

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS



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| the first conversation.

Acknowledgement of the Territories

We acknowledge that Oakville lies on the traditional territories of the Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Anishinaabe. We recognize that these lands include Treaties 14 and 22 with the Mississaugas of the Credit. We also acknowledge the many First Nations, Metis and Inuit people who now call our Town home.

The Foundation is proud to convene the Oakville Partnership on Truth and Reconciliation and work with community partners committed to implementing the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. We are thankful for the guidance of the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation and the many Indigenous knowledge keepers and community leaders who have shared their knowledge on this reconciliation journey.



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CONVERSATIONS

Methodology

25 Community Conversations is a community engagement project in commemoration of The Oakville Community Foundation's 25th Anniversary. As we celebrate our first 25 years, we wanted to learn how Oakville could foster more belonging and inclusiveness over the next 25 years.

This initiative builds on The Foundation's 2016 Belonging Survey. From this research we learned that many residents connect to our Town through formal associations like faith groups to shared interest groups, like the environment to more activity based clubs, like the arts and sports. We wanted to gain more insights and ideas on what can be done to build greater belonging across our community from this network of existing organizations.

With the support from our partners at the Oakville Public Library, The Foundation launched 25 Community Conversations in April 2019.

From May 1st to August 23rd, 2019, a series of 25 conversations were held across Oakville. With the combined participation of over 330 community members, the 25 groups consisted of people from every age, ethnicity and



330 Community Members

postal code. Some participants have lived in Oakville their whole lives, while others were newcomers to Canada.

The groups covered a variety of topics including spaces and places of inclusion and exclusion, safety, social trends, available supports and services, and finally the groups one BIG belonging idea.

How Did We Connect With Groups?

25 Community Conversations began with an outreach to more than 50 community groups inviting them to participate. The invitations were sent to groups who represented a broad cross section of the population by demographic, shared interest or activity. No group was declined participation.

How We Helped Them Host A Conversation

The Foundation created toolkits, one for facilitators and one for participants, to help everyone engage with the conversation. The discussion guides included tools for stimulating conversations and were supported by a dedicated Foundation team member who helped groups facilitate their conversations.

The Foundation also provided each group with a grocery gift card so they could pick their menu and entice their members to participate. As George Eliot once quipped "no one can be wise on an empty stomach." From coffee and cookies to samosas and soft drinks, our groups provided a wide assortment of freshments to stimulate the conversation.

Common Themes

Prevalent themes in the discussions included a desire for more community connection, and a need for more accessible and inclusive community spaces. Another emerging theme was the importance of bridging the equity gap in order to reduce stigma and cultivate deeper social connections

within the community. Participating groups did not shy away from many of the difficult issues facing our community. And, other groups just wanted to have fun!

We are very thankful for all the host groups and community members who contributed to the discussions.

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How to read this report

Similar to our 2017 Belonging Report, we have classified the Big Belonging ideas from the 25 community groups into five colour coded categories for easy reference:

-  1. Place
-  2. Community Connection
-  3. Social Connection
-  4. Safety
-  5. Pride & Identity

Each category represents a particular focus the community group feels would be the most impactful in improving their sense of belonging.



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Groups & Big Belonging Ideas

1. **Members for the Oakville Partnership for Truth & Reconciliation,** *Indigenous Knowledge Centre*
2. **Finding Hope,** *Community Garden*
3. **Food For Life,** *Addiction & Mental Health Centre*
4. **Oakville Chinese Network Society,** *Multi-Cultural Centre*
5. **St. Jude's Anglican Church,** *Housing Developments for Low Income/Homeless*
6. **North Oakville Youth Development Council,** *Love My Hood*
7. **Halton Environmental Network,** *Oakville Action Plan*
8. **Sheridan College Bruins Toastmasters,** *Annual Celebration and Welcome Event for Oakville Newcomers*
9. **Oakville Improv,** *theaudience.org*
10. **Golden Briar Trail Community,** *Sports & Recreation Fundraiser*
11. **Oakvillegreen,** *Environmental Education and Action Sessions for New Canadians*
12. **The Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton,** *Youth Mentors*
13. **Explore Dreams,** *Friendship Program*
14. **Halton Youth Disability Council,** *Teen/Adult Group Nights*
15. **Silicon Halton,** *Oakville "Play Days"*
16. **Sir John Colborne Recreation Centre,** *Senior Network*
17. **Acclaim Health,** *"Safe-Space" Dance*
18. **Positive Space Network,** *Positive Space Centre*
19. **CNIB- EnVision,** *Oakville Awareness Plan*
20. **STRIDE,** *Wellness House*
21. **ConnecTions,** *Oakville Pride Day*
22. **Silicon Halton,** *Multi-Cultural Celebration Day*
23. **Seniors Life Enhancement Centre,** *Senior's Day*
24. **YMCA of Oakville Youth General Meeting,** *Youth Leaders*
25. **Project Autism,** *ABILITY Programming*

Place: Feeling safe in public and private spaces enables us to feel connected and welcomed in our social networks and the larger community. The ideas in this category call for the creation of places where members feel welcome, safe, comfortable and provide resources the groups feel the community is lacking.

