

Annual Report

2023-2024



*Inspiring possibilities
since 1962*

Our Vision

Opening doors in an inclusive community.

Our Purpose

Fostering inclusiveness for people to live, work and play
in unique and purposeful ways.

Community Living Huntsville is a not-for-profit, registered charity that
supports and advocates alongside people with developmental disabilities
to live the lives they choose in their community.

Find more at www.clhuntsville.ca or follow us on
Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn.

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Board Chair's Message

What a year!

In October 2023, I began my two-year term as board chair for Community Living Huntsville. While I had 2 previous years of experience as a board member and a lifetime of experience as a family member of a loved one with a developmental disability, there was a lot to learn and important work to continue. I was eager to work together with my fellow board members.

Our biggest task? To lead the development of a new Strategic Plan with our consultant, People Minded Business, to support us. Our board wanted the plan to reflect and respect the perspectives and experience of senior leaders, employees, people with developmental disabilities, and their families, so we asked them to help guide us, too. After all, this plan is for them: it defines the organization's priorities for the next several years so it can best meet the needs of people and families now and into the future. I am grateful for everyone's time and wisdom. Our Strategic Plan will be stronger because of them.

The Government of Ontario's multi-year plan for Developmental Services reform demanded attention, too. There are still many unanswered questions. I am confident Community Living Huntsville is well positioned to adapt to whatever lies ahead; however, we must strengthen relationships, actively anticipate needs, and prepare to roll out innovative changes and solutions now, so people and families remain well supported whenever reform comes.

Our community's desperate need for affordable housing, especially for people with developmental disabilities, remained a board priority, too. I offer sincere thanks to the landlords who work with us and readily consider people and families we support as viable tenants. Further partnerships and ideas remain under consideration, and I anticipate we will refine our role in supporting housing solutions in the year ahead.

Today, I feel encouraged and excited. We have a good group of dedicated people – people with disabilities, families, employees, senior leaders, and board members – who will champion our innovative future and move through change as stars. I am also grateful for the supporters and donors who continue to invest in Community Living Huntsville's vision of opening doors in an inclusive community. We are building a stronger future – together.

Sincerely,

Lorraine Morin

Chair, Board of Directors



Executive Director's Message

Our organization has spent the past year strengthening connections for a stronger future.

Much of that work relied on listening to people and families, our employees, and our community partners. Their perspectives and ideas have shaped our new Strategic Plan and reaffirmed our role in empowering people and inspiring possibilities for a more disability-inclusive community.

Our employees' perspectives and ideas are leading our ongoing Thriving Culture project, too. This project will create an employee-driven plan to develop a deeply collaborative, compassionate, and motivated workplace where every member of our team, no matter their job title, can thrive, personally and professionally.

We also officially launched our new Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee. These principles – equity, diversity, and inclusion – are the foundation of the Community Living Movement. The committee is championing these principles to promote a broader culture of respect, equality, and belonging that goes beyond disability in our increasingly diverse workplace and community.

We are not alone in our efforts. I am grateful for the landlords in our community who see the value in our work and have embraced inclusion. In their willingness to consider people with developmental disabilities as worthy tenants, these landlords are not only empowering people in independence – they are also building a healthier community that includes, welcomes, and respects all community members.

While there has been work, there also has been fun. Thanks to employee recommendations, we started hosting monthly lunch socials for people and families we support, employees, and invited guests. These events have rekindled friendships, enabled new introductions, and helped to rebuild a feeling of connection. It has been wonderful to see everyone enjoying themselves at these relaxed events. Thank you to everyone who has made them possible.

What does all this mean? People and our connections make us stronger. To everyone – whether a self-advocate, family member, employee, board member, landlord, supporter, donor, or community partner – who has been involved in strengthening our team, organization, and community, thank you. You have made a real difference.

There is more work ahead. Together, we can make the future awesome.

Sincerely,

Suzanne Willett

Executive Director



A Bit About Who We Are

Celebrating Our History and Our Future

Today it would be hard to imagine a world where children are sent away from their homes and communities because they live with developmental disabilities. Before the 1960s, this was the reality for many families in Muskoka. Parents and caregivers were advised to send their children to residential institutions to receive the supports they needed. Institutions like the former Huronia Regional Centre in Orillia and the local Lakewood Nursing Home in Huntsville were far from ideal. Children and adults lived in segregated buildings and had little to no choice in their daily lives.

The “community living movement” inspired new possibilities. This grassroots movement believed that, with the right supports in place, people living with developmental disabilities could stay in their communities and participate as valued community members.

In Huntsville, parents of children with developmental disabilities started the Blue Horizons Nursery School. Run by volunteers out of church basements, the school was part of the shift to where inclusion could be possible.

By 1971, this progressive group established a not-for-profit organization and hired its first two part-time staff. The organization expanded its

services to support older children and adults through skills programs and group homes.

In 1987, the organization was renamed Community Living Huntsville to reflect its purpose: to support people living with developmental disabilities to be recognized as important members of their community. Community Living Huntsville now operated an integrated Resource Teacher program to support children in mainstream schools and daycares. The organization also provided supports for people to live independently in their own homes. By 1990, Community Living Huntsville started its Supported Employment program, an opportunity for people to connect with local employers who would value their skills and contributions.

Community Living Huntsville has evolved to become an organization with a rich history of disability rights and inclusion. We are a proud employer of roughly 80 people in our community, who support and advocate alongside more than 300 children and adults, and their families, in North Muskoka.

While Community Living Huntsville has evolved over the years, one thing remains the same: we continue to support the growth of an inclusive community where everyone’s voices are heard, their decisions are respected, and their contributions are valued.

Community Living Huntsville respectfully acknowledges that we are on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabeg under the terms of Robinson-Huron Treaty No. 61 of 1850 and the Williams Treaties of 1923. We are grateful to be here. We hope you are too. We commit to acknowledge, learn, educate, create opportunity, honour sacred places, and take actions toward real truth and reconciliation in support of our commitment to walking the path together in respect, peace, and harmony for future generations.

