

# *County of Oxford*

**What you  
may not  
know...**

**2008 Social Report**

# The Oxford Social Report

## Introduction

This report was commissioned in the spring of 2008 to accomplish two things. First, to assess the quality of life for the residents of Oxford County; for example, what issues and problems are the members of our community facing? Secondly, lay the groundwork for the next steps of this process. With the assistance of service providers, the next steps will be the development of strategies that have the potential to improve the quality of life for the residents of Oxford County. This report, which is the summary of the more in depth analysis, is intended to provide a broad look at the problems that plague some of our most vulnerable community members.

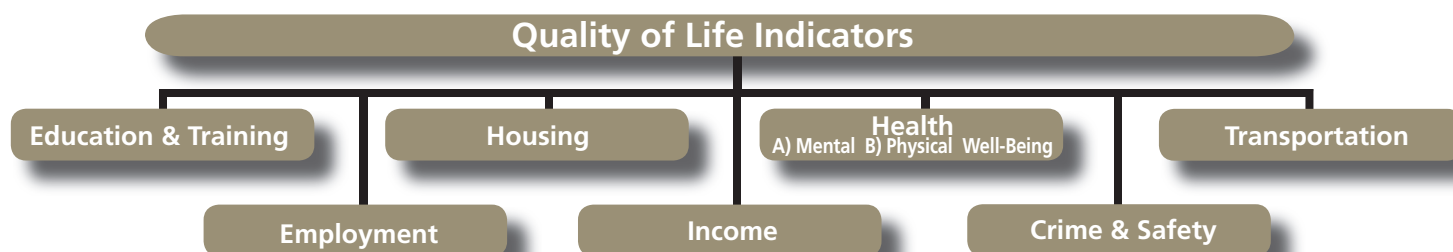
Many local citizens may not be aware of the extent of poverty in our own community, or the obstacles that residents face daily in order to simply “get by.” We need to look beyond the statistics and stereotypes in order to see the many faces of poverty. We need to take ownership of both the problems and the solutions.

## Quality of Life Indicators

The Ontario Social Development Council and Social Planning Network of Ontario define the quality of life as:

*“The product of the interplay among social, health, economic and environmental conditions which affect human and social development.”<sup>1</sup>*

There are many indicators that can be used to measure the quality of life of the community. The seven indicators that were chosen for this report were selected and measured through consultation with other community reports, the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario, and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities. Gaining direction from these sources helps to ensure that the indicators which we have chosen are relevant, credibly sourced and comparable to the rest of the Province.



## Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts of Erin Buchner for the extensive research and compilation of data to produce this report, the support of the members of the Oxford Social Planning Committee and the very generous contributions of the United Way of Oxford, Community Employment Services, the Oxford Small Business Support Centre and other community organizations that made this project possible.



OXFORD  
SMALL BUSINESS SUPPORT CENTRE INC.  
A Community Futures Development Corporation



United Way  
of Oxford



Community Employment Services

# EDUCATION & Training

Education is one of the primary indicators of socio-economic status and is also an important determinant of health. Older populations generally have lower education levels than younger populations due to changes in access to education.<sup>2</sup> Those with lower education are more likely to have occupations where there are more risks of occupational injuries and learned risk behaviors.<sup>3</sup>

There is a significant amount of the population in every municipality in Oxford County living without a high school diploma. Only 11.4% of those living in Oxford have some form of university education where the Provincial average is 24.6%.

Two of the factors explaining this are the percentage of seniors in our population with low levels of education, as well as the high migration of youth who attend post secondary education in other communities and do not return here to live. This lower level of education negatively impacts our community in many ways. It poses challenges for new and existing businesses who are trying to recruit workers, and it also effects potential industrial growth.

In the 2006 Community Matters Report,<sup>4</sup> 7 out of 8 municipalities in the County identified that rural school closures are a serious concern for their residents.

