

DROP-IN AT THE BRIDGE STRATEGIC PLAN



746 Queen Street, Kincardine, ON

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Executive Summary

"Because He rescues the poor at the first sign of need,
the destitute who have run out of luck.
He opens a place in his heart for the down-and-out,
He restores the wretched of the earth.
He frees them from tyranny and torture—
when they bleed, He bleeds;
when they die, He dies."

Psalm 72:12–14, *The Message*

Drop-in at The Bridge is a not-for-profit charitable organization that reaches out to the lost, vulnerable, isolated, lonely, and poor. It is a community that seeks to welcome all while empowering people who are often cast out. We believe in coming as we are, creating a safe space to ask hard questions, encourage each other, share meals, and celebrate life. Drop-in is built on the belief that Jesus is real and that God's love transforms us. Our love and passion for people inspire us to serve humanity by creating an inclusive, connected, and just community.

Drop-in provides a safe place for people to be themselves in a relaxing and joyful environment. At Drop-in, guests can interact with others who have shared similar experiences. Understanding that they are not alone creates a powerful support system that helps individuals through challenging times.

Drop-in is emotionally safe for both the clients and volunteers. Clients are vulnerable; building trust takes time, patience, and consistency. Expressing and dealing with feelings is often difficult. Many of our clients have suppressed their feelings for so long that they no longer know how to express them. Drop-in gives individuals a safe outlet to learn about and express feelings. As individuals share their experiences and feelings, they discover that they are not isolated; this sense of community enables healing.

On the surface, Kincardine appears to be an affluent, vibrant community, and for the most part, it is. However, Kincardine has issues that build a compelling case for a downtown drop-in centre. Some of those issues include the following:

- Although Kincardine's medium annual income is \$104,000, a significant percentage of Kincardine's population lives in poverty.¹
- 22% of population make over \$100,000 annually.

¹ 2021 Statistics Canada Census.

- There are 12,270 residents in Kincardine, with an average age of 43.9. Males make up 49.5% of the population, while females account for 50.5%. Locals over 65 years old represent the largest age group in Kincardine (25.5%), followed by those aged under 14 (17.5%), 15–19-year-olds account for 4.4% of the population.
 - 19% of all renters live in subsidized housing.
 - 43% of all renters spend 30% or more of their income on shelter costs.
 - 17% of all homeowners spend more than 30% of their household income on shelter costs.²
 - 31% of total households in Kincardine make less than \$30,000 per year.
- Kincardine has one of the highest rates of seniors per capita in all of Canada with 25% of its population over 65, rivalling retirement cities such as Victoria and Kelowna, BC.
- Foodbank usage in Kincardine continues to climb dramatically.
 - At the end of November 2023, there were 1,638 total visits, serving 787 families, 183 single-parent families and 668 singles (including 403 seniors), for a total of 4,368 individuals (up from 2,974 the year before).
 - By August 2023, the Kincardine Food Bank had already hit the total for all of 2022.
 - People are accessing the Food Bank weekly instead of the former once-a-month regulation, and the Food Bank is sending bags of food to Kincardine District Senior School to supplement students' food.
 - The total for August 2023 was 172, including 87 families, 19 single parents, 66 singles (of which 35 were seniors) and 167 dependents.³

There are already many excellent social agencies, churches, and educational programs in Kincardine. A crucial component of the drop-in centre's role is to help bridge the trust gap that often exists between organizations and our clientele. Drop-in at The Bridge forms those important relationships on a daily basis through our many programs. As we get to know someone, our volunteers can encourage and point them toward the correct agency. We become the bridge—a valuable partner in helping people get from where they are to where they need to be.

To become the vibrant community hub we envision, raising funds is. Our goal is to collaborate with businesses, churches, organizations, and individuals to ensure the economic viability of our drop-in centre. We are a community helping each other heal, develop, and grow.

² Housing Key Figures, Grey Bruce, 2021.

