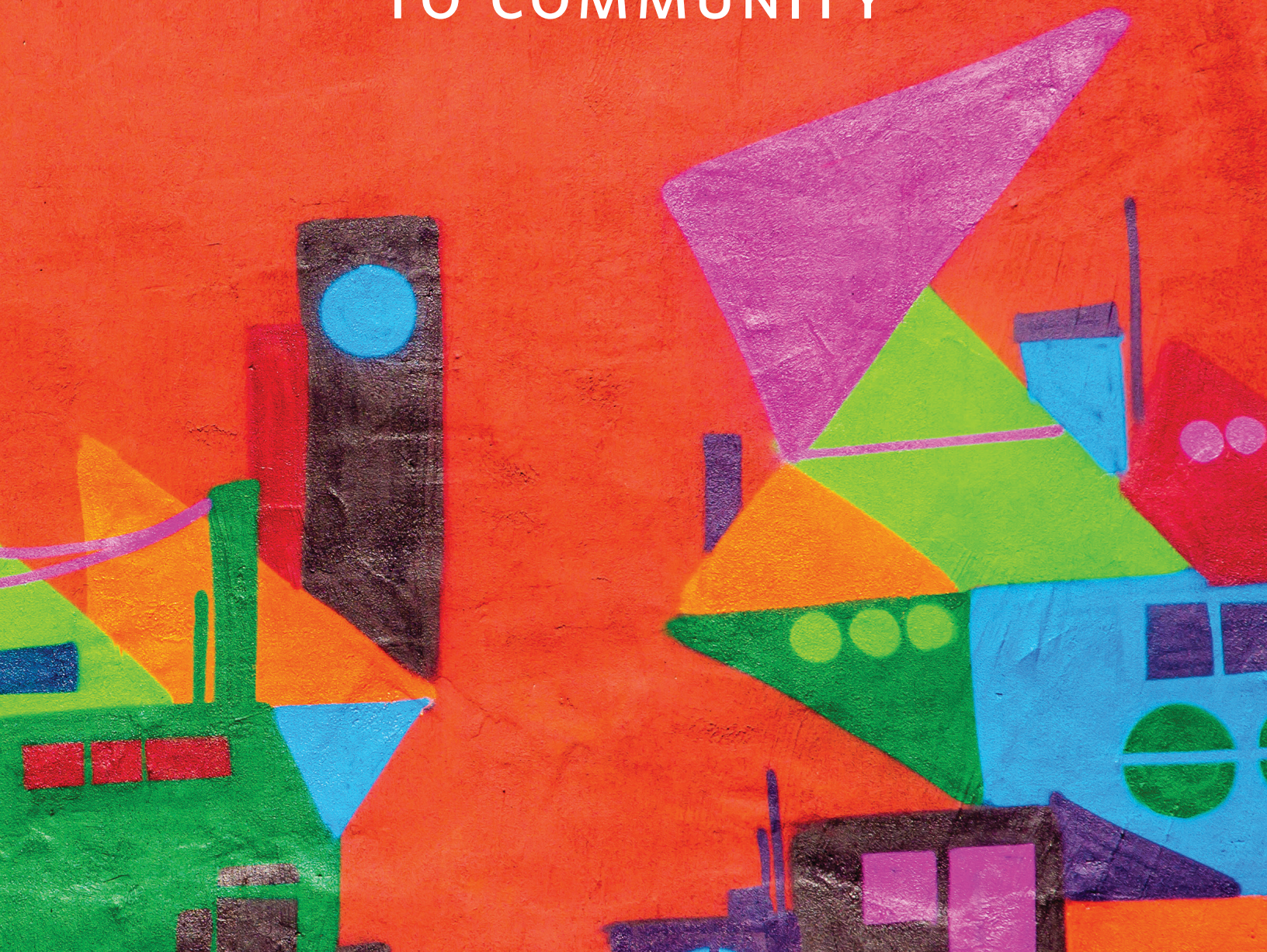


# BELONGING: EXPLORING CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY



**VitalSigns®**

Community foundations taking the pulse of  
Canadian communities.



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA  
*all for community.*

**2016 NATIONAL VITAL SIGNS REPORT**  
VITALSIGNSCANADA.CA





# BELONGING

In 2015 Community Foundations of Canada released *Belonging: Exploring Connection to Community*—a national *Vital Signs* report that sparked an ongoing exploration and focus on belonging in Canada.

*What is belonging? What influences it? Why is it important?*

We define belonging simply as being part of a collective we. It's a two-way street: It's about communities sending signals of acceptance and inclusion, and about individuals cultivating their own connections to community. A sense of belonging is important to build safe, vibrant communities, and it brings purpose to our lives.

As we continue our exploration this year, we're focusing on one side of Belonging Street and are using the lens of social participation to better understand how we as individuals cultivate our connections to community.

*What does it mean to participate? What are the benefits? What are the challenges or barriers? What's the connection between participation and our sense of belonging? How can we help others to feel like they belong?*

As you'll discover throughout this report—belonging and social participation influence each other. The more we get involved in the community, the more we feel like we belong.<sup>1</sup> The stronger our sense of belonging, the more willing we are to contribute to the community because we feel responsible for its well-being.<sup>2</sup>

Scientists and statisticians call that a positive correlation. We call it the key to community vitality.



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA  
all for community.

## About Community Foundations of Canada

Community Foundations of Canada is the national network for Canada's 191 community foundations. Together we are a philanthropic movement working across sectors to help Canadians invest in building strong and resilient communities.



Community foundations taking the pulse of  
Canadian communities.

## About Vital Signs

*Vital Signs* is a national program led by community foundations and coordinated by Community Foundations of Canada that leverages community knowledge to measure the vitality of our communities and support action towards improving our quality of life.