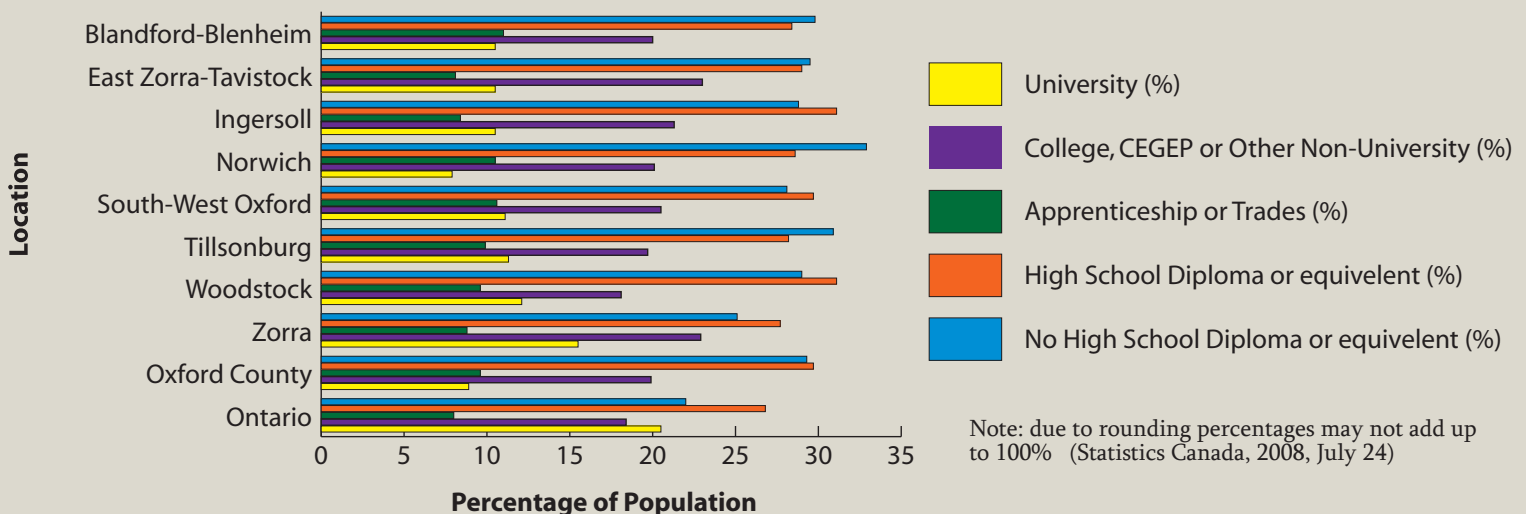
In addition, all of the head offices of the school boards in the area<sup>5</sup> are located outside of Oxford County in large urban centres and have limited local representation.

According to the 2008 Oxford County Youth Matters Survey, where over 1700 youth were surveyed, the top ranked education concerns were about getting into college or university, getting help with homework, staying in high school, graduating from high school and being able to afford a post secondary education.

In 2003, less than 31% of 19-year-old youth from families in the bottom 25% income level had attended university. In contrast, 50% of young people of the same age from families in the top level of income attended university. This gap can be attributed to differences in the characteristics of youth from different economic backgrounds including: their academic performance, their parents level of education, their parents expectations and their high school attendance.

Students may also be unable to attend university due to lack of finances. When surveyed, twice as many low income youth (13.4%) cited financial concerns constraining their choice to attend university as opposed to only 5.9% of high income youth.<sup>6</sup> With these factors stacked against them, low income youth will have a difficult time climbing out of poverty and the cycle will continue.

**Highest Level of Education for Those Aged 15 + by Municipality, 2006**



# Employment

Unemployment is associated with difficult living conditions, low socio-economic status, health and social problems.<sup>7</sup>

The changing economy makes it increasingly difficult for many of our industries to compete in the global market. This creates stress, instability and financial strain for many families in Oxford.

While there are positive impacts in our local community from the new Toyota plant located in Woodstock, there are also a number of displaced workers who are feeling the effects of the shifts in the manufacturing sector.

According to Service Canada, in the past five years, four manufacturing plants in Oxford have closed and several others have had mass layoffs resulting in over 1800 displaced individuals in the County. There are also 4,660 workers who have been displaced from manufacturing plants located in London, St. Thomas, Stratford and St. Mary's, many of whom are residents of Oxford. Many of these displaced workers have lost long-standing, high paying positions and will have a challenge finding comparable employment.

