Our sense of connection with one another is strengthened when we contribute to our community by voting, volunteering or donating. When we feel like we belong to our community we are more likely to feel accountable and more likely to step up in a leadership capacity.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

Although our community’s subjective sense of belonging appears to be improving, the growth of our community donation levels have not kept pace with our rapid population growth. We are still waiting to see the positive outcomes associated with our increased subjective feelings of belonging.

In the past 17 years, our population has grown by 24% while our donor base has grown by just 1%.

**Donor growth not keeping pace with population**

*Source: CANSIM Table 111-0001

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**Sense of community belonging on the rise**

Although improving, those aged 20–34 still report a sense of belonging significantly lower than the community.

*Source: CANSIM Table 105-0501 (Data for 45–64 age group was unreliable and could not be reported)

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**46% of residents who have an annual income of less than $40,000 have a strong sense of belonging**

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**60.8% of residents who have an annual income of $120,000 or more have a strong sense of belonging**

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS

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**Sexual orientation impacts sense of belonging**

54.2% of those who identify as being straight or heterosexual have a strong sense of belonging compared to only 36.9% of those in the community who identify as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or other-identified.

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS

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**GETTING AROUND**

Did you know that simply getting out and walking around your neighbourhood can increase your sense of community belonging?
Participating in arts and cultural activities such as music festivals, art galleries or live theatre offers us an opportunity to show our creative side and nurture our soul. Culturally rich communities are more likely to have proud populations and are better able to attract and retain great talent.

**THE BIG PICTURE**

Employment in culturally related industries has rebounded from a very significant drop in 2012. Although our residents report low usage levels of local cultural facilities, they do report being engaged in cultural activities. This suggests our community is travelling to other cities for arts and culturally related events. Despite the fact that Waterloo Region has numerous free festivals each year, attendance seems to be income-related.

**Participation in cultural activities VS. use of cultural facilities**

Although our residents reported low usage rates of cultural facilities within the Region, their participation in cultural activities (regardless of geographical location) was much higher. This indicates that our residents are active in arts and culture but do so outside of the Region.

**How income impacts cultural activity attendance**

- **$40,000**: Fewer than 50% of residents with an annual income of less than $40,000 attend cultural activities.
- **$120,000**: Over 70% of residents with an annual income of at least $120,000 attend cultural activities.

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS

**How cultural activity attendance affects sense of belonging**

- **71.6%**: of residents who attend cultural events report a stronger sense of belonging to our community.

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS

Concerned about parking? There are over 500 free parking spots in our uptown/downtown cores, giving us access to many of our community’s arts and culture activities.
Getting started as a new Canadian, as a young person entering the workforce or as a young family can be challenging in the Region. Assisting these groups helps create a more vital community and can make a lasting improvement for all.

THE BIG PICTURE
Many of our young adults have failed to achieve a solid connection to work. Many are in part-time, low-paying positions. If this population sub-group is unable to secure meaningful work, they are less likely to develop a strong sense of belonging to our community. In addition, wages for those new to Canada continue to lag behind those born in Canada.

Almost one in five of our population are local university or college students
Over 60,000 full-time and 33,000 part-time students are enrolled in our three post-secondary institutions.
*Source: Association of Universities and Colleges

Number of regional licensed child care spaces lag behind Ontario rates

Regional youth unemployment rates lower than Ontario average
While the Region’s youth unemployment rates track the provincial trends, local rates remain considerably lower than the Ontario average.
*3-month averages for youth aged 15–24 years. Source: CANSIM Tables 282-0109 and 282-000

How country of birth can impact employment earnings
Of those born in Canada, 26.3% reported earning over $120,000 per year compared to just 21.2% of those not born in Canada.
Of those born in Canada, only 16.7% reported earning less than $40,000 per year compared to 23.3% of those not born in Canada.
*Source: 2013 C/W CWS

Grand River Transit offers subsidized passes for individuals on low income through the Transit for Reduced Income Program. The passes are less than half the regular adult monthly rate and can be accessed through The Working Centre or Lutherwood.
Physical health and active lifestyle are important contributors to the quality of life in our community. Overall health is affected by many socio-economic factors including income, education and housing.

**THE BIG PICTURE**
A significant number of residents in our community struggle with mental health issues and higher levels of stress. Our community tends to lead a more sedentary inactive lifestyle.

More residents self-rated their mental health as ‘fair or poor’ than across the province or country

*Source: CANSIM Table 105-0501*

1 in 5 people experience quite a lot of stress

*Source: CANSIM Tables 105-0105 and 105-0501*

Income levels can impact satisfaction with physical wellbeing

More than 25% of our population has a disability that limits their activity

*Source: CANSIM Table 105-0501*

Only 56.4% of those earning less than $40,000 per year report feeling satisfied with their physical wellbeing.

