

2020 | Activity Report

SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE WATERLOO REGION



Walking TOGETHER

54th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

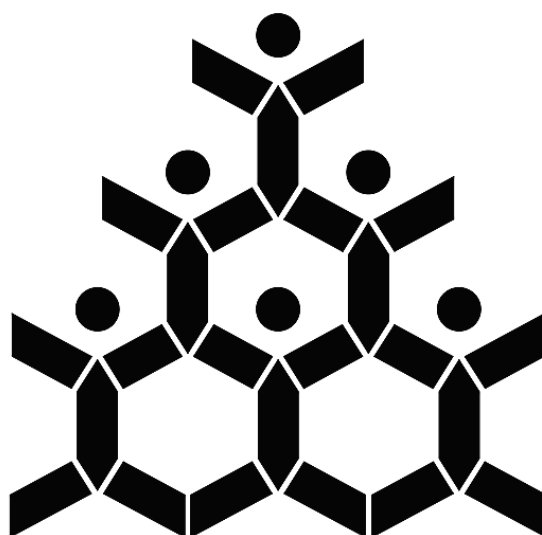
June 29, 2021 - 6:00pm to 7:30pm



Social Development Centre
WATERLOO REGION

A YEAR OF THE UNEXPECTED

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Social Development Centre
—— WATERLOO REGION ——

Letter from the Board

We will always think of the year 2020 as ‘the year of the pandemic’. What did the pandemic mean for SDCWR? For staff, Board and partners, it meant a rapid move to at-home working and an enormous rise in Zoom meetings. For the organization as a whole, the pandemic had two primary impacts.

First, there was an explosion in demand for SDCWR services. Through the Civic Hub program, we supported mobilization for COVID-appropriate responses and shelter for the unsheltered homeless through the Unsheltered Campaign and A Better Tent City. We provided increased administrative support to Civic Hub partner organizations, such as assisting with grant writing, budgeting and financial sponsorships. We served in a fiduciary role for a growing list of groups that lack charitable status, banking, disbursing donations and providing tax receipts; examples of these included A Better Tent City, Black Lives Matter WR and KW Land Back. Finally, we responded to the greater regional and municipal emphasis on affordable housing, and the need for research on displacement due to developments in collaboration with lived experience groups and individuals in continued collaboration with University of Waterloo. Without interruption, we dealt with more than double the usual requests for assistance in financial supports, such as the tax clinic and applications for emergency assistance.

Second, delays in payments from funders meant that our incredible staff were working even longer hours, constantly juggling roles, and relying on amazing volunteers. This required re-prioritizing activities, putting on hold needed consultations, shelving the marketing of our navigation tools and products, delaying outreach to potential collaborators, all in order to ensure the sustainability of our existing initiatives and to meet our obligations in a timely manner. We have worked hard to procure all the emergency benefits available and have avoided staff layoffs. We have continued to pursue grant opportunities that will help us build capacity and prepare for change.

More and more groups have been requesting our support because, they tell us, we “walk our talk” and are the only organization in the region that is responsive to what they need. We are being increasingly recognized as a community incubator, catalyst, convener, and connector, an organization that walks alongside those who live on the margins of our society due to intersections of poverty, disability, race, gender or sexual orientation. We value, support, promote, document and advocate for the knowledge that comes from lived experience, and are dedicated to making this knowledge the basis for the decision-making that shapes all our lives.