1 **Members of the Oakville Partnership on Truth & Reconciliation**
Idea: Bring an Indigenous Knowledge Centre to Oakville

Members of the Oakville Partnership on Truth & Reconciliation, a group that includes representation from Oakville organizations are committed to implementing the Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Belonging Matters

The Anishinaabe concept of “Mitakuye-Oyasin” meaning “All My Relations” is literally: “We are all related or All are related”. We are all of creation, we are all brothers and sisters. We are all connected, to the universe, to the world to each other.

Big Belonging Idea

An Indigenous Knowledge Centre in Halton would provide a loving environment where Indigenous teachings and ceremonies can be shared for the healing of all our relations. Our vision is that all people in Halton will be able to gather with a circle of Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and others to share traditional Indigenous Knowledge and teachings while taking part in ceremonies that can help strengthen the bodies, emotions, minds, and spirits to support the Indigenous identity of our people, families, and communities.

**AN EXCERPT FROM
 CHIEF R. STACEY
 LAFORME’S
 BOOK OF POEMS:**

**“LIVING IN
 THE TALL
 GRASS”**

Sacred Trust

*We are the keepers of this land
 She shelters and sustains us
 Long after the flesh fails the spirit
 We will care for these lands
 Our drums will be heard upon the winds
 Our voices in the rustle of the leaves
 My people have a sacred trust with the land
 A trust no man may break, a trust that death cannot sever
 We were here when you first stepped foot upon this land
 And here we will remain long after the last step has
 disturbed her soil.*

2 **Finding Hope**
Idea: A Community Garden with Fresh Produce

Finding Hope is a group that meets every Wednesday morning at the Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre. The group supports, cares for and encourages people living in poverty. The environment is safe and welcoming, providing opportunities for individuals to share their struggles, pain, joys and sorrows.

Belonging Matters:

Finding Hope would like to see more initiatives to eliminate loneliness and isolation, and continued work to better bridge the inequality gap. Finding Hope believes everyone should have a chance to feel

heard, understood and supported within Oakville no matter where they come from.

Big Belonging Idea:

A Community Garden would allow those in need to receive fresh produce, but would also act as a community space to bring people together. Food from the garden would also be donated to local organizations, with greater priority being given to those who have more need, such as single mothers, those who live in poverty, and newcomers.

3 **Food For Life**
Idea: An Addiction & Mental Health Centre in Oakville

Food For Life is the biggest food recovery organization in Halton Region, which brings fresh and nutritious food to those in need.

Belonging Matters:

Food For Life provides an important service to those who are living in poverty and isolation, by using food as a tool for social inclusion while also building essential nourishment. Food insecurity is a very real fear for people in some areas of Oakville, and there are additional concerns with new developments and the potential closing of grocery stores which are accessible in the Oak Park area. How can someone feel that they belong in a community that does not have the resources to feed them? Food programs should be viewed as a priority for Oakville, as they increase

a sense of not only belonging, but also support over all well-being and mental health.

Big Belonging Idea:

Along with providing nourishment for the body, understanding and providing resources for addiction and mental health are important aspects when building a sense of belonging for everyone in our community. Some members of the group were recovering addicts but had to travel outside of Oakville in order to seek help. They want local mental health centres that are accessible and are available for any kind of help. Having a Centre where these issues can be addressed is an important step in creating belonging for those who often have to leave Oakville for help in other communities.



4

Oakville Chinese Network Society

Idea: A Multi-Cultural Centre

The Oakville Chinese Network (OCN) Society is a volunteer-run, non-religious, non-political, non-profit organization working with social and public services to be the voice of the Chinese community, promote Chinese traditional culture and participate in multi-cultural and social activities.

Belonging Matters:

OCN believes that Oakville should provide more resources and supports for Newcomers to the Town, with a particular emphasis on those who are looking to give back and build social connections. Members agreed that there should be more opportunities for those who do not speak English to be able to volunteer; especially seniors as they have the time and knowledge available to give back.

Senior newcomers often have trouble accessing ways to get involved due to the language barrier and also struggle the most with isolation.

Big Belonging Idea:

A Multi-Cultural Centre would eliminate some of the exclusion issues the group currently faces. It also would give members the opportunity to share what they love most, their culture. A Centre would allow OCN members to volunteer, learn about other cultures, share their knowledge, and run programs and classes for the greater population of Oakville.

5

St. Jude's Anglican Church

Idea: Housing Developments for Low-Income and Homeless People

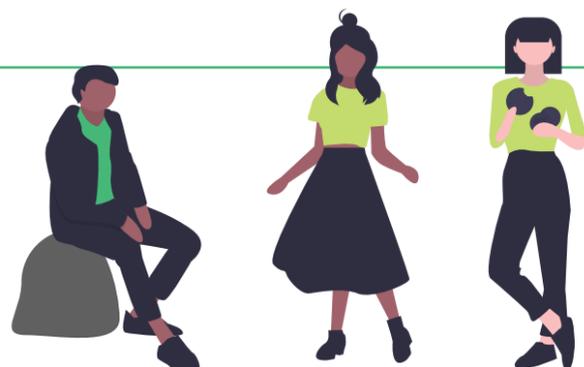
St. Jude's Anglican Church is a vibrant community which seeks to provide opportunities for people of all ages to learn more about what it means to be a Christian in our society and to respond, as a caring fellowship of Christian people, to the needs of others in the parish and beyond.

