

Grassroots conneXion



Social Development Centre
— WATERLOO REGION —



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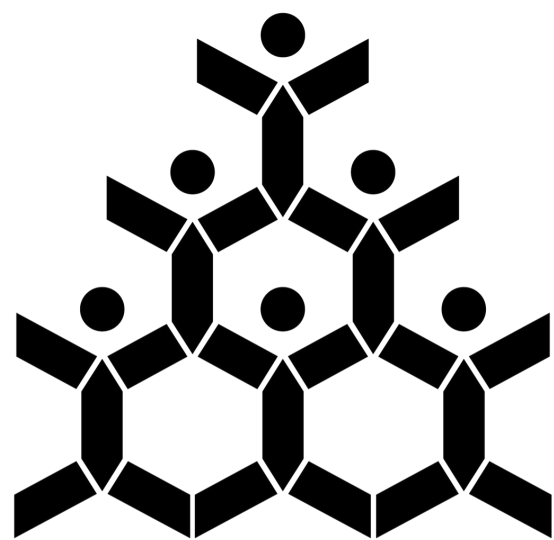
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Prepared by the board and staff of the SDCWR, March 2020



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LETTER FROM THE BOARD

Barbara Spronk

What an exciting year we have had! The main event was the launching of the Civic Hub, thanks to funding from Heritage Canada, but there have been many successes, such as continued funding for theHealthline data transfer and Festival of Neighbourhoods, and new initiatives that include Life Stories of Displacement podcasts and outreach to the tech community. We have been collaborating with a number of networks, including Wellbeing Waterloo Region and Immigration Partnership on exciting initiative, and explored possible collaborations with several more. The Human Rights and Disability group continued their valuable work of monitoring and advocacy, and we have been fortunate in our connections with several other lived experience collectivities.

What has made this possible? No mystery here: were it not for the commitment, talents and unfailing energy of our amazing staff and volunteers, the Good Ship SDCWR would have sunk by now and joined the growing list of casualties of the current, austerity-driven policy and funding environment. Aleks and her team have been working flat out to keep the SDC ship not only afloat on these rough seas, but on course for our ultimate goal of long-term sustainability.

As board members of SDCWR, we have done what we can to support this team, keeping track of the strategic planning decisions to focus on the organization's strengths and to go for growth. We had to bid farewell to two of our valued board members but happily have gained two more, Debra Brown and Myron Steinman, who have brought with them experience and intelligence and new ideas that keep us moving ahead. We are very much a working board, swapping round roles of chairing and minute taking, assisting Aleks by writing grant proposals, representing the organization at partner meetings, and suggesting and creating links with agencies and initiatives in the community that are engaged as we are in the work of social development. Distance-conquering technologies have been our friends, enabling Nate to "Zoom" in to our meetings from wherever he might be in North America, and Ambika to join us from Cambodia, where she was working for a term with the UNDP. It might have been 5 a.m. for her, but she would not only join us but take the minutes which we could see arriving onscreen as she wrote them. Amazing.

We have not forgotten Trudy Beaulne. We are consciously guided by her spirit and determined to continue her legacy. We can't help but think she would be delighted with Civic Hub, and with the relationships SDCWR is developing and fostering within our community. Thank you, Trudy. We trust that we are doing you proud.

