

United Way  of Perth County

# *Listening for Change*

IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES



Community  Matters

THE ONTARIO TRILLIUM FOUNDATION  LA FONDATION TRILLIUM DE L'ONTARIO



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**Ellen Balmain**

## *From The Desk of* **THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

The United Way of Perth County is a locally guided organization dedicated to identifying key local priorities and supporting the mobilization of local resources to create sustainable community improvements.

Countless volunteer hours are dedicated year in and year out to raise money to address local issues via funded agencies and community based initiatives. Volunteers contribute their energy and expertise not only to raising the funds, but to ensuring that they are used in our local community to address local concerns.

Issues and concerns, however, change as our community changes and grows. We receive invaluable information on an annual basis from our funded agencies, community partners, volunteers and donors about community needs. The Community Matters Project allowed us to expand that base, to ask citizens directly about what is most important to them. It offered us the opportunity to listen, to learn, to change.

We would like to acknowledge the broad base of community support that enabled us to complete this report. First and foremost, we thank the individuals who participated in the process, offering frank opinions and insights through the community meetings or by completing the survey.

Our facilitators, Charlene Gordon and Dale Howatt, contributed many hours and considerable expertise facilitating community discussions about local issues and offering feedback during the development of the survey. As friends of our United Way, Charlene and Dale brought with them a wealth of knowledge, community connections and a contagious passion for community engagement.

Our funded agencies not only actively participated in the consultation process, but distributed the survey to their stakeholders - clients, employees, volunteers, board members. A myriad of community partners - industrial, commercial, governmental, financial - also generously distributed the survey to their employees and stakeholders. Many added links to their websites and intranets to encourage participation in the survey. Service clubs allowed us to distribute and collect surveys at their meetings. Medical offices, public libraries and post offices also acted as distribution/collection points. Community Living North Perth, the Town of Mitchell, the Friendship Centre, Spruce Lodge and Knollcrest Lodge all generously donated their facilities for our community consultations.

To everyone who participated in or facilitated this process, thank you! I encourage anyone who has yet to get involved to speak up now and ensure your voice is counted. Community Matters ... You matter.

The consultation process is designed to promote civic engagement, facilitate community collaboration, identify innovative solutions to community challenges, enhance the impact of the United Way and help build stronger, healthier communities. I am confident that the Community Matters reports, together with other research projects, such as the Social Planning Council, will provide a clear direction for our United Way and organizations within Perth County. I look forward to working together, forming local collaborations, and addressing the goals with creative and enduring solutions.

***“The Community Matters Project allowed us to ask citizens directly about what is most important to them. It offers us the opportunity to listen, to learn, to change.”***

*ELLEN BALMAIN,  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*

## *Listening For Change:* **THE COMMUNITY MATTERS PROJECT**

The United Way of Perth County is dedicated to identifying key local priorities and supporting the mobilization of local resources to create sustainable community improvements. We were therefore delighted to join with 16 other small rural United Ways in a unique community consultation process generously funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation.

The Community Matters project offered local citizens the opportunity to tell us what is important in their communities, what the most pressing issues are for them and their neighbours. We began by inviting local community leaders to meetings to talk about the issues and trends they had identified in recent years, particularly those not currently being addressed. We asked the same questions of our funded agencies. The results of these consultations are outlined in the Phase I section of this report.

Using the information gathered from Phase I and consultations in other small rural communities, we developed a survey to be widely distributed to citizens throughout the County. The survey asked respondents to identify which issues were important for their families and communities and to identify their top three funding priorities. In all, 765 individuals completed the survey. The results are outlined in the Phase II Section of this report

This report marks the next stage in the consultation process. We invite your feedback. Does it reflect your experience of living in Perth County? Have we missed something? The results of this report, combined with your feedback will help guide the United Way of Perth County make a difference in the lives of our friends, family members and neighbours, creating stronger, more resilient communities. Please, let us know what you think.

***"The outcomes of the Community Matters consultations will enable more informed decision-making by funders and government."***

CHARLENE GORDON,  
FACILITATOR & BOARD CHAIR, PERTH  
COUNTY SOCIAL PLANNING COUNCIL

***"Commitment - to community and to making a difference - is what we witnessed time and time again throughout this process, and what makes Perth County such a wonderful place to live."***

DALE HOWATT  
VOLUNTEER FACILITATOR

## About PERTH COUNTY

The County of Perth is located in the heartland of southwestern Ontario. It consists of the Town of North Perth, Township of Perth East, Township of Perth South, and the Township of West Perth. The City of Stratford and the Town of St. Marys also lie within the geographical boundaries of the County of Perth.

According to the 2001 census there are approximately 73,675 residents of Perth County. Larger centres of population include Stratford, St. Marys, Listowel, Mitchell and Milverton. These centres are complemented by a multitude of smaller villages and hamlets as well as a thriving rural communities that have a long history of caring for one another, creating a wonderful place to live, work, raise a family and retire.

Perth County has a diverse economic base. Large numbers of the population are employed in the manufacturing, construction, agriculture and tourism industries.

## Consulting With The Community: PHASE I

We began by inviting local community leaders to meetings to talk about the issues and trends they had identified in recent years, particularly those issues and trends that were not being addressed. We asked the same questions of our funded agencies and local youth.

