

# Prince Edward County's Vital Signs 2023 Report

## “Building Bridges of Inclusion”

Welcome to the 2023 presentation of Prince Edward County's Vital Signs. We are pleased to present this interim report “Building Bridges of Inclusion”, brought to you by The County Foundation.

Vital Signs is a nationwide initiative led by Community Foundations of Canada. Its purpose is to leverage local knowledge, measure the vitality of our communities, and support action towards improving our collective quality of life. Our Vital Signs data helps to guide donations and resources where they can best help our community thrive.

This year's Vital Signs theme focuses specifically on inclusion, belonging, and the challenges of urbanization and preserving our sense of community, which are significant underlying concerns at this time.

As The County Foundation continues its journey of understanding and taking meaningful actions towards diversity, inclusion, and Truth and Reconciliation, our hope is that this report sparks meaningful conversations in the community.

### Vital Signs data

Last year's Vital Signs report was grounded in the 2021 census data, encompassing nine vital aspects crucial to our community. These included community, economy, education, environment, food security, health, housing, safety, and transportation. Continual updates pertaining to these key areas are readily accessible in the Vital Signs data repository found at [PECdata.ca](http://PECdata.ca).

### Report Table of Contents

This report represents the convergence of data and human perspectives. It draws from statistical data and the insights of around 200 local stakeholders representing a diverse cross-section of our community. During the presentation, you will be introduced to the voices and insights of several residents.

During the live presentation, it may be beneficial to mention that, given the sensitive and personal nature of this year's topics, speaker interviews were pre-recorded as a considerate approach, rather than having them present in person.

The content includes:

- Vision for The County Foundation
- Accelerated rate of change
- Defining inclusive community
- Populations facing barriers to inclusion

- The role of social infrastructure
- The human need to connect
- Sponsors and Acknowledgements
- Community Resources
- Call to Action

The report is accessible online and provided in a condensed print format for accessibility.

## **Accelerated rate of change**

Despite the sentiment that "we're all in this together," nearly half of Canadians surveyed (47 percent) perceive their communities as more fractured than ever. While the pandemic offered a chance for reflection on equality and collective effort, 70 percent of those surveyed fear society has not learned valuable lessons from it.

Prince Edward County is not exempt from the influences contributing to this growing disconnect. The influx of new urban residents is straining the coexistence of our old and new traditions, potentially leaving long-time residents feeling their culture is fading and newcomers struggling to fit in.

The pandemic amplified these tensions and increased the pace of change, making it harder to preserve our County's unique character and sense of belonging.

Census data tells us that 6,200 new people moved to the County from 2016 to 2021, marking a 77% increase compared to the previous 5 years. Consequently, our community is grappling with new cultural influences, higher housing costs, and the gentrification of neighborhoods.

However, with a net change in our population of less than 1,000, we know that 5,200 people have left our community over this period, including many who could no longer manage the higher living costs.

## **Voice of Evan Nash, long-time resident, business owner, and volunteer**

The presentation highlights valuable insights gleaned from local residents concerning the themes of inclusion and belonging. While there is not time to delve into all of these during the presentation, this rich content is available in the online version of the report.

Among these voices is Evan Nash, a long-time resident, business owner, and volunteer. Evan reflects on the changes he's seen in the County and the inherent caring nature of this community.

(Evan Nash) For me, growing up, there was never a question of inclusion, and it was always if you showed up, you were welcome. You were welcome to join into things and what's happening now. People moving here, new residents, but also a wider diversity of people from different minority groups. There's a lot of new faces, and more diversity means more opportunity. It means more interesting people, interesting ways of doing things and broadens our horizons. There's a growing segment of the

population here that either feels left behind or just frozen out altogether, and that's not who we are and that's not what we stand for. At least it's not the Prince Edward County that I grew up in. We are grounded in being a really caring community, and we need to be conscious of the fact that sometimes that community can feel impenetrable from the outside for new residents or young people. Essentially, we as a community need to continue to do the work to be that community that I grew up in here that was so inclusive and make sure that we're opening up to new people and opening up to new ways of thinking and new ideas and just making sure that nobody's getting left behind or left out.

