



Cambridge & North Dumfries
Community Foundation

on the table.[®]

2019 Reflections & Insights about Waterloo Region





“

Belonging is rooted
in trusting relationships.
This takes time and
sustained effort.

”

- On the Table participant

Introduction

Between September 27 and 29, 2019, Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation (KWCF) and the Cambridge & North Dumfries Community Foundation (CNDCF) invited hosts to bring together friends, colleagues, neighbours, and other community members over some food to talk about what matters most to you. Whether it was over a meal, snack or coffee break, On the Table Waterloo Region encouraged people to take the time to connect with one-another face-to-face.

This new initiative was a real opportunity to see what is being discussed across our region and the challenges that the community is concerned about. Our goal was to ensure that no topic was “off the table”.

What did we learn?

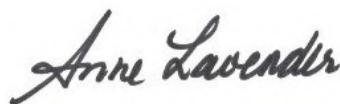
- Part of the value of those discussions was the conversations themselves. Great things happen when we come together, share food, and have a conversation. People made connections to others that could further develop, providing a greater sense of belonging in our community.
- On the Table was a new idea for Waterloo Region. We didn't know if people would want to participate. So, we chose to gather high-level themes and ideas, rather than asking hosts and participants for detailed feedback. Hosts had the option of gathering data they could use to galvanize action – and many are doing just that! Next time, we'll ask participants for a bit more information to be able to share additional insights more broadly.
- We did get a pulse of the community. Ten key themes emerged, along with ten things our community told us we can collectively do.

What happens next?

Based on your feedback we believe there is a role for our Foundations to play in bringing people together to discuss issues that matter. In 2020 and beyond, we commit to doing just that! We look forward to working with people across Waterloo Region to turn conversations into actions with community impact.



Elizabeth Heald
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Kitchener Waterloo
Community Foundation*



Anne Lavender
*Executive Director,
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Where did conversations happen?

KWCF and CND CF launched On the Table Waterloo Region with a goal of encouraging at least 500 people to participate in 25 hosted discussions. We also hoped that conversations would continue online for those who couldn't attend and be part of the face-to-face gatherings.

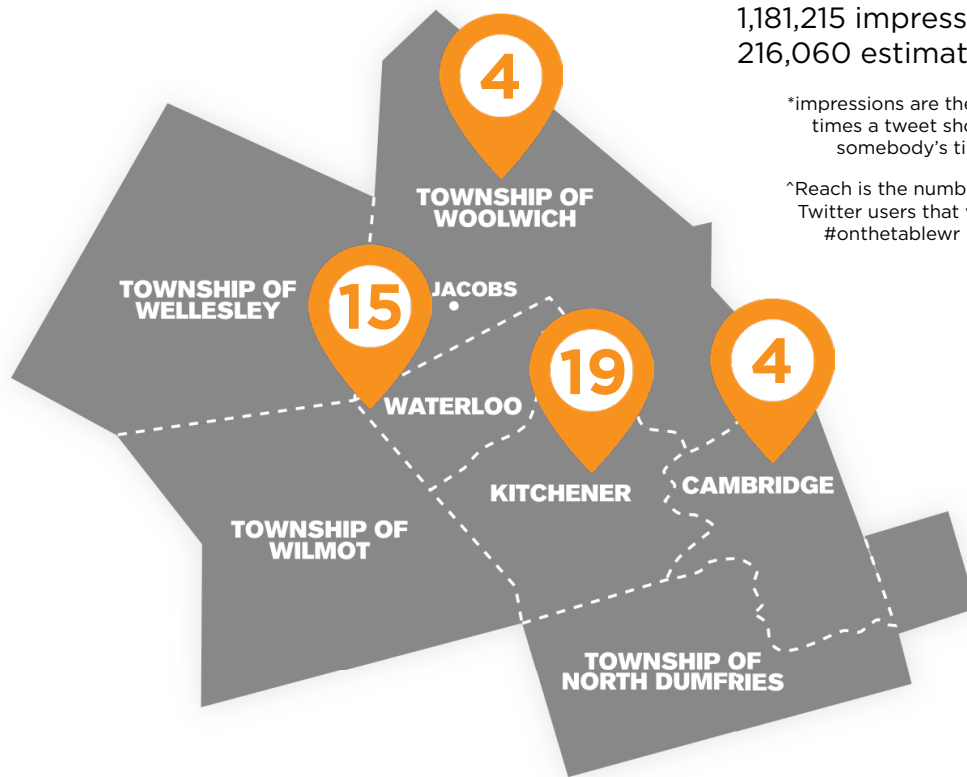
Results are in and the very first On the Table Waterloo Region exceeded expectations, demonstrating that with a little nudge, people can find time in their busy schedules to gather together and make conversation happen.