## MFS - National Vital Signs Lead Partner

MFS is the lead partner for our national Vital Signs program and is working with Community Foundations of Canada to strengthen our understanding of the role that belonging plays in fostering connection to community.

## THANK YOU TO THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED MAKE THIS REPORT POSSIBLE.

NATIONAL  
VITAL SIGNS LEAD:  
LEE ROSE

VITAL SIGNS TEAM:  
CLAUDE LAUZIÈRE  
CINDY LINDSAY

RESEARCH LEAD:  
JUNIPER GLASS

COMMUNITY  
STORYTELLER:  
JP NIKOTA

DESIGN:  
CERTO CREATIVE



*When people feel a strong sense of belonging to a group, they are more willing to contribute and they take ownership of the group's struggles. They show concern for other members of the group and will try to help them overcome their problems.*

– THE KITCHENER AND WATERLOO COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

| COMMON WAYS WE PARTICIPATE IN OUR COMMUNITIES                     | REGULARLY | INFREQUENTLY     |
|---|-----------|------------------|
| Participate in a neighbourhood or community project               | 11%       | 41%              |
| Attend neighbourhood or community meetings                        | 11%       | 43%              |
| Use the local library or recreation centre                        | 33%       | 43%              |
| Attend religious services in the community                        | 19%       | 26%              |
| Go out to hear live music   | 25%       | 47%              |
| Socialize with your neighbours, beyond a quick “hello”            | 36%       | 36%              |
| Get involved in children's activities (school, sports, arts etc.) | 19%       | 33% <sup>3</sup> |

## Benefits of social participation

We know that participating actively in our communities is beneficial for individuals and the community as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

### Getting involved in the community:

- ✓ Positively affects our sense of belonging to our local community and to Canada<sup>5</sup>
- ✓ Helps young people find jobs, do better in school, and improve mental health<sup>6</sup>
- ✓ Supports older people to be healthy and redefine their role in society<sup>7</sup>
- ✓ Leads to longer lives<sup>8</sup>



**BELONGING ST.**

# REDEFINING SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

We know that being actively involved in our communities is good for people and for the country. But what does being involved mean?

Volunteering, voting and giving.<sup>9</sup> These are some of the common ways we measure participation in society. Each of these appears to be on the decline in Canada. Does this mean we are becoming less involved in our communities?

## VOLUNTEERING

### VOLUNTEERING RATES HAVE PLATEAUED

% of Canadians that volunteer:

**45%**<sup>10</sup> → **44%**  
{ 2004 } { 2013 }

### VOLUNTEER HOURS ARE IN DECLINE

Average annual volunteer hours:

**168**<sup>11</sup> ↓ **154**  
{ 2004 } { 2013 }

IN 2013, **12.7 MILLION VOLUNTEERS**  
CONTRIBUTED **1.96 BILLION HOURS**<sup>14</sup>



### SUPER VOLUNTEERS!

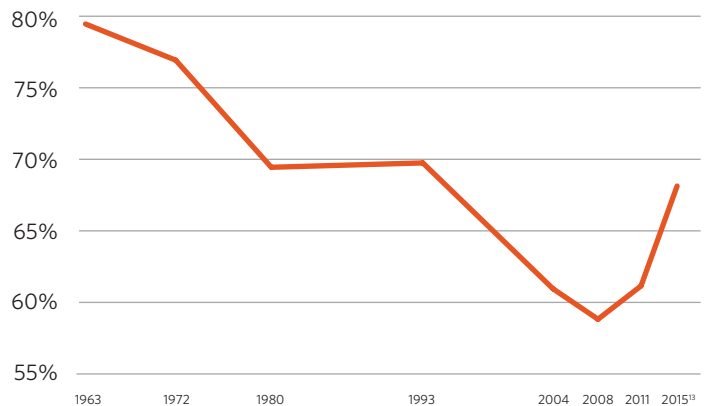
10% of volunteers accounted for 53% of all volunteer hours given to nonprofit organizations.<sup>15</sup>

Volunteerism rates **higher in rural and less urban regions.**<sup>16</sup>

## VOTING ✓

Compared to peer countries, Canada gets a C grade for its national election voter turnout.<sup>12</sup>

VOTER TURNOUT IN FEDERAL ELECTIONS IS IN DECLINE, BUT HAVE WE TURNED A CORNER?



*Volunteerism benefits both society at large and the individual volunteer by strengthening trust, solidarity and reciprocity among citizens.*

— UNITED NATIONS VOLUNTEERS<sup>17</sup>





## GIVING

### THE PROPORTION OF CANADIANS WHO GIVE IS SHRINKING

% of Canadians that donate:

85%

{ 2004 }



82%

{ 2013 }

### HOWEVER, THOSE DONORS ARE GIVING LARGER AMOUNTS

Average annual donations:

\$469<sup>18</sup>

{ 2004 }



\$531

{ 2013 }

## CANADIANS AGED 55+

make up give

34%

of the adult population

47%

of total donations<sup>19</sup>

## PARTICIPATION 2.0

In every community across the country, people are giving back, joining together and contributing to each other's sense of belonging. Is this always recorded in a survey or statistic? Probably not. It's time we expand our view of being involved to reflect the many ways we create community in our everyday lives.



### Do-It-Yourself Citizens

There is a resurgence of change efforts in our local communities and through informal networks, led by ordinary people. They have been called "Everyday Makers"<sup>20</sup> and "Do-It-Yourself Citizens"<sup>21</sup>—and any of us could be one.



