

Success Story:
*Community and local government
collaborate to improve wellbeing for
Guelph residents*

October 2013

The Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) makes an impact in Guelph

After a dozen years in development, the release of our first national report in October 2011 and an updated [CIW composite index report](#) this past October, garnered impressive media coverage both across Canada and around the world. One exciting outcome is that countries starting to develop an index of wellbeing are now calling us for advice. What we had not fully anticipated was the volume of Canadian calls asking if we also had regional, provincial, and local data on indicators of wellbeing. While disaggregation of data to the provincial level was anticipated as a complement to the national composite index, and our first provincial report will be forthcoming in 2013, we needed to think more deeply about the significant challenges of disaggregating data based on such a diverse array of data sets. And perhaps even more importantly, how we could respond and assist communities wanting to use the CIW framework at the local level.

The City of Guelph, which is just east of the University of Waterloo where the CIW is housed, developed a [Plan for Wellbeing in Guelph](#) that identified the CIW as an ideal framework for its initiative to advance civic engagement and the wellbeing of its residents. In February 2012, the CIW attended a first meeting with City staff and their partners to discuss the development of a community

wellbeing survey as an alternate way to understand residents' perceptions of their quality of life, especially the absence of local indicator data. Barbara Powell, General Manager of Community Engagement for the City of Guelph, sums up the resulting whirlwind of 2012 activity like this:

“We have a wonderful partnership with the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). Early in the development of our [Community Wellbeing Initiative](#) we discovered the CIW and were immediately impressed with the breath of the definition of wellbeing and the rigour with which the indicators and index were developed. We adopted it as the basis for our Community Wellbeing Initiative and have used it throughout the engagement phase as a way to solicit the opinions and concerns of our citizens and to focus on the development of actions”.

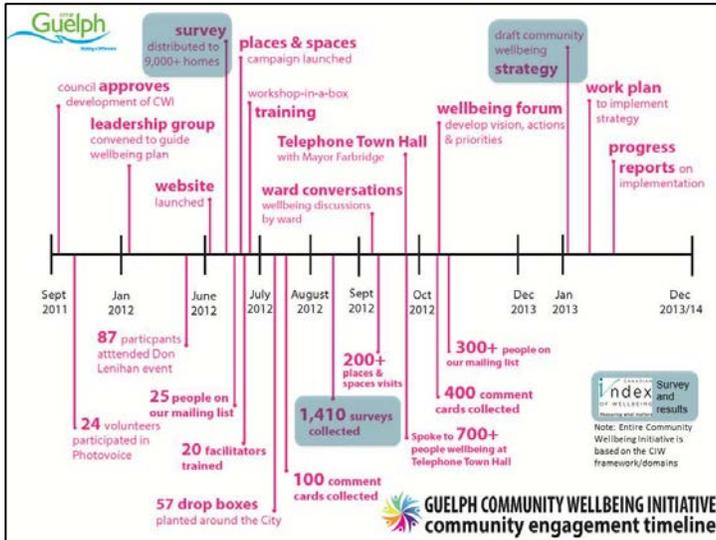
Guelph Community Wellbeing Initiative (CWI)

- Community-wide initiative to:
 - Define what we value in Guelph
 - Find ways to improve our wellbeing
- Tool for decision-makers, community groups and citizens
- Way to encourage new projects, actions and partnerships

