poverty, mental health, those complex challenges need collaborative efforts and amplified voices, people and groups coming together to solve problems and this is a huge benefit of the collaboration – it can really amplify voices – increased attention on an issue and increased resources"
- 3. Poverty:** Issues such as lack of affordable housing and food security are a concern.
"Stop access to junk food. Stress of poverty makes you think only short-term. Adequate home and income would help people make better choices with respect to the foods they eat."
- 4. Inclusion/Belonging:** The value of and need to create a more inclusive community (e.g. a sense of belonging) is a common theme, not just on a social level but from an economic/social welfare standpoint. This ties into issues around newcomers, and marginalized groups within the community.
"WR was really good at welcoming Syrian refugees, but most are past their 13 months and now are looking for work. Which is proving to be very difficult to them. Welcoming them in one thing, making them apart of our community is another."
- 5. Community Cohesion:** Greater cohesion between the two cities is highly valued. There is a need for stronger cohesion between intercity services. This ties into transit, marginalized people, newcomers, those with addictions and those with mental health issues.
*"Community cohesiveness - there are disjointed communities. An invisible wall exists. People are pushed to the margins of society."
"Thinking about specific cities not the whole Waterloo Region, identity to where we do and don't belong, lack cohesion"*

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The following information was collected from participants.

What are the things that make living in Waterloo Region great for you and your community?

- Kitchener different from Hamilton (hometown)
- Queen St. has a great community feel, I never felt that sense of community in Hamilton, its more individualistic there, people in Kitchener are holding together
- The working centre is a good example of people helping each other to grow
- The college and two universities really help our community and provide many opportunities, they are great assets to the community
- The region felt more conducive of the things they wanted for themselves. My parents struggled in Toronto, it was unaffordable and hard to navigate. The little my parents had in Toronto took a lot to get, and it feels easier here. You don't have to work as hard for the same amount. It didn't feel like the community they grew up in, there is more diversity here compared to Toronto (more specifically Brampton)
- It's a good mix of rural and decent sized communities
- There are three communities/cities. This is where the resiliency comes from, we have more strength together and give alternative voices to issues, and we can see what we are all doing to solve issues, and take inspiration from each other.
- Even though it's a big region, it feels small and connected
- There are things to do here- Kitchener is the glue...
- Global community center
- Green space, outdoor space, opportunity to participate in healthy activities
- Multiculturalism, people are welcomed. Plenty of visible minorities.
- City caters to universities and is trying to get out of the stigma.
- City is growing to a stage comparable to Montreal where they can focus on healthy lifestyle initiatives.
- A city where people enjoy an active life. Outdoor muscle parks with equipment to exercise. Not too expensive, can be sponsored by a company.
- Diversity. We see differences and appreciate all of them. Each community offers unique things. When you compare Waterloo to big cities and having to go from area to area, people go. Why doesn't that happen Waterloo Region? Its not that far to go. Lots of things going on.
- Meeting people
- Taking public transit; great to have access to different neighbourhoods; explore the city; discover the city
- Eat out; different places to eat and sample different foods
- Going to Kitchener market: variety of people and things
- Bicycle and motorcycle: love the tracks
- St. Jacob's market
- Enjoy taking my dogs to the St. Jacob's market; enjoy taking coffee and watching life go by
- Cultural diversity; where we live has diverse cultures
- Innovative: the region is more collaborative within the tech region