### A culture of helping out

Indigenous people have strong cultural traditions of sharing and caring for each other without expectations of payment. The term *volunteer* does not even exist in most Indigenous languages, because helping out – people's responsibility to each other – is such an inherent part of life.<sup>22</sup>



### Informal volunteering

Definition: *helping people on one's own, instead of through an organization.*<sup>23</sup>

Four in five Canadians, 83%, provide direct help to friends, neighbours and relatives that they do not share a household with. Informal volunteering is all that helping out we do for others without an exchange of money: yard work, a drive to the airport, child minding, and many other supports that increase quality of life in our communities.<sup>24</sup>

*Volunteers today are different: Today's Canadians tend to be more goal-oriented and have greater structure in their school, work, family, and social lives. They are mobile, technologically savvy, value autonomy, and have multiple interests and roles within the community.*

– VOLUNTEER CANADA<sup>25</sup>

### ON THE RISE: SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Percentage of Canadians who reported doing a favour for a neighbour in the last month:

{ 2003 } 61%



{ 2013 } 70%

Canadians with 3+ close friends:

{ 2003 } 70%



{ 2013 } 75%

Canadians with 10+ other friends or acquaintances:

{ 2003 } 70%



{ 2013 } 75%<sup>26</sup>



### ON THE RISE: PARTICIPATION IN COMMUNITY GROUPS

Involvement in the community does not have to be formal or even highly organized for it to count. Meaningful participation can simply look like groups of people who get together on a regular basis to do an activity together or discuss things that are important to them.<sup>27</sup>

% Canadians participating in a group, association or organization:

{ 2003 } 61%



{ 2013 } 65%<sup>28</sup>

The increase in the rate of participation over that time was twice as high for women as for men.

Youth engage in their communities and in politics differently than older generations. One of the most striking aspects of youth giving and volunteering is polarization: Millennials tend either to give generously of their time and money, or hardly at all.<sup>29</sup>



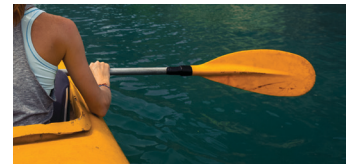
# PATHWAYS TO PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING

How do you participate in your community? Taking in the sounds of a music festival, attending a religious service or helping a neighbour—these are all examples of social participation. When you add it all up, you soon realize that there are many pathways to participation and belonging. In this report we've highlighted five such pathways. Beyond the facts and stats, we also share stories of *Belonging Makers*—people who are making their communities better places to live, work and play through social participation.



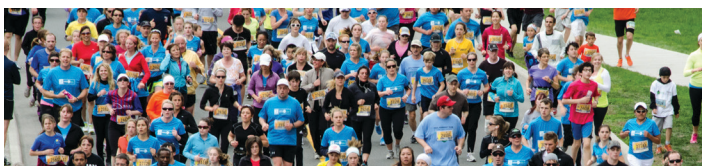
## FAITH THE NEW CONGREGATION

**FACT:** People who consider their religion or faith to be very important are 54% more likely to have a strong sense of belonging to Canada. While participation in organized religion is in decline, alternative forms of collective spiritual expression are on the rise.



## SPORT THE STARTING LINE

**FACT:** 87% of new citizens say watching their children play sports makes them feel more connected to the community. While we experience the benefits of sport most immediately as individuals, it also plays a major role in strengthening communities by bringing people together, building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of excluded groups. Why? Because sport is inherently social. It brings people together—both on the field and in the stands.







## ACTIVISM

### SHIFTING THE STATUS QUO

**FACT:** People involved in activism rate higher on several indicators of well-being. It's more than just agitating for change—it's also about building stronger connections to community through people and causes.



## ONLINE

### BEYOND BANDWIDTH

**FACT:** People who are active on social media are more likely to visit their friends in person and volunteer. What's not to like about that? We explore what makes technology – like the internet, social media and that smartphone in your pocket – a high-speed connection to community.



## THE ARTS

### MORE THAN JUST AN ACT

**FACT:** Canadians who attended an arts or cultural performance in the last year were 34% more likely to do a favour for a neighbour. There's enough evidence to fill a museum showing that taking part in the arts increases our sense of belonging and our engagement in the community.



# THE ARTS MORE THAN JUST AN ACT

Book groups, murals, music festivals and a whole range of arts performances—they're all enjoyable, but do they have any real impact on belonging? Definitely!

Whether you're on stage or in the audience, there is enough evidence to fill a museum that taking part in the arts increases our sense of belonging and our active engagement in the community.



## STATS & FACTS

PEOPLE WHO GO AT LEAST ONCE PER YEAR TO:

An art gallery



ARE

**21%**

A theatre or show



**16%**

A conservation area or park



**14%**

An historic site



**13%**

MORE LIKELY TO HAVE A VERY STRONG SENSE OF BELONGING TO CANADA<sup>30</sup>



THE TENDENCY TO VOLUNTEER INCREASES AS THE FREQUENCY OF OUR PARTICIPATION IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES INCREASES.<sup>31</sup>