G’chi miigwech. Thank you very much.

A Bit About What We Do

Community Living Huntsville supports more than 300 children and adults, and their families, in North Muskoka. We envision a future where the community listens to and honours the voice, respects the rights, and values the contributions of everyone.

Children and Youth Services

Our Children and Youth Services include Resource Consultants and Family Support Workers.

Resource Consultants support families with children ages 18 months to six years, who have a developmental delay or are at risk for a developmental delay. No diagnosis is needed to access these supports.

Family Support Workers support families with children ages six to 18 or 21, who are in school and diagnosed with developmental disabilities.

Our team also works in collaboration with licensed childcare centres and schools to promote inclusion, and ensure all children and youth are able to access support. We support families to access respite services, too.

Adult Services

We provide a variety of government-funded supports and services for adults with developmental disabilities, including Supported Group

Living, Supported Independent Living, Community Participation, Supported Employment, and Planning Services.

Our Supported Group Living team supports people to live in a group home in their community with flexible 24-hour supports tailored to their needs. People are encouraged and supported to be as independent as possible and make their own decisions.

Our Supported Independent Living team supports people to live in their own home in their community. Support is flexible and tailored to a person's needs and interests.

Our Community Participation team offers people support to meaningfully participate in their community as fully as they choose. Supports are tailored to the person, and focus on people living the life they choose in an inclusive community.

Our Supported Employment team supports people in developing their employment-related skills and securing jobs that meet their interests, skills, abilities and experience, and offers on-the-job coaching and ongoing collaboration with employees and employers as needed to help ensure everyone's needs are met. We also partner with Fleming Muskoka-Kawarthas Employment Services to offer employment supports to people

supported by the Ontario Disability Support Program, who have complex barriers to employment, in the Huntsville area.

Our Planning Services support people to explore, discover, and work toward the life they want to live in their community. Our team listens to what the person feels is important, now and into the future, guides a planning process that focuses on the person as the decision maker, and supports the person to realize their plan.

Connections

Our Connections service is available to people and families with Developmental Services Ontario Passport funds or other personal funds who want to purchase our supports and services. Our team works with people to create personalized plans, access services, and build a life that is truly their own based on their budget and interests.

Pathways

Our Pathways service is for adults with developmental disabilities who are deemed ineligible for Developmental Services Ontario-funded supports or are waitlisted for funds. It offers supports and services free to people in need. Pathways relies on donations, fundraised dollars, and charitable grants.



Reports to the Board of Directors

Community Engagement Report

I am thrilled to present our 2023-2024 Community Engagement Report, highlighting a year of remarkable community relations and fundraising initiatives that promoted and supported community inclusion.

In May, for Community Living Month, we invited everyone to reflect on community and what it means to truly belong. Our community got involved, too: the Town of Huntsville raised our flag, downtown businesses displayed Community Living Month signs, and the Huntsville Festival of the Arts illuminated Civic Square in blue and green to *Shine a Light on Community Living*.

Golf Fore Inclusion kicked off our fundraising season as another sold-out success.

Our revamped annual Autumn Brunch followed with a new venue and an incredible partnership with Randy and Ashley Vowels, owners of Tall Trees Muskoka, whose generous donation of food and kitchen staff meant funds raised went where they were needed most.

Huntsville's Got Talent sold out, too, raising roughly \$35,000. We thank show founders Dr. Drew and Janet Markham for allowing us to carry on their legacy.

These signature events raised essential funds for our affordable

housing initiatives, supporting people and families who access our services and helping to address a critical need in our community.

But wait, there is more! Thanks to a District of Muskoka IDEA Community Grant, we produced a new video, *Why Be a Disability-Inclusive Employer?*, to promote disability inclusion in employment. We thank Deerhurst Resort, Huntsville Brewhouse, Bullock's Your Independent Grocer, and community member Cindy Payne for participating in the video.

For the holidays, our annual Sponsor-a-Family Holiday Drive saw 25 families receive food and gifts, thanks to our generous supporters. We also held a Holiday Card Drawing Contest, sensory-friendly Sensitive Santa event with the Downtown Huntsville BIA and Minds Alive Toy Store, and Community Jingle and Mingle in Kent Park. Plus, we partnered with community members, the Downtown Huntsville BIA, and Muskoka Lumber to decorate Main Street with hand-painted snowmen and community spirit.

Supporters held events to benefit us throughout the year, too, demonstrating our community's commitment to disability inclusion: Sandhill Nursery raised funds through its breathtaking *Flower Power* open-air art exhibit, MP

Scott Aitchison named us as the primary beneficiary of the 2023 Scotty Charity Golf Tournament, and The Huntsville Polar Bear Dip by Markus Latzel saw 70 people donate and raise funds before bravely plunging into the icy lake.

Beyond events? When I made a plea for 3 picnic tables for our monthly lunch socials, I was blown away when, within hours, we had 7 new picnic tables on site! We were also thankful for the expertise and generosity of Ed and Kelly Hammond, owners of Refined Kitchen and Bath, who completed a needed renovation at a Supported Group Living home with beautiful results.

We were also grateful to receive a one-time contribution from the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Rural and Remote Homelessness Program, with funding administered by United Way Simcoe Muskoka, for our Transitional Housing initiative.

Our work is possible only with the support of our community members, donors, and partners. We are deeply grateful to everyone who contributed in 2023-2024, and we look forward to continuing to build an inclusive community together.

Jennifer Jerrett

Community Engagement
Specialist

Reports to the Board of Directors

Governance Committee

The work of the previous Governance Committee, led by committee chair Debbie Kirwin, in revising our bylaw and the respective policies to ensure compliance with the Ontario Not-For-Profit Corporations Act set our committee up for success.

