



Perth and District  
**COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION**

*Lanark County 2023*

# Vital Signs<sup>®</sup>

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## REPORT



*Collaboration. Community. Resilience.*



## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that Lanark County is situated on the ancestral and unceded traditional land of the Omàmìwinini, also known as the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. With this acknowledgment comes respect for the land and the people who have been living here since time immemorial. As part of this land acknowledgment, we recognize the injustices of the past and those that continue today. We recognize our responsibility to contribute to Truth and Reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples of the land we call Canada. To this end, we are learning about the impact of colonization on the Indigenous peoples of Canada, we have established an annual Indigenous Youth Award through our partnership with Indspire, a national Indigenous charity, and we will communicate the results of our actions to the community.



# FOREWORD

This report was prepared in the third year of the global COVID-19 pandemic. During the earliest days of the pandemic, our communities recognized that, though we were physically separated, we had to face our challenges together. Often working in new ways, people pulled together as individuals, organizations, local governments, and businesses. We planted community gardens, launched tool libraries, developed emergency housing and delivered meals. Service providers worked around the clock to offer new forms of support for residents, such as health and social service hubs for people without homes and emergency child care for front-line workers.

We were proud of our community's response to the crisis, but could not ignore that challenges were growing: Lack of affordable housing, food insecurity, mental health crises, and a health-care system under stress were amplified by the pandemic. All of these issues existed before the pandemic but as they grew bigger, more people became aware of the burdens that were placed on some far more than others. And, as the pandemic winds down, the inequity remains.

In the wake of the identification of unmarked graves at Indian Residential Schools was the need for Truth and Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples. Hundreds of residents came out to events across Lanark County to mark the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation on September 30, 2021. People committed themselves to learning about past and present injustices against Indigenous peoples. This county is fortunate to benefit from local knowledge keepers, storytellers, and advocates who are leading this work, including The Circle of Turtle Lodge, the Lanark Drum Circle, Plenty Canada, Mississippi Mills All My Relations, and Lanark County Neighbours for Truth and Reconciliation. The story of truth, reconciliation and healing is only beginning.

Watching people unite to learn from each other and take action builds community. That is what this Vital Signs report is about: stories of collaboration in the face of challenge. We want our readers to see that ordinary people can do extraordinary things together! To that end, we have included in each section three things that anyone can do to contribute to a better, more inclusive, vibrant and sustainable county. Please share this report with your friends and neighbours, take some of the actions suggested, and know that you are making a difference.

*David Poole*

*Chair of the Board of Directors*

*&*

*Victoria Gibb-Carsley*

*Executive Director, PDCF*

# THEMES

This report is arranged into 10 themes that together contribute to the vitality of Lanark County



## SOURCES

Data and statistics in this report originate from Statistics Canada and research projects conducted by partners in our local community. Note: Lanark County Census Division data includes Smiths Falls.

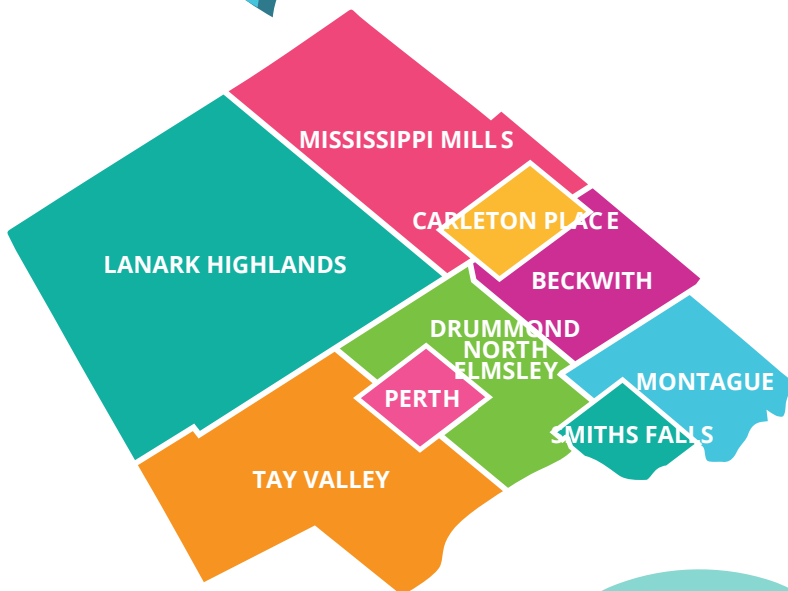
We also collaborated closely with the community in preparing this report:

- Vital Conversation Consultations (36 community partners)
- Eleven featured stories
- Vital Signs Community Survey (93 respondents)

## OUR COMMUNITY

Known for picturesque small towns, rolling farmland, and pristine waters and forests, Lanark County is a great place to call home. The communities that make up our county are vibrant and diverse in their histories, arts and economies. Lanark County has experienced dramatic shifts in recent years; the COVID-19 pandemic and wide adoption of virtual gathering places have transformed the way we connect and form community. We are welcoming new neighbours, largely from urban centres, who seek out the natural beauty and human connection that our region has to offer.

"WE LOVE LIVING IN LANARK COUNTY. IT IS A CREATIVE, COLLABORATIVE AND CONNECTION BASED COMMUNITY!"



**POPULATION 75,625**  
OUR COMMUNITY HAS GROWN 13% SINCE 2011

15% OF RESIDENTS ARE UNDER THE AGE OF 14

25% OF RESIDENTS ARE OVER THE AGE OF 65

OUR COMMUNITY IS AGING. THE MEDIAN AGE HAS RISEN 3 YEARS SINCE 2011

Median age in Lanark County 49

Median age in Ontario 42

4% OF RESIDENTS ARE INDIGENOUS

7% OF RESIDENTS ARE IMMIGRANTS

3% OF RESIDENTS ARE RACIALIZED PEOPLE. THIS HAS ALMOST DOUBLED SINCE 2016

## HOUSING

In our recent survey, increasing safe, affordable and attainable housing was cited as the most urgent priority for the community<sup>1</sup>.

Residents who are not adequately housed are more likely to face health challenges, isolation from the community and barriers to opportunities.

While some aspects of housing in Lanark County improved between 2016 and 2020, recent spikes in the market have further stretched affordability and access to stable housing in our community.