Belonging Matters:

St. Jude's offers a variety of events and spaces that are available to other community organizations. The group expressed a desire for better advertising of their offerings, as this could help to build community connection but may also attract new people to their Church.

Big Belonging Idea:

The group expressed concern when it comes to the cost of renting and living in Oakville. In order to better accommodate people of all needs, the group would like to build housing to better address homelessness and affordability for low-income families. St. Jude's suggested local groups (including the community at St. Jude's) develop partnerships with other local organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity to make this idea a reality.



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Community Connection: Having a sense of engagement and connection with our community is important to feel like we belong here. The ideas in this category come from participants who wanted to have more ways to become engaged and involved community members and would like increased interactions with the Oakville community as a whole.

6

North Oakville Youth Development Council

Idea: Introduce Love My Hood Program

The North Oakville Youth Developmental Council (NOYDC) is a council made up of youth ages 12-17 years old, and adult allies from various organizations in the community. NOYDC believes that strengthening relationships between youth and adults in North Oakville will help to build youth assets and increase positive youth development.

Belonging Matters:

NOYDC believes that youth voices matter, and that the Oakville community should play a more active role by taking youth voices and perspectives into account. In preparation for 25 Community Conversations, NOYDC conducted a survey in which, twenty youth who were not council members participated. After receiving the responses, the results showed that 85% of youth were interested in organizing their own events. The sample ideas they provided ranged from arts-based gatherings to environmental initiatives.

However, they all had one thing in common; they all supported inclusivity within our community and

aimed to provide spaces that allowed people to grow. The survey proved that youth are actively interested in contributing to the Oakville community, and would like an opportunity to do so.

Big Belonging Idea:

Inspired by initiatives based in Burlington and Kitchener, Love My Hood is a program that would build community connection through local events. Potential events are submitted to a panel in the community, who then decide what events would best bring the community together.

Applications would come in from youth or others for youth-led events and projects, and then NOYDC as a council, will decide on what groups will better build a sense of youth "Belonging" in the community. It's an initiative that will benefit everyone, as it allows the youth to have their voices heard, but also inspires others to feel like they belong by attending the events.

"By engaging and contributing you 'belong' and can make a difference as an individual and collectively with other residents."

Ann Mulvale, Co-Founder

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7

Halton Environmental Network

Idea: Oakville Action Plan

Halton Environmental Network (HEN) is a non-profit organization that supports and enhances the capacity for local climate action and environmental sustainability across our community.

Belonging Matters:

HEN members agreed that getting everyone in Oakville involved in environmental initiatives would benefit all. The group felt that Oakville has a unique advantage, and has the opportunity to be a catalyst for change and a role model for other communities. Having everyone involved and contributing to the well-being of the Oakville environment not only improves Oakville for the better, but it also allows for citizens to build a network and a greater sense of belonging.

Big Belonging Idea:

HEN proposes an annual action plan, in which Oakville's major agencies and community members will meet and pick an issue. For the entire year, local agencies and community members will campaign and engage in continuous action around that issue. The Oakville Action Plan would cover a variety of topics, such as climate change or banning single-use plastics. At the end of each year there will be a networking event where active agencies will come together and focus on how they could further move the issue forward, and plan next-steps for the future.

8

Sheridan College Bruins ToastMaster's

Idea: Annual Celebration and Welcome Event for Oakville Newcomers

Sheridan College Bruins Toastmasters is part of an international organization with more than 332,000 members in 135 countries. The Sheridan Bruins Toastmasters Club has a membership of all International Students.

Belonging Matters:

The Club believes Oakville should provide spaces and places that Newcomers can go where they feel welcome and can feel like they can actively contribute to the Oakville community. Participants felt that they lacked a connection to the community, as they lack awareness of what is happening outside of Sheridan College. Attending college is difficult, but being an International student has different challenges. They feel it is important for newcomers to feel just as much a part of the Oakville community as long-time

residents.

Big Belonging Idea:

The participants agreed that the main barrier they have encountered is a distinct divide between those who have grown-up in Oakville, and those who are newcomers to Oakville. They feel since Oakville is diverse (in culture, tradition and community) it would be beneficial to introduce new residents to the community. This program will not only allow new residents to feel more welcome, but can bridge the divide between new-comers and long-time residents. The group also suggested that there be an annual celebration that all newcomers could attend as well as community members in order to welcome everyone and cultivate a deeper social connection



9

Oakville Improv

Idea: Telling Local Stories Through Art

Oakville Improv offers the highest standard training in improvisation, taught by professionals in the field. Oakville Improv is committed to developing and promoting improvisation as an art form, and working on new styles of performance.

Belonging Matters:

Oakville Improv is the perfect way to bring people together, as it differs from other major improv hubs, due to the nature of those who attend classes. Family come out, and parents and kids perform together. Oakville Improv offers drop in classes and promotes that all members of the community can attend.

Big Belonging Idea:

Oakville Improv believes the best way to reflect the uniqueness of the Town of Oakville is with the use of art (titles of shows reference Oakville, content is

Oakville based, people from Oakville, stories from Oakville, etc.) Since art is so pivotal to belonging, the group initially wanted to build a group of people that would support local shows and have a central place to see what's around, what they can support as audience members and how everyone can help collaborate with advertising, reviews and shout outs. This became: theaudience.org and would consist of interested audience members that attends local arts shows in Oakville. It would provide a consistent audience base for all performance groups, but would also create a group that can talk about and celebrate local arts together.