This past year, we continued to work within the established review system and worked our way through the second cycle

of reviews. We made a number of changes, such as adding a new policy and revising others. This review system has allowed committee members to focus on the content of policies and has afforded us the ability to focus on big-picture thinking.

As this was my first year as committee chair, and my second year as a board member, I would like to thank all those who sat on the Governance

Committee, including Tish Firman, Morgan Lonsdale, Heather Hunter, and Lorraine Morin, and supported me through the transition of taking on a new role. I look forward to continuing the work we do to serve the organization and our community.

Crystal Paroschy

Chair,
Governance Committee



Reports to the Board of Directors

Finance and Audit Committee Report

The Finance and Audit Committee assists the Board of Directors to ensure the organization operates in a financially prudent manner with appropriate controls in place to safeguard assets and to identify and mitigate financial risks.

The committee oversaw a yearly budget of more than \$7 million. The main funding partners were the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the District of Muskoka, Fleming Muskoka-Kawartha Employment Services, grantors such as the Government of Canada's Reaching Home Rural and Remote Homelessness Program with funding administered by United Way Simcoe Muskoka, and donors, both corporate and individual.

The committee met regularly to receive and approve financial reports and budgets.

The committee is confident that all government statutory filings were completed on time.

I have been awed by the

dedication, sense of duty, and commitment to quality of performance shown by the organization's board members, senior leadership, and employees who have attended our Finance Committee meetings. I feel this reflects the quality of senior leadership and the organization.

I have felt a real collaborative team attitude, too, as everyone works on their parallel paths toward the same goal, guided by a shared commitment to the Strategic Plan and the clear direction it sets. Everyone has done so with a positive attitude despite the pressures the organization and sector face, which includes employees being underpaid due to Government of Ontario underinvestment in Developmental Services.

Specifically, my fellow committee members and I wish to acknowledge the excellent performance of the organization's finance and accounting team members and their willingness to go above and beyond what would normally be expected to keep

the financial records timely and accurate. The committee also thanks BDO Canada for assigning an experienced Certified Professional Accountant to the organization's annual audit.

Personally, I wish to thank Lee Russell and my fellow committee members, Lorraine Morin, Bernadette Lovegrove, John Garlick, April Best-Sararas, and Suzanne Willett, for their commitment to the organization.

I would like to add how pleased I am to be a part of this organization as a board member, contributing to the social fabric and development of my community with like-minded people. I am grateful to sit on a board where everyone is encouraged and expected to ask questions and share their unique perspectives in a respectful environment toward a vibrant, collaborative, and sustainable future.

David A. Wright
Chair, Finance and
Audit Committee

Reports to the Board of Directors

Nomination Committee

Community Living Huntsville Board of Directors 2023-2024:

- Chair – Loraine Morin
- Vice-Chair – Bernadette Lovegrove
- Director – Tish Firman
- Director – Morgan Lonsdale
- Director – Heather Hunter
- Director – John Garlick
- Director – Crystal Paroschy
- Director – David A. Wright
- Director – April Best-Sararas

Our Board of Directors started the year with 9 members. We are ending the year with 9 members. We thank these board members for their contribution, time, and commitment to Community Living Huntsville. And we thank April Best-Sararas, who has served as a director for this past year and will not be returning.

Community Living Huntsville’s Board of Directors provides the following recommendations for the

upcoming 2024-2025 term:

Members Recommended for Reappointment:

- Morgan Lonsdale
- Crystal Paroschy
- John Garlick

Proposed New Member to the Board:

- Debbie Kirwin

Proposed Board of Directors for 2024-2025:

- Tish Firman
- Debbie Kirwin
- Morgan Lonsdale
- Bernadette Lovegrove
- Lorraine Morin
- Heather Hunter
- John Garlick
- Crystal Paroschy
- David A. Wright

Lorraine Morin
Chair, Nominations Committee



Reports to the Board of Directors

Introduction of New Directors

Debbie Kirwin

Debbie has promoted inclusion in our community by advocating for improved accessible transit and taxi service, accessible affordable housing, employment opportunities for people with disabilities, inclusive recreational programming, and activities such as: accessible trails and playgrounds, accessible public meetings, accessible festivals and events, and improved access to businesses through the retired “Yellow Ramp” program.

Debbie served as chair of the Town of Huntsville’s Accessibility Advisory Committee from 2004 to 2018 and sat on the District of Muskoka’s Accessibility

Advisory Committee from 2013 to her retirement in 2018. After 4 years of retirement, she stepped back into the limelight and joined Huntsville’s Accessibility Advisory Committee once again. She sat on the Accessibility Standards Advisory Committee for the Province of Ontario 2012-2014, was a member of the 2006 Parasport Games Organizing Committee Huntsville, and co-chaired the Organizing Committee for the 2012 Parasport Games Huntsville.

Debbie was a member of Community Living Huntsville’s Board of Directors from 2010 to 2012. She rejoined the board in 2018, fulfilling 3 terms. Taking

the mandatory year off, she has once again stepped up to work for a great organization that provides support for those who have a developmental disability.

Her passion and advocacy for inclusion, equality, independence, and dignity for persons with disabilities carries on.



Our Vision: Opening doors in an inclusive community.

Our Purpose: Fostering inclusiveness for people to live, work, and play in unique and purposeful ways.

Strategic Priorities



1. Growing Our Services to Meet Needs

People and families often ask us for respite, service navigation, and other services. We aim to expand our offerings to provide people and families with more services they want and need, when they need them.

2. Strengthening Our Team

We will make our great team stronger by championing a healthy, safe, and inclusive workplace that spurs innovation and employee development, ensuring our supports are solid and our workplace is fulfilling.

3. Adapting Our Operations for a Sustainable Future

We are adapting our business operations to maximize the resources available for supporting people and families while adapting to unprecedented changes in the Developmental Services sector.

4. Championing Housing Solutions

As housing in our community is increasingly challenging, we will prioritize the increase of available, accessible, affordable, and economically sustainable housing for people with developmental disabilities through partnerships and service evolution.