*"When a company is laying people off, you are just a number...they don't care."*

- displaced worker

Manufacturing accounts for almost 1/4 of all of our employment. According to the Canadian Auto Workers Union, for every job lost inside an assembly plant, another 3 jobs are lost in supply industries. These losses also trickle down to other

sectors, such as construction, trades and services. An estimated 7 jobs can be affected by one manufacturing job loss.

There are several barriers to employment including; the cost of transportation, child-care, appropriate work attire, mental health and addictions and dental hygiene.

These barriers are further exaggerated for the growing sector of our population that is employed by the service industry. Those who work in the service industry often receive low wages, work non-traditional hours and cannot access the many services that are only offered between the hours of 9 to 5. Public transportation and licensed childcare centres are just two of the services that do not accommodate the schedules of those who work in the service industry.

*"I don't know what I would do without this (childcare subsidy) as a single mom...It wouldn't be worth it for me to work."*

- single mother receiving childcare subsidy

Agriculture is a key industry in our area. With changes in that industry, it has become difficult to sustain the viability of a family farm. Many farmers have been raised on the family farm and can't imagine doing anything else. But sometimes factors that are out of their control make it impossible for them to keep afloat. With changes in the Canadian dollar, increased fuel costs, increased government regulations and the tobacco industry buy-out, many farmers in our area are finding it difficult to survive in the only industry that they know. Farmers often have trouble coping effectively with all of this stress.

*"In many cases, when farmers do not seek the help they need the problem gets worse and the stress negatively affects other areas of their life. A lot of marriages are having issues. It's hard for a rural family."*

- Kim DeKlein, OMAFRA

Of specific note locally, since 1998, the tobacco crop size in Canada has been reduced by 63% and many tobacco farmers have been facing economic hardship.



# Housing

Good quality housing can reduce the negative health impacts for some of the most disadvantaged in society.<sup>8</sup>

In an emergency, the Salvation Army can house families for 1 or 2 nights but no longer. Beyond that, people are sent to London to access a residential facility. Locally, there is only one emergency shelter for women and children fleeing from violence. Even that service is limited as it does not allow for older male teens to remain with their mothers and other siblings. Inn Out of the Cold, located in a church basement in Woodstock, provides shelter but only during the winter months.

Finding affordable housing tops the list of obstacles faced by those who fall below the Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO, see Income section).

*"The cost of doing nothing is devastating to humanity and the economy."*

- Judith Binder, CMHC speaking on affordable housing.

Home ownership is simply out of reach for many and the rental prices for the 3 urban centers in Oxford County force working poor and residents living on social assistance to spend more than 30% of their income on rent. Over 7700 households in Oxford are spending more than 30% of their income on housing which means they may have inadequate funds for other necessities including food, clothing, transportation and healthcare.<sup>10</sup>

*"Affordable housing is the foundation of strong communities and healthy families"*

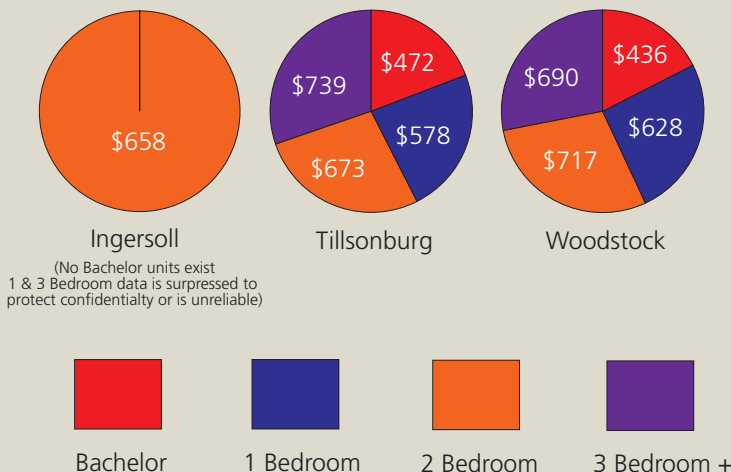
- Paul Beaton

For many people the only option is to access a social housing unit, yet the wait times average 1 year. Although there is a waiting list available, some of our most vulnerable citizens may not have the mental faculties, knowledge or understanding of what the list is, or why they need to be on the list to qualify for affordable housing. Many homeless live in the "here and now," focusing on immediate concerns like where they are going to sleep tonight, instead of looking forward and thinking of where they will sleep next week or next year. What is compounding the problem is that once a low income family is placed in a social housing unit, they can become ensnared in a poverty trap of work disincentives, inflexible transfer and re-entry rules, and weak integration with employment programs.<sup>8</sup>