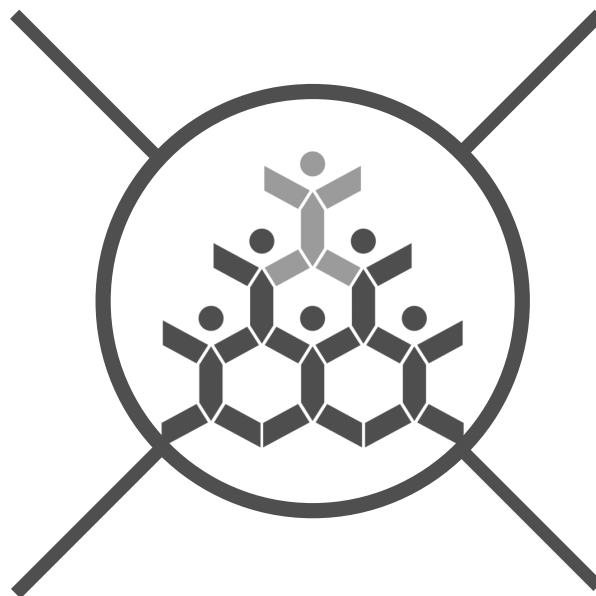
STREAMS OF ACTIVITY

The Social Development Centre Waterloo Region was created in 1967 with the goal of cultivating community knowledge and advancing social justice in the region. With the increase for basic needs, supports, and responses to complex individual and community challenges such as mental health and addictions, social justice work and community based social planning have been regarded in two contradictory ways: as a non-essential service in terms of investment & as a necessary litmus test for equity in decision-making.

Is this a challenge or an opportunity? We see it as an opportunity to transform the ways in which we work together, deepen the understanding of the context we live in, and ensure presence and representation of voices traditionally excluded from decision-making due to marginalization, stigma and exclusion. Funding will follow from the relationships and engagement we build.

**LIVED
EXPERIENCE**

**STRONG
NEIGHBOURHOODS**



**COMMUNITY
DIALOGUE**

**SERVICE SYSTEMS
NAVIGATION**

COMMUNITY DIALOGUE



Civic Hub Waterloo Region | Grassroots organizations across the community, under-resourced and under-represented, worked together to establish a home where they can cross-recruit and cross-promote. Ultimately, without continuing to work together in a common space, they cannot grow, learn, and innovate. SDC, together with St John Church, opened the door of the Lower Parish Hall & welcomed the first 15 partners to the Civic Hub, its meeting space, classroom and offices in June 2019. The Heritage Ministry of Canada provided seed funding for the initiative in the fall, and the number of partner groups rose to 23.

We work to build individual groups' capacity by offering free event, meeting, work and idea activation spaces for grassroots and resident-led inclusive groups dedicated to social justice & civic engagement. Environment, peace, food security, anti-poverty, culture, arts, technology and democratic reform, all under one roof. Find out more at civichubwr.org.

The first partnership initiatives focused on broadening the reach and deepening the community dialogue:

- **Waterloo Region Multicultural Connection** | With Immigration Partnership and Volunteer Action Centre Waterloo Region, we developed and hosted the 3rd Multicultural Connection Forum allowing ethnocultural groups in the region to learn from each other, make lasting connections & build support networks in the Civic Hub.
- **Finding Common Ground** | In collaboration with Marit Collective, we started exploring the ways in which we live deeply entrenched divisions across class in our society, how it is shaped by our identities based in faith, culture, skin colour, age, ability and gender expression. We try out a range of strategies & come together to share what we felt and what we learned



LIVED EXPERIENCE

Networking of lived-experience groups, small organizations and nonprofits has been a priority for us since the conception. Lack of recognition and supports for grassroots groups impacts the capacity of residents to sustain their work, grow the membership and to collaborate. This year, we have seen increase in mutual recognition among the groups as they start attending each other's meetings and working together on issues such as poverty elimination and deeply affordable housing. Each has offered unique ways to support their members in their lifelong engagement. Our role evolves as a connector and a strategic partner to ensure the individuals are supported in their work and their time and competence are being compensated.

In collaboration with the **People's Action Group & Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition**, we mobilized participation in the **Voices from the Margins Hearing** in the region, providing feedback on the current impact of income insecurity and lack of poverty reduction strategy in the province. The groups that took part were Disabilities and Human Rights, Awareness of Low-income Voices, and Alliance Against Poverty.

Disabilities and Human Rights (DHR) | The group members who have a disability or are passionate about accessibility issues in policy making continue to be the forum to discuss, raise awareness, and advocate for inclusion. Extend-A-Family, Independent Living Centre Waterloo Region and the Canadian National Institute for the Blind support information sharing and explore ways to make direct connections with their participants.

Initiative that looks at individual supports in 2019 was **Deep Breathing Sessions** offered to all lived experience groups and connectors in collaboration with the **Spiritual Heritage and Education Network**.

