

2021 | Activity Report

Walking Together

This is how we'll greet you!



An Honest AGM

Strength, Love, Courage and Honesty



Social Development Centre
— WATERLOO REGION —

55th Annual General Meeting, June 28, 2022



Land Acknowledgement

“Land Is Not Meant To Be Individual Property”

We are working on the traditional shared lands of the Mississaugas, Haudenosaunee, the Chonnonton and the Anishinaabe peoples. We pay respect to their original claim on these lands and to the traditions of the first displaced peoples.

The territory we are on is Block 2 of the Haldimand Tract, a promise never fulfilled to the Six Nations of the Grand River for serving the British during the American Revolution. In April 2021, nine months into the land reclamation by the people at 1492 Land Back Lane, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy Chiefs Council announced a moratorium on development within the entire Haldimand Tract.

It is our responsibility to call out the dispossession of the land and demand the collaboration of the province and of the municipalities in Waterloo Region to work out agreements based on the Haudenosaunee Development Protocol.

Table of Contents

<i>Letter from the Board</i>	p 03
<i>Streams of Activity</i>	p 05
<i>Community Development</i>	p 06
<i>Civic Hub Waterloo Region</i>	p 06
<i>Strong Neighbourhoods</i>	p 07
<i>Community Advocacy</i>	p 08
<i>Housing and Homelessness</i>	p 08
<i>Lived Expertise</i>	p 10
<i>Low-income Supports</i>	p 12
<i>Strategic Planning 2021</i>	p 11
<i>Staff and Board Members</i>	p 13
<i>Funding Partners</i>	p 14
<i>Walking Together</i>	p 15

Letter from the Board ...

Wow! What a year! In 2021, the pandemic continued, and SDC continued to act as a community catalyst, connector and incubator for community groups, supports, and needs. The public health situation and the state of the economy mean that SDC is more needed in the community.

Thanks so much if you were part of the staff, volunteers, participants, or people touched by the work of SDC in 2021. It would not have been the same without your part.

SDC continues to learn and grow. SDC doubled our staff size, adding a staff member for the Festival of Neighbourhoods and two staff for United Way-funded work in eviction prevention in the three cities (Kitchener, Waterloo and Cambridge.) Eviction prevention work is not easy, and we continue to explore how best we can support our staff who support people with this need in the community.

Lived-experience groups continue to be a mainstay of our work. We work with many voices who need to be heard. ALIVE and the Disability and Human Rights Group are two forums which continued their work over many years.

We continued our work, including community members with lived expertise in the work of implementing the City of Kitchener's housing strategy. Partnered with the City of Kitchener, we successfully obtained a federal grant to hire a coordinator for this Lived Expertise group, ensuring that this group will be a part of our work for the foreseeable future. This means that we need to ensure more funds to secure longevity and completion of this process for the next two years and further into the future.



Letter from the Board

The shared platform and Civic Hub grew because we are not the only organization doing worthy work. Small organizations need support, including financial hosting responsibilities.

We join others in important peace and anti-racism work. We supported The Unsheltered Campaign as they continued to add members and take on advocacy and watchdog tasks throughout the Region.

Likely, we have not mentioned some important projects in this space. Please accept my apology if I have not mentioned your work.

Our small organization is busy trying to support so much important work that the our working spent part of the year completing the strategic planning process, while its executive members provided operational support to the Executive Director with human resources, staff-wellbeing and operational oversight tasks.

We declared a moratorium on further growth and project funding to focus our energies on consolidating our existing work aligned with our vision, mission and the strategic plan. More people in the community seek assistance and offer their support. How are all the needs best addressed as humanely as possible while appropriately compensating and rewarding staff for their work?

