

HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29, 2025

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OWEN SOUND



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Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

“Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, working together is success.”



It is with great pleasure that I present this report on behalf of Harmony Centre and all the fantastic people who contributed to the success of our Small Communities Solutions Conference.

This event was made possible by the collective efforts of many dedicated individuals and organizations who share a passion for strengthening our small communities and finding solutions that meet their unique needs.

To our inspiring speakers and insightful changemakers — thank you for sharing your expertise, stories, and innovative ideas. You’ve sparked conversations and connections that will continue to make a difference long after this conference.

A sincere thank you to our volunteers, staff, and planning committee for your tireless work behind the scenes. Your commitment, creativity, and attention to detail ensured everything ran smoothly and made everyone feel welcome.

To our sponsors and community partners, Community Foundation Grey Bruce and Van Dolder’s Home Team — your support made this gathering possible, and your belief in the importance of local, community-driven solutions is greatly appreciated.

And finally, to all the attendees — thank you for bringing your voices, experiences, and enthusiasm to this event. Your participation reminds us of the strength that exists in small communities when we come together.

We look forward to building on this momentum and continuing these vital conversations in the months and years ahead.

Jeff Elie

Chair, Harmony Centre Board of Directors
April 2025

HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

Shared Challenges, Collaborative Solutions

Harmony Centre's Small Communities Solutions Conference was a successful grassroots initiative that germinated with an idea and grew to become an important and productive forum for promoting positive change. Organized by Owen Sound's Harmony Centre – a non-partisan charitable organization – the conference drew participants from a wide range of advocacy groups, local government, and social service agencies in an atmosphere that promoted discussion, inspiration, and abundant networking opportunities.



Conference Speakers (L-R): david sereda, Community Singer; Heidi Lucas, Grey Bruce Public Health; Kevin McNab, Grey County Paramedic Services; Annette Pedlar, Safe 'N Sound; Gwen Patrick, Shorefast Institute; Sharon Irwin, Grey County Community Housing; Kim Wingrove, Grey County CAO; Craig Ambrose, Owen Sound Police Chief; Stuart Reid, Community Foundation Grey Bruce; Lori Pyne, Helping Hands Society; Josh Gibson, Grey Country Housing Programs. **Absent:** Marilyn Struthers, Institute of Southern Georgian Bay; Savannah Myers, Grey County Economic Development; Leigh Greaves, Harmony Centre.

The one-day event brought together local leaders, community members, experts, and innovators to explore and share strategies for addressing the unique challenges faced by small communities in Grey and Bruce counties and beyond.



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

The conference focused on practical, sustainable solutions that can be implemented within small-scale settings where resources are limited – but where community engagement and creativity thrive.

From the outset, conference organizers and stakeholders worked to craft a speakers list representing unique perspectives that result in positive outcomes. Their intent was to create a conference dynamic that inspires change and achieves the following goals, among others:

- Foster collaboration among different sectors, including local government, non-profits, social services, businesses, and residents;
- Promote resilience in small communities by helping them adapt to changing economic, social, and environmental conditions;
- Empower small communities by providing them with the knowledge, resources, and connections they need to succeed; and,
- Support innovation by encouraging the use of new technologies and strategies to overcome traditional barriers.

The Small Communities Solutions conference was deemed a success by those in attendance. It promoted dialogue, inspired change – and most importantly of all – it has already come to be a springboard for meaningful collaboration in the future.

Conference Quick Facts

- 12 speakers
- 109 people in attendance
- Two community sing sessions
- 10 table presenters
- One community meal



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

Conference Summary

by Francesca Dobbyn: Member, Conference Planning Committee; Executive Director, United Way of Bruce Grey.

Harmony Centre's Small Communities Solutions Conference brought together community members, municipal leaders, experts, and innovators to share successful strategies for tackling challenges unique to small communities. The intent of the conference was to highlight practical, working solutions to the pressing issues facing our region.

The organizing committee was clear: presenters were to focus on what is working – not on the barriers standing in their way.

To this end, the conference showcased actionable strategies addressing issues such as homelessness, substance use, economic development, employment, and education.

Presenters

Note: Find the full conference video by searching YouTube for “Small Communities Solutions Conference” or using the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHxQ&t=1s>

The speaker summaries below are followed by links to their presentations in the conference video.



