



Good neighbours, green spaces most valued by Canadians

A new national survey shows that surroundings and people are top quality-of-life concerns

BY SKANA GEE

Canadians believe good neighbours and green places are the top contributors to good quality of life in their communities, in comparison with such factors as jobs or low taxes, say the findings of a new national public-opinion survey.

And, despite the tough economic times, almost nine in 10 Canadians consider the quality of life in their communities to be good, if not excellent.

"We are weathering the worst recession in nearly 20 years, but when Canadians think about what makes our communities special, we think about the people and the surroundings — whether that means parks, clean air or the presence of lakes and rivers," said Monica Patten, President and CEO of Community Foundations of Canada, which commissioned the survey.

Ms. Patten said while the economy and local safety routinely top public opinion surveys as key issues, it's clear that our connection to our homes is not just about jobs, services and security.

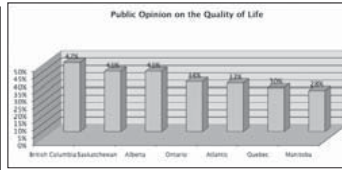
Only 10 per cent of respondents identified the economy and/or job opportunities as the most important factor defining quality of life in their community. Almost one-quarter (23 per cent) identified the physical environment (e.g. green spaces, lakes, rivers or air quality), and almost as many (20 per cent)

'We connect with the people and the place first.'

—*Monica Patten, President and CEO of Community Foundations of Canada*

emphasized a positive social atmosphere (friendly people, good neighbourhoods, good relations between different groups). Another 16 per cent noted rural or small-town character, while 14 per cent identified infrastructure and local services.

"We connect with the people and the place first," said Patten, whose organization works with more than 165 community foundations from coast to coast. On Oct. 6, community founda-



Almost half (47%) of B.C. respondents rate their quality of life as excellent.

tions released their annual *Vital Signs* report cards, an overview of quality-of-life issues across the country.

Although the national survey, conducted by the Environics Research Group to complement *Vital Signs*, found the vast majority of Canadians feel positively about quality of life in their communities, there were some notable variations based on community size.

"Residents of smaller communities rate their quality of life as excellent more often than those in large centres," said Michael Adams, founder of Environics Research Group and head of the Environics Institute.

Mr. Adams related the challenges facing Canadian cities. "Like many societies around the world, Canada has urbanized at a tremendous rate over the last century. Many of our systems — political, economic, infrastructure — have had a hard time keeping pace with this massive

top of their priority list in terms of improving their community's quality of life over the next few years.

Three in 10 (29 per cent of Canadians surveyed) said improvements in public transit, roads, health care and social services were the most important factor in improving local quality of life. That was followed by a stronger economy/more jobs (16 per cent) and improved environmental protection/awareness (11 per cent).

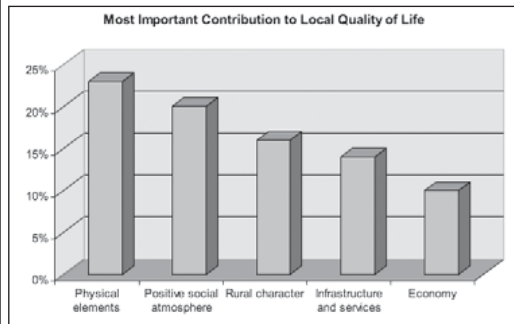
"We know small towns have their own challenges related to the economy and health care," said Mr. Adams. "But their residents are not only more satisfied, they have more confidence that their local leaders can make the changes necessary to improve life in their communities over time."

Canadians have the greatest confidence in leaders of chari-

ties and non-profit organizations to contribute to positive change in their communities. Three-quarters of those polled say they have a great deal (27 per cent) or some (50 per cent) confidence in leaders of charities. By comparison, seven in 10 have confidence in local business leaders, dropping to just over six in ten for their municipal elected officials.

The national survey was conducted by the Environics Research Group via telephone survey August 19 through 26 with a representative sample of 2,007 Canadians, aged 18 and older. Results from this survey can be considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.5 per cent (19 times out of 20).

Full survey results and *Vital Signs* reports from community foundations across Canada can be found at www.vitalsignscanada.ca.



Only 10 per cent of Canadians identified the economy and/or job opportunities as a top quality-of-life concern.

