



Social Research & Planning Council

A Division of  United Way Perth-Huron



QUALITY OF LIFE

in Perth & Huron County 2014

SUMMARY



WHAT IS QUALITY OF LIFE?

Quality of life refers to the general wellbeing of individuals and society, and is defined in terms of health and happiness, rather than wealth. In many respects, quality of life is subjective. What is considered to be ‘good’ varies from individual-to-individual and community-to-community.

This report presents some of the latest statistical measures that have been identified in the Canadian Index of Wellbeing as being important to quality of life in Perth and Huron counties. In addition to common indicators about education, work and health, it explores issues like how safe is our community, how engaged are residents in community life, how do we treat the planet, and how do we spend our time.

This summary is a condensed version of the full Quality of Life Report released by the Social Research and Planning Council. For further information and details regarding the methodology, sources of information, geography, definitions, and data limitations, please refer to the full report, which is available at www.socialresearchandplanning.ca.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

What’s working well?

The rural environment that characterizes Perth and Huron contributes positively to quality of life, bringing strong friendships, attachments, and a willingness of neighbours to lend a helping hand. This is most evident in the indicators under the Community Vitality domain. Three-quarters of the population reports a strong sense of belonging to the community – consistently well above the provincial average. In addition, Perth and Huron are very safe places to live according to the Crime Severity Index.

Where are we falling behind?

Like many areas across Ontario, Perth and Huron are experiencing a number of similar challenges. The population is aging, and seniors (over age 65) now make up a higher percentage of the populace than children (under age 15). Voter turnout rates are on the decline, and citizens are less likely to vote in municipal and school board elections, than in federal and provincial ones. The Watershed Report Cards published by the local conservation authority areas reveal that the quality of the local surface water and forested areas are below provincial standards. Over half the population is obese or overweight, and these rates have flat-lined. Physical activity rates are starting to go up, yet there is room for improvement. And, at least one in 10 residents is living in poverty, struggling to pay for rising food and shelter costs.

What makes Perth and Huron unique?

There is a high out-migration of young adults who are leaving the community for employment and/or post-secondary education opportunities. The unemployment rate sits at 2-percentage points below the provincial average. However, many of the top occupations in the local economic region are categorized as low skill level, requiring minimal education and training. The wages associated with these jobs are typically low, resulting in lower average income rates in Perth and Huron in comparison to Ontario as a whole. Moreover, there are a greater percentage of low- to moderate-income households earning between \$20,000 - \$60,000 annually, and a smaller share of households in the top and bottom income deciles in Perth and Huron.

COMMUNITY VITALITY

Community Vitality looks at the strength, activity and inclusiveness of relationships between residents, the private sector, the public sector, and community groups that foster individual and collective wellbeing. Three key quality of life indicators here are perceptions of community belonging, safety and security, and participation in voluntary organizations.

Sense of Community Belonging



In 2011/12, three-quarters of the population reported a strong sense of community belonging, higher than the provincial average.

Safety

The Crime Severity Index rates for Perth and Huron are very low, indicating that this is a very safe place to live.

Volunteerism

Number of volunteer hours contributed in **Perth**, per year: **5 million**
This is the equivalent of: **2,500 full-time jobs**

Number of volunteer hours contributed in **Huron**, per year: **4 million**
This is the equivalent of: **2,000 full-time jobs**



Close to **85%** of local volunteers put in at least 40 hours in 2012 – the equivalent of one week's worth of unpaid full-time work. Statistics Canada reported that 47% of Canadians aged 15 and over volunteered in 2010. However, of those who did, only a small proportion of the volunteers (10%) contributed 53% of the total volunteer hours given to non-profit and charitable organizations.

DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT

Democratic Engagement refers to the participation of citizens in public life, the functioning of government, as well as the role citizens and institutions play in the global community. Two indicators that were identified as important to Perth and Huron residents were voter rates in recent municipal, provincial and federal elections, and the representation of women in local government.