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- Universities and colleges
- Diverse people and religions (Mennonite heritage etc.) (diversity came up many times)
- Religious freedom; without conflicts so far
- Opportunity to learn
- Enjoy the facilities that are here: Rim Park; Museums; trails
- The size of the community is perfect. Lots to do, lots to going on, but small enough to know people. Easy to get around easily.
- The sense of community. Being outdoors and connecting with people you know and don't. people care about each other here.
- The universities. It creates an atmosphere of innovation and learning.
- The community if very friendly, and outgoing. People are warm and engaging. It's a different feel than in Mississauga. The whole region has wonderful and friendly people here.
- As a community we are open to working collectively the Region. Looking at the Region as a whole to make it better is great. We have a lot of great social services that want to make it a better place.
- The Region is reinventing itself. Taking things that were old and repurposing them but keeping the character. With the changes that happening so rapidly, they are taking care of the past.
- The idea that we are better together than being closed off. It's about task, not turf.
- A neat thing is the Mennonite culture, and how it has influenced our region. Holding onto those traditions are great.
- We do celebrate a lot of cultures and heritages within our community. People are willing to learn a lot about others
- People show up to places. The effort does not go for naught here.
- The local school opportunities. Kids have to be engaged the opportunities pulling them into different communities is great.
- The physical location of WR is very convenient. In any direction you drive you can get to the country. Having the townships around is great to have around and provide a different culture.
- Institutions, organizations, individuals all step forward to take projects for big changes. They take on brave initiatives for the greater good. Embracing local resources, they are social innovators, showing forward thinking.
- On a personal level, there is a diversity of things that are available for a family, for an artsy family as well as for an athletic family. There's even a variety in churches. Anywhere you go, there is a welcoming and friendly sense. For example, there is the Centre in the Square. On a professional level, working at the Carizon, there is a richness and willingness to work collectively for the better, putting organization ego aside. Collective efforts are witnessed, which allows for what we see in the community. This is especially evidenced in rural areas where organizations have to work across sectors. There's a feeling of "let's get this done". People own their problems. Clients would express needs and those needs would be met from a variety of different sources of resource.
- KW makes you feel like you are at home. The presence of investment from institutions into this community is palpable. There is also a sense in the community that celebrates diversity, which gives strength to individuals. Value is witnessed and experienced.
- From an organizational perspective, one sees an ability for community groups to quickly come together to work on a priority issue, putting their organizational hats aside for the moment. This speaks to the strength of relationships in this community that are rarely in seen anywhere else.

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- Free and low-cost family spaces, parks, across the Region
- Great opportunity for post secondary education, lots of innovative people live in this Region
- Awesome to live in an innovative space
- Very progressive in terms on transportation,
- Great downtown core, beautiful, want to be a part of it
- Great leadership, very bold, innovative. Feels like most of the time our leaders are ahead of the curve
- Connected with transportation, express way
- Arts & culture piece, Princess Cinemas, Centre in the Square
- Summer local produce, support our local community
- Mennonite 'Barn Building' analogy, community comes together to get jobs done
- MCC was very instrumental in a lot of the refugee settlement, Mennonite community has a great impact on our Region
- We are close to Toronto but not too close. We are not a bedroom community. We are our own community.
- Small town perks with big city amenities
- Easy to get out in contrasting environments – out into countryside, nature – impact on mental health (aware of privilege to private transit, bike trails)
- Interesting conversations, community thinks differently as a result of having two universities, ups everyone's game in thinking differently, innovation
- Always something more to think about in challenges, entrepreneurial spirit in community – moving into social innovation and social start-ups
- Institutions are entrepreneurial even if they may not realize or don't model in the same way as a tech start-up
- Partnerships through community outreach projects
- Friendly people in community places, e.g. Queen Street Commons Café, sense of belonging
- Scale helps to facilitate community feeling – areas where you have a small, tight-knit community
- Schools as central hub of connecting, belong to sports, cultural or diaspora community
- Proximity to Toronto if you have way to get there
- Best of both worlds – not too big or small
- Good place for families – sense of community, not as busy, less expensive than large city
- Association with place that sounds like it's going somewhere – external positive impression, growth area, rural areas growing
- Reputation for start-ups and innovation
- Nature, trails, restaurants, trails, people, connections'
- Innovation – Communitech hub, young people from universities – hearing them present their projects and ideas. The amount of innovation and entrepreneurship is like no other place.
- Academic life, college, perimeter, CIGI make like here so interesting. I would not be here with out it.
- Blackberry put us on the map.
- There are a lot of resources in this community. Can get services easily in this community.