## Oxford Social Housing Wait List

# of units	May 2007 Number on waiting list	May 2008 Number on waiting list
1228	177	200

## Private Apartment Average Rents \$ - April 2008



# Income

It can take just one life-changing event to prevent some individuals and families from remaining self-sufficient. A sudden illness, an unexpected pregnancy or a marriage breakdown can put a family in a sudden financial crisis where they have to depend on social assistance.

Low income correlates with low-skilled jobs, high unemployment rates, unfavorable lifestyle and living conditions, and a greater prevalence of disability and health problems.<sup>3</sup>

Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO), produced by Statistics Canada, provide an income threshold below which a family would likely devote too large of a share of its income to the necessities of food, shelter and clothing. Families spending 70% or more of their income on these basic necessities are considered marginalized.

In 2005, 5% of Oxford County (approximately 5200 residents) fell below the LICO. If an individual

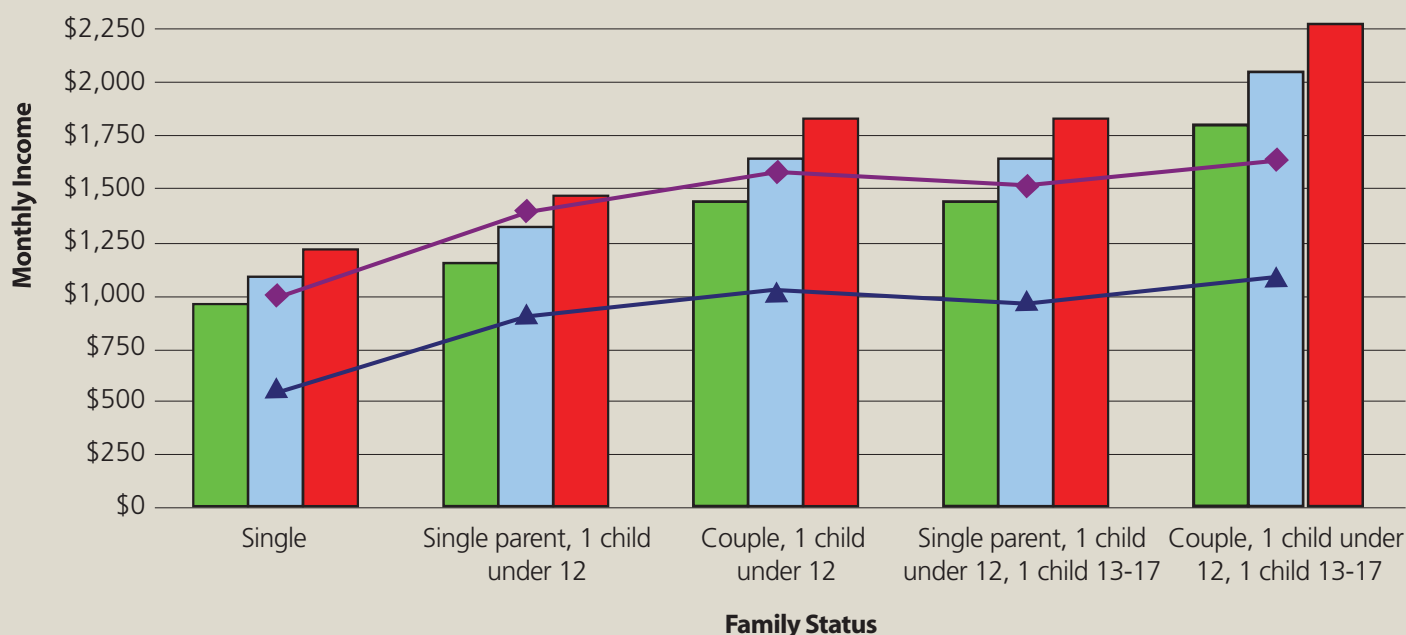
with no dependents is employed full time earning minimum wage (\$8.75), they will receive approximately \$15,700 annually after tax. The average rental price in Oxford County is \$708 per month or about \$8,500 per year. This individual would be spending about 54% of their income on housing alone.