In 2020, 24 percent of households found themselves in dwellings that were not suitable, required major repairs or were costing them more than 30 percent of their income.

Renters and/or low-income earners are suffering the most. In the years 2016-2020, homeowners typically saw their monthly shelter costs rise by 3 percent, while renters saw them rise by 15 percent.

In the spring of 2022, the number of people awaiting community housing had declined slightly to 713 in 2021 from 720 in 2020. Furthermore, 187 unhoused households accessed service in 2021 and 642 people were provided with hotel/motel stays, transportation, rent, utilities, moving costs, and food/gas through the County's Housing Options Program<sup>2</sup>.

## ACTION AND LEADERSHIP

Lanark County, partners, clients and the community, equipped with a Housing and Homelessness Plan<sup>3</sup>, have mobilized a multi-pronged approach to improve housing in our community. The plan includes mandated targets set by the province.

Here is a sample of recent progress:

- A new 20-unit community housing building in Carleton Place
- Funding to 27 households to renovate their homes to continue to reside safely
- Funding for 65 supportive housing beds with four providers
- Recommendations from a homelessness study are underway
- A toolkit for municipalities to develop more affordable housing

*"Cost of housing is so high, where does it end?"*

The wait time for community housing in Lanark County is 6-8 years

**13%**

*Early in the pandemic 13% of residents had reported a change in their housing situations<sup>4</sup>.*

*"The County has added 120 units to the service level standards/affordable housing since 2018, and we will meet our service level target for the first time in 2023."*

~Emily Hollington,  
Lanark County Social Services

*"You need safety to be yourself, to be heard, to have a safe place to live. To not have that takes everything out of you. It drains you."*

## SUPPORTIVE COMMUNITY

Renewed awareness and leadership is emerging from the wider community. A community survey showed strong support for policy changes to allow a wider range of housing options and highlighted the value of increased affordable housing options<sup>4</sup>.

## HOME DURING THE PANDEMIC

Amongst those reporting a change in housing situation in the first months of the pandemic, the most commonly cited change was difficulty paying rent or mortgage and utilities.

One senior, living alone, shared her story of compounding housing challenges related to the pandemic: With her dwelling in need of major repair, she was struggling to afford the repairs and contractors were not able to go into the house. The resulting impact of her unresolved leaky roof led to dangerous mould in her living space<sup>5</sup>.

**78%**  
OF RESIDENTS OWN

**22%**  
OF RESIDENTS RENT

**7% OF DWELLINGS  
NEED MAJOR REPAIRS**

**TYPICAL MONTHLY  
SHELTER COSTS**

**For owners: \$1,180**

**For renters: \$1,080**



## *Safety and support under one roof*

*In May of 2020, multiple community partners, led by Lanark County Mental Health, mobilized emergency funds to establish isolation centres in Perth and Smiths Falls that supported 108 community members experiencing homelessness or living in a setting where social distancing or quarantining were not possible. Both sites were modelled as hubs with on-site social, health and food/provision supports.*

## **3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference**

Contact Lanark County Housing Services to learn how your buildings, business, church or community organization can help to create affordable housing.

Start an email campaign to your MPP to express your support for more housing-first programs.

Learn the meaning of hidden homelessness.



## WEALTH & INCOME GAPS

Poverty diminishes the potential of our community. We are more prosperous, healthy, and resilient when all residents can meet their needs. While we saw gains in alleviating poverty across Lanark County between 2016 and 2020, the pandemic and other economic trends in more recent years sound the alarm for more effective approaches to end poverty in our community.

While income levels across Lanark County vary, also notable is the variance in the percentage of households with less than \$40K income before tax.

## INCOME & THE PANDEMIC

The pandemic impacted workers' earnings. Between 2019 and 2020, most (54 percent) employed residents saw an increase in earnings while 46 percent saw either no change or a decrease<sup>6</sup>.


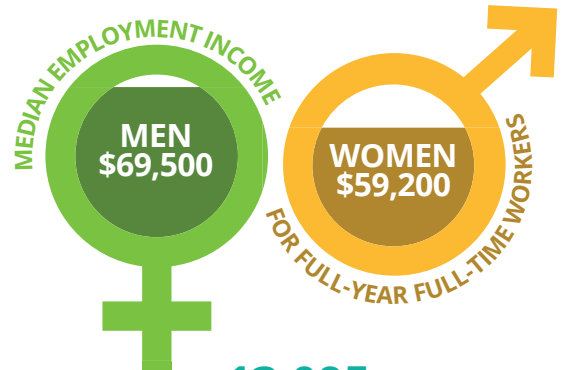
Lower-income earners are more likely to face employment and income precarity and have a lower net worth (or "safety net"). People living on lower incomes were more likely to report pandemic-related challenges<sup>7</sup> and were considerably more likely (27 percent) to see a dramatic (30 percent or more) decrease in their earnings than top earners (15 percent)<sup>8</sup>.

## GENDER INCOME GAP

The income gap between men and women in the county persists for both full-time and part-time workers. Research suggests the pandemic had more of an impact on women's finances regardless of employment status<sup>9</sup>. More women (7,050) than men (6,045) in Lanark County applied for and received COVID-19 emergency and recovery benefits. There is a lack of data on income for transgender and gender non-binary or non-conforming members of our community.



**\$19.05/  
HOUR IS THE  
LIVING WAGE  
IN LANARK  
COUNTY<sup>11</sup>**



**13,095  
LANARK RESIDENTS  
RECEIVED COVID-19  
EMERGENCY &  
RECOVERY  
BENEFITS**

**COVID-19 EMERGENCY  
AND RECOVERY BENEFITS  
ACCOUNTED FOR 3%  
OF INCOME IN LANARK  
COUNTY IN 2020**

*Median* **AMOUNT  
OF COVID-19 BENEFITS  
RECEIVED: \$8,000**

*Median* **INCOME OF  
SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES:  
\$68,500**