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- People volunteer here. Lots of opportunities here, and information is easy to get so makes it easier to live here in Waterloo Region.
- Before immigrating to Canada we researched where to come to. My son decided to come here because of University of Waterloo. My son then left and went to Ottawa to study after two years but we decided to stay here. I like the contradiction – you find people who are very open minded and have good conversation and other people who are very close minded. Culture of this area is that we are very open here. Mennonites started here – they started good services – they are open minded. They help draw people here. Very interesting here.
- Goes back to when Kitchener was called Berlin – but now we are everything here.
- Have different perspective as I am a student. Staff at university are very supportive. So very responsive. They are willing to listen and not agree with you but at least they listen to you.
- Victoria Park
- Opportunities to do free things
- Bike trails
- Safe communities – pretty confident that bad things generally don't happen, although we recognize that some groups still don't feel safe
- For children and adults, the good sports programs. The problem is the affordability and access to these programs.
- The sense of grassroots community makes WR a great place to live in. Neighbourhood soccer teams vs. big organized soccer leagues. Street music festivals within the neighbourhood, initiated by families and individuals coming from that community.
- The size and the quietness of the community that makes raising up children going to university/college and high school ideal. What gets in the way are the subjects that we are uncomfortable talking about --- racism, discrimination, and phobia...
- The unlimited choices of community organizations doing great work in the region that provide a lot of volunteer opportunities to local residents.
- Incredible renewal of energy, business and transit, especially with the arrival of the Tech companies.
- Tons of community collaboration in the Waterloo Region that makes it very exciting to drive societal change.
- Issues don't belong in sectors --- they're all our issues. Ex: Crime Prevention Council hosted conversations to promote the initiative of mobilizing individuals to be "Allies" or rise up as "Allies".
- The Mennonite culture has created an atmosphere where even in the larger community like the Region, we are able to host conversations like this and talk around the table vital issues.
- Nearby country – hiking, buggies,
- Community trails – walking, cycling,
- Going for coffee with others
- Seeing groups together – festivals, walks,
- Market
- Diversity
- Strong neighbourhoods – neighbourhood events
- Natural spaces
- Feels more community-driven (not too big to know more people)



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- Schools concentric to neighbourhoods – strong efforts to identify with/pull together for their neighbourhood, feel like community, teaching community in schools, regular family communication, awareness, public events, work with neighbourhood associations, school communities willing to share with lower income schools

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What gets in the way of wellbeing for you and your community?

- It's a bit of a closed community, it's hard to get involved sometimes (as an outsider) it's very inward looking
- Local is valued (which can be good, but can also be exclusive)
- We need more open networks
- Community events are too formal...it's hard for the community to get involved. It's not that easy to get involved with stuff (ex as a new member of the neighbourhood, they felt like the neighbourhood association was a clique. It was hard and intimidating to get involved)
- "Rules" in the neighbourhoods like stigma towards renters, students and people without kids. Unspoken assumptions.
- Huge disconnect between students and "talent." We don't want them while they are students, but once they graduate and can be productive we want them to stay
- Access, affordability.
- City caters to university; more students bring in more businesses, jobs, economy, and government support and program.
- Get government involved in sharing programs with students. Students don't feel welcome in the community. Some stay, most leave. Talent shortage in community because they don't feel welcome.
- There is opportunity to bridge the gap, make students feel more welcome and get them to stay here. And get the region to embrace students and what they bring to our economy.
- Things should be close but if they aren't then its too far.
- Access- not sure where to go or how to meet people or find resources. Isolation.
- Access to facilities in Cambridge- transportation to Kitchener for programs (youth programs and addiction programs). Collaboration is important.
- Resilience in youth- mental health challenges. How do we support our youth? High anxiety, social anxiety.
- Epidemic of anxiety and depression. What is behind it?
- Is the problem bigger or are we able to talk about it more which reveals more cases? It's a real problem.
- What is not being said; interacting with people from different cultures is a challenge
- How do different worldviews get appreciated?
- Do I know my neighbour? We are not very connected with each other and we need to push boundaries; doing things that are to comfortable
- Not being knowledgeable about other cultures; proactively seek knowledge about how other people live?
- Fear of people and what they stand for; not being informed about their values
- One of the issues is of all the things that are not talked about are not accessible to all people.
- The accessibility of our services to the whole area. In the townships there is a lack of services and it's quite evident. What tangible steps can we take to help this out?



