



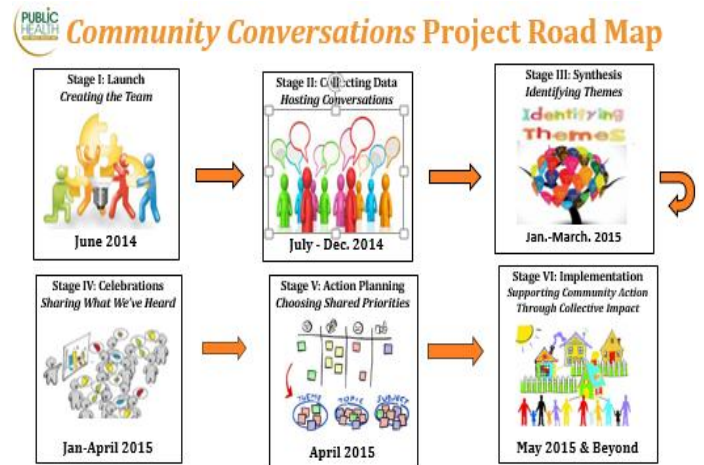
Grey Bruce 2014-15 Community Conversations Project Highlights

Why A Community Conversations Project?

In the spring of 2014, Grey Bruce Public Health began a partnership with the Tamarack Institute to launch a Community Conversations Project. This project creates an opportunity to think and act differently together: recognizing that no one sector, working alone, can effectively address complex community issues.

The goals of this project were:

1. To reveal and strengthen community connections;
2. To increase community engagement;
3. To build consensus on opportunities for shared action; and
4. To nurture diverse community leadership.

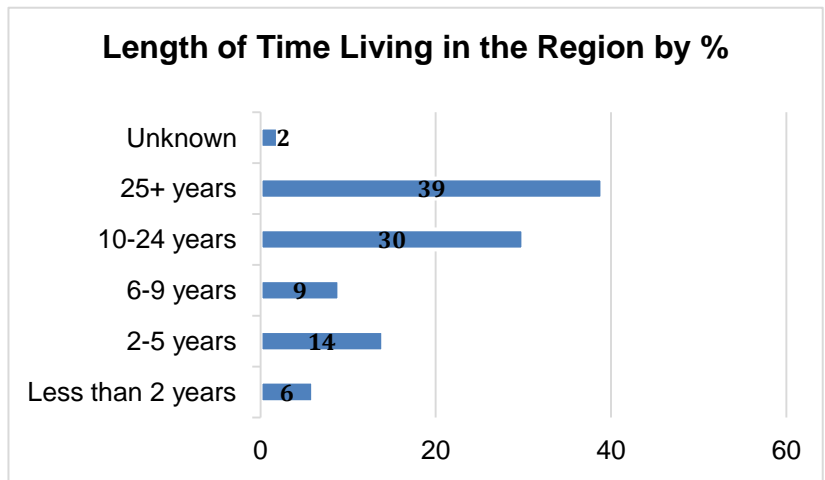
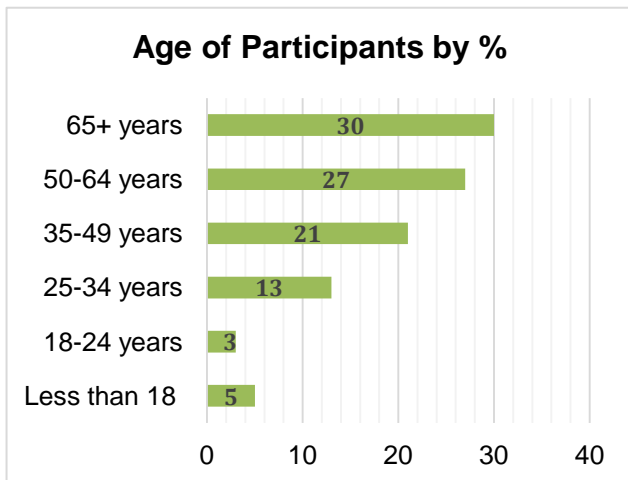


As part of a national Community Conversation campaign with the Tamarack Institute, a team of Public Health staff hosted a series of conversations with different groups across the region over a period of six months. These conversations explored: the meaning of community; community strengths; challenges; future hopes; and, priorities for shared action. Highlights from this process are shared here and through a series of six local celebrations hosted in the spring of 2015.

Who Did We Hear From?

A total of **47** different Community Conversations were hosted across the region. These conversations:

- Involved a total of **407** individuals
- 72% of participants were female and 27% were male
- **10 Sectors/Perspectives were engaged** (People with disabilities, youth, faith communities, citizens' groups, seniors, non-profits, municipalities, new moms/young families, business sector/local economy, arts and culture)



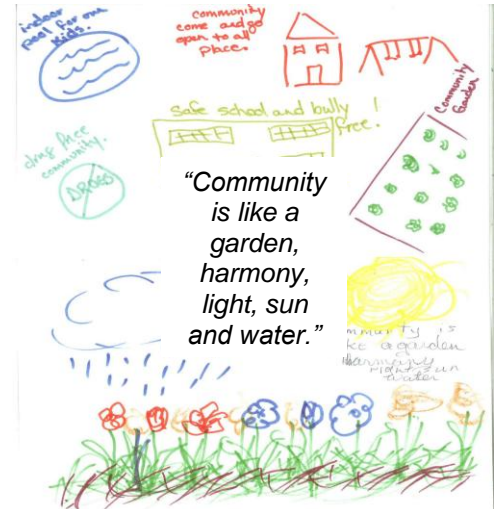
What Did We Learn?