The following table shows the LICO's which an individual must have met in 2005 in order to be included in the low income category.

## Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program

Single individuals without children are the most common recipients making up 50.3% of the Ontario Works (OW) and 77.3% of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) caseloads respectively. Many families and individuals receiving OW or ODSP fall below the LICO as shown in the chart below.<sup>11</sup>

**2005 Low Income Cut-Offs Compared to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Financial Assistance**



\* Please note that these are the maximum monthly entitlements and therefore some households may receive less. Additional support may be available for those with special needs.

■ Low Income Cut Off - Pop. Rural Area  
■ Low Income Cut Off - Pop. Less than 30,000  
■ Low Income Cut Off - Pop. 30,000 to 99,000

◆ Income on ODSP\*  
▲ Income on Ontario Works\*

Oxford County has an average total income less than Ontario with both male and female average incomes being \$4000 - \$4500 lower per year.

## Families

In Oxford County 13.1% of families are sole support with 10.7 % of those families led by a female. Female lone-parent households have lower incomes than male lone-parent households.<sup>3</sup> One of the things hurting poverty stricken families is the social isolation that they experience because of their low income. When forced to choose between putting food on the table and going on a school trip, the choice is clear.

The isolation experienced by those living in poverty can cause or exaggerate feelings of depression and loneliness.

*"Birthday's come up and they (her children) want to have parties and friends over. They can't. I've never had a birthday party with their friends... feeding four or five kids would make it really difficult..."*

– single mother on Ontario Works

In July 2008, making ends meet became even more difficult as the Province ended back-to-school and winter clothing allowances for families receiving OW or ODSP payments. Although the Ontario Childhood Benefit is increasing, many say that it is not enough.

## Seniors

20.4% of Oxford County's population is over age 60, compared with the Provincial average of 18.3%. There is great income disparity among the seniors living in Oxford County. Seniors with low income do receive government assistance through the Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security however, according to the National Advisory Council on Aging, many seniors receiving income from these two sources alone live below the LICO. This is a reality many seniors face. Most of them are women whom have never participated in the workforce and are living alone. Even financially stable seniors can suddenly find themselves in a dire situation when they encounter unexpected illness or another life crisis. The problems seniors encounter are often magnified by the fact that they feel embarrassed and are reluctant to ask for help.

*"The hardest thing for seniors is to ask for help... it's a pride thing. The drawback is that they don't ask for help until they reach a crisis situation."*

– Wendy Palen, Administrator Ingersoll Services for Seniors Activity Centre

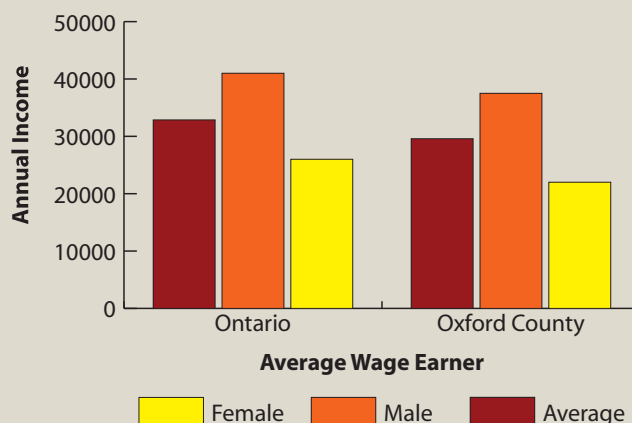
## Food Security

In the past few decades, food banks have popped up with increasing frequency to respond to poverty and hunger in our communities. The establishment of food banks across the country by many generous Canadians should not be envisioned as a permanent part of the landscape. Food banks should be perceived as only a stop-gap measure put in place until governments manage to strengthen the social safety net and eradicate poverty.<sup>12</sup>

In 2008, it cost approximately \$136.08 per week to feed a family of four (man and women 35 years of age, boy 14 years of age and a girl 8 years of age).<sup>13</sup> This expense totalling \$544.32 per month is astronomical to someone who is earning minimum wage or receiving social assistance.