## **Defining inclusive community**

Accessibility Canada defines inclusive community as “welcoming to diverse groups of people, including seniors, youth, children, Indigenous peoples, immigrants and newcomers, gender diverse, persons with disabilities, people experiencing mental health challenges, and low-income populations.”

Inclusion is the active process of creating an environment that embraces everyone, while belonging represents the outcome – the feeling of being welcomed and integrated in a community.

With increased awareness and intentional efforts, we can help everyone to feel that they belong in this caring community.

## **Populations facing barriers to inclusion**

The following section elevates the voices of groups facing greater barriers in terms of inclusion.

- Persons living with disabilities
- Residents living on low-income
- Racial and ethnic minorities
- Gender and sexually diverse populations
- Youth

## **Persons living with disabilities**

Persons with disabilities often feel left out in society, struggling to access work, education, and to become part of the community.

About one in every five Canadians aged 15 and older (22% of the population) has a disability. In PEC, that's more than 5600 people. Disabilities become more common as people get older. For young people (15 to 24 years old), mental health-related disabilities are the most common type.

Efforts toward social inclusion and equity in PEC include becoming barrier-free, advocating for higher disability pensions, and seeking more provincial mental health funding.

## Residents living on low-income

In PEC, up to 3,500 residents (10.1% to 13.5%) are living on low income (less than \$36,000 a year after taxes). And PEC's median income lags behind Ontario by \$7500/year, adding to the hardship. People living on low income are faced not only with financial struggles, but often with housing insecurity, stigma and judgment.

The pandemic created a wider gap between those doing well and those struggling. In PEC the income gap below high and low incomes is even greater than in Ontario and Canada. Many programs and initiatives in PEC promote more equitable opportunities, including:

access to education upgrades; job connections; income tax and benefits screening; public transportation; financial relief grants; technology via the libraries; public spaces; free and low cost events; affordable housing; and advocacy for living wages and improved pensions.

In addition to these services, local organizations are collaborating on a "no wrong door" approach to assist residents in efficiently accessing services by navigating through the system.

Christine Durant of the Prince Edward Learning Centre discusses the challenges faced by low income residents and the programs designed to empower their them.

(Christine) There's a number of barriers, so I'd say one of the biggest ones right now is homelessness, and it really precludes people from being engaged in employment. We have a lot of people coming to the centre who are unhoused. We can refer them and connect them with community resources. There's Financial Empowerment program. How it started was with a free tax program for people at a certain income level or less. We also do benefit screening as well to see what other things out there people may be able to access. The return on investment is huge. That means millions of dollars coming back into the hands of people and access to benefits and health supports. The Inspire program is funded federally. It's a training and employment program for youth 15 to 30, really focused around sustainable livelihood approaches where employment, training, social support, and then our Literacy and essential Skills program is probably what we're best known for. We also have a food program, Prince Edward County Fresh Market. Basically fruits and vegetables at wholesale cost. Anyone can go to that market. So the market's been designed to remove any stigma of using the food program.

Technology can be a barrier. There's work here to support that. We have people coming in to develop more digital literacy as well. In the Inspire program, this youth employment program, there are people living in rural areas where there is no County Transit and they can't get to work. It's difficult for anybody to be able to buy a second-hand car and get the insurance or the cost of having a car. People with learning challenges want to finish their high school, but there's no programs. The curriculum that's available kind of precludes people with bigger learning challenges. We also, in the Inspire program, do workshops around soft skills, as does our Essential Skills program around managing anxiety and stress. In the Inspire program, we have wraparound funding, so we've been able to pay for people to access private counselors. We try to foster at the Learning Centre a common space approach where people feel welcomed. Here it's a multipronged approach to supporting people to be themselves, their best selves.

## Racial and ethnic minorities

PEC's population of BIPOC residents (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) has reached 6.3% (almost 1600 people). As the BIPOC community grows, so do reports of racist incidents in PEC.

And since the pandemic, globally antisemitism and hate crimes have increased, a stark reminder that words of hate led to the holocaust.

People who experience discrimination generally report having a weaker sense of belonging to the local community.

