



Annual Report

2022-2023



*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, and LinkedIn.

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Board Chair's Message

Looks like we made it.

It has been another difficult year, and we have worked through it with a renewed determination to open doors in an inclusive community.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic remained a stubborn reality. Even as restrictions eased and our community started to rebuild itself, the caution and isolation caused by the pandemic continued to disproportionately affect many people and families who access our services.

Second, the relentless housing crisis saw a rising number of people with developmental disabilities and families in our community unable to find and keep roofs over their heads. Prices skyrocketed, rental apartments vanished, and a ruthless market pushed more and more people who access our services toward homelessness.

And so, it was with purpose and resolve that Community Living Huntsville acted. Staff doubled down on housing-related supports, strengthened partnerships, and launched new initiatives to help people find and keep places to live in their community.

Staff, board members, community members, and donors also celebrated the return of our in-person community awareness and fundraising events this past year. We celebrated not only because it was our organization's 60th anniversary, but also because it was an opportunity to call our community to action on inclusion and raise vital funds to support our innovative housing efforts, like our Transitional Housing initiative.

Several more exciting housing initiatives are on the horizon. I trust in my fellow board members and Community Living staff to take them into the future, as I step down after reaching the maximum six years on the board. It has been an honour to serve my community as a board member and as board chair. Please know I will continue to proudly support community inclusion – and Community Living Huntsville.

Thank you to Suzanne Willett and Community Living Huntsville staff for their hard work, expertise, and commitment to the people, families, and community they serve. Thank you to my fellow board members for their leadership, passion, and commitment.

And thank you to the people, families, and community supporters who put their well-founded trust in Community Living Huntsville to grow a community where everyone can live with dignity, share in every element of living, and have equal opportunity to participate.

Sincerely,

Myke Malone

Chair, Board of Directors



Executive Director's Message

Our community is awesome.

After three difficult years, it was a relief to have pandemic restrictions ease. Community members started to have both the ability and the confidence to gather again. Many people and families who access our services, as well as broader community members, advocates, donors, business owners, and elected officials, celebrated with us as our community engagement events returned in full force. That included both our 60th anniversary celebrations during Community Living Month and our revitalized fundraising events. People came not only to help us raise much needed funds but also to reaffirm their commitment to growing an inclusive community where people with and without disabilities can live as respected, included, and contributing community members.

In short, it was a year of gratitude and hope.

What did that look like? It looked like seven people moving into four accessible and affordable rental apartments after we officially signed a five-year lease with Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North for its Generation Homes Huntsville complex. It looked like five unhoused young men with developmental disabilities participating in our Transitional Housing initiative. And it looked like new and strengthened partnerships with area landlords to build and support sustainable tenancies for people and families who access our services.

It also looked like a renewed enthusiasm in our skilled and passionate staff, as they empowered people in creative ways to forge and rebuild community connections. Our seasoned staff welcomed several new team members, too, who are passionate about the community living movement. I am confident our community is well served.

So too is our community well served by our dedicated board of directors. In particular, I thank Debbie Kirwin and Myke Malone for their six years on the board. Debbie has been the chair of our governance committee and has lead the committee in some great work. Myke, over the past two years, has been as our board chair. Their terms have ended, but I know they won't be too far away.

Now, we shift our focus to the province's Developmental Services reform plan, called *Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion*. The multi-year plan aims to empower people and families. While there is much still unknown about the province's plan, we are confident our organization and our team will remain innovative and resilient leaders in providing quality person-directed supports and services to community members into the future.

It is, after all, what we do best.

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, 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 jobseekers 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.

Community Engagement Report

As the Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, I am thrilled to present the 2022-2023 community engagement report for our organization, showcasing the incredible community relation and fundraising initiatives we have undertaken throughout the year. From milestone celebrations to successful fundraising events, we are proud to highlight the impact we have made together in our community.

A kickoff to Community Living Huntsville's 60th anniversary began in May with Community Living Month and our annual flag raising celebration. The event brought together community members and supporters to commemorate our organization's rich history and commitment to inclusivity. It was a reaffirming moment that set the tone for the rest of our engagement initiatives.

We also had record-breaking fundraising events, hosting some of the most successful fundraisers in Community Living Huntsville's history.

Our first all-abilities 9-hole golf tournament, Golf Fore Inclusion 2022, sold out with a waiting list, generating substantial funds to support our housing initiatives.

We also welcomed the return of our Autumn Brunch in 2022.

Community members gathered for a delicious brunch and conversations worth having while raising vital funds for our housing initiatives.

Our 2023 Huntsville's Got Talent show was a sold-out event, too, receiving overwhelming support from the community, corporate sponsors, and local media. Addressing the packed house at the Algonquin Theater, I had the opportunity to speak with a captivated audience about the impact of our housing initiatives and the dire need for support. The event resulted in both a show of community support for our organization's work and a significant boost to our fundraising efforts.

Additionally, thoughtful community members hosted events on our behalf, such as the Huntsville Polar Bear Dip hosted by Markus Latzel and the Lost in the Woods open-air art installation hosted by Sandhill Nursery Home and Garden Centre, which raised significant funds to further our cause.

Working with the Huntsville/Lake of Bays Chamber of Commerce, we hosted a successful Business After Hours event in March 2023, too. It enabled us to connect with local businesses and community members, and raise awareness about our housing initiatives

and the need for inclusive employment partners. The event was a resounding success, with attendance and engagement beyond our expectations.

We are also immensely grateful to the generous people and groups who stepped up during the holiday season for our sponsor-a-family campaign. Thanks to donor support, 23 families had a spectacular Christmas holiday, complete with food and presents.

Our community engagement and fundraising initiatives have been outstanding this year. From milestone celebrations to successful fundraising events, we have made a significant impact for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the community.

None of our successes would have been possible without the unwavering support of our donors. We express our deepest gratitude to all the people, businesses, and organizations that have participated and contributed to Community Living Huntsville's events, fundraisers, and causes throughout the year. Your generosity has made a meaningful difference in our community, and we are truly grateful for your continued support.

Jennifer Jerrett
Community Engagement
Specialist

Governance Committee Report

The work of the Governance Committee over the last six years involved revising our bylaw and the respective policies in order to be compliant with the Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act (ONCA). Following that, we devised a system to ensure our policies will always remain current.

This past year, we completed

the first round of that system. We made a number of changes, such as deleting policies, adding new policies, and editing existing policies. The system is cyclical and thus, entering 2024, the new board will be charged with starting the second cycle. This system is documented and will run in perpetuity, avoiding the need for a complete overhaul again.

As I am retiring from the board this year, I would like to thank all those who sat on the Governance Committee and worked diligently to provide all future board members with the tools to guide them through their term.

Debbie Kirwin

Chair, Governance Committee

Finance and Audit Committee Report

The Finance and Audit Committee, consisting of at least three board members, assists the board 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 \$6 million. The main funding partners were the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the District of Muskoka, Fleming Muskoka-Kawartha Employment Services, 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.

The committee would like to recognize Lee Russell and Suzanne Willett for the achievement of smoother financial reporting a year after COVID disruptions. In addition, the financial team realized additional revenue derived from placing funds, not required in the short term, into secure GICs.