10

Golden Briar Trail Community

Idea: Sports & Recreation Fundraiser

The Golden Briar Trail Group is a local group that was created with the support of the Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre whose members live at the Golden Briar Trail social complex, as well as other interested members in the local community.

Belonging Matters:

Their key goal is, as the group stated, *"advocates are needed to represent different needs. For example, who better to talk about drugs than a drug addict, or who better to talk about poverty than someone who was raised in it and is still living in it."*

Members agreed that a key issue is additional supports and programs to help those in need. All members have goals, ideas, dreams and many feel these are out of reach due to their mental health, addic-

tions, lack of self worth or because of where they live. They would like to change this cycle for the future.

Big Belonging Idea:

This group would like to give their children better opportunities to thrive in the Oakville community and beyond. They suggested a major sports and recreation fundraiser at the beginning of each year in Oakville to give children and teens who come from low income families a chance to participate in recreational activities, with an emphasis on rep sports. Rep sports are too expensive for many to afford and often gifted athletes who live in low-income families lose out on opportunities. Getting more youth involved in recreational activities helps build belonging, but also allows a chance to break down the barriers which often accompany poverty.

11

Oakvillegreen

Idea: Environmental Education and Action Sessions for New Canadians

Oakvillegreen (OCA) is a not-for profit environmental organization, whose focus is “protecting and restoring nature where you live”. Oakvillegreen’s programs engage citizens in action that promote environmental good practices and helps them to get outside and take action locally to help Mother Earth.

Belonging Matters:

Over the years, Oakvillegreen has noticed that many newcomers seek them out to understand more about Canada. Learning about the natural environment where you live, is a huge step forward in getting settled in a new country. Many new Canadians do not know what a robin or a monarch butterfly is, or how to recognize a maple tree, and are thrilled to be able to learn the basics about the natural environment in Oakville. Through programming by OCA, New Canadians are both literally and metaphorically, able to plant new roots in their community. OCA’s interpretive tree walks and tours get all age groups outside to explore natural spaces. Additionally, after experiencing OCA’s interpretive tours, newcomers have

expressed gratitude for helping them to feel safe and secure in natural settings, something Canadian’s take for granted. In their home countries with civil unrest, natural spaces are often viewed as unsafe.

Big Belonging Idea:

Oakvillegreen would like to educate as many new Canadians and expand their newcomer programming to provide education and action sessions in all languages. Through OCA’s outdoor and stewardship activities (like tree plantings, invasive species removals, garbage clean ups), new Canadians can understand, learn and appreciate our environment while taking actions to improve those areas- as well as increasing their sense of belonging. Increasing awareness also showcases Oakville’s natural assets and illustrates the challenges that Oakville faces as a growing urban community. New Canadian’s cannot be expected to save what they don’t know, and OCA’s programming reinforces the importance of stewardship.



Melissa facilitated the Acclaim Health Conversation Pg. 16

Featured Facilitator: Melissa Cameron, Acclaim Health

Melissa Cameron, Director of Development and Marketing, is passionate about community-building initiatives. She shares that their conversation, “was interesting when we started because we had those icebreaker questions where everyone discussed how they were connected to Oakville. There were people who have lived here their whole lives or those who had come here recently. But it was interesting what came out- both groups had things they would like to change. I was surprised that they all said they disliked the divide between old Oakville and New Oakville, and they want the opportunity to bring the two together, but no one really knows how.”

Social Connection: Becoming closer with members of our community is a positive way to foster inclusivity and sustainability. The ideas in this category are ones that will create a sense of belonging for those in Oakville who may be socially isolated and in need of a social circle to feel connected.

12

Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton

Idea: Youth Mentors

The Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton (CCAH) is a charity which promotes awareness that unity in diversity, full and active participation, unbiased inclusion, and the capacity to value differences equally are essential to the social, cultural, and economic growth of Halton Region. Membership is open to anyone who shares and supports the objectives of the organization.

Belonging Matters:

CCAH offers resources and programming that have a particular emphasis on black youth and other minorities in Halton who may be struggling or looking for a place to fit in. CCAH runs the “Inspire the Leaders of Tomorrow” program with the Halton Regional Police. In this program, youth ages 12 to 18 are invited to

participate in Youth Leadership in Action workshops which use various art forms to explore the topics of cultural identity, conflict resolution, time management, and goal setting.

Big Belonging Idea:

CCAH would like to broaden their engagement with vulnerable Black community members. A new program to achieve this goal would give members identified as vulnerable, the opportunity to experience positive role models, and connect them to proper supports and resources. This program will create better citizens within Oakville, and provide participants a sense of belonging, and an appreciation for those who live here.



Ruth facilitated the EnVision Conversation Pg. 17

Featured Facilitator: Ruth Sheridan

An active community member, Ruth has never let her visual impairment hold her back and wants to see a community that is safe and accessible for everyone, regardless of their ability. “Commonalities are what bring people together. Lots of teenagers are struggling with mental health- but so are isolated seniors. And that’s just one example. We need to look at partnerships we may not have thought of before.”