PEC is making strides toward embracing racial and cultural diversity. Examples include:

- All Welcome Here Rural BIPOC Association is focused on connecting residents to each other, to anti-racist education, and to pathways to local action.
- JEDII (Justice Equity Diversity Indigeneity Inclusion) program at Prince Edward Collegiate equips youth to challenge injustice and work toward a fairer world.
- Community events celebrate and create awareness about cultural diversity.
- Truth & Reconciliation initiatives continue with our neighbours, the Mohawks of the Bay of Quinte.
- And Community groups provide support for immigrants, minority racial and ethnic groups.

## Voice of Judith Burfoot, a BIPOC resident and founder of All Welcome Here Rural BIPOC Association

Judith shares her experiences as part of a minority population.

I founded All Welcome Here in 2018. The first purpose was to help BIPOC residents. So BIPOC is black, Indigenous, and or people of colour to help us connect with one another. And then COVID happened in 2020. And after the murder of George Floyd, I put together a Black Lives Matter demonstration that happened in Picton. And it was massive. Picton is a town of 4,000 people, and there were over 1,000 people on Picton Main Street. It's important, I think, always to remember that this is a 95% white community. So those are also the people that came out. And it was a really powerful evening. Honestly, it's probably one of the best things I've ever done in my life. And I've never been so proud to live here as I was on that day. And since that demonstration, I and Welcome Here have been going kind of full out. I think that people in this community realize we haven't been as inclusive as we like to think that we are. In 2022, we did a BIPOC residents survey and to talk about our experiences here in terms of racism. And the respondents responded that 73% had experienced racism. 68% of people also said that it was worse than from where they came from if they'd moved here. Probably the most impactful for a lot of people was youth. Of the students that we had responding, 100% of those youth reported being victims of racism in the school, called names, yelled at, pushed and spit on. And these are things that, to be clear, these are things that are happening to BIPOC students, 2SLGBTQIA+ students, to differently abled students, or students who are struggling with, say, learning disabilities. That's not something any of us should ignore. We all deserve to be included in our communities. We deserve to be part of our

communities. We want to be part of our communities. And I think most of us want all of those people to be included because I think that at heart here, people have kind of a different sensibility than people do in cities about all of us being in it together. So we're actively working to address those things. But it's a long haul.

## **Gender and sexually diverse populations**

Over the years, society has become more accepting and understanding of gender and sexual diversity. Younger people seem to be more at ease talking about their gender identity compared to older generations.

About 4% of Canadians aged 15 years and older identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or with a different sexual orientation than heterosexual. In PEC, that would be over 1,000 individuals.

Support and allyship locally is shown through:

- County Pride events; Rainbow registered businesses; DiscoverYOUth safe spaces and support network; and GSA gender & sexuality alliance at Prince Edward Collegiate.
- PECL has an Equity Committee and is a pilot K-12 school for equity committees, which will be rolled out across Ontario.
- More can be done, for example youth have asked for consistent access to sexual health education that is inclusive and relevant, and for mental health support from qualified professionals with lived experience.

## **Voice of Holly Baines Educator, Facilitator & Change Agent**

Holly Baines is an Educator, Facilitator & Change Agent whose teaching career at Wilfred Laurier University included courses in sociology, gender and sexuality. Holly reflects on feeling isolated as a member of the 2SLGBTQ+ community in a predominantly heterosexual society.

So, first off, I have over 20 years of lived experience as a queer woman who has identified variously as lesbian, as dyke, as queer over the years. What's important to think about in the context of isolation is that when the world feels really traditional, heteronormative, traditional mom, dad, and the kids, it can be very hard for people who are questioning. The term heteronormativity refers to norms. So the sort of rules and mores, the cultural beliefs that we operate by. And hetero refers to straightness. And so the man woman alignment, whether it be in coupledness or in marriage, but that's the only option that's out there. And also because it's the man woman alliance, those are the only two genders that are available out there. And so heteronormativity really reinforces a world without multiplicity of gender or sexuality. You have one sexuality, you have two genders. And so that in itself can be isolating. It can be really isolating to live your life inside of heteronormativity, even if you're not isolated from other people.

## Youth

Young people seek authentic involvement, not token gestures, in collaborative partnerships with adults. They aspire to have a say in shaping their future and actively contribute to turning their dreams into reality.

