



**United Way
Centraide**
Windsor-Essex County

Taking Back Our Neighbourhoods

Mapping the Need for Neighbourhood Revitalization



United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County in Partnership
with the Great Lakes Institute for Environmental Research



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of Windsor**



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Introduction

Since 1994, Ontario's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has grown by over 24%, but that economic growth hasn't led to an overall increase in the well-being of our community. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing which combines GDP growth with a wide range of other social, environmental and cultural factors was developed as a measure of overall well-being. What the Index illustrates is that over the same 20-year period of economic growth, overall well-being in the province of Ontario has only increased by just over seven percent, with measurable declines in overall environmental, leisure and cultural well-being.ⁱ



A DECADE OF DECLINE

Using data gathered from the previous three censuses (2011, 2006, 2001) United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County, in partnership with the Great Lakes Institute of Environmental Research (GLIER), has mapped a number of the socio-economic indicators that have shaped Windsor and Essex County.

Over the last decade of census data, poverty levels have become more concentrated in certain neighbourhoods in Windsor and Essex County.

CALL TO ACTION

The call to action is not just about bringing investment into these neighbourhoods; it is about bringing strategically targeted, coordinated over-investment into these struggling neighbourhoods so we can kick start their renewal.

While the province as a whole only made modest strides in well-being, residents of Windsor and Essex County know that the first decade of the 21st century was difficult for our region, with social and economic upheaval that dramatically reshaped it. And while Windsor and Essex County have been “traveling down the road” to improvement, the progress has been slow and the impact uneven.

The results of this difficult recovery are well known. First and foremost, the unemployment rate of the region for much of the last decade has been one of the highest in the country, with only a very recent decline unseating us as “Canada’s Unemployment Capital”. Second, nearly 1 in 5 people in the Windsor-Essex County area are living in poverty, which translates to approximately 25,000 children and youth growing up in low-income homes.ⁱⁱ Unfortunately, 1 in 4 of those children will fail to escape poverty during their lifetime, threatening future generations with the same fate.

Both high unemployment and high poverty rates present challenges to the region which translate into costs that society must bear. United Way’s 2014 *Cost of Poverty* report estimates that poverty costs taxpayers and the economy in Windsor-Essex County, approximately \$450 million annually.ⁱⁱⁱ In addition, poverty is very concentrated in our region, especially in Windsor, where 33% of low-income families are living in very low-income neighbourhoods – the highest rate in Canada.^{iv}

When faced with statistics such as these, the question must be asked, “How do we, as a community and region, come together to tackle these problems?”. In order to answer this question, we must drill down a little further to better understand what specific challenges the various neighbourhoods of our region face.

Using data gathered from the previous three censuses (2011, 2006, 2001) United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County, in partnership with the Great Lakes Institute of Environmental Research (GLIER), has mapped a number of the socio-economic indicators that have shaped Windsor and Essex County. Mapping socio-economic challenges in this way provides a


better understanding of the “Poverty of Place” that afflicts areas of our communities so that collectively business, government, private citizens and the not-for-profit sector can come together as partners to improve the lives of those most vulnerable.

Poverty of Place is different than the poverty that impacts individuals and families in our community, in that it is much harder to overcome. Individuals and families can be supported through the hard times – food banks provide food, counselling services can ease mental health difficulties, after-school and mentoring programs can provide children with the supports they need, and training programs can prepare people to enter or re-enter the workforce. The challenge in dealing with Poverty of Place is that people are mobile, while a place is not. As income declines in a geographic area, services tend to follow.

Having access to basic services like a grocery store, transportation, affordable housing, recreation and schooling for children are vital for the individual and family to be self-sufficient and have a quality of life that ensures well-being. As these services are lost in neighbourhoods, the impacts become cumulative, creating a downward spiral of decline. The loss of a school leads to an exodus of families. The flight of middle-income families results in local businesses closing. The newly vacated homes then begin to deteriorate or are bought up and rented, creating a rotating door of disengaged tenants. This disengagement and deterioration leads to a loss of a “community voice” through which advocacy with the wider community occurs, erecting walls of isolation and cultivating an “us” versus “them” attitude. The solution to overcoming the challenge that is presented by the long-term decline of a place is a sustained and equally long-term approach to recovery.

Are we doing enough to help?





Individuals who are self-sufficient have the ability in most cases to move on to bigger and better things by moving up and out of neighbourhoods on the decline. These individuals in many instances leave behind those who are most vulnerable and least resourced to take action. This is the foundation of poverty of place and is the cycle that has occurred across parts of our region, during the “boom times” of the 1990s and early 2000s. Those with the capacity to do so moved up and out of the core of many neighbourhoods in our region. Population and housing data from across the region shows a veritable suburban boom during this period, leaving behind those without the means to relocate.^v

A similar pattern was emerging in Hamilton in the mid-2000s and the response was captured in the Code Red series, a media exposé by the Hamilton Spectator in collaboration with McMaster University, that identified and mapped the challenges of poverty in that community.^{vi} Our report, *Taking Back Our Neighbourhoods*, mirrors their work and, just like Hamilton, the call to action is not just about bringing investment into these neighbourhoods; it is about bringing strategically targeted, coordinated over-investment into these struggling neighbourhoods so we can kick start their renewal.

Our report is divided into five sections. The first section outlines the mapping of the various community measures and discusses the challenges that have been identified. The second section highlights United Way's Poverty by Place Index which combines a number of factors related to risks of poverty and maps them across the region. The third and fourth sections outline possible pathways forward for Windsor and Essex County, highlighting the work being done by United Way in these neighbourhoods and providing recommendations for actions that can be taken to roll back the losses that have occurred across our region, before concluding in the fifth section.

Commentary about the data

The data used to compile this report along with the mapping originated from the 2001, 2006, and 2011 Census as well as the 2011 National Household Survey at the dissemination area level for the entirety of Windsor and Essex County with the exception of Pelee Island.¹ Although much of the data is directly comparable, there are a few caveats that must be outlined.

Statistically speaking, the National Household Survey is not directly comparable to the earlier census data even where the questions are the same. The inconsistencies are due to the differing response rates between the mandatory response rate (generally greater than 95%) in the 2001 and 2006 censuses and the variable response rate of the National Household Survey – as a whole Essex County had a non-response rate of 27.8%.^{vii}

According to Statistics Canada, analysis of non-response rates found that individuals and families with lower levels of education, those living in short-term housing such as university students and seniors in transitional homes, new immigrants, visible minorities, and Aboriginal peoples were statistically less likely to respond to the voluntary National Household Survey.^{viii} In many cases, these same groups are those who are most vulnerable. As a result, their non-responses may actually understate the challenges that we face. Recognizing these inconsistencies, this report provides a visual “snapshot” of our communities for three census periods. The mapping illustrates the best available information despite some discrepancies in the underlying data.

A second consideration is the effect of the passage of time on the data. The impact of inflation of both costs and wages changes the thresholds that Statistics Canada employs to measure poverty and other social issues.

Table 1 illustrates how the After-Tax Low- Income Cut Off has increased between Census periods reviewed in this report. As a result, the specific threshold for a specific measure on a map may not be the same for

each census period. As a result, what was considered a low-income household in 2001 may not have been considered low-income in 2011 despite the income for a particular family not changing.

Table 1: After-tax low-income cut off over time for a community 100,000-499,999 people.^{ix}

YEAR	INDIVIDUAL	FAMILY OF 4
2001	\$13,318	\$25,181
2006	\$14,857	\$28,091
2011	\$16,328	\$30,871

Third, when viewing certain maps it is important to keep in mind that the map may be illustrating only the portion of a population that fits a specific category (age, immigrant, single parents, etc.). There may only be a handful of households or individuals meeting criteria in a specific dissemination area, meaning that if one or two households have a change in status, it can swing an entire dissemination area category on the map. In addition, the scaling on the maps generalizes information removing the specific detail of a geographic area.

Finally, Statistics Canada realigned geographic boundaries based on changes in population, creating differences in various Dissemination Areas between census periods.^x These boundaries are in many cases not drawn using intuitive local measures, like a major roadway or neighbourhood. Rather they are created largely by the number of people within the catchment area. As a result some of the Dissemination Areas, particularly in the City of Windsor, straddle a roadway or wrap around neighbourhoods which can give a somewhat muddled picture of what is occurring in the community. It is possible there are a few Dissemination Areas that are not directly comparable over time and across the maps, as new geographies were added or taken away, altering the make-up of the area.

¹ Dissemination areas (DAs) are small geographic areas composed of one or more neighbouring dissemination blocks, with a population of 400 to 700 persons. It is the smallest standard geographic area for which all census data are gathered. DAs cover all the territories of Canada.