During the fall of 2005 we met with citizens from across the county. We held meetings in Listowel, Mitchell, St. Marys, Milverton, St. Marys and Stratford. We met with our funded agencies and the grade 12 social studies class from Listowel District Secondary School. All participants were asked to respond to the following questions:

- **What is working well in our community?**
- **What issues need to be addressed?**
- **How can we identify opportunities to make the changes we need?**

In general, participants county-wide described wonderful communities with a myriad of strengths, richness of resources and variety of opportunities to get involved and make a difference. We heard about strong local communities with lots of services, conveniently located close to major centres for access to specialized hospital services and higher education facilities. They also expressed concern about the changing face of their communities. Concerns about youth, seniors, access to services, access to medical care (especially family doctors), affordable housing, and community economic development were expressed in all consultations. Transportation was identified as a significant issues in all communities outside of Stratford.

## North Perth/Listowel

Participants described their communities as wonderful places to live with a strong faith base, quality recreation opportunities, and lots of services available. They noted that North Perth is conveniently located close to Kitchener Waterloo hospitals, universities and colleges and spoke positively about the variety of services available to them, some medical services, economic strength and potential for growth (including lots of new housing development).

Breakfast programs in local schools, childcare for teen parents in the local high school, VON, Meals on Wheels and activity programs for seniors were all identified as positives. Participants felt that community services cooperate and advocate well to ensure that citizens receive services. They also noted that John Wilkinson, the local MPP has been a strong visible resource in the community, open to hearing what residents have to say and advocating on their behalf at Queen's Park.

In general they were pleased that family doctors exercise flexibility in making referrals to a variety of larger centres and that many medical specialists offer regular clinics in Listowel. Hospital volunteer services, ambulance and 911 services were identified as excellent.

The group agreed that there is lots of opportunity for volunteering and that this is strength in the community. High school programs offered in Listowel are addressing the needs of lots of students who are using new approaches to learning.

Participants identified the following as issues in their community. The most pressing 'major issues' were transportation, medical care, transportation and housing, however youth issues were identified as the most prevalent (although sometimes moderate or minor on a relative scale).

### **Transportation**

Lack of affordable transportation for seniors, disabled and people on fixed incomes was the primary transportation concern. Limited schedules and lack of regular service for out of town appointments was also identified.

### **Medical Issues**

Shortage of medical doctors was the primary medical concern. Participants also identified the crowded conditions of the single medical centre as a major issue - citing concerns about privacy and confidentiality. They noted that the emergency room wait is very long, that the hospital has limited beds for children and that treatment for individuals with dual diagnosis is a decided gap.

### **Housing**

The need for more affordable/public housing was identified as a major issue. Housing for seniors, the disabled, homeless or pregnant teens is also needed. The aging population requires more seniors housing that will be flexible as individuals age.

### **Youth**

Drug use by youth and the existence of local meth-amphetamine labs was identified as a major issue for the community. Increased supports for existing life skills and new employment skills courses would be helpful. Teen homelessness and pregnancy, vandalism and petty crime were also cause for concern.

### **Access to Services**

Participants expressed concern that ‘piecemeal services are geographically based rather than located throughout natural communities’. The sense of community responsibility to ‘look after their own’ is quite strong in North Perth. As a result smaller agencies have limited time and resources to meet the needs of residents. In addition they need assistance with fundraising and with writing funding proposals in an increasingly competitive environment. While there are many ‘county-wide’ services offered in North Perth, it is often difficult to find them and/or which days they are available in North Perth.

### **Recreation**

While participants identified opportunities to play soccer, baseball and hockey as strengths and arenas/communities as the heart of local communities, they also noted that recreational needs are changing with the growing community. They identified gaps in current programming, the need for more inclusive programming and the need for an indoor pool.

### **Economy**

While small, family based businesses currently provide a fair amount of retail variety in Listowel and can be the hub of local economic activity in smaller centres, they are finding it increasingly difficult to compete with discount shopping centres. They also noted that commuters tend to shop where they work rather than in the local communities and that it is challenging to keep young and skilled workers in the community. Many families are having difficult time providing for their children’s’ basic needs. Local not-for-profit and charitable organizations are competing for the same fundraised dollars from the same people.

### **Agriculture**

Participants noted with concern the loss of the family farm. They commented that the increasing size of farms makes it much more difficult for young farmers to start up.

### **Other**

Other issues identified included appropriate diagnosis and services for individuals with learning disabilities, decreased participation in church and organized activities, the need for flexible, affordable child care and after school activities, and the stigma associated with seeking help with mental health issues.

### **The Youth Perspective**

The grade 12 social studies class at Listowel District High School was engaged in a similar consultation. They ranked volunteer development as the most pressing social issue, followed closely by social and recreational needs, although school based activities and programs were the most prevalent (albeit identified as minor) concern.

### **Volunteer Development**

There was an extremely strong interest in volunteerism and the need for better mentoring and training of volunteers so that more activities could be organized and services offered. Participants comments that volunteers are needed in every part of the community and expressed concern that not enough people make the time to volunteer.

### **Social and Recreational Needs**

The most pressing social concerns identified were the need for more visiting of seniors in the community, poverty and gay/lesbian/transgender issues in the community. Participants felt that a recreation centre similar to that in Wingham, including an indoor pool, should be a priority for the community. They also identified the need for more coaches,

equipment, funding and facilities for organized sports as well as increased opportunities for casual participation such as the existing Wednesday night sports night at the high school. They also noted that there was a lot of time being spent on fundraising for school equipment. Multi-generational activities and programs after school and on weekends were also suggested.