³ Dadson, Liz, "Donations welcome at the Kincardine Food Bank as demand continues to soar," *The Kincardine Record*, Dec. 8, 2023. <https://www.kincardinerecord.com/story.php?id=15746>

Vision Statement

Drop in at The Bridge is a sanctuary where all who are hurting, vulnerable, or in need journey into wholeness of self in the context of a vibrant community through the power of love.

Mission Statement

Drop-in at The Bridge is a charitable organization reaching out to the lost, vulnerable, isolated, lonely, and poor. It is a community that seeks to be welcoming to all while empowering at our core people who are often isolated—those experiencing poverty of spirit and/or space. Community members of all backgrounds and abilities run drop-in programs. We believe in coming as we are, creating a space where we are safe to ask hard questions, encourage each other, share meals, and celebrate.

Our Values

Love and passion are the core values of all Drop-in does. Our culture, programs, and activities are motivated by these two values.

Love

Drop-in is founded on the belief that God's love is real and transformative. Christ invites us to serve Kincardine by creating an inclusive, connected, and just community. From love, we are compelled to act compassionately as we nurture generosity and thoughtfulness in our words and deeds. Love compels us to act with integrity and to open our hearts to everyone without exception. Love emboldens us to face injustice head on, and stand up for what is right and true with confidence and strength.

Passion

We are passionate community builders. Passion will not allow us to settle for the status quo. It inspires us to imaginatively challenge convention, explore new possibilities, and dare to dream for a better future.

Keys to Success

The aim of Drop-in at The Bridge is to establish and sustain the following keys to success:

- Maintain a physical drop-in centre in the downtown core
- Grow a strong network of support with local churches and social agencies
- Establish an effective training program for volunteers that will increase their ability to serve others and lead well
- Launch a revenue strategy that will successfully fund the expanding program
- Sustainably manage ongoing programs and activities that continue to meet a felt need for community and healing
- Launch new initiatives to address needs as they arise

Assessing the Need

Relational

Every person who walks through our doors is a unique individual with a powerful story to tell. The reasons they come to us are all different. Many carry with them a history of neglect, abuse, and isolation. Some battle addictions, while others struggle with a mental health condition.

Sometimes, all a person needs is a hot meal to get them through the day, a shoulder to lean on, or someone who will listen to them. Many require more extensive services such as counselling, medical care, help accessing government services and income support, or access to affordable housing. With care tailored to their needs, we are here to help our clients navigate the complex and often overwhelming path they are on.

Financial

On the surface, Kincardine appears to be an affluent, vibrant community, and for the most part, it is. However, Kincardine has issues that build a compelling case for a downtown drop-in centre. While the average income in Kincardine is \$110,700, a significant percentage of the population is living in poverty.⁴ Among renters in Kincardine, 19% live in subsidized housing. The proportion of renters who spend a minimum of 30% of their income on shelter costs is a staggering 43%.

⁴ 2021 Statistics Canada Census.

Many homeowners living on fixed incomes are also affected, as 15% of all homeowners spend over 30% of their household income on shelter costs.

Food Security

17.5% of Grey Bruce County struggle to afford the food they need. Food insecurity is not the same as hunger. Hunger is something we all experience from time to time and can be solved with food. Food insecurity results from policy choices that lead to poverty. Food insecure households make impossible choices every day between paying for utilities, housing, food for their families, prescriptions, or transportation.

- 67% of household in Ontario with social assistance as their main income are food insecure.
- Having a job is not enough to protect families from food insecurity and poverty. Grey Bruce's 2023 Living Wage is \$22.75 per hour—well above minimum wage.
- Real solutions to food insecurity are income based. Improving a household's financial circumstances addresses the root cause of household food insecurity.⁵

Substance Abuse

The misuse of drugs continues to change as new drugs emerge at an alarming rate. Synthetic drugs and a growing list of prescription medications have joined drugs that were available and widely used in the 1960s and 1970s. Substances available only twenty years ago have changed due to enhanced refining and growing techniques. There are many reasons why people turn to drugs and alcohol, including but not limited to self-medication, escape, stress, boredom, instant gratification, lack of confidence, and peer pressure.