The greatest effort was invested in the letter campaign to inform Members of Provincial Parliament of the harm that would result from changes to the definition of disability & to ensure accessibility is part of the zoning bylaw review at the City of Kitchener leading to the development of the Affordable Housing Strategy development.

LIVED EXPERIENCE

Awareness of Low Income Voices (ALIVE) | The group continues to organize a monthly forum that brings together people who have or are experiencing poverty to share their views with decision-makers and leaders in the community. We provides meeting space, archive, bookkeeping, and general support. Guests at the ALIVE forums were many of the staff working in housing sector, All In 2020, Lutherwood, Region of Waterloo and Leadership Waterloo Region. City of Waterloo Mayor Dave Jawrosky and Les Armstrong the Mayor of Wilmot Township contributed to the conversation about affordable housing and gained insight into current challenges for residents living on low or fixed income. The conversations resulted in the letter 'Do No Harm' referring to the situation where "low income residents in uptown and downtown spend close to 75% of their income on rent and are under constant fear of displacement to make way for the next condo."

People's Action Group introduced their work at the ALIVE meeting, and now there are members from each group that joined the other group to ensure ongoing flow of information and resources.

Renters Educating and Networking Together (RENT) | The group advocates on behalf of tenant associations and individual tenants. The SDC has been on the RENT Executive since 2014 and has supported the organizing of forums and meetings. In 2019, the group hosted a forum in collaboration with the staff lawyer from the Waterloo Region Community Services. They provided feedback to the development of the Tenant's Information app, continue to share information and link tenants to resources. The group has a representative at Kitchener's Affordable Housing Strategy advisory.

The three main collaborative activities of the lived experience groups where the most active members received stipends for their contributions were:

- **Wellbeing Waterloo Region Survey | Data Sense Making**
- **Life Stories of Displacement | Podcast series & blogs**
- **Affordable and Accessible Housing NOW | Recommendations to the City of City of Kitchener and Region of Waterloo strategy work**

LIFE STORIES OF DISPLACEMENT

Considering that the age of gentrification has hit Waterloo Region with the first plans of introducing the Light Rail Transit and construction shift from the borderlines to the urban core, the label hasn't been used in the public narrative about community change. This change swept over Waterloo uptown in the 90s and is currently blowing away houses and buildings in downtown Kitchener, replacing affordable units with high end rentals and condominiums.

Life Stories of Displacement is a unique story in itself. It is created by the collaboration between community connectors with lived experience, SDC summer staff working in neighbourhoods and urban change, and Canada Research Chair in Planning, Brian Doucet, at University of Waterloo.

Despite numerous reports about the perils of homelessness since the 80s, lack of tenant protections and rent decontrols, financialization of the housing market, inequitable property values based on 'the best possible use' and ongoing downloading cost of services to municipal governments, we have created a perfect storm in which our cities are becoming unlivable. Especially for low income residents.

We partnered with Professor Doucet to reach out to residents who experienced displacement in many forms, and complement his research on Neighbourhood Changes along LRT. The community connectors with lived experience recruited 20 participants. Our summer staff did walk-along interviews in King East and Civic Centre and started mapping the stories, pinning the locations where displacement happened, and edited interviews into a series of podcasts.

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TURNING UP THE VOLUME
**LIFE STORIES OF
DISPLACEMENT**



STRONG NEIGHBOURHOODS

Festival of Neighbourhoods | The initiative supporting neighbours since 1994, celebrated its 26th year and its inclusion leaders across Kitchener. The Festival Season has encouraged and recognized this year a wonderful range of neighbourhood gatherings large and small, totaling 69 in all. Neighbours have taken the initiative to organize and attend gatherings at which they meet one another, exchange ideas and strengthen the fabric of our community.

The Celebration was organized as a “gathering of the gatherings”, staying true to the overall aims of the Festival for bringing people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to meet and engage with one another.



Traynor-Fairway Pedestrian Crossing | The work on acknowledgement of the problem and building a case for urgency for the crossing started in 2014. 5 years after, the pedestrian crossing is in place connecting residents of Traynor-Vanier to the stores, transit and work places they were separated from with the construction of LRT. Many community advocates joined in turning up the volume in service of the neighbourhood. Many who work on the initiative long and hard have since moved out, and many who will benefit from this connection would not know of the patience and strife that made it possible.