13 Explore Dreams
Idea: Friendship Program

Explore Dreams is a community project between The Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre and The Community Oak Park, a parent-led collective who have adult children with developmental disabilities. To gather the perspectives of these adults they use art-based inquiry methods for adults with developmental disabilities.

Belonging Matters:

Patience and creativity are needed when engaging people with unique needs. It's a missing element that requires addressing because many people with various types of disabilities are lonely, isolated and depressed. Explore Dreams members require a variety of communications methods to suit their needs, rather than society norms.

Big Belonging Idea:

Explore Dreams participants explained that they have a great need for human contact. They want

to participate in worthwhile initiatives, such as on-the-job training opportunities so they can feel useful and are making significant contributions to the community, while also earning a living. They have a need for real and meaningful connections that are not paid relationships, such as support workers. For example, one participant said that he wants people who are willing to help him learn how to take public transportation because they care about him, not because they are obligated to. Participants believe a Friendship Program would be beneficial as participants would be able to build relationships outside their immediate families and support workers. The Friendship Program would also be paired with willing employers who would provide work experience, and further support for participants of the program.

14 Halton Youth Disability Council
Idea: Teen/Adult Group Nights

The Halton Youth Advisory Council (HYDC) is a group of young people of all abilities, between the ages of 14-29 who believe that they can make a difference in our communities. HYDC's goal is to empower young people to have a voice, to influence, to encourage participation, build awareness and acceptance. HYDC believes that individually, we each have something important to offer and from the group we can learn and grow, creating positive change that will benefit everyone around us.

Belonging Matters:

HYDC is passionate about sharing needs for better accommodations in Oakville, as people with disabilities still face many barriers. For those with handicaps, Oakville needs further work when it comes to accommodating everyone who lives here. Oakville is in need of additional ramps, visual signs explaining

rules and regulations, increased accessible buildings, sensory tool boxes, and more!

Big Belonging Idea:

With so many barriers, HYDC believes that having somewhere to belong to is vitally important to members of this group. Although many teen and youth programs exist in Oakville, young people with disabilities who attend feel like they are not always able to be themselves. When they have attended these programs, they are often stared at, unable to connect, and even spoken about behind their backs and ridiculed for being different by peers. Hosting an all ability program night for teens and young adults will bring these isolated members of the community together in a safe and welcoming space.

15 Silicon Halton
Idea: Oakville "Play Days"

Silicon Halton is a grassroots, industry-led, technology focused community of Freelancers, Solopreneurs, Entrepreneurs, IT Professionals, and Students committed to technology, community and growth.

Belonging Matters:

The members of Silicon Halton agreed that they feel very fortunate to live in Oakville, and had no urgent issues facing their group at the present time. However, participants would like to see a greater understanding and more support for the urgent issues facing other people and community groups within Oakville. The group feels that low-income, disabled and minority groups should take priority and feel that there should be an ongoing focus and dialogue when it comes to belonging discussions in the future.

Big Belonging Idea:

Silicon Halton members made it clear how vital physical activity is, and provides increased benefits when it comes to mental health, and believes a community that is physically healthy will also be mentally healthy. The group recognized that exercise is a luxury that not everyone can afford or access. The group said they feel best, and most mentally healthy when they are exercising. The group proposed a town-wide activity day, where everyone had the ability to exercise, no matter their ability. In order for maximum participation, the Town could offer access to public transport to take them to these activity hubs. Eventually Silicon Halton hopes that Play Days could increase in frequency- allowing everyone in Oakville to be mentally and physically healthy.

16 Sir John Colborne Recreation Centre
Idea: Senior Network

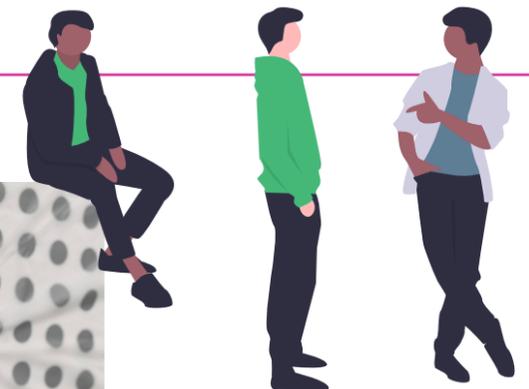
Sir John Colborne Recreation Centre offers a wide variety of social, recreational, health and wellness activities for Oakville seniors close to Coronation Park in Bronte. It's mission is to provide a welcoming, accessible and supportive environment for everyone.

Belonging Matters:

Participants stated that seniors love to come to events to talk and spend time with other people, regardless of the activity. The group would like programs offered in Oakville to be more available and accessible to those who need human contact. All seniors should have the opportunity to attend events and programs in the community so that they can build a "family" of support and care.

Big Belonging Idea:

Sir John Colborne participants agreed that ageing can be extremely isolating, with many seniors finding it difficult to access service and communicate their needs. A Senior Network would be a way to combat isolation, and help seniors to access the services they need. Through the network, seniors can seek out other seniors for help and friendship. Some seniors who are more capable than others are able to offer strong support, and check up on people in the Senior's Network.