The alcohol consumption crisis in Grey Bruce is a serious public health issue that requires shared action by local community leaders—the Grey Bruce Healthy Communities Partnership plus municipal, provincial, and federal governments. It is important to recognize that the negative impacts associated with excess alcohol use far outweigh the benefits.

One in five drinkers in Grey and Bruce is a regular heavy drinker. This high-risk practice is a strong predictor of alcohol-related problems, which are evident in our community. Drinking and driving is an issue; 4% of Grey Bruce residents aged 18 and over reported drinking before operating a motor vehicle, and 8% admitted to drinking before driving a recreation vehicle at least once in the previous twelve months.⁶ Increased normalization of regular heavy drinking

⁵ Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force, 2024. <https://povertytaskforce.com/>

⁶ Grey Bruce Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System, York University, 2006.

makes it a challenge to profile alcohol use as a serious, high-priority health issue. There is an urgent need in Grey Bruce to shift from excessive to moderate alcohol intake.

Demographics

Children and Youth (0–14 years): Approximately 17% of the population

This group includes young children and teenagers, supported by local schools, recreational programs, and community initiatives.

Key Characteristics:

- Many families with children live in the area, drawn by the town's safe environment, family-friendly activities, and excellent schools.
- Activities for this age group include youth sports leagues, school programs, and events like Kincardine's Summer Music Festival.

Young Adults (15–24 years): Around 8% of the population

A smaller percentage compared to larger urban centers, as many young adults leave Kincardine for post-secondary education or job opportunities in bigger cities.

Key Characteristics:

- Programs such as **Beans & Banter** cater specifically to teens, offering social and recreational opportunities.
- Local employment opportunities exist, particularly for those entering the skilled trades or working with Bruce Power.
- Some choose to stay or return due to family ties and quality of life.

Working Age Adults (25–54 years): 34% of the population

This group forms the economic backbone of the community, with a significant portion employed in industries like energy (Bruce Power), agriculture, healthcare, and tourism.

Key Characteristics:

- Families with children and professionals are common in this age bracket.
- Kincardine appeals to young professionals due to its outdoor lifestyle, lower housing costs compared to cities, and career opportunities in high-demand fields.

Pre-Retirees and Early Retirees (55–64 years): Around 15% of the population

Many residents in this group are nearing retirement or have opted for early retirement.

Key Characteristics:

- Often professionals or tradespeople with long careers in the local energy sector.
- They actively participate in volunteer work, community events, and recreational activities like golf, fishing, and hiking.

- This group often contributes significantly to local non-profits and community initiatives.

Seniors (65+ years): Around 25% of the population

One of the fastest-growing demographic groups, as Kincardine is a popular retirement destination due to its scenic location, small-town charm, and healthcare access.

Key Characteristics:

- Many seniors are retirees who have moved to Kincardine for its slower pace of life and proximity to Lake Huron.
- Seniors are heavily involved in community activities, including volunteering, social clubs, and cultural events like the Kincardine Scottish Festival.
- Services for seniors are well-developed, with programs like the **Monday Drop-in** that cater to this age group with socialization opportunities and free meals.

Trends in Age Distribution

- **Aging Population:** Kincardine is experiencing an aging trend, in line with many rural and semi-rural communities in Ontario.
- **Youth Retention:** Efforts are ongoing to create more opportunities for young people to stay or return, focusing on education, jobs, and community engagement.
- **Intergenerational Community:** A unique aspect of Kincardine is its strong sense of community, where different age groups interact through events and programs, fostering connection across generations.

Operations

Drop-in creates a safe, welcoming space in which all people are encouraged to participate fully, to the best of their abilities, and journey together toward a deeper experience of the life God has given us. It is a place where individuals can learn to live in a community and take control of their lives. As individuals are accepted by their peers, they learn to accept themselves. Self-acceptance results in the growth of self-confidence and self-esteem. At Drop-in, they learn that they can succeed. With each success, self-confidence grows. With new experiences, support, and faith, individuals learn to believe in themselves.