Leigh Greaves, Conference Organizing Committee Chair, opened the conference with welcoming remarks and a reminder that Harmony Centre, now a successful social enterprise, originally housed a soup kitchen to help Owen Sound's needy. Today, thirteen years later, it is a thriving community hub that is itself a solution continually paying it forward to enrich our community.

[Opening Remarks](#)

[Closing Remarks with Barry Randall](#)

HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre



Kim Wingrove, Grey County CAO, started off the speakers' lineup by emphasizing the power of collaboration to address big issues – both within and beyond the scope of mandated programs. She challenged attendees to move past the “we’ve always done it this way” mindset, encouraging openness to imperfection and innovation. County staff followed with presentations on creative approaches to homelessness, including the County’s purchase of a motel to provide cost-effective shelter, and the Transitional Housing Program—a partnership with the Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) – on Owen Sound’s west side. The Sydenham Campus was also spotlighted for its many partnerships supporting local access to apprenticeships and nursing programs.

Kim Wingrove, Chief Administrative Officer, Grey County

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHxQ&t=453s>

Sharon Irwin, Community Housing Manager, Grey County

<https://youtu.be/xH3XtddKHxQ?si=JPab2deTgfAUo5zn&t=970>

Josh Gibson, Housing Programs Manager, Grey County

https://youtu.be/xH3XtddKHxQ?si=S6Ct_aFYIRYz9YEI&t=1594

Savanna Myers, Economic Development Director, Grey County

<https://youtu.be/xH3XtddKHxQ?si=MdWUzOXPElb27G9a&t=2147>



Stuart Reid, Executive Director of the Community Foundation

Grey Bruce, shared a program addressing youth homelessness through a combination of rent supplements, counselling, and mentorship. Youth participants are actively involved in the program, which reflects many elements of a basic income model.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHxQ&t=3009s>



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre



Annette Pedler, Executive Director of Safe 'n Sound, spoke about two programs run through the organization: a sharps exchange initiative (currently on pause due to lack of funding), and a proposed pilot that would see staff respond to community concerns rather than relying on 911. Pedler reminded attendees that homelessness was created by a series of ideas – and so, too, can a series of ideas solve it.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtdKHXQ&t=3904s>



Marilyn Struthers of the Institute of Southern Georgian Bay walked attendees through her organization's innovative approaches to the affordable housing crisis. Her message echoed a common theme: collaboration is key, and everyone has a role in the solution.

<https://youtu.be/xH3XtdKHXQ?si=CX6tdT4JRuSQjTfI&t=6289>



Heidi Lucas, public health nurse with Grey Bruce Public Health, introduced a pilot program using drug test strips as a harm reduction strategy. Feedback from participants showed that the information gleaned from using the strips significantly changed substance use behaviours – from reduced use to complete abstinence.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtdKHXQ&t=7213s>



Kevin McNabb, Director of Paramedic Services with Grey County, was recently awarded the King Charles III Coronation Medal, and recounted the origin story of the Supportive Outreach Services (SOS) program. What began during a COVID-19 outbreak in a Hanover rooming house has since grown into a multidisciplinary, award-winning initiative connecting marginalized individuals with health and social supports. With over 30 organizations involved and bi-weekly



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

collaboration meetings, the SOS program exemplifies the power of community partnership.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHXQ&t=7859s>



Chief Craig Ambrose, Owen Sound Police Chief, addressed the community's call for action on open drug use. While acknowledging that police are not the ideal response to service gaps, he informed attendees that enforcement of public drug use laws would be stepped up. He emphasized that the lack of local wraparound services limits the effectiveness of harm reduction approaches.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHXQ&t=8971s>

Two presenters joined from beyond the region – one from Canada's west coast and one from the east:



Lori Pyne, Executive Director of the Squamish Helping Hands Society (BC), focused on involving community members in co-creating solutions. Her emphasis on the power of relationship-building reinforced a powerful message: the answers lie within our communities.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHXQ&t=10422s>



Gwen Patrick, Financial Innovation Lead at the Shorefast Institute on Fogo Island Newfoundland, spoke on holistic economic development strategies for small communities. She described how the people of Fogo Island faced their challenges by leaning into community-driven action.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHXQ&t=13481s>

HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

The event also featured local musical talent **david sereda**, who brought a creative energy to the room with live performances before the coffee breaks – adding another layer to the inspiration in the air.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xH3XtddKHXQ&t=5212s>

Reflecting on the day, Kim Wingrove noted that neither federal nor provincial governments are likely to “rescue” us – and that we must be the architects of our own solutions. Lori Pyne introduced the idea of “multi-solving”: addressing multiple problems with a single solution.

