

## ACTION AREA: ACTIVE PEOPLE

### Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



In the 2017 Grow granting cycle, there were 10 grants made in the [Active People](#) Action Area totalling \$3.3 million and accounting for 7% of OTF investments. These investments are expected to foster active healthy lifestyles for more than **12,000 Ontarians**. Particularly notable are projects for individuals that typically have barriers to participation and lower physical activity rates, including programs that target older adults, women, low-income families, people with early stage dementia, and Ontarians living with disabilities.

An initiative that embodies this trend is the StrongWomen Program administered by the RA Centre in Ottawa. StrongWomen is an evidence-based community exercise program targeting mid-life and older women. The program provides strength training that helps maintain muscle mass, strength and function as women age, and a heart-health curriculum focusing on aerobic activity. The program will train 30 program leaders and move 540 women to become active, fit, strong and healthy.

OTF has invested close to \$29.8 million in 204 projects in the Active People Action Area since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy.

#### Alignment with Government Priorities:

OTF has strategically aligned outcomes of the Active People investment model with multiple strategies including: [Game ON](#), the Ontario Government's Sport Plan with emphasis on the participation and leadership development priorities, the [Ontario Trails Strategy](#) and Trails Act, the Ontario's Ministry of Education's Daily Physical Activity Policy, the physical activity goals of Ontario's [After School Strategy](#), the Framework for Recreation in Canada, Canadian Sport Policy 2.0, and Canada's Active 20/20 Physical Activity Strategy.

OTF continues to work in partnership with multiple Ontario ministries and community stakeholders to develop comprehensive provincial strategies for Physical Literacy and Parasport.

#### Background:

The Ontario Trillium Foundation's Active People Action Area was developed to combat the significant social and health challenges arising from Ontario's epidemic levels of physical inactivity. For the first time in recorded history, younger generations of Canadians are expected to live shorter lives than their parents due to obesity and chronic diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, stroke, cardiovascular disease and various cancers. The estimated annual cost of diabetes in Ontario is \$7.7 billion; cases of diabetes in the province are projected to rise by 48% from 2015 to 2025. Obesity and lack of physical activity are responsible for nearly 95% of Type 2 diabetes cases.

Research shows that active lifestyles in children lead to healthy growth, improved school performance and social development. Further benefits include reduced risk of chronic disease and improved mental health in the general population. Active people are more productive, more connected in their communities, and more likely to avoid illness and injury throughout their lives. Although the benefits are well known, there is a significant gap between how people perceive their behavior and the benefits they are realizing from their physical activity. Although 55% of Canadians self-report that they are physically active, only 15% of Canadian adults and 5% of children engage in enough physical activity to derive health benefits. Furthermore, Ontario's estimated recreation infrastructure deficit is greater than \$5 billion, creating a substantial and ongoing demand for OTF capital investments.

# ACTION AREA: PROMISING YOUNG PEOPLE

## Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



2017 Grow grant projects support over 32,000 children, youth, parents, caregivers and adult allies, across Ontario. Projects continue to support youth facing barriers, including newcomer, racialized, youth in care, LGBTTTQ+, and low income youth, amongst others. For this Grow granting cycle, notable projects addressed unique challenges faced by youth with disabilities such as autism, down syndrome and other physical and cognitive disabilities. For the most part, these projects support the development of strong social emotional skills of children and youth.

OTF has invested over \$52.3 million in 276 projects in in the [Promising Young People](#) Action Area since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy. For the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested \$12,139,300 in 33 projects, accounting for 24% of total investments.

One of these notable projects is being delivered by the [Geneva Centre for Autism Foundation](#). The Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills (PEERS), is the only available evidence-based social skills program for adolescents and adults with autism. Social skill deficits are a core feature of autism and have an enormous effect on children's mental health and wellbeing. Fully 50% of adolescents with autism report having no friends at all. PEERS was developed at UCLA and rigorous evaluation, including randomized control trials, revealed significant improvements in overall social skills in the areas such as social communication, social cognition, social awareness, social motivation, assertion, cooperation and responsibility. This project will improve the social and emotional skills of approximately 420 children and youth with autism in the Greater Toronto Area over a three-year period.