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS*

Satisfaction with leisure time encourages a stronger sense of belonging

*Source: 2013 CIW CWS*

The Working Centre recently launched a Community Access Bikeshare (CAB) program to provide short-term bicycle rentals on a very affordable basis. For a low annual fee members can now access well-maintained bikes in uptown Waterloo and downtown Kitchener.
In last year's 2013 full WRVS report, we examined all 11 issue areas as well as an economic context to understand the bigger picture. Focus groups, our Expert Panel and our data consultant helped us understand our community's most pressing issues. This year and next, we will take the time to dive deeper into these areas with our WRVS Priority Reports.

Announced at the October 2013 launch event, our community's Priority Areas for 2013–2015 are Belonging & Leadership, Arts & Culture, Getting Started (in life and/or in Canada) and Health & Wellness. In addition, Getting Around was highlighted as a special focus. Whatever issues a member of our community may face in these areas, they are only exacerbated by issues with access or transportation.

Data for this report was obtained from the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, Community Wellbeing Survey (CIW CWS), the Ontario Municipal Benchmarking Initiative (OMBI) and Statistics Canada (CANSIM) amongst other sources. For more information and to access full data tables please visit: www.wrvitalsigns.ca

**Inspired to make change happen?**

Interested in how you can help make a difference in these areas of community need? Check out www.cckwr.ca, The Foundation’s online platform designed to connect community needs to those who can help make a difference.
The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation wishes to extend our sincerest thanks to the many organizations and individuals that provided information, guidance, data or in any way assisted in the creation of this year's report. We are especially grateful to the dynamic community leaders of our Expert Panel for their guidance and to our community partners for their support.

**Expert Panel**

- Social Planning Council of Cambridge and North Dumfries
  - Kristine Allison

- University of Waterloo
  - Ryan Connell

- Creative Enterprise Initiative
  - Roger Farwell

- Region of Waterloo Strategic Planning
  - Lorie Frozie

- UW Social Innovation Generation
  - Sean Geobey

- Community CarShare
  - Jason Hammond

- Muslim Social Services
  - Sabira Hudda

- WLU Student Union
  - Chris Hyde

- UW Propel Centre for Population Health Impact
  - Leila Miraker

- Waterloo Regional Police Service
  - Shaena Morris

- WLU Student Publications
  - Bryn Ossington

- Region of Waterloo Public Health
  - Katherine Pigott

- Waterloo Region Crime Prevention Council
  - Anthony Piscitelli

A special thank you goes out to the photographers who submitted photos for our annual *Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs* photo contest. You can find all the winners featured on the WRVS website at [www.wrvitalsigns.ca](http://www.wrvitalsigns.ca)

**Photo Contest Winners**

First Prize: Brent Wettlaufer  
Second Prize: Julie Schmidt  
Third Prize: Elizabeth Clarke

**Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs® Project Team**

- Chelsea Arnott  
- Ernie Ginsler  
- Bethan Llewellyn  
- Brendan M. Sheehan  
- Rosemary Smith

*Vital Signs* is a community check-up conducted by Community Foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our communities, identifies significant trends and supports action on issues that are critical to our quality of life. Special thanks to the Toronto Foundation for developing and sharing the *Vital Signs* concept and Community Foundations of Canada for supporting a coordinated national *Vital Signs* initiative. For more information visit: [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca)

A special thank you goes to the following organizations for their leadership and generous financial support in making this year’s *Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs* a reality:

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**Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs® Photo Contest Judge**

Shubhagata Sengupta

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**THANKS TO OUR PARTNERS**...
Welcome to the 2014 edition of Waterloo Region’s Vital Signs® (WRVS) – the Priority Report. Since 2007, The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation has aspired to inspire civic engagement, to provide focus for public debate and to mobilize philanthropy around community need. As a Community Foundation, WRVS helps us focus on the most challenging issues facing our Region. Whether it is setting strategy at the Board level, improving the impact of our grant work or building relationships and knowledge, Vital Signs is a tool for learning, for change and for action.

As you can see, the Priority Report you hold in your hands is a departure from our previous editions of Vital Signs. This year’s report is an opportunity to share the data in a more concise, readable and accessible way. The end result is a visual report that the entire community can read and understand. Our friends at Quarry Integrated Communications helped us improve our previous booklet-style format and throughout the report you will find data presented via a new infographic-style approach.

Last year, we were proud to partner with the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) housed at the University of Waterloo to complete the first ever Waterloo Region Community Wellbeing Survey (CWS). Look for CWS information throughout this report and in next year’s 2015 Priority Report.

It is through informed action and empathetic passion for our community that we can truly make this Region the best place to live, work, play and raise a family. Join us as we explore the most pressing issues facing our community and seek to find ways for each of us to make an impact.

Only together can we make a lasting difference.

Sincerely,

David Brenneman
Rosemary Smith

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