The Greater Than County Youth Collective comprises about 28 local organizations dedicated to actively supporting youth and enhancing their prospects, particularly those facing obstacles. A shared objective is to raise high school graduation rates, which continue to lag behind provincial averages. Among these organizations, theROC Youth Services provides free programs and services to nearly 400 youth. 70 percent of ROC youth report living in low-income neighbourhoods and 48 percent feel that theROC programming has directly impacted their community sense of belonging.

County youth who are involved in the local project “Communities Building Youth Futures” have defined their vision for an inclusive community ...

“Our dream community is a space where all members feel comfortable and live in harmony, a place to call ‘home.’ Our community encompasses all walks of life, welcomes new and old, and ensures resources and services reach those in need. Prince Edward County supports all of its partnerships, people, businesses and networks, which embody this village of amazing connections. By looking out for one another, exchanging favours, and listening to each other, PEC is going to continue to be a community where all youth dreams are recognized, and continue to grow and thrive through them.”

## The role of social infrastructure

The way we design public spaces and neighbourhoods can either help or hinder social interaction.

Social infrastructure includes places, services, programs, and networks that bring people together, such as parks, transportation, libraries, and public spaces. Well-planned infrastructure helps to create a sense of community.

Barrier-free design in the community means creating spaces that everyone can use, for example ramps for wheelchairs and strollers, signage in braille, and sensory friendly shopping hours ...

## Social infrastructure speakers

**Irene Harris of PEC’s Accessibility Advisory Committee Chair** discusses the ongoing work toward becoming a barrier-free community, and the role of public services in providing equitable access.

(Irene) We're very much an advisory committee only. We make recommendations to Council about anything to do with accessibility and how to make the County an accessible place to be. Now, the root of this is from an act, a piece of legislation in Ontario called the Accessibility for Ontarians with the Disability Act. That act requires all municipalities, anyone with more than 10,000 in population, to have

an advisory committee to Council. They're saying that all municipalities have to be accessible by 2025. That's two years from now.

One example I'll give you is site planning. So let's say a developer wants to come along and develop a piece of property. The Planning Act actually requires, and the Ontario Disabilities Act, would say that councils should use their accessibility advisory committees to look at those site plans for accessibility questions. Do they have enough disabled parking spots? Are there walkways plans so that people can get to the building if they have walkers or wheelchairs? That kind of thing? So that's an example of one item that we would look at. Public spaces is another example. Say Picton Main Street, if you're walking down Picton Main Street, you now see outdoor patios. So one question that comes up is, if you were using a walker or wheelchair or you had seeing disabilities, would you be able to maneuver the sidewalks around these patios that we have? If not, what kinds of recommendations should council consider to take into account accessibility issues? So that's really the purpose of the committee, in my view. We don't make decisions, we recommend to council.

Now, when we look at disabilities and accessibility, at the end of last year, Council actually added a new term of reference to the Accessibility Advisory Committee. And what they've asked the committee to look at as part of its mandate is social inclusion. How are people left out? Poverty? What does the effect of poverty have on people's ability to access all services and programs in the County? What about community wellness generally? There's a lot of ways that I think people are excluded. And I'm going to make a pitch here and show a bent for public services in everything we do, because I think that public services are an equalizer. Think about if you didn't have libraries, people would have to buy their own books or they wouldn't have access to them. That public service has opened a whole world to people for Internet, for reading, for programs, and children's programs. Other public services, like roads. Think of parks. If you didn't have public parks and you didn't get to use open space unless you owned it. Healthcare is another example. Public health care, that access. It says, I have access to care whether I'm rich or I'm poor or anything. Public education, what a gem to think that we have public schools that you can just send your kids to. If you didn't have that, if you couldn't afford tutors or private schools, your kids wouldn't get educated and we would have an uneducated population. Can you imagine how horrible that would be? So I think that will be an interesting discussion because it's going to broaden what we mean by how is the county accessible or not accessible for people. And I think as we go through the County, there's work being done to make things more accessible, and that's good. So one wonderful example of accessibility in the County that's taken place, people should notice on the Millennium Trail, there's a lot of people that are using it for walking, for hiking, for riding their bikes. And the County and the Trails Committee have put in a station, a starting point for the trail. It's at White Chapel Road in Picton, where White Chapel Road meets Highway 49, just south of the golf course. And what they put in there is a wonderful parking lot with spaces, accessible parking spaces. They then have a lovely gazebo with a picnic table that is an accessible picnic table. So when you slide, you can slide into it without hitting any bars under your feet. So it's perfect. But what they've also done is put in an outhouse that is an accessible washroom, basically, so that a wheelchair could roll into that outhouse, or if you had a walker. So I think the Trails Committee and the County worked hard on getting this done. They put a lot of thought into it, and it's fabulous. So I'd encourage everyone to check it out if they can.