This Grow cycle we saw projects scale up based on new practice-based evidence generated from previously funded Seed projects. For instance, new evidence was generated by the [Visions of Science](#) Network Learning linking their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) clubs to social and emotional skill development of youth living with low income. Visions of Science Network Learning was recently funded through the Seed stream to research whether its STEM club, particularly when using a mentoring approach, supported the positive development of social and emotional strengths. The intent was to test an unproven approach and develop evidence. The evaluation demonstrated that at least 60% participants experienced increased development of key social emotional learning (SEL) competencies such as self-awareness and relationship skills because of the program. This outcome is in addition to their main outcome of academic performance, which also improved by 60%. With this success, the program saw increased demand, and this Grow cycle OTF funded the scaling of their STEM club program to impact up to 600 youth from numerous low-income communities in Toronto.

### Alignment with Government Priorities

The Promising Young People Action Area is strategically aligned with the direction of the Ontario government. Our investments align with the Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services' Enhanced Youth Action Plan by supporting youth of all ages to be meaningfully engaged and successfully transition into adulthood. Worth noting are projects OTF continues to fund that support young people to become agents of change and address social issues that matter to them, such as racism and illiteracy. Young people are supported in designing, leading and implementing initiatives in their schools and communities.

Through investments in social and emotional strengths of children and youth, OTF leverages the Ontario Well-Being Strategy for Education and supports the work of the Ministry of Education to promote well-being efforts in schools. The Promising Young People Action Area is also aligned with some of the priorities of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, especially around 'achieving excellence and ensuring equity: realizing our kids' potential.'

### Background

Evidence shows that to become healthy and productive adults, children and youth need specific skill sets, relationships and experiences to support their transition to different life stages. Children and youth with strong social and emotional skills are more likely to have fewer behavioural problems, experience less emotional

distress (e.g. anxiety and depression), and exhibit pro-social behaviours. Youth who are engaged, and those with strong emotional and social skills, experience improved outcomes in education, health, income, and employment. They are more physically active, exhibit fewer risky behaviours, are more likely to finish high school, and are more connected to family, friends, and community.

Apart from these well-documented positive outcomes, social emotional learning initiatives have also been shown to produce a significant economic return of \$11 per dollar invested. Schools today are therefore looking beyond academics to integrate social emotional learning in the classroom, and employers are changing hiring processes, focusing more on the social and emotional competencies of candidates. There is also growing recognition that youth who volunteer and take on leadership roles further sharpen their social and emotional skills. Currently in Ontario, though 58% of youth volunteer, many still face challenges to meaningful participation in their communities. The Promising Young People Action Area is designed to foster the positive development of Ontario's children and youth so that they have a better chance for success in life. This is consistent with the research and priorities established by the Government of Ontario. OTF investments focus on two Priority Outcomes: more children and youth have emotional and social strengths, and more youth are meaningfully engaged in the community

# ACTION AREA: PROSPEROUS PEOPLE

## Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



2017 Grow projects support over 36,000 people in vulnerable situations, notably women, youth, immigrants, and people with disabilities. Many of these projects address employment, food security, and financial literacy, thereby improving the quality of life, stability and health of low-income individuals and families across Ontario.

OTF has invested more than \$47.7 million in 255 projects in the [Prosperous People Action Area](#) since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy. For the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested \$11,040,300 in 30 projects, accounting for 22% of the grants.

Two notable projects funded are interesting in terms of their approach to providing employment and entrepreneurship opportunities for immigrants. The first is a grant to [WIL Employment Connections](#) to expand two of its existing "Immploy Online" employment initiatives focused on improving the economic well-being of 320 additional immigrant job seekers across Southwestern Ontario. Through strategic employer leadership and partner collaborations, Immploy connects employers with immigrant talent, offering dedicated screening, job matching, and recruitment services. As well, there is a mentorship component which connects immigrant job seekers (mentees) with regional business leaders (mentors) from their occupation/industry. This multi-pronged approach addresses both the demand and supply side of employment, which are instrumental in effectively meeting the needs of both employer and employee. It also provides ongoing coaching for the job seeker, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustained employment.