CHARITABLE DONATIONS ARE MORE COMMON AMONG PEOPLE WHO TAKE PART IN CULTURAL ACTIVITIES.<sup>32</sup>



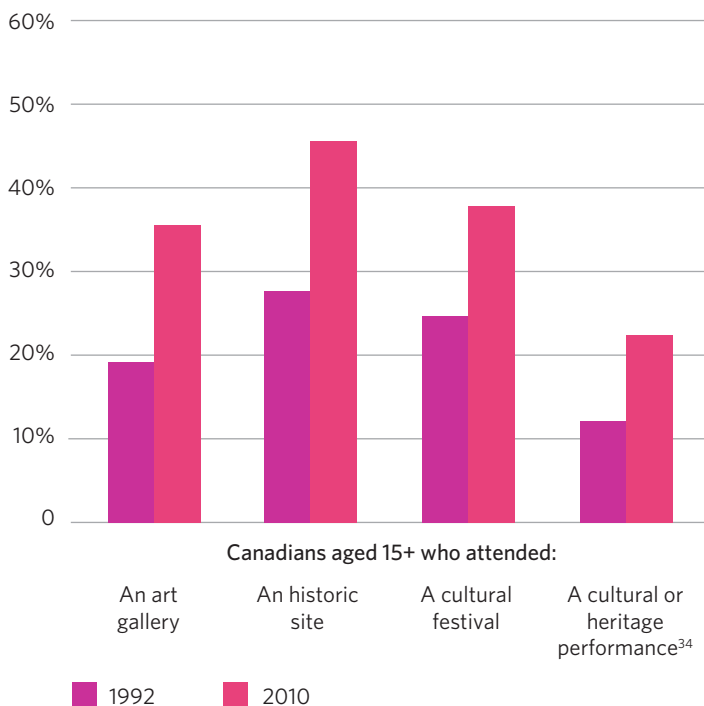
CANADIANS WHO ATTENDED  
AN ARTS OR CULTURAL PERFORMANCE  
IN THE LAST YEAR ARE

**34%**

MORE LIKELY TO DO A FAVOUR  
FOR A NEIGHBOUR<sup>33</sup>



#### ON THE RISE: PARTICIPATION IN ARTS, CULTURE & HERITAGE



In partnership with CAPACOA, Community Foundations of Canada will be releasing a special Vital Signs report exploring the connections between the arts and belonging. Look for it in the spring of 2017!

## BELONGING MAKER



PHOTO CREDIT: JASON LANG, BURNABY NOW

### KEVIN TAKAHIDE LEE & THE NEWCOMERS CHOIR

"I put my choir members through a trial of fire and ice," says Kevin Takahide Lee, a professional opera singer and founder of the Newcomers' Choir in Burnaby, British Columbia. "Not only do they have songs to learn but harmonies and foreign languages." Since 2013, the choir has woven in the voices of over 100 people originally from China, Greece, Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, the UK and Canada. "One of my concerns is that cultures don't intermingle and share their gifts. Music is a great way to bridge those divides." The choir is getting a response unlike anything Kevin expected when he started out, something to do with the magic created when people sing together: "Singers get to be part of something bigger. I'm blown away how many people want to join the choir after we perform!"

## WHAT IS IT ABOUT CHOIRS?



*Singing together is a quick way for groups to generate a sense of belonging, even among people who have never met before<sup>35</sup>, perhaps because of the way that singers' breath and heartbeat become synchronized.<sup>36</sup> Research shows that being part of choirs increases our feeling of inclusion and connectedness, releases endorphins and promotes better mental health.<sup>37</sup>*



# SPORT THE STARTING LINE

**85% of Canadians agree that participation in sport builds stronger communities.<sup>38</sup>**

More than half of all Canadians are involved in community-level sport as participants, spectators, volunteers, coaches or officials. And while we experience the benefits of sport most immediately as individuals, it can also play a major role in strengthening communities by bringing people together, building social capital and fostering greater inclusion of excluded groups.

Why? Because sport is inherently social. It brings people together—both on the field and in the stands. Newcomers also reported that they often had more meaningful social interactions playing or watching sports than in the workplace.<sup>39</sup>

## SPORT CAN CREATE COMMUNITIES WHERE EVERYONE FEELS THEY BELONG.

- ✓ In Indigenous communities, sport reinforces cultural strength, participation and even high school completion.<sup>40</sup>
- ✓ 87% of new citizens say watching their children play sports makes them feel more connected to the community.<sup>41</sup>
- ✓ Sport for people with developmental disabilities reduces isolation for athletes and their caregivers alike.<sup>42</sup>



## BUILDING BELONGING

BANFF CANMORE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

Going for Olympic gold was just the start of Beckie Scott's journey. Thanks to support from the Banff Canmore Community Foundation she founded an organization to introduce First Nations and Métis youth to cross-country skiing in remote communities across Alberta. With contributions from teachers, nutritionists and mental health experts, one woman's passion for sport has snowballed into a holistic approach to community well-being and belonging. Read the full story at [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca).





SPORTS AND RECREATION  
GROUPS ARE THE MOST  
POPULAR TYPE OF  
COMMUNITY GROUP

31%

OF CANADIANS PARTICIPATE<sup>43</sup>



## CANADIANS ARE GETTING OUTSIDE

% THAT VISITED A CONSERVATION AREA  
OR NATURE PARK:



COMMUNITIES WITH **<1000** RESIDENTS ARE  
MORE LIKELY TO REPORT PARTICIPATION IN SPORT.<sup>46</sup>

## BELONGING MAKER



PHOTO CREDIT: TRINE MIKKELSEN, MUMSA

### ROBERTO GODOY & SAMEDIS SOCCER

Roberto Godoy tosses four orange cones onto the grass making a kid-sized soccer pitch and starts to play with his three children. Seconds later, four more parents and kids zoom up on bikes to join the game. Soon there are 5 or 6 families. It's been like this every fairweather Saturday morning for the last three years. At first Roberto just wanted to get kids moving. Soccer, the national game of his home country Guatemala, was an easy pick. But the informal game has turned into an important part of what Roberto calls the *tissu urbain*, the urban fabric, of this east Montreal neighbourhood. Here, neighbours finally learn each others' names, parents exchange tips and vent to sympathetic ears, and kids get the rare chance to play alongside their parents.



Check out our Vital Signs Sport & Belonging Report that looks at how sport – when grounded in fairness, excellence, inclusion and fun – can strengthen belonging to each other and to our communities.