SECTION 1:

Mapping the problem

Due to space constraints, this report does not include all of the maps that were created as part of this project. The maps are available digitally for download and community use on United Way's website. To view the maps, visit weareunited.com/TakingBackOurNeighbourhoods

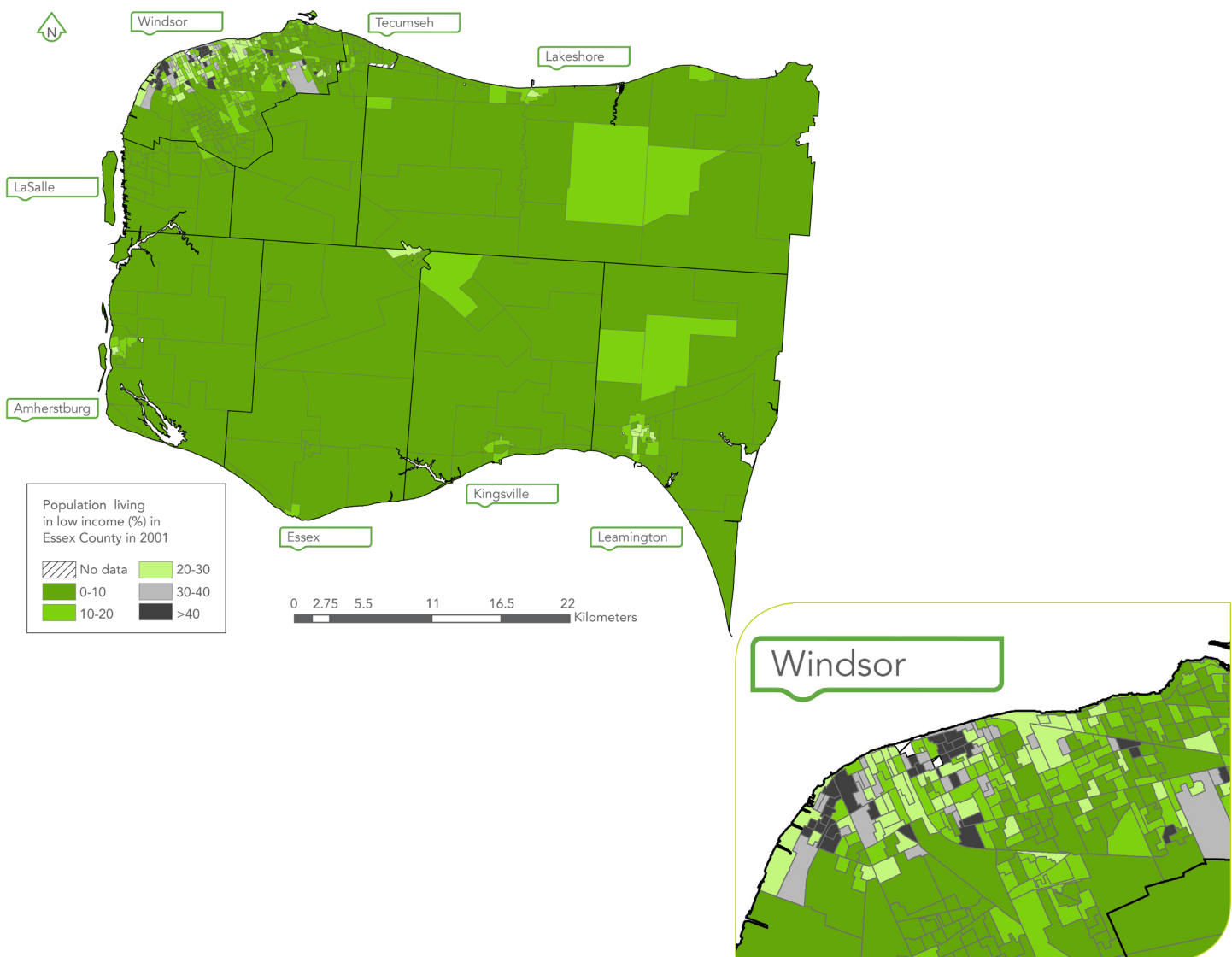


Percentage of population living in low-income

It is no secret that Windsor and Essex County have been hit hard over the last decade and a half. In 2001, our region was very different from today. The automotive industry was strong and Windsor was still home to the “big three” domestic producers. Prior to the tragic events of September 11, 2001 and the tightening of border security, American tourists were more likely to take advantage of a 67-cent dollar in stores, restaurants, and the many entertainment attractions in our region.

Although there have always been challenged neighbourhoods in central areas of Windsor, the impact of the economic crash of 2008 and the recession that followed are clear when the last three censuses are compared. For example, Dissemination Areas jump from less than 10% of the population living in low-income to greater than 40% living in low-income. Areas like downtown Essex, Harrow, and segments of Kingsville and Leamington have also suffered.

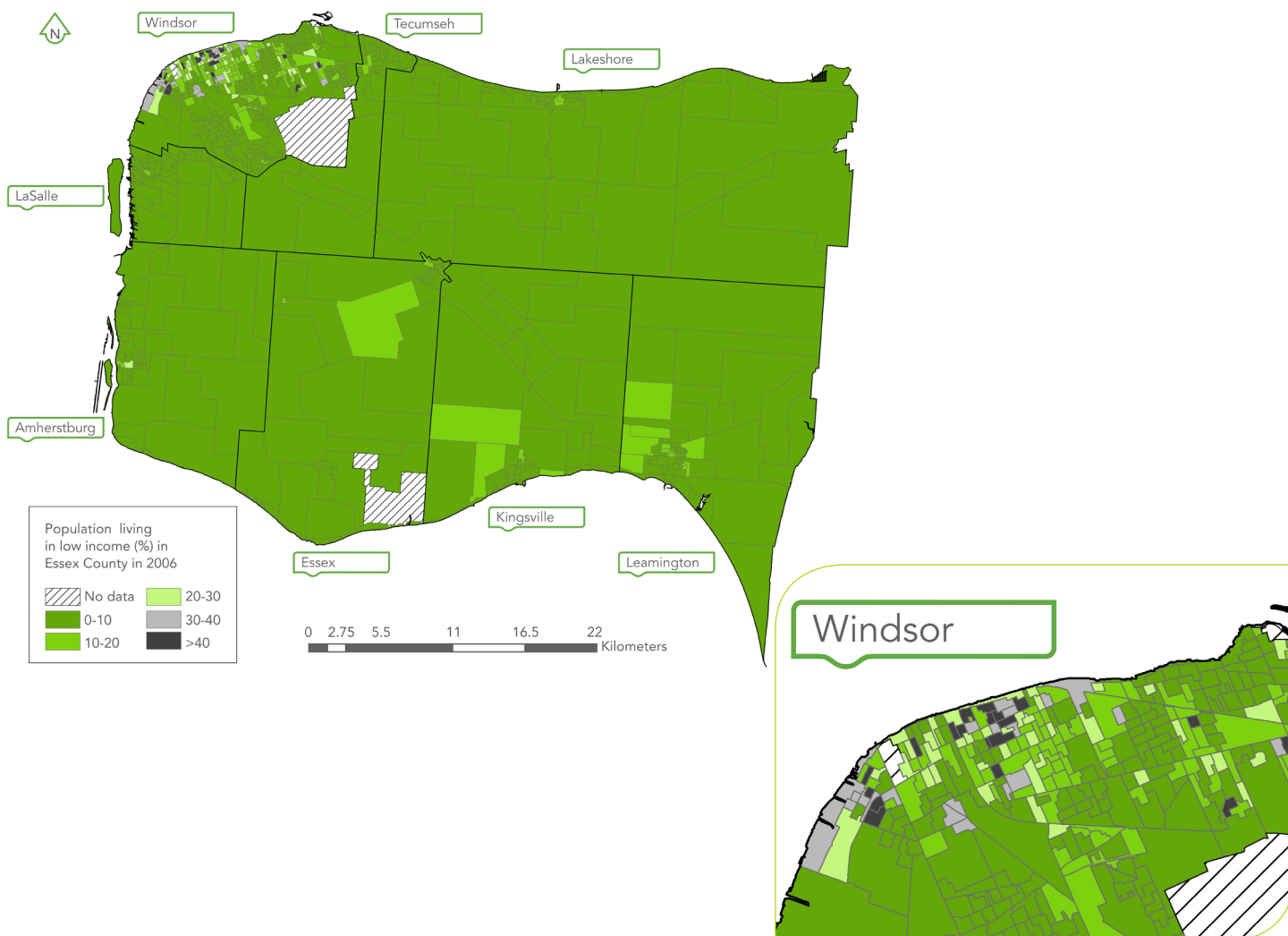
Map 1: Percentage of population living in low-income – after-tax low-income cut off 2001^{xi}



In 2011, 93 Dissemination Areas in Windsor-Essex County featured low-income levels greater than 40%, an increase from only 19 Dissemination Areas in 2006. During that same period the number of Dissemination Areas with less than 10% of the population living in low-income decreased from 469 to 271. This means that in 389 of the 660 Dissemination Areas in Windsor-Essex County had low-income levels greater than ten percent.

This trend isn't surprising. We have anecdotally known the impact that the 2008 crash has had on our community. As previously stated, previous reports from Statistics Canada have highlighted that the Windsor Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) has been home to the highest concentration of low-income people living in low-income neighbourhoods in Canada.^{xiii} The bulk of this concentration of poverty is situated in the "core" of Windsor, with a nearly unbroken strip of at least twenty percent of the population living in low-income from Ojibway to Walkerville, and other pockets around Ford City and Meadowbrook in the East End.