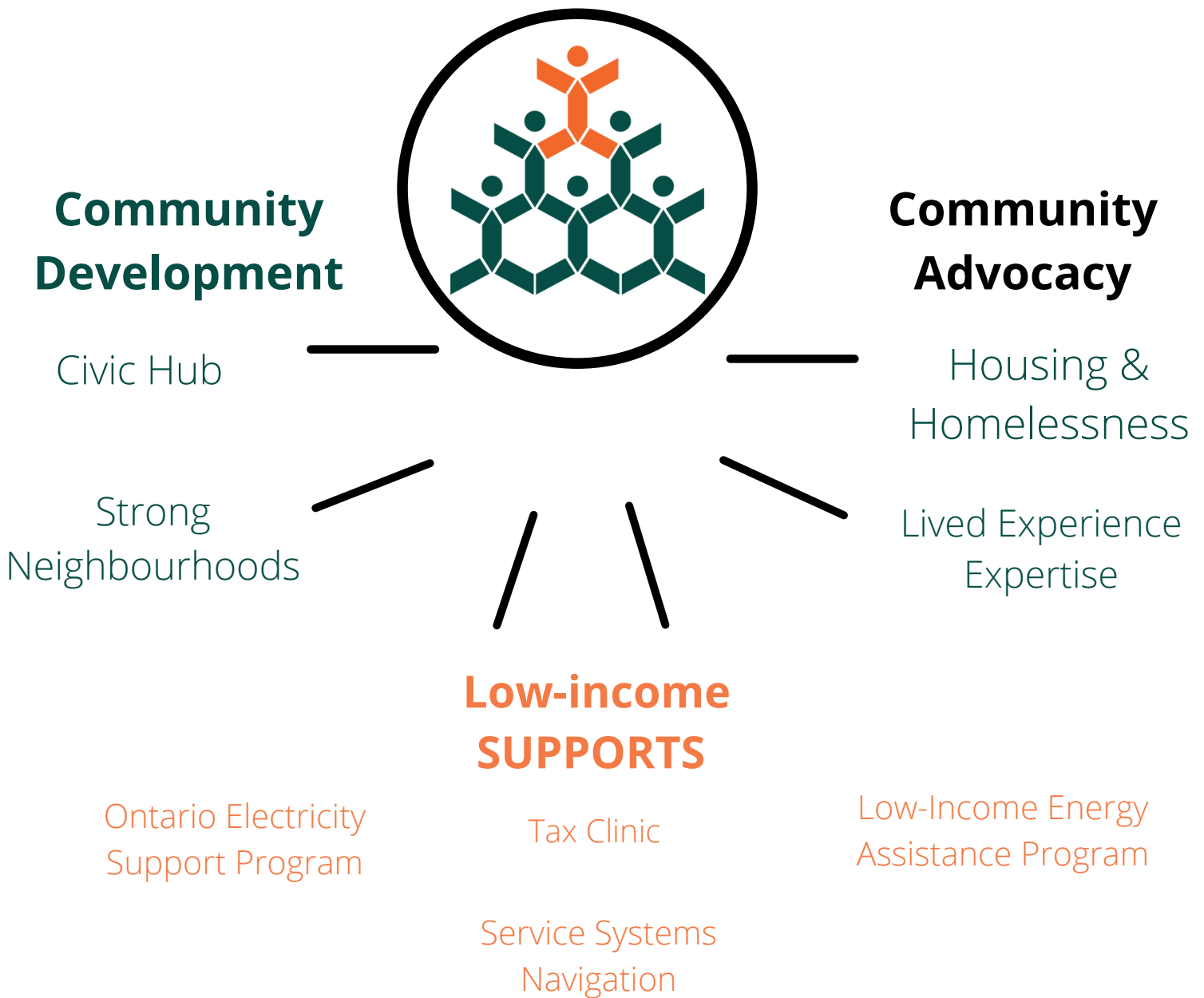
Please join us on the adventure of ascertaining how best to undertake this important process.

Sincerely,
Brad Ullner
Co-chair of the Board



Streams of Activity

Streamlining our activities was essential for the second year of the pandemic. As the needs of low-income and underrepresented groups were more pronounced, our team was reminded once again that the alignment of our resources, our values and the organization's mandate need to be taken more seriously. The culture of self-sacrifice that pervades the non-profit sector has been recognized for its devastating impact, and a moratorium on new streams of activity has been introduced in the fall of 2021. It is just a beginning.