## FAITH THE NEW CONGREGATION

Whether it's at a church, mosque, temple or synagogue, people who regularly attend religious services report a greater sense of belonging than those who don't. Research has shown that it's the social rather than spiritual aspects of religion that are more important to building a sense of belonging.<sup>47</sup> Regularly getting together with others who share a similar worldview and the friendships we foster while congregating are important influencers of our social well-being.

Knowing that shared collective experiences like religious services are important, how will the declining rates of participation in organized religion and Canada's increasing religious diversity affect our sense of belonging and connection to community?

A DECLINING NUMBER OF CANADIANS AFFILIATE  
WITH AN ORGANIZED RELIGION



**83.5%**

{ 2001 }

**76.1%**

{ 2011 }



### BUILDING BELONGING

COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GREATER PETERBOROUGH

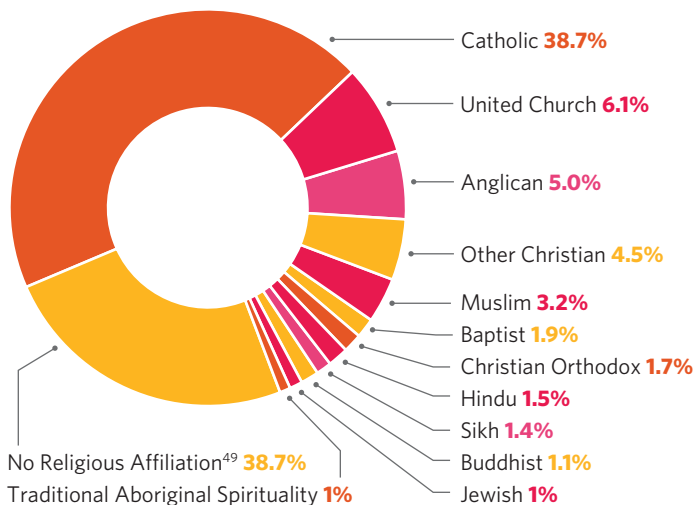
Peterborough's Muslim community turned an attack on their local mosque into a renewed sense of belonging by engaging people from all walks of life in a higher purpose. With a single act of generosity from a local couple which sparked a wave of contributions and the creation of a fund at the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough, the community was able to bring people together, rebuild the mosque and welcome newly arriving families from Syria. Read the full story at [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca).

PHOTO CREDIT: CLIFFORD SKARSTEDT/PETERBOROUGH EXAMINER/POSTMEDIA NETWORK

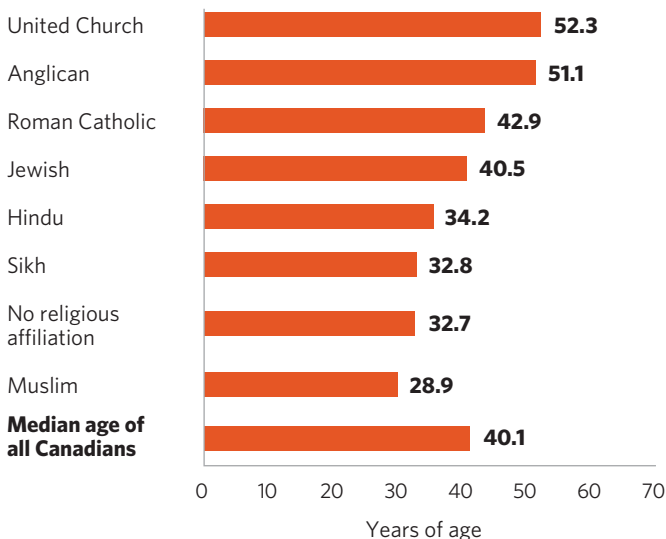




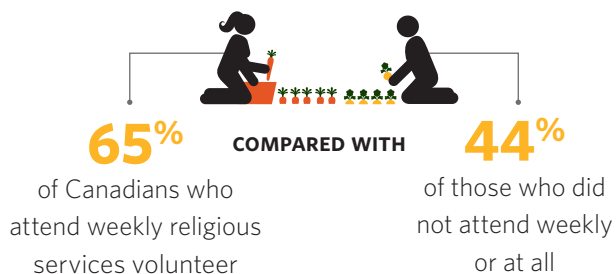
## CANADA'S RELIGIOUS MAKEUP IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY DIVERSE<sup>48</sup>



### RELIGIONS BY MEDIAN AGE:<sup>50</sup>



### VOLUNTEERING:



COMPARED TO CANADIANS FOR WHOM RELIGION IS SOMEWHAT OR NOT VERY IMPORTANT, THOSE WHO CONSIDER RELIGION VERY IMPORTANT ARE:



## BELONGING MAKER



PHOTO CREDIT: RICHARD RHYME

### MOUSTAFA ABDELRAHMAN & THE MEDITATION GROUP AT THE 519

"What am I grateful for?" That is the question that people ask themselves each Sunday afternoon at the beginning of their meditation session at The 519, an LGBTQ community centre in Toronto. The question transcends cultures and faiths, and so do the people who form the circle. "Next to me is the Italian mother of a gay man, sitting beside a senior psychotherapist, sitting beside a Catholic theologian, next to a straight Chinese-Canadian 22 year-old looking for community because her family lives far away," describes Moustafa Abdelrahman, the volunteer facilitator of the group. Experiences like this are what Moustafa was seeking when he emigrated from Egypt six years ago. "I chose to come to Canada, because I always wanted to be in a place where people of all parts of the earth come together." Nearly 500 people have taken part in the drop-in meditation group since its inception three years ago. Moustafa thinks spiritual practice strengthens belonging because "when we observe ourselves beyond our thoughts, we realize that we have so much in common. We start to feel for each other and give each other more chances."