### **School Programs and Activities**

Lack of school supplies (art, sports equipment, drama) was identified as important. Participants expressed interest in an instrumental music program but noted that they shouldn't have to 'pay to learn' (ie buy instruments). Health nurse availability and accessibility was discussed at length, including safe private places to meet with the nurse and the availability of male nurse for male students. Increased bursary programs for advanced education were also identified as important.

### **Drugs**

Participants identified the need for more education for younger (pre high school) students and parents about drugs.

### **Other**

Participants expressed a great deal of interest in environmental issues.

## **Perth South/St. Marys**

Participants described many resources in their community. The Friendship Centre and Youth Centre were both identified as positive 'hubs of activity', the hospital as a critical element of small town life. Services are available for seniors, youth, individuals living with disabilities. There are also opportunities to volunteer with children, youth, adults and seniors.

Economic indicators are also positive. The group cited a strong retail business in the core, growth in tourism, proximity to larger centres and daily train service as positives. The library expansion was also viewed positively.

Participants identified the following as issues in their community. The most pressing 'major issue' was transportation for the elderly and disabled.

### **Affordable Transportation**

Transportation options for seniors are limited. Weekend transportation in particular, is dependent upon mobility bus service.

### **Aging Population**

47% of St. Marys residents are over 50 years of age. Many citizens find themselves in the 'sandwich' generation - caring for both children and family members who are aging or living with disabilities. Volunteers also tend to be older - and have different needs.

### **Access to Services**

Affordability and waiting lists for services were identified as issues. Gaps for people needing mental health services were also noted.

### **Other**

Concerns were also expressed regarding encouraging youth to be involved in positive activities, literacy, and attracting people to live in the area.

## Perth East/Milverton

Participants described thriving small towns and villages, responsive to individual needs, with growing volunteer involvement. Participants noted that Milverton as all conveniences available locally, including an excellent day care program. The availability of quality home based daycare was also noted.

The group expressed concern about the pervasiveness of poverty throughout the community.

They identified the following as issues in their community. The most pressing 'major issues' were transportation and economic/community development, however seniors issues and family violence were identified as the most prevalent (albeit more moderate on a relative scale).

### **Transportation**

Limited local options for transportation and increasing costs related to providing transportation were both identified as significant local issues. The lack of transportation affects youth education since it is often difficult or impossible for young people to arrange transportation to co-op placements. The challenges of living in 'commuter villages' were also noted.

### **Economic/Community Development**

There are many diverse businesses in East Perth that employ local people, however its important that all citizens recognize the importance of supporting local business. There is potential for significantly more development in many communities. Youth out-migration is a concern.

### **Seniors Services**

The current redevelopment of Knollcrest Lodge was cited as positive, however participants noted that the community needs a long range plan to address the need for a continuum of care.

### **Family Violence**

Rural isolation is a two fold issue: women are often not aware of the services available to them and when they are, they don't always have the means (especially transportation) to leave violent home situations. A community resource centre would be helpful.

### **Volunteer Development**

The group agreed that the community has strong volunteer resources both in people and programs, however the same people volunteer for different groups and services and the volunteer base is aging. Agencies lack the time and resources to recruit, train and manage volunteers effectively.

### **Visible Minorities**

Perth East has a significant Anabaptist population. The distinctions between Anabaptist communities are not always clear to the rest of the population. Many live 'apart' from mainstream society, which can create a degree of hesitancy to access programs in the community. Participants noted the significant contributions of these communities to Perth East: they operate many local businesses and tend to support local business, have a strong work ethic and network to assist in times of trouble.

### **Other**

Participants expressed concern about unhealthy, 'rushed' lifestyles, lack of knowledge about nutrition and obesity. They noted that despite the excellent daycare programs available, there is not enough childcare to meet family needs. Drug use, meth labs, increasing disparity between rich and poor, lack of affordable recreation programs and environmental issues were also discussed.

## West Perth/Mitchell

Participants described their communities as friendly and supportive with strong leadership, a high degree of community involvement, many active service clubs and churches and lots of sporting activities for children, youth and adults. The group agreed that the community has strong volunteer resources both in people and programs. They described a farm community with many well established family farms. The Community Futures Program is a decided asset. Perth Care for Kids was lauded for the programs it offers the community. Excellent nursing home facilities and the basis of a 'continuum of care' were also praised.

Participants identified the following as issues in their community. The most pressing 'major issues' were youth and seniors, however community development was identified as a significant 'minor' issue.

### **Youth**

Participants noted that if youth are not involved with sports, there are few other options. An arts or drama program would be an outlet for positive youth expression. The Youth Centre is under-resourced and struggling with how to address the needs of youth living outside of the Town of Mitchell. They noted the need for 13 to 16 year olds to learn better life/work skills and noted that many 18 to 25 year olds lack sufficient life/work skills to earn a living. Participants described a 'hidden Perth' of homeless youth sleeping at friends' houses, having no long term options available to them. Concern was also expressed about drug use among youth.