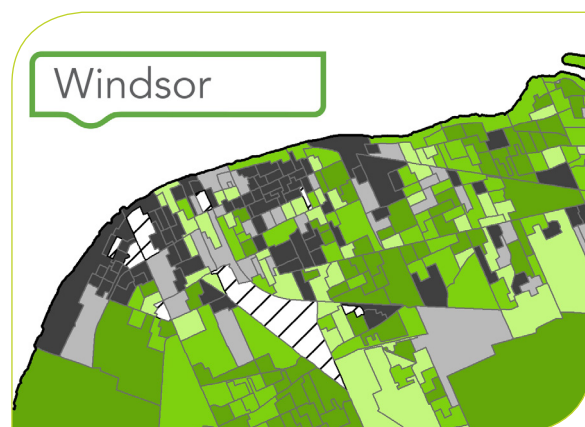
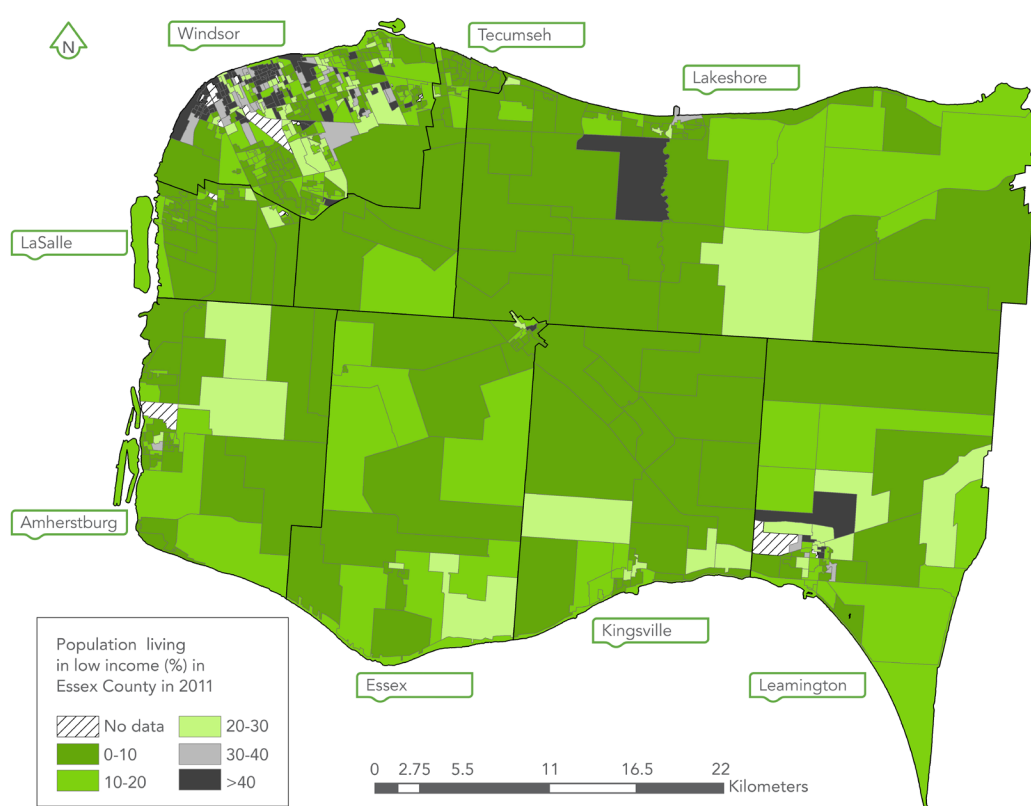
Map 2: Percentage of population living in low-income – after-tax low-income cut off 2006^{xiii}



In the County, lower population density and larger Dissemination Areas give the appearance of large swaths of low-income populations – the large geographic space of the County presents unique challenges. In 2006, 24 Dissemination Areas featured a low-income rate between 10% and 20%, which increased to 72

Dissemination Areas in 2011. Most of the urban centres of the County, including Lakeshore, Leamington, Kingsville, Essex, Harrow and Amherstburg all saw significant jumps in low-income populations in the Dissemination Areas that overlap higher density areas.

Map 3: Percentage of population living in low-income – after-tax low-income cut off 2011^{xiv}



Children under 6 years living in low-income

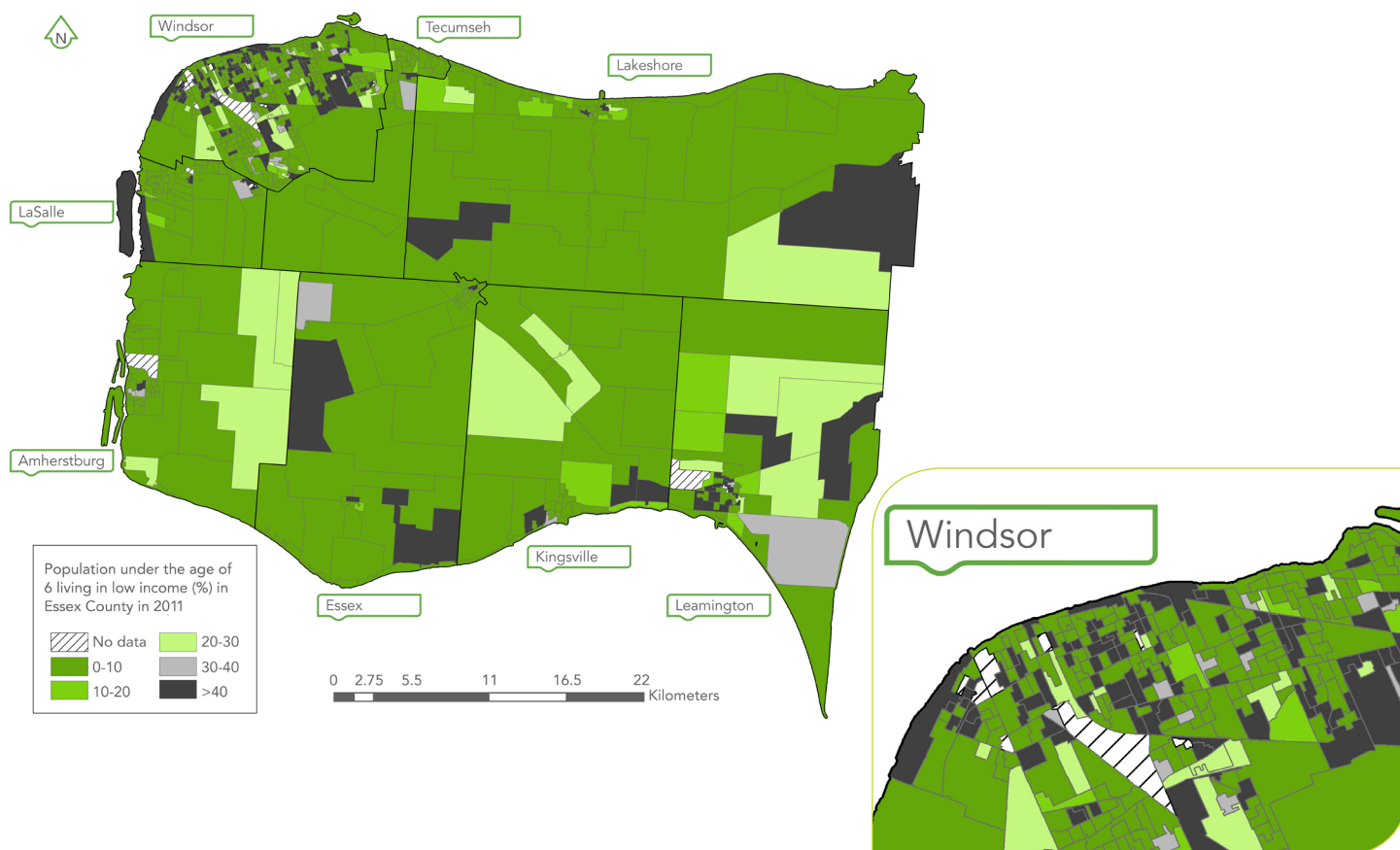
Unfortunately, Statistics Canada did not collect data on young children or seniors living in low-income in 2001, as a result mapping was only conducted for 2006 and 2011 for these age groups. The implication of the general concentrations of low-income on specific populations is an important consideration to evaluate in the context of services and supports for our community. The first six years of life are some of the most important for a child's development and there is a wide catalogue of research examining the long-term impacts of poverty on young children. Concentrations of children growing up in low-income within specific areas are particularly troubling.

Without proper interventions in their formative years, these children face additional barriers to being successful and reaching their potential. Research indicates that children who grow up in low-income neighbourhoods

are more likely to have poorer health outcomes, lower educational attainment, are more likely to participate in "at-risk" behaviour including alcohol and drug use, and are more likely to become teenage parents. If interventions are not implemented before children who live in low-income neighbourhoods enter the school system, these children are more likely to achieve poorer long-term educational outcomes, despite the best efforts of their teachers.^{xv}

Clearly there is a relationship between where children who live in low-income families reside and where general poverty is widespread. The fact that economically disadvantaged children are prevalent in every community in Windsor and Essex County should give us pause to take stock and consider if our current policies and supports are doing enough for the next generation.