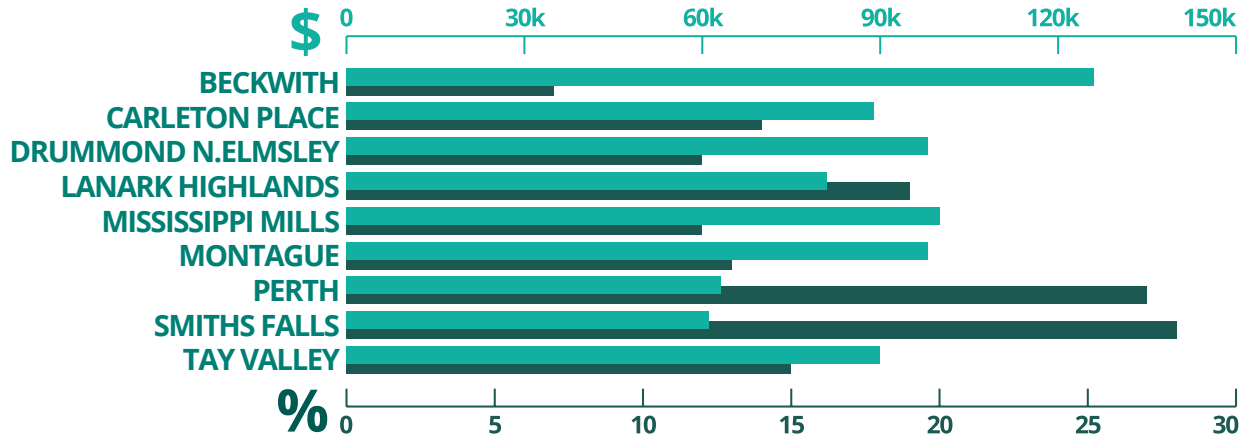
*"Poverty is isolating,  
not having money affects  
self-esteem, comparing  
yourself to others."*

*"More people  
are falling  
through the  
cracks."*

*"When you  
live in poverty you  
don't have time to  
advocate for what  
you need."*



**MEDIAN TOTAL INCOME OF HOUSEHOLDS AND PERCENT OF HOUSEHOLDS WITH LESS THAN \$40,000 OF INCOME BEFORE TAX, BY MUNICIPALITY, 2020**



**MIND THE *(wealth)* GAP**

Income only tells part of the story of financial security. As we have witnessed in recent years, individuals with a high net worth (determined by assets minus debts) had a more robust financial cushion to endure the turmoil. The middle class saw the highest rate of wealth gain between 2005 and 2019 in Ontario. The only group to experience a decline in the value of their net worth were those in the lowest bracket<sup>10</sup>. The poor are getting poorer and may not have access to emergency funds when a crisis arrives.

**ADDRESSING INEQUALITY & CRISIS**

COVID-19 emergency and recovery benefits provided significant relief for many residents during the height of the pandemic and, over time, changes to government income supports have had a slight impact on addressing income inequality in Lanark County.

We held consultations with community members who clearly indicated a need for universal basic income for Canadians in order to end poverty and improve health.

*Saying 'NO' to poverty*

*Approximately 1.5 million people with disabilities live in poverty across Canada. On October 19, 2022, The Table Community Food Centre arranged for a group to attend a rally in support of Bill C-22, which would see the roll-out of a Canada Disability Benefit. At the time of this report the Bill remains in the House of Commons awaiting its third reading before going to the Senate.*

**3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference**

Donate skills or money to an organization that works to eliminate poverty and/or helps people to meet their immediate needs.

Speak up to your elected representatives for universal basic income.

Celebrate local employers who pay their workers a living wage.

## HEALTH & WELL-BEING

COVID-19 dramatically affected our health and well-being and the community responded. Healthcare professionals, frontline workers, municipal governments, community organizations, and volunteers stepped up to care for one another. All area hospitals experienced temporary closures due to COVID-related staff shortages and such pressures have led many to call for system renewal.

### MENTAL HEALTH

Mental health challenges were identified prior to the pandemic, including problematic wait times, lack of awareness of services, and a need for better integration and coordination across the system. Early in the pandemic, self-reported mental health was much worse for lower income earners than higher income earners.



*Among the lowest income group, only 24 percent of respondents indicated their mental health was good or excellent<sup>12</sup>.*

BETWEEN 2016 AND 2021, LANARK COUNTY SAW AN OVERALL INCREASE IN FAMILY PHYSICIANS, FROM

**116 TO 131 PER 100,000 RESIDENTS.**

## THE OPIOID CRISIS

The opioid crisis continues to impact our community with a recent increase in overdoses and deaths. The crisis has been fueled by growth in the local distribution of drugs as well as disruption in services, financial hardship, and increased isolation of residents<sup>7</sup>.

### FOOD SECURITY

More than ever before, residents are concerned and struggling to access nutritious and affordable food. With food prices rising, ensuring everyone has an adequate income is key to accessing healthy food.

**142**

LIVES HAVE BEEN LOST TO COVID-19 IN THE LEEDS, GRENVILLE AND LANARK HEALTH UNIT REGION<sup>14</sup>.

**15%**

OF PEOPLE REPORT THAT MOST DAYS IN THEIR LIFE ARE QUITE A BIT OR EXTREMELY STRESSFUL.

**113**

OPIOID-RELATED EMERGENCY DEPARTMENT VISITS AND 14 LIVES LOST IN THE REGION IN 2021<sup>15</sup>.

**82%**

OF SURVEY RESIDENTS SURVEYED REPORTED A DECLINE IN PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC<sup>16</sup>.

**45%**

OF ADULTS ARE REGULARLY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE<sup>17,18</sup>.



Community Check-In Survey

*“The community as a whole, including public health, municipalities, organizations, health care providers, and individuals, came together in so many ways to respond to the challenges presented to us by the COVID pandemic, including making us #1 for vaccines in Ontario – an important prevention tool. It is critical to continue this collective response to support the many people in our community who continue to face challenges in their lives as outlined in this report.”*

- Paula Stewart, recently retired Medical Officer of Health, Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

*“Medical coverage does not include therapy or counseling of any kind. I cannot afford to pay \$150+ per hour. My children’s mental health is declining and we are struggling<sup>19</sup>.”*

## ACCESS TO PRIMARY CARE

Despite an increase in family physicians in Lanark County, access to primary care for area residents is expected to decline because of staffing shortages in supporting roles, our aging population, and the increased complexity of health-care needs.

Existing models of care could be expanded to improve outcomes: Primary care teams in Community Health Centres and Family Health Teams promote health and manage health problems by working together. Hybrid models of care (virtual and in-person) can remove barriers such as transportation, anxiety, and taking time off work.