The second notable project by the [Women's Multicultural Resource and Counselling Centre of Durham](#) to support, train and mentor 160 skilled immigrant and refugee women, age 20 to 49. Built upon the evidence of immigrant women workers' cooperatives developed by "Community Economic Development for Immigrant Women," this initiative will result in the formation of six workers' cooperatives in Durham comprising of teachers, artists, child & family care workers, writers, cleaners/organizers, and bookkeepers. Groups will be trained in business skills and the principles of developing workers cooperatives. They will also be provided with networking opportunities, specific service sector forums, and mentorship. The approach of cooperation rather than competition aims to leverage collaboration within the sector and ensure ongoing support and collective learning between co-workers in service specific cooperatives. The expectation is that 50% of the women supported through this initiative will become self-employed entrepreneurs. Their increased income and improved skills will have an ongoing positive impact on their families' economic well-being.

### Alignment with Government Priorities

The Prosperous People Action Area is strategically aligned to several government mandates and priorities. These include the Province of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy (2014- 2019); The Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure Youth Entrepreneurship Partnership program (2015); Ontario's Youth Job Strategy (2015); Financial Empowerment Initiatives (2016); Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (2016); The Social Enterprise Strategy for Ontario (2015); Ontario's long Term Affordable Housing Strategy (2010); and the Private Sector and Mentorship Initiative through the Ontario Ministry of Child and Youth Services' Enhanced Youth Action Plan (2015).

### Background

The landscape of poverty and employment in Ontario is vast, multifaceted, and complex. Living standards in Ontario today lag far behind that of Canada as a whole. Over 1.5 million people are living in poverty. One in 13 Ontarians are unemployed, and 50% of them are youth aged 15 to 24. Since 2009, Ontario has seen increases of 50% in involuntary part-time employment and 75% in long-term unemployment. The quality of employment has declined and the growth of precarious work arrangements are leaving children, youth and families in poverty. While Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy is making steady progress to reduce child poverty by 25% by the year 2025, child and family poverty persists. About 1 in 5 children overall in Ontario are living in poverty, including 44% of children of single mothers. In 2014, 375,000 Ontarians, a third of whom are children, used food banks each month. To address these realities, OTF has focused on two Priority Outcomes: increased economic stability

and increased economic opportunity. Evidence shows that economic security improves when the risks of poverty are reduced and economic opportunities are enhanced, especially for those who are most vulnerable. When people's basic needs are met, they are in a better position to succeed. Improved access to food, housing, counselling, and other community supports can reduce or eliminate barriers to economic wellbeing. Ensuring people have the knowledge, skills, and tools for greater financial independence and are better able to find meaningful livelihoods, also leads to increased economic wellbeing.

## ACTION AREA: GREEN PEOPLE

### Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



In the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested 10% of available funds to support initiatives in the [Green People](#) Action Area that contribute to a healthy and sustainable environment. Projects addressed both Priority Outcomes, helping to ensure that ecosystems are conserved and restored, and that people reduce their impact on the environment.

Several projects supported this cycle address the urgent need to restore degraded ecosystems, important for enhancing wildlife habitat, improving soil and water quality, and a myriad of other benefits. For example, with OTF support, the [Nature Conservancy of Canada](#) will significantly expand restoration of endangered tallgrass prairie and oak savanna in the [Rice Lake Plains](#). These native habitats have been vastly diminished across North America, with only about 1% remaining. Some of the best remaining examples and opportunities for restoration exist in Ontario's Rice Lake Plains. Recognizing the threats to shoreline ecosystems and the value these provide to biodiversity and people, [Watersheds Canada](#) will launch a new shoreline restoration program across Renfrew County, based on its proven restoration model successfully implemented elsewhere. Both projects are underpinned by sound science and restoration planning, and engage the local community and landowners to ensure success.

OTF has invested over \$28.2 million in 169 projects in the Green People Action Area since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy. For the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested \$4,808,900 in 15 projects.

#### Alignment with Government Priorities:

As one of the largest funders of the public benefit sector in Ontario, OTF aims to advance a strategy that engages individuals and sectors in efforts to conserve our biodiversity and ensure we use our environment responsibly. Our investments support several action areas identified in Ontario's Climate Change Action Plan (2016) and complement efforts to build a greener Ontario announced in recent budgets. Our investments also align strongly with directions laid out in other relevant strategies such as Ontario's Biodiversity Strategy (2011), Ontario's Great Lakes Strategy (2012), Ontario's Invasive Species Strategy (2012) and the Wetland Conservation Strategy for Ontario 2017-2030. By working together, we can help realize a cleaner, greener future for all Ontarians.