Map 4: Percentage of children under age 6 living in low-income – after-tax low-income cut off 2011^{xvi}



Seniors over 65 years living in low-income

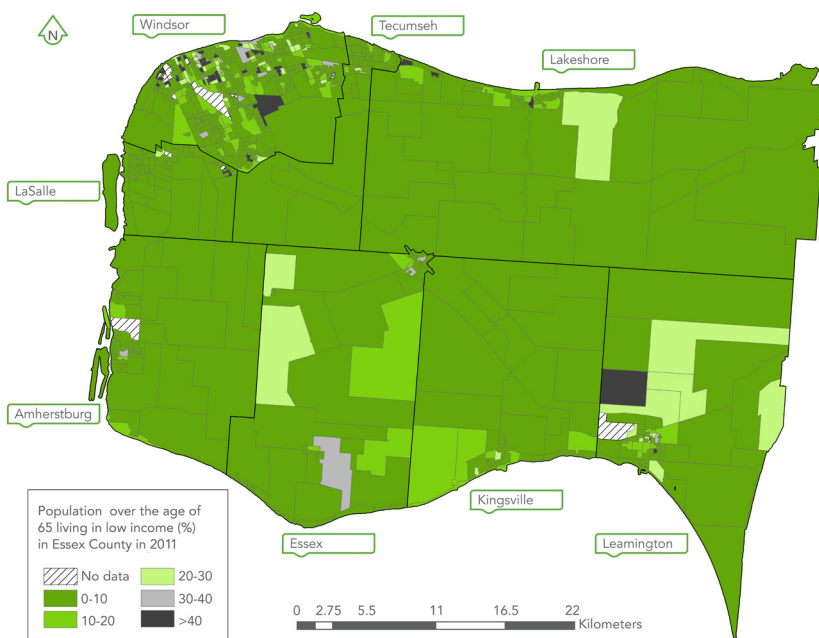
The mapping of seniors living in poverty (ages 65+) in Windsor-Essex County is particularly jarring. Although seniors who live in low-income was an issue in 2006, the overall concentration of these seniors was relatively evenly distributed across the region, with the average percentage of seniors living in low-income being less than 4%. In 2006, there were only 12 Dissemination Areas with seniors experiencing poverty at a rate greater than 10%, with most of these areas concentrated in retirement communities or senior-dominated apartment buildings. From a geographic standpoint, this concentration of poverty makes sense – living behaviours for seniors tend to lead to centralized populations in specific geographic spaces whether through planning and design of targeted communities or demographic shifts as existing households age in place.^{xvii}

What occurred in 2011 was a widespread increase in seniors' poverty in our region. The exact reasons for this surge are not readily apparent from the available data, but there are a number of factors that may have contributed to it. First, the total number of seniors

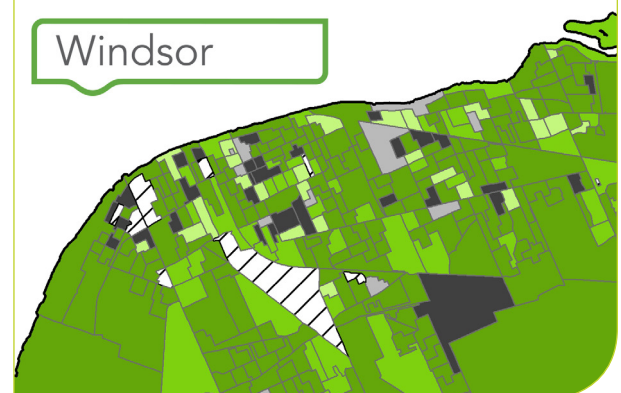
in our region between 2006 and 2011 increased by approximately 6,700 people, which represents close to 2% of the total population. Much of this growth likely came from the general aging of the population in Windsor-Essex County, but efforts to attract seniors to the region likely contributed to general population growth. A secondary effect, in conjunction with this aging population, was likely the job losses of 2008 to 2010. As buyouts, early retirements, business closures, pension restructurings, and layoffs hit the labour force, many older workers moved out of the workforce.

Geographically, the hardest hit areas for seniors stretch across the core of Windsor, particularly in the areas between downtown and Walkerville, stretching from near the Detroit River towards Tecumseh Road. Some of the shifts in the County are more situational rather than structural, with the data pointing to many of the areas being home to only a handful of senior residents, a portion of which have fallen on hard times. Overall, poverty among seniors rose in Windsor-Essex County between 2001 and 2011 but remained under 10% which is why a majority of the map remains shaded in green.

Map 5: Percentage of seniors over age 65 living in low-income – after-tax low-income cut off 2011^{xviii}



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Immigrant populations

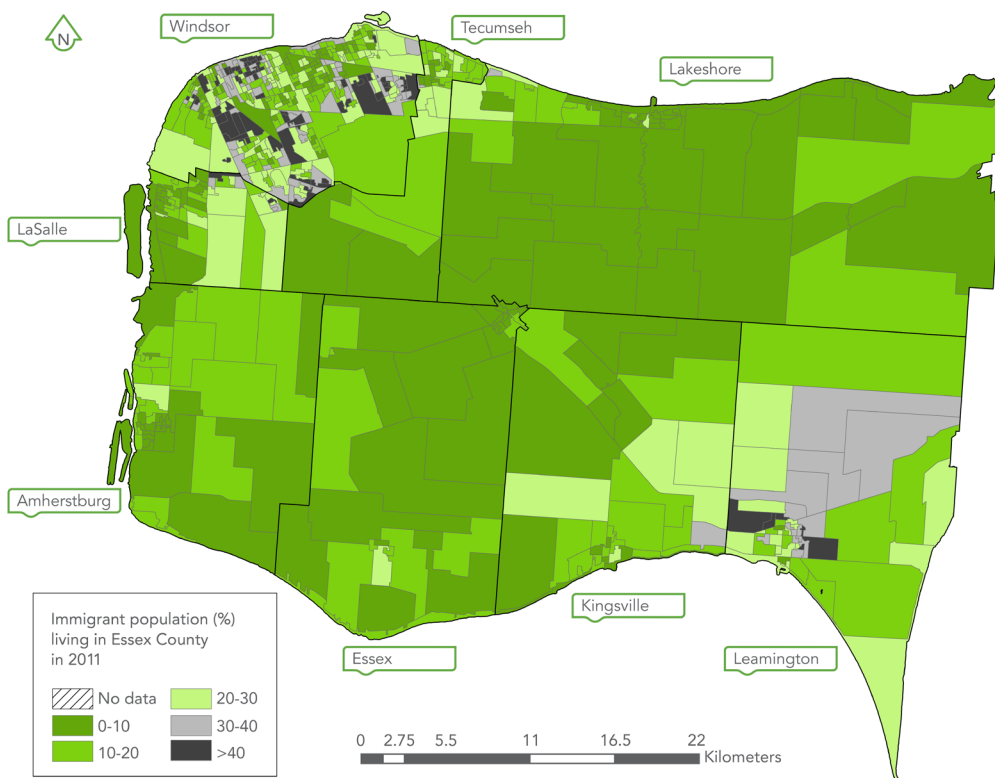
Between 2001 and 2011 approximately 20,000 immigrants² arrived in Windsor-Essex County.^{xxix} Where these individuals live and how they integrate into broader society plays an important role in the vitality of the community. It is well known that Windsor-Essex County is one of the most culturally diverse communities in Canada, but it is also reported by Statistics Canada that only half of new arrivals in Canada manage to earn over \$18,000 in their first year and approximately 25% fail to find employment in their first two years in Canada.^{xx}

According to research on immigrant settlement patterns, immigrants who arrive in immigrant-dense provinces like Ontario earned approximately \$20,470 less in 2006 less than Canadian-born individuals.^{xxi} There is a wide

body of evidence that has been collected by Statistics Canada over a six year period indicating that first and second generation immigrants face an income deficit and those who identify as a visible minority have lower levels of income despite having equal or greater levels of education.^{xxii}

The mapping of immigrant populations shows several clear trends in our region. One of the clearest is the growth of new immigrants in areas surrounding Leamington. Windsor saw increasing concentrations of immigrant populations in certain areas, with the number of census Dissemination Areas with greater than 40% immigrant population increasing from 54 areas to 61 areas between 2001 and 2011.

Map 6: Percentage immigrant population 2011^{xxiii}



Only half of new arrivals in Canada manage to earn over \$18,000 in their first year and approximately 25% fail to find employment in their first two years in Canada.



² Note to reader: Immigrant populations only count immigrant individuals who are permanent residents or have become Canadian citizens.

Single parent families

The link between being part of a single parent family and living in poverty is well documented.^{xxiv} Single parent families are significantly more likely to be living in poverty and females are over four times more likely to be leading a single parent family than their male counterparts. Even for middle and upper income single parent families, the struggle to balance work, children, personal time and the stress that it can cause has been connected to negative health effects.^{xxv} It also has consequences for a child's development and educational attainment, regardless of income level.