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- Busyness – the constant racing from one thing to another. Not being able to do anything well. The idea of sitting down and relaxing is foreign. In our society it gets in our way because it causes us to not care for our neighbours
- One of the reasons why kids are too busy, is because the parents are too busy.
- Youth unemployment is major. Over educated, and complete lack of opportunity. You come out of university and there are no opportunities
- Doctor access is getting better. For the people who can articulate what their needs are, the health system works well for them. To those who can't advocate well for themselves they need someone who can help them navigate the system and also advocate for them.
- Access to affordable to childcare – it's getting worse. There is a significant drop in the number of licenced places for childcare. The absence of childcare but also the shift in how people work.
- We have a culture of "othering" – people don't fit. Rather than trying to find ways of connecting and engaging people, there is a pushing out. Being better at strengthening families in order to help with kids who have special needs. Instead of issues pulling families apart, how can we push them together.
- The number of calls the police get for people who are "unwanted" persons. They aren't breaking any laws, but they just don't want them around their lawns, businesses. "The idea of I just don't want them here" but where are they supposed to go?
- WR seems a little less active in political advocacy. Maybe, people here are comfortable, and less people show up for things. People will go to Toronto for the big issues, like the Pride parade there Vs. being here, or the Women's March in Toronto rather than the one here. Why not support local?
- Transit – there is a year long wait for reduced bus transit list. Having free bus transit in off-peak hours
- Biking in the community is not easy and can be dangerous because of the lack of bike lanes. When you commute on a bike, you can feel your surroundings better. You feel closer to the city because you smell and hear what's around you. This contributes to a sense of being closeness to the community you are in, and unfortunately, in KW, it's just too dangerous to experience this.
- From organizational perspective, there is this dark side of belonging. As there's been housing expansions in rural communities, people are forced to move away. If you didn't have history in the community before moving away, for example, it's not the case that your parents and your parents' parents were from KW, then it becomes very difficult to relate to the community.
- Adequacy of nutrition vs. moderation. There is so much unhealthy food in this region. You leave it up to individuals to pay attention to what they eat and care about what they eat, and it's failing. In this culture, people are expected to eat so much junk food - indoctrinated. It's difficult to get away.
- There is poverty and inequity in the region. There is growing inequity - while there is growth in wealth, there is also growing poverty.
- The vacuous space in-between the majority culture and different immigrant minority cultures. Newcomers have to overcome many hurdles, language being the most obvious one. When you have so many obstacles to overcome on a daily basis, your instinct is to surround yourself with the things that you are most familiar with. As a result, immigrant communities gravitate towards and inward themselves - creating a vacuous gap between immigrant communities and the majority culture. To break this natural tendency, there needs to be a very obvious, explicit pull or an invite from the majority culture to these minority cultures so as to, not integrate them into the majority



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culture per say, but to create energy that could shake things up, allowing room for cultural transformation to take place.

- Gap between, 'have and have-nots' is evident. Too much disparity
- Quite a difference in neighbourhoods in our Region, evident that some people do not have acceptable standards of living
- Affordable housing, decent housing that is affordable in the Region is the biggest challenge for individuals that are living off lower income
- Employment, harder to find entry level jobs for new comers, low skill labour, factories, etc...
- Homelessness, without an address you cannot have a bank account. It is dangerous to carry large amounts of cash, money is often spent in one day. Reloadable VISA's such as Toronto has would be a solution
- Lower income families do not have a lot of money left for the month after they pay the rent
- Sustainable housing should be a focus
- Equality
- Access to transportation, for low income and working poor
- Challenge in people seeing organizations in stereotypical ways – expected to stay in your traditional place
- Stifled innovation from close-minded thinking, making assumptions about other organizations
- Other people not knowing who you are, narrow perception of role
- Resource allocation currently set to silo organizations, stay in box
- Aspirations are not backed up
- Lacking in connecting to the whole community
- Thinking about specific cities not the whole Waterloo Region, identity to where we do and don't belong, lack of cohesion
- Gentrification issue in downtown Kitchener, high-tech moving in
- Housing prices going up
- Stigma around poverty, mental health, and addictions
- Hate crimes in Waterloo Region
- Immigrant population not as visible in integration, voice not at the table, lack of day to day interacting
- Self-selecting individuals attending programs, presentations, conversations
- Fear about going to a mono-cultural event that isn't your own cultural group – will be more comfortable going to something multicultural
- Myself gets in the way of wellbeing – I make excuses – I moved here from Toronto. Looking at the recreation center in Waterloo, I think I should go but I don't go – too busy. So for me it is myself that is getting in the way. There is a lot to offer in this community I just don't seek it out.
- I find myself very distant – when I want to do something I am afraid. I worry about people's reactions so I start to have negative thoughts about myself.
- Fear of public speaking – right now I am learning. Need to come out of myself.
- Urban spaces – I can walk to the grocery store but I can't walk to other places. If there was some more thoughtful planning on the urban spaces – European cities do not have cars. If you want to talk about physical wellbeing than walking with out driving would help. This has to do with urban