In June 2007, Helping Hands Food Bank in Tillsonburg served 211 clients and in 2008 the numbers increased to 276. In Woodstock, the Salvation Army serves an average of 75 to 100 people a week at their food bank. As the need increases, they are always fearful that donations will not be able to keep up. Food For Friends is another program that provides food for Oxford County residents in need. The first year this program was in operation about \$90,000 was collected in donations. These donations are used to assist approximately 275 families a month access food.

Average Total Income Data (Stats Can 2001)



## Addiction and Mental Health

Throughout the service provider and community consultation process, we heard repeatedly about the lack of addiction and mental health services in our community despite the enormous need for those services.

The wait time to access service, even for childrens' mental health services, is unacceptable. For individuals or families in a crisis the need is for quick access to appropriate services, not a waiting list for evaluation to then get on another waiting list for eventual service.

Adding to the problem is the increasing need for stress coping mechanisms. Stress and anxiety was rated as the #1 problem our high school students are currently facing.<sup>15</sup> This problem extends beyond students and their families; it is one which the educational system is struggling with as well. They know that many of their students require help, yet services are so limited.

As our country and community continues to see fall out from the economic crisis, it is anticipated by service providers that the need for mental health and addiction services will continue to grow.

It was continually stressed that the following services must be offered in a timely fashion, reducing intake, assessment and counselling wait times.

- Early detection and treatment
- Detoxification program
- Residential treatment facility
- Increase counselling services including monitoring and follow-up
- A warm line that people can call if they are experiencing a mental health issue that is not a crisis
- Improvements to the existing crisis line

The stigma associated with mental illness can be hurtful and destructive to individuals and families trying to cope.

*"Mental health issues can plague anyone – no one is immune. In fact, at any one time approximately 20-25% of the population is experiencing a mental health issue."*

- Pat Edwards, Woodstock General Hospital  
Mental Health Services

Substance abuse is a costly societal issue that is not restricted by age, socioeconomic status or gender. It is an issue that crosses many sectors – education, social services, health and enforcement. Likewise, the impact of substance abuse on individuals and the community is pervasive – it affects not just individual health and well-being, but the community's health and well-being as well. The Oxford County Drug Task Force formed in 2006. Since then, the Task Force has witnessed growing concerns about the incidence and extent of substance abuse in Oxford County. It has also noted the lack of adequate funding to provide timely and accessible services and information for residents involved, or at risk of becoming involved, with abusing substances. As a result, the Task Force recognized the need for action. To guide its action, it has developed a community-wide Strategic Plan that identifies short and long term opportunities to fight substance abuse in Oxford County.<sup>22</sup>

In 2007 the Oxford Community Police Services and O.P.P. Oxford Detachment charged 277 people with drug related offences.<sup>14</sup>

High School youth in Oxford County identified being stressed out, doing drugs and dealing with pressure from friends as top three problems they and their peers face. They ranked drugs as the number two problem for themselves and their peers.<sup>15</sup>

*"These guys that I see... they're good guys. They worked construction or in factories, they drove truck and had good jobs. But.... they drank too much and lost their job, or couldn't get off the percs they took for their bad back... and now people walk by them and think they're scum. But they're someone's son, someone's daughter, someone's mom or dad... this junk got a hold of them and now ... It's a waste. And it's just so sad because they're good guys."*

- Oxford County community stakeholder<sup>22</sup>

*"The pressure to have sex, do drugs, drink alcohol is crazy. But the pressure to do well in school & get a job & go to university is also prominent. Basically, it's one way or the other. And this has been stressing me & many of the people I know out."*

- Oxford County teen <sup>15</sup>

## Access to Physicians

Lack of access to a family physician is a problem experienced across the South West Local Health Integration Networks (LHIN). According to the 2006 Community Matters Report finding a family doctor was the number one concern identified by residents in Ingersoll, Tillsonburg and Woodstock.<sup>4</sup>

In 2004, the number of family physicians per 100,000 people who provided care to South West LHIN residents was 78, which is below the Provincial average of 84.<sup>16</sup>

Basic health care needs are not being met when people do not have access to a family doctor. They can not access immediate treatment or follow up care without going to a hospital emergency room or a walk in clinic, where wait times are often problematic.