### **Seniors**

A variety of challenges for seniors were noted and prioritized by the group. The doctor shortage is particularly difficult for seniors. The shortage of nurses is affecting serviced. Affordable housing, transportation and supports to age at home were all identified as significant and pressing needs for seniors in West Perth. The loss of church communities has affected seniors as well. The changing nature of family was also discussed at length - many seniors in the community no longer have children living nearby.

### **Community Development**

Participants agreed that there is a strong local economy and potential for future economic development in the community of West Perth. They noted significant challenges however. The face of the community is changing. Church closures and bussing for schools has resulted in a sense of loss of community. Many people have lived in Mitchell for less than ten years - there appears to be an old and new Mitchell and its difficult to get to know people. There are many empty shops on main street in Mitchell. Commuters shop where they work. Smaller communities have experienced a significant decline in their populations. Monkton, however, is experiencing an economic recovery. Participants wondered if the factors contributing to this recovery could be identified and replicated in other communities.

Community groups and service clubs need to prepare for the future, attract younger volunteers. Fund development training would also be helpful.

### **Transportation**

Participants indicated satisfaction with the mobility bus provision of transportation to seniors and the disabled in the community but expressed concerns about the rising cost of service provision and the difficulty arranging transportation for out of town appointments. They also noted that youth often resort to hitchhiking if they can't find someone to drive them where they need to go.

# Stratford

Participants described Stratford as an culturally rich community that welcomes volunteer involvement and encourages high levels of social involvement. Transit - both internally and externally - was identified as a strength. The group agreed that there are issues related to poverty and isolation in the city that are not being identified and addressed. Services are available but often people don't know how to access them.

Participants identified the following as issues in their community. The most pressing 'major issues' and the most prevalent issues were related to youth, the economy and affordable housing.

## Youth

Youth homelessness was identified as a critical community issue. Dating violence is also significant. Getting a prevention worker back into the high schools would be helpful. Youth activities, after school programs and school based programs to help youth stay in school were all identified as needs.

## Economy

Participants noted that the cost of living in Stratford seems to be a lot higher than neighbouring communities and communities of similar size. A lot of people are struggling to simply make ends meet. The working poor are often juggling two or three part time jobs. The shrinking automotive sector has had a significant impact on people working in the sector. It is particularly difficult for older workers to find work when they have been laid off.

## Affordable Housing

The cost of housing (both rental and modest home ownership) in Stratford is higher than surrounding communities and cities of similar size. There are long waiting lists for nursing home care and a growing need for a continuum of housing options for seniors.

## Gay/Lesbian Issues

Lack of resources for the gay/lesbian population was identified as an issue. The lack of services for teens is particularly pressing.

## Seniors

Participants noted that seniors often come to Stratford to retire - but then don't have the family/natural supports that they need in place as they age. Fixed incomes are worrisome as housing and other costs continue to increase. Transportation for home bound seniors can be difficult. Increased activities for seniors and increased availability of information about existing services were also identified as areas for action.

## Environment

Participants expressed concern about a variety of environmental issues, including landfill availability, recycling of hazardous materials throughout the county and the advantages of wet recycling. Increased use of public transit would be helpful in many ways.

## Other

The doctor shortage is a concern in Stratford as it is elsewhere. Social isolation is a challenge for many individuals - how can we be a more open and welcoming community? The public library needs more space.

# United Way Member Agencies

All United Way member agencies were invited to participate in the consultation. Representatives from Emily Murphy Centre, St. John Ambulance, Family Services Perth Huron, YMCA, SAAIL, Red Cross, Epilepsy Huron Perth Bruce, St. Marys Youth Centre and Aids Action Perth were in attendance.

Participants described excellent communication and cooperation between agencies. They identified the Funders Group as an opportunity to coordinate strategic funding priorities. They would like more supports to develop volunteerism to offset some of the costs of service delivery.

The groups felt that the Community Care Access Centre and various seniors services organizations serve the senior population well. They noted that transportation/mobility services are not equally accessible across the county, that with the plethora of seniors services available, it can be confusing to find the right service. More centralized resources, such as the United Centre would be helpful.

Participants identified the following as issues in their community. Youth and poverty were identified as both the most pressing 'major issues' and the most prevalent issues to be addressed.

## Youth

Drug use by youth was identified as a significant concern, as were unsupervised youth late at night, vandalism and petty crime. It was felt that the availability of positive evening/late night activities might offset some of these concerns, suggesting that the current deficit in this area is more the result of lack of resources than lack of interest, energy or creative ideas.

## Poverty

Lack of crisis and temporary housing as well as affordable housing in general was identified as a critical issue, closely followed by inability to pay for basic needs (food, shelter, clothing) a lack of public awareness and understanding regarding the prevalence of and reasons for poverty in the community.

## Access to services

Concerns were expressed regarding funding and service overlaps, decentralization of HRSDC and inability to provide needed services due to lack of funding.

## Seniors

Participants expressed concern for isolated seniors. Despite the services available, they know that there are many who do not access them. The affordability and accessibility of transportation for the elderly and disabled was also identified as an issue.

## Other

The Sandwich generation is a growing concern in Stratford, as it is elsewhere. Despite the richness and variety of programming throughout the County, there is a decided lack of programming for children 7-12 and younger seniors.