The complexities of the organization's financials have become apparent to the committee and we wish to acknowledge the excellent performance of the organization's finance and accounting personnel for their

willingness to go above and beyond what would normally be expected to keep the financial records timely and accurate. The committee would also like to thank BDO Canada for assigning an experienced Certified Professional Accountant to the organization's annual audit.

As committee chair, I wish to thank Lee Russell and committee members Myke Malone, Morgan Lonsdale, Lorraine Morin, and Suzanne Willett for their commitment to the organization.

Jim Alexander

Chair, Finance and Audit Committee

Nomination Committee

Community Living Huntsville Board of Directors 2022-2023:

- Chair – Myke Malone
- Director – Debbie Kirwin
- Director – Tish Firman
- Director – Morgan Lonsdale
- Director – Jim Alexander
- Director – Bernadette Lovegrove
- Director – Lorraine Morin
- Director – Heather Hunter
- Director – John Garlick
- Director – Crystal Paroschy

The Community Living board of directors started the year with 11 members. We are ending the year with 10, as one member had to end their term early.

We thank the board members for their contributions, time, and commitment to Community Living Huntsville.

We also thank Myke Malone and Debbie Kirwin, who have come to the end of their third terms and are now required to step down from the board. We thank them for their hard work, leadership, and dedication over the past six years. And we thank Jim Alexander, who has served as treasurer for the last two years, for his contributions as he ends his term.

Community Living Huntsville's board of directors provides the following recommendations for the upcoming 2023-2024 term:

Members Recommended for Reappointment:

- Tish Firman
- Bernadette Lovegrove
- Lorraine Morin
- Heather Hunter

Proposed New Members to the Board:

- April Best-Sararas
- David Wright

Proposed Board of Directors for 2023-2024:

- Tish Firman
- Morgan Lonsdale
- Bernadette Lovegrove
- Lorraine Morin
- Heather Hunter
- John Garlick
- Crystal Paroschy
- April Best-Sararas
- David Wright

Lorraine Morin
Chair, Nomination Committee



Introduction of New Directors

April Best-Sararas

April was born and raised in Huntsville, Ontario. April attended University of Waterloo and graduated with a Bachelor of Environmental Studies, Honours, in Planning. Following graduation, April moved back to Huntsville to work as a Land-Use Planner, where she is currently Director of Planning Services at the Township of Lake of Bays.

After graduating from university, April completed 300-hours of yoga teacher training, which

included training in Rishikesh, India, and is also a certified Fitness and Nutrition Expert.

As a Land Use Planner, April has a wide range of experience in reviewing and formulating long-range objectives and strategies. Through all of her work, there is a strong focus on providing affordable and attainable housing for current and future generations.

April has a passion for community building and is

eager to help Huntsville grow into an even more inclusive community.



David A. Wright

David is eager to embrace the opportunity of assisting in the community-based growth and sustained stewardship of assistive programs and services which benefit and secure the inclusion of all of our Huntsville family however challenged.

A background of successful business management and ownership, extensive community volunteering involving church, service clubs, sports, theatre, arts, fraternal

organizations, and educational advisory committees, serving in board and committee positions as needed, has been demonstrated.

Originally rooted in the village of Huntsville in the 1870s, the Wright family's record of community service includes reeve, councillor, and mayor of Huntsville, and member of Parliament for Parry Sound-Muskoka, well into the 1900s. David is very much looking

forward to exemplifying that dedication to community service.





Strategic Plan 2019 - 2023

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



Strategic Direction #1: Intentional Innovation

Goal #1

Be intentional about applying creativity, using technology, and engaging partners to find innovative solutions to:

- a) Affordable housing
- b) Lifetime transition services for:
 - i. Children
 - ii. Youth & their families entering the adult service system
 - iii. People requiring supports associated with aging & end of life
 - iv. People requiring new or altered supports due to aging family members
- c) Expanding meaningful employment & other opportunities in the community
- d) Influencing education & life-long learning organizations
- e) Moving community awareness and advocacy efforts forward



Strategic Direction #2: Cohesive & Creative Workplace Culture

Goal #2

Cultivate a cohesive and creative workplace culture by engaging Community Living Huntsville's staff team, in:

- a) Identifying together, why Community Living Huntsville is adopting an innovative approach to our work, and how each of our stakeholders will benefit
- b) Using collaborative and creative approaches to seize opportunities & solve challenges
- c) Developing a culture that promotes informed risk-taking in a safe environment, and learning from the things we have tried
- d) Working across programs to try new things and to provide seamless support
- e) Exploring learning opportunities that enable the team to communicate more effectively, both internally & with members of our community



Strategic Direction #3: Resource Development

Goal #3

Access new funds and resources to promote sustainable supports for people using services by:

- a) Reaching out to existing & new partners from the private and public sectors, to co-create mutually beneficial initiatives
- b) Having a voice, role and vote at decision-making tables locally, regionally, and provincially
- c) Growing direct funding and fee-for-service options
- d) Expanding the application of Community Living Huntsville's sustainable fundraising model
- e) Exploring social enterprise as an opportunity for fund development
- f) Designing and implementing a deliberate and focused approach to finding efficiencies
- g) Connecting with other organizations in the geographical area to explore possibilities of ways to share resources to minimize administrative costs and maximize effectiveness, while maintaining Community Living Huntsville's identity

Strategic Plan Update

The goals in our strategic plan are designed to ensure our organization is innovative, sustainable, and relevant now and into the future.

Action on these goals has helped us remain resilient through the COVID-19 pandemic – and it has proactively positioned us well for the province's upcoming Developmental Services reform, called *Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion*.

With innovation, creativity, collaboration, and resourcefulness as our guides, we have made incredible strides in the past year toward our Strategic Plan goals:

Strategic Direction #1: Intentional Innovation

- Head leased a house to help homeless youth who access our services (1a, 1b)
- Leased a four-plex (Habitat for Humanity), and moved four people from an old home to new home (1a)
- Secured district rent subsidies for people we support (1a, 1b)
- Built stronger relationships with landlords and expanded our communication strategy with a webpage and brochure to reach more landlords (1a)
- Staff rep on Muskoka Housing

Task Force (1a)

- Children and Youth Services team worked with the high school to support youth in co-op to transition to summer jobs with on-the-job coaching (1b)
- Launched a new Pre-K Play & Learn program to support children transitioning to full-time kindergarten (1a, 1d)

Strategic Direction #2: Cohesive and Creative Workplace Culture

- Created On-Call Direct Support Professional positions (2d)
- Empowered Supported Group Living staff to assist people they support in Passport experiences (2d)
- Enhanced our communication through our Communications Specialist (2e)
- Transitioned to new technology (MS 365) for enhanced communications (2e)
- Created a Joint Union Management Urgent Issues Committee to problem solve around organization concerns (2b)
- Created a Human Resources Network of Developmental Services agencies in the north (2b)
- Converted part-time positions into full-time positions to attract

and retain staff (2b)

- Implemented flexible working schedules and compressed work weeks to aid in recruitment and retention (2a)
- Fostered a collaborative culture and enhanced work environment with a new Wellness Committee and team building initiatives (2c)

Strategic Direction #3: Resource Development

- Launched a social media awareness campaign for our Connections service (3c)
- Partnered with Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North on housing solutions (3a)
- Staff rep on Muskoka Housing Task Force (3b)
- Expanded our fundraising efforts with grant applications (3d)
- Continued staff representation on the OASIS Labour Relations Committee and OASIS Business Resource Committee (3b)

Our organization will review its strategic plan and priorities in 2024. Until then, we remain committed to our current strategic plan and to the continued creativity and collaboration that will drive the plan forward.