Voter Rates

Percentage of eligible voters who cast ballots in recent elections:

FEDERAL (2011)

64%

Perth-Wellington

68%

Huron-Bruce

62%

Ontario

PROVINCIAL (2011)

52%

Perth-Wellington

59%

Huron-Bruce

48%

Ontario

MUNICIPAL (2010)

27%

Perth East (Lowest)

58%

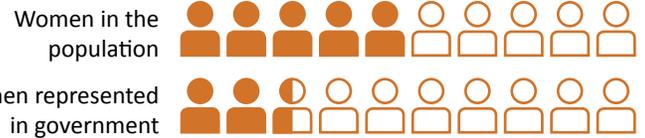
Bluewater (Highest)

44%

Ontario (Average)

Women in Local Government

Women represent half of the population, yet hold less than one-quarter of municipal seats (22%) and heads of council (24%) in Ontario.



EDUCATION

The Education domain probes the knowledge and skill levels of the population, and the ability of children and adults to participate in a competitive workplace. Some of the indicators investigated were educational attainment rates, literacy and math skills among school-aged children, and opportunities for life long learning.

Educational Attainment

Educational attainment levels in Perth and Huron are below the provincial average. This is most likely attributable to the fact that many of the most common occupations in the local economic region are categorized as low skill level, requiring minimal education and training.

The Village of 100 – Highest Educational Attainment (Age 15+), 2011

	Stratford	Perth (excl. Stratford)	Huron	Ontario
No certificate, diploma or degree	22	29	26	19
High school diploma or equivalent	31	29	28	27
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	8	11	11	7
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	20	20	22	20
University certificate or diploma below bachelor level	2	2	2	4
Bachelor's degree	11	7	7	14
University certificate, diploma or degree above bachelor level	6	3	4	9

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

Literacy and Math Skills

Every year, Ontario students in grades 3, 6, 9 and 10 take province-wide tests in reading, writing and mathematics, administered by EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office). In general, the student achievement results at the local English school board are in line with provincial trends.

Lifelong Learning

The Composite Learning Index (CLI) is a national indicator that measures lifelong learning in Canada. The 2010 CLI rates for municipalities in Perth and Huron were fairly consistent with the national average of 75, ranging from a low of 72 in Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh to a high of 77 in St. Mary's.

ENVIRONMENT

The Environment domain tells us about the state of the local ecosystem (i.e. forests, wetlands, natural areas and wildlife). Healthy ecosystems affect our wellbeing by providing safe drinking water, clean air, reduced stress, and opportunities for physical activities in parks and conservation areas. Listed below are selected indicators regarding the quality of our air, water and forests, as well as rates of waste diversion.

Air Quality

Air quality has improved significantly over the past decade.

Number of smog advisories in Perth and Huron in 2005: **12** In 2013: **1**

Watershed

According to the Watershed Report Cards published by the local Conservation Authorities, the survey water quality and forest conditions are below provincial standards.



Waste Diversion

The 2012 Residential Waste Diversion Rates (percentage of waste material diverted from traditional disposal to be recycled, composted or reused) for the six reporting municipalities and recycling associations in Perth and Huron are generally consistent with their municipal peer group averages, with the exception of Ashfield-Colborne-Wawanosh's rate which is 14 percentage points below provincial goal rates (of 60%), and Perth's rate which is 15 percentage points above.

HEALTHY POPULATIONS

The Healthy Populations domain explores the physical, mental and social wellbeing of the population by looking at different aspects of health status and certain determinants of health. Indicators explored included self-rated health status and the prevalence of mood disorders, addictions, and obesity, as well as access to primary care physicians.

Perceived Health



In 2011/12, two-thirds of the population reported that they are in very good or excellent health, consistent with the Peer Group and provincial average.

Mental Health

Since 2007/08, prevalence of mood disorders in the region has remained fairly constant, ranging from 6% to 8% in a given year.

Illicit Drug Use

More than **1** in **10** used an illicit drug, primarily cannabis (marijuana) in the past 12 months, comparable with the Peer Group and provincial average.

Obesity



Since 2007/08, the rate of obesity locally and across the province appears to have flat-lined, with over 55% of the population reporting that they are obese or overweight.

Primary Care

Over 95% of residents in Perth and Huron reported having access to a regular medical doctor in 2011/12, higher than the Peer Group (91%) and provincial average (90%).