Strategic Plan Update

Our board of directors, employees, and community are helping us shape the future of Community Living Huntsville.

Work to create our organization's new Strategic Plan officially started in early 2024. The plan will focus our priorities for the next several years, so we can best meet the needs of people, families, and our broader community, now and into the future. The plan will also position our organization to adapt with innovation to the Government of Ontario's multi-year plan for Developmental Services reform, called *Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion*.

Developing a Strategic Plan is a board-led process. Our board was supported by People Minded Business, a consultant with expertise in the Developmental Services sector and Strategic Plan development. To help inform the plan, People Minded Business consulted many people:

- 95 employees, people, and families participated in surveys
- 50 employees, people, families, and board members participated in focus groups, and
- 10 community partners participated in one-on-one interviews

Both our Strategic Plan process and Thriving Culture project have relied on a chorus of voices to help us creatively and collaboratively build a firm foundation for our future.

Input also came from our Strategic Plan Advisory Team, an invited group of board members, people and families who access our services, and employees tasked with providing insight that might otherwise be missed, during sessions with the consultant. Members included:

- Lorraine Morin
- Bernadette Lovegrove
- Annette Mongeon
- Cindy Payne
- Darlene Chapman
- Rachel Hicks
- Richelle Cope
- Sherri-Lynn Cox
- Stacey Bullock
- Christopher Jordan-Stevens
- Heidi Collings, and
- Alison Brownlee

People Minded Business then worked with board members, senior leadership, and advisory team members to prepare a draft Strategic Plan for our board of directors' consideration.

At the same time, we also launched into our Thriving Culture project led by Michael Schiel, a high-performance coach and transformation consultant. This project is an employee-led effort to help us

create a workplace environment that ensures every member of our team can thrive, feel more engaged, motivated, and collaborative, and have a strong sense of career well-being. The project is informed by employee surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews. Recommendations from this project will complement our Strategic Plan priorities and goals.

Both our Strategic Plan process and Thriving Culture project have relied on a chorus of voices to help us creatively and collaboratively build a firm foundation for our future. I am grateful for everyone's contributions and dedication.

While it is impossible to predict the future, strategically positioning ourselves with innovation, people, and community at the centre will help guide us sustainably and confidently into the future, so we will remain creative and resilient leaders in providing person-directed supports and services to community members.

Suzanne Willett
Executive Director



(Left) Community Living Huntsville board chair Lorraine Morin shares the profound impact the community living movement has had on her family; (right) Community members celebrate the raising of the Community Living flag at Huntsville Town Hall on May 6, 2024. Photos by Community Living Huntsville.

‘Can’t Imagine Huntsville Without You’

Flag flies at Town Hall for Community Living Month

A flag celebrating real community inclusion of people with developmental disabilities and their families was proudly hoisted at Huntsville Town Hall in May 2024.

“Community Living Month is a celebration,” Suzanne Willett, our Executive Director, told the crowd of roughly 30 people gathered in Huntsville Civic Square on May 6. “It is a celebration of the Community Living Movement and, really, that is a celebration of the advocacy work of people that we support.”

Everyone had come together to celebrate the Town of Huntsville raising the Community Living

flag for Community Living Month. Attendees included town councillors and staff, community members, disability-inclusion advocates, Downtown Huntsville BIA members, and Community Living Huntsville board members and staff.

Willett thanked everyone who joined us for the celebration. She also applauded the disability self-advocates and families who have championed the Community Living Movement in Huntsville since 1962.

Huntsville mayor Nancy Alcock shared that the annual Community Living flag raising celebration was an exciting one for her because it highlighted how Community Living

Huntsville worked to help build a disability-inclusive community that is better for everyone. “It creates such a positive vibe in our community,” said Mayor Alcock. “And you touch so many lives in so many different ways.” She thanked our board, staff, volunteers, and everyone who contributes to the community living movement in Huntsville. “I love everything Community Living Huntsville is doing for our whole community,” she said. “I can’t imagine Huntsville without you.”

Lorraine Morin, our board chair, thanked Mayor Alcock and the Town of Huntsville. She said she was excited to promote and advocate for a community where people with developmental disabilities

and their families can live as respected, included, and contributing community members. This was the community living movement, she said, and it lived deep in her family's heart.

"My big brother, Marcel, was labelled with a developmental disability at age 4. My mom and dad were told to put him in an institution. This was common. At the time, families weren't given many alternatives," she said. "It not only meant Marcel would live without his family and his community, but also that his family and his community would live without Marcel. He would disappear from his community."

She said she was thankful her parents, who lived in Kapuskasing at the time, said no. "I really think the reason Marcel has thrived as a person is because he lived at home with the love of his family – including his don't-mess-with-Marcel little sister – and he lived in his community in ways that mattered to him with support from his local Community Living organization."

The decision, she said, made a difference for the community, too. "Because Marcel had lived in Kapuskasing since he was a kid – and he is such a fun person who loves to laugh and joke around – he had a lot of people in the community who knew that about him, and they just treated him like Marcel," she said. "Attitudes changed."

Morin noted the Community Living Movement was built by families with similar stories – "families who believed children and adults with developmental disabilities deserved better than what they got" – and knew that with access to the right supports and services people with developmental disabilities could make their own choices and live independently in their community.

The movement has helped change public opinion and government policy. For example, in 2009, the Government of Ontario closed its last institution meant to hold people with developmental disabilities. Morin added that there was still more work to do: "Barriers to employment, financial security, housing, support, and social inclusion continue to exist."

She said Community Living Huntsville's roughly 80 staff support and advocate alongside more than 300 children and adults, and their families, in North Muskoka. "I know these staff members share my passion for the community living movement, and I thank them for their care, skill, and unrelenting effort to open doors in an inclusive community for the people and families they serve."