Suzanne Willett
Executive Director



Community members, advocates, business owners, elected officials, staff and board members gathered in Huntsville Civic Square to celebrate as the town raised the Community Living flag at town hall for Community Living Month in May 2022.

Flag flies at town hall for inclusion in May

Community Living celebrates 60 years of leadership in inclusion

The Town of Huntsville hoisted the Community Living flag at town hall in an air of celebration in May.

“Thank you, everyone, for being here this morning, and thank you, Community Living Huntsville,” said Mayor Karin Terziano to the crowd gathered in Huntsville Civic Square. “Sixty years is a long time as an organization, and it’s wonderful for Huntsville and its residents.”

The town raised the flag to honour both Community Living Month 2022 and Community Living Huntsville’s 60 anniversary year. Festivities included speakers, community connection,

Community Living-themed cupcakes by Sweet Confections Muskoka, themed cookies by Farmer’s Daughter, and coffee and tea by Starbucks Huntsville.

Jo-Anne Demick, Director of Stakeholder Relations for Community Living Ontario, offered congratulations on behalf of the provincial association.

“Both regionally and provincially, Community Living Huntsville is recognized as a leader for inclusive community development,” said Demick. “And as a leader on support for people to live full and inclusive lives of their choosing. Thank you for all you do.”

Myke Malone, board chair for Community Living Huntsville,

told the crowd the organization has been passionate about opening doors in an inclusive community for people with developmental disabilities and their families since 1962.

He said he felt the same sense of possibility for a more connected and inclusive future now as Community Living Movement advocates in North Muskoka must have felt throughout the past 60 years, as they inspired possibilities and strived for disability rights, self-determination, and inclusion.

“Consider how you, personally, can get involved or reignite your passion for the movement. Raise your voice as a self-advocate. Join our membership. Become an inclusive employer.

Support our fundraisers and come to our events,” said Malone. “Together, we can honour the hard work of those who have come before us, celebrate our present, and inspire possibilities for a more inclusive future.”

Suzanne Willett, Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville, noted the celebration belonged not only to Community Living Huntsville, but also to the broader community because for decades the community had advocated and made strides toward dignity, respect, and inclusion, too.

She shared Huntsville resident Don Eagles’ story as a testament to the importance of self-determination, person-directed support, and community inclusion. His was a story of a man who spent his early life in an institution in Orillia for people with developmental disabilities. Through self-determination and access to Community Living Huntsville support, he was eventually able to move into his own downtown Huntsville apartment, build a job providing snow clearing and year-round storefront maintenance services for downtown businesses, and create meaningful professional and personal connections with his community.

“Don became a valued employee, a friend, and a respected member of the Main Street community,” said Willett.



Community Living Huntsville celebrated its 60th anniversary at the flag raising celebration with speeches, refreshments, and fellowship.

“Together, we can honour the hard work of those who have come before us, celebrate our present, and inspire possibilities for a more inclusive future.”

“He had people in his life, besides those who were paid to be there, who cared about his welfare, who looked for him when he was not around, and celebrated holidays with him.”

His community, she said, rallied around him when he lost his apartment and needed a new place to live. And it rallied again when he passed away in 2015, installing a permanent tribute to Eagles downtown at Main and King streets – a bronzed broom and commemorative plaque.

“This is a perfect example of

why this is not only Community Living Huntsville’s celebration,” said Willett. “We encourage and invite everyone in our community to consider personal, social, professional, and organizational action they can take in their own lives to inspire possibilities for inclusion in their community.”

The crowd broke into applause.

We are grateful to the town for raising our flag to support and promote community inclusion, the Community Living Movement, and Community Living Huntsville.



Yvonne Bush, a Resource Consultant with Community Living Huntsville, has created a new Pre-K Play & Learn program to help children discover and build their strengths as they head into kindergarten.

New Pre-K Play & Learn preps families for kindergarten

A new school readiness program created by a Community Living Huntsville staff member helps young children and families calm those pre-school nerves – and provides them with confidence and tools for a strong start.

Pre-K Play & Learn, created by Resource Consultant Yvonne Bush, is a flexible eight-week program designed to help children and families prepare for kindergarten. It launched in July 2022.

“I highly recommend taking this class if you have the

opportunity. It was a fun activity to do this summer – and so very helpful,” said family member Lisa Hill.

Children and families we support were invited to sign up and, each week, Bush led families through one-on-one sessions. Seven families participated. The sessions offered fun, hands-on, skills-building activities that focused on belonging, engagement, well-being, and expression. Bush designed each activity around the kindergarten learning framework, which is based on the Early Years

developmental document for children ages 0 to 6. The entire program was linked to school curriculum.

After each session, families took home activity kits to practice that week’s skills, like self-help, emotions, math, art, and literacy. At the end, families received a report to share with their children’s teachers.

Children and families who completed the program also celebrated with a graduation ceremony in early September that included certificates, graduation caps, treats, and



games. It was all smiles.

Hill said her family participated in the program because she felt it would be a great opportunity for her grandson, Desmond, who was starting senior kindergarten in September.

“Yvonne was an amazing teacher. She was able to see how best to engage with Desmond. He enjoyed showing off his existing skills and practising new skills,” said Hill. She noted, for example, Desmond retold a brown bear story for the sessions many, many times when at home. “It was fantastic to be able to bring so many activities home with us – we were able to continue his learning at home with the items,” she said.

Hill said Desmond really enjoyed all the different activities: “It was great for us preparing him for

“Going to senior kindergarten can be a stressful time with all the unknowns, and Yvonne was able to reassure us and helped reduce the anxiety.”

kindergarten as it showed us areas we need to keep working on and areas that he seems to have mastered,” she said. She added that his teacher appreciated the information in the final report, too.

“Going to senior kindergarten can be a stressful time with all the unknowns, and Yvonne was able to reassure us and helped reduce the anxiety in both adult and child,” said Hill. “Thank you, Yvonne and Community Living, for the opportunity!”

Bush said she developed the program out of a desire to provide hands-on opportunities to children and families supported by Community Living

Huntsville, who have children about to start kindergarten. She felt there was a programming gap for children that age in North Muskoka, and took the initiative to fill it. She said she was especially excited to offer the fun, new program because children and families in that age group had not had many opportunities in the previous two years to interact with peers, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s all about discovering and building strengths, as children get ready to step into the classroom, and the gaining understanding and tools to support children’s learning experience throughout their first year in school,” said Bush.



Youth coach supports inclusive summer jobs

New service helps build connections and confidence

Morgan wanted a real life with a real job and real pay. “I want to have my own money so I can save,” said the Huntsville High School student who also accesses Community Living Huntsville services.

After a Cooperative Education placement with Canadian Tire Huntsville that impressed her employer, Morgan accepted a paid summer position. Her employer then contacted us for recommendations to ensure a supportive and inclusive workplace.

Morgan soon connected with our Youth Services team’s new youth job coach service. This was the first time the team had directly supported school-aged youth, like Morgan, in the workplace.