Community Development

"Walking together beats the alternative". The work we do remains essentially communal and collaborative. The transformation of the way in which we carry out our work, connecting to a range of grassroots groups and initiatives, led us to a more robust structure, the so-called Shared Platform philanthropic partnerships to continue to reallocate resources to underfunded and underserved communities.

Civic Hub

A Better Tent City

SDCWR remains the philanthropic partner of ABTC, watching it grow and incorporate as a non-profit in 2021. However, change and turbulence remain the staples of day-to-day life in this unique and brave community. While participating in the work of its Leadership Group, SDCWR saw it through the move to the next temporary location, while continuing to collect funds generously donated by individuals, schools, faith organizations, and foundations. Watch the Living Report we produced to tell this incredible story, thanks to the voices, expressions, faces and body language captured during a whole day virtual event on March 26, 2021.



Peace for All Canada

SDCWR supported a series of discussions with Peace for All Canada on mental health supports and domestic violence engaging East African immigrant communities, particularly in the context of the pandemic. One of the major concerns for newcomer families is persisting racism in the school system. After-school activities and tutoring in math and language started early in 2021, welcoming students from ages 9-14, as well as their families, to connect and learn as they adjust to life in their new country.

Unsheltered Campaign

The call for sanctioning of encampments was relaunched one year after the first series of letters to the Regional and city governments in 2020. More organizations and individuals joined in signing the letter and petitions, while the message asking for decriminalization of homelessness is steadily growing stronger.

Strong Neighborhoods

Festival of Neighborhoods

The annual Festival of Neighborhoods Celebration went virtual once again, with a focus on celebrating the unique ways in which neighbourhoods have adapted to COVID. We invited neighbourhoods to participate in the COVID Comeback Bingo, and to rebuild connections among the community. Our inclusion challenge took a special form thanks to the Neighbourhood Exchange 2021, a walking visit between neighbours from Lydia Street and A Better Tent City. In some of the videos from the celebration, you can hear how one of the Lydia Street neighbours, a supporter of ABTC since its start, describes the similarities and differences between the two neighbourhoods.

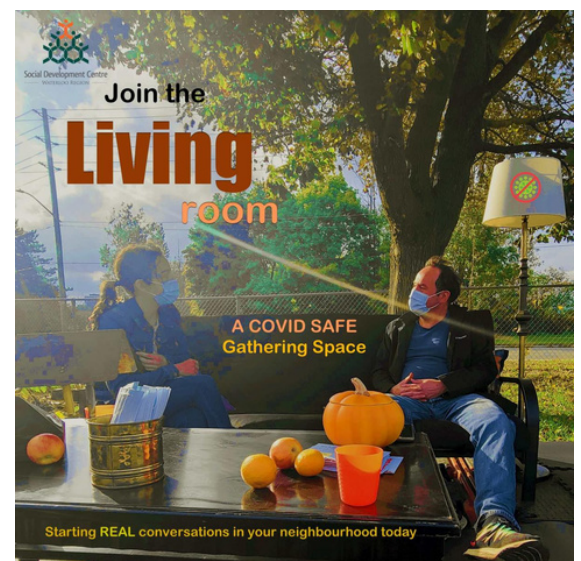
COVID-Safe Living Room

With the support of the Canada Healthy Communities Initiatives, we created an innovative approach to bringing people safely together during the pandemic. We piloted 5 dynamic COVID-safe LIVING rooms in Kitchener-Waterloo. Installing our first Living Room at the Bring On The Sunshine Community Fun Day we offered a full mobile pop-up furniture set with an activity toolkit. Our team hosted a COVID awareness obstacle course that was enjoyed by all visitors. Visitors became participants in the installation, playing games, sharing stories and engaging with a community health nurse, while being able to share their own observations and experiences of the pandemic so far. We held another full day installation at the L'Harmonie/Vermont Community Garden. Lots of fun stories were shared. We also experimented with hybrid meetings and organized a deep breathing session with participants in downtown Kitchener and online with the Spiritual Heritage Educational Network.