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planning. How can we fix that? Less car dependency and more walkability. Cities and the Region need to figure that out. Mental wellbeing – stigma attached with mental illness. When I went through menopause – it was not until I started talking to people that I realized I was not alone but no one talked about it until I spoke up first. The buttons that say I am not myself today. That it is ok to say I am not feeling myself today. Wellbeing is about mental wellness too. And being open about mental health.

- Lack of access to good transportation. In a timely way. And also cost is outrageous. Air Quality – half of my family have asthma because of the air quality in this community. Poverty for a number of reasons – lack of opportunity, in an area where there are not a lot of stable jobs with decent pay that have a living wage. Too many precarious jobs. Incredible divide – we have high and very low income and that is growing. Cost of living is also going up – it is crazy. Prices of vegetables and meat etc. Also my kids are far away we are much more spread out.
- Students do not find the mental health services on campus very welcoming. System and customer service is not very good. People accepting things that bad landlords do because it is cheaper. People feel they have to do this as it is hard to find good cheap places.
- Stereotype and discrimination with mental health are real barriers – you can feel it. Putting people in compartments. These are refugees, etc., and you have to act to the stereotype. This impacts your mental health. Depression and anxiety cause you to expect and fear their reaction. Hate crimes being high in this region is very disappointing. See and hear the discrimination. It is there all the time. When things happen in Europe – people think I think about it because I am Muslim not a human. When people see my name they stereotype me. simple things but you feel it all the time.
- Myself – being spiritual my responsibility
- Silo-ed services
- More connected staff that can help redirect any inquires that might be better dealt with elsewhere
- Funding from government
- Social stigma
- Conflict between the community need vs. the ideals of the employees of the service (job protectionism)
- What's the motivation for employee/associations to help with the community issue?
- Are they really doing their job?
- Transit is a major concern
- Not accessible
- Where are the bus stops?
- Takes too long
- Never on time/not reliable
- Convenience
- Reliability
- Functionality
- Should take Bogota as an example