## Health Status / Substance Use, 2007

Health Indicator	Ontario Residents %	Oxford Residents %
Current Smoker (daily or occasional)	20.6	31.3
5 or more drinks on 1 occasion at least once per month for past year	21.1	26.5
Diabetes	6.1	5.1
Arthritis	16.2	18.8
Asthma	8.1	9.5
High Blood Pressure	16.4	21.4
Obesity (18 yrs or older)	16.1	21.8
Physically Active	48.8	42.0
Consume 5 or more fruits & vegetables daily	39.9	38.3

(Statistics Canada, 2008b)

## Physical Well Being

There are higher rates of arthritis, asthma, high blood pressure and obesity in the County of Oxford than there are in Ontario or the South West LHIN.<sup>9</sup> Basic health care needs for those living in poverty including medical and dental expenses are overwhelming.

*"My child needs eye glasses and I don't have \$200 for them."*

- Oxford County resident living in poverty

Included in this basic health care is oral health. About 26% of Canadians report that they cannot afford oral health care. Oral diseases are proven to contribute to overall health and affect the most basic needs such as: eating, drinking, swallowing, and communicating.

Unfortunately, the pain and discomfort that can be the result of poor oral health can even cause people to avoid certain foods, and thus create more serious health problems. Add to these problems the social and economic consequences of poor oral health. These include loss of self-esteem, limited employment opportunities and restricted social and community participation. Overall, lack of dental care can have a significant negative impact on a person's health status and quality of life.<sup>17</sup>

Poor access to dental care has a real impact on the lives of Oxford County residents. It can affect the ability to gain and keep employment.

By providing adequate dental care for a person on OW to eliminate infection, improve appearance (including dentures when necessary) it is possible to remove barriers to employment thereby allowing a recipient to gain a job. The short term cost of oral health care pales compared to the cost of maintaining a client on social services for life.

*"I know that the first impression is the most important...When you walk into a place the first thing people notice is your teeth."*

- Oxford resident looking for employment



# Crime & Safety

Crime is a symptom of an unhealthy community. Crime is not just a police responsibility, but a community responsibility. Drug abuse issues and their relationship with property offences impact all their service areas in the County according to the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) – Oxford.

*"We continue to see more and more people with addiction problems, we see increases in drug trafficking and an increase in individuals who are in desperate need for drug money. As a direct result, we see an increase in the number of property crimes, break and enters, robberies and vehicle thefts that we deal with."*

– Chief Ron Fraser, Oxford Community Police Services

According to Oxford Community Police, domestic violence/abuse in Oxford County negatively affects the health of Oxford families. Gender inequality and the generational cycle of domestic violence needs to be stopped. It is important for both adults and children to learn how to resolve conflict in a healthy way, be responsible for their actions and respectful of others. A trend of substance abuse by both accused persons and victims has been identified. Mental health issues are also identified in many incidents.

*"Oxycontin abuse along with crack cocaine abuse continues to be the two major problems observed within Oxford County. The addiction to these substances does not define itself to a specific age, race or class."*

– Heidi Becks, Oxford Community Police Services

In 2007, the Oxford Community Police Service statistics show that within their policing jurisdiction (approx. ½ of Oxford County) there were 146 domestic calls in which charges were laid, 106 calls in which offences were alleged but insufficient evidence to proceed with charges, and 858 other domestic calls for assistance. That totals 1110 calls that officers responded to in regard to domestic violence.