SUPPORT SYSTEMS NAVIGATION

Community Information Database Management | The SDC continues to provide data transfers to the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integrated Network's theHealthline.ca database, ensuring that residents in Waterloo Region have reliable and current access to health and community service information. As we follow the transformation of LHINs into Ontario Health Teams in the region, we were updating the integration protocols.

Tenants Enforcement Information | Development of the web and mobile application for simplified and easier access to information and supports tenants may need is done in collaboration with Blueprint.

Ontario Electricity Support Program Administration (OESP) | SDC helps with the application process for the electricity bill relief for households on moderate income. In 2019, the SDC helped over 200 households with the OESP applications. It also provides information and referrals to low-income residents, people with disabilities, international students, newcomers, and seniors regarding income security and social services.

Low-income Energy Assistance Program (LEAP) | In 2019, the SDC helped over 25 households with the LEAP applications as the coordination of the program is outside of the region and requires manual verification of eligibility.

2020 Tax Clinics | The team completed 420 returns in March and April, and processed 40 2016 and 2017 returns. The volunteers also responded to over 100 T1 adjustments, assessment notices & inquires, including CPP applications, and electricity bill relief.



PARTNERSHIPS

Wellbeing Waterloo Region | In support of the work mobilizing knowledge and resources to improve the overall health and social outcomes for all the residents, SDC has served as the co-convenor of the Social Inclusion Catalyst Group, and participated in the Engagement and Communications as well as, the Measurement and Monitoring Work Group.

Immigration Partnership | As a participant in the Social Inclusion Work Group of the Immigration Partnership, SDC supported the planning and facilitation of the series of networking forums for the ethno-cultural groups. The representatives of a number of diverse communities came together to define what they saw as the immediate needs and challenges to be addressed, in their own voice: resources & space, representation & advocacy, coordinated supports.

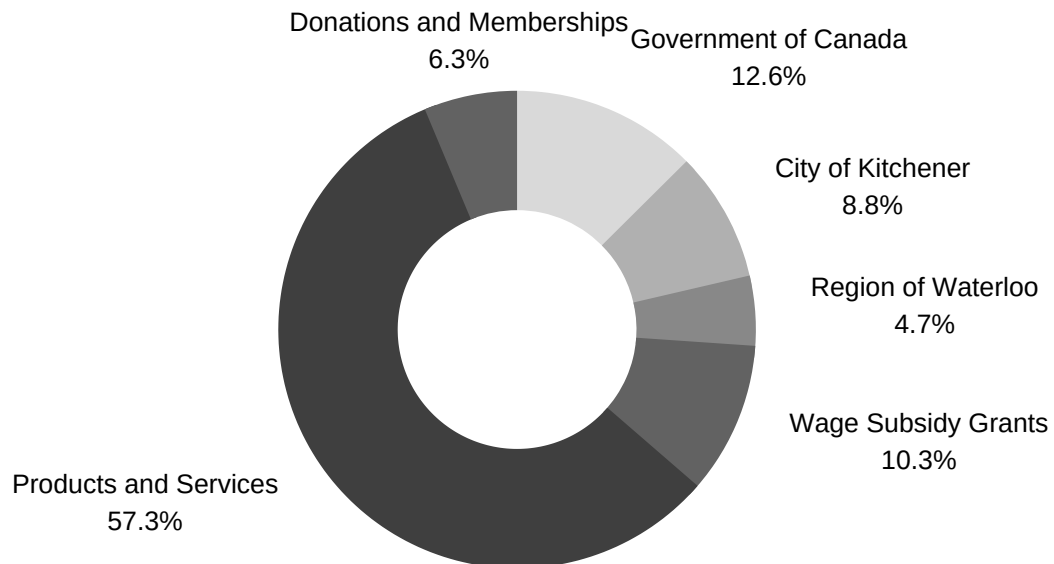
WRDSB Equity and Inclusion Advisory | The SDC continues to serve as a co-chair of the Waterloo Region District School Board's Equity and Inclusion Advisory Group, and supports the defining of the work plan and measurement indicators informed by the Equity and Indigenous Strategy of the schoolboard.