Source: Environics Research Group, 2009 Vital Signs Survey

To read the *Canada's Vital Signs 2009* report in English or French, visit www.vitalsignscanada.ca

Vital Signs report points to an increasingly urbanized region. THE RECORD

Improving health should be a top priority in Ottawa, Vital Signs report says. OTTAWA CITIZEN

Most of us happy with where we live, report finds. VICTORIA TIMES COLONIST

Poor get poorer in an affluent city. TORONTO STAR

Let the discussion begin.

KELOWNA DAILY COURIER

Vital Signs delivers a wakeup call.

GUELPH MERCURY

Young Canadians facing worst job market in decades.

TELEGRAPH-JOURNAL, SAINT JOHN

A message that shouldn't be ignored. CALGARY HERALD



COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS OF CANADA

VitalSigns[®]

Community foundations taking the pulse of Canadian communities

Community means so many things to so many people, and the world to us. In all we do, and all we say, we're all for community. To find the community foundation near you visit www.cfc-ccc.ca



A vital report card

How Canadian communities are faring in key areas of concern

If you want to learn more about the issues facing our communities and our country, *Vital Signs* can help. The annual report card on quality of life from community foundations across Canada offers a snapshot of how Canadian communities are faring in 10 key areas, including health, learning, safety, arts and culture, and the environment.

And it's making an impact. *Vital Signs* has become a platform for local action among a wide range of community leaders, including governments, non-profits, philanthropists, the private sector, and individual citizens," says Monica Patten, President and CEO of Community Foundations of Canada.

On Oct. 6, the national organization released *Canada's Vital Signs 2009*, and 16 local *Vital Signs* report cards were also issued by community foundations across Canada. The full findings are available at www.vitalsignscanada.ca.

With data collected from recognized sources, the reports are designed to share important research in an engaging, reader-friendly way that is accessible to all Canadians.

Vital Signs gives us a comprehensive view of the issues and trends that need particular attention, and helps member foundations increase the effectiveness of their grantmaking," says Ms. Patten.

Community foundations connect donors to community needs and opportunities. In 2008, Canada's 165 community foundations contributed \$169-million to charities across the country. Together, they help Canadians invest in building strong and resilient places to live, work and play.

Follow *Vital Signs* on twitter.com at CFCVitalSigns.

Join the conversation

The conversation about *Canada's Vital Signs* is just beginning on our blog.

During the month of October, Community Foundations of Canada is featuring articles by key experts on communities and community vitality including:

- Michael Adams, Environics Research Group
- Rahul K. Bhardwaj, Toronto Community Foundation
- Dr. Paul Cappon, Canadian Council on Learning
- Mike Christie, Community Foundation of Medicine Hat & Southeastern Alberta
- Eva Friesen, The Calgary Foundation
- Dennis Howlett, Make Poverty History
- Khalil Shariff, Aga Khan Foundation Canada
- Dr. Andrew Sharpe, Centre for the Study of Living Standards
- Dr. Sharon Manson Singer, Canadian Policy Research Networks
- Rosemary Smith, The Kitchener and Waterloo Community Foundation
- Faye Wightman, Vancouver Foundation
- Researchers from the Institute of Wellbeing

Be part of our community. Visit www.vitalsignscanada.ca and click on the blog link.

Putting their best foot forward

Running program in Victoria helps give homeless new hope

The Victoria Foundation is putting its best foot forward with a new program that aims to foster health and self-reliance – through running – among the city's homeless population.

Every Step Counts, launched in February, is a mentored running program for people experiencing housing as well as mental health and addiction challenges.

"We really made a conscious effort to listen to what *Vital Signs* was telling us, and try to make a difference in that area," says foundation CEO Sandy Richardson. "Last year was the third year we had done *Vital Signs* and what kept bubbling up were issues around homelessness."

In response, the Victoria Foundation contributed \$125,000 to homelessness initiatives in the city, including grants to the Greater Victoria Coalition to End Homelessness,

and Every Step Counts, initiated by Ms. Richardson and based on a running program she'd heard about in Philadelphia.

To get Every Step Counts out of the blocks, the foundation partnered with Frontrunners Victoria and Victoria Cool Aid Society, a non-profit agency that – among other initiatives – runs the Downtown Community Activity Centre.

"When you see someone who has been afraid to come out of their apartment for a month coming out to a running group every week, and starting to socialize, it's incredible," says Ms. Richardson, herself a runner.