# ACTIVISM SHIFTING THE STATUS QUO

When you first think about activism, your mind might go right to marches and civil disobedience—but activism comes in many forms. It's more than just placards and protests. It's about getting together to make things better in our communities.

There are countless examples in recent history, from the American civil rights movement and the Stonewall riots, to the Great Bear Rainforest protests and Idle No More movement, that show that while we're agitating for change – whether through protest or policy advocacy – we're also stirring up a greater sense of belonging.

**ACTIVISM. NOUN AC-TIV-ISM \ AK-TI-,VI-ZEM\. COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR A COLLECTIVE GOOD.**<sup>52</sup>

People involved in activism rate higher on several indicators of well-being: sense of motivation, life satisfaction, autonomy and positive relations with others.<sup>53</sup>

When we are involved in group efforts to make a change in our communities or influence the policies of governments or businesses, we feel a greater sense of control in our lives and in our environment.<sup>54</sup>

## PARTICIPATING IN GROUP ACTIVITIES HELPS BUILD OUR SOCIAL NETWORKS.

**71%** of Canadians that took part in group activities or meetings at least once a month have more than 10 friends or acquaintances...

compared with **59%** of those who had participated less often and 45% of those who never participated in group activities.

**57%** of people who participate monthly in group activities have met, within the past month, at least one new person they intend to remain in contact with.<sup>55</sup>



### BUILDING BELONGING

FONDATION DU GRAND MONTRÉAL

Tackling systemic challenges facing a community requires many individuals, groups and organizations to be involved. In Montreal, the community is mobilizing around a bold vision to end homelessness. Using its recent *Vital Signs* report as a springboard for conversation, the Foundation of Greater Montreal is convening local groups and coordinating action to offer shelter, support and belonging to people without somewhere safe and secure to live. Read the full story at [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca).





# 38%

OF CANADIANS



DO NOT FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE A STAKE IN THEIR LOCAL COMMUNITY.<sup>3</sup>

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT PARENTS WHO ENGAGE IN VOTING, ACTIVISM AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS RAISE KIDS WHO DO THE SAME.<sup>56</sup>



## ARE CANADIANS BECOMING LESS POLITICALLY INVOLVED?

■ 2003 ■ 2013

### MEMBERS OF A POLITICAL PARTY OR GROUP



### ATTENDED A PUBLIC MEETING



### EXPRESSED THEIR VIEWS ON AN ISSUE BY CONTACTING A NEWSPAPER OR A POLITICIAN



### PARTICIPATED IN A DEMONSTRATION OR PROTEST MARCH



## ON THE RISE: SENIORS' CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Percentage of older Canadians that participate in community groups:

45%  
{ 2003 }



59%<sup>58</sup>  
{ 2013 }



## BELONGING MAKER



BARB GOODE AND LIZ ETMANSKI  
PHOTO CREDIT: SPECTRUM SOCIETY  
FOR COMMUNITY LIVING

### BARB GOODE

"I wouldn't call myself an activist," says Barb Goode, although she and other self-advocates have been getting together to make things better for people with disabilities for over 30 years. Barb has helped change more public policy than most of us could ever hope for in a lifetime: helping bring in the Representation Agreement Act that ensures people with disabilities are active decision makers, and the Eve Case, which confirmed no one can be sterilized without their informed consent.

Belonging and empowerment are her main motivations: "I feel that people need to belong in their own way. I just want to see people have a life that they want, instead of having to worry that someone else is making that decision for you." Barb constantly notices the things that need changing. "If I'm not going as fast as I want, then I get people to help. If you work with other people you can find a way of doing it."



## ONLINE BEYOND BANDWIDTH

What happens when the communities to which we belong aren't physical or *IRL*? The proliferation of the social web and platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat make it easy for us to instantly connect with people—whether they're across the street or on the other side of the world.

While we're sharing updates or photos with friends and family, joining a new parent forum or playing a massive multiplayer online game—the social nature of our online activity is making the internet a high-speed connection to community.

**IRL: ONLINE PARLANCE FOR IN REAL LIFE—A TERM USED TO LET PEOPLE KNOW YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT SOMETHING IN THE REAL WORLD AND NOT JUST ONLINE.**



### BUILDING BELONGING VANCOUVER FOUNDATION

Hit the streets, connect with people and use technology to affect change. That's the way that *Fostering Change*, an initiative of Vancouver Foundation, is working to improve policy, practice and community belonging for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood. Their online petition campaign has had an incredible impact locally, raising awareness and support for a big goal—to ensure that every young person leaving foster care has what they need to thrive as adults. Read the full story at [www.vitalsignscanada.ca](http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca).

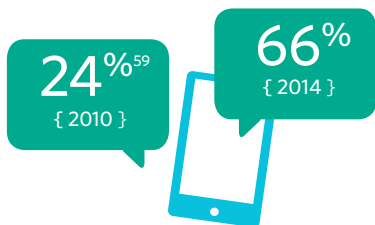




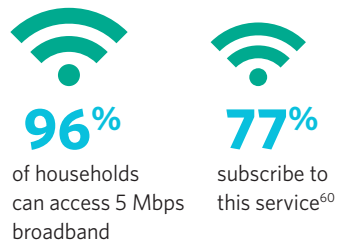
## NEW TECHNOLOGIES SHAPE HOW CANADIANS COMMUNICATE

### SMARTPHONES

% of Canadians who owned a smartphone:



### HIGH SPEED INTERNET

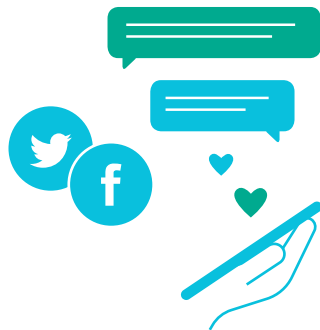


## ARE ONLINE COMMUNITIES REPLACING IN-PERSON CONNECTIONS?

Canadians who use social media like Facebook and Twitter were more likely to visit their friends in-person several times each week.<sup>61</sup>

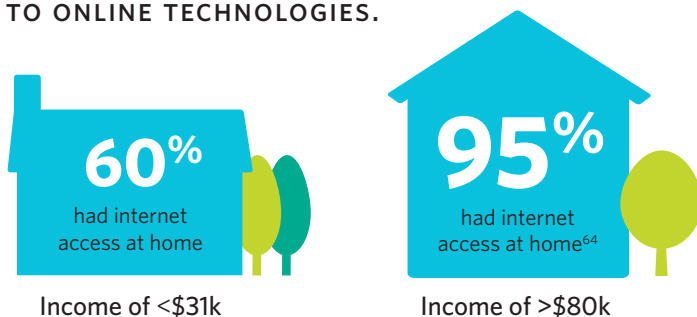
Internet users are more likely to volunteer and contribute more volunteer hours than non-users.<sup>62</sup>

44% of Canadians involved in community groups use the internet as part of their involvement.<sup>63</sup>



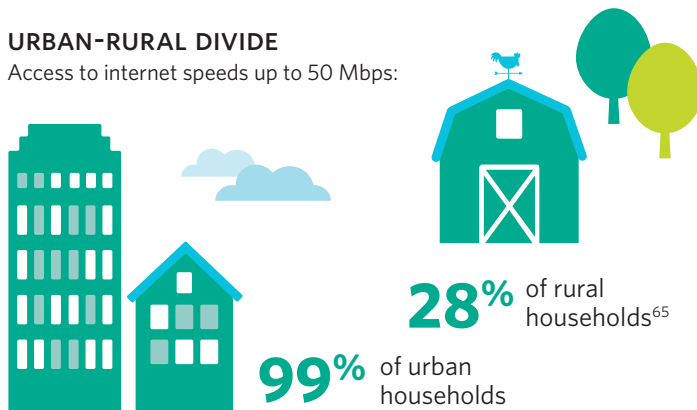
### DIGITAL DIVIDES

#### NOT EVERYONE HAS THE SAME ACCESS TO ONLINE TECHNOLOGIES.

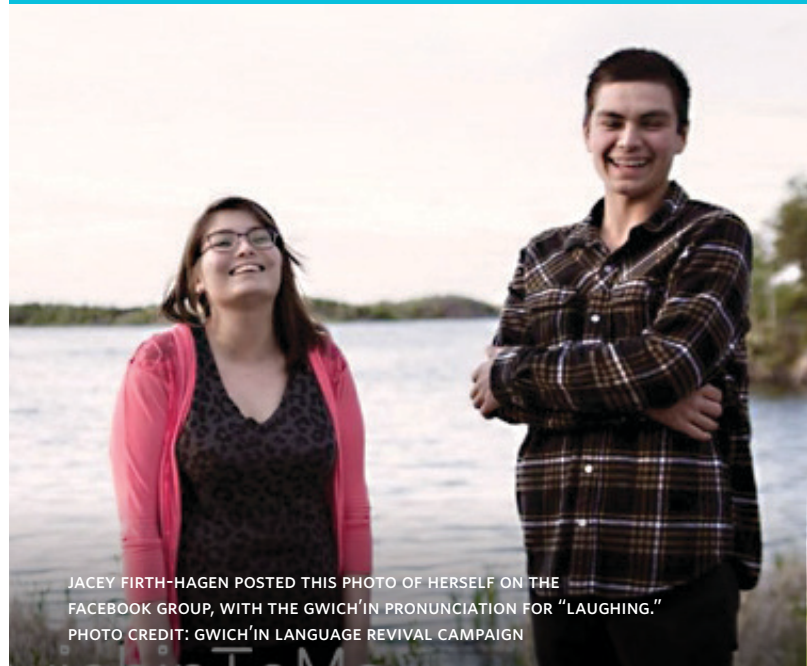


### URBAN-RURAL DIVIDE

Access to internet speeds up to 50 Mbps:



## BELONGING MAKER



JACEY FIRTH-HAGEN POSTED THIS PHOTO OF HERSELF ON THE FACEBOOK GROUP, WITH THE GWICH'IN PRONUNCIATION FOR "LAUGHING."  
PHOTO CREDIT: GWICH'IN LANGUAGE REVIVAL CAMPAIGN

### JACEY FIRTH-HAGEN #SPEAKGWICH'INTOME

"Youth, adult, elder, Gwich'in speaker, non-speaker. I wanted a community where everyone could learn better, share suggestions of how to learn, and ask questions. That's what I've created and it's amazing!" says Jacey Firth-Hagen, 22. She founded the Gwich'in Language Revival Campaign last year through a hashtag #SpeakGwichinToMe and Facebook group that now has more than 1000 members. Gwich'in is an endangered language with only 5% of the Nation speaking fluently, most over age 65. Jacey is determined to help change that. The digital community is reviving people's desire to learn the language and bringing Gwich'in words and stories into their everyday lives through their newsfeeds. Being online, the community has helped connect Gwich'in people across Alaska, the Yukon and Northwest Territories who rarely get the chance to meet in person.

"Today Gwich'in youth have all these options to learn, work, travel, because of our ancestors' will to survive. It is my duty to ensure that my ancestors' legacies carry on. Knowing who you are, where you come from, that sense of belonging—that's what language and culture bring to you."