The coach shadowed Morgan at work for about an hour and a half each week and also made themselves available to the employer, if needed. But neither Morgan nor her employer needed much support. Not only was Morgan a capable, reliable and motivated employee, but Canadian Tire was also a motivated employer. Management and staff offered Morgan on-the-job training, job shadowing, and mentorship support, plus a flexible work

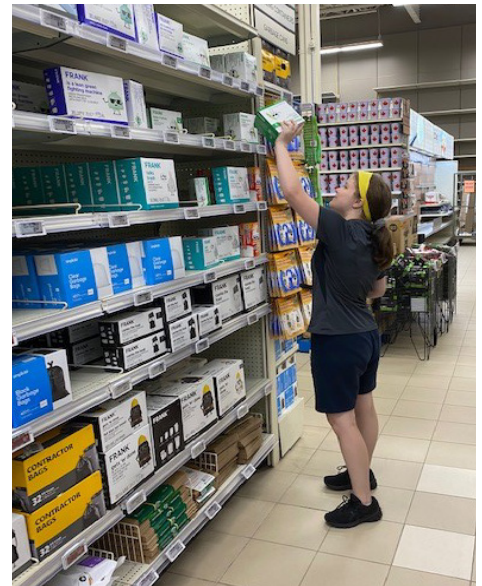
schedule, should she need it. As importantly, fellow staff treated her as part of the team.

By the end of the summer, Morgan had such a strong and confident handle on her job that she was able to mock-train her coach on her role, which included tidying shelves, rehoming misplaced products, and operating equipment, like a recycling compactor.

Her success was a result of her skills, ability, mindset, and determination as much as the commitment and support of an inclusive workplace. “My boss is kind and he understands people with disabilities. That’s important,” said Morgan.

An inclusive workplace can open doors to opportunities for both workers and employers. Denise Boone, a representative for Canadian Tire Huntsville, said Morgan was a good fit with the team – she was so eager to learn and work – and her contributions were valued. Boone encouraged other employers to create inclusive work environments: “Everybody deserves an opportunity,” she said.

Stacey Bullock, Manager of Children and Youth Services for Community Living Huntsville, said employment is important



An inclusive workplace can open doors to opportunities for both workers, like Morgan, and employers.

on many levels for students: “Gaining skills at this age prepares people for meaningful employment when they leave school,” said Bullock. “It is the same for all of us.”

She noted the student summer job coach experience was such a success that Community Living planned to continue its youth summer job coaching into the future for students who want to build on their high school co-op placement experiences.

“We don’t have a large program, so we are limited in the hours we have available, but this is definitely an area we want to grow,” said Bullock.

“Gaining skills at this age prepares people for meaningful employment when they leave school.”



Christopher Pierce, who works at Boston Pizza in Huntsville, says he feels supported, welcomed, and comfortable at work, where he is considered a valued team member. Boston Pizza Huntsville has been an inclusive employment partner with Community Living Huntsville since the restaurant opened.

Driving the future of work with disability inclusion in Huntsville: NDEAM 2022

The conversation around disability inclusion in employment has started to shift.

“Recently, we have noticed that more people with disabilities are being considered for positions for which they were previously overlooked,” said Diane Lupton, Manager of Community Supports for Community Living Huntsville. “Employers are also expanding their approach and looking for creative ways to fulfil their hiring needs.”

A lot has happened in recent years to prompt employers to create and grow inclusive workplaces that welcome workers with disabilities. For one, businesses are starting to understand that workplace diversity includes disability. For another, staffing shortages are forcing businesses to consider a previously overlooked and underemployed talent pool: “Employers are willing to give people opportunities they may not have had in the past,” said Lupton.

She noted it is essential for employers to create and grow inclusive workplaces, if they want to be successful now and into the future.

It is a shift across Ontario that was reflected in the Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN) theme for National Disability Employment Awareness Month in October 2022: *Driving the Future of Work with Disability Inclusion*.

“The number of Canadians who

have a disability is increasing ... so in the years ahead, there are going to be more employees – and more jobseekers – in the disability talent pool,” stated ODEN. “Organizations that understand the power of investing in the talent of skilled people who have a disability now invest in future success. They’re driving the future of work with disability inclusion.”

Roughly one in five Canadians has a disability, and that is expected to rise to one in four Canadians within the next two decades, according to Statistics Canada. So, ODEN said businesses need to have hiring strategies and workplace environments that sincerely welcome workers with disabilities, if they want to fill labour needs, stay successful and competitive, demonstrate their commitment to inclusion, and create a culture that reflects and meets the needs of all their employees and the communities they serve.

Blake Hayden, who accesses Community Living Huntsville’s Supported Employment services, works as a room attendant at Holiday Inn Express and Suites Huntsville. He said he likes his job and the work environment: “The people are nice to me, and I can work independently,” he said. He also enjoys his workday routine. “And getting a paycheck,” he added.

Hayden said the Community Living Huntsville team has supported him in his employment by helping him to access transportation to work and to create a strategy to complete his work task list, as examples.

He also has an employer with an inclusive mindset.

“Organizations that understand the power of investing in the talent of skilled people who have a disability now invest in future success.”

Marisa Kapourelakos, General Manager for Holiday Inn Express and Suites Huntsville, said, as part of its search for housekeeping and breakfast staff, the business looked into the Ready, Willing and Able initiative. The national initiative is designed to increase labour force participation of people with intellectual disabilities or autism. “We wanted to give opportunities to those who are able to perform tasks in the workplace,” said Kapourelakos.

Kapourelakos noted the partnership with Community Living Huntsville’s Employment Services team has supported a positive work environment. Moreover, she said Hayden had shown he is able to do the work.

According to Community Living Ontario, more employers will need to follow suit.

“Despite the considerable efforts that have been made to diversify

the Canadian labour force, Statistics Canada reports that, in 2017, 3.7 million working-age Canadians identified as having a disability and only three in five (59 per cent) were employed,” stated Community Living Ontario. “The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially intensified the situation. Currently, approximately 1 million

Canadian jobseekers experiencing disability are unemployed or underemployed. Given current

workforce shortages, Canadian employers coast to coast need the skills, education, and experience of this untapped talent resource.”

Community Living Huntsville has provided Supported Employment services for adults with developmental disabilities and Employment Services for employers in the Huntsville area since 1990. It has inclusive employment relationships with more than 125 local businesses and organizations.

Supported Employment services for workers include job exploration, skill development, job application and retention, and ongoing job coaching, as needed, while Employment Services for employers include job matching, onboarding support, best practices support, and team disability awareness training. The goal is to create a win-win situation for both the employee and the employer.



Suzanne Willett (left), Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville, and Kimberley Woodcock, CEO for Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North, open doors to affordable housing through a new partnership. (Photo by Habitat OGN)

Habitat partnership opens doors to housing inclusion in North Muskoka

Four sets of keys, placed firmly in community members' hands, have unlocked doors to housing inclusion in Huntsville.

"Housing isn't just about putting a roof over someone's head – it's about dignity, choice, and community belonging that comes with a stable place to make your own. It's the foundation of community inclusion," said Suzanne Willett, Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville. "We are proud that, through this innovative partnership, we have added one more way for us to creatively support and serve people and families with housing solutions in these

difficult times."