Anti-poverty Work | We have supported a number of public events and Aleksandra Petrovic presented at the Viepoints on Poverty panel in collaboration with the WR Nonviolence in May. She also spoke the panel with Mayor Vrbancovic and researcher Martine August after the mind warping movie screening of PUSH about inequities in the housing market.

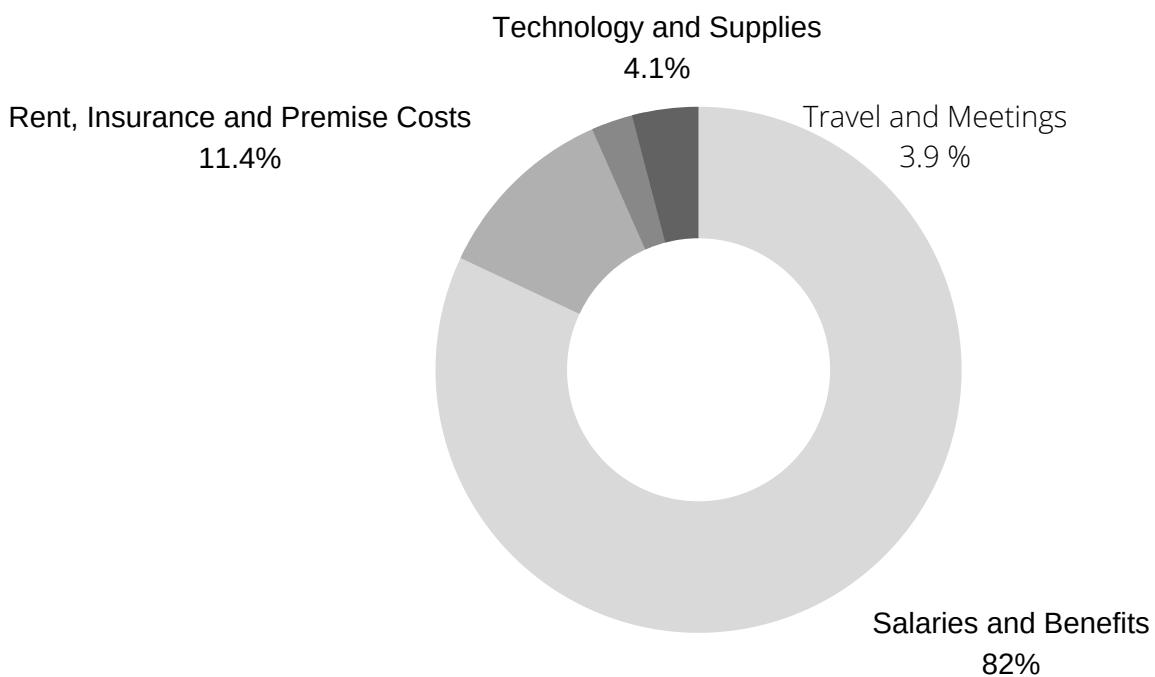


FINANCES SUMMARY

REVENUE **\$126,981**



EXPENSES **\$125,852**



OUR TEAM

3

FULL TIME STAFF

We commend the staff for their extreme dedication and contributions made above and beyond the hours paid for their work.

Aleksandra Petrovic

Executive Director, since March 2018

Community Development Lead since 2012

Todd Turnbull,

Data & Information Systems Lead, since 1994.

Lesley Crompton,

Festival of Neighbourhoods Coordinator, since September 2019

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SUMMER STUDENTS

Faryal Diwan, *Social Planning Associate*

Isaiah Thompsen, *Resource Associate*

Rachel Bair, *Engagement Associate*

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WORKING BOARD MEMBERS

Dedication
Experience
Thoughtfulness

Brad Ullner, *Co-Chair*

Barbara Spronk, *Co-Chair*

Nathan Pike, *Treasurer*

Ambika Opal, *Secretary*

Myron Steinman, *Director*

Debra Brown, *Director*

We have worked with over 50 dedicated community members and partner organizations during the course of the year. They are our anchor, our source of inspiration and straight.

Every person matters, every voice counts!

FUNDING PARTNERS



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