# Consulting With The Community: PHASE II

**“The Community Matters survey is a significant milestone for the United Way of Perth County. It is the first time our organization has actively sought out community opinion on social issues. The information we have accumulated will be of immense help to the United Way and to our member agencies as we all work to ensure that funded programs achieve maximum benefit in our community.”**

JANE KIRKPATRICK,  
PRESIDENT, UNITED WAY OF PERTH  
COUNTY BOARD OF DIRECTORS

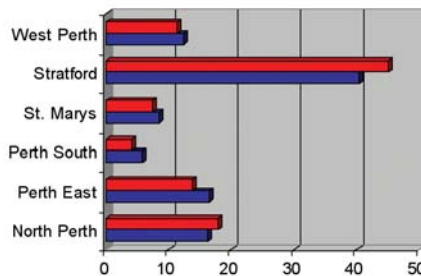
Phase II of the Community Matters project involved encouraging the general public to identify which of the issues identified earlier in the process resonated with them - either as issues affecting their families or their communities. In addition, respondents were asked to identify and rank issues that may not have surfaced during the preliminary consultation.

Groups and individuals were invited to respond electronically to the survey posted on the United Way of Perth County Website. Funded agencies and community partners generously posted links on both their public websites and their intranets.

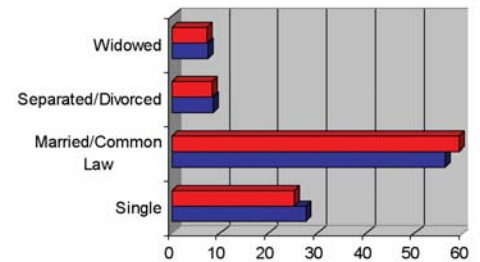
Local media also ran stories about the survey, inviting residents to respond electronically to pick up a copy at one of several locations throughout the County. We distributed paper copy surveys at libraries throughout the County, at the Early Years Centres, through our Member Agencies, local service clubs, service provider meetings and public gatherings.

In total, 765 residents completed the survey, representing just over 1% of the total population and 1.3% of the adult (over 15) population, based on 2001 census data. In general, respondents were representative of County residents along several dimensions:

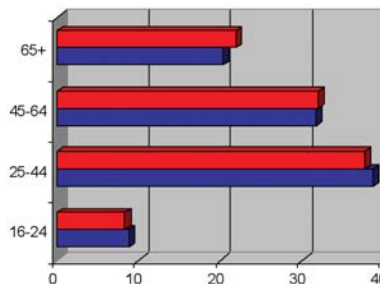
**PLACE OF RESIDENCE**



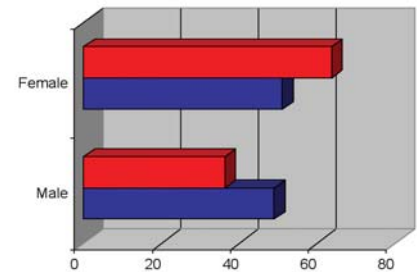
**MARITAL STATUS**



**AGE**



**SEX**



In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in our community are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	65%
2	Affordable Housing	58%
3	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	55%
4	Affordable Childcare	45%
5	Finding a Job with Benefits	43%
6	Drug/Alcohol Misuse by Adults	42%
6	Social & Recreational Opportunities for Youth	42%
7	Environment	41%
8	Poverty	39%
8	Crisis Counselling for Children & Youth	39%
8	Safety in Schools/Bullying	39%
8	Affordable Dental Care	39%
8	Help for Seniors in their Homes	39%
9	Job Security	38%
9	Specialized Health Care	38%
9	Child Abuse & Neglect	38%
9	Crisis Housing	38%

A summary of major issues identified by residents of each of the smaller municipalities is included in the appendices.

Respondents were also asked to identify their top three priorities for funding. Their responses were as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth (activities, services)	29%
2	Affordable Housing	22%
3	Poverty/Basic Needs	18%
4	Affordable Childcare	17%
5	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	16%
6	Health Care (affordable, wait times, hospital closures)	15%
7	Recreation (opportunities, facilities, affordability, arts)	12%
7	Employment Supports	12%
7	Doctors	12%
8	Environmental Issues	11%
9	Seniors (programs, services, activities)	9%
10	Abuse	8%
10	Transportation	8%

Minor issues for the community identified by a significant number of respondents included:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as 'major'
1	Quitting School before graduation	49%
1	Adult Literacy	49%
2	Budgeting	48%
2	High levels of stress at home	48%
2	Supports to employment / job finding club	48%
2	Isolation	48%
3	Unemployment	47%
4	High levels of stress at work	46%
4	Meeting everyday expenses (food, clothing, utilities	46%
4	Access to housing limited by transportation	46%
4	Job Training	46%
4	Social & Recreational Opportunities for Children	46%
4	Sexual Assault	46%
4	Discrimination	46%
5	Supports for individuals with physical disabilities	45%
5	Supports for individuals with developmental delays	45%
5	Access to Ontario Works or Disability Pension	45%
5	Elder Abuse	45%
6	Depression/Anxiety	44%
6	Suicide	44%
6	Affordable Legal Services	44%
6	Workplace Safety	44%
6	Day programs for seniors	44%
6	Finding Out about Programs and Services	44%
6	Spousal Abuse	44%
7	Safety in Schools/Bullying	43%
7	Financial Assistance for Special Needs	43%
7	Affordable Dental Care	43%
7	Volunteer recruitment & management	43%
7	Child Abuse & Neglect	43%
8	Ability to pay utilities	42%
9	Access to transportation	41%
9	Extended Health Care Benefits / Affordable Medication	41%
9	Recreational Opportunities & Facilities	41%
9	Poverty	41%
9	Crisis Counselling for Adults/Families	41%
9	Life Long Learning Opportunities	41%
9	Help for seniors in their homes	41%
10	Crisis Counselling for Children & Youth	40%
10	Homelessness	40%
10	Finding a job in my community	40%
10	Social & Recreational Opportunities for Seniors	40%