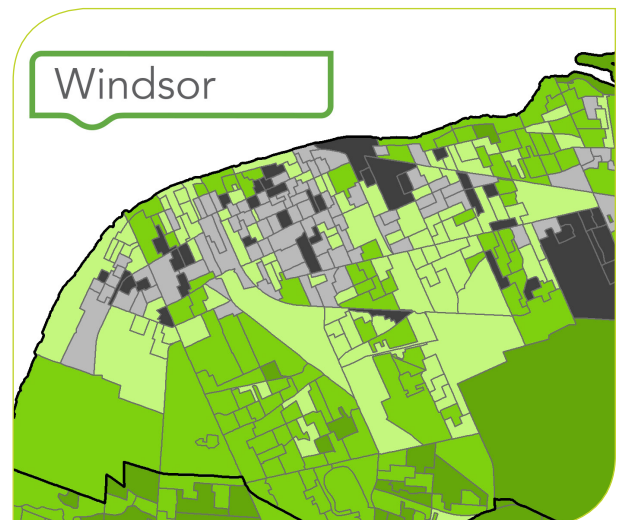
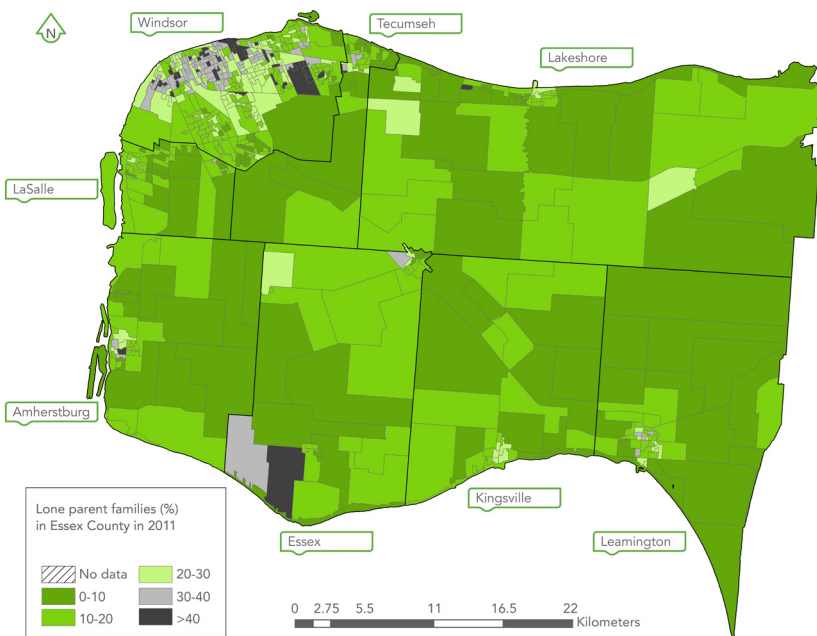
Between 2001 and 2011 there was a significant increase in the number of single parent families across the region, with the number of families growing from 16,600 to approximately 19,995. Given that the region's population has only marginally grown over that period, it is likely that this change is a result of a demographic shift in families.

With approximately 44% of single mothers and 11% of single parent fathers earning less than the low-income cut off, Windsor-Essex County faces significant challenges in ensuring these parents and their children achieve economic stability and independence and do not remain economically disadvantaged – increasing the potential for intergenerational poverty.

44% 
single mothers
11% 
single fathers

EARN LESS
than the **low-income CUT OFF**

Map 7: Percentage of single parent families 2011^{xxvi}

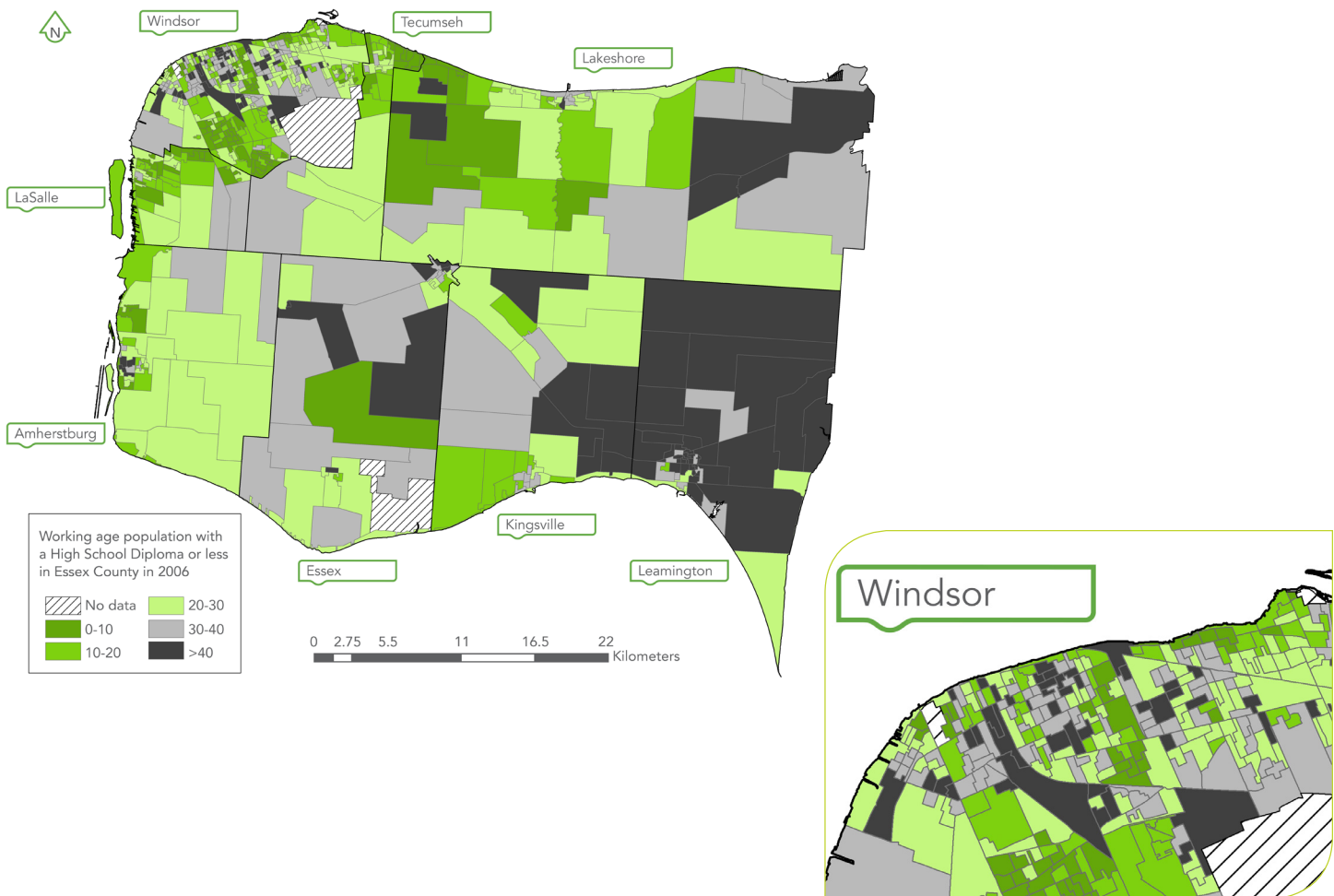


Educational attainment

Whether it is retraining an unemployed worker with the skills to enter a new field or ensuring that our children have the best opportunities in life, one of the clearest pathways out of poverty is through education. Last year United Way published *Overcoming the Odds*, a report that outlines the barriers that prevent youth from succeeding in school and the long-term earning implications of being unable to continue their education beyond high school or its equivalent.^{xxvii}

Recent research out of major urban centres has found evidence that the socio-economic characteristics of a child's neighbourhood can affect academic achievement in secondary school. For example, neighbourhood-based low-income rates predicted drop-out rates in Vancouver, Montreal, and Toronto.^{xxviii} A study out of the University of Michigan found that relationships between parental educational level and income directly relate to a child's education outcomes and even childhood mortality.^{xxix} The ability to complete high school is a major determinant of socio-economic well-being and upward mobility.

Map 8³: Percentage of working age population with a high school diploma or less 2006^{xxx}