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- Community bulletin boards are being removed (i.e. downtown Kitchener light poles do not allow people to put up posters). This takes away the ability for the lowest level groups a way to communicate
- Some policies are hindering us
- But some red-tape is being removed (having patio parties)
- Have consistent policies across the different the cities
- But people should be able to choose which part of the Region they want to live in (different policies between the cities allow choice of where to live)
- Amount of effort it takes to live; programs are available but it's difficult to access
- A lack of openness to speak towards racism and other 'uncomfortable' topics that would be significant factors to hindering wellbeing development in the community.
- Stereotypes and social phobia/fears hinder wellbeing.
- The reality that many people are detached from the actual socio-economic issues which contributes to a culture conducive to apathy.
- Delicate balance/dance of stopping ourselves to reinforce what we are trying to stop or solve.
- How do we actually get out of our "privileged" backgrounds/situations to actually sympathize and understand the actual needs among those in the middle of the challenges we are trying to address?
- A lack of enforcement on speeding laws which can put the community's wellbeing at risk and shows a lack of respect for basic laws
- Well-meaning social solutions are also unfortunately designed to break families, such as Ontario Works that provide a couple hundred dollars more if your family broke apart and are now living as a single parent. So instead of the government preventing the breaking of families, the system encourages the opposite.
- Lack of education of what citizenship means --- such as ownership of your community.
- The lack of a sense of ownership can possibly imply the lack of a sense of belonging.
- Driving fast or littering is not a big issue that could affect wellbeing
- Drinking and driving or binge drinking is a bigger issue
- Job hunting is a big issue that causes a lot of insecurities and affects wellbeing
- Problem of "overstaying generals" that limit the opportunities for fresh graduates, so the number of university/college graduates seems to outnumber the job opportunities.
- Benefits of higher income communities not available everywhere and equally
- Lack of leadership in some communities to make consistent supports
- Time for volunteer leadership sometimes an issue
- Townships: distance barrier for neighbourhood associations to exist, not equally serviced vs urban areas
- Many little grants that require expertise to find out about them, not widely known/accessible to everyday people/leaders, navigation of these grants
- Counsellors spend a lot of time to show clientele how to navigate the system vs core counselling
- Public health cuts: no longer available to everyone (fee-based), used to do home visits, back to "bare bones" programs, hard to know where to go to access what



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- Students transient, so hard to truly feel part of neighbourhood/community though they are numerous, not engaging in the larger community as a result, community unto themselves, isolated, "us vs them"
- Lack of awareness of community needs and richness of community by the many who are not in the "know" or in proximity to the needs; how do we engage more of the "everyday" individual going about their everyday life? Social needs "serviced" well so little visibility

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If you could choose one issue to address wellbeing in our community what would it be?

- So many groups doing so many things that they are competing. We need more collaboration, less hands in the pot.
- Change must come from the bottom up
- But how do we do this? We can't change everything, we need more collaboration to work on all the issues and define what it is we are working on
- We must decide as a community-do we want students or not, do we want newcomers or not? We say we want them and then complain about everything that comes with them. It's getting tiring going back and forth. There is still a disconnect. Do our practices mirror what we want? We need commit to the process and live those intentions.
- We need a clearer vision. Whose vision is it? Or do we need a common intention?
- We need to make sure the grassroots are involved.
- Working center has the right idea, everyone works together, everyone is involved
- Virtues over vision?
- Community takes responsibility for itself
- How do we work on a smaller lever on smaller components?
- Access to physical health fitness resources and facilitation of such -ie. bike lanes, active parks, greenspace.
- Montreal- musical swings, parks with exercise equipment.
- Central hub of where do I find things? How do I find where I belong? Once I belong, finding resources will be easier.
- Language barrier.
- Transportation-how do you get to the resources?
- Aging population.
- Belonging- inclusion.
- How to sustain the religious freedom, knowing that tensions exist even if they are not discussed
- People are not stepping out of their comfort zones
- Mental health: social aspects such as how the environment may contribute to various ways of coping? Developed resilience due to lifetime experiences; how different mental health is expressed in different communities; greater awareness to come up with more supportive programs
- Relationships around communities need to be built on understanding
- Sense of belonging should be addressed early before things get out of hand and we have to resort to suppression.
- Affordable transit. It's a huge quality of life thing.
- Finding different ways of pulling people together, restorative justice. How do we pull people together? The more we can do that, the bigger issues will be easier to figure out.
- WR was really good at welcoming Syrian refugees, but most are past their 13 months and now are looking for work. Which is proving to be very difficult to them. Welcoming them in is one thing, making them apart of our community is another.
- Being better at working together, and ensuring that we don't forget the communities within the townships. We tend to try and put all the people together but they have their own personalities from one another and even from the cities. We need to better understand them
- The housing issue is not affordable. With more people leaving the GTA, it increases house prices and also rent prices. People in this region have to leave this region in order to afford a home. This



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affects the people who used to be served through services because these options are no longer available because it's increasingly more difficult for families to get homes.

