United Way Centraide
Windsor-Essex
Chatham-Kent

Voices of Chatham-Kent

Shaping Our Community's Future Together 2025

Executive Summary

For more than 77 years, United Way has been part of the Chatham-Kent community—supporting local programs, strengthening neighbourhoods, and helping people live better lives. Since it began in 1948, United Way has worked to meet local needs by bringing people and organizations together. In 2024, United Way Chatham-Kent joined with United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County to become one regional organization: United Way Centraide Windsor-Essex Chatham-Kent (UWWECK). This unification streamlined operations and helps us work more efficiently while still respecting the unique identity, leadership, and priorities of each community.

UWWECK is focusing its work on equity, community input, and lasting results. We want to move beyond short-term fixes and instead support long-term solutions that make our communities resilient and more inclusive. We're investing in the community, encouraging collaboration, and using data to guide our efforts.

Between January and June 2025, we engaged with nearly 600 people across Chatham-Kent through surveys and community meetings. This helped us better understand what matters most to local residents. The top concerns we heard were affordable housing, mental health and addiction support, and access to healthcare. People also raised issues like food insecurity, youth development, jobs, and transportation. Many said that supports need to be easier to access, better connected, and focused on preventing problems—not just responding to them.

People across Chatham-Kent want bold, equity-driven solutions that tackle the root causes of these problems. They consistently voiced a need for upstream, preventative solutions to long-standing issues. They want services that work together and are focused on long-term change.

In response, UWWECK is exploring a shift toward a collective impact approach. This means bringing residents, service providers, funders, and community leaders together to work on shared goals. A good example of this is the Cradle to Career (C2C) model. This strategy supports children and youth at every life stage by aligning services and partners all focused on a shared goal. Initiatives such as the Harlem Children's Zone and ProsperUs in Windsor-Essex demonstrate the C2C model's potential to improve education, the well-being of children and youth, and create long-term positive impact for the whole community. Residents and local organizations in Chatham-Kent expressed interest in trying a similar approach here.

The C2C model focuses on equity, prevention, and partnership. It directly responds to what residents told us they want: long-term, community-led solutions that make a real difference.

To support our work, UWWECK is also developing a Neighbourhood Opportunity Index (NOI). This tool uses local data and community feedback to identify where resources are needed most and helps track progress over time.

This approach means:

- Residents get services that reflect their real needs and remove barriers.
- Partner organizations work more closely together toward common goals.
- Donors can be confident that their support is creating meaningful, lasting change.

One of our next steps is to continue our consultation process and ask if this is the right path for Chatham-Kent. These next steps will be based on continued community engagement, measuring what works, and staying flexible to adapt based on what the data says is most effective.

UWWECK is committed to walking this path with residents, community partners, funders, and governments with a strong commitment to Indigenous partnership and reconciliation. By listening to the people of Chatham-Kent, UWWECK is committed to shape a future that reflects their hopes and builds a stronger, more supportive community for everyone.

Visit our website to read the full report: www.weareunited.com/voicesofchathamkent

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The land that is known as Chatham-Kent today was established as part of Treaty #2, the McKee Purchase Treaty of 1790. At that time the land was also inhabited by the Three Fires Confederacy: the Odawa, Potawatomi and Ojibwe. The Lunaapeew also lived in the area at the time, stewarding the land. The People of the Three Fires Confederacy, also known as the Anishinaabeg, and Lunaapeew Peoples agreed to the mutual sharing of the land, with obligations and responsibilities to the environment. Today, Chatham-Kent neighbours the Lunaapeew at Eelūnaapèewi Lahkèewiit which is part of the McKee Purchase Treaty, as well as the unceded territory of the Bkejwanong Walpole Island First Nation. Chatham-Kent continues to be home to diverse First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples. As beneficiaries of the treaty, we recognize all Peoples have responsibilities including collective responsibilities to the land and water.

"Youth mental health waitlists are out of control."

– Survey Respondent

"I would recommend that United Way choose a few things and do them extremely well versus many things done decently."

– Survey Respondent

"Not everyone has equal opportunity."

– Survey Respondent

"Even if support exists, people don't know how to find it."

– Survey Respondent

Cradle to Career Milestones

1

CHILDREN WHO ARE KINDERGARTEN READY are more likely to have a foundation that supports future learning and better health. This includes the first 1,000 days (pre-natal care).

2

STUDENTS WHO ARE PROFICIENT IN READING IN 3RD GRADE are more likely to graduate from high school.

3

STUDENTS WHO ARE PROFICIENT IN MATH IN 6TH GRADE are more likely to complete post secondary and be prepared for the workforce.

4

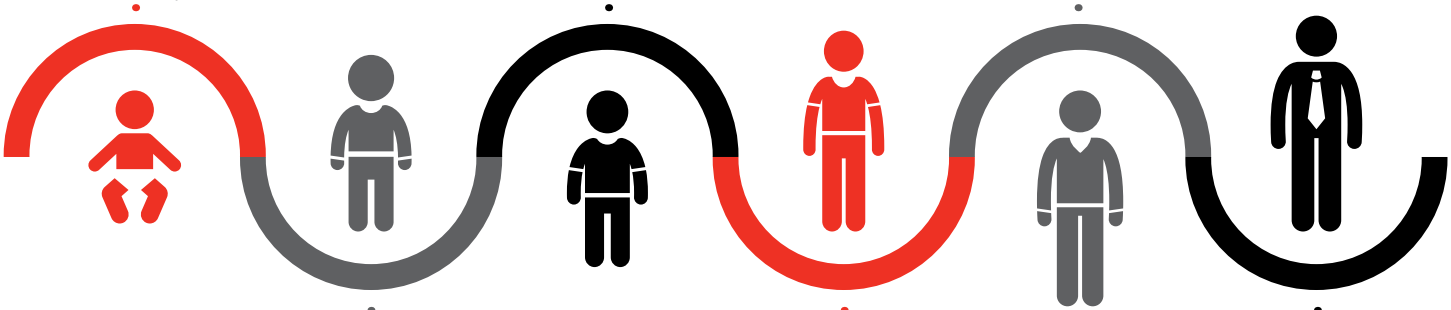
STUDENTS WHO GRADUATE HIGH SCHOOL are less likely to experience poverty, receive public assistance, or become involved in the criminal justice system.

5

STUDENTS WHO ARE POST SECONDARY & CAREER READY are more likely to have better employment and earnings opportunities.

6

STUDENTS WHO ARE EMPLOYED within a year of graduation is crucial for achieving self-sufficiency and developing skills for the 21st century economy.



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