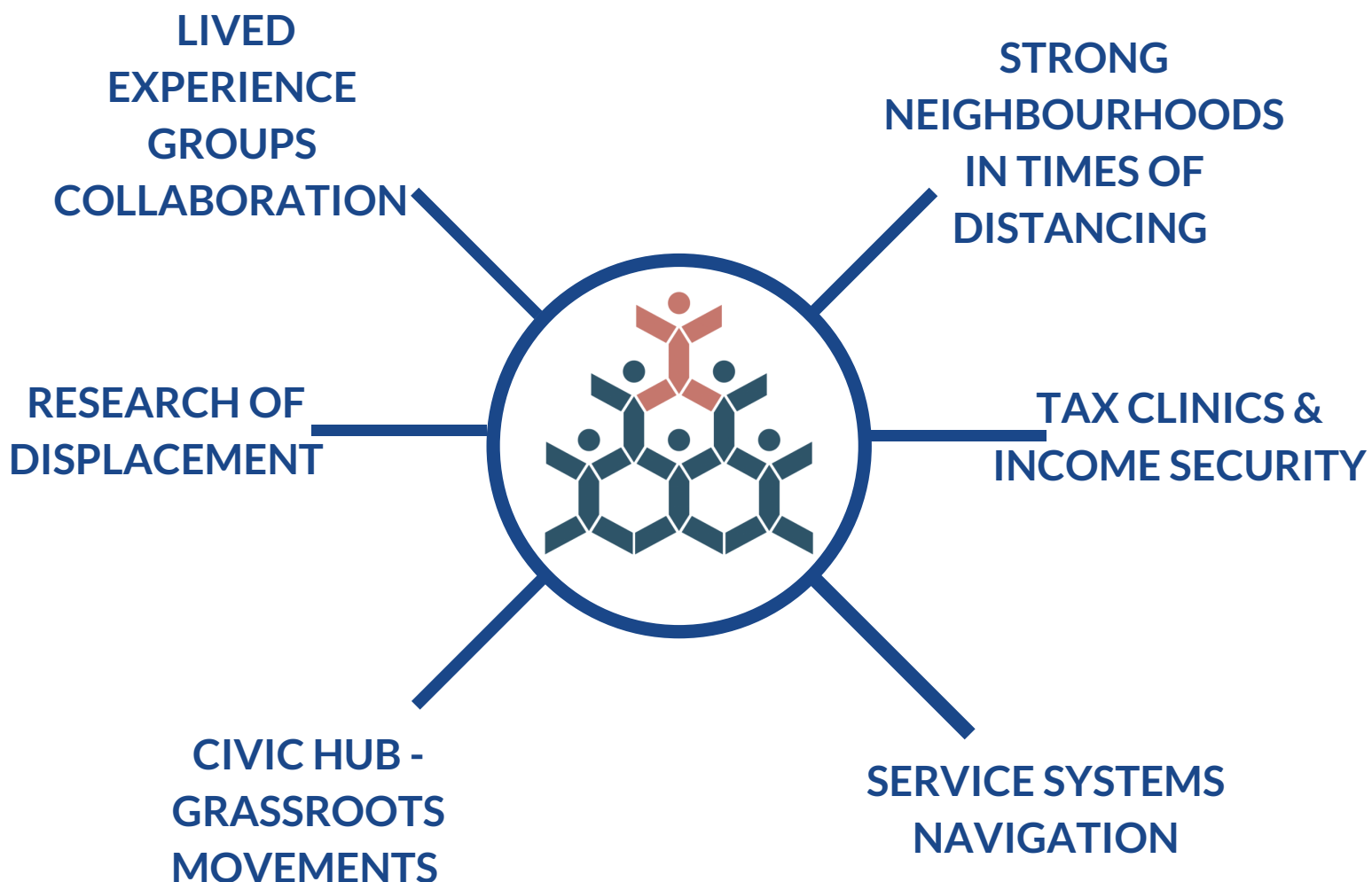
Thank you all for walking together,

Barbara Spronk and Brad Ullner
Board of Directors Co-Chairs

EXPANDED 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 increased demand 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 and as a necessary litmus test for equity in decision-making and community wellbeing.

Are these contradictory views a challenge or an opportunity? We see them as opportunities to transform the ways in which we work together, deepen the understanding of the context in which we live, and ensure the presence and representation of voices traditionally excluded from decision-making because of marginalization, stigma and exclusion. We know the funding will follow from the relationships and engagement we build.