I would say to anyone listening to this, if you are going through Prince Edward County, stop sometimes and think, now I'm going to go to this bookstore, I'm going to go into this restaurant. If I had eyesight problems, are there enough ramps that have the colours in them that help people see their way? Are



there ramps for people with wheelchairs or walkers? Could they get into this location? If there's any County services, any parkland, would someone with a wheelchair be able to use this park? And if you see examples where there's not accessibility, I think what's really critical is for people to flag it with Council flag the issue, say, here's an example of accessibility that doesn't exist. I think we have to start to do that more and more.

**Barbara Sweet of PEC Library** describes the role of libraries as an inclusive space in the community.

I think that one of the really important features of public libraries is the fact that it is completely free and open to everyone. There is no other public entity that offers that same access. At the County of Prince Edward Public Library, it's very important to us that we try to offer something for everyone in the community because we want everyone in the community to have that exposure and to benefit from the services that we can provide. I think that that has become increasingly important post-COVID. People's habits have changed. Some have become more insular. For a healthy community, you need that engagement. We run our infant and toddler programs. We move on to preschool. We have school visits. We have teen programs, for example, have our youth group that is for LGBTQ youth. And of course, we have ongoing programs that will engage people, like author visits, demonstrations, conversational, French, the things that people express an interest in. My hope is that this facility in its new enhanced state will really open up doors in the community. And our hope is that we will get a lot of new people through the front door and that those new people will give us input and tell us what they want from the public library in the community. It's our goal to provide it if we possibly can.

## **The human need to connect**

The human need to connect with others is just as basic as needing food and water. We're wired to connect, and being alone can affect us mentally and physically. The impact of loneliness is associated with an increased risk of heart disease, depression, and cognitive decline, and according to recent studies, is comparable to smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness is now considered a public health issue.

In PEC, about 27% of households (one in four) have just one person living in them. That's around 3,055 people living alone, which can lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation. In our rural area, isolation can happen because of living alone, distance, lack of transportation, health problems, loss of social connections, technology gaps, financial constraints, exclusion, and not knowing about opportunities.

What's being done: Addressing the risk of social isolation involves multiple initiatives, such as public transportation, volunteer drivers, active living programs for seniors, wellness checks, meal deliveries, youth programs with transportation support, and events/programs with cost-flexible options. Additionally, a Connections Directory aids in locating communities of interest, activities, and volunteer roles.

This quote by Shannon Alder is fitting: "One of the most important things you can do on this earth is to let people know they are not alone."

## The human need to connect – speakers

**Laura McGugan of PEC Community Care for Seniors** discusses “Aging in Place” and Community Care programs and services that counteract social isolation for seniors.

PEC has a large senior population, with over a third of our residents being age 65+; this compares to about 18% of seniors at the provincial and national levels. Nearly one-third of older Canadians are at risk of being socially isolated.

(Laura) We've always known that senior isolation is a problem, and especially in a rural community too, you have to look at that where not everybody has neighbors and making connections is really important. And we're seeing more too, that because of the housing situation and the economy, so many families now are having to leave the County because they can't afford to stay in the County. So now caregivers, sons and daughters, granddaughters, they don't get to stay local and so they don't have that family connection as well. And also recently, because senior isolation has been brought to the forefront, especially because of COVID and what happened in long term care homes and families not being able to see each other, there have been studies now done that isolation is just as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. You need to be moving, you need to be active, you need to be connected.

When the municipality was working on the age friendly communities, that was a part of bringing the community together, because if you're designing a community for seniors, then it's meant for everybody. One of the ways that came from the Age friendly communities was the fact that in the County, because it's so large geographically, not everybody wants to come into Picton. So how do we provide activities for people who live in Ameliasburg, North Marysburg? They all have town halls. So as part of that project, we started offering programming in the various town halls so that they stayed within their community.