The challenges we face may be complex, but they are not insurmountable. These are not problems with tidy, technical fixes – they require thoughtful, flexible, people-centered approaches. For example, the success of the SOS program didn’t come from funding alone; it grew from relationships. Every program presented noted the impact of limited funding – but what was also clear was the strength of interconnectedness within our community.

As the day came to a close, we were left with one final challenge: to approach hope, not just as a feeling, but as a mindset. All it takes is a goal, the agency to act, and a pathway to follow.



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

Goals and Outcomes: Frameworks for Change

1. Community Engagement & Collaboration

Pre-Event Goals: Participants sought to network, build relationships, and learn from others working toward community improvement.

Community Assets Identified: Strong leadership (e.g., Kim Wingrove), existing collaborations, and a network of engaged individuals.

Post-Event Outcomes: Many attendees highlighted the existing collaborations within the community as a source of inspiration. The event served as a connector, strengthening partnerships and identifying new opportunities for collaboration with leaders and organizations like Gwen Patrick/Shorefast.

2. Affordable Housing & Homelessness Solutions

Pre-Event Goals: Attendees aimed to gain knowledge on best practices for increasing affordable housing and addressing homelessness.

Community Assets Identified: Programs such as rent-geared-to-income housing developments, the SOS program, and the paramedic mobile service.

Post-Event Outcomes: Participants recognized and expressed interest in leveraging these existing programs to drive further action, demonstrating that knowledge-sharing led to increased awareness of available solutions.

3. Practical & Actionable Solutions

Pre-Event Goals: Many sought immediate, pragmatic solutions and actionable items.



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

Community Assets Identified: Local government engagement, economic development frameworks, and grassroots initiatives.

Post-Event Outcomes: Attendees left with specific ideas, such as inviting delegations to council meetings and moving beyond "bricks and mortar thinking," demonstrating a shift toward action-oriented solutions.

4. Overcoming Barriers to Change

Pre-Event Goals: Participants hoped to understand resistance to change and how to navigate it effectively.

Community Assets Identified: Frameworks like Economic Nutrition and collaborative community efforts.

Post-Event Outcomes: The event highlighted structured approaches to community challenges, increasing awareness of available support and successful strategies to navigate barriers to change.

5. Addressing Larger Social Issues

Pre-Event Goals: Attendees wanted to explore solutions for broader issues such as mental health, poverty, and social inequities.

Community Assets Identified: Community-driven programs, the Fogo Island project, and grassroots solutions.

Post-Event Outcomes: The event successfully provided models for tackling these complex issues, reinforcing the idea that local solutions can be informed by external best practices and adapted to the community's needs.

6. Inspiration & Energizing Change

Pre-Event Goals: Participants sought to leave the event feeling motivated and empowered.

Community Assets Identified: Existing enthusiasm, commitment from local changemakers, and an ecosystem of motivated individuals.

Post-Event Outcomes: Responses such as "There is hope," "Commitment," and "A shared community motivation" demonstrate that the event successfully energized attendees and reinforced a sense of possibility for change.

7. Results

By utilizing an asset mapping approach, this report highlights the strengths, resources, and existing networks that contributed to the event's success. The event met its primary goals by fostering collaboration, presenting actionable solutions, and inspiring continued engagement. The post-event reflections indicate that attendees left with new ideas, strengthened relationships, and a renewed commitment to addressing key community issues. Moving forward, ensuring sustained action and follow-up on the initiatives discussed will be crucial to maintaining this momentum and maximizing the impact of existing community assets.





HARMONY CENTRE'S SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

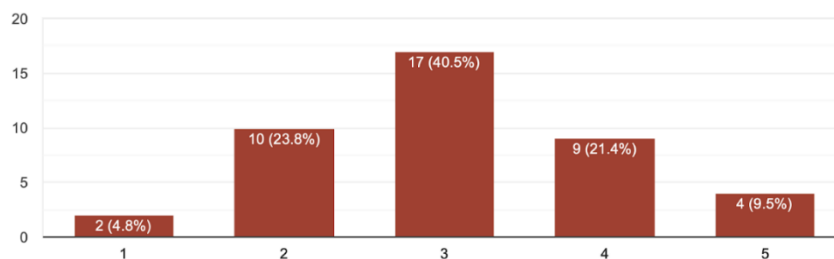
Goals & Impact: How Did We Measure Up?