The LIVING room also travelled to A Better Tent City where folks who live in this neighbourhood of tiny houses could share with us their experiences during the pandemic and talk more about the sense of safety for those in our communities who are living rough.

Indigenous storytelling and music concert held in November was a treat for everybody involved where the Living Room created a warm welcome to everyone with the first snow: "Maamawi Revisited."

28th Festival of Neighbourhoods Celebration brought us all together, online and offline to enjoy connectivity in our living room!



Housing and Homelessness

Mapping of Displacement

This year the StoryMap of Displacement was released to accompany the report written in collaboration with the University of Waterloo. Multimedia digital storytelling took shape of an interactive exhibit with audio-visual content, Internet links to media articles on particular addresses, transcripts of testimonies and other data to expand knowledge in order to improve future planning of developments. Housing strategies and supports for tenants who are being reallocated due to renovations and construction. This Partnership Development Research multiyear project hopes to bring all regional municipalities, and major housing agencies into conversation as it develops.



Displacement in the Inner Suburbs in Kitchener

Thanks to the collaboration with the Housing Strategy Advisory Committee, City of Kitchener and the University of Waterloo School of Planning, under the leadership of Prof. Brian Doucet, Canada Research Chair in Urban Planning and Social Change, we invested in a follow-up displacement study. This study focused on areas adjacent to the urban core, inner suburb locations in Kitchener close to the LRT rails, and further out, to explore the scope and characteristics of lived experiences of displacement and change compared to the experiences in the urban core.

Eviction Prevention Waterloo Region

As an immediate response to the findings from the Displacement studies and Life Stories of Displacement oral history project, Social Development Centre received funding from the United Way Waterloo Region Communities to start the Eviction Prevention program across the three cities. Since the program's inception in May 2021, the work of peer-outreach workers representing BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities continues to testify to the inadequacies of tenant access to enforcement and justice due to both provincial and municipal legislation and regulations. Renewed engagement of all the players, locally and provincially, started giving immediate results.

Community Advocacy

Homelessness Advocacy

SDCWR partnered with community musician Mary Abdel Malik Neil to create an installation which was a part of the SONICA exhibit at theMUSEUM in January 2021. It was initially inspired by the 'Life Stories of Displacement & Homes for All' oral history project from 2019-2020, and a series of podcasts where local residents who live on low income and have experienced marginalization spoke about their experiences. We created displays of poetry, photography and testimonies of the unsheltered and of the community members who are providing selfless supports to growing encampments. Mary got angry and inspired after hearing the stories, and composed the original song "For the Weary" as the background of the video that was created for the exhibit, conveying a sense of resilience and hope expressed by homeless residents and their advocates.

Point in Time Count of Homeless

We continued participating in housing/homelessness advocacy through the Housing and Homelessness stability system working groups, and expanded our focus to issues faced by the hidden homeless. Hidden homelessness was also an added focus for the 2021 Point in Time Count. It has highlighted the many gaps in the existing programs and systems in responding to the challenges that homelessness poses to the low-income residents in the region. A number of community connectors that SDCWR has worked with over the years stepped up to visit less known locations for people living rough, and also to canvass populations such as students and persons on ODSP who live in transient and unsafe cohabitations without a lease in their name. The team not only supported collection of the quantitative survey data, but took ample notes to capture the depth and the complexity of every story told. The report of the narratives and stories was published in November 2021.

"There is trust & leadership in homeless communities. It is just that the greater community hasn't accepted it yet."



POINT IN TIME COUNT OF HOMELESS

STORIES AND NARRATIVES



Lived Experience Expertise

Disabilities and Human Rights



DISABILITIES AND
HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

The group has continued to meet monthly, since 2008, to discuss challenges and gaps in service delivery that are preventing full participation and self-determination for persons with disabilities. Writing editorials on accessibility and providing input in consultations remain its main activities. The group also said goodbye to Mike Savage, long-standing member who provided great insight to all of us who were not born with a disability, how our lives, as we age, are being impacted by institutional policies, programs and investments. Mike was also a dedicated homeless advocate and a social justice activist with the First United Church in Waterloo. He is sorely missed across the communities in Waterloo Region.