Each conversation began by inviting participants to remember a time when they felt a strong sense of community and to share those stories with one another. Common themes were generated from these experiences and were used to help define community.

What Is Community?

Participants described community in a variety of different ways. These included:

- **A Physical Space** – parks, trails, beaches, public spaces, natural features
- **A Gathering of People** – family, friends, neighbours, a common voice or identity
- **An Activity** – getting things done, working together, raising children, infrastructure, volunteering, caring for each other, having fun
- **A Describing Word** – safety, belonging, caring and being cared for, diversity, multi-generational, inclusion/exclusion
- **A Purpose or Benefit** – a healthy social and economic climate, mutual support, new ideas, honouring history and traditions.



The Challenges & Benefits of Community

Participants recognized the following as “benefits of community”:

- **Reciprocity:** Giving and receiving from others; “helping each other in times of difficulty”
- **A Sense of Trust:** Friendship and support; knowing neighbours...and who needs help; watching out for each other
- **The Whole is Greater:** Together we are stronger and can do more; infrastructure; public services etc.
- **Working Towards Common Goals:** Working together towards mutual aims and goals.

The following were identified by participants as “challenges of community”:

- **Lack of Privacy:** Rumours, gossip, everyone knowing each other’s business
- **Lack of Common Sense:** Sometimes “common sense” isn’t so common
- **Too Few Engaged:** How do we “sew new seeds” and attract new volunteers?
- **Lack of Empathy:** Being willing/able to think beyond your own experiences

Strengths of Grey Bruce Communities

- Community festivals and celebrations
- Green space and natural environment
- Caring for one another
- Willingness to help each other
- “Small Town” friendliness
- Community groups and networks
- Interfaith and church community
- Collaboration amongst community agencies and services
- Vibrant arts, music and theatre

Participant Quotes

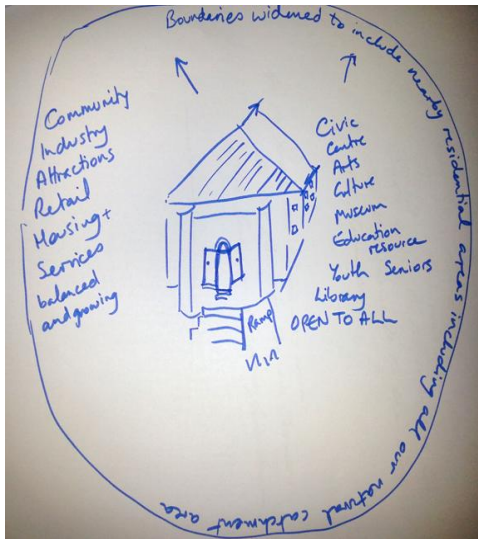
Community is... “Dedicated people from different backgrounds committed to improve our community.”

“Friends go in different directions but community, whether large or small, works together for a common goal.”

“A community acts like a mirror

Challenges Facing Grey Bruce Communities and Opportunities for Shared Action

The following challenges/opportunities for shared action were identified by participants:



- **Local Economic Development** –growth and prosperity, stable jobs, vibrant downtowns
- **Affordable Housing** – safe, accessible, affordable housing options for all
- **Enhanced Local Resources/Services** – coordinated services, community hubs, education and training opportunities, high-speed internet, public transportation
- **Youth Retention** –recreation, education, employment, sense of belonging
- **Attracting Young Families** –communities that are welcoming to young families, employment, recreation and services
- **Increased Social & Leisure Opportunities** – activities for all ages, trails and parks, theatre and arts, festivals and celebrations, cultural opportunities

Opportunities for Shared Action: THE HOW

Improve Communication: How can we keep citizens informed and involved in projects and opportunities?

Enhance Community Connection: How do we value and support formal and informal opportunities to connect with each other?

Increase Citizen Engagement/Leadership: How can citizens participate and contribute to creating our shared vision?

Greater Collaboration: How do citizens, governments and sectors learn to work better together on shared community opportunities?

What Can You Do to Build Community?

- Focus on what is possible
- Notice and celebrate positive progress
- Be friendly and help make connections
- Offer enthusiasm and encouragement
- Be willing and able to participate
- Ask for what you need and contribute what you can



Participant Quotes

“Good community takes work and participation.”

“Gratitude to be living among such creative, intelligent, caring people”

“Strengthening connections is important.”

How have Conversations Changed Participants' Perceptions?

Participant perceptions were assessed both before and after having participated in a Community Conversation to determine what, if any, changes may have occurred. Here are the results:

Question	Average Score Before Gathering (from 1-5)	Average Score After Gathering (from 1-5)	Percentage Change
How connected do you feel to the people in this gathering?	3.7	4.1	↑ 11%
How aware are you of the different experiences & perspectives of people in this gathering?	3.2	3.9	↑ 22%
How interested are you in working together to strengthen your community?	4.2	4.4	↑ 5%

9 out of 10 participants indicated they were interested in working together to strengthen community after being part of a Community Conversation.

Community Gatherings

A series of 6 community conversation gathering events were held across Grey Bruce. These celebration events aimed to:

- Connect people to each other
- Share highlights from the **Community Conversations Project**
- Offer training in community engagement and how to contribute to positive community change.



Thanks!

Thank-you to the residents of Grey Bruce who participated in these conversations, shared their thoughts and ideas and helped us reconnect to the power and possibility of community.

The Community Conversations Project Team

Lynda Bumstead
Karen Croker
Jason Wepler
Sarah Milne

Amber Schieck
Staci Ollerton
Sylvia Cheuy, Tamarack Institute

Project Sponsors:



Learn more at: www.seekingcommunity.ca