The group began with 12 participants and has now grown to more than 30. Over the past eight months, several members have participated in the popular Times Colonist TK 10K and the Sidney Days 5K. Some participants planned to take part in Victoria



Victoria's mentored running program, aimed at fostering health and self-reliance, began with just 12 participants and now boasts more than 30. Every Step Counts participants Pery Evans (left) and Dan O'Connor celebrate after a race in Victoria.

'This program actually addresses a multitude of issues identified by Victoria's Vital Signs report.'

– Sandy Richardson, President and CEO, Victoria Foundation

Marathon races last weekend.

"You feel more alert, you feel more connected to your community, you have the endurance to walk and get your groceries – you have the energy to interact," Drew Barnes, co-ordinator of the Royal Jubilee's psychiatric day hospital, told the Globe and Mail earlier this year, adding that he

actively markets Every Step Counts to clients.

"This program actually addresses a multitude of issues identified by Victoria's *Vital Signs* report," says Ms. Richardson. "We are so pleased to see the impact this program is having in our community."

Recipe for success

Residents of Toronto's Alexandra Park are stirring up community vitality with a new project that blends four key ingredients for a safe and healthy community.

Recipe for Community focuses on food, convening, youth engagement and neighbourhood beautification.

A resident-inspired partnership between Toronto Community Foundation (TCF), the City of Toronto's Office of Partnerships, and Toronto Community Housing, the project was initiated by a TCF fundholder who was eager to help after the foundation's *Vital Signs* report identified safety and a low sense of belonging as key issues.

The partners used the priorities identified by area residents to create Recipe for Community, and soon other fundholders at the Community Foundation quickly jumped in to help.

"The Recipe for Community project will help create a more vital community in Alexandra Park," said Toronto Community Foundation President and CEO Rahul K. Bhardwaj. "By creat-

ing public spaces, residents can meet and get to know their neighbours better, which helps build a safer community and a stronger sense of belonging."

Residents worked together to build window boxes, paint murals, and plant an organic vegetable garden. Then a barbecue and cooking area was added, along with benches, picnic tables and bleacher seating – a lovely spot to enjoy a meal, watch a basketball game, or chat with friends and neighbours.

Youth from the neighbourhood have been hired and trained to assist in the ongoing community beautification efforts, including public art installations and the construction of 300 custom-made window flowerboxes.

A community recipe book is also in the works, with help from renowned "food sleuth" Marion Kane, who is generously volunteering her time. The recipe book will feature recipes for some of the residents' favourite dishes as well as, in some cases, stories about why they came to Canada.



Toronto Community Foundation CEO Rahul K. Bhardwaj (second from left) and Toronto Mayor David Miller (far right) work on a community garden with residents from Alexandra Park.

One person can make a wish.
Making it come true – that can take a few.

Dealing with dumping

Medicine Hat's charities knew that illegal dumping at their donation boxes was a problem. They just didn't know what a mammoth problem it was.

But when *Vital Signs* revealed that two local charities were spending \$33,000 annually to dispose of unusable donations dumped on their doorsteps, they were spurred to action. Further research revealed \$100,000 was being spent yearly among four local charities to dispose of unwanted goods.

"That is taking away from programs and services that we all want to deliver back into the community," says Lois Bourassa, executive director of the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). "It's very startling, and I think that's what hit the Community Foundation ... they could see how ludicrous it was."

The Community Foundation of Medicine Hat & Southeastern Alberta helped

facilitate a partnership between CMHA, REDI Enterprises Society, the Salvation Army and the Canadian Diabetes Association to address the problem. It also organized a public event called "Donating or Dumping?"

The anti-dumping subcommittee has garnered support from local police and media in communicating relevant information to the public and continues to work on the issue.

In August, the CMHA cut the ribbon on a very successful home-grown solution: a set of locally constructed – by Alberta Job Corps members – various-sized wooden lockers for after-hours donations. It's this type of action, and collaboration, that makes *Vital Signs* so valuable, says Jennifer Thompson, the Foundation's community impact co-ordinator. "Suddenly, a problem they didn't realize was so big is becoming a lot more manageable," she notes.

To be entrusted with the wishes of those who yearn to make a difference – that is a great responsibility. It is one we do not take lightly, which is likely why our Foundations and Endowments team manages some \$1.5 billion in assets. If you'd like tell us how we wish to make a difference, and learn how we can help it happen, contact us at foundations@mcleanbudden.com.

Investment Managers Since 1947
www.mcleanbudden.com

Toronto Montréal Vancouver Chicago