In October 2022, Community Living Huntsville officially entered a five-year lease agreement with Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North for Habitat's four newly built Generation Home Huntsville rental apartments. Now, Habitat owns the property, while our organization manages the apartments and supports the tenants.

The partnership and housing model were a first for both of us.

Kimberley Woodcock, CEO for Habitat for Humanity Ontario Gateway North, noted

that, while Habitat remained committed to affordable home ownership, the dire need for affordable rental apartments convinced the organization to launch the Generation Homes Huntsville build as a pilot project when a funding opportunity became available in late 2018.

The apartments were built with support from the District of Muskoka, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, the Rotary Club of Huntsville, and individual donors. Then, as market rates soared, Habitat looked to a community partner to ensure rent remained affordable for the apartments, specifically built for community

members with disabilities and women rebuilding their lives after violence.

Habitat and Community Living Huntsville started talks in 2019. Once our organization determined the partnership made financial sense and would serve our vision of opening doors in an inclusive community, we forged ahead. And our experience, reputation, and sound financial management inspired Habitat's board to approve our partnership as the best way to effectively and sustainably serve marginalized community members.

"The most exciting thing about the partnership with Community Living that I didn't expect was the sense of pride that we now have in our expanded reach. We have now served people that we wouldn't have been able to get to in our traditional model, and I thank you for being the connection that we needed," said Woodcock. "I am proud to have partnered with an organization of such high repute, and doing the work that you are doing, which is so important."

For Community Living, the partnership was about finding another new and creative way to support and empower people who have historically struggled with fair access to safe, dignified, and affordable housing in their communities because of labels that marginalized them and barriers

that dismissed them.

And since the keys changed hands, lives have changed. For example, access to the accessible and affordable units have empowered four older adults in two barrier-free apartments that fully accommodate their mobility needs. In another apartment, an unhoused young woman now has a safe, stable, and dignified roof over her head after much fear and uncertainty.

Efforts have not gone unnoticed.

In 2023, OASIS, an association representing Developmental Service organizations across Ontario, recognized us with its Annual Member Leadership Award. It was one of four awards OASIS presented to individuals and organizations across Ontario. Specifically, OASIS noted our dedication

to innovative and collaborative action on community-based housing for people and families who access our services.

Jo-Anne Demick, Director of Stakeholder Relations for Community Living Ontario, later noted during a Community Living Month event in Huntsville, that access to housing remains the most pressing issue for people, organizations, and communities across Ontario.

"Community Living Huntsville is such an innovative leader within our province, and I would like to congratulate Suzanne and all of Community Living Huntsville on your recent OASIS award," said Demick. "When we survey our members, housing is the No. 1 issue that people face – affordable, accessible, safe housing – so congratulations on your partnership with Habitat for Humanity."



Jo-Anne Demick (centre), Director of Stakeholder Relations for Community Living Ontario, presents Community Living Huntsville's Suzanne Willett and Myke Malone with a certificate of recognition for our 60th anniversary.

Artists for Inclusion raises \$7.6K for housing

Last-minute bidding frenzies kindled more hope for housing in North Muskoka.

Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, said the not-for-profit organization's Artists for Inclusion 2022 online art auction raised nearly \$7,600 to support its Transitional Housing initiative.

"We couldn't have done it without the artists, craftspeople, and community members who donated items for the auction, nor the bidders who raised their virtual auction paddles to bid on and buy the items," said Jerrett. "Really, the people at the center of this are those who contributed, so people we support could benefit. We cannot thank you enough!"

The auction had more than 80 items up for bid, more than the previous year. There were more bidders, too, nearly half of whom were bidding in an Artists for Inclusion auction for the first time.

"People are hearing about the auction, and the cause, and getting involved, which is excellent," said Jerrett.

Bids started as soon as the auction opened, but the final moments had everyone on the edge of their seats.



Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, says she is excited about the impact that funds raised through Artists for Inclusion 2022 will have on housing inclusion in North Muskoka.

"The term 'frenzy' comes to mind," laughed Jerrett. "I saw all these bidding wars and I thought, 'Yes! This is all going to help people who are on the cusp of homelessness. This is amazing!'"

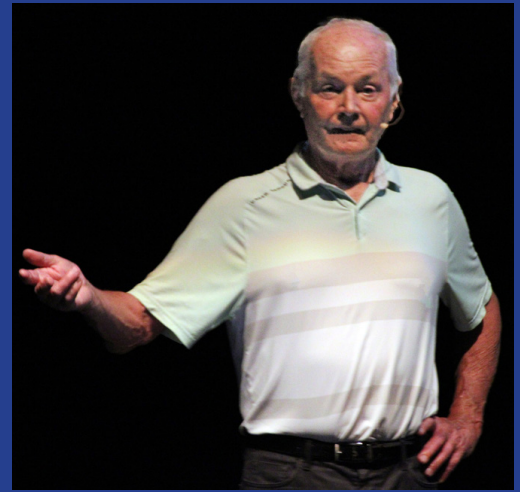
Community Living Huntsville team members have routinely witnessed people and families they support unable to find, afford, or maintain adequate living space in North Muskoka due to low availability, cost, competition, and systemic barriers.

The organization's new and innovative Transitional Housing initiative provides people with developmental disabilities, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with short-term housing, skills-building,

resources, and support to successfully move into their own place, long-term. The initiative relies on fundraised dollars, donations, and charitable grants to continue.

"To the people who bought the art, it's a win-win for them. They have a piece of art they can love and display in their home, and they are helping support someone to get a home," said Jerrett.

If you missed the auction, were outbid on your favourite pieces, or would like to make a further donation to our Transitional Housing initiative, you can donate through our website at www.clhuntsville.ca/donate/ or contact Jennifer Jerrett at 705-789-4543, Ext. 241, for more information.



(Left) Heather Hunter, a board member for Community Living Huntsville, welcomes everyone to *Tom & Winnie: Art, Mystery and Tragedy*; (centre) audience members listen enraptured as author Roy MacGregor re-examines Tom Thomson's life, love, and death; (right) Roy MacGregor takes the Algonquin Theatre stage to share his research.

'Tom & Winnie' revisits past to create stronger future

The mystery may never be solved, but one thing is for sure – an enduring fascination with Canadian icon Tom Thomson has made a difference for people in North Muskoka.

"Words cannot express how grateful we are that Roy MacGregor gave his time to share his love of Huntsville, and the wealth of knowledge he has gathered over the years about Tom Thomson and Winnie Trainor, with guests at the wonderful Algonquin Theatre," said Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville. "And special thanks to our board member, Heather Hunter, for spearheading this amazing event in support of Community Living Huntsville."

MacGregor presented a research-based talk, *Tom & Winnie: Art, Mystery and Tragedy*, to an audience of

roughly 200 interested listeners in July 2022. His presentation grew out of his lifelong attachment to Huntsville, keen interest in Thomson, and his bestselling book, *Northern Light*. The event, which re-examined theories around Thomson's life, love, and mysterious death, astounded the crowd and prompted some thought-provoking questions.

"Roy took us on an adventure through time – and we didn't even have to leave our seats," laughed Jerrett. "But he had us on the edges of them."

She also thanked the Algonquin Theatre and its staff for their incredible support in making the event a success.

The event raised more than \$6,100 through both tickets sales and freewill donations. Funds raised will support Community Living Huntsville's

Transitional Housing initiative.