She also offered her sincere thanks to the people and families who access our services. "Believe me, I know how hard it can be to challenge assumptions, break



Town of Huntsville staff officially raise the Community Living flag at Huntsville Town Hall for the month.

down barriers, and work your way through confusing and frustrating systems to access the supports and services you need and deserve," she said. "It is your strength and determination that has got our community to where it is today. You are the foundation of the community living movement and I, my fellow board members, the Community Living team, and everyone here today are proud to walk alongside you as we continue to grow a community where everyone can live with dignity, choice, and inclusion."

The crowd broke into applause.

Huntsville Cheers as Caroline's Cart Rolls into Local Business

A Huntsville business's new shopping cart sparked swift and passionate reaction on social media.

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" said Leslie Aubin. "It will be so much easier to take my son shopping with my now."

"Oh, my goodness. Thank you for this. This has been a concern for me as my son gets older and doesn't fit in the baby seat anymore," said Leah Reeder. "You have no idea how helpful this will be for our family."

Bullock's Your Independent Grocer announced through its Facebook page on May 9, 2024, that its newly purchased Caroline's Cart had officially rolled into the store. This modified shopping cart features a full-sized, caregiver-facing seat, an extra set of wheels for easy maneuverability, and plenty of space remaining for products, creating for a more disability-inclusive shopping experience for older children, adults, and older adults with disabilities, and their families and support workers.

While there were Caroline's Carts in other communities, including Bracebridge and North Bay, this was the first one in Huntsville.



Alycia Simmons (left), co-owner for Bullock's Your Independent Grocer, Emily Kerns, Family Support Worker for Community Living Huntsville, and Emily Kouyoumjian, Resource Consultant for Community Living Huntsville, celebrate the arrival of Huntsville's first Caroline's Cart. Photos by Community Living Huntsville.

The announcement on Facebook earned 124 reactions,

10 comments, and 27 shares in a matter of hours.

Darcy Bullock and Alycia Simmons, co-owners for Bullock's Your Independent Grocer, said the decision to purchase the cart was easy to make once Community Living Huntsville brought it to their attention.

"I hope it makes a difference for our customers and the community," said Bullock.

Simmons added that she hoped the cart made the shopping experience easier and more inclusive. "I hope it helps and makes it easier for people and families to shop together," she said. "Kudos to Community Living for making us aware."

Emily Kouyoumjian, a Resource Consultant with Community Living Huntsville, said a mom approached our not-for-profit organization's Children and Youth Services team about the need for Caroline's Carts in Huntsville: "She has an older child, who cannot walk around a store because of severe medical and mobility needs, which leaves mom struggling to push a wheelchair and a shopping cart at the same time while doing all the shopping at a grocery store or a department store," said Kouyoumjian. "That makes what some would think of as a quick errand – popping into the grocery store for a few items – feel physically and emotionally difficult and exhausting."

She noted the family was far from alone in its experience. Roughly 27 per cent of

Canadians identify as having a disability and, when their families and caregivers are considered, roughly 53 per cent of consumers are directly affected by disability.

Kouyoumjian said she and her colleague, Emily Kerns, a Family Support Worker with Community Living Huntsville, started advocating for the carts soon after the family reached out.

The team drafted a letter, which described the cart and laid out its business benefits, and then started contacting some of the larger retailers in the community. After an in-person meeting with Bullock's Your Independent Grocer, the store immediately ordered its cart.

Another business ordered a cart as well, and it was expected to arrive later in 2024.

"These carts are not just for children – they can also assist an adult with a disability to come shopping with a family member or a support worker," said Kouyoumjian. She envisioned an older adult with mobility or cognitive disability able to move through a store with their spouse, the couple able to face each other thanks to the cart's design, discussing what items to put in their cart. "Shopping is part of every-day life, and being included in both the experience and the decisions is really empowering," she said. "These carts are about social and community inclusion as much as they are about physical accessibility."



Emily Kouyoumjian, Resource Consultant for Community Living Huntsville, says accessible shopping experiences are a step in the right direction toward a more inclusive community for everyone.

Kouyoumjian hoped more businesses would build on this momentum and offer Caroline's Carts and other enhanced accessibility features, like ramps, for their customers into the future: "Even a single step into a business can be a huge barrier," she said.

She added that the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act had a deadline for certain accessibility standards to be met in Ontario by 2025: "There is a lot left to be done," said Kouyoumjian.



Jeffrey (left) and Gwen enjoy a joyful moment while blowing bubbles. (Photo provided by Jeffrey's family)

‘Families need a spark of hope’

Family Support Workers are disappearing, yet they play a crucial role in empowering families

Families need help – and hope.

“I don’t feel like families get a fair shake,” said Gwen Jones, a Family Support Worker with Community Living Huntsville. “More needs to be done to actually help children and families, through access to more funding and more opportunities. Families just need a little spark of hope.”

The Children and Youth Services team at Community Living Huntsville includes 2 part-time Family Support Workers.

These workers assist about 100 children with developmental disabilities ages 6 to 18 or 21, if in school, and their families to navigate systems, access respite and disability-related funding, supports and services, advocate during meetings with teachers and school administrators, explore and connect with interests and community life, gain work experience, and transition successfully from elementary school to high school and adult life.

Family Support Workers also lead school-based information and skills-building sessions and advocate for accessibility and authentic inclusion of children

with developmental disabilities and their families in the community.

It is a role that is increasingly rare across Ontario. “Family Support Workers are disappearing, yet they play a crucial role in empowering families,” said Jones. “Families do the work, and our role is to strengthen them and empower them with resources and confidence to take action. Our work is about listening and building trust, relationships, and community connections.”

Funding for Family Support comes from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social

Services. Due to rising demand and inflation eating away at funding that has been stagnant for at least 10 years, Community Living Huntsville now has a waitlist for Family Support services. The team is working hard to eliminate any wait.

Jones noted families founded Community Living Huntsville. She felt privileged and humbled to walk alongside families and witness their determination as she helped them to navigate complex systems and break down barriers.

