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Community Foundations of Canada

Community Foundations of Canada is proud to be a partner in the symposium on Overcoming Isolation and Deepening Social Connectedness. Community Foundations of Canada is the network for the country's 191 community foundations. We serve 82% of the Canadian population and include some of the country's largest, and smallest, foundations. We invest in communities in many different ways including grantmaking, impact investing, contributing to community knowledge and bringing community players to the table to work together on issues of common concern.

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Selected Community Foundation Stories

Community foundations identify and act on key priorities in their communities. They invest a wide range of assets from human resources to financial resources and bring communities together to collaborate on issues and opportunities that cut across organizational silos. Through community engagement tools such as Vital Signs, community foundations are increasingly tackling specific, community-identified challenges – including many different approaches to strengthening connection and belonging within communities and reducing social isolation among some of our most vulnerable populations.

Below is just a small selection of stories from a variety of community foundations across the country.

Connection and Belonging: Vancouver, British Columbia

As an extension of its Vital Signs work the Vancouver Foundation, Canada's largest community foundation, interviewed hundreds of local leaders and citizens looking for the biggest issue facing its city. The results were astonishing because they were unexpected and because of the deep chord the research struck among metro residents. The foundation had expected to hear about homelessness, or addiction, or the environment. Instead they listened to person after person, from all walks of life, from a wide range of professions, and in many different languages tell a story about a city that left them feeling isolated, disconnected and alone.

The data told them that people didn't feel like neighbours. They called the garage door opener 'the invention that killed community' because it allowed people to travel to and from their homes and offices without interacting with a single person. Rebuilding those elemental connections between neighbours was paramount. Citizens asked the hard question: How can we begin to tackle complex issues like poverty and homelessness if people are disconnected, isolated and indifferent? How can we make people care about community issues if their concern stops at their front yard?

The Vancouver Foundation unveiled its priority to help build a more connected and engaged community. A new focus on neighbourhood grants was developed that helps people become more connected and engaged to one another, to their neighbours and neighbourhood and to their larger community, a significant departure from where they thought their help was needed.

Some key findings in the report include:

- The most cited obstacle to neighbourhood participation is that people feel they have little to offer.
- Those in the 25 to 34 year-old age group feel more isolated and alone in the community
- Exploring the consequences of loneliness
- The experience of new immigrants in metro Vancouver – their feelings about their neighbourhoods, levels of optimism and how those levels change over time
- The benefits of neighbourliness – does connecting with your neighbour really matter?
- The effect of apartment living on neighbourliness

More Information

Read [Vancouver Foundation's Connection and Belonging reports](#)

Read more about its [Neighbourhood Small Grants program](#)

Tackling Poverty Together: Hamilton, ON

Recognizing strong neighbourhoods as the key to a strong city, Hamilton Community Foundation launched its *Growing Roots...Strengthening Neighbourhoods Institute* in 2002. This small grants program has received attention across North America and proved the power of small grants and leadership development to help the city's most challenged neighbourhoods identify and build on their assets.

The lessons Hamilton learned in the process helped it in the ensuing years as its ongoing research and experience pointed to one pervasive barrier to Hamilton's vitality: poverty.

HCF's board decided to tackle this complex, long-term problem, head-on, focusing the bulk of its discretionary granting on this single issue. It was a bold approach, unheard-of in the community foundation world at the time.

Since 2002 the Foundation has invested some \$10 million in reducing and preventing poverty through strategic grantmaking and community leadership. The foundation established the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction to address policy-level changes while stressing the pivotal role of neighbourhoods in strengthening the city – an approach since adopted by the City of Hamilton. Some of the change the community has seen because of the foundation's work include:

- Increased community leadership and participation in some of Hamilton's most challenged, yet resilient, neighbourhoods. By supporting community developers, local planning teams have been advanced within each hub with resident leadership and significant resident involvement.
- Citizens receiving help in meeting their basic needs where they live. Food security transportation and local services are being addressed directly in the neighbourhoods.
- New programs and services planned, delivered and provided at a neighbourhood level, especially services for children and youth.