To improve the lives of adults and children, Domestic Violence must become an unacceptable and un-tolerated behaviour in Oxford County. To effect this change we need:

- Extensive community education & education in schools
- Available counselling/therapy for support and education of victims & children
- Available counselling/therapy for abusers/accused persons promoting taking responsibility for their behaviour and for education
- Transitional support to assist victims wishing to leave an abusive relationship and move forward with their lives in a safe way
- Safety planning and risk assessments for victims of domestic
- Safe housing and shelter
- Available counselling for substance abuse
- Available support for mental health issues

## Conclusion

In order to improve social service delivery in Oxford County we must utilize our community capacity. Community capacity was defined by Easterling as "...the set of assets or strengths that residents individually and collectively bring to the cause of improving local quality of life."<sup>21</sup>

Public, private and not-for-profit agencies need to continue to develop community partnerships and work together. By creating these partnerships, social

service providers will be able to reduce duplication and become more efficient, ultimately providing the best quality, client centered services.

This report is just the beginning. We challenge service providers, community members, and politicians to act on the information presented in this report to improve the lives of our citizens. Together, we can make a difference.

# Transportation

Transportation is a fundamental, yet often overlooked, element in the struggle for equal opportunities. Access to a reliable means of transportation impacts quality of life, financial security and freedom of movement. Many times poor and disadvantaged people are unable to get to their jobs or to the grocery store, to bring their children to childcare, or to accomplish other daily tasks that many of us take for granted. We are living in a 24/7 economy, but it's not supported by our public transportation system. Lack of access to transportation was cited as one of the top 5 issue in the United Way's Community Matters Report and was identified as one of the top 10 priorities in all of the municipalities across Oxford County.<sup>4</sup>

## Increased Hours of Operation and Areas of Service

Many service providers throughout the County indicated that there needs to be an increase in the availability of public transit in both hours of operation, as well as areas of service.

Currently there is no public transportation outside of the City of Woodstock. Within that system, there is no service to the industrial parks for access to employers, and transit does not run after 6:30 p.m. or on Sundays.

These limited hours of operation do not allow for shift or evening workers to get to work.

Recipients of OW and ODSP do receive some assistance with transportation costs, however, this limited assistance is inadequate. Transportation presents a serious issue to the working poor who do not receive any subsidy for their transportation costs.<sup>19</sup>

*"A client searching for jobs on his bike in 30 degree weather shows up sweaty and is not in an appropriate state for applying for a job."*

– Julie Matheson, Community Employment Services Counsellor

## Isolation

Many seniors and members of the rural community feel isolated in the outer lying areas of the County. Also, many medical appointments are either in the three urban centres of Oxford County or outside of the community and with lack of access to public transportation, attending those appointments is difficult, sometimes impossible and often costly.



*"When poverty, homelessness and mental illness has a name, it is difficult to ignore. People begin to care about that person and recognize that the person is someone's son, mother, or brother and that you could easily be in that situation yourself. When people know the faces and names of those living in poverty, homelessness or with mental illness, community transformation is possible."*

– Jeff Nevan, Director of Operation, Homestead Christian Care

1 Malcolm Shookner, 1997  
2 Core Indicators Work Group, May 23, 2006a  
3 South West LHIN, Spring, 2006  
4 United Way of Oxford Community Matters Report, 2006  
5 Thames Valley District School Board, London District Catholic School Board, Conseil scolaire de district des écoles catholiques du Sud-Ouest

6 Statistics Canada, Feb. 8, 2007  
7 Core Indicators Work Group, May 24, 2006  
8 Priebe, April, 2008  
9 Statistics Canada, 2008  
10 Core Indicators Work Group, May 23, 2006b  
11 Ministry of Community and Social Services, March 2006b  
12 Vanier Institute of the Family, Winter, 2007-2008

13 Public Health and Emergency Services, August 13, 2008  
14 Oxford Community Police Service, 2007 and Ontario Provincial Police - Oxford, 2008  
15 Oxford County Youth Matters Report, 2008  
16 South West LHIN, October, 2006  
17 Canadian Dental Hygienists Association, October, 2005  
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19 Social Services and Housing, March 26, 2008  
20 Ontario Provincial Police – Oxford, 2008  
21 Labonte, 1999  
22 Oxford County Drug Task Force Strategic Plan, 2008



**Using Knowledge.  
Moving Forward.  
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