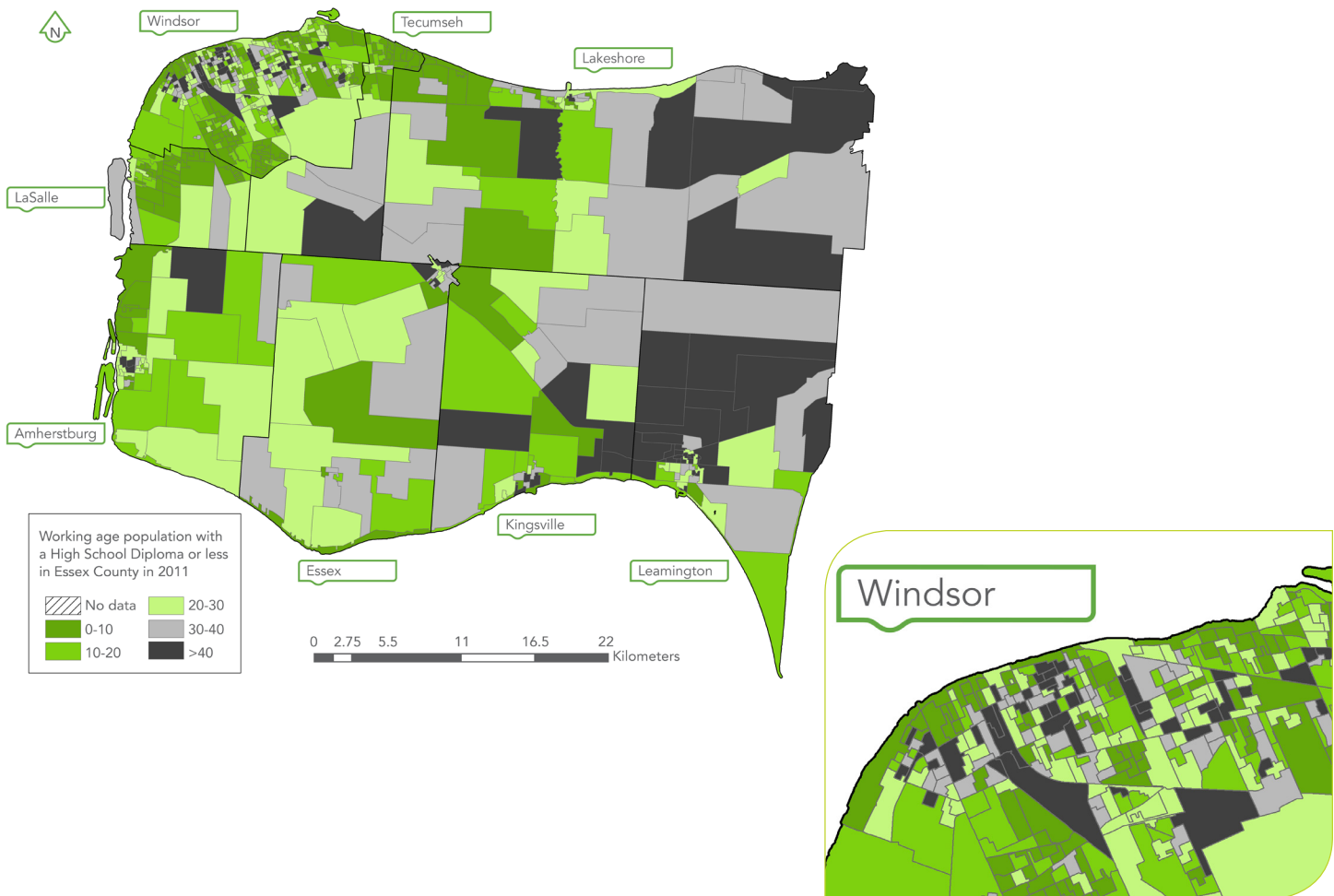


In the Windsor-Essex region, the working age population (aged 25-64) with a high school diploma or less was approximately 41.8% compared to the national rate of approximately 35.9% in 2011.^{xxxii} Fewer people moving on to higher levels of education in Windsor-Essex when compared to other Ontario communities, has an impact on our community and our neighbourhoods. An individual in Windsor-Essex County with a high school diploma earns over their working lifetime on average \$230,000 less than a college graduate, \$440,000 less than a trades person, and \$685,000 less than a university graduate.^{xxxiii} Although there are always exceptions to the rules, generally speaking, this

income potential directly ties to where people live, their lifestyle, their social networks and their ability to spend dollars in the community.

Although the movement of people, individuals who are aging through demographic groups, and net-migration impact the mapping, certain Dissemination Areas consistently report poor educational attainment levels over the multiple census periods. Given that education is widely recognized as a key factor in building resilience to poverty and other social challenges, persistent geographic concentrations of low educational outcomes in the workforce are a major concern for our region.

Map 9: Percentage of working age population with a high school diploma or less 2011^{xxxiii}



3 Please Note the Scale on these maps is different than the scales on the other maps despite being the same colour pallet.

SECTION 2:

Poverty by place index

The Poverty by Place Index combines much of the data that has been outlined in the previous section of the report into a single map. This map illustrates the areas of Windsor-Essex County that are most at risk of place-based poverty by illustrating concentrations of risk factors within specific geographic spaces.

The index was constructed from three sub-indices. The first index represents populations at risk in our community by combining the prevalence of dependent populations as illustrated by the dependency ratio⁴, immigrant populations, single parent families and female-led single parent families within the specific Dissemination Areas.



⁴ Note: The dependency ratio is the percentage of people living under the age of 19 or over the age of 65 in a given area. For statistical purposes Statistics Canada considers these groups as “dependent” due to their higher likelihood of being outside of the full time workforce and the greater likelihood that they are reliant on public institutions and family supports.

The second index emerged from economic factors in our region, comparing each dissemination area median income to the regional median income, unemployment rates, percentage of working population with a high school degree or less, and the percentage of housing requiring major repair.

The third index was a weighted poverty index that took the percentage of individuals living in low-income after-tax 2011 and combined it with a weighted value measure for the low-income rates in 2006 to represent the impact of long-term poverty in a particular area.

The three sub-indices were then combined to create a score that represents the risk factors of poverty and actual poverty rates in each dissemination area in Windsor-Essex County. The Dissemination Areas were then ranked from best to worst and divided into five equal groups of 129 Dissemination Areas and mapped. As with all indices, the index blends risk factors together, meaning that areas that experience low levels of many risk factors are scored, mapped, treated and indexed the same as an area that experiences high levels of only a single risk factor.

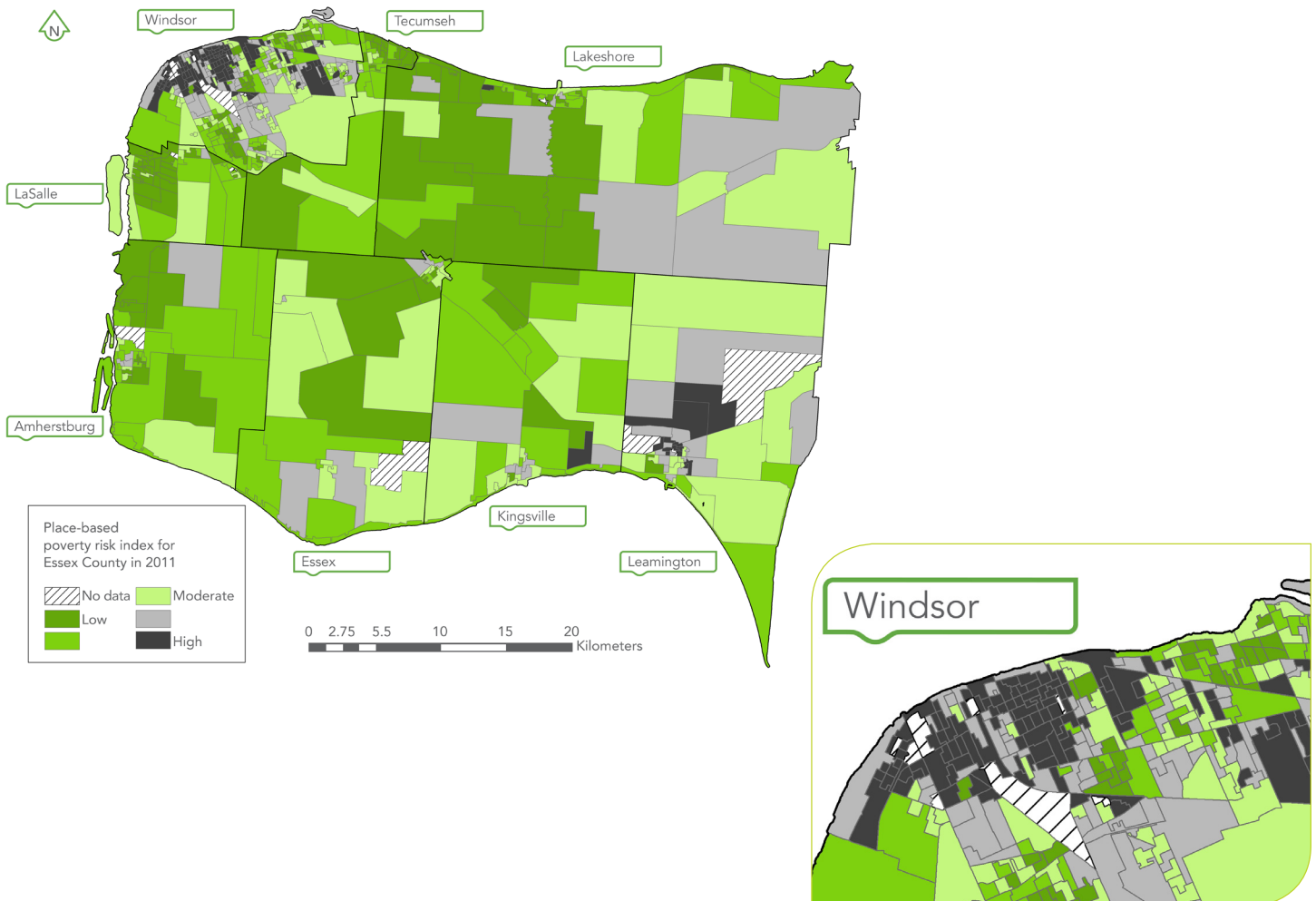


The Poverty by Place Index map is a tool to illustrate the overall need in our community and to help prioritize action going forward. While some neighbourhoods traditionally known for being “better off” show various levels of risk concentration, this is due to the concentration of seniors. Seniors represent a future cost to the community since seniors, as they continue to age, are more likely to require more health care, become less mobile, and face increasing social isolation. By identifying these potential costs now it enables us to lessen the impact of challenges that may emerge in the future through proper planning.

When examining the mapping of the index, the risk factors generally align with the other areas of known concern across our region: Windsor’s core, northern portions of the Town of Leamington and the core of the Town of Essex. Many of the areas of moderate risk emerge from demographic factors with dependent populations in those areas skewing towards increasing numbers of seniors, giving us a hint of where future supports may need to be directed.

Map 10:

Poverty by place index Windsor-Essex county^{xxxiv}



SECTION 3:

Early interventions

The purpose of the mapping and index was not to state that all is lost for Windsor and Essex County. We know that things have improved in our region since the downturn in 2008-2009. The data collected in 2011 was a snapshot of a region at its lowest point. As we await the results of the restored 2016 Long Form Census it is not time to “rest on our laurels” and hope for the best, but rather to strategize how we can put this data into action for the long-term betterment of our community.

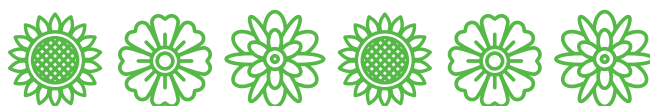
United Way has already begun to take steps to tackle these issues. In 2010, United Way shifted its community investments to a Community Impact model. This approach utilizes data to intentionally invest in evidence-based strategies that create measureable community change.