Right now we currently have over 50 activities that seniors can do a month, whether it's virtual or in person, so lots of options. And of course, when COVID did hit in 2020, we immediately figured out a way to switch all of our programming to virtual so that we could provide programs. And it was great because seniors were really receptive to trying to learn zoom and learn their computers to get connected. One of the things we also did during COVID was we partnered with the libraries. We were provided with ten tablets and we worked with the libraries, and we still do, where seniors can call the library and say, I would like to borrow a tablet. They also have the Turbo stick. If someone has Internet issues or doesn't have the Internet, the staff at the library teach them how to use it. So it's given people the opportunity to attend some of the events we provide virtually if they don't have access to a computer, and also connect with family and friends because it has the basic apps to be able to connect with family so that they can visit. And so that was another way we addressed the social isolation, is the sense of trying to have seniors become more comfortable with technology. We do our best to have capacity for everyone. We have over 3000 seniors in our database that we serve.

We also operate a volunteer driving program. And in a rural community, transportation is so important. When someone loses their license or has to make the decision to give it up because of the aging process, it's very much a challenge and can immediately make a person feel more isolated. So our volunteer transportation program priority is medical. And then we look at essential shopping, like grocery shopping, going to the bank and getting prescriptions. And what seniors really like about our program is

that it's one to one. But for some people who are dealing with some health struggles, having that one to one can be really nice. So whether it's using our program or using Quinte Access or the County Specialized Transit, it allows people to get to be where they want to be.

At Community Care for Seniors, volunteering is so important. We need volunteers to offer any of our programs. And we know that volunteering, volunteer studies have shown, and we've known it for a long time, live happier, healthier, longer lives. And that's another way to address socialization among seniors within the County. And we work with seniors. If they want to work within their community, we can arrange for them to do volunteer activities within their community. Whether it still means they want to work from home but can be connected by making phone calls, or they want to get out and maybe work at the thrift shop or want to deliver meals and have a brief visit with multiple seniors along the way. So lots of different activities. We have a great partnership with the Family Health Team and we have said if you are concerned or the client you're visiting says I'm isolated, I want to make connections, there's a new thing called social prescribing. We say refer for volunteering.

Sometimes what also contributes to social isolation is the fear of reaching out for help. And we always say that reaching out for help is a sign of strength, not a weakness. Because we know there's stigma about asking for help, not being able to do things anymore, or having to admit that you can't do things anymore. Community Care for Seniors vision is we believe in the freedom of dignity of choice, the comfort of home, and a passion for volunteers. So we know so many years want to live at home. Nothing wrong for asking for help, for advocating for yourself, so that you can have the comfort and dignity to stay in your home, to have the life that you would like to have as you age, as you age in place.

### **Julie Watson, Executive Director of Alternatives for Women**

Julie Watson, representing Alternatives for Women, sheds light on the isolation that often envelops women in abusive relationships. Alternatives for Women in Prince Edward County provides education, awareness, safe and confidential support services. In Canada, one woman each week is killed by her male partner and those numbers continue to rise. Canada lags behind other countries in its response to male violence against women and girls.

(Julie) The organization has been in Prince Edward County for 35 years now. We're a nonprofit that offers programs and services to women who are experiencing or fleeing intimate partner violence. Abusers use control to socially isolate the individual so that they lose any form of support. The world becomes very small and when a woman is isolated, she is less likely to feel she can seek help or have any resources to do that. Oftentimes she's isolated from her friends, her family, any sort of support that she maybe originally would have sought. There are a lot of specifics on how abusers can control access to communication. Checking the woman's phone, her email, her social media, limiting access to all of those things, like even not allowing the woman to have her own phone. So she's forced to communicate through his phone or through the landline which he can access. It can be escalating over time in terms of your family and friend support by criticizing the woman's friends and family, getting angry when she spends time with them until she no longer does so because it's not worth the blow-up that she's going to experience for doing that. And then even just controlling woman's movements, wanting to know where