COMMUNITY MOVEMENTS

2020 was on its gentle course towards increased vibrancy of the activity in the Civic Hub, welcoming 30 groups, inviting collaboration across climate justice, peace and refugee rights, anti-poverty, food security, affordability of housing, anti-racism, when the pandemic twisted our trajectory towards immediate advocacy and mobilization responses to address homelessness as a health crisis, on-line learning for Black and immigrant children, and hands-on involvement in food security projects with emerging movements and grassroots initiatives.



The Unsheltered Campaign

The most intense collaboration among a number of Civic Hub partners and community initiatives was in decriminalization of homelessness during the pandemic, where the residents living rough really had nowhere to go. The groups ranged from 519 Community Collective, to Stirling Church Kitchen, WR Yes In My Backyard, Food Not Bombs, Mobile Lot 42, and over 100 good-doers. We joined in coordinated efforts of the Region of Waterloo and its partners to strengthen housing and homelessness responses, and most of all, move residents to action.



A Better Tent City

We stepped up as a philanthropic partner for A Better Tent City from its very beginnings. SDC issued tax receipts for over \$87,000 in donations during the pandemic, and secured a \$75,000 grant from the Emergency Community Support Fund through KW Community Foundation to complete the work on the cabins and to document the evolution of the community at Lot 42.

East African Coalition

Communities and organizations from 10 African countries, seeking a common voice and concerted effort, joined Civic Hub to be able to coordinate and offer necessary programs for immigrant families and their children to improve their children's education, mental health and access to resources.



LIVED EXPERIENCE GROUPS COLLABORATING

Networking of lived-experience group started in 2019 and with the heightened mobilization around the City of Kitchener Affordable Housing strategy, they made their first joint submission to the Advisory Committee to address the needs of the homeless and low income tenants equally. Their voices were among the first to explore alternatives to shelters, such as modular and prefabricated homes, re-purposing and re-habiting of existing unused buildings, and the sanctioned encampments, before COVID-19 hit.

The new podcast series HOMES 4 ALL was created to showcase stories and solutions across the region and in Ontario in support of the suggestions the groups brought forward to the Advisory Committee.



In collaboration, **Disabilities and Human Rights Group, Awareness of Low Income Voices, Alliance Against Poverty, Renters Educating & Networking Together and Alliance Against Poverty and People's Action Group**, brought many allies and supportive groups to explore income insecurity and housing instability during the pandemic.

The following joint submissions followed:

Most supports for the Most Impacted, income insecurity during COVID to the provincial government, May 2020

Equity in Bill 184, changes to the Landlord and Tenant Board Procedures during the pandemic, submission to the provincial government, July 2020

Impact of COVID on low income residents and persons with disabilities, submission to the House of Commons, August 2020.

Members of the lived experience groups contributed to the creation of the **City Of Kitchener's Housing Strategy** throughout 2020.



NEIGHBOURHOODS DURING DISTANCING

Festival of Neighbourhoods | As the outreach started in 2020, The Trudy Beaulne Award planning in North 6 Neighbourhood, creation of the new website and streamlined registration process... COVID-19 made us all stop and rethink how we maintain connections, reach out to more neighbours, remain inclusive and supportive while physically distancing. We learned from neighbours who found ways to connect without gathering face to face, researched creative activities in other cities, and shared exciting ideas. The response to COVID was the objective during the summer. We found out which organizers in our Festival of Neighbourhoods community stayed most active and revised the eligibility for registering activities that were adaptable and flexible responses to the new social context.



We hosted our first virtual Festival of Neighbourhoods Annual Celebration and succeeded in connecting across neighbourhoods capturing the walks and the conversations in a wonderful Neighbourhood Exchange video series.



Festival Of Neighbourhoods
- Kingsdale, Vanier and...