At that time, United Way identified a number of priority neighbourhoods in Windsor that face some of the greatest challenges in our region including West Windsor, Downtown Windsor, the Glengarry to Marentette Corridor, and Ford City – Drouillard Road – home to some of the highest levels of poverty and other socio-demographic challenges. United Way is investing in these four neighbourhoods by supporting “on the ground” staff and programs that activate and engage community residents and leverage resources to tackle issues that residents feel are most pressing. Recognizing that it takes more than just the mobilization of people, United Way and its partners have concentrated their efforts by stacking resources in these neighbourhoods to increase the potential for positive changes. These resources include food banks, after-school and youth programming, early-years programs, community gardens, counselling, health care and other services.



These initial interventions have laid the ground work for deeper and more strategic action to be taken by the community. The neighbourhood programs have engaged previously disenfranchised residents to empower them to set the agenda for their own communities’ revival. Although crime across the City of Windsor has been down since 2012, crime in United Way priority neighbourhoods has declined at equal or greater rates than city averages. Property crime, for example, is down across the city by an average of 7.0 percent since 2012, while in our priority neighbourhoods it is down by 12.9 percent.^{xxxv} Directly informing and empowering residents so that they have the knowledge and confidence to report suspicious activity has been a major goal of our strategic investment.



beautification

HAS BEEN A RESIDENT PRIORITY

Beautification has been another resident priority, including mural projects, community clean ups, park adoptions and community gardens. These strategies have improved the physical condition of the neighbourhoods while providing ownership of spaces that were previously underused or abandoned. Five years ago there were only a handful of community gardens in our region. Now, through the hard work of our partners at the Windsor Essex Community Garden Collective and other groups, there are 46 community gardens, with 13 of these gardens situated within the priority neighbourhoods and maintained by residents or local organizations.^{xxxvi} These gardens are now focal points for neighbours to meet neighbours, and for people to gather, share ideas and work towards a common goal. Unfortunately, to overcome the structural barriers and disinvestment that these neighbourhoods have faced much more needs to be done.

When schools and community centres close, as they tend to do in low-income neighbourhoods, there is a direct correlation to the breakdown of the social fabric of that neighbourhood (lack of sense of belonging, neighbours not knowing one another, children having fewer friends in a neighbourhood). It also affects property tax rates in the neighbourhood. Research out of the United States on school proximity and home property values show clear links between the closing of schools and declining property values, reduced walkability, and increased transportation costs for parents and families.^{xxxvii}

This loss in property tax revenue impacts city finances, which in turn must be offset with cuts in services or tax increases. As the deterioration of a neighbourhood continues, vacant and boarded-up homes not only become a visible sign of the plight of the area and erosion of the community but also another blow to a community's economic fabric. A 2015 evaluation conducted by United Way-supported Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal in the Ford City-Drouillard Road area found 67 buildings confirmed vacant. Based on research and methodology developed by Temple University, those building and all buildings within 150 feet suffer a decline in property tax assessment value due to their proximity to vacancy and blight.

Applying the Temple University methodology and 2015 tax rates, the Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal report found that the City of Windsor forfeited \$93,302 in tax revenues in 2015 in the Ford City-Drouillard Road neighbourhood by maintaining the status quo.^{xxxviii}


This is the loss from just one hard-hit neighbourhood. We do not know the total number of vacant homes and buildings across Windsor-Essex County or the lost property tax revenue associated with them, but it impacts us all. Across our region 114 of 660 Dissemination Areas have greater than 10% of their housing inventory requiring major repairs. This is but one symptom of the broader challenges and costs that place-based poverty imposes on us all. This type of poverty costs all of the communities of Windsor-Essex measurable amounts annually. Whether or not a specific neighbourhood is better or worse off than another, we are all paying to support those who are living in poverty through declining community wealth, lower productivity rates, and overall poorer quality of life. This issue requires more support than just United Way. Our priority neighbourhoods, our partners and other groups cannot tackle this alone.

We must bring all of the community's resources to bear on creating a long-term solution to place-based poverty in our region.



SECTION 4:

The path forward



Given the scope of the challenges that our region faces, it is beyond the capacity of any one organization to bring about real and lasting change. United Way's investment in the programs and supports in the four priority neighbourhoods have resulted in measurable progress on a number of indicators. Unfortunately, that investment is not enough to overcome the structural challenges faced by these neighbourhoods.

What is needed is a new pathway forward. Targeting interventions on the hardest hit areas with the highest concentrations of risk factors for poverty will not only have the greatest impact but will also be the most cost effective. United Way has laid the foundation for other parties including businesses, government, and other funders, to start investing in these neighbourhoods. Overcoming place-based challenges takes time and resources – some outcomes may not be fully realized until today's toddlers graduate high school and attend post-secondary education.

When you look beyond Windsor and Essex County to other communities where place-based revitalization has been used to battle poverty, a number of common and effective policies and priorities emerge as best practices for reducing poverty and enhancing our own community.

Vacant building registry

The registration and tracking of vacant and blighted buildings has been a key tool in battling physical signs of structural poverty in neighbourhoods in both Hamilton and Detroit. As the name implies, a vacant building registry requires building owners that have left their building vacant for more than a prescribed period of time to register that building and pay a fee with the City. Ford City Neighbourhood Renewal has suggested that such a program be launched in Windsor.^{xxxix}

The registry fees are then used by the municipality to pay for enhanced by-law and property standards enforcement of not only vacant buildings in priority neighbourhoods but across the community, thereby enhancing overall property standards and “shoring up” property taxes in struggling neighbourhoods. The registry not only enables tracking of vacant and blighted buildings, but it is also a centralized list of underutilized properties that interested parties and developers can consider, potentially spurring redevelopment.

Hamilton utilizes its vacant building registry as a means to track and combat blight and enhance property standards in their respective communities. Hamilton's program costs a one-time fee of \$262 and an annual fee of \$654 that covers the cost of seasonal exterior inspections of the site for by-law compliance. Failure to register can result in a \$10,000 fine for individuals and a \$50,000 fine for corporations.^{xl} Both Detroit and Pittsburgh operate similar programs.^{xli} In Detroit's case, the vacant building registry plays an instrumental role in community land banks, which go a step further and clear blighted land and restore it so it can be easily redeveloped or naturalized.

Although a locally designed price structure should be developed, the frameworks used by other cities are clear road maps forward.



Community hubs

Community hubs are essentially a one-stop shop for social services and supports in a particular community. The concept is simple: if those who are in need are able to access a wide range of services in their neighbourhood, they will not only be more likely to access and engage those services but the services will also be more effective due to their proximity and accessibility to service users and community members. One of the key value propositions that community hubs provide is removing barriers to accessing vital services by placing those services right where the people are – the hub quickly becomes an anchor institution for the neighbourhood in a manner similar to a school or community centre.

Although there are a number of social service hubs across our region, these hubs emerged in a piecemeal

manner over time in response to community challenges and generally targeting an immediate need without considering broader root causes. Currently, there are no true hubs in priority neighbourhoods. What has not occurred in any significant way is the strategic placement of hubs into the areas of the community where the need is greatest as a part of a coordinated effort to tackle systemic neighbourhood issues.^{xlii}

United Way Toronto York Region and the City of Toronto have partnered on numerous hub projects, in some cases going so far as the City being a landlord after purchasing land from school boards, enabling low cost operations for the organizations providing the services. In 2012, these partner hubs provided over 168,000 square feet of space, housing over 54 social service agencies in Toronto's priority neighbourhoods.^{xliii}



It is from this space that neighbourhood revitalization occurs. Community groups can gather, discuss issues, and plan actions. Individuals in need can engage services locally. Agencies and workers become embedded within the community, enhancing their understanding of local needs and dynamics. Depending on the needs of the specific neighbourhood, community hubs can offer a range of services – free or low-cost space, community legal aid, employment programs and supports, childcare, community kitchens and food banks, and entrepreneurial programs. The opportunities are potentially endless and, more importantly, customizable to the needs and wants of the local residents accessing the hub.

Experience from major urban centres that have successfully deployed community hubs reveal two significant challenges that will need to be overcome. First, despite the plethora of vacant space in our region, there are few options well suited for a hub-like facility. Determining and controlling the costs of a new construction or major renovation is vitally important in a mid-sized region like Windsor. The second challenge originates from the issue that in order to be sustainable, hubs require partners to put “skin in the game” and be financially committed to the space and the programming within in it for the long-term either through directly contributing or by renting space within the hub. To bring hubs to Windsor and Essex County requires significant time and material investment from a wide range of partners.

Community hubs can offer a range of services – the opportunities are potentially endless and, more importantly, customizable to the needs and wants of the local residents accessing the hub.



Neighbourhood level economic development

For a long time our region has focused its economic development strategies on attracting large scale employers. What was overlooked in many cases was the micro neighbourhood level economic development activities that, at a relatively low cost, provide significant return on a small scale, that on a region-wide level add up to significant impact.

Presently, there are a number of Community Improvement Plans and Strategies in place across the region that cover a number of areas that are identified as high risk in our Poverty by Place Index.^{xliv} The question remains – is that enough? Generally speaking these plans are based on relieving property tax burdens and development charges from an investing individual or company. The challenge that is illustrated in our index is that the priority neighbourhoods do not have the internal capital capacity in many cases for individuals or existing small businesses to undertake this kind of investment and due to the economic strains in those neighbourhoods, external investment is relatively rare.