*Despite evidence that getting involved in community activities benefits us personally, many of us are retreating from civic life. We vote less, give less, volunteer less and join less. This fraying of community leads to indifference, a corrosion of caring and compassion and a retreat from the very things that make our community a better place to live.<sup>66</sup>*

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# BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION AND BELONGING

As we learned in our 2015 report, one third of Canadians report a weak sense of community belonging.<sup>67</sup> **That's more than 11.5 million of us across the country.** While we understand the reciprocal relationship between social participation and our sense of belonging—the solution is not as simple as encouraging people to get out and participate.


*Why? Because for many of us, feelings of discrimination and social isolation persist. For example:*



A significant number of Canadians of visible minority experience racial discrimination when they try to access work opportunities, government services and housing.<sup>68</sup>



**45%**  
of lesbian, gay and bisexual teens and



**69%**  
of transgender teens in Canada do not feel a real part of their school community.<sup>69</sup>

Many Canadians with intellectual disabilities continue to be institutionalized and almost



**30%**

of youth with intellectual disabilities go to school in entirely segregated classrooms.<sup>70</sup>



Indigenous Canadians are less likely than non-Indigenous Canadians to feel a sense of belonging to Canada or to their province.<sup>71</sup>

While there are many pathways to social participation and belonging, some of which we've outlined in this report—for many of us, those pathways include significant hurdles that need to be overcome.

## What makes a community a place where everyone feels like they belong?

As we continue our exploration of belonging and connection to community, we'll be turning our attention to the other side of Belonging Street—using our national *Vital Signs* program and our 2017 national report to explore the challenges and issues that communities and places – and the institutions and systems within them – face in making people feel welcome and included.

**PARTICIPATION WAY**

# PARTICIPATION: THE KEY TO COMMUNITY VITALITY

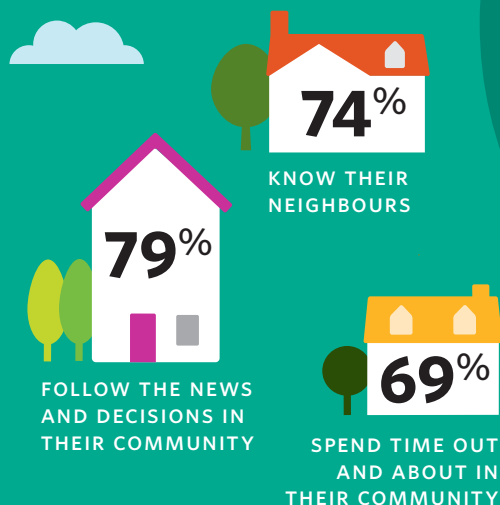
The more we get involved in the community, the more we feel like we belong. The more we feel like we belong the more willing we are to contribute to the community.

## WHY IS COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION SO GOOD FOR US?

When we are involved in our community we gain<sup>72</sup>:

- ✓ Wider and stronger networks of people
- ✓ Access to material and social support when we need it, from a drive to the airport to encouragement when we lose a job
- ✓ A sense of identity and purpose
- ✓ Knowledge and skills: how things work and how to get things done in our communities

### PROPORTION OF CANADIANS THAT THINK IT IS IMPORTANT TO<sup>3</sup>:



## REACH OUT TO OUR ELDERS

One in four seniors

24%

say they would have liked to have participated in more social, recreational and group activities in the past year.<sup>74</sup>



## GET OUTDOORS

Canadians who visit conservation areas and parks are

38%

more likely to do a favour for a neighbour than those who do not.<sup>73</sup>



## OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES ARE IMPORTANT

As the number of close friends living nearby increases, so does the feeling of community belonging<sup>75</sup> and trust in others.<sup>76</sup>

Having friends from ethnic backgrounds other than our own has positive impact on belonging to the country.<sup>77</sup>

In 2013, 59% of people reported that at least a few of their friends belonged to an ethnic group visibly different from theirs, up from 54% in 2003.<sup>78</sup>



## VISIT OUR FRIENDS AND NEIGHBOURS

### COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT RUNS IN FAMILIES

People whose parents volunteered are



more likely to volunteer themselves.<sup>79</sup>



We are less likely to spend time in person with our friends compared to a decade ago. The proportion of Canadians who saw their friends a few times or more each week dropped from 56% in 2003 to 44% in 2013.<sup>80</sup>

The proportion of Canadians that know many or most of their neighbours is only slightly more than 4 in 10, the proportion did not change between 2003 and 2013.<sup>81</sup>

### GET INVOLVED

Only half of Canadians

**50%**

think that being involved in community events or activities is important in their day-to-day lives.<sup>3</sup>

**74%**

OF CANADIANS BELIEVE THAT KNOWING THEIR NEIGHBOURS IS AN IMPORTANT PART OF THEIR DAY-TO-DAY LIVES.<sup>3</sup>



*Participation in community not only prolongs our lives—it makes them worth living.*

— DR. S. MARK PANCER  
WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY<sup>82</sup>

### REBUILD THAT HOMETOWN FEELING

**61%** OF CANADIANS DO NOT CURRENTLY LIVE WHERE THEY GREW UP<sup>3</sup>

Since most of us do not live where we grew up, we have to be proactive to build that hometown feeling.

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**Community Foundations of Canada**

75 Albert Street, Suite 301

Ottawa, Ontario K1P 5E7

Phone: (613) 236-2664

Fax: (613) 236-1621

Email: [info@communityfoundations.ca](mailto:info@communityfoundations.ca)

[WWW.COMMUNITYFOUNDATIONS.CA](http://WWW.COMMUNITYFOUNDATIONS.CA)



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