

# LAWSON FOUNDATION

## Strategic Direction



**The Lawson Foundation is a national family foundation that invests in and engages with ideas, people and organizations that contribute to the wellbeing of children and youth and their development as active and engaged members of society.**



Photo provided by Philip Jessup

## Our vision

We envision a future where everyone has the opportunity to thrive and fully participate in and contribute to community and society.

## Our mission

We invest in and engage with ideas, people and organizations that contribute to healthy outcomes of Canadians throughout their life course.

## Our focus

We focus our work on the healthy development of children and youth, who represent Canada's future, both socially and economically. We do this by investing in three strategic areas that have a significant impact on the healthy, optimal development of children and youth:

- Early Child Development
- Healthy Active Children and Youth
- Youth and the Environment

# How we approach our work

At the Lawson Foundation, we believe that:

- \* Promotion, prevention and early intervention are effective means to bring about positive social change.
- \* Equity and social justice are important considerations in our decision-making.
- \* Mobilizing knowledge and getting information into the hands of people who can use it at the community level is key to improving outcomes.
- \* Good governance and transparency are essential for charities to succeed.
- \* Learning from success and failure strengthens an organization's ability to succeed.
- \* Bold leadership is crucial to making change happen.
- \* Multi-year core funding is an effective and sometimes the best way to support organizations.
- \* It is important to advocate for changes to public policy where appropriate.
- \* Support for capacity building helps charities to build and maintain the skills and competencies they need to do their work effectively.
- \* Investing in evaluation is crucial to better understand the impact of our work and to support our grantees.


# Our tools

The Lawson Foundation supports the work of Canadian charities working in our areas of interest in three ways:




## WE GRANT

We provide grants to charities for a variety of activities including community action, knowledge mobilization, monitoring, leadership, public policy, knowledge development, capacity building, evaluation and learning.



## WE CONVENE

We act as a convenor and connector to create bridges and conversations by bringing leaders and organizations together to share knowledge and learn from one another.



## WE INVEST

We seek to use our broader financial resources to achieve both a social and a financial return and to support initiatives in an innovative and complementary way.



## Our commitment to reconciliation

The Lawson Foundation is committed to supporting and advancing the work of reconciliation between Canada's Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. We see this work as a continuous journey and not a destination or goal