Goal 1: Participants leave the conference with more knowledge about models, ideas, and strategies for impacting positive change in the Grey Bruce community.

Pre Survey Results

How much do you know about ways to help small communities with problems like climate change, economic development, housing, food, and safety?

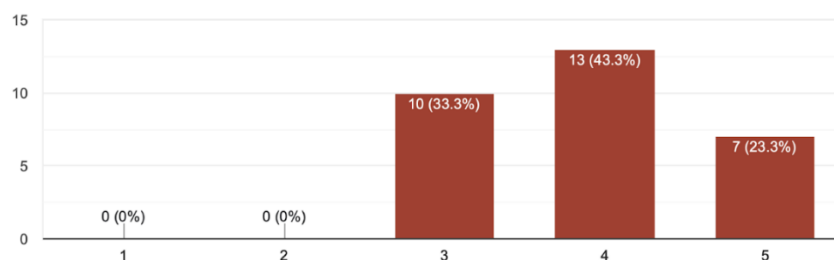
42 responses



Post Survey

After this event, how much do you know about ways to help small communities with problems like climate change, economic development, housing, food, and safety?

30 responses





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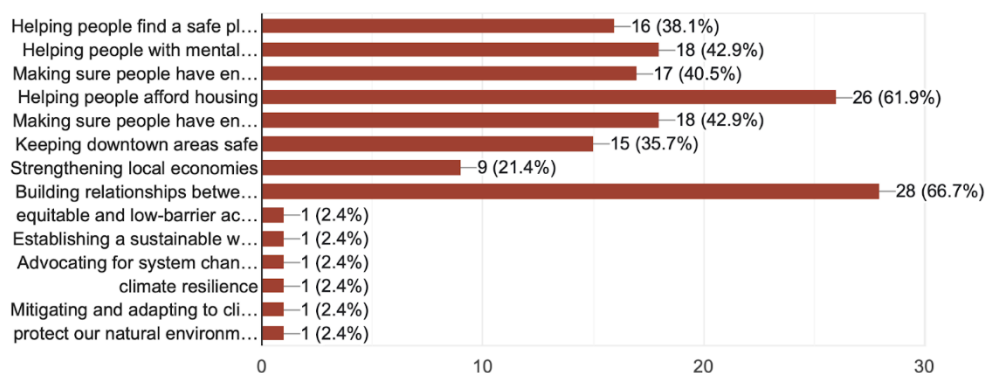
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Goal 2: Understand the issues that the participants most care about.

Pre-Survey

Which problems do you care about the most? (Pick up to three)

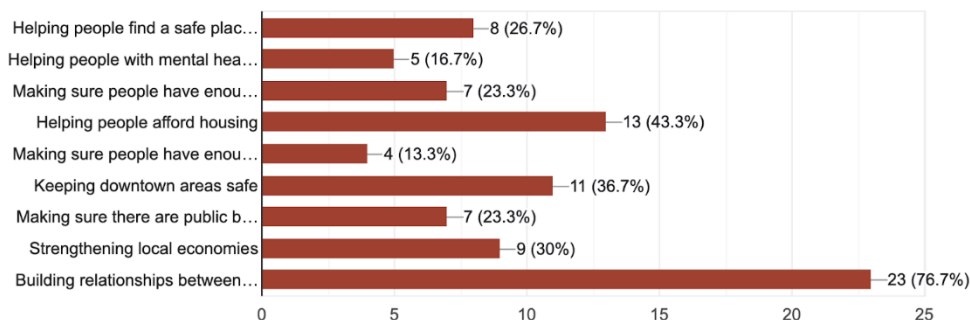
42 responses



Post Survey Results

Which problems do you want to work on the most after this event? (Pick up to three)

30 responses





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SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