“Life is not just hardships. I don’t want to give the impression that life is so hard or so challenging. It’s sometimes messy – and often beautiful – but we work with real people with real emotions,” said Jones. “I have seen people cope and deal with things that people shouldn’t have to cope and deal with. Yet, despite needing and deserving supports and services, their reality could be barriers and waitlists.” Waitlists continued into adulthood, too, where the system’s attention was increasingly on those with complex needs in extreme crisis. “It’s not the fault of children and families that there are waitlists. That is where the real action needs to happen,” said Jones. “Everything depends on funding, which hasn’t changed in years.”

She worried about what would happen to children and families without deeper provincial investment in family support, transition, and adult supported independent living services

across Ontario. “Families matter – and Family Support Workers make a difference,” said Jones.

Stacey Bullock, Manager of Children and Youth Services for Community Living Huntsville, said families face a daunting labyrinth of services, applications, assessments, funding pockets, and more, in the Developmental Services sector alone. The family of a child with complex needs may also have to navigate other sectors, too, such as health care, mental health care, or child welfare. Even one piece of a system could feel like an insurmountable challenge.

Bullock noted that, as an example, the Developmental Services Ontario application can take years to complete. Without an approved application, an adult age 18 and older cannot access ministry-funded developmental services. With assistance from a Family Support Worker to complete the application process, she said, a child and family could have an eligibility letter in hand for when they turn 18.

She said the team also assists families to understand services and resources, such as the Ontario Autism Program, Registered Disability Savings Plans, and Child Respite, and then navigate and coordinate those services, too.

“Families need support to navigate and coordinate multiple systems, not just Developmental Services,” said Bullock. “To



Gwen Jones (left) supports parents, like Jessica Adam, with knowledge, skill, and compassion, as they navigate complex government and service systems.

provide that navigation, we need money, especially for children with complex needs.”

She urged everyone to recognize the provincial government’s role and raise the issue with elected officials. “Is who you vote for supportive of children, families, and Developmental Services?” she asked. “Make a point of asking whether they will invest in supports and services that make a real difference for families.”

She also encouraged people to follow advocacy efforts, like Community Living Ontario and OASIS’s #WaitingToBelong campaign that calls on the Government of Ontario to end wait lists for Developmental Services.

“Families – parents and children – need support to be as successful as possible. Early intervention can make a massive difference,” said Bullock. “We are all affected. The biggest impact comes at a young age – for children, families, and communities.”

The Power of Social Connection

Supporting people to thrive with Community Participation

Imagine a life without fun, friends, or community.

“A sense of community is really important for anyone,” said Jamie Arnold, a Direct Support Professional with our Community Participation team.

Our Community Participation team empowers adults with developmental disabilities to discover interests, connect meaningfully with their community, and develop real relationships with fellow community members with and without disabilities. The team focuses on supporting people to plan and live well-connected lives in their community through social, recreational, educational, and volunteer opportunities.

Social isolation, exclusion, ableism, and harmful myths remain serious barriers to full participation in community life for people with developmental disabilities. Our Community Participation team assists people to break down those barriers by facilitating connections, providing side-by-side support, and advocating alongside people for a more welcoming and disability-inclusive community.

The work is about more than filling people’s social calendars: “Supporting people



Wendy Sawyer (left) and Jamie Arnold cheer for their knight at Medieval Times Dinner and Tournament in Toronto. (Photos by Community Living Huntsville)

to feel included and welcomed is extremely important for their mental health and well-being,” said Arnold.

The work also changes our community.

Arnold recalled supporting an adult who enjoyed skating and swimming, but declined to do anything else, until one day the person agreed to go to a cooking class. Once there, the person flourished, connecting with old friends and talking to new people. The person tapped into an interest in cooking, even taking a recipe home to family.

And something else happened, too. After the class, people who met the person started inviting

the person to other events as well. The community welcomed the person – and the person had found fun and community in a way that mattered to them.

“I love being out in the community and supporting people to thrive on their own terms,” said Arnold.

Diane Lupton, Manager of Community Support for Community Living Huntsville, said demand for our Community Participation services is on the rise.

“The COVID-19 pandemic took a real toll on our community. Some of the opportunities that were lost haven’t come back yet and, in some cases, social isolation is worse than before the pandemic,

despite our community growing,” said Lupton. “When we lose those moments and places where we can build relationships with each other through shared experiences and interests, we lose our sense of community and connection. Everyone loses.”

The loss is particularly stark for people with developmental disabilities. Data shows that people with developmental disabilities have an average of 3.1 people in their social networks, including support staff, while people without developmental disabilities have an average of 125. It is unsurprising that 85% of young adults with developmental disabilities say they feel lonely most days.

Lupton said our Community Participation team has become increasingly creative and tenacious in finding and supporting new opportunities for people, who access our support either through our Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services-funded services or our Connections service, which is



Alex Sherar (front left) and Glen Slater (front right) meet the members of Lighthouse after the band performs at the Algonquin Theatre in Huntsville.

purchased through Passport, Special Services at Home, Respite, or other personal money.

She noted challenges remained, as continued underinvestment by the Province of Ontario in Developmental Services has led to waitlists for ministry-funded services and staffing challenges in the sector.

Lupton said our organization is working hard to hire more staff to

meet demand, while continuing to provide quality services and launch new offerings, such as our organization’s Community Explorer Series to promote social connection, skill building, and fun around town.

She added, though, that the onus ultimately falls on the community to embrace diversity, express empathy, and create meaningful opportunities for inclusion for every person – without exception.



(Left Photo) Haley Griffiths (left) and Erica Somers share some laughs at a themed barbecue social at Community Living Huntsville’s administration offices; (Right Photo) Jason Dodds meets some Mandalorians at ComicCon in Toronto.



(Left) Margaret enjoys the renovations to her kitchen that include brighter colours and a more open-concept design; (top right) the kitchen sink area before renovations; (bottom right) the kitchen sink area after renovations.