Festival Of Neighbourhoods
- King East

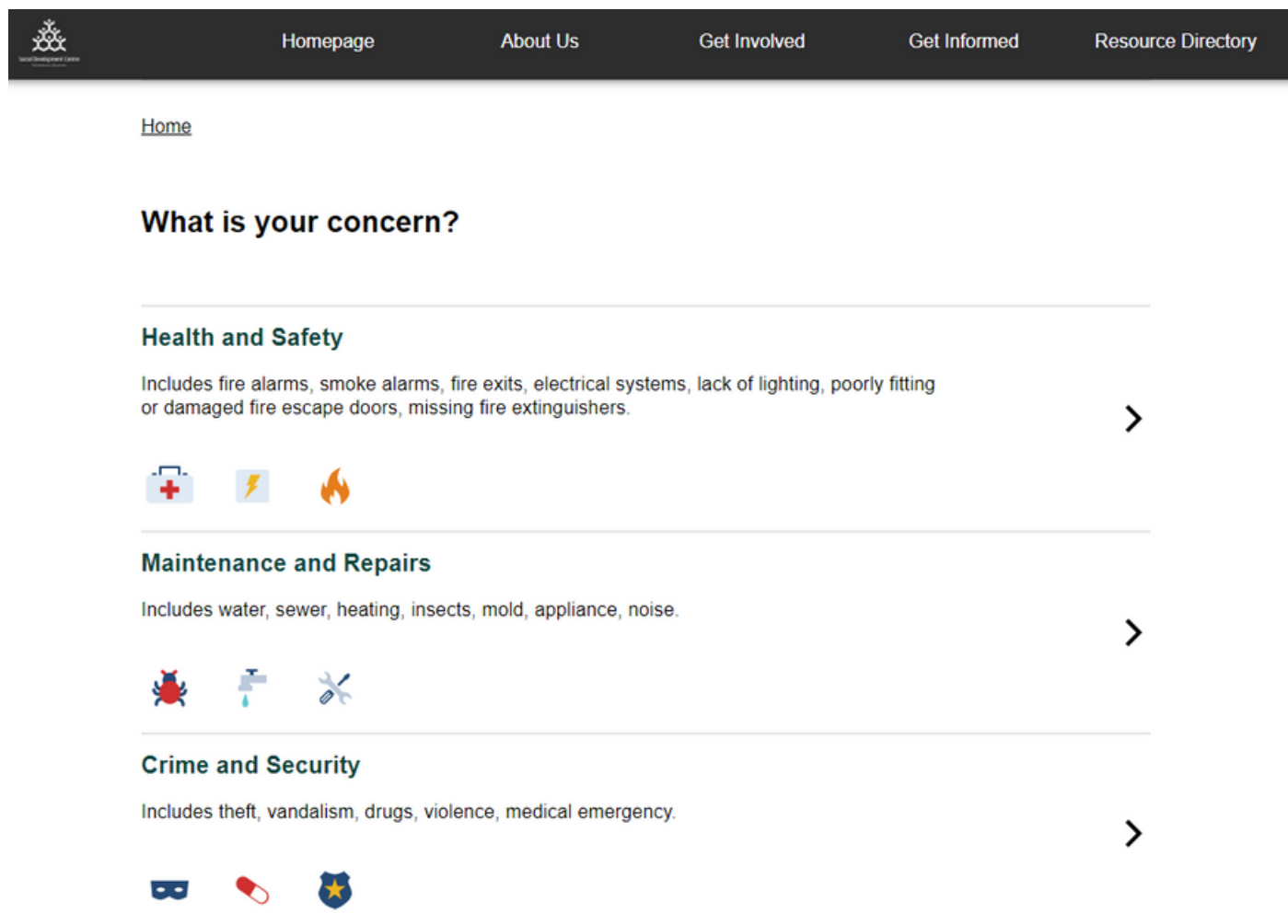


Festival Of Neighbourhoods
- Huron Community...

SERVICE SYSTEMS NAVIGATION

Community Information Database Management | The SDC continues to provide data transfers to the Waterloo-Wellington Local Health Integrated Network's Healthline.ca database, ensuring that residents in Waterloo Region have reliable and current access to health and community service information. As we followed the transformation of the LHINs into Ontario Health Teams in the Region, we updated the integration protocols and adjusted information gathering to include COVID-19 closures, hours of operation, and other pandemic-related information in a timely manner.