Awareness of Low Income Voices

Throughout the pandemic, ALIVE continued to advocate for equitable and sustainable financial support for seniors and social assistance recipients. Its monthly meetings continue to draw many lived experience groups, who have deep conversations with elected representatives and institutional leaders. They provide summaries from these conversations as submissions to different governments on issues impacting low-income populations such as housing precarity, accessible transportation and food security. It continues to be a source of information for decision-makers, and for inviting a broader range of allies into the conversation.

Lived Expertise Working Group - Kitchener's Housing Strategy

Throughout 2021, we continued grant seeking and collaborated with the City of Kitchener team on the development of the approach and recruitment strategies for the Lived Expertise Working Group - one of the actions named in the Homes for All housing strategy. The persistence and patience were rewarded, mutual understanding was deepened and the funding for the project was secured for the first 18 years of the two-year pilot from the Community Based Tenant Initiatives. The project started in January 2022.

Services

Service Systems Navigation

The SDCWR continues to provide up-to-date information on community resources through the HealthLine Directory as well as through the new online navigation application for Eviction Prevention supports. We provide information on such matters as tenant's rights, financial information, and customized resources for the community's needs. There is a wealth of tacit knowledge living in networks of service providers, and as we look at the richness of connections of our staff team, we hope to start mapping some of those connections and knowledge so they can be put to better use.

Tax Clinic

In preparation for the 2022 tax season, 15 volunteers were trained. Our volunteer model focused on individuals from low-income, marginalized and English as a 2nd language groups. Our volunteers and locations expanded into Cambridge, using facilities at 150 Main (WR building) and the Cambridge Self Help food bank. Twelve of those volunteers remained available and are participating in the 2022 tax season. All three of 5 prior year volunteers have been retained. Over 700 tax returns were filed and \$2.5 million claimed in benefits by low-income households. Tax preparation continued throughout 2021 with a significant focus on individuals who required multiple years of returns to be completed, including individuals outside our region who have no access to free services.

OESP & LEAP PROGRAMS - electricity bill and gas arrears supports

Low-income Ontarians receiving CPP, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), or Ontario Works (OW) are still learning about the program. Further, unemployed Ontarians, whether in Ontario's post-secondary institutions, receiving Employment Insurance (EI), or receiving no benefits and holding no job, have the opportunity to apply for the electricity bill relief and gas utilities arrears programs. With the lack of affordable housing across communities, the inflated cost of essential resources, food, water, housing, and increased unemployment rates due to the Covid-19 pandemic, supports such as those offered by these programs are essential, especially due to the low barriers for access thanks to the support of agencies such as ours.



Strategic Planning 2021

The Plan

In the second half of 2021, staff and board organized a series of hybrid meetings to assess the operational, financial and human resources needed to remain accountable for the overall mandate:

- (1) enhancing equitable opportunities and resources necessary for underrepresented communities and populations to achieve their cultural, spiritual and economic self-determination;
- (2) those with lived experience of poverty and homelessness are provided access to the information and opportunities they need to create knowledge and participate in decision-making;
- (3) lived expertise voices are heard and incorporated in the development and implementation of local strategies, especially in the area of housing;
- (4) grassroots organizations and groups have access to the space and supports they need to operate and grow through Civic Hub Waterloo Region; and
- (5) Social Development Centre is resilient, healthy, adaptable and accountable to its members and the communities it serves.