- Equity or equitability. We need to establish equitable standards. This would require raising the standards we currently have vis-a-vis basic needs. We need to continue working on affordable housing and integrated community that's diverse.
- Stop access to junk food. Stress of poverty makes you think only short-term. Adequate home and income would help people make better choices with respect to the foods they eat.
- Community cohesiveness - there are disjointed communities. An invisible wall exists. People are pushed to the margins of society.
- Hope - hope that we can be better; hope that we can fix our problems; hope that we can transform our community
- Living wage
- Transit - so that people can get to places. Every child should get to go to school. Every child should be able to experience arts and culture. In Vancouver, for example, it's free to go to museums.
- Strengthening neighborhoods; there is lower cost involved, a reachable goal. After all, everyone wants to improve the neighborhood they live in!
- Poverty!!!!
- Affordable housing, can't have a sense of wellbeing if you do not have a safe, sustainable house to live in
- Employment, need sustainable jobs, job security, jobs with benefits
- Causes a lot of money stresses, life problems when individuals do not have benefits
- Repurpose some of the vacant student housing to allow for low income people to rent
- Finding way for different groups to interact with larger community
- Intersection of resources, services, programs
- Increasing visibility – new groups interacting with other groups that may not have traditionally interacted, partnerships (e.g. arts and culture, children's services, sports)
- Increasing diversity in service providers, so people see themselves in the employees, providers (conscious intention toward)
- More initiatives in broadly public situations and active welcoming
- See leaders and role models, move leadership broadly and engage
- Conscious of cultural sensitivity, making programs accessible and well-suited to people of different cultures
- Thinking ahead before concerns happen – e.g. addressing fire drills, fireworks, travel through snow for newcomers who may not have experienced these phenomenons
- Better integration of newer Canadians through well-planned and resourced programs
- What is me? What will happen to me if I don't do something for two minutes. Solution is our breath – breathing is happening to us. If we breathe fewer breaths for a few minutes a day - like meditation - will improve mental health.
- Breathing less is not an option. We can't tell this country to just to breathe. Now you are asking us to breathe less?
- Deeper breaths – that is the key – slow down your breath – take in more oxygen and you change the bio chemistry of your body. This changes the way your brain works. This is science. Medical doctors believe neurons are forming every day when you breathe. Can do this with zero cost. Problem is me. I don't want to do it. If you do it then you will feel better in a matter of days. All relationships are changes, mental health, behaviour.
- I agree – I had help with breathing with Vic the breathing guy – helped me when I was going through tough times. It did help me get through this tough time.



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

- They teach this practice at GRH. To help people manage their breathing. The hospital says this is the best thing they have got going. Alcoholics get out of their problems by breathing for a few minutes a day. This can take away many of their problems that we are talking about. Connects you with yourself or with your life.
- Many parts of the brain and we need the breath to help.
- Change our attitude and teaching kids how to breath will help. At age 2 need to start.
- Supporting families and their children to go to school. Some kids think they would not be successful to go to school. Don't see themselves going to school as a parent as I am busy with kids. But I got encouragement to go to school was hard with kids. Families especially mothers need to be encouraged to go to school to improve yourself. Need to be able to read and contribute to community. Literacy is important.
- Mental health services – every semester at school there is a long wait list. Having some forward thinking and plan and prevent mental health access supports and services. Need to be there when you are ready to access especially during exams and peak periods.
- Add mental health to the health services. Not in public health services. Recently they added programs but mental health is not covered. Like to see more programs there.
- Poverty of people who are on welfare especially seniors and recently arrivals. Very easy to transfer seniors who are immigrants to disability. Would be in their favour. Why deny them this support? Be more flexible.
- Transit (2) – simple to do; does not need a lot of money; just takes political will
- Bring back the sense of neighbourhood level; help build relationships despite differences in economic, social, housing situations
- Allow people to participate in their neighbourhoods
- Would help address safety issue
- Grass root movement
- Nutritional health/healthy diets
- If people are healthy, many issues can be solved
- Community/roof top (green roofs) gardens
- Small amount of funding for grass roots groups (matching funding/volunteer time) – helping neighbourhoods get events/projects off the ground
- Document it which can be displayed afterwards
- Create ownership with the neighbourhood
- Teaching financial responsibilities in schools
- This should be a course that occurs every year so it becomes a habit
- Make this course age-appropriate
- Parents should have some responsibility to teach this as well
- Should encourage kids/teens to have discussions about financial responsibility and/or financial planning
- Health (physical, mental, financial and other types of health) we need to (re)invest in these concepts again
- Community initiatives/volunteers should be supported
- Transit:
 - Let GRT give free passes to all OW/ODSP people:
 - Non-peak hours minimum (15%?) increase in costs
 - Max benefits throughout wider community: more activity in all community events, not to say personal validation of worth/dignity
- Easy to administer – no validation required/photo ID machinery (physical and human) already in place