Through their Community Check-in, The Table found that family and friends were a top way that people coped with the stress of the pandemic, with online groups, counselling, spirituality and the outdoors also supporting their wellness. Community matters.

## LONG-TERM CARE

Long-term care and retirement homes faced major challenges with COVID-19 outbreaks. The lack of long-term care beds close to home required people to stay in hospital longer or for families to provide care at home. Additional provincial funding for adequate staffing for both long-term care facilities and home support is needed.

## END OF LIFE CARE


There is no permanently-funded palliative care program or hospice in Lanark County. As demand grows, so does the need for provincial funding and support to address the significant gaps in the region. A volunteer committee, made up of health care professionals, advocates and service providers, has been meeting to improve access to palliative care services.

**SELF-REPORTED INCREASE OF DRUGS OR ALCOHOL EARLY IN THE PANDEMIC (2020)<sup>20</sup>:**

**22% SLIGHT INCREASE**

**6% MODERATE INCREASE**

**3% SIGNIFICANT INCREASE**

**350,000+** 

**NUMBER OF COVID-19 VACCINATIONS GIVEN IN LEEDS, GRENVILLE AND LANARK DISTRICT HEALTH UNIT IN 2021**

## Community Safety and Well-Being Plan

The Community Safety and Well-Being Plan for Lanark County and Smiths Falls, founded in 2016, looks at assets and gaps in 12 risk areas, and strategizes to address issues through social programming, prevention, intervention, and emergency response. The plan will be updated in 2023, providing a strong template for how the community can work together to promote safe communities, health, and well-being.

**3 THINGS  
WE CAN DO  
TO MAKE A  
difference**

Sign up for a CPR, general or mental health first aid course.

Ask a friend or neighbour to go for a walk with you.

Advocate for affordable and accessible mental health services.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The entire community plays a role in fostering healthy, caring, and resilient children, adolescents and young adults. Families are under pressure, often facing significant and stressful fluctuations in employment, scheduling, and availability of supports in recent years.

### EARLY YEARS AND YOUNG CHILDREN

During COVID restrictions, many families with young children had to manage without the support of extended family or community connections. Only since July 2022 have vaccines been available for pre-school children.

Children's health is closely tied to the employment and income status of their parents. As the cost of living has skyrocketed, it has become more difficult for families with children to afford healthy food. The Lanark County Food Bank saw a 40 percent increase in visits from 2021 to 2022 as the cost of food went up — and 37 percent of their clients were families with children<sup>21</sup>.

*“I think families with children that have complex needs are forgotten. We can't access child care due to age and respite isn't available because of social distancing and it is limited to an hour outside... Try to do grocery shopping for a family of 6 in one hour!!<sup>22</sup>”*

## CHILD CARE

In the spring of 2019 the Lanark County Child Care and Early Years Service System Plan<sup>23</sup> described the landscape and challenges of early years programming and child care in the county.

The report shows a dramatic increase in the number of children with special needs in licensed child care settings and recreation programs, as well as the severity and complexity of those needs.

Community consultation illuminated some key pressure points on child care which include longer wait lists, especially for infant care, in Perth, Smiths Falls, Carleton Place, and Mississippi Mills. In the more rural areas of Lanark County, parents reported concern with lack of before- and after-school care.

On the positive side, measures are being taken at all levels of government to respond to the need for quality child care. In September 2022, Lanark County approved the Pakenham Community Early Learning Centre as its first Canada-Wide Early Learning Child Care centre as part of the new \$10-per-day program established by the federal government in partnership with provinces and administered locally.

**54%** OF BOYS SPEND 3 HOURS OR MORE A DAY PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

**66%** OF GIRLS SPEND 3 HOURS OR MORE A DAY ON SOCIAL MEDIA<sup>24</sup>

*“All of my school health coordinator career I was striving to work with the boards at the level we got to during COVID and here we are.”*

~Tawnya Boileau, Public Health  
Nurse School Health Co-ordinator

## ADOLESCENCE

Being a teenager today can be incredibly challenging, with a multitude of pressures and expectations. It is inspiring and promising to notice growth in local research and partnerships focused on supporting youth and fostering brighter futures.

A consultation with sector service providers identified that two priorities for youth were expanding mental health support and establishing community spaces dedicated for youth.

A 2022 Planet Youth survey of high school students across Lanark County determined that alcohol use is high (33 percent) and e-cigarette and cannabis use is rather high (19 percent have smoked an e-cigarette and 21 percent used cannabis in the last month). While 63 percent of youth report they often or always spend time with their parents on weekends, over 50 percent spend three hours or more a day online (playing video games or using social media)<sup>25</sup>.

**69%** OF GRADE 10 STUDENTS POLLED GET SIGNIFICANTLY LESS THAN 8 HOURS OF SLEEP. THESE YOUTH ARE MORE LIKELY TO REPORT THAT THEY ARE 'NOT HAPPY' AND HAVE USED SUBSTANCES<sup>26</sup>.

**32%** OF CHILDREN IN THE REGION<sup>27</sup> ARE CONSIDERED VULNERABLE IN AREAS OF EARLY DEVELOPMENT (READINESS FOR SCHOOL)

**24%** OF CHILDREN ARE BEING RAISED IN LONE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS



### A new way to engage youth

Since early 2017 Planet Youth Lanark County has been building a network of support, monitoring, and opportunities to understand how to make Lanark County a better place to grow up. With leaders in education, health-care, local governments, and police services, as well as various volunteer organizations around the table, the network has a goal to prevent, delay, and reduce problematic substance use among youth - while helping to build and strengthen communities. To date, this community-driven approach has yielded insightful survey data on the experiences of Grade 10 students across the county. With results and evidence in-hand, Planet Youth Lanark County's next step is to support the development of strategies to respond to the data.

### 3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference

Read a book every day to a child in our lives to encourage lifelong learning and literacy.

Mentor a youth through a local non-profit, or start small by participating in "take our kids to work" day.

Encourage and model healthy habits in your household.