LEISURE & CULTURE

Participation in arts, culture and recreation activities greatly contribute to life satisfaction, and help shape our identity (i.e. who we are as individuals, communities, and societies). Unfortunately, there is an absence of standardized indicators on arts and culture available at the local level, especially for rural areas like Perth and Huron. As a result, the indicators below focus on leisure activities and pastimes, such as physical activity levels and library use.

Leisure-Time Physical Activity

In 2011/12, over half of the population reported that they are active or moderately active during their leisure time, comparable with the Peer Group and provincial average.

Library Usage



About a third of residents are active patrons of the local library systems.

Less than 10% of loaned materials are downloaded digital materials. However, the downloading of electronic library resources grew 5-percentage points between 2011 and 2013, with a corresponding decrease in the proportion of borrowed material that are traditional books.

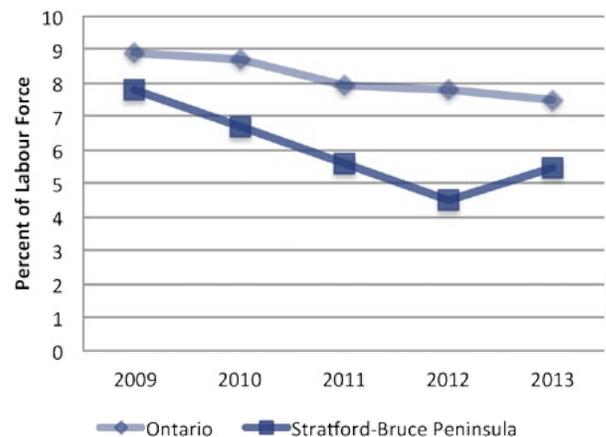
LIVING STANDARDS

The Living Standards domain looks at the level and distribution of income and wealth in the community. In this section, we explore the state of employment, poverty, housing affordability, social assistance, food security and Internet connectivity.

Unemployment

In March 2014, the unemployment rate in the Perth and Huron's economic region of Stratford-Bruce Peninsula was 6%, compared to 8% for Ontario.

Annual Average Unemployment Rate, 2009-2013



Source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, 2014. Data has not been seasonally adjusted.

Class of Workers



One-quarter of the labour force works part-time, which is higher than the provincial average.



Less than 20% of the labour force in Perth (excluding Stratford) and Huron is self-employed.

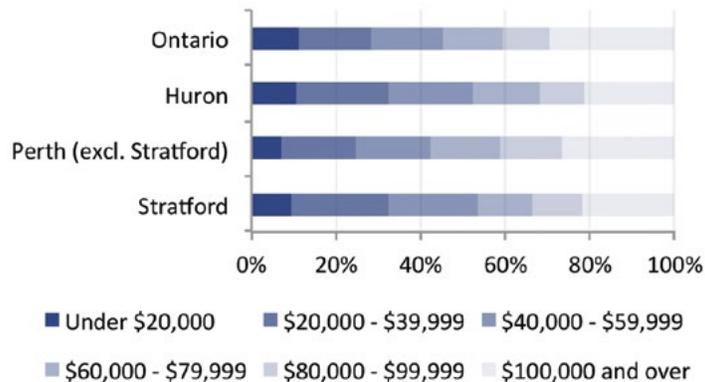
Income

The average annual earnings for a full-time worker is less than \$50,000 in Perth and Huron – more than \$13,000 below provincial average.

The average total 'household' income in Perth and Huron - \$75,863 and \$71,916 – is less than the provincial average of \$85,772.

There are a greater percentage of low- to moderate-income households earning between \$20,000 - \$60,000 annually, in comparison to the province. There is a smaller share of households in the top and bottom income deciles in Perth and Huron.

Percentage of Households by Income Level, 2011



Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

Ontario Works

As of December 2013, there were 474 individuals/families on the Ontario Works caseload in Stratford, 170 in Perth (excluding Stratford), and 519 cases in Huron. This equates to less than 4% of all Census family and non-Census family households (i.e. individuals living alone) in the community.

About 60% of cases are singles without children, and one-third are single parents with children. Couples (with or without children) represent less than 10% of all cases.

In December 2013, the average time spent on assistance was 16 months in Perth and 14 months in Huron. Single parents with children spent the most time on assistance – 24 months in Perth and 19 months in Huron.