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

- Requires essentially only (ONLY!?) will. Not constrained by physical resources
- GRT/Region: stop this patriarchal power dancing and just solve the issue by decree.
- Exercise your power for everyone's benefit.
- It's hard to isolate issues. Everything is interconnected.
- Wages is a major issue --- #1 issue. If you want someone to clean your toilet, pay them comfortably for your comfort.
- For people who are on "fixed income" living off Ontario Works or Disabilities, we should get that income adjusted as well to the current standard of living, inflation, etc.
- Minimum wage is just arbitrary numbers. Those words don't necessarily take into consideration housing costs and other costs of living.
- #2 issue would be the "citizenship threat"
- Possible solution would be to organize/mobilize your own community for an open conversation or training to get the residents to really talk about how they can improve the situation in the neighbourhood, such as garbage problems, speeding issues, etc.
- People living on low income: often relationship tools are needed (many key relationships), mental health tools, etc
- Understanding the resources out there and how to access them when find people in crisis situations or low income needs etc
- Navigators who stay with you to see you through the helps you need
- More collaboration of treatment into centres with all one needs to see them through their struggle area (e.g. addictions treated in one centre with doctor, social workers, counselling, rather than going to the hospital)
- More preventative work on "self-care", making it OK to ask for help earlier, remove stigma that clouds conversations like this
- More training to share growing learning/expertise within organizations e.g. mental health. Durham – city wide training for free for front-line workers (suicide prevention, mental health, noticing abuse, etc)
- Duplication of services/fragmentation (e.g. one person may need multiple case workers)

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Community Conversation Flags

Participants were asked to write one thing they could do for themselves or for their community. The following responses were placed on flags and were hung up around the room.

What can you do to improve wellbeing for yourself or for your community?

- Be a community connector! Invite, engage, welcome
- Build relationships with my neighbours
- Invite others in!
- Be fearless
- Learn more about community issues
- Speak up and take a stand on issues related to the SDOH
- REST and engage in authentic conversations
- Instill a sense of community and social responsibility in my children and the people I meet
- Advocate for change
- Raise a little hell
- Go for evening walks and say hello to everyone I meet!
- Get to know my neighbours- learn about them
- Volunteer
- Move from an individualist mentality to a collectivist one!
- Connect and invest and participate in my neighbourhood
- Learn more about the key issues and get involved with capacity-building organizations that are most effectively addressing them
- Not sure where to start , but I'm here
- Be respectful to everyone
- Make time to explore and move in the community
- Engage in authentic conversations about how people/others and our community is really doing
- Use talents to inform citizens
- Explore
- Invite a new neighbour to a BBQ
- Say hello!
- Do a big, bold thing: like welcoming a refugee into my home
- Participate in my community outside of my comfort zone
- Be involved, be supportive, assume positive intent
- Include a wellbeing initiative facilitated and lead by students
- Fight for free transit for low income people
- Remember to translate my sense of belonging into invitations to others
- Live by example and assist others in living well
- Have a community conversation with staff team
- Comfort the afflicted; afflict the comfortable
- Reach out to different communities more often
- Talk to my neighbours
- Education (continuous learning)
- Leadership/support
- Stay calm more often
- Engage and welcome neighbours in my community



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

- Going out and be in the community (whether taking a walk or participating in an event)
- I could reach out more and build relationships with and between those in my community
- Continue having conversations about well-being. PROACTIVE not just REACTIVE

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