Heart of a Home: Kitchen Renovation Embraces Dignity and Inclusion

Margaret smiled as she led the way into her newly renovated kitchen.

A kitchen renovation at the Community Living Huntsville Supported Group Living home had been discussed for years. Typical household wear and tear had taken its toll since the home was built in 1988-89, and while staff members had tried to fix and refresh what they could, the kitchen was also in desperate need of accessibility modifications. Design work officially started in late 2023 with Refined Kitchen and Bath, who completed the renovations in early 2024.

Margaret, resting her hand on

the new kitchen countertop, showed off the bright cupboards and open-concept design, while fellow residents Glen and Charlene offered greetings through the new pass-through window that opened into the living room.

Christopher Jordan-Stevens, Manager of Supported Group Living for Community Living Huntsville, said the staff team that worked at the home had advocated for a more open and accessible space to empower and include those who lived there.

“It was very closed off – it didn’t open up into the living room or anything – and there was limited space which made participation

and inclusion in the kitchen and in food preparation difficult for the people in the home who use wheelchairs,” said Jordan-Stevens.

More broadly, though, Jordan-Stevens said a person’s home should respond to their needs: “Bathrooms, kitchens, and bedrooms have to be accessible to empower people and provide them dignity and safety,” he said. “Accessibility is inclusion and there is no sense of inclusion without being able to navigate freely and with choice in your environment.”

Margaret, Glen, and Charlene directed much of the renovation. For example, each made it clear

they wanted to participate more in the kitchen, which influenced design decisions on space and sightlines. They also reviewed colour palettes and came to a shared decision on warm, comfortable tones. They then weighed in on what to do during construction, opting to stay elsewhere for a few days during peak work. “That said, Refined Kitchen and Bath were incredible – they had everything prepped off-site and it was really a very quiet process and very quick,” said Jordan-Stevens. “I was very impressed with that. People were able to get comfortably back into their home very quickly, which was important.”

Since the renovation, everyone is participating more in meal preparation – either by being physically in the kitchen or talking with staff through the kitchen’s pass-through window – which gives them more choice, control, and involvement.

Ed and Kelly Hammond, owners of Refined Kitchen and Bath in Huntsville and generous supporters of our not-for-profit organization, were eager to be involved. As owners of a family-run business, the couple said it was important to them to find opportunities to give back to their town – and the renovation reflected both their business and personal values.

“With the kitchen being the heart of a home, it brings family and friends together and creates a space of inclusion, discovery, and exploration,” said



Areas of the kitchen before renovation (above) and after renovation (below).

Ed and Kelly. “It gave us great joy to watch this project come together and see how engaged residents and staff were during the process, and the excitement that this new space offered them. We will always be proud and ready to support future projects with this incredible organization.”

Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, noted that, while Refined Kitchen and Bath was paid for its work, Ed and Kelly, in addition to their own generosity, took it upon themselves to rally their suppliers to support the project through discounts and in-kind donations, too, which reduced the overall cost. “Their efforts and generosity allow us to do more for the people we serve,” said Jerrett. “We are beyond grateful.”

Jerrett noted community support and donations were

vital to our organization’s work on housing for people with developmental disabilities and families who access our services. “Capital expenses like this aren’t necessarily covered, and yet there are other homes and other kitchens, plus driveway repairs, accessible vehicle purchases, and even new property purchases and construction to consider,” she said. “That means we have to be very strategic in our priorities – and ask the community for its support.”

She said our team and supporters are working hard to break down barriers for people with developmental disabilities.

“I often hear people thank us for the work we do. They see the difference we are making in people’s lives and our community, and they want to be a part of that because everyone in our community deserves to live with dignity,” said Jerrett.

Community Living Champions Disability-Inclusion in Land Trust's Huntsville Plan

What if housing was not a commodity?

Christopher Jordan-Stevens, Manager of Supported Group Living for Community Living Huntsville and a board member for Muskoka Community Land Trust, said housing is a dominant need for people and families who access our services.

“Not a day goes by at work that I don't hear the word, 'housing.' We know there is simply not enough housing to go around, and the housing that does exist is not always affordable or accessible,” said Jordan-Stevens. “Many people who access our services are faced with a multitude of barriers.”

He felt Huntsville and Muskoka needed not only permanently affordable housing protected from privatization, financialization, and speculation, but also housing communities that were accessible, inclusive, and diverse.

He then learned about the Muskoka Community Land Trust.

Founded in 2021, the volunteer-led nonprofit organization works to acquire and steward property for the development of permanently affordable and environmentally conscious housing, social enterprise, and food security.

Jordan-Stevens now sits as a



Sandi Martin, Executive Director for the Muskoka Community Land Trust, tells attendees at Community Living Huntsville's 2023 Annual General Meeting that land trusts can acquire and steward land for affordable and stable housing.

board member for the land trust representing Community Living Huntsville and advocating for the housing needs of people and families who access our services and those of our current and future employees.

“Additionally, I advocate for the accessibility needs of people with disabilities to ensure that accessibility is continuously considered,” he said.

Sandi Martin, Executive Director for the Muskoka Community Land Trust, noted, during our Annual General Meeting in 2023, that the land trust was working toward its first development, in Huntsville.

The development, called the Florence Street Micro-Community Initiative, includes 179 rental,

rent-to-own, cooperative, and homeownership units, designed as a mixed-income and diverse neighbourhood affordable for the local workforce, seniors, single parent families, community members in vulnerable situations, and others, all on land retained by the land trust.

“It is very important that what we build is for a lot of different people,” said Martin. “And the idea is that a community land trust is a beautiful place, not just a box to put people in, so we are looking for community spaces, gardens, trails (and more).”

Plans for the land trust's Florence Street Micro-Community Initiative are not yet finalized, though efforts continue. Early estimates point to construction completion in 2029.