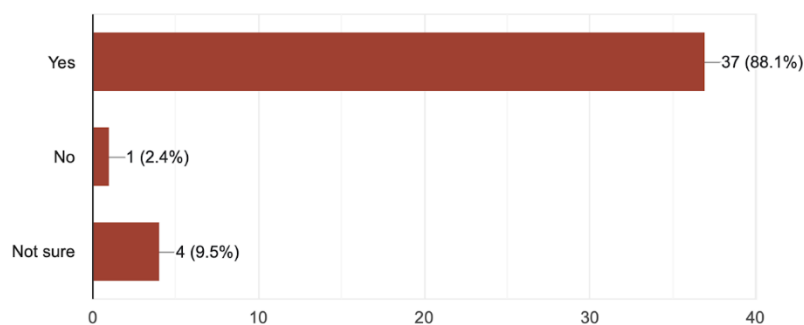
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Harmony Centre

Goal 3: Understand the participants willingness to participate in collaborative solution finding in our community.

Pre Survey

Have you ever tried to help fix a problem in your community?

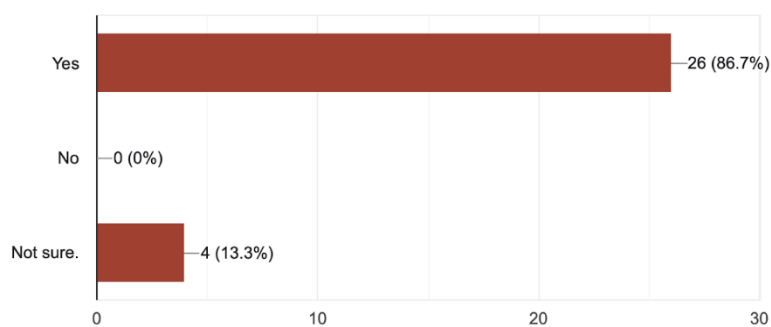
42 responses



Post Survey

Are you planning to try and help fix a problem in your community after this event?

30 responses





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SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

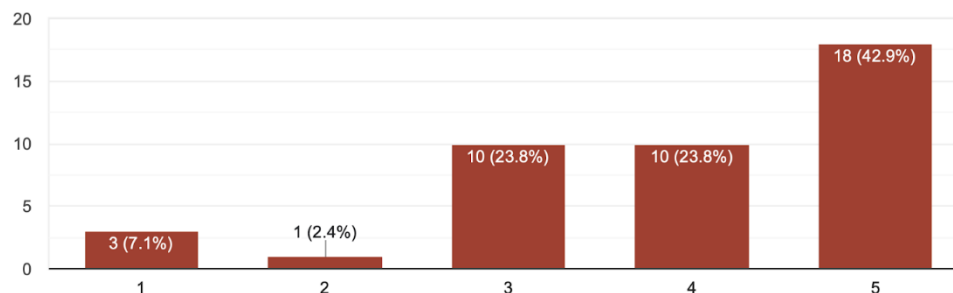
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Goal 4: Understand if participants have the tools they need to impact change locally.

Pre Survey

How sure are you that you can help make a change in your community? (1 = Not sure at all, 5 = Very sure)

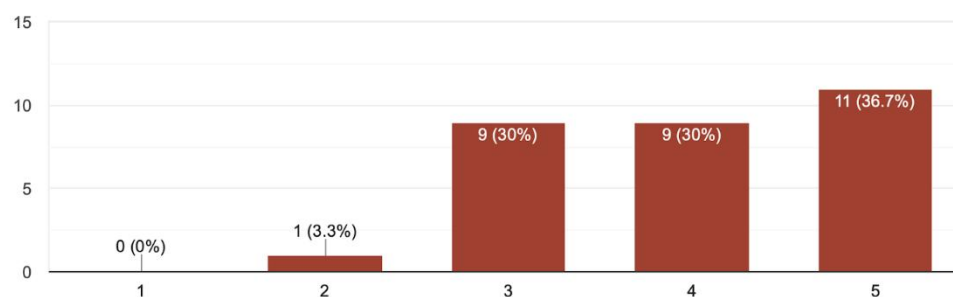
42 responses



Post Survey

How sure are you now that you can help make a change in your community?

30 responses





HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

Feedback from speakers/presenters,

Themes: What Went Well

- **Engaged & Supportive Audience**
Attendees were deeply interested in solutions, offering positive energy and aligned values.
- **Seamless Organization & Execution**
Tech, venue, transitions, and logistics were smooth, making the event feel “well-oiled.”
- **Celebration of Local Solutions**
A fresh focus on showcasing community wins was energizing and affirming.
- **Rich Networking Opportunities**
Informal chats during lunch and breaks fostered meaningful exchanges.
- **Creative & Emotional Engagement**
Music, storytelling, and art helped connect people to place and each other in powerful ways.
- **Strong Team & Leadership**
Multiple shout-outs to Kate Mosher and the planning team for their professionalism and warmth.