A challenge for many who come to Drop-in is the absence of family support. At The Bridge, we seek to be family. The strength of a family network and a quiet concern for each other develop at the drop-in. Along with the sense of family a sense of home develops. Many people come to Drop-in because it is like home to them; it is a familiar, predictable, and safe place. There are always others at the drop-in who care, share their lives, and understand. With this "family," support is found in one's life. The Bridge is a place of both stabilization and growth because of

the family-like atmosphere. Even individuals who have been away for a while always know that they can come “home” to share their successes and challenges.

Drop-in at The Bridge does not have a volunteer group that is separate from our community. Many of the people who volunteer regularly came to us first needing a hot meal and a place to belong. Volunteering at Drop-in is not something we do for “others” but something we are all doing together. Everyone who comes is given an opportunity to help and participate fully.

Drop-in has the potential to facilitate engagement with people living in crisis and help them back into the mainstream. We are about empowering people to be who they truly are without judgment. We value all people for their unique gifts and strengths, and we prioritize welcoming people who are marginalized, disadvantaged, and vulnerable. People and relationships are at the centre of all that we do.

Current Programs

Drop-in at The Bridge began in June 2018 with one program: Monday drop-in. While the Monday drop-in continues to embody the heart of Drop-in at The Bridge, several other programs have been developed in response to needs that were unveiled by crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

For a full list of current programs, see the Drop-in at The Bridge Operating Plan or visit www.dropinathebridge.ca.

Leadership

Board of Directors

Drop-in at The Bridge is governed by a Board of Directors. The Board ensures that all Drop-in activities comply with Canada Revenue Agency standards and best practices for charitable organizations. The Board works closely with the Executive Director to assess the success of Drop-in programs, create annual budgets, and cast a vision for the future of Drop-in.

Executive Director

The executive director is a paid staff person whose responsibilities include operational management, volunteer recruitment, marketing, and strategic planning.

Other staff

Drop-in at The Bridge may hire full-time, part-time, or temporary staff as employment capacity increases.

Volunteers

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Drop-in. As of October 2024, there are over 60 volunteers who host weekly programs, make and deliver meals, run fundraising events, and more—and that number is always growing! Volunteers increase community ownership. The more community members are involved in Drop-in, the easier it will be to gain local support. In addition, volunteers from the community ensure that Drop-in sets goals that are aligned with the heart of the broader community in Kincardine.

Individuals or teams who volunteer can see the value of what Drop-in at The Bridge does firsthand. They often have specialized knowledge (computers, advertising, mentoring, etc.) that may be utilized through Drop-in programs. Volunteers can bring a fresh perspective and enthusiasm for the work. This can help revitalize staff and may help move projects in exciting new directions.

The role of a volunteer is to serve clients and fellow volunteers with an attitude of humility and respect. People of different faiths and walks of life are welcome to volunteer. Many volunteers originally came to The Bridge as clients. Volunteers are asked to read, understand, and sign the Drop-in at The Bridge list of values before joining the team.

Volunteers are trained to recognize when someone requires more help than they can provide. Volunteers are also trained in conflict resolution. To promote emotional safety and confidentiality, volunteers are prohibited from discussing client's issues with anyone outside of the centre. Volunteers must be at least eighteen years old and complete a police background check. The only exception to the age requirement is for our holiday meals, where younger volunteers are welcome. Volunteers from Community Living and local elementary schools are encouraged to participate, but they **MUST** be accompanied by an adult who is responsible for their safety.

Location

The drop-in centre is in a location that is easily accessible to our clients. It should be in the downtown core, where many services and agencies are located. Building positive relationships with businesses and homeowners in the immediate vicinity is important to help cultivate community support. This helps to create a sense of safety and well-being for our clients, making them feel welcome. Building safety is an important criterion.

Safety

Whether on-site or off-site, Drop-in at The Bridge is a physically, emotionally, and spiritually safe environment. The on-site centre in downtown Kincardine has an open floor plan that is well-lit and comfortable. This promotes a feeling of security for both the clients and volunteers. Everything is seen, which greatly diminishes problems that arise from bullying, misbehaving, and

drug dealing. The washroom is small, allowing only one person in at a time. One door leads to another section of the building, which is only accessible to volunteers and staff.