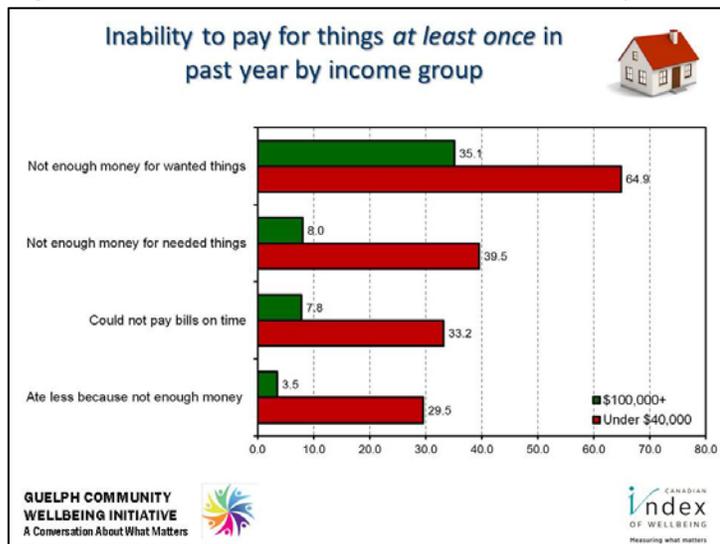


The [community wellbeing survey](#) is the first of its kind in Canada and uses the [CIW framework](#) as a guide to ask residents how they are *really* doing. Some of the survey questions are drawn from indicators gathered for our national CIW composite index, others are taken from valid measures developed in previous studies, and some are

original questions focusing on local community issues related to wellbeing. Several rounds of consultations with the City of Guelph and community partners ensured that the survey reflected the needs of local residents. Invitations from the Mayor to participate were distributed to almost 9,000 randomly selected households, with 1,401 ultimately completed over the summer.



Preliminary analyses have just been completed, which generated some interesting findings about the differences between highest (over \$100,000 per year) and lowest (under \$40,000 per year) income households. Whether by choice or circumstance, many more residents from lower income households appear to be working part-time or are under-employed. The income gap is most striking when considering residents' ability to pay for various things. On at least one occasion in the past year, residents living in lower income households were unable to pay for the things they needed (39.5%), could not pay bills on time (33.2%), and/or ate less because there was not enough money for food (29.5%). Even more troubling, approximately 10% of residents living in lower income households said they were unable to pay for these things at least once each month. When aspects of health and wellbeing are considered, much higher percentages of residents in lower income households rated their physical health (22.8%) and their mental health (15.0%) as either poor or fair than do residents in higher income households (6.9% and 6.0% respectively). Overall, residents in lower income households consistently rated their wellbeing *lower* in all areas



compared to residents from upper income households. The lone exception was *leisure time* where satisfaction was virtually the same for both groups. Of some concern were the much larger gaps in the ratings of wellbeing between lower and upper income households on their *financial situation*, their *work situation*, and on *physical wellbeing*.

In 2013 and beyond, the complete findings from the CIW survey, along with all of the other information gathered from the extensive community engagement process undertaken by the City of Guelph, will be used to frame further community discussions, and ultimately, the City's new community wellbeing strategy. The strategy will then be used to improve services and facilitate community-wide action on enhancing wellbeing in Guelph.

As an unexpected but welcome sidebar to this work, representatives from the Carnegie UK Trust visited us in June and later profiled our collective work in a report called [*Shifting the dial: From wellbeing measures to policy practice*](#) as two case studies of projects that are "further ahead than the UK government in either collecting or acting on wellbeing data" (p. 9).¹ And in October 2013, the [Community Indicators Consortium \(CIC\)](#) jointly awarded the CIW and City of Guelph with an International Impact Award.

Note: The CIW community wellbeing survey has now been used in Kingston, Ontario and Waterloo Region in 2013 through collaboration with Community Foundations of Canada and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. Additional communities have expressed interest for 2014.

About the [University of Waterloo](#)

In just half a century, the University of Waterloo, located at the heart of Canada's technology hub, has become one of Canada's leading comprehensive universities with 34,000 full- and part-time students in undergraduate and graduate programs. Waterloo, as home to the world's largest post-secondary co-operative education program, embraces its connections to the world and encourages enterprising partnerships in learning, research and discovery. In the next decade, the university is committed to building a better future for Canada and the world by championing innovation and collaboration to create solutions relevant to the needs of today and tomorrow.

About the Faculty of [Applied Health Sciences](#)

Committed to improving the quality of life for individuals and communities through innovative education and research activities, Applied Health Sciences and its three academic units are leaders in developing strategies that prevent disease and injury, protect and promote healthy living, optimize physical ability, and improve well-being across the life course.

To find out more about the **Canadian Index of Wellbeing**, go to ciw.ca.

¹ Wallace, J., & Schmueker, K. (2012). *Shifting the dial: From wellbeing measures to policy practice*. Dunfermline, Scotland: Carnegie UK Trust.