 **#onthetablewr** (28 day snapshot)

537 tweets
1,181,215 impressions*
216,060 estimated reach^

*impressions are the number of times a tweet shows up in somebody's timeline

^Reach is the number of unique Twitter users that viewed the #onthetablewr hashtag



42

conversations were held across Waterloo Region

797

people attended conversations

3

people attended the smallest conversation

119

people attended the largest conversation

What did you talk about?

We asked hosts what their groups talked about so we could share the topics with you. Ten key themes emerged:

Affordable Housing, Homelessness & Basic Income

Affordable housing
Basic income
Homelessness and affordable housing

Community Participation & Partnerships

Partnership and the future
Children and youth community involvement
Volunteerism
What matters most to people in your community?
Sense of community
Social inclusion - being more involved in community
Importance of shopping local
What does wellbeing look like in our community?
Politics

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Community Connection
Community inclusion and neighbourhood engagement
Helping our region be more welcoming and inclusive
Social inclusion and what it means to be a welcoming community
Sense of Belonging
Inclusive communities
Diversity and inclusion
Community - social inclusion/exclusion and belonging
Issues affecting seniors/older adults
Building support between LGBTQ2S+ in community and those who are in prison

Environment, Sustainability & Climate Action

Sustainability
Climate action
Local resiliency and community
Climate action and the impact on our planet
Importance of Nature in our community
Local climate resilience

Food's Impact on Community

Indigenous teaching and discussion about food sustainability, food intention and climate action
Food programs and their impact on connection and belonging in low income communities
Zero hunger and reducing food waste

Gender Equality

Women in governance and politics
Empowering the next generation of female leaders

Getting Around Waterloo Region

Transit - mom's managing getting around - ease and environmental impacts
Accessible transit and travel

Healthy Children & Youth

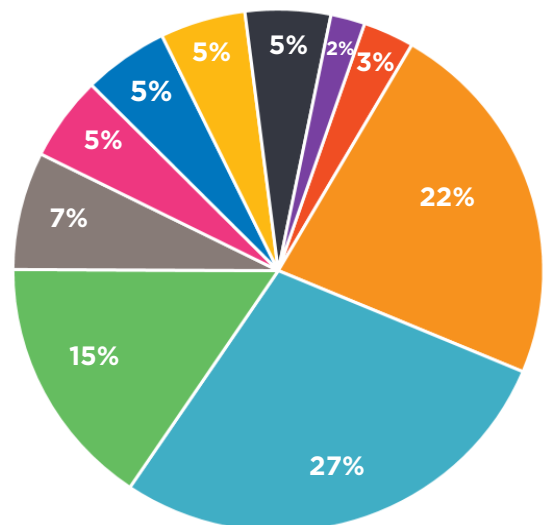
Youth democracy and engagement
Sense of Belonging for children and youth in Waterloo Region

Immigration & Newcomers

The creation of an Arab cultural centre, and its role in the academic and cultural community
Immigration

Literacy

How can we elevate the literacy in our community?