Housing Affordability

A third of renters pay above the affordability threshold - 32% in Perth and 36% in Huron, in comparison to 42% for Ontario.

Average amount renters paid on shelter costs per month **Perth**, in 2010: **\$761**

Average amount renters paid on shelter costs per month **Huron**, in 2010: **\$728**

Housing Costs, 2010

	Stratford	Perth (excl. Stratford)	Huron	Ontario
Average value of <u>owned</u> dwellings	\$262,280	\$269,028	\$236,396	\$367,428
Average monthly shelter costs for <u>owned</u> dwellings	\$1,070	\$1,044	\$925	\$1,284
Average monthly shelter costs for <u>rented</u> dwellings	\$768	\$761	\$728	\$926

Source: Statistics Canada, 2011 National Household Survey

Average annual employment income for full-time workers:

\$61,495 Ontario
\$50,858 Stratford
\$48,443 Perth
\$47,487 Huron

Poverty

According to the after-tax Low Income Measure (LIM), the overall poverty rates for Perth and Huron were 10% and 12% respectively in 2010, lower than the provincial rate of 14%. The poverty rate for seniors (over 65 years) in Huron is on par with the provincial average (8-9%). The poverty rate for young children (under 6 years) in Perth is equivalent to the provincial average (18%).

Food Security



Nine in 10 residents report that they always have enough to eat, comparable to the Peer Group and provincial average.

Weekly cost of groceries to feed a family of four in **Perth**, in 2013: **\$191.75**

Weekly cost of groceries to feed a family of four in **Huron**, in 2013: **\$198.89**

These figures are up 2% and 8% respectively from the previous year. Over the past five years, the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket has gone up 16% in Perth and 13% in Huron.

Internet Access

In 2012, 80% of households in Perth and 83% in Huron had Internet access, in comparison to 84% across the province.

TIME USE

The Time Use domain looks at the use of time, how people experience time, what controls its use and how it affects wellbeing. In this section, we explore indicators related to time spent getting around (transportation), time spent working for pay, and overall satisfaction with life in general.

Getting Around - Commuting (2010)

11
minutes
Perth

15
minutes
Huron

21
minutes
Ontario

The median amount of time residents spent commuting to work (one-way). This does not include the percentage of the population who work at home (e.g. farming).

According to a broad-based survey of transportation conducted by the Huron-Perth Transportation Task Force in November 2013:



Two-thirds of respondents are able to travel wherever they need or want to all or most of the time.

The top three barriers to getting around are: driving conditions and road closures (41%), access to affordable VIA and GO Train services (38%), and access to public transportation (33%).

Time Spent Working for Pay

In 2011/12, the median number of hours worked per week per respondent is 38 hours, consistent with the Peer Group and provincial average.

Life Satisfaction



In 2011/12, over 90% of the population reported that they are satisfied or very satisfied with life in general, consistent with the Peer Group and provincial average.



WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP?

If you or your organization has been motivated by what you have read in this report, please:

- **Pass it on** - Share this report with your employer, your teacher, your friends, and your neighbour.
- **Find out more** - This report presents a compilation of secondary research published by respected organizations that are researching and tracking data on quality of life issues. For more information, check out the websites of the organizations listed in the References.
- **Take part in community life** – Organize a street party. Borrow a book from the library. Plant a tree. Vote in the upcoming municipal election.
- **Volunteer** - Identify an area where you would like to make a difference, and get involved.
- **Give back** - Make a donation to a charitable organization that is helping to make a difference.

ABOUT THE SRPC

The Social Research and Planning Council (SRPC) is comprised of community representatives who are dedicated to the collection, analysis and distribution of information relating to social trends and issues in Perth and Huron County. It is our hope that with this information, social and human service agencies and funders can make informed decisions regarding courses of action and the distribution of resources.

The SRPC approaches its work in two ways:

1. Commissioning research into specific social issues, plus providing access to research reports created by local, regional, national, and international agencies
2. Developing recommendations for community improvement based on local findings, and working collaboratively with community members to implement change

Social Planning Councils exist in a variety of forms throughout Canada and the world. In general, they share the role of tracking the community pulse, providing a public forum for social issues dialogue, identifying and prioritizing unmet needs, and building community commitment and capacity to address those needs.

The Council is generously funded by:

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