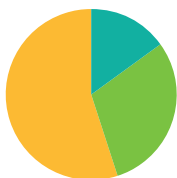


## PEOPLE AT WORK

The sense of prosperity in the county relies on safe, meaningful, and stable employment that provides a livable income. Economic trends, including the rise of remote work options, labour shortages, growing popularity of online retail, and business interruptions caused by lockdown measures and supply chain problems, are impacting many households and local businesses.

## SKILLS-BUILDING

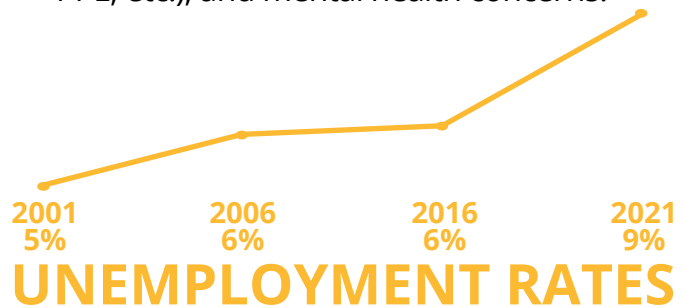
Perth hosts a campus of Algonquin College. The campus is endeavouring to expand international student enrolment to help further alleviate skills shortages in the county; however, lack of housing and public transportation present barriers to enrolment<sup>28</sup>.



**EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT**  
 Less than high school: 15%  
 High school diploma: 30%  
 Postsecondary certificate, degree, or diploma: 55%

## EMPLOYMENT TRENDS

COVID-19 has impacted work and income for many people. In the spring of 2020, The Table found that 5.6 percent of residents surveyed had lost a job and 10.2 percent had experienced a layoff<sup>29</sup> (Community Check-In). Households with income between \$30,000 and \$50,000 were more likely than higher income households to have: lost work (7.8 percent), been laid off (10.2 percent), or had their hours reduced (8.7 percent)<sup>30</sup> (Community Check In). For employers reporting a negative impact on their workforce, the most commonly cited issues included reduced revenue/sales, increased costs (i.e. cleaning, security, PPE, etc.), and mental health concerns.<sup>31</sup>



## Caring labour shortages

The essential, yet often undervalued, caring labour sectors are facing alarming shortages. Issues around access, cost, and quality of care across health care, childcare, long-term care, etc. are producing grim repercussions for many individuals and families across our region. Those who work and lead in these sectors are innovating to reverse the trends.

In an effort to make caring labour more visible and recognized, Perth Enrichment Program Seniors Therapeutic Centre has created a Caregiver ID Badge so that informal caregivers are recognized as accompanying and supporting their loved ones in care settings and around the community.

In late 2021, Lanark County's Children's Services Department was provincially recognized for its efforts in early childhood educator (ECE) recruitment and retention. Their activities have included standardized training, mentorship opportunities, guaranteed employment pathways, succession planning tool development and media and social media blitzes.

"I can't get a job because I have to wait for daycare spots but they're all closed and the lists aren't moving<sup>32</sup>."

Working-age women have exited the labour market in greater numbers than men due to their likelihood of being in more precarious jobs, as well as social pressures amplified by the pandemic. Between 2016 and 2021, the employment rate for women declined 4.3 percent to 50.2 and the rate for men has declined 2.6 percent to 58.1 percent.

Between February 2020 and February 2021, the number of residents of Lanark County claiming employment insurance benefits spiked by 138 percent from 1,150 to 2,740, signalling the uncertainty that many workers faced<sup>33</sup>. By February 2022, this number was much closer to the pre-pandemic count, at 1,350.

The Lanark County unemployment rate rose in 2021 to 8.5 percent, which was still considerably lower than the Ontario average of 12.2 percent. Rates have since fallen significantly, with the Ontario rate having reached 5.2 percent in January 2023 (local rate unavailable).

In addition to pandemic-related pressures on the labour market, the baby boomer segment of the population is aging into retirement. Since the early 2000s this demographic shift accounts for a large proportion of the decline in Lanark County's labour force.

**HEALTH CARE, FOLLOWED BY CONSTRUCTION AND RETAIL ARE THE TOP INDUSTRIES IN LANARK COUNTY.**

*Industries most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic:*

- RETAIL
- HEALTH CARE & SOCIAL ASSISTANCE
- ACCOMMODATION & FOOD SERVICES
- MANUFACTURING & CONSTRUCTION<sup>34</sup>

*Immigrants in Lanark County are 2 times more likely than Canadian-born residents to have a university education.*



**15% OF LANARK COUNTY WORKERS ARE SELF-EMPLOYED**

*26% of employed residents work from home*

*“If international students are to be attracted to pursue their diploma at the Perth Campus, three major pillars are to be addressed and satisfied: Transportation, Housing and Jobs<sup>35</sup>.”*

*“... The loss of business has been catastrophic. I’m a sole proprietor so it’s been very difficult to get government support (still haven’t managed). Shipping is an issue, supply chains are an issue<sup>36</sup>.”*  
Small business owner in the spring of 2020

**3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference**

- Advocate for co-op placements and internships at your workplace.
- Support local businesses and buy from local farmers where possible.
- Support businesses that are intentional about hiring a diverse workforce, including newcomers, people with disabilities, etc.



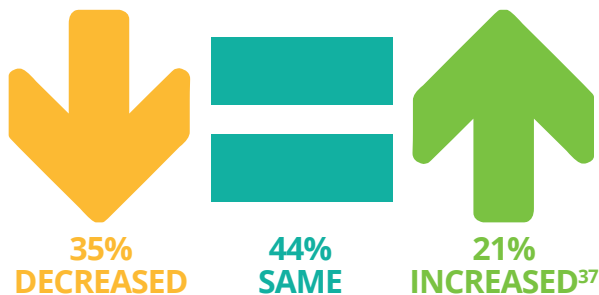
## BELONGING, LEADERSHIP AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

With a strong sense of belonging, community members feel more motivated to get involved. Since our last report, community awareness of social justice and equity issues has grown. Considerable work is still needed to translate awareness into action to reduce discrimination and ensure everyone feels they belong here.

### CONNECTION

Connecting during the lockdowns required new tools. Bereavement Support Lanark County created virtual spaces to foster meaningful connection between residents. ConnectWell and Perth Enrichment Program Seniors Therapeutic Centre connected seniors for social time using a phone conferencing system.