## YOUTH FEEDBACK

Since youth related issues were consistently identified among the most pressing and prevalent throughout the consultation process, we decided to consult youth throughout the community to obtain their input before finalizing the report. We consulted with grade 11 and 12 classes in Stratford, Mitchell and St. Marys and collated their responses with those from Listowel obtained at the beginning of the process.

### **Social and Recreational Needs**

All youth consulted indicated that lack of interesting things to do in their local communities was an issue. Some suggested that there were lots of things to do - just not things that youth are interested in. Others asserted that there was very little to do, period.

Several noted that as soon as they are old enough to drive, they drive out of town for social/recreational opportunities and entertainment. Suggestions regarding possible activities included events, dances, local shows. Integrated activities that would be appealing to both youth and adults would be a positive thing. Affordability of activities was an issue for some, so a range of affordable social/recreational opportunities throughout the County would be preferable.

Youth in Stratford and Mitchell indicated an awareness of the local youth centre, but a reluctance to go there. It was felt that a small group of youth used the facilities but that most were uncomfortable even walking by. In St. Marys, youth consulted indicated that youth centre programming and hours are targeted at younger youth (ages 11 & 12).

Suggestions for improvement included later evening programming, movies, a pool table.

There was a clear distinction among youth between organized sports activities and other social/recreational opportunities. They noted a solid arts community in Stratford but a decided lack of arts/recreational opportunities other than sports in smaller towns.

Feedback regarding recreational facilities and opportunities to participate in sports were mixed. Participating in organized sports was seen as positive by those who participate, however affordability and accessibility were major barriers to participation. More frequent opportunities to purchase second hand equipment could alleviate some of the affordability issues. It was also noted that there are few opportunities to participate in 'fun' leagues rather than at competitive levels. The dependence of minor sports on volunteers was also noted time and time again - both in terms of the dedication and commitment of the existing volunteer base and the need for more volunteers.

### **Drug and Alcohol Abuse**

Youth in all areas of the county acknowledged that drug and alcohol use is prevalent, especially on weekends. Some indicated that it is a real problem, others that suggested that simple experimentation is not necessarily indicative of a problem. Most agreed that drinking was a social activity of choice. They also noted that marijuana is as accessible to them as tobacco and many youth access alcohol in their parents' homes.

Some youth indicated that the concern for youth with Crystal Meth usage is exaggerated. They reported that the people in their community currently using the substance tend to be older (25 years and up), that youth tend to use marijuana. Others felt it was a serious issue among their peers. Youth suggested that programs to address alcohol and drug abuse might not be accessed by those who need them in smaller communities, expressing concern about privacy. They emphasized the importance of prevention programming for younger (pre-high school) children.

## Education

Youth demonstrated a clear understanding of the importance of post secondary education or training for future employability. They expressed concern for peers who had dropped out of high school, citing not only the loss of education, but the lost of structure, responsibility and the need to do something productive every day. They are frustrated with the high cost of further education and the lack of local opportunity for post secondary education.

Overcrowded classrooms and classes cancelled due to low numbers were sources of frustration. Public system students unable to get the classes they want locally expressed frustration that they were not allowed to access the separate school system busses to travel to Stratford to attend those classes at another school. Lack of school supplies (art, sports equipment, drama) was identified as important, particularly by students in smaller towns. School closures increase bussing time for rural students (affecting their ability to schedule homework, extra-curricular activities and part-time employment) as well as contributing to crowding. Funding formula differentials between the two boards of education were discussed related to these issues.

## Violence, Crime and Policing

Youth offered mixed reactions to concerns regarding violence and crime. Some of the Stratford youth consulted speculated that recent violence in the downtown core may be related to boredom/lack of positive things to do. Others indicated that youth appear to be unfairly targeted by police.

## Economic & Employment Issues

Most of the youth consulted were employed part time, many averaging 20 hours or more per week in addition to school. Reasons for employment ranged from earning spending money to saving for post secondary education to paying for basic needs/supporting themselves to live independently while finishing high school. Youth expressed frustration with the limited opportunities in smaller towns - both for part time employment as students and gainful employment as adults.

Youth in Stratford expressed mixed views about tourism, seeing the Festival as an important economic contributor to community well-being, but questioning the proportion and priority of municipal spending on flowers compared to social issues.

## Poverty

Youth indicated that poverty is a serious issue, one that is currently not being appropriately addressed by local or senior levels of government. Youth noted the 'invisibility' of poverty, and expressed concern about ensuring that services are available to those that truly need them. They noted that the availability of technology creates greater disparity between the 'haves' and 'have nots' in our community.

They noted the importance of integrating 'affordable housing' into the community at large, suggesting that the current model of social housing stigmatizes people who are already struggling. They also commented that some municipal policies and practices, such as refusal of severance requests, limits the stock of affordable housing.