3-Word Conference Vibe

- *Hopeful, Grassroots, Celebratory*
- *Dynamic, Positive, Inspiring*
- *Connection, Collaboration, Change-making*

Participant Testimonials: In Their Own Words

- ❖ *a shared community motivation*
- ❖ *Grass roots solutions can make a difference.*
- ❖ *There is a great deal of effort being made by a great many people through a large number of programs but there is a large disconnect between these efforts and the public. I think I can help bring together organizations to work in concert with filling gaps in the plans and help communicate this to the public.*
- ❖ *Kim Wingrove demonstrated great leadership & knowledge about our communities - I'd love to work with her and others to pursue collaboration with Gwen Patrick/Shorefast*
- ❖ *Creative solutions that go beyond organisation mandates*
- ❖ *All of the collaboration within our community to make change!*
- ❖ *Listening to what every day citizens are doing to take action.*
- ❖ *Out of the bricks and mortar thinking.*
- ❖ *The partnerships already in place.*
- ❖ *Hearing about the collaboration that already exists!*
- ❖ *That there is collaboration. There is hope*
- ❖ *That there is a team of creative thinkers working for the same.*
- ❖ *It was great to share some of the solutions we are working on implementing and learning more about how to borrow from other ideas to continue to expand services.*
- ❖ *Message from Kim Wingrove that federal and provincial governments are not coming to rescue us-communities and relationships will help to move us towards solutions.*
- ❖ *What I found inspiring was that there are people out there who care about the issues we are facing, and that they are willing to work together to bring about solutions.*



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

APPENDIX – Community Asset Map: Grey Bruce Counties

Community Event Summary: Key Themes and Insights (Asset Mapping Approach using Pre & Post Survey Data)

Using an asset mapping approach, the analysis highlights the strengths, resources, and connections within the community that were identified and leveraged during the event. The responses reflect a strong desire for collaboration, learning, and actionable solutions to address pressing community challenges, with a particular emphasis on affordable housing, homelessness, and community engagement. Additionally, post-event reflections highlight the degree to which these goals were achieved and identify areas of continued interest and inspiration.

To further support community engagement and action, the following asset map categorizes key resources available in Grey Bruce counties, though by no means is a complete list.

1. Community & Civic Organizations

- Community Foundation Grey Bruce
- United Way of Bruce Grey
- Owen Sound & District Chamber of Commerce
- Municipal councils & local governance structures
- Grey Bruce Local Immigration Partnership (GBLIP)

2. Housing & Homelessness Support

- Grey County Housing
- Bruce County Housing Services
- YMCA Housing Services
- Safe 'n Sound
- SOS Program (Supportive Outreach Service)



HARMONY CENTRE'S

SMALL COMMUNITIES SOLUTIONS CONFERENCE

Saturday March 29
Harmony Centre

3. Health & Social Services

- Grey Bruce Health Unit
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) Grey Bruce
- Grey Bruce Public Health
- Grey Bruce Paramedic Mobile Services
- Women's House Serving Bruce & Grey

4. Economic Development & Employment

- Bruce Power economic initiatives
- Grey Bruce Business Enterprise Centre
- Saugeen Economic Development Corporation
- Local Workforce Development Boards
- Regional Chambers of Commerce