The initiative provides adults supported by Community Living Huntsville, who have experienced periodic or chronic homelessness, with a stable place to live for up to four years. During that time, participants access tailored supports and services that empower them to create action plans, build skills, access resources, and forge the community connections everyone needs to find and keep a place of their own.

The initiative relies on fundraised dollars, donations, and charitable grants.

"Thank you to everyone who came to *Tom & Winnie* and supported the event," said Jerrett. "You revisited the past, and in doing so helped us work toward a stronger future for people we support and our community."



Golfers with and without disabilities enjoyed golf, giggles, and good times at Deerhurst Lakeside Golf Course for the first Golf Fore Inclusion all-abilities tournament hosted by Community Living Huntsville in 2022.

Friends, fun, and flying marshmallows

Friendly laughter, encouraging cheers, and only occasionally some lighthearted groans filled the air at a Muskoka golf course.

Community Living Huntsville hosted its first Golf Fore Inclusion all-abilities golf tournament at Deerhurst Lakeside Golf Course in September 2022. The sold-out event saw 67 golfers – both with and without disabilities – register to participate in the casual, nine-hole tournament filled with fun challenges and community spirit.

“I came to hang out with my friends, and to meet people,”

said Margo Cybulski, a tournament participant and community member who accesses Community Living Huntsville’s services. She said the event helped her do just that. “I had a good time.”

She also rocked a solid golf game. Cybulski, an avid golfer, led her team in sinking putts. She was also one of the few tournament participants who knocked a golf ball into the cup during the RBC Putting Challenge, though Al Stobbart ultimately took top spot.

But, as Cybulski points out, the focus was on fun and community. Golfers connected

with each other as much as with their golf balls. They didn’t always connect with their golf balls, though. Sometimes their golf balls were replaced with extra-large marshmallows.

“Oh, come on!” exclaimed one golfer, as they putted their increasingly damp and gritty marshmallow only slightly closer to the pin on the green. Another golfer, whose team had clearly spent time developing a strategy, explained: “We figured out it’s all about the position of the marshmallow. You want it to roll on its side, rather than trying to send it end over end.”

For at least one team, strategy



The sold-out tournament brought community members together for a fun and friendly event that included bouncing golf balls, windswept Frisbees, and slightly damp marshmallows, all in support of community-based housing initiatives.

made little difference: “We got our marshmallows to the green. One was, maybe, 18 inches from the cup, and another two were further away. But then a seagull came in and picked up our marshmallow and flew off with it,” said Myke Malone, a tournament participant and board chair for Community Living Huntsville. “Of course the seagull had to take the one that was closest to the cup.”

Other challenges saw teams throw their golf balls from the tee by hand, or use only one club for an entire hole. The most notorious challenge – even more so than the marshmallows – was when teams replaced their golf balls with Frisbees.

The wind seemed to have as much fun with the discs as

the golfers did. Many Frisbees gilded gently, and deeply, into the ruff as they were carried off by the wind. Sighs and laughter ensued. Many teams shared their Frisbees with others who had lost theirs, or helped them track down wayward discs, getting to know each other in the process.

Malone said the tournament was the perfect way to spend the day on the course. “I like to have fun and I knew today would be a fun day,” he said. “This was a great way, whether you’re a golfer or not, to get out on the golf course, have some fun, play some games, and meet people, without taking the game too seriously.” He noted the relaxed pace of the event also offered teams like his a chance to get to know

the teams ahead of them, and the teams behind them. “We actually got to chat for a bit, so there was a little bit more camaraderie,” he said.

And that was the point: “We have been able to come out, golf, be included whether we have a disability or not, and have fun,” said Malone. “And it’s a great way to show how you can have fun on a golf course without just chasing that little white ball around.”

After the tournament, golfers enjoyed a barbecue lunch and a fun prize ceremony. Tournament participants also received a tote bag filled with treats.

Funds raised went toward Community Living Huntsville’s Transitional Housing initiative.



(Left) Community Living volunteers Marjory Curry and Brent Finn greet attendees during the Mimosa Mingle at the 2022 Autumn Brunch. (Top Right) Mitchell Beesley, Community Living Ontario CEO Chris Beesley, and Community Living Huntsville executive director Suzanne Willett. (Bottom Right) Guests enjoy the first in-person Autumn Brunch since 2019.

'Inclusion is beautiful'

Autumn Brunch inspires conversations worth having

Guests set down their brunch forks and rose to their feet with applause and cheers.

Community Living Huntsville's 2022 Autumn Brunch saw community members with and without disabilities come together at Grandview Golf Club to share in delicious food, a silent auction, live music, and inspiring conversations worth having in October.

The event raised more than \$22,700 to support our Transitional Housing Initiative.

"Our entire community has struggled with social isolation in the last couple of years. It has been especially difficult for people with developmental disabilities," said Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville. "We reimagined our Autumn Brunch to bring people together for community, positivity, and hope, which are feelings a lot of us want to embrace and nurture now."

Guests, including Parry Sound-Muskoka MP Scott Aitchison, Huntsville mayor Karin Terziano, and Town of Huntsville CAO Denise Corry, heard from two incredible speakers: Chris

Beesley, Chief Executive Officer for Community Living Ontario, and Allison Bobbette, an author, singer-songwriter and inclusion self-advocate.

Beesley shared the story of how his son, Mitchell, who was born with an intellectual disability, launched a successful farm-fresh egg distribution business in their neighbourhood mid-COVID-19 pandemic. The business came about from Mitchell's passion for farming, his connection with a farm that could supply the eggs, and a suggestion from a support worker who saw the opportunity.

Soon, the business became so

popular that Mitchell had to set up a wait list for new customers.

And something else happened. Beesley said that, not only did Mitchell come to know many neighbours by name, but they also knew and greeted him by name, too. Mitchell had created deep connections and a genuine sense of belonging through the opportunity to meaningfully contribute to his community. And that, said Beesley, was what community living truly meant.

The audience broke into cheers and applause.

Allison Bobbette then shared how her determination to overcome barriers to education and inclusion had sparked her passion for empowering people to achieve their dreams.

"I recognized very early in life that I was different from most of my classmates. I was bullied and teased by my classmates for being different. I struggled with why God had made me different," said Bobbette. "Gradually, I started to realize my mission in life was to provide a voice for all of us who are different."

Bobbette worked hard to promote and advocate for inclusion. For example, in high school she started a fun and successful networking group for students with and without disabilities. She later sought out and enrolled in a post-secondary program at Sault College, called Community Integration through



Suzanne Willett (left), Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville, thanks Allison Bobbette for her motivational speech on the power of inclusion.

Cooperative Education (CICE), and launched a special needs chapter group at the college. She and her dad later worked to get a CICE program started at Georgian College, too.

She now serves on the Empower Simcoe board of directors, is a member of its Believe in Yourself Committee, and co-teaches a Rights Training and Abuse Course.

She has received numerous awards from her elementary school, school board, and college, and a municipal association, for her contributions, advocacy, and leadership.

"I have learned that inclusion is beautiful," said Bobbette. She encouraged everyone to be courageous, follow their passions, surround themselves with supportive people, and include others. "Even though we are different, we are all in this beautiful thing called

life together. So think about love before you think about indifference. Be the change you want to see in the world."

She then performed her original song, *I am Able*, and received a standing ovation.