Safety: Feeling safe is a state of being, and an important factor associated with belonging in our community. Having a safe space allows community members to lay down roots and develop a sense of security. Ideas in this category allow all members to feel secure within our community.

17

Acclaim Health

Idea: “Safe-Space” Dance

Acclaim Health offers a full spectrum of programs that support physical and mental well-being through independent living, reduced social isolation, innovative dementia care, end of life care and bereavement support.

Belonging Matters:

Acclaim Health participants agreed that belonging is all about inclusion. Improved accessibility to services and community social events would greatly benefit those who are suffering from old-age diseases. Too many people in Oakville are waiting for care and support, and wait lists are long. The participants of this conversation believes that Acclaim Health should broaden their reach within the community, as Oakville’s senior population is increasing. Currently, Acclaim Health lacks the capacity and resources to meet the demands of the growing population of seniors. The members of the group would like to see

more informal social events hosted all over Town, creating an overall awareness and commitment to helping the older members of our community as they age.

Big Belonging Idea:

Along with opening more social events, community social events are needed that are “safe spaces” for older adults, particularly people with physical disabilities or cognitive impairments (such as dementia). We all still want to meet new people and have fun with friends – regardless of our age or our abilities. Smaller scale community events that address the needs of older adults would help address the risk of social isolation and increase feelings of belonging. The group suggested a 60’s style-dance, where seniors could relive the music of their youth but in an accessible and safe environment.

18

Positive Space Network

Idea: Positive Space Centre

Positive Space Network (PSN) believes that through education, visibility, awareness, and supportive programming, diverse LGBTQ+ youth, individuals, and families can live in a welcoming and supportive community. PSN works in the Halton Region providing LGBTQ+ youth and trans specific programming.

Belonging Matters:

Belonging and safety go hand in hand, and for the LGBTQ+ community, Oakville doesn’t always feel like the safest place to be. Members would like to see more education and resources surrounding LGBTQ+ people available in Oakville. PSN members agree there is still a degree of prejudice against the LGBTQ+

community, and this weakens their connection to our community. Open-minded and educated community members lead to an overall safer environment, and LGBTQ+ can feel safe and that they belong.

Big Belonging Idea:

Along with resources, LGBTQ+ people feel that they would benefit from a designated Drop In Centre. At the centre they could meet other people and allies, and receive additional support services. The drop-in centre could also act as a resource centre for parents and families of LGBTQ+ people, as well as offering information sessions for those who are seeking more knowledge.

19

CNIB - EnVision

Idea: Oakville Awareness Plan

EnVision Oakville, a program of CNIB, is working to provide support for those who may be feeling depressed, angry or alone when experiencing a loss of sight. With EnVision these feelings can turn to confidence, independence, and joy as old skills are rediscovered and new skills are developed. EnVision’s peer support groups bring together people with sight loss from all walks of life to connect through their shared experiences and stories.

Belonging Matters:

The EnVision group has noticed a changing environment in Oakville- it is growing busier and feels much less safe, especially to those who are visually-impaired. The group would like to live in a Town where basic everyday tasks such as shopping or banking can be conducted safely. The group agreed that long-term it would be nice to see more safe zones with reduced or no car traffic. Short-term

there is a need for better traffic control and better enforcement of traffic violations.

Big Belonging Idea:

EnVision’ idea is to create an Awareness Plan. Ideally when Oakville is Googled, the searcher would see an Accessibility Awareness and Safety Mission Statement. This statement would share the vision (no pun intended!) of our community and include wide sidewalks with audible crossings, pedestrian zones, accessible malls and businesses as well as trails and recreational areas. The statement would be followed by a list of the best accessible locations and services. Additionally, increased communication with Town contacts will enable us to work together and find solutions to achieve the Town’s accessibility goals.

20

STRIDE

Idea: Wellness House

STRIDE (Supported Training & Rehabilitation in Diverse Environments) is a non-profit, charitable, community based vocational rehabilitation program founded in 1983. STRIDE is the only Halton-based organization whose primary purpose is to serve the employment needs of individuals facing mental health and addiction issues.

Belonging Matters:

Participants agreed that the community should have an improved approach when it comes to acknowledging that all walks of life are present in Oakville, and all have different struggles with mental health and addiction. Mental health and addiction affect the rich, poor, different races, and genders. In the future, everyone in Oakville should be

working together in order to create a community of acceptance and understanding.

Big Belonging Idea:

Their idea is a Wellness House, which acts as a safe space where people can stay, and are able to receive programs and services. Having a Wellness House in Oakville will ensure that those who are struggling with mental health and addiction are able to get the resources they need. Wellness houses would be connected to additional programming and facilities if not offered locally. A Wellness House would aid those in need and engage community members to become more accepting of with these types of spaces in the community.



Pride & Identity: Oakville is a diverse place, and a sense of belonging where you live also enhances your sense of pride and identity. Those who experience discrimination and prejudice are among those who will have a weaker sense of belonging. The ideas in this category are all about increasing cultural identities and giving a voice to those who often feel unheard.

21 **ConnecTions, a program of Positive Space Network**
Idea: Oakville Pride Day

ConnecTions is a program run by the Positive Space Network, and is a specialized social group for trans and gender-diverse children, youth & their families/ caregivers.