- Neighbourhoods look different because decommissioned schools and churches are now community centres offering a wide range of services/programs. There is also new affordable housing, neighbourhood park clean-ups, playground builds, community gardens and property repairs.
- Grassroots groups have access to space and support as these new centres allow neighbourhood groups to have space at no cost or low cost. ..
- Neighbourhood hubs have become part of community conversation bringing an increased awareness of the challenges and good work being done in local neighbourhoods. Residents are also more aware of their rights and responsibilities as citizens.

Most significantly, however, is that the work pioneered by Hamilton Community Foundation has led to the City of Hamilton's decision to establish a Neighbourhood Development Strategy, building and expanding on the original hub model.

The Hamilton Community Foundation continues to support the work of residents to develop their neighbourhoods, focusing on enabling residents to realize the action plans they have developed for their communities. One aspect of this work is a small grants fund that:

- Builds resident capacity for project planning and implementation
- Supports the engagement of the diverse range of people and groups within the neighbourhood
- Builds upon and share existing residents' skills, knowledge and connections
- Supports a sense of shared ownership and pride of neighbourhoods by local residents

HCF also supports agencies to partner with the local planning teams and carry out actions identified in the neighbourhood plans. And it continues to fund community developers who help residents engage and connect with their neighbours and their communities.

Beginning with "Growing Roots... Strengthening Neighbourhoods" to the foundation's multi-year poverty grantmaking focus, through to the new Neighbourhood Leadership Institute, Hamilton Community Foundation has held fast to two principles:

- We believe that every neighbourhood has assets: people with ideas and strengths and skills to offer. Our job has been to help them build on those assets.

- We believe that residents know best what their neighbourhoods need. Our job has been to listen, to be responsive, and to help their voices be heard.

Of course there is more to be done and more to learn about how best to do it but our neighbourhoods have shown that, with committed support from responsive partners in the public, private and voluntary sectors, they are more than up to the challenge.

More Information

Read about the foundation's [work in poverty and its Neighbourhood Leadership Institute](#)

Playing for Keeps: Toronto, Ontario

The Toronto Foundation is collaborating with [Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario](#), [University of Toronto - Faculty of Physical Education and Health](#), [Ontario Trillium Foundation](#), [Get Active Toronto](#), [Durham Family YMCA](#), [Hamilton Community Foundation](#) and many other organizations in Durham Region, and the cities of Toronto and Hamilton on a social capital initiative. The initiative, called Playing for Keeps will leverage the 2012 Ontario Summer Games and the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games to build social capital and create a legacy of healthier, more active and stronger communities and a deepened sense of belonging.

Goal: Leverage the [2012 Ontario Summer Games](#) and the [2015 Pan/ Parapan American Games](#) to create a legacy of healthier, more active and stronger communities and a deepened sense of belonging.

Vision: Communities within the footprint of the 2015 Pan/Parapan American Games and throughout Ontario will see opportunities to create positive impacts relating to health, economic growth, community safety, civic engagement and the productivity of individuals and organizations.

Objectives:

- Enhance social networks and develop social capital.

- Determine how to leverage the Games and explore program ideas which will develop social capital, and lead to healthier, more active and stronger communities.
- Ensure commitment to find ways to implement research, programs and evaluation before, during and after the Games.

Shared Principles:

- The best results can be achieved by engaging stakeholders cross-regionally, from all sectors, and from a variety of priority areas within the not-for-profit sector (i.e. sport & recreation, physical activity, health, education, arts, accessibility, social development, employment, environment, etc.).
- Minimize duplication by building upon the findings of other reports, community consultations and summits (GAT Summit 2010, HSFO Knowledge to Action seminars, Civic Action Summit 2011, Toronto Sports Council Summit 2011, Sport Legacies Research Collaborative meetings, Toronto's Vital Signs®).

Social Capital Initiative - how do we ensure the dialogue continues beyond 2015?

The three design workshops in spring/summer 2011 will inform a long-term strategy, leveraging the Games for continued engagement in developing sustainable social capital initiatives. The strategy for engagement will in fact begin in the weeks leading up to the planning workshops with a social media campaign aimed at engaging people that may or may not be in attendance at the planning workshops but can inform the content of the events through these pre-interactions. The social media campaign will continue during and post events to ensure the momentum continues to grow and will offer an opportunity for everyone, including those not able to participate in the design workshops, to see progress stemming from this initiative.

More Information

[Learn more on the Playing for Keeps website >>](#)

[Check out the Vital Youth/Playing for Keeps grant >>](#)