Suzanne Willett, Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville, thanked the speakers and the audience.

"By being here, you're not only helping to strengthen a sense of community and build understanding, you are also taking action on the deepening housing crisis by helping us raise funds for our Transitional Housing initiative," said Willett. "The initiative empowers a growing number of people we support, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, with the stability, skills, and support everyone needs to have equal opportunity at securing permanent housing in our community."



(Left to right): Huntsville's Got Talent 2023 judges Geordie Sabbagh and Sean Cotton, guitarist-vocalist Sonya Robertson, guitarist-vocalist Todd Blair, percussionist Brandon Colonello, and judge Sue Kirwin-Campbell celebrate after a sold-out event.

Cheers, laughter, and happy tears

Huntsville's Got Talent 2023 packs sold-out Algonquin Theatre

There was a lot of cheers and applause, a bit of laughter, and even a few happy tears as Huntsville's Got Talent returned to a sold-out crowd at the Algonquin Theatre after a three-year hiatus in March 2023.

"Wow!" said Jennifer Jerrett, event coordinator and Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, to the packed 408-seat theatre. "Thank you all so much for being here tonight."

The event raised more than \$17,000 toward Community Living Huntsville's Transitional Housing initiative – a new record for the event.

Audience members were on the edges of their seats as the Top 10 Finalists, as chosen by the judges and the public, stepped into the spotlight. The crowd was loud and supportive.

Judges Sue Kirwin-Campbell, Sean Cotton, and Geordie Sabbagh had the daunting task of choosing a winner after the jaw-dropping performances. First Place went to guitarist and singer-songwriter Todd Blair, Second Place to guitarist and singer-songwriter Sonya Robertson, and Third Place to percussionist Brandon Colonello.

"The talent on stage tonight was just unbelievable. And the Top 3? I don't even know how the judges do it," said Blair. "Any one of us could have walked away with it."

Based on the crowd's reactions, every finalist deserved their chance to shine. As singers belted out soulful alt rock, rock, country, show tunes, and pop songs, and musicians dazzled on drums, guitars, and woodwinds, audience members cheered, hollered, and shouted their praise and encouragement.

Smiles broke out on faces, and tears fell, as the audience, judges and fellow performers alike embraced the finalists, many of who had pushed themselves to perform emotional and powerful solos on stage for the first time.

And if the audience was supportive, so too were the judges: "We understand what it takes to put yourself out there, especially as a solo artist," said



Audience members cheered loudly for the Top 10 finalists, who all performed powerful solos. Audience members also cheered loudly for the All Abilities Dance Troupe, which performed on stage as the judges deliberated.

Kirwin-Campbell. “I don’t want anyone to go away thinking, ‘I wasn’t good enough,’ because you are all good enough. ... Keep doing what you do.”

Sabbagh thanked audience members for their energy, too: “Artists can’t survive without audiences,” he said. “I felt a lot of love for all the people up here, and I think they don’t get up here without all of you.”

And Cotton thanked the stellar finalists for choosing to join in Huntsville’s Got Talent: “The funds raised are going to a very special place with some really great people,” he said to applause and cheers.

Suzanne Willett, Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville, said she was excited by how the community came together for Huntsville’s Got

Talent. Its success, she said, reinforced that North Muskoka is a supportive community dedicated to building connections and inclusion, even after three incredibly difficult years.

She noted it takes a lot of work behind the scenes, whether by event organizers, contestants, judges, guest performers like the crowd-favourite All Abilities Dance Troupe, and others, to make the event a reality. “It’s an analogy for the work we do as an organization,” said Willett. “A lot of work happens behind the scenes at Community Living Huntsville to support individuals with developmental disabilities to feel included in the community.” And that’s why the community coming together for an event like Huntsville’s Got Talent was so important: “It’s a way of building community connections through shared experience.”

Special thanks to event founders Dr. Drew and Janet Markham, MC Helena Renwick, the judges, the applicants and finalists, stage manager Lynn Hill, guest performers All Abilities Dance Troupe, local media, the Algonquin Theatre crew, audience members, and Community Living Huntsville’s 2022-2023 event sponsors for an incredible event.

Huntsville’s Got Talent is a nonprofit competition created by Dr. Drew and Janet Markham. It brings the community together to celebrate local talent and raise funds for charity. Community Living Huntsville is grateful to the Markhams for allowing our not-for-profit organization to host the 2023 competition. Since its launch in 2017, Huntsville’s Got Talent has now raised more than \$45,000 for Community Living Huntsville.

'Life had taught him to wear his shoes'

Funds raised support life-changing Transitional Housing

Community members did more than celebrate the arts at Huntsville's Got Talent 2023.

"Why does Huntsville's Got Talent matter?" Jennifer Jerrett, Community Engagement Specialist for Community Living Huntsville, asked the audience in a full Algonquin Theatre on March 4. "First, it's a celebration of the arts, local talent, and community. Second, it raises vital funds for Community Living Huntsville."

She thanked the sold-out crowd for helping the organization empower community members. The event raised more than \$17,000 toward Community Living Huntsville's Transitional Housing initiative to end homelessness for adults, who have developmental disabilities and access the organization's services, in North Muskoka. It was a record-breaking total for the event.

Jerrett noted that, since 1962, the not-for-profit organization has been opening doors in an inclusive community for people with developmental disabilities, and their families, to build a community of belonging for everyone. "But it's impossible to feel like you belong when you have nowhere to live," said Jerrett. She noted difficult realities, like the housing crisis,



Jennifer Jerrett says Huntsville's Got Talent's record-breaking fundraising total will help end homelessness for adults with developmental disabilities in North Muskoka.

cost of living crisis, and systemic bias, have made homelessness and the risk of homelessness a dangerous reality for an increasing number of people and families the organization supports. "You can't build your life if you don't know where you're going to sleep at night," she said. "Having somewhere safe and stable to call your own can make all the difference." She offered an example:

A young man with a developmental disability and mental illness was homeless. Community Living Huntsville, said Jerrett, was able to build a team around him, develop a support plan, and help him find an apartment. But before he moved into his apartment, staff noticed something. "He never took off his shoes. Never," said Jerrett. "He went to bed in his shoes, he woke up in his shoes. He refused to take them off." His shoes, she said, made him feel safe. With his shoes

on, he was ready to run from danger or run toward help. "Life had taught him to wear his shoes," she said. "Life had taught him he was never really safe."

When staff helped him move into his apartment, he got his own room, set up his own bed, organized his own cupboards and fridge space, and had his own TV. He made his space his own. At the end of the day, he bent over, untied his laces and took off his shoes. He said goodnight, went to his room, and closed his door behind him.

"That's what it means to have a home," said Jerrett. "Safety, security, empowerment, dignity."

She noted that, with the community's financial support, Community Living Huntsville was making a difference through innovative housing solutions for a growing number of people and families it supports.



Knocking down barriers, discovering strengths, and building community

Celebrating staff members' commitment to inclusion

It was a long-awaited moment of celebration.

"It is great that, after three years, we are able to hold this in person," said Suzanne Willett, Executive Director for Community Living Huntsville.

Our organization held its Staff Service Awards celebration in Algonquin Theatre's Partners Hall for honoured staff in March 2023. It was the first time the celebration could be held in person since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The event formally recognized 14 staff members who had reached employment milestones with Community Living Huntsville, whether in 2020, 2021, or 2022. The team members' milestones represented a combined 220 years of service.