A secondary factor is that nowhere in our region are there significant incentives for residents to move into existing priority neighbourhoods and invest in the housing stock.^{xlv} Part of the story of poverty of place

is due to middle class families leaving the existing neighbourhoods and not being able to attract them back, which leaves local businesses without customers. The simple solution is to give residents who live outside of these neighbourhoods the opportunity to invest in single family homes by providing them with the same incentives as businesses to establish themselves in these neighbourhoods.

A number of cities have adopted approaches, some innovative and some not so, to encourage neighbourhood economic development. Some of these approaches are very simple: wayfinding signage, installing more benches or seating in public spaces, ensuring that garbage and litter are routinely collected and spaces are maintained. Some approaches represent more dramatic shifts, such as municipally-led living wages and locally sourced, socially responsible procurement of goods and services. Some cities are aggressively targeting priority neighbourhoods with business and residential incentive programs, installing municipally operated WIFI networks to support the 21st century economy, or undertaking innovative land reclamation projects that enable urban food production and naturalized community green spaces.^{xlvi}



Whether small or large, these programs, in tandem with traditional economic development activities, can help create traction for change in these neighbourhoods and develop community wealth in these areas. As was identified in the Hamilton Spectator's Code Red series, priority neighbourhoods do not need investment, they require sustained and targeted overinvestment to overcome the structural barriers that exist.

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Community action plans and tables

In major urban areas Neighbourhood Level Community Action Plans and planning tables have been established to tackle the entrenched challenges and place-based poverty in low-income neighbourhoods. These action plans are multi-stakeholder strategies with dedicated resources and are designed to tackle specific issues with explicit and targeted outcomes. It is through these joint efforts that progress is being made.

Paramount to the success of these action plans is resident engagement and input which ensures residents identified needs and wants are prioritized. Those priorities are then translated into action by the various stakeholders as a means to revitalize these neighbourhoods. For example, Toronto's Kingston-Galloway/Orton Park planning table features thirty or more stakeholders with representatives from churches, universities, provincial and federal agencies, multiple resident groups, Business Improvement Areas and local businesses, community agencies and representatives from eleven different city departments.^{xlvii} Although a 30-member table may seem unmanageable, each member has a specific role as a participant at the table. City officials are mandated to report back not only to their respective departments on the progress of the revitalization efforts but also to senior city administration

and city council to ensure that actions are aligning with the City's poverty reduction strategy. These senior managers and political leaders regularly meet with the leadership of key partners to ensure that accountability is maintained, and that synergies between departments and programs can be enhanced and progress is being made.

Developing a complex structure like those outlined in Toronto may not be the pathway forward for our region but United Way and other service agencies are looking to local government to make a commitment to poverty reduction, particularly in identified neighbourhoods. Streamlining processes, aligning funding and work plans, improved information sharing and reducing duplication of effort in our communities will make all of our work more effective. Having concrete plans which provide frameworks through which we can all operate and to which local governments are committed have the potential to make a dramatic impact. To see what is possible, we only need to look at the work of the Housing First Initiative here in Windsor-Essex County, where the City of Windsor and County of Essex are taking a leadership role. This approach is well on its way to eliminating homelessness within the next five years. The same focus and initiative needs to be applied to hard hit neighbourhoods across our region.



United Way and other service agencies are looking to local government to make a commitment to poverty reduction in identified neighbourhoods.

A regional transit plan

Accessing economic opportunities and creating community connectivity is a vital part of economic development and neighbourhood revitalization in our region. United Way was founded in our region nearly 70 years ago, and since the late 1960s having access to affordable and reliable transportation has been an ongoing issue that has been identified by United Way's community partners. Our region lacks a coordinated plan – not just a bus system or light rail, but also active transit options like walking or biking in our communities.

Of 33 CMAs in Canada in 2011, the Windsor CMA tied for 28th in transit usage to get to work, tied for 30th in walking to work and tied for 18th place in biking to work.^{xlvi} This is not to say that a car is a bad thing, but the automobile as the exclusive mode of transport means that the primary beneficiary is the individual who owns the car. Car transport has high barriers to entry – the purchase price of a vehicle, insurance, fuel and maintenance, etc. For those living with low-income it is often beyond their capacity to gain access to that mode of transportation. But the car's dominance as a means of transportation in our region has created structural barriers against other modes of transport that unfairly punish those who are not able to drive.

Although there has been some movement on public transit opportunities in Tecumseh and LaSalle, simply connecting to Windsor's system is not enough. If we want to overcome the structural barriers in our region, we need to bring the region together to create a unified plan and unlock untold economic potential. We only need to look to comparable regions, like Waterloo, Hamilton and London, to get an idea of what this vision could be.^{xlix}

A proper regional transit backbone grounded in a long-term plan that is coordinated between the municipalities would be a true game changer for our region. Even if it is designed to complement automotive transport, it will provide viable alternatives for people to get to the place they need to go, while at the same time linking and expanding existing infrastructure to encourage active transport in a safe and productive manner. This will not only lead to a healthier community but create a more productive and economically robust region.ⁱ

WINDSOR CMA ranked

 transit **28th**

 walking **30th**

 biking **18th**

OF 33 CMAs ACROSS CANADA

to reach their place of employment

SECTION 5:

Conclusion

Windsor and Essex County do not exist in a vacuum from each other and from the world. If we truly hope to compete economically and socially on a global stage, we cannot allow areas of our communities to continue into further decline. Only by working together and strategically targeting resources can we hope to solve this entrenched and structural poverty in our region.



For those of us who are fortunate enough to live in parts of our region not experiencing place-based poverty, we are paying every day to maintain the status quo in those hard hit areas. As a result of that cost, our quality of life is degraded – we receive reduced services in our community, there are fewer local economic opportunities for families, and our tax dollars in many cases fail to get at the root causes of the problem.

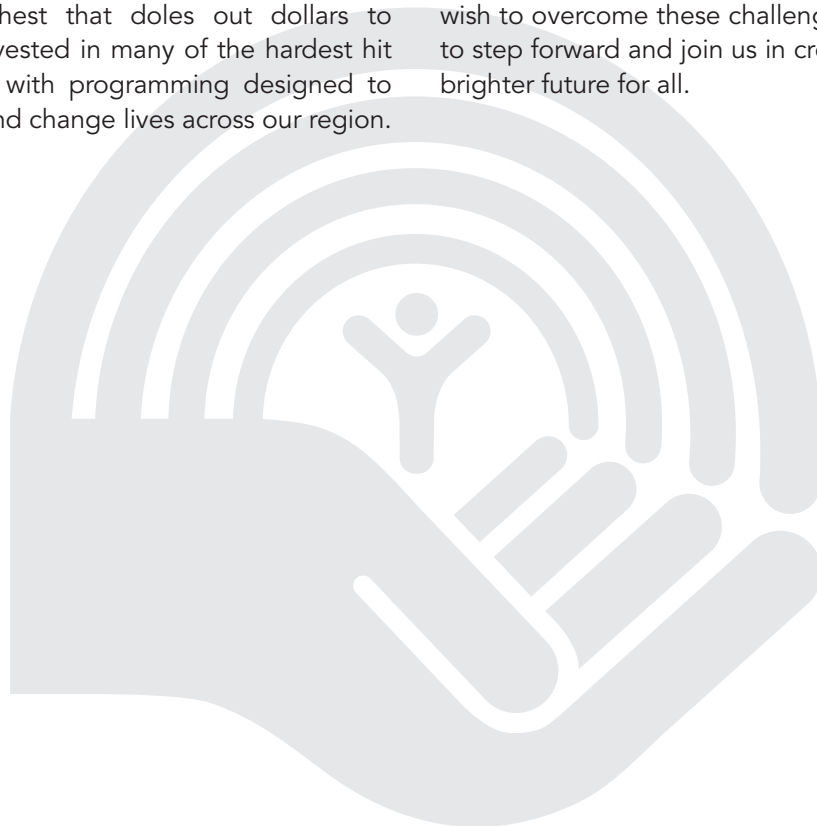
Together this creates a perception of a frustrating lack of progress that feeds into cycles of cynicism and “us” vs “them” thinking that hurts our region as a whole. There is no “us” or “them” in Windsor-Essex County, only WE and only together can we solve these problems.

Some have stated that our community’s efforts to combat poverty over the past few years have been a failure. We say that our region has emerged from one of the greatest socio-economic crises since the great depression – of course it will take time to move the needle, but we all need to take action. United Way has evolved our role in the region from being just a community chest that doles out dollars to being strategically invested in many of the hardest hit areas of our region, with programming designed to improve conditions and change lives across our region.

That investment of funding and other resources can be further leveraged by our community to enhance overall outcomes, to improve the lives of residents and to grow our economy.

Whether you volunteer your time doing a community clean up, donate to a local charity, shop at a small businesses in your neighbourhood or speak up on an issue that is important to you, only together can we drive toward positive and lasting change in our region.

United Way cannot solve the issues in our community alone. Only when municipalities, non-profits, businesses and residents are all pulling in the same direction will true progress be made. Our hope is that when the 2016 Census is completed we will be able to see some initial progress and at that time this report will be updated. What the current data has shown is a clear benchmark with every neighbourhood, town and city facing some challenges going forward and only when we all agree to combat these challenges will we be able to make substantial progress. United Way invites all those who wish to overcome these challenges in our communities to step forward and join us in creating possibility and a brighter future for all.



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