At any Drop-in event or activity, no weapons are allowed. Any violation of this rule will result in immediate removal from the premises. During these events, whether on-site or at another location, no one is permitted to threaten or harm themselves or others. Aggressive behaviors such as name-calling, bullying, and swearing are strictly prohibited within the building.

The Drop-in Centre is designed to be an emotionally safe space for both clients and volunteers. Clients often come to us in vulnerable states; therefore, building trust takes time, patience, and consistency. Expressing and managing emotions can be challenging, as many of our clients have suppressed their feelings for so long that they struggle to articulate them. The Drop-in Centre provides a safe outlet for individuals to learn about and express their emotions. It is a place for conversation, comparison, analysis, and understanding of one's feelings. As individuals share their experiences, they often realize that they are not alone. Volunteers will step in if a guest exhibits aggressive behavior, whether through actions or speech. They will first attempt to calm the guest, then invite them outside for a private discussion. If the guest refuses to leave, the lead volunteer will contact the police. Our staff and volunteers are dedicated to helping clients restore relationships when feelings are hurt and tensions rise. Reconciliation is always our goal, provided that all parties are willing to work towards it.

Marketing

The Drop-in marketing strategy is a multi-pronged approach that is continuously under development.

Community Relations

It is essential that Drop-in is seen as a positive contributor to the downtown neighbourhood. The Executive Director meets with social agencies, churches, service groups, businesses, and interested individuals to discuss the strategy and benefits of a downtown drop-in centre. During these meetings, potential collaboration and financial support are explored. Financial support and sponsorship from individual donors and businesses are vital to Drop-in's success.

Fundraising

Fundraising is an ongoing requirement to maintain Drop-in operations. The success and/or failure to raise money will dictate the hours of operation and activities we provide. Fundraising events are designed to be creative and fun, generating excitement and opportunities for ongoing revenue streams throughout the year.

Private and Government Grants

Grants from private organizations, government programs, and foundations are vital for generating revenue for Drop-in at The Bridge. They provide the financial resources needed to sustain and expand programs, improve infrastructure, and support the community. These grants cover core operational costs, ensuring that programs such as the Frozen Food Program, Monday and Saturday Drop-ins, and youth initiatives like Beans & Banter continue to operate smoothly. Additionally, they enable the development of new initiatives, such as the free food store and cooking classes supported by a Trillium Seed Grant, as well as workshops and targeted services for marginalized groups, including Ukrainian families and seniors.

Grants often support infrastructure upgrades, such as kitchen improvements, accessibility enhancements, and technology investments. They are also crucial for staffing, funding new positions like part-time cooks or consultants for strategic projects. In times of emergency, grants provide essential relief to maintain services, while seasonal funding ensures that initiatives like holiday meal programs can meet increased demand.

Multi-year grants, such as the proposed Trillium Grow Grant, facilitate long-term planning and financial stability, allowing Drop-in to implement strategic improvements over time. Furthermore, receiving grants enhances community partnerships and increases the organization's visibility, making it more appealing to potential funders. By funding pilot projects and innovative approaches, grants encourage creativity in addressing ongoing challenges like food insecurity and social isolation.

Although applying for grants can be competitive and demands accountability, having diversified funding sources helps reduce the risk of financial gaps. Overall, grants are integral to Drop-in's sustainability and growth, empowering the organization to fulfill its mission of building a stronger, more inclusive community.

APPENDIX

References

- Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force, 2024. <https://povertytaskforce.com/>
Crystal Methamphetamine: A Profile of its Use in Grey and Bruce Counties, the Associated Challenges, and Recommendations for Action Final Report. Prepared by: Glenda Clarke and Associates for the Grey Bruce Crystal Meth Steering Committee. May 2009.
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- Housing Key Figures, Grey Bruce, 2021.
- 2016 Statistics Canada, Canadian Census Program.
- 2021 Statistics Canada, Canadian Census Program.

Recommended Resources

For a list of Kincardine Social Service Resources, follow the link below.

[Kincardine Social Service Resources](#)