Belonging Matters:

Members of ConnecTions would like to see more awareness and understanding for transgender people within Oakville. ConnecTions would like to build safer and more accommodating places in the community, which are more understanding of the specific needs of trans people. This could include spaces with gender neutral bathrooms, specialized resources and support, as well as signs marked as “trans-positive” businesses. Overall, trans people

would like to view all areas of Oakville as welcome spaces, where the intersectional needs of individuals are validated and recognized.

Big Belonging Idea:

Pride in who you are is a very important piece of belonging. Having a community that has pride for who you are is the ultimate way to bring people together. Having a Pride Day in Oakville would allow LGBTQ+ to build a healthy, accepting and positive environment. Having acceptance and inclusion where you live allows for members of the community to thrive.

22 **Silicon Halton**
Idea: Multi-Cultural Celebration Day

This group was put together with the support of Silicon Halton. The group consisted of entrepreneurs within the Oakville community.

Belonging Matters:

The entrepreneurs of the group were tired of Oakville being a “bedroom community” just a place to sleep, and no connection to their community. To combat this, some are starting their own businesses. This allows a shift to providing more connection to the community where they live. The group suggested there should be a better way for entrepreneurs and commuters to feel a community connection, whether that be through events or networking sessions, where they can build attachments locally.

Big Belonging Idea:

After much discussion on how to build a better linkage for commuters and entrepreneurs- the group agreed that outside of work, they all love to share and learn about various cultures. Oakville has a diverse population but the group noticed that on the whole, cultural groups within Oakville stay fairly separate. In a community that offers such diversity within its population, everyone should have an opportunity to share and experience different cultures. The day could be set up at a community centre or downtown including live performances and sharing of food. All cultures welcome!

23 **Seniors Life Enhancement Centres**
Idea: Senior’s Day

The Seniors Life Enhancement Centres (SLEC) provides social and recreational activities in a safe, stimulating and encouraging environment. The programs offered by SLEC provide assistance with maintaining the highest possible degree of independence and enhanced quality of life.

Belonging Matters:

Seniors represent a growing portion of the Oakville population, SLEC is working hard to provide caring service to those in need. SLEC offers a safe space for seniors, and allows caregivers some respite and peace of mind. These programs are pivotal as

they also allow clients a chance to socialize and experience time away from home.

Big Belonging Idea:

Their idea is to host a Senior’s Day in Oakville. This community-wide event could be hosted at local community hubs such as the library, recreation centres or malls. Senior’s Day would allow Oakville’s senior population a chance to be appreciated by their local community. Hubs across the community would host specialized events catered to seniors that would be safe, accessible and properly equipped.

24 **YMCA of Oakville Youth General Meeting**
Idea: Youth Leaders

The YMCA Youth General Meeting provides opportunities for youth voice, engagement initiatives, development of skills & talents, and community advocacy. This event is an opportunity for young people to network, learn from each other, advocate for issues that matter to them, and highlight the work that the community is doing to support young people.

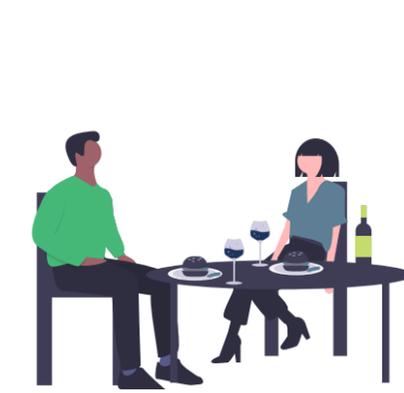
Belonging Matters:

YMCA youth would like to have their voices heard, and build a sense of two-way communication between themselves and the Town. They agreed it is especially important to make sure youth are receiving information and education when it comes to government, and decision-making that affects them.

The youth want to make sure that they are educated voters and contributing to society, but also that Oakville has a vested interest in them as well.

Big Belonging Idea:

As the voice of the future, the youth would like the opportunity to represent and make decisions for their future. The group agreed that youth in Oakville have valuable opinions that are often overlooked. The group would like to see representation through young leaders who are actively engaged and present, and willing to engage, whether that be answering questions on social media or holding youth-centred meetings.



25

Project Autism

Idea: ABILITY Programming

Project Autism was created in 2013, by families who have members with autism that were disconnected, struggling to find connections - social opportunities, resources, sports and educational programs that were both inclusive and organic. The group has addressed these needs including enclosed parks, signage for drivers, and the growing concern of suicide within the Autism community.

Belonging Matters:

Project Autism offers the ability to share the needs and wants of people diagnosed with Autism (and their families) and in turn, gives a voice to those who are not always heard. Project Autism strives to build a sustainable community that will have a direct long-term positive impact on people with Autism and their families.

Big Belonging Idea:

ABILITY programming would offer specific focus groups, taught by people who have unique abilities, whether that program be sports, learning, or special interest groups. For example, art taught by instructors with Autism, instructors that will understand the importance of adding the element of individual needs and modifications. ABILITY programming is all about inclusivity, and building a better understanding. Opening the program up to families without disabilities so that they can learn and be included is another way to build a larger understanding in our community.