Recipients included direct support professionals Janice Austin, Sherri-Lynn Cox, and Leah Rand, and accounting technician Janet Dodgson, who had each reached 30 years of service: "I really love my job," remarked Rand, a member of our Supported Group Living team.

Community Living Huntsville

employs roughly 80 staff, including direct support professionals, who support and advocate alongside more than 300 children and adults with developmental disabilities, and their families, in North Muskoka. Staff empower people to live the lives they choose both at home and in their community.

"I love supporting people to discover their strengths and skills, while knocking down all the fears and barriers that have held them back from experiencing life in community," said Cox, a Supported Independent Living team member.

It has been a tough haul these past few years with pandemic challenges, province-wide staff shortages, and burnout. In that time, the province has recognized the essential role direct support professionals have in supporting people with developmental disabilities by making permanent what was a temporary wage enhancement launched in the pandemic.

Our organization also invested in team member's health and wellbeing by providing Compassion Fatigue training to frontline staff, negotiating with new carriers for benefits and

employee assistance programs, and fostering staff-led wellness and social committees.

Staff, supervisors, and managers may now have supported people and families, their colleagues, and themselves through the worst of the pandemic. And they did it with skill, care, and professionalism.

"I love to empower and support families, and encourage them, as they achieve in spite of remarkable challenges," said Gwen Jones, a Family Support Worker with our Children and Youth Services team.

As skilled professionals and champions for choice and inclusion, our team helps build a stronger community where dignity, respect, and community connection flourish for everyone: "I love that I get to help people work toward their goals and dreams in order to live their best lives," said Heidi Collings, a former direct support professional with our Community Participation team who is now a supervisor with our Supported Group Living team.

We are grateful to our team for their work and dedication to making a difference in people's lives, and in our community.

"I love supporting people to discover their strengths and skills, while knocking down all the fears and barriers."



2022-2023 Financial Summary

We are grateful for the ongoing financial support from the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, the District of Muskoka, and Fleming Muskoka-Kawarthas Employment Services. Without their support, the work we do could not be done.

And that work is done by our awesome staff. As with any service-based organization, most of our funds support staff wages and benefits, followed by other program-related costs. Our staff members, who are driven by our organization’s vision, purpose, and values, are responsible for providing our excellent and needed supports, services, and programs to people and families. Our community is well-served by our skilled, trained, compassionate, and professional staff.

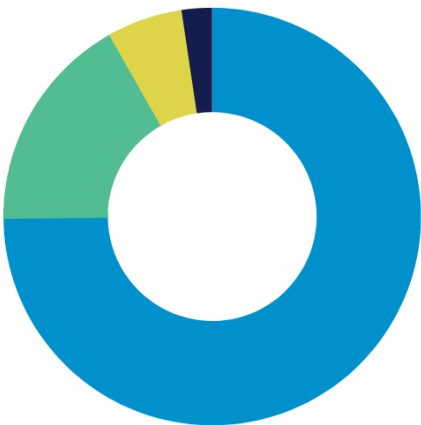
We have, however, continued to experience financial pressure. Despite costs rising for our organization and our community, funding from our main funder, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, has not. Without additional funding, higher costs for food, insurance, and services such as snow removal, repairs and maintenance, for example, must be covered through organizational constrictions and cuts. It is a difficult task, as we work hard to run as efficiently as possible as it is.

To request a copy of Community Living Huntsville’s full 2022-2023 audited financial statement, please contact info@clhuntsville.ca.

We have also continued to proactively prepare for the province’s multi-year Developmental Services reform plan, called *Journey to Belonging: Choice and Inclusion*. The plan aims to make services for people with developmental disabilities better. It also promises to fundamentally change how organizations like ours are funded. There are still many unknowns. Regardless,

our strategic plans and initiatives, including extensive work on business performance measurement and management, are positioning us well to continuously improve and best serve people, families, and our community, as leaders in our sector, now and into the future.

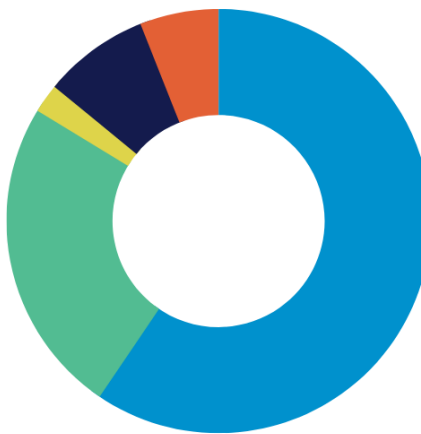
Suzanne Willett
Executive Director



Where do our funds come from?

- 74.83% Province of Ontario
- 16.95% Other Funding Sources
- 5.87% COVID-19-Related Funding
- 2.36% Fundraising

Total \$6,857,719



How do we put our funds to work?

- 59.47% Group and Independent Living
- 24.24% Community Participation and Passport
- 2.21% Employment Options
- 8.07% Admin, Ops, and Professional Services
- 6.01% COVID-19 Protocols

Total \$6,670,342

Fundraising Overview

2022-2023 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 with developmental disabilities. One young man has already moved into his own place.

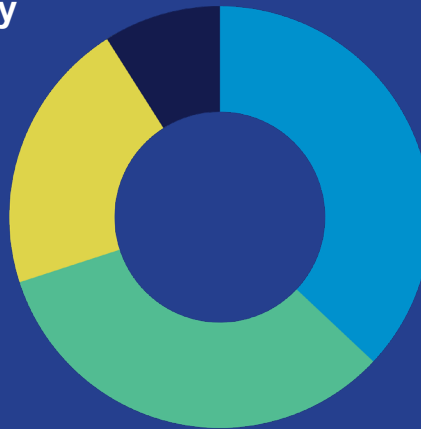
Our free Pathways service for adults with developmental disabilities, who do not have access to Developmental Services Ontario-funded supports or are waitlisted for funds, allows us to assist people to access needed supports and

services so no one falls through the cracks.

And funds raise for general use offer us further flexibility in meeting people's unanticipated needs, including holiday hampers and toys for our annual sponsor-a-family campaign for families experiencing financial pressure and isolation in December.

These solutions build a stronger community where everyone can live with dignity as a respected,

Where do our fundraised dollars come from?



- 37% Events
- 33% Charitable Grants
- 21% Donations
- 9% Sponsorship

Total \$161,586

What are fundraised dollars raised for?



- 67% Housing Initiatives
- 20% Pathways
- 13% General Undesignated

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:**

Abdo and Jelnar Hlal

Huntsville Fuels

Cayman Marshall International Realty

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Lovegrove Construction & Design

Dan Willett Financial

Men of Grandview Foundation

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Heather Hunter

Near North Business Machines

Gary and Gail Donald

Ed Wiebe

Huntsville Doppler

And other donors who wish
to remain anonymous

Thank you for your generous support!

2022-2023 Signature Event Partners

Trailblazers



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Community Partners



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Re/Max The Greater
Muskoka Group



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**Victoria Darling-Wadel
and Jessica Brown**
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Nancy Carr
Royal LePage
Lakes of Muskoka Realty



Kayley Spalding
Coldwell Banker
Thompson Real Estate

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