she is at all times, limiting her access to transportation, checking the gas and mileage on the car, calling her, asking where she is. You can download the where are you apps on your phone so you can monitor movements, limiting her financial means so that if she wants to take a cab somewhere, she's unable to do that because she doesn't have money. So there are so many specific ways where they can control communication. And the support networks that a woman might otherwise have obviously has huge negative impacts. Social isolation is lonely, can lead to or contribute to other mental health issues. Often with women who are in intimate partner violent situations, the abuser often makes them feel like no one will care about them. So that can turn inward to feelings of worthlessness, very low self esteem, very low confidence. And even often when women come to us, that is one huge thing that we are constantly working on with them because that runs deep and that has been probably ingrained in them for a very long time. Without their support networks, with literally just one person in your life controlling everything and telling you every day how terrible you are, that socialization can lead to very low self worth. One thing that I would say is that if someone's trying to control your movements, who you see, what you do, if you're afraid to do something because of your partner, how will they react, what they'll think, then that is a big red flag for an abusive relationship. There are so many women who have experienced social isolation because of abusive relationships, especially during COVID. That was such an issue for women who couldn't leave. Partners were at home, everyone's at home, socially isolated together.

So I just would tell them there's help available. Our crisis lines are open 24 hours. We want to hear from you. We can share our resources. We can share support. We can also come up with ideas for women to socialize with others while remaining safe if she's still in that abusive relationship. For example we can use things like doctors appointments as reasons to come into the community and engage with others. We do safety planning around code phrases to communicate with others, to let them know he's at home right now, or I can meet you in an hour, that kind of thing. We can come up with creative ways to make sure you're safe and you're also engaging with people. Alternatives for Women offers safe and confidential support services for victims of domestic abuse.

Alternatives for Women confidential crisis line is available 24 hours a day, every day. The number is 613-476-2787. Or for more information, visit [online@alternativesforwomen.org](mailto:online@alternativesforwomen.org).

## **The human need to connect – speakers**

**The Reverend Aaron Miechkota, minister of Cressy Glenora United Church** and a new resident in 2021, reflects on her experiences integrating into the community.

(Aaron) I moved in the middle of COVID so at first it was really lonely, but when COVID started lifting, I just was really intentional about getting out to meet other human beings in the flesh. I joined the department of Illumination. They have an embroidery group that happens throughout the month of February, which was just perfect because I found the winter months were really challenging because there weren't a lot of things happening and there's lots of people there that are looking to hang out, meet some people. And also in February there was the Flashback February, so it just kind of gave me something to do and people to meet and just sort of be out there and learn about PEC. And then also I

started accepting invitations. There was the Greater Than County Youth and I thought that sounds like something I would believe in and I bet there's nice adults there. I found kind of a group of adults who had laid down their picnic blankets and I just asked if I could sit with them and ended up chatting, which was really nice. And then I also looked up all of the free or low cost community events. Another thing that I have been involved in is the Thrive Book Club. It's people who have a similar mindset to me. It also kind of takes us around the County, which has been really interesting because then as a solo person, I probably wouldn't go to a restaurant on my own. I've made connections with my colleagues, so what I've been doing is going to other churches. I get to see different communities around PEC and also make deeper bonds with my colleagues. I just love visiting the grocery store, especially when I was new, because they would talk to me. They just have this wonderful way that made me feel really welcome. Having that circle of friendly acquaintances is what makes PEC so lovely to live in after two years, and I have to say, like, a lot of getting myself out there, I do feel like I have a little community forming.

**Katy McIntyre, Thrive PEC community activator,** invites you to participate in shaping the future of our community. Join Thrive in meaningful and focused community conversations to safely share diverse perspectives.

(Katy) Thrive Prince Edward County, is about collaboratively creating a revitalized vision for community and economic development. Here in Prince Edward County, we really encourage everyone who wants to get involved at every level of your strength. There's a place for you in Prince Edward County, and Thrive is one of the community networks that you can help find your place. We're very soon having action groups about some of the issues that the community has identified as its top priorities. And we need community supporters, community actors, community champions. If you can connect us to a great idea or a great support resource, or even if you want to follow along, stay involved with Thrive. You can find us everywhere at [Thrivepec.ca](http://Thrivepec.ca) or Thrive PEC on all social media. And this community needs you. It needs everybody. Because we've got an exciting next ten years and we need to make sure that we're all represented in the future of Prince Edward County.

### **Call to Action: We're all in this together**

This poignant poem by Damien Barr reminds us of the diverse experiences within our shared journey.