Marcus facilitated the Oakville Pride Day Conversation Pg. 18

Featured Facilitator: Marcus Logan

Marcus Logan, Manager of Community Information, Oakville Public Library, believes these conversations are the first-step in creating a more accepting and open community for LGBTQ+ people *"I think any conversation about belonging brings people back together. Everyone loves living in Oakville, that's why we're here, but people shouldn't have to hide pieces of who they are. Everywhere in Oakville should be a safe space for people to live, work and exist. We also need to focus on intersectionality on how we can reconcile these spaces."*



Judith facilitated the Project Autism Conversation Pg. 18

Featured Facilitator: Judith Elaine

Judith is a dedicated and passionate individual, the leader for Project Autism and for the Halton Youth Disability Council. *"I learned that people are extremely vulnerable. And you never realize how isolated people with disabilities truly are. They are so lonely. Children with disabilities do not have a place where they can really fit in. It's very hard to belong in a place where you feel different. Belonging is wonderful, but it's hard if you're classified from the get go. These kids need the opportunity just to be kids."*

"In order to make Oakville a truly great place to live, belonging really means helping everyone feel fully engaged in the community and civic life in Oakville. So they feel pride and responsibility and connectedness for their community."

Lisa Helsdon, Founding Family



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
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In Summary

Inclusion and Belonging have been explored in every Vital Report The Foundation has published. Producing these reports guides The Foundation's focus on how to best support our community, and has resulted in The Foundation producing new initiatives to build belonging, including:



Be Long
Oakville

A Free Open-doors community day, every spring break

YOUTH IN PHILANTHROPY

The Foundation's Youth In Philanthropy program introduces Oakville High school students to local philanthropy and giving.



Community
Classroom

A free local arts, culture, environment and heritage program provided to every elementary school student in Oakville. The Foundation funds local organizations and cultural institutions to provide the programming free to all students.

Current "Like-Minded" Big Belonging Ideas

There is growing awareness of the diversity of people who live within the Oakville community. Each group has a set of unique needs, and with that, a growing desire for more representation and inclusion. Many local agencies have recognized these opportunities for change, and many of them are already working to support initiatives similar to the Big Belonging ideas listed in this report.

- Community-wide Play Days: check out BeLong Oakville, Family Day activities, Tim Horton Skate programs, and the Oakville Children's Festival.
- Multicultural Celebration Days: celebrate cultures with the Carousel of Nations and Multiculturalism Day hosted by HMC Connections.
- Community Gardens: Many community gardens are present in Oakville, try Home Suite Hope and Healthy Fam to start.
- Recreational Sports Fundraiser for Low-Income Families: Initiatives like this are present through YMCA free programming, Jumpstart, Halton Learning Foundation and Halton Catholic Children's Education Fund.
- ABILITY Program: Community Classroom Aiden Lee - "Art by the Heart" programming

The Foundation's Next Steps

It's clear that there is still work to be done in order to support belonging within our community and these 25 Big Belonging ideas will help to get things started!

The Foundation will continue to take steps to further impact and improve belonging within our community through continued dialogue with community groups regarding priorities identified in their conversations; through engagement with The Foundation's belonging initiatives, and through future funding of the belonging ideas suggested through the 25 Community Conversations program.

How can you help?

Share this report with friends and family, get to know the groups who hosted one of the 25 Community Conversations, and ask how you can help.

Building belonging takes time, and involves many different approaches. If you see something you think is a good idea, connect with one of the groups, or connect with The Foundation and help us make these ideas come to life! We're excited to see the results!

We will again be reaching out to Oakville residents in our second Sense Belonging Community-wide Survey in 2021. Help us take the collective Belonging pulse of our community, please participate!



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS
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COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS HAPPENING ALL OVER TOWN.



"(Belonging is) definitely involvement. You have to look at what the individual's involvement with the community is like. What interactions do you have with the community? There has to be more than only receiving a good or a service."

Bruce Etherington, Co-Founder - Oakville Community Foundation



Conversation Partners

- **Food For Life**
www.foodforlife.ca
- **Oak Park Neighbourhood Centre**
www.opnc.ca
- **Oakville Chinese Network Society**
www.oakvillechinesenetwork.ca/en
- **St. Jude's Anglican Church**
www.stjudeschurch.net
- **North Oakville Youth Development Council**
www.ourkidsnetwork.ca/public/Engaging-and-Supporting-Youth
- **Halton Environmental Network**
www.haltonenvironet.ca
- **Oakville Improv**
www.oakvilleimprov.com
- **Oakvillegreen**
www.oakvillegreen.org
- **The Canadian Caribbean Association of Halton**
www.ccah.ca
- **Halton Youth Disability Council**
www.projectautismcanada.com/hydac.html
- **Silicon Halton**
www.siliconhalton.com
- **Sir John Colborne Recreation Centre**
www.oakville.ca/culturerec/sir-john-colborne-recreation-centre-for-seniors.html
- **Acclaim Health**
www.acclaimhealth.ca
- **Positive Space Network**
www.positivespacenetwork.ca
- **CNIB, EnVision**
www.cnib.ca/en/event/envision-support-group-oakville?region=on
- **STRIDE**
www.stride.on.ca
- **Seniors Life Enhancement Centre**
www.slec.ca
- **YMCA of Oakville**
<https://ymcaofaokville.org>

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To the Power of Twenty-Five