#### Background:

OTF's Green People Action Area recognizes that a healthy environment is critical to the wellbeing and long-term prosperity of our communities. Ontario is home to a rich biodiversity, with over 250,000 lakes, 18% of Canada's forests and over 30,000 known species. This biodiversity has an intrinsic value and is a fundamental driver of our economy. There is also a growing body of evidence regarding the importance of nature to our physical and mental wellbeing. As stewards of our natural resources, Ontarians have a responsibility to ensure that future generations benefit from all that our environment provides.

Addressing Ontario's environmental challenges is complex and long-term. Ontario has one of the largest ecological footprints in the world and habitat continues to be lost at an alarming rate. Ontario has conserved only 11.2% of its terrestrial habitats and this drops to just over 4% in Southern Ontario. Fortunately, progress is being made. The 2015 State of Ontario's Biodiversity Report highlights several areas of improvement, but stresses that continued and accelerated action is required if we are to protect all that sustains us. Guided by the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) indicators, Living Planet Index and Ecological Footprint, OTF's Green People Action Area aims to promote this by engaging individuals and sectors in efforts to conserve and restore our ecosystems and reducing the impact we have on our environment.

# ACTION AREA: INSPIRED PEOPLE

## Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



The [Inspired People](#) action area accounts for 15% of investments in this Grow cycle. Of that investment, 52% will fund increasing access to arts-based learning and compelling artistic, cultural and heritage experiences, 18% will fund engagement in community-based arts creation, and 30% will fund the preservation and animation of cultural heritage. These investments are expected to enrich the lives of over 190,000 Ontarians through arts, culture and heritage.

OTF has invested more than \$32.7 million in 240 projects in the Inspired People Action Area since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy. For the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested \$7,646,600 in 24 projects.

A notable example of an investment in increasing access to arts-based learning is being led by Culture Link Settlement and Community Services in Toronto. Through a three-year investment of \$724,500 its [Nai Choir Project will](#) provide free and accessible music education to refugee children from Syria and other war-torn countries of the Middle East, using music as a mobilizing force for healing, hope and connection. A notable example of an investment in the preservation and animation of cultural heritage is being led by the Moose Cree First Nation. Through a three-year investment of \$502,800, Moose Cree First Nation will increase access to cultural teachings through arts, traditional food preparation, land based activities and gatherings ensuring that knowledge is transferred from Elders and Traditional Knowledge Keepers to the community at large.

### Alignment with Government Priorities:

The Inspired People Action Area is aligned with the Ontario Government's Culture Strategy and Arts Policy Framework because it enables people to benefit by experiencing, participating and engaging with culture, heritage and the arts. Evidence-based investments in this Action Area will support Ontario's Culture Strategy through improved and expanded cultural infrastructure, building the skills and talents of next generation artists, fostering creativity in our schools and telling our stories that value our diversity.

### Background:

The Inspired People Action Area is built on the recognition that culture, heritage and the arts have intrinsic value. We are hard-wired as human beings to experience creative acts, become authors of our own self-expression and combine such experiences into lived engagement as we find our place within society.

Even though Ontarians enjoy an abundance of culture, heritage and arts offerings, the time spent on such activities declined by 12% between 1994 and 2010 according to the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW). Communities benefit from a strong cultural infrastructure, however 72% of arts organizations report insufficient access to facilities and specialized equipment. There is an urgent need to develop young audiences for the future. However, only 62% of elementary schools in the Greater Toronto Area have music teachers, and the numbers drop steeply for eastern Ontario (32%) and northern Ontario (26%). In 33% of Ontario elementary schools, students do not have opportunities to work with artists, perform in a musical group, or play an instrument. Community arts programs are limited.