## Youth Housing Needs & Homelessness

Participants noted that many of their peers don't currently live at home. Some manage to attend school while supporting themselves, others find themselves unable to do so because they need to work to pay the rent. Youth identified both bad choices and poor home environments as the primary reason some youth find themselves homeless. In some cases, it was felt that the youth themselves need to be more respectful of house-

- hold rules and learn to communicate their concerns in a more productive way to parents.
- In others, there was evidence of intolerable home situations, leaving youth with no choice but to leave home.

### **Transportation**

- Youth, particularly outside of Stratford, expressed frustration with the lack of transportation, although they also acknowledged the challenges inherent in providing affordable transportation for small numbers of people. Many had access to their own or family vehicles. Those who didn't indicated that the lack of transportation alternatives limited not only their social life but also their ability to get and maintain part time employment.
- Hitchhiking was a principal mode of transportation for several participants.

### **Volunteer Development / Community Organizations**

- Participants comments that volunteers are needed in every part of the community and expressed concern that not enough people make the time to volunteer. At the same time, many admitted that they only volunteer the mandatory 40 hours of community service, finding it difficult to contribute more as they balance school and work.
- Youth also expressed concern about the apparent competitiveness between community organizations - for both charitable dollars and volunteers. A more collaborative structure and equitable allocation of resources is required.

### **Environment**

- Participants expressed a great deal of interest in environmental issues. Concerns ranged from littering to global warming. Pesticide use was noted as a health and safety issue.
- Organic farming as an alternative to traditional agriculture was noted as a need.

### **Healthcare**

- Youth expressed frustration with both the lack of family physicians in their area and the wait times to access their services.

### **Respect, Inclusion and Communication**

- Youth felt that a lot of problems could be resolved by respect - youth treating others with respect and others treating youth with respect. Clearly communicating reasons decisions are made and including youth in decision-making processes are desirable.

### **Other**

- Youth suggested local workshops on depression/suicide, self-esteem, self-confidence, health and safety, emergency preparedness. Breakfast programs were also suggested.

***" During my years as a United Way volunteer I have seen how the organization is moving beyond the traditional role of fundraiser and increasingly becoming an organization to turn to for action and ideas. United Way is not only funding programs and services, we are engaging citizens. It is a very exciting time as a volunteer."***

DAVE CLARKE,  
PAST-PRESIDENT UNITED WAY  
OF PERTH COUNTY BOARD  
OF DIRECTORS

## *Feedback & Next Steps:* **PHASE III**

During the coming months, we will be returning to local communities to present and ask for feedback about this report. Together we will choose the issues that are to be tackled and identify the groups that need to come together to work on the issues at hand. Some of the responses may be County-wide in nature while others are specific to the community involved. The final results will be then forwarded to a variety of local, municipal, provincial, federal and not-for-profit policy and decision makers to ensure the collective voice of Perth County residents is heard.

The United Way of Perth County will examine and evaluate how we are focusing our resources in light of the concerns identified and expressed in this document and throughout the consultation. We will listen for change, to ensure that our actions respond to the needs identified by our community.

In addition, the results of this process will be combined with those of similar consultations conducted by 16 other small, rural United Ways across the province to form a final report which will be submitted to both the Ontario Trillium Foundation and the Government of Ontario."

## *Making Decisions - Affecting Change* **PHASE IV**

Residents have provided a compelling look at the issues facing their communities, and we look forward to working together to develop strategies that will address those concerns. We are excited about Phase IV and look forward to the positive changes that can take place as various organizations and funders embark upon resolutions for the issues identified and keep the needs of the citizens at the centre of the process.

# FEEDBACK

**I believe that the following issues/concerns could/should have been more thoroughly addressed in the Listening For Change: Community Priorities Report:**

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**I believe that the United Way of Perth County should:**

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**Optional**

- Please contact me if you would like further information about these issues/ideas.
- I would like to discuss these issues/ideas further.

*Please return completed form to:*

**United Way of Perth County**  
32 Erie Street, Stratford, Ontario N5A 2M4  
519.273.9350 [info@perthcounty.unitedway.ca](mailto:info@perthcounty.unitedway.ca)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

# APPENDICES

## NORTH PERTH / LISTOWEL SURVEY RESULTS (122 RESPONDENTS)

In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in the North Perth community are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	66%
2	Finding a job with benefits	61%
3	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	60%
4	Affordable Childcare	57%
5	Public Transportation	54%
6	Social & Recreational Opportunities for Youth	52%
7	Affordable Childcare	46%
7	Crime Prevention/Policing	46%
8	Drug/Alcohol Misuse by Adults	45%
9	Lifelong Learning Opportunities	43%
10	Volunteer Development	39%

Respondents from North Perth also indicated that finding a job with benefits (61%), lifelong learning opportunities (43%) were major issues for their families as well as the community at large. Funding priorities were identified as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth (activities, supports)	33%
2	Childcare	30%
3	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	27%
4	Health Care	21%
4	Recreation	21%
5	Employment/Better Paying Jobs	14%
5	Finding a Doctor	14%
6	Transportation	11%
7	Affordable Housing	9%
8	Children’s Programs	8%
8	Family Services	8%
8	Home Health Care	8%
8	Mental Health Supports	8%
8	Volunteer Development	8%
9	Abuse	6%
9	Crime Prevention/Policing	6%
10	Bullying/Safe School	5%
10	Counselling/Stress Management	5%
10	Education & Training	5%
10	Seniors Programs & Activities	5%