### COMMUNITY MEMBERS INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY ISSUES



*We have communities with heaps of folks that are ready and willing to support/care for one another. Leveraging that is key to responding to an emergency."*

*"You have a voice with LCCAN - you can slowly be who you're supposed to be, because you have a voice."*

*"I have more time and am now very involved with a couple of organizations."*

## ADVOCACY AND ELECTIONS

Community consultation has surfaced a growing concern about apathy. Voter turnout is trending downwards, and there is a sense that civic discourse has become more divisive. New approaches are being used to encourage residents to get involved on issues that matter to them.

Since 2021, the Lanark County Community Action Network (LCCAN) has been organizing to foster the empowerment of people living in poverty and their allies. Participants work together to create positive change within the community.

### COMMUNITY COLLABORATION

In the community sector there is a strong appetite to creatively work together. There have been many collaboratives, including the Lanark County Child and Youth Services Collaborative and the COVID-19 Community Services Collaborative. Perth's Youth Action Committee (YAK), Lanark County Community Justice, The Table, Fire Dawgs and partners also recently established a hub under one roof.



SINCE 2021 THE COMMUNITY ALLIANCE FOR REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT (CARR2) HAS SUPPORTED

# 10 REFUGEES

*in the process of resettling from Afghanistan thanks to 156 donors and 40 volunteers.*

## VOLUNTEERISM

According to our survey, the top reasons for declining volunteerism were increasing age and health concerns (including risk of COVID), changes in the type of volunteering opportunities, volunteer burnout, and feeling powerless. A small proportion of community members reported volunteering more, mainly because they felt compelled to address urgent issues like housing and the environment.

**75%**  **84%**  
OF RESIDENTS OF SENIOR RESIDENTS  
*Report a strong  
or somewhat strong  
sense of community belonging*

## SOCIAL JUSTICE

Some positive steps on the long road to justice for all are taking shape across the county.

Queer Connection Lanark, with a mission to increase the visibility of the 2SLGBTQI+ community, saw an increase in requests from other agencies to help tackle bullying issues and to make services more inclusive. They have experienced growing participation in Lanark Pride, with increasing involvement of young people.

In late 2020, with support from a wider working group, Lanark County Interval House and Community Support launched the Inclusive Voices Campaign - a series of videos to raise awareness around issues of racism, hate, and diversity. Centering youth voices, the videos span topics of racism, gender-based violence, 2SLGBTQI+, ableism, transphobia, and mental health.

### National Day for Truth and Reconciliation

September 30, 2021 marked the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Two public ceremonies were held in the county.

Lanark County Council passed a motion to recognize the national day, and a smudging ceremony was led by Elder Larry McDermott. In Last Duel Park, over 200 community members gathered to participate in a ceremony to raise awareness and honour the children of the residential school graves. A ceremony was led by the Lanark Drum Circle.

These events were highly collaborative, also including First Nations members and representatives from reconciliation-focused organizations All My Relations, Lanark County Neighbours for Truth and Reconciliation, the Youth Program at Plenty Canada, and more.

### 3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference

Check in on someone who lives alone.

Vote! And get involved in coalitions, town halls, and advocacy in the community.

Consult local reconciliation resources through groups like Lanark County Neighbours for Truth and Reconciliation and Mississippi Mills All My Relations.

## TRANSPORTATION

Transportation enables people - regardless of income or ability - to access jobs, education, services, recreation, and social activities. In our largely rural region, it is widely understood that a private vehicle is a necessity to get around. There is no public or private service that connects Lanark County communities to each other or to jobs, educational opportunities, or services in nearby municipalities (the commuter bus line to Ottawa has not resumed since the pandemic<sup>39</sup>). It is no surprise, then, that with 41 percent of employed residents commuting for 30 minutes or longer, 91 percent take a motor vehicle.

The transportation status quo leaves those without a reliable car with few options. In our county, transportation challenges make it difficult for 31 percent of respondents and their families to enjoy a good quality of life<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, 14 percent of respondents in the same survey said that affordable public transportation would be the one thing that could improve their family's quality of life.

Active transportation (walking, rolling) is an important component of accessible transportation, as these are more affordable and low-carbon modes of travel for those commuting shorter distances. The County and lower-tier municipalities are engaged in planning active transportation routes and some have been realized, such as the Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail that connects Carleton Place to Arnprior and Smiths Falls. However, most trail development is recreation oriented (e.g., the Rideau Trail) and does not connect homes with businesses, schools, and jobs via infrastructure that is safe for "ages 8 to 80."

Transportation and housing are closely linked. Planning housing and transit solutions alongside one another supports more complete (vibrant, convenient and sustainable) communities in which to live.

**"I'D LOVE TO BIKE BUT I'M SO SCARED. THIS AREA IS NOT SAFE AT ALL IN PERTH."**

*"Due to the extreme rural nature [of our area], many of our residents HAVE TO travel everywhere: school, groceries, community events - this requires a safe vehicle and money for fuel and repairs. I'm concerned about how people can afford all of this in the future."*

*"If I didn't drive I don't know what I would do, I would probably be out hitchhiking. The taxi is expensive."*

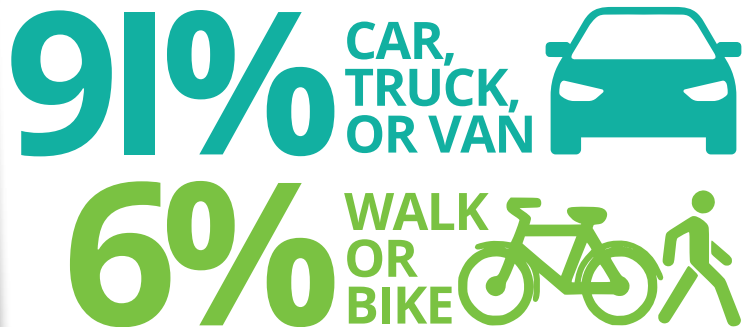
## MOVING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

The lockdowns of the pandemic shifted mobility needs. More white-collar workers switched to a virtual work set up, and shops and service providers embraced models of curbside pickup, shuttle transportation, and delivery to continue to meet residents' needs. At the same time, school bus transportation became more difficult and many parents began to drive their children to school rather than send them on the bus.