Financial Overview

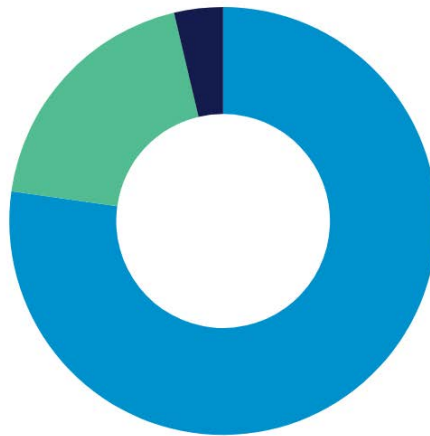
2023-2024 Financial Summary

In 2023, Community Living Ontario and fellow advocates, including Community Living Huntsville, joined in an Ontario-wide campaign called #5ToSurvive.

The campaign petitioned the Government of Ontario for an immediate 5 per cent core funding increase to Developmental Services organizations, Passport, and Special Services at Home. Developmental Services in Ontario have been historically underfunded with less than a 4 per cent cumulative base funding increase for Developmental Services organizations over the past 3 decades. Community Living Huntsville has experienced financial pressure. Funding has not kept pace with rising costs of essential expenses, such as food, insurance, repairs and maintenance, snow removal, and more.

We are grateful for the continued support of the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the District of Muskoka, and Fleming Muskoka-Kawarthas Employment Services. We are also encouraged by our conversations with Parry Sound-Muskoka MPP Graydon Smith.

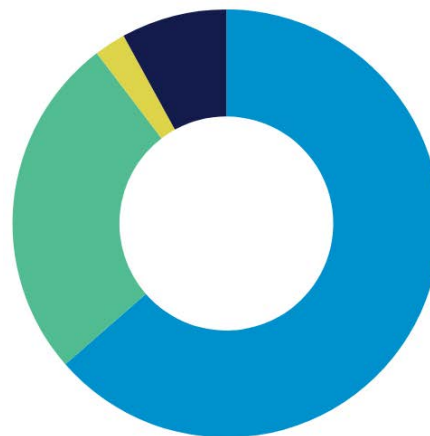
In mid-2024, we learned that Community Living Huntsville will receive what could be roughly a 3 per cent base funding increase from the Ministry for 2024-2025. It comes too late to



Where do our funds come from?

- 77.22% Province of Ontario
- 19.09% Other Funding Sources
- 3.69% Fundraising

Total \$7,764,309



How do we put our funds to work?

- 63.56% Group and Independent Living
- 26.07% Community Participation and Passport
- 2.38% Employment Options
- 7.98% Admin, Ops, and Professional Services

Total \$7,448,967

To request a copy of Community Living Huntsville's full 2023-2024 audited financial statement, please contact info@clhuntsville.ca.

affect our 2023-2024 fiscal year, is less than the 5 per cent ask, and does not erase 30 years of underinvestment, but any additional provincial investment is welcome.

Our board and financial management team will continue to act with fiscal responsibility, so our organization and its services remain robust and sustainable. Our highly skilled and compassionate

employees will continue to provide essential supports and quality services to people and families in our community. We will also continue to advocate for provincial investment that reflects financial realities, rising demand for services, and the need for funding parity with other sectors, such as long-term care and health care.

Suzanne Willett
Executive Director

Fundraising Overview

2023-2024 Fundraising Summary

Community Living Huntsville relies on fundraised dollars to meet the current, growing, and increasingly unfunded needs of people and families who access our services. While government funding is essential to providing certain supports and services, rigid rules mean those funds must be spent in precise ways, or for specific people, and must be returned to the government if unused. They cannot and do not meet every need.

Funds raised through our events and initiatives, third-party events, donations, sponsorships, and charitable grants provide us the flexibility to meaningfully address our community's unique and otherwise unfunded needs quickly and creatively.

Our Transitional Housing initiative, for example, has provided temporary apartments and housing-related skills building to unhoused young men and young women with developmental disabilities, so they can find and keep a place of their own.

Our free Pathways service for adults with developmental disabilities, who do not have access to Developmental Services Ontario-funded supports or are waitlisted for funds, allows us to assist people to access needed supports and

services so no one falls through the cracks.

And funds raise for general use mean we can pay for essential repairs, renovations, and purchases that we get no government funding to cover. This includes accessibility renovations to group homes, purchase of accessible vehicles, and other unfunded yet vital capital expenses.

These solutions build a stronger community where everyone can

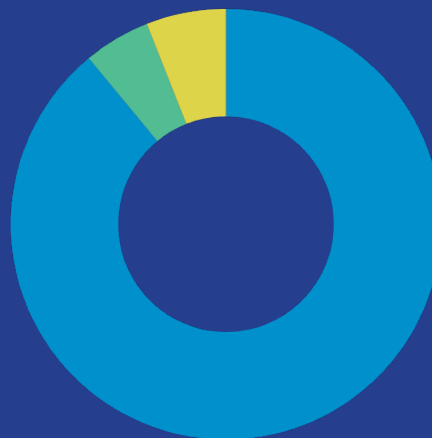
Where do our fundraised dollars come from?



- 17% Events
- 49% Charitable Grants
- 21% Donations
- 13% Sponsorship

Total \$286,578

What are fundraised dollars raised for?



- 89% Housing Initiatives
- 5% Pathways
- 6% General Undesignated

Total \$286,578

live with dignity as a respected, included, and contributing community member. They are possible only with the support of our generous donors.

Your contributions help us change lives. Thanks to you, we are building an inclusive community, together.

Jennifer Jerrett

Community Engagement
Specialist

COMMUNITY LIVING
Huntsville

Partners for Inclusion

Annual Gifts for Growth



**We thank the following donors for supporting innovative housing solutions
with multi-year contributions to Community Living Huntsville:**

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to remain anonymous

Huntsville Fuels

Thank you for your generous support!

2023-2024 Signature Event Partners

Platinum



Gold



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Community Partners



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