Tenants Rights Information | We completed the web and mobile application for simplified and easier access to information and supports tenants may need, done in collaboration with Blueprint. They have built a decision tree infrastructure and made possible future creation of service systems navigation tools as we remain responsive to the needs in the community.



TAX CLINICS 2020 & INCOME SUPPORTS

The 2020 Tax Clinic season was interrupted mid-March because of the pandemic. The carefully selected and trained volunteers needed to take precautions while the virtual filing method was introduced to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of clients. The outbreak meant that our under-resourced team took on a role of connecting social service agencies and community partners to provide information about resuming the process, with new deadlines, and additional benefits.

As the situation started to stabilize, many of the agencies in all three cities that also lost their volunteers started referring numbers of applications. Despite the interruption, the changing guidelines, and the small number of volunteers, the team completed 475 returns and adjustments before September. With the CERB in place, there was an additional flow of inquiries, including CPP applications, and electricity bill relief.

Ontario Electricity Support Program Administration (OESP) | SDC helps with the application process for the electricity bill relief for households on moderate incomes. In 2020, the SDC helped over 30 households with OESP applications. The number is down significantly compared to previous years. This is partially due to the change in electricity rates during COVID, and a decrease in international students residing in Canada. OESP applications have been done remotely to the extent possible.

FREE TAX CLINICS



TAXES - VALUE - IMPACT - BENEFITS - GRATITUDE

HELP
**HUNDREDS OF
THOUSANDS**
OF PEOPLE



GET EXPERIENCE

RESEARCH OF DISPLACEMENT & GENTRIFICATION

Life Stories of Displacement | The oral history project solidified our objective to capture the history of recent gentrification in Kitchener-Waterloo core areas as well as to make displacement more tangible for the community and contribute to the work of the Kitchener's Affordable Housing Strategy Advisory Committee and its regional partners.

Thanks to the ongoing collaboration with the University of Waterloo School of Planning, and funding through the Ontario Job Creation Partnership program, we continued to collect data during distancing by conducting phone interviews. This research also maps the changes with buildings, streets, houses, stores, and community spaces in the last five to ten years. Our cities continue to change during the pandemic which brings increased housing challenges. The interactive Map of Displacement in Kitchener-Waterloo offers images, audio, and quotes to tell the story underneath the progress and development that has disproportionately affected the poor, the disabled, the racialized, LGBTQ+ and immigrant populations in the urban core.



Thanks to the collaboration with the City of Kitchener in the Housing Strategy development process, we continued studying forms and experiences of **displacement, but this time out of the urban core**. We will also co-design together the **Lived Experience Working Group** engagement process in the implementation and monitoring of the Housing Strategy with the City of Kitchener, Civic Hub partner groups and many equity-seeking communities.

WALKING TOGETHER

The culmination of the collaboration with **Disabilities and Human Rights (DHR)** group was the organizing of the first virtual celebration of December 3rd 2020, UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities: Disability, Poverty and Resilience. We shared stories and learned from their experiences before and during COVID to help us cope as a community. The recording is on line!



Awareness of Low Income Voices (ALIVe) continues to be a forum for sharing and policy development regarding transit, housing, social assistance, and emerges as a prime convener of lived experience groups in the region.

Renters Educating and Networking Together (RENT) are gathering to voice their concerns regarding the loss and the lack of affordable housing options for increasing numbers of tenants and to protest against the changes of the procedures at the Landlord and Tenant Board going virtual.



OUR TEAM

5

OUR 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, until April 2020; since June 2020 Financial Program Coordinator

Faryal Diwan, *Research Associate*

Neelu Mehta, *GIS Mapping Associate*

Natasha Ing, *Social Planning Associate*

KC Ziyenge, *Engagement Associate*

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SUMMER STUDENTS

9

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*

Laura Hamilton, *Director*

Bob Jonkman, *Director*

Ayiko Solomon, *Director*

FUNDING PARTNERS



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