### *Collaborating to connect people with their needs*

*During the height of pandemic lockdowns, transportation services were transformed quickly to help meet people's needs. The Table Community Food Centre partnered with Lanark Transportation Association to deliver food to their clients. This helped address mobility issues that clients faced even before the pandemic, and enabled community connection and wellness checks when isolation was beginning to take a toll. The Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit offered transportation for residents to vaccination sites, supporting the county to have one of the highest vaccination rates in Ontario.*

## MAIN MODE OF COMMUTING FOR WORK



**41%** of employed residents have a work commute of 30 minutes or more.

### 3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference

Organize ridesharing with your neighbours.

Roll or walk to a new-to-you part of the county on one of the local multi-purpose trails.

Advocate to your local council for community-based transportation such as shuttle buses, commuter buses, bike paths, and sidewalks.



## ENVIRONMENT AND NATURE

The natural systems we depend on and which sustain life face unprecedented imbalance and unpredictability. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has issued dire warnings about the consequences of increasing the earth's temperature by more than 1.5 degrees Celsius<sup>41</sup>.

We know how important this is: Protecting our environment and climate was a high or essential priority for 82 percent of the PDCF community survey respondents. Taking action to strike a more sustainable and regenerative balance with our environment can improve our health and increase the chances that our children and grandchildren will inherit a liveable planet.

## ENVIRONMENTAL CHECKUP

Our lakes, rivers, forests, wetlands, and shorelines are all essential parts of a healthy watershed and a healthy environment. Our local Conservation Authorities (Mississippi Valley and Rideau Valley) are committed to monitoring and gathering relevant information about the condition of our watershed resources and features. The results of these efforts are consolidated in the Rideau and Mississippi Watershed Reports. The latest reports show that forest cover, wetlands, and healthy shorelines are decreasing. Water quality conditions across our watersheds are also under threat from settlement and climate change.

**LANARK COUNTY HAS SET A CORPORATE EMISSIONS REDUCTION TARGET OF 20%.**



**THERE ARE 19 ELECTRIC VEHICLE CHARGING STATIONS ACROSS LANARK COUNTY**



*“We know we need to take care of Mother Earth if we’re going to survive.”*

*“We need a longer-term vision for 7 generations.”*

*“In the Indigenous worldview no one is marginalized, we take care of each other.”*



## LOCAL MUNICIPAL ACTION

Lanark County is undertaking climate action planning and implementation at the corporate (municipal) and community levels. It recently voted to adopt a Climate Lens tool that will support decision makers to understand the carbon footprint associated with various actions. Furthermore, a county-wide Climate Action Committee has been struck, with a representative from each lower-tier municipality and Smiths Falls. According to the Climate Initiatives Dashboard for Lanark County<sup>42</sup>, the most common action being taken by municipalities is upgrading

lighting systems to LED and supporting the Lanark Local Flavour initiative, which connects local farmers and local consumers. The least common actions taken are setting emissions reduction targets and implementing composting programs.

Lanark County has also partnered with the Rideau Valley Conservation Authority to plant one million trees in ten years, has won awards for pollinator habitat restoration, and has taken steps to encourage more sustainable business practices.



**BUILDINGS ACCOUNT FOR 34% OF LANARK GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.**

### Community-led action

Climate Network Lanark (CNL) enables collaborative efforts and actions by and for the community to address the impacts of climate change. Its volunteer-led projects are made possible with the commitment of 50+ core volunteers across various working groups and by over 1,000 supportive residents, business owners, and municipal politicians. CNL has been instrumental in urging municipal climate action that brings changes to systems, as well as equipping people with resources to reduce their carbon footprints through home retrofitting. CNL has also brought beneficial programs to the county such as ALUS (Alternative Land Use Services), which rewards farmers for contributing to environmental sustainability.

“My favourite slogan is ‘Change... or be changed.’ I would far prefer to have a say over the changes that are happening, to have some capacity to manage them, because my community is informed and thinking and preparing, rather than to be taken off-guard by calamities. The breadth, thoughtfulness, and ability of people here to do this has been proven time and time again.” - Sue Brandum, Co-Director, Climate Network Lanark

### 3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference

Plant a tree.

Manage stormwater runoff by using a rain barrel, creating a rain garden, and considering permeable driveway surfaces.

Research home-energy retrofits to reduce your carbon footprint and your monthly bills.

## ARTS AND CULTURE

During the height of the pandemic, the appetite in our community for connection, belonging and opportunity for expression through culture and the arts was stronger than ever. Despite isolation measures, local people and governments made commendable efforts to continue offering safe artistic and cultural experiences that kept peoples' spirits up and supported small and local businesses in the culture, arts, and tourism sectors.

As in-person events have returned, there is a renewed call from the community for more multipurpose arts and culture venues and other infrastructure to support the growth of these activities.

## COMMUNITY KNOWLEDGE HUB

Libraries are gathering places, safe havens, connection points, and spaces for lifelong learning. Across Lanark County, during the pandemic, libraries innovated to continue offering and enhancing their services through a time of great need.

Materials lending was quickly transformed with the launch of curbside pickup, and staff at some libraries even made regular wellness phone calls to community members and library patrons who they recognized as isolated. These calls enabled meaningful connection and often catalyzed other support and referral.

While recent library metrics such as program attendance and visits are lower than pre-pandemic levels, they are on the rise again. eBook and eAudio circulation has also increased.

*“After two years without the Stewart Park Festival, we sensed that people were eager to get back to live events. But we couldn't have expected that we would draw the largest single day crowd we ever had. Clearly people missed us and were happy to have a chance to gather with their community.” ~James Keelaghan, Artistic Director, Stewart Park Festival*

*“Our community has always been great at stepping up and supporting our events, especially in the arts. This is a very engaged community.”*

*“Artists of all kinds reflect history, society, and culture in their work. We can use art as a way to reconstruct, shape, and reshape representations of community, gender, race, and class - creating the change we want to see.” ~Bel Angeles - Artist and Activist*



*“When my walls are getting too small I can be by myself at the library, and it's safe. Everyone says hello to you.”*



## IN 2021<sup>43</sup> LIBRARIES IN LANARK COUNTY LOGGED OVER

**115,000**  
VISITS



**8,000**  
PROGRAM ATTENDEES



**340,000**  
MATERIALS BORROWED



### Arts, crafts and more at MERA

McDonalds Corners Elphin Recreation and Arts (MERA) is a non-profit that promotes rural community connections and art in Lanark Highlands. Approximately 80 members actively participate in arts, craft, music, and dance activities as well as children's summer arts camp and workshops delivered by local artists and experts. MERA also supports local art through the annual MERA Award of Excellence.