5. Food Security & Basic Needs

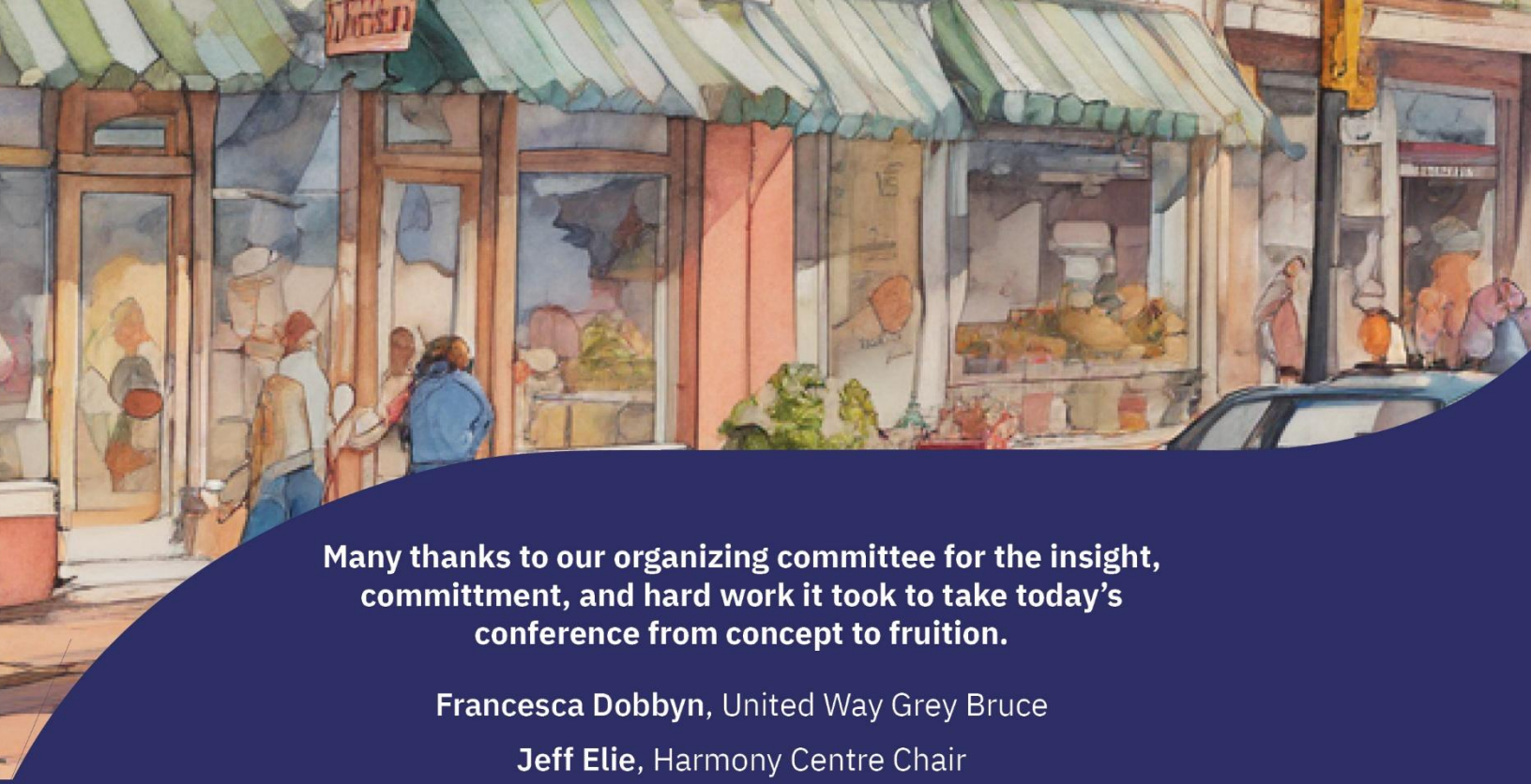
- OSHaRE (Owen Sound Hunger and Relief Effort)
- Meaford Food Bank & Outreach
- Kincardine Food Bank
- Local community gardens and food programs

6. Education & Learning

- Georgian College (Owen Sound Campus)
- Bluewater District School Board
- Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board
- Adult Learning Centres across Grey Bruce
- Indigenous education initiatives

7. Environmental & Sustainability Initiatives

- Grey Sauble Conservation Authority
- Bruce Peninsula Environmental Group
- Peninsula Bruce Trail Club
- Bruce Power initiatives



Many thanks to our organizing committee for the insight, commitment, and hard work it took to take today's conference from concept to fruition.

Francesca Dobbyn, United Way Grey Bruce

Jeff Elie, Harmony Centre Chair

Lori Elliott, Harmony Centre Board

Steve Furness, Grey County

Leigh Greaves, Conference Leader, Harmony Centre Board

Sandy Kobelak, Harmony Centre Vice-Chair

Carol Merton, Owen Sound City Councillor

Kate Mosher, Conference Coordinator

Kevin Moyse, Harmony Centre Events Committee

Barry Randall, Harmony Centre Board

Marilyn Struthers, Institute of Southern Georgian Bay

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