**PERTH SOUTH /ST. MARYS SURVEY RESULTS (80 RESPONDENTS)**

In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in the South Perth/St. Marys community are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	59%
2	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	52%
3	Affordable Housing	51%
4	Teen Pregnancy	48%
5	Affordable Dental Care	39%
5	Affordable Legal Services	39%
6	Extended Health Benefits/Affordable Medication	37%
6	Affordable Childcare	37%
7	Finding a Job in my Community	36%
7	Volunteer Development	36%
8	Public Transit	35%
9	Making Ends Meet	30%
10	Drug/Alcohol Misuse by Adults	28%

Respondents from Perth South/St Marys also indicated that finding a job with benefits (35%), was a major issue for their families as well as the community at large. Funding priorities were identified as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth Programs & Activities	33%
2	Affordable Housing	26%
2	Seniors Programs & Activities	26%
3	Transportation	22%
4	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	15%
4	Quality Education	15%
4	Employment Supports	15%
5	Children’s Programs	11%
5	Environmental Issues	11%
5	Recreation	11%
5	Doctors	11%
6	Health Care	7%
6	Home Health Care	7%
6	Mental Health Supports	7%
6	Poverty/Basic Needs	7%

## PERTH EAST SURVEY RESULTS (94 RESPONDENTS)

In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in the Perth East community are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	53%
2	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	49%
3	Affordable Housing	45%
4	Affordable Dental Care	44%
4	Childcare	44%
5	Public Transportation	43%
6	Drug/Alcohol Misuse by Adults	38%
7	Poverty	34%
8	Environment	33%
9	Finding a Job in my Community	32%
10	Crime Prevention/Policing	31%

Respondents from Perth East also indicated that affordable medication (35%), and school safety/bullying (35%) were major issues for their families as well as the community at large. Funding priorities were identified as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth Programs & Activities	28%
2	Affordable Housing	22%
3	Childcare	19%
3	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	19%
3	Home Health Care	19%
4	Environment	16%
5	Counselling	13%
5	Health Care	13%
5	Quality Education	13%
5	Seniors Programs & Activities	13%
6	Homelessness	9%
7	Crime Prevention	6%
7	Affordable Medication	6%
7	Specialized Health Care	6%
7	Finding a Doctor	6%
7	Poverty/Basic Needs	6%
7	Recreation	6%
7	Transportation	6%

## WEST PERTH SURVEY RESULTS (78 RESPONDENTS)

In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in the Perth East community are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	67%
1	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	67%
2	Childcare	56%
3	Home Health Care	52%
4	Affordable Housing	51%
4	Drug/Alcohol Misuse by Adults	51%
5	Crisis Counselling for Adults	50%
5	Addiction Counselling	50%
5	Finding a Job with Benefits	50%
5	Youth Programs & Activities	50%
6	Stress at Work	49%
7	Family Services/Counselling	48%
8	Environment	47%
9	Poverty	45%
9	Public Transportation	45%
10	Mental Health Services	44%
10	Finding a Job in My Community	44%
10	Day Programs for Seniors	44%
10	Child Abuse & Neglect	44%

Funding priorities were identified as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth Programs & Activities	47%
2	Employment Supports	24%
3	Poverty/Basic Needs	21%
4	Transportation	18%
5	Homelessness	16%
6	Affordable Housing	13%
7	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	11%
8	Children’s Programs	8%
8	Crime Prevention/Policing	8%
8	Environmental Issues	8%
8	Isolation	8%
8	Recreation	8%
9	Childcare	5%
9	Children’s Mental Health	5%
9	Home Health Care	5%
9	Volunteer Development	5%

## STRATFORD SURVEY RESULTS (207 RESPONDENTS)

In general, respondents reported more ‘major issues’ in their community than they did in their families. They indicated that the most pressing ‘major’ issues in Stratford are:

Rank	Issue	% Respondents identifying issue as ‘major’
1	Finding a doctor	67%
2	Affordable Housing	65%
3	Drug/Alcohol Use by Youth	55%
4	Child Abuse & Neglect	48%
5	Childcare	47%
5	Affordable Medication	47%
5	Poverty	47%
5	Drug/Alcohol Abuse by Adults	47%
6	School Safety/Bullying	46%
6	Environment	46%
7	Spousal Abuse	45%
8	Job Security	44%
8	Meeting Everyday Expenses	44%
9	Homelessness	41%
9	Quitting School before Graduation	41%
9	Crime Prevention/Policing	41%
9	Affordable Dental Care	41%
9	Crisis Counselling for Children	41%
10	Social/Recreational Opportunities for Youth	40%

Funding priorities were identified as follows:

Rank	Funding Priorities	% of Total Responses
1	Youth Programs & Activities	50%
1	Affordable Housing	50%
2	Poverty	34%
3	Drug/Alcohol Abuse	26%
4	Childcare	22%
4	Environmental Issues	22%
4	Finding a Doctor	22%
5	Health Care	21%
6	Abuse	19%
7	Recreation	16%
8	Education & Training	15%
8	Home Health Care	15%
9	Homelessness	14%
9	Children’s Programs	14%
10	Crime Prevention/Policing	13%

**United Way**  **of Perth County**

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