We are NOT all in the same "BOAT"

We are in the same "STORM"

Some have yachts

Some have canoes

And some are "DROWNING"

Just be kind and HELP when you can

Building bridges of inclusion is eloquently summarized by Reverend Aaron Miechkota.

(Aaron) I gave it some thought on what does inclusivity mean to me or what is inclusivity. I came down to two ways of understanding inclusivity. So in inclusivity, concrete factors that make sure people are welcome and invited and included are things like removing barriers to inclusion. So some barriers to inclusion could be things like a wheelchair ramp, not just steps. There could be cost barriers. For example, is there an event in a public space that costs more than \$25? That's getting quite expensive for most folks. Are we only advertising on the Internet? Not everyone has a computer. Not everyone has technology skills.

Our planning of our communities, are we creating spaces where people live, where it's only high income housing and only low income housing? When you create ghettos, you create not just economic situations, but also social factors, cultural, political situations and lifestyle situations in both of those places that make it difficult for people to integrate and to know each other and to build community. That is a healthy balance of all members of society. So those are the kind of concrete factors that we can actually control through personal choice and awareness, but also through public policy.

Those things are inspired by a kind of inclusive heart space, a mindset of recognizing and appreciating the personal and social value of integrated spaces. There are gifts in each pocket of society. Each group and each person has gifts that they can share and give in learning to other members who aren't in that little pocket of society. And aren't we all the better for it? It's better that we're together, it's safer, it's more sustainable, it's more nourishing. It's a better investment of our time, our energy and our financial resources when we invest in the common good because more people are better for longer. If only we can move ourselves towards that direction of really valuing inclusivity, I think that would just be so beautiful.

## **Community Resources**

If you see your circumstances reflected in this report, the Community Resources Directory may help to connect you with valuable support and assistance.

Select the link below to access the directory, which lists support services such as education, health, employment, financial, food, shelter, safety, legal, transportation and more.

<https://vitalsigns.thecountyfoundation.ca/community-resources/>

## **Call to Action**

Together we can build a more inclusive community, a welcoming environment where everyone belongs!

You may ask ... "But what can I do, I am just one person" as echoed by 26,000 Prince Edward County residents.

Each of us has the power to make a difference by ...

DISPLAYING KINDNESS - small actions hold significant impact.

RAISING AWARENESS by sharing this report.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY - it strengthens us collectively.

CONNECTING, particularly with those facing isolation or personal challenges.

ENGAGING in shaping our community's destiny.

CONTRIBUTING to a current fund that supports Vital Signs priorities.

CREATING A FUND or making a bequest.

To delve deeper into any of the PEC Vital Signs themes, explore the comprehensive resources online at [PECdata.ca](http://PECdata.ca).

## Vision for The County Foundation

The County Foundation's vision is "working together to build a place where everyone belongs and all can thrive."

The Foundation is one of 201 community foundations across Canada, providing leadership and funding for community-well-being initiatives. There are 3 main roles:

- Our community grants program has successfully channeled over \$6.1 million in funding to various initiatives within our community since the Foundation's inception in 2008.
- Vital Signs data and reports inform decision-making related to community well-being, and
- Collaborative Action supports positive, community-led action. Our contributions have surpassed \$2.2 million to support these projects.

## Sponsors & Acknowledgements

We would like to express our appreciation to all those who have supported bringing this report to life.

### Sponsors

To our Vital Signs sponsors, who make it possible to produce the Vital Signs data and reports.

Prince Edward County municipality, Wilkinson & Company Accountants, Base 31 / PEC Partners, Connor Clark & Lunn Foundation, and Community Foundations of Canada

### Acknowledgements

To the individuals and community organizations who gave generously of their time and knowledge, and to the Vital Signs Review Team that provided feedback and insights during the process.

The comprehensive list of acknowledgments is available online with the report.

## **The County Foundation**

Picton, Ontario

Website [info@thecountyfoundation.ca](mailto:info@thecountyfoundation.ca)

With gratitude, we acknowledge that The County Foundation office is located on the traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee peoples.

You are invited to provide feedback about this report, which assists us in enhancing our reports and delivering valuable information to the community. The short survey is online at.

<https://thecountyfoundation.ca/ninja-forms/45agmj/>

Your voice matters; please share your perspectives!