During the pandemic, indoor activities were greatly reduced; however, the weekly farmers' market and outdoor pizza oven safely brought together local folk. MERA has also hosted several festivals including the 2022 "Trees4Life" festival that included art works of trees, children's art activities centered on trees, tree-planting, and seminars.

### Making Music Happen

Blue SKies in the Community has been spreading the spirit of the Blue SKies Music Festival by fostering and supporting music, musicians, and the arts between Cloyne, Perth, Ompah, and Kingston for 30 years. The initiative supports a children's arts camp, an adult music camp, the Blue SKies Instrument Bank, and the Blue SKies Community Fiddle Orchestra. The organization awarded COVID grants to ten musicians, supporting them through some of the severe financial impacts musicians suffered as performances dwindled.

### Countdown Public Art Project: Pebble Mosaic

Since September 2022, Smiths Falls Town Square has been the proud home of the latest community mosaic project "Countdown Public Art" - a Lanark County Interval House and Community Services-led project that brings public art to various locations across the region. The mosaics are created to honour victims and survivors of gender-based violence and to spark hard conversations about ending violence. They are designed and built by community members through a series of online and in-person workshops, storytelling sessions, and building events.

## 3 THINGS WE CAN DO TO MAKE A difference

Participate in art shows, fairs, festivals, historic sites, or concerts that represent diverse cultures - don't forget to invite a friend.

Get involved in supporting and taking care of creative spaces in our community.

Shop at local markets.

## SAFETY

In a safe community, people can carry out their daily routines without concern about endangerment to themselves, their loved ones, or their possessions. Local policing priorities include fostering investigative excellence for all crimes, a focus on traffic safety, and continued community engagement and partnerships for prevention programs and to support victims and vulnerable populations<sup>44</sup>.

Two vital components that contribute to maintaining community safety are feelings of belonging and trust. Another essential aspect of community safety is addressing harm after a crime has been committed, by means of healing and reconciliation.



*The “Big Four” causal factors in deaths and injuries on our roadways, waterways and trails:*

- AGGRESSIVE DRIVING
- INATTENTIVE DRIVING
- IMPAIRED DRIVING
- LACK OF OCCUPANT RESTRAINTS



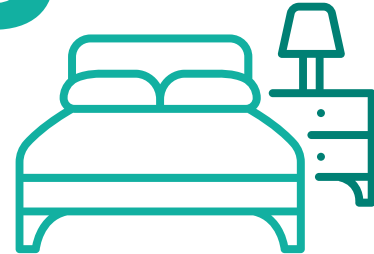
## VICTIM ADVOCACY

As part of a 2020-2022 Action Plan<sup>45</sup> The Lanark Detachment of the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) committed to collaborate with community partners and establish a Victim Advocate Program. This program provides additional support to victims of domestic violence, human trafficking, and sexual assault. The Victim Advocate, working with the OPP and other community partners, assists victims in navigating the system from the time of incident and throughout the criminal justice process. Now in its third year, the program has made a significant impact, helping nearly 300 victims. The program received an OPP Accolade Award in early 2023 for “Supporting Victims of Crime,” recognizing individuals and/or teams who best achieve the OPP’s vision, mission and values.

# 1 EMERGENCY SHELTER

*for survivors of domestic violence in Lanark County, with...*

# 15 BEDS



“...[T]his process has helped me feel that it is not just going to get pushed aside and that the accused will hopefully get put on the right track.”

## Community Justice

Lanark County Community Justice (LCCJ) is a proven model that has been working in our region for over 20 years. The program “provides and promotes the community use of restorative practices, bringing people together to repair the harm from conflict and crime, build community, and strengthen relationships.”

Activities of LCCJ include facilitating restorative justice forums through a Community Justice Court Diversion Program, as well as providing interactive Restorative Parenting sessions, geared towards families with teens who are struggling. The LCCJ Court Diversion Program has demonstrated excellent cost-benefit returns, where for every \$1.00 spent on the program, \$2.53 of benefit is generated.

The program has had high satisfaction rates, proving beneficial to all parties involved, including victims, the accused, and other participants. In an exit survey, 85 percent of victims were satisfied with the forum, and 95 percent felt that it was better for their case to go through community justice rather than traditional court proceedings<sup>46</sup>. What’s more, 78 percent said they felt the forum helped them have more control over the process.

After participating in a forum hosted by LCCJ, there was a 43 percent increase in accused parties who reported that they very much understood how their actions affected other people. In addition, the proportion of accused parties reporting a strong understanding of their impact on others increased by 25 percent.

**Lanark County Interval House and Community Support received...**

**3025 CRISIS CALLS**  
**IN 2022** and served  
**460 WOMEN & CHILDREN**



**3 THINGS  
WE CAN DO  
TO MAKE A  
difference**

Drive carefully - keep devices out of arm’s reach, drive sober, and keep a close watch on your speedometer.

Be a good neighbour; if you see something wrong and it feels safe to intervene, express concern and speak up, or seek support to do so.

Participate in the “See It, Name It, Change It” campaign to end domestic violence (lcih.ca)<sup>47</sup>.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND SPONSORS

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Lead a Vital Signs conversation or focus group in the next 18 months.

Animate community action and show community leadership in responding to issues identified in this report.

Update the Vital Signs report in four to five years.



## ABOUT THE PERTH & DISTRICT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

*A strong foundation helps build a strong community.*

The Perth and District Community Foundation, established in 2002, is a charitable public foundation dedicated to strengthening the quality of life in Perth, Drummond/North Elmsley, Lanark Highlands, and Tay Valley. We connect the generosity of donors with the energy and ideas of people and community organizations to support local projects that have a meaningful and lasting impact.

Vital Signs® is a community checkup conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our communities and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. Vital Signs is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada and with special thanks to the Toronto Foundation for developing and sharing the Vital Signs concept. **Vitalsignscanada.ca**