Decolonizing and Creation of a Safer Space

As the greater pressures and demands on our team continued throughout the pandemic, its impact was difficult to grasp while being in the thick of it. The signs of exhaustion, private-work life out of balance, stress and overall funding and job insecurity were taking a toll. As we benefit from the greater diversity of knowledge and lived expertise of our staff, we are adapting to trauma informed practices and recognition of realities that bring intergenerational impact. The Board introduced a series of self-care measures for staff in recognition of their different identities, cultures and traditions, including unlimited sick and self-care time and paid holidays on National Indigenous Peoples Day and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Our lease agreement includes protocols for smudging practices, we are planning for cultural and spiritual representation of the diversity within the team, as we are designing our space to be more accessible, relaxing and easier to navigate.

Staff & Board Members

OUR TEAM

9

OUR STAFF

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

CORE STAFF

Aleksandra Petrovic

Executive Director, since March 2018

Community Development Lead since 2012

Todd Turnbull,

Data & Information Systems Lead, since 1994

Lesley Crompton,

Low-Income Support Program Coordinator, since 2019

Paul Loughran, *Bookkeeper*

PROJECT STAFF

Michelle Knight, *Cambridge Eviction Prevention May 2021*

Hollee George, *KW Eviction Prevention May 2021*

Heather Majaury, *Creative Project Coordinator, ABTC documenting and COVID-Safe Living Room, Festival of Neighbourhoods, since May 2020*

Hannah Swidarsky, *Festival of Neighbourhoods May 2021 - September 2021*

Faryal Diwan, *Research Assistant, since June 2018*

9

WORKING BOARD MEMBERS

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



Social Development Centre Waterloo Region

23 Water St North, Kitchener ON N2H 5A4

519-579-3800

sdcwr@waterlooregion.org

www.waterlooregion.org



2021 Activity Report
/SDCWR



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SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CENTRE WATERLOO REGION



Social Development Centre
WATERLOO REGION

WALKING TOGETHER REQUIRES A LEVEL PLAYING FIELD

Social Development Centre Waterloo Region works with people who have lived experience and expertise to improve the quality of life for all citizens in Waterloo Region. This can only be achieved by proactively working towards equity and social justice in all spheres of life. Because we believe that walking together requires a level playing field, we are intentional about creating conditions and opportunities where every voice counts, no matter how strong, in decisions that affect their own lives and shape our community.

OUR LEGACY OF IMPACT

Founded in 1967 as the Social Planning Council of Kitchener-Waterloo, the Social Development Centre Waterloo Region has a long legacy of impact.

- **Community Information Centre of WR**
- **ConnectKW**, a network of public Internet sites
- **Meet-the-Candidates**, unique participatory forums creating a space for exchange and dialogue
- **Visitable Housing WR** framework in collaboration with planners and builders
- **Decent Lives Framework** to show how strong neighbourhoods create opportunities for everyone
- **Poverty Free Action Group** bringing together social services, unions, and people with lived experience together in action and advocacy

Many organizations that are now integral to our community evolved through this inclusive approach:

- Food Bank of Waterloo Region
- OneROOF
- Waterloo Region Community Legal Services
- KW AccessAbility
- Meals on Wheels and more...
- Volunteer Action Centre of KW and Area

HOW WE DO IT TODAY

INCLUDING ALL THE VOICES

We identify emerging issues in support systems through collaboration and research. Then we get to work on solutions led by people with lived experience.

Mapping of Displacement

Unsheltered Campaign

Indigenization of Our Practice

OPENING PATHWAYS TO SUPPORTS

By listening to people and understanding their challenges, we help improve community supports and services.

Eviction Prevention & Tenant Rights

Financial Empowerment for Low Income Residents

BUILDING COMMUNITY

We help build inclusive neighbourhoods that strengthen initiative in individuals and communities.

A Better Tent City

Festival of Neighbourhoods

COVID Safe Gathering Spaces

POWERING COMMUNITY ACTION

We facilitate citizen engagement that empowers individuals and groups.

Civic Hub Waterloo Region

Kitchener's Housing Lived Expertise Working Group

OUR COMMON FUTURE

We are fortunate to live in a prosperous region but the benefits of living here are not shared equitably. Many of us are missed, forgotten or left behind. That is why we must continue working together.