

Vital Conversations



Community Foundations of Canada and the RBC Foundation collaborated to deliver a two-year, \$5-million initiative to help shift power to youth from coast to coast to coast. Through the Canadian network of community foundations, the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge (RBC FLCC) provided grants of up to \$15,000 to over 200 youth-led projects in 185 small and medium-sized communities between 2019 to 2020.

Through the Challenge, Community Foundations of Canada and the RBC Foundation set out to learn what youth see as the most important challenges of the future. Nearly 500 youth leaders took action on issues that matter.

Across the country, local community foundations and RBC also partnered to host Vital Conversations — a community conversation used to explore emerging issues, learn about lived experience, and co-create potential solutions. Vital Conversations supported through the RBC FLCC provided a space for the community to come together and listen to youth and learn what issues matter to them.

Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation

Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation (KWCF) hosted three Vital Conversations with youth in partnership with Social Venture Partners (SVP) Teens, Volunteer Action Centre Waterloo Region (VAC), Coalition of Muslim Women of KW (CMW), and Wilmot's Youth Action Council. Between June 24th and December 12th, 2020, 68 youth came together to talk about emerging issues in their community, and how they might be able to work together to create positive change.

The following key themes emerged from breakout sessions identified by youth that were important to them.

“Conversations with local youth have clearly shown that initiatives developed for youth must be driven by youth. The opportunities that youth are looking for within our community need to be meaningful — on their terms.”

SARAH WITMER, COMMUNITY IMPACT LEAD OF THE KITCHENER WATERLOO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Hosted by SVP Teens, 24 participants, June 24, 2020

Here are the key themes from that session:

- COVID-19 and its impact on youth mental health
- Inclusivity and representation in the community
- The need to access learning opportunities

Hosted by VAC WR & COMW KW, 29 participants, August 12, 2020

Here are the key themes from that session:

- The importance of volunteerism
- A need to create recreational opportunities
- A greater need to celebrate diversity and sustainability

Hosted by Wilmot's Youth Action Council, 15 participants, December 12, 2020

Here are the key themes from that session:

- Impacts of COVID-19 on youth
- Lack of accessible and reliable transportation
- The importance of diversity and reducing stigma

After building a shared understanding of what is important for youth in our community, it was time to brainstorm potential solutions. Some of the ideas from each session, as well as thoughts about participating in these Vital Conversations, are listed below:

- Engaging youth in extracurricular activities
- Promoting diversity through multicultural events
- Increasing STEM learning opportunities.



“Ten years from now, I hope our community has broken down systemic barriers of oppression, even if it starts on a small scale.”

YOUTH ATTENDEE

- Creating more volunteer opportunities in the region.
- Developing programs and recreational activities that improve mental health.
- Creating a dialogue within the community to discuss important issues



We would like to see in the future of our community more job opportunities for youth led by youth.”

YOUTH ATTENDEE

“I want to see a more accepting community... diversifying who we talk about in history class or at events. Use social media to connect and spread messages of being accepting and learning about other cultures.”

YOUTH ATTENDEE

- Offering more opportunities for youth to interact and develop skills
- Increasing representation within the community through programs and services offered to marginalized groups
- Improving infrastructure for public transit through community consultation.



“We would like to be able to have a reliable bus that allows us to go to other parts of the region.”

YOUTH ATTENDEE

“I would like to be able to afford a house in which I can live in.”

YOUTH ATTENDEE

“As an active member of this community, I’m proud to see how the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge and Kitchener Waterloo Community Foundation is making Waterloo Region youth part of the conversation and also part of the solution. I am inspired by the passion our youth have to create change.”

DARCY KRAHN, COMMUNITY MANAGER, RBC ROYAL BANK