Evidence from the field shows that arts-based learning models, such as "Learning Through the Arts" and "ArtSmarts," have many positive impacts on the intellectual and social development of young people. Students engaged through arts creation methodologies develop critical thinking, higher self-esteem and leadership. Research also shows significant benefits to the health and wellbeing of seniors participating in arts and heritage activities. As well, community-based arts and heritage initiatives engender inter-cultural understanding, belonging and civic pride. It is for these reasons that OTF is focusing its investments in this Action Area on two priority outcomes: better quality programming and infrastructure to experience culture, heritage and the arts, and more people connect with culture, heritage and the arts.

## ACTION AREA: CONNECTED PEOPLE

### Grow Cycle Granting Highlights: Fall 2017



About 19,480 Ontarians will be impacted by OTF investments to reduce social isolation and bring together the diversity in our communities. OTF has invested over \$51.3 million in 344 projects in the [Connected People](#) Action Area since the 2015 introduction of its Investment Strategy.

For the 2017 Grow cycle, OTF invested \$11.396,000 million in 32 projects accounting for 23% of OTF investments.

A persistent trend within the Action Area is the focus on addressing social isolation. While this is a commonly-held goal by many organizations and communities, approaches and populations impacted vary greatly. OTF's investment in pilots and testing through the Seed grants continues to be a strong source of evidence for several notable projects, as they build on successful tests and research of their chosen approaches.

Of note is the \$300,000 investment in [Volunteer Sudbury's](#) Valuable Volunteer Program (VVP) aimed at reducing social isolation among people with disabilities and living with mental illness. The program creates meaningful volunteer opportunities for them and breaks down organizational barriers they face when looking to participate. This project will connect at least 425 persons with disabilities to meaningful volunteer opportunities in the Greater Sudbury Area.

Another key investment is [Park People's](#) Sparking Change program, which offers training, networking, capacity building, access to start-up funding and one-on-one coaching and support to community groups so that they can animate and improve their local parks. At the end of the three-year program, at least 50 community park groups will be a part of the Park People network, with at least one group in each of Toronto's 31 Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIA). Building the capacity of community park groups will give residents tools to work together and shape programs in their community. These groups will host over 240 community-led events in their local parks, offering opportunities to engage 30,000 NIA residents in inclusive community-building, local economic development and civic engagement, thus helping to make their neighbourhoods stronger and more resilient. The Sparking Change program is built on learning from a previous OTF Seed grant.

#### Alignment with Government Priorities

OTF's Connected People Action Area is strategically aligned with a variety of government mandates and priorities. These include the Province of Ontario's Action Plan for Seniors (2015); The Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration's Newcomer Settlement Program and Ontario Immigration Strategy; the Strategic Framework and Action Plan for Expanding Community Hubs in Ontario (2015), and the Ministry of Community and Social Services' mandate to build communities that are resilient, inclusive and sustained by the economic and civic contributions of all Ontarians.

This Action Area is also aligned with the mandate of the Anti-Racism Directorate, specifically A Better Way Forward: Ontario's three-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan (2017), which is part of the government's commitment to fight systemic racism and create fair and equitable outcomes for Black, Indigenous and other racialized people. Connected People is also aligned with the Ministry of Children and Youth Services' Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (2017) to help reduce disparities for Black children, youth and families.

#### Background

OTF's Connected People Action Area is built around creating a strong sense of belonging and reducing social isolation. When individuals feel a greater sense of belonging and have strong connections to the people around them, they are more likely to reach out, participate in, and actively engage in their community's economic, social, cultural, and political institutions. People who have adequate social relationships are at a 50% lower risk of death than those who do not. Social isolation now exceeds obesity and physical inactivity as a risk factor for mortality. In addition to that, the long term positive effects of social connectedness on long-term health are now seen to be equal to those of quitting smoking. However, since 2008, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW) reports that our

trust in others has declined by 15%, and the number of Ontarians with strong social networks has declined by 24%. About a third of Ontario's population was born outside of Canada, and 15% of Ontarians are above the age of 65. Our diversity of identities, origin, age, etc. is a vibrant source of ideas and approaches for building and maintaining the social infrastructure that makes communities stronger and more integrated. When everyone feels at home, and plays a meaningful role in their community, we have better health outcomes, fresh ideas and approaches to community needs. This is why our two priority outcomes for this Action Area are: 'diverse groups work better together to shape community', and 'reduced social isolation'.