“The information we collected was really helpful in hearing what the community wants/needs/would like to see happening. I think we will host similar events every 6 months or every year.” - On the Table Host



Reflections on conversations

As part of On the Table Waterloo Region, we asked hosts to provide us with feedback about what stood out to them the most from the discussions around their tables. The next few pages include thoughts shared as part of the conversations. They include information, views and ideas you might want to learn more about or take some action on:



Affordable Housing, Homelessness & Basic Income

- There are affordable housing barriers and challenges for many in our community that must be addressed, particularly those dealing with mental health, addiction and accessibility issues.
- There is a need for basic income. Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW) aren't enough to provide the support people in our community need.
- Affordable housing needs to be tackled at all three levels of government (regional, provincial and federal) in partnership with local residents. This is a community issue. The time for collective action is now.

Community Participation & Partnerships

- We need to frame volunteer opportunities to what today's volunteers are looking for. This means finding a better way to engage young people in volunteerism and civic duty, and creating family-friendly opportunities to involve children and youth. It also includes inviting newcomers to our community to participate, so they feel included in a meaningful way and don't stay away for fear of rejection.
- Shopping local builds stronger neighbourhoods, keeps money in the local economy, creates new jobs and stimulates growth.
- Barriers keeping people from feeling a sense of belonging and inclusion in our community include: poverty, transportation issues, racism, transphobia, homophobia, accessibility, affordable housing and language.
- Isolation is not a new phenomenon, but it was less prevalent when seniors had family members living nearby. How can we engage seniors who are isolated; how can we assist them in attending events; how can we reduce barriers to their participation?



Reflections on conversations



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

- An equity approach must be at the root of community connection, and relationship-building in our community is an important path to action.
- Everyone is accountable for championing diversity.
- Exclusion and discrimination impacts LGBTQ2S+ community members' health, safety, and well-being. Our community needs to work together to actively combat transphobia and homophobia.
- There is a need to link the LGBTQ2S+ community inside Grand Valley Institution (GVI) with better access to the LGBTQ2S+ community outside GVI as well as other strong advocates throughout the community. This increased connectivity extends to feeling welcome.
- A sense of belonging is really about people and places. It's about making connections, fostering relationships in spaces that are welcoming, intentionally inclusive and accessible, not only physically, but mentally and socially as well.

Environment, Sustainability & Climate Action

- People want to act on climate change, but struggle to know what to do and how.
- There is a need for more trusted non-partisan information about what can be done. Many of the options for taking action are seen as inconvenient or expensive. For example, green energy and transportation are attractive but seem unattainable due to cost. It's important to share stories of local examples and impacts.
- The work that groups do locally to protect the environment is an important contributor to larger issues (e.g. global climate change).
- Climate change is a real problem for everyone! It's time we work with various levels of our community to integrate these solutions into every field across Waterloo Region.



What did you find most valuable about hosting an On the Table Waterloo Region conversation?

The relationship element – getting a variety of people in the same room who might not otherwise have the opportunity to chat with one another. It's important to get new and different perspectives.

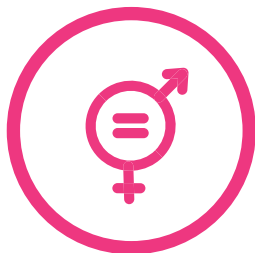
- On the Table Participant



Reflections on conversations

Food's Impact on Community

- Preparing food with intentionality and eating healthy, in conjunction with food sustainability, is possible and best for our health and the earth.
- There continues to be a great need for food assistance in our community, and a great need for connectedness. Food programs in low-income communities build connection and belonging.
- In Canada, nearly 32% of lost and wasted food is edible. Businesses can save money, reduce food waste and help support people requiring food assistance. Food recovery is a viable alternative that impacts people and the environment.



Gender Equality

- Women need a support system, not just from male allies but also other women. There still is extra work that women need to put in when sitting on a board, going into politics, and moving into a leadership role. Help make connections.
- Provide childcare or have child-friendly meetings. It's also important to think about meeting times to accommodate a variety of schedules and family situations.
- So much in this world happens because of relationships. We need to think of women who don't have "natural mentors". Can we extend this privilege to others who we don't know yet?

Getting Around Waterloo Region

- Work culture and resources (like bike racks, secure storage, showers on site) have a huge impact on the likelihood of using active transit (walking or cycling) to get to and from work.
- Many people with disabilities have trouble getting around the region. They may feel unsafe interacting with the Ion transit system (including its stations and train crossings). Roundabouts are often difficult to use safely and other transit options present potential barriers. Technology has the ability to assist, and those with lived experience need to be included in implementing solutions.
- Everyone has individual circumstances they are balancing, as they determine how they are getting around. It's important to recognize that these circumstances will change as we (and our families) grow, age and change. Access to transit is really important, and as our region changes - we must adapt.



Reflections on conversations



Healthy Children & Youth

- Youth are concerned about a variety of issues and want to be involved in making an impact. Justice and fairness are top of mind (e.g. bullying and racism). They are highly concerned about the environment, and are disappointed with the displacement of animals because of development.
- Sense of belonging for children and youth is rooted in trusting relationships, which takes time and sustained effort. Belonging is intimately connected to other aspects of wellness, such as learning and health.

Immigration & Newcomers

- It is important for newcomers to have a feeling of acceptance and a place to celebrate their culture.
- Waterloo Region offers many supports but people are not aware of them, and navigating the systems as a newcomer is very challenging.
- Immigrants and refugees face many challenges in finding meaningful employment in Waterloo Region: (1) discrimination (2) recognition of international credentials (3) mismatch of newcomer expectations and the low-skilled roles available in the community.



Literacy

- The entire community thrives when barriers to literacy are removed.
- Literacy is important in all aspects of life, from reading literacy and employment, to belonging and health.
- Public libraries play an integral role to providing welcoming and free programs and spaces for all.

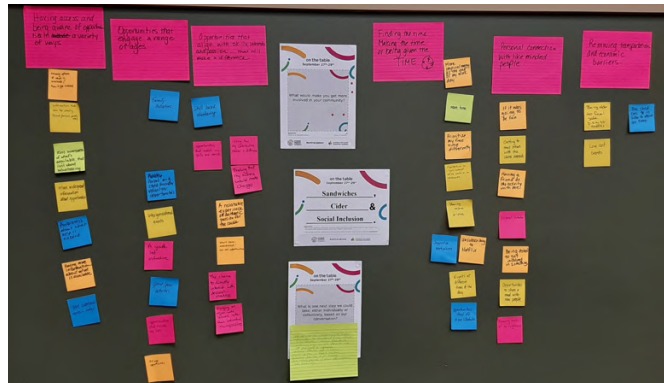




10 things our community told us we can all do

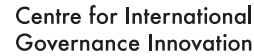
Small changes can make a big difference in our community

- 1.** Find opportunities in our community that align with your talents, passion and skills – then get involved.
- 2.** Let all levels of government know what is important to you. Talk to our politicians. Write a letter. Share your views on social media.
- 3.** Get to know your neighbours and neighbourhood. Find out about your community association. Knock on your neighbours' doors and introduce yourself. Understand if there are grants available in your City or Township, and get a group of neighbours to brainstorm an idea and apply together.
- 4.** “Vote with your dollar”. Help advocate for a community you want to live in by what you spend your money on, and conversely what you don't spend your money on.
- 5.** Share and invite friends, family and neighbours to activities and events happening in our community.
- 6.** Host events in Waterloo Region that appeal to students to get them off campus to connect with their community and see different parts of our region. They will feel a greater sense of belonging to the community while they are students, and potentially stay in the community.
- 7.** Advocate for communities you aren't part of. Be an ally.
- 8.** Organizations that require volunteers should look at their recruitment practices, and think of ways to engage people who can't volunteer in “typical” volunteer roles.
- 9.** Find opportunities for youth to take on leadership roles.
- 10.** Continue to share what's on your mind. When we share conversations it brings people together about issues we care about. That helps foster connections – and it builds and strengthens community.



Thank you!

Thank you to our many hosts, including those listed below, for participating in our first On the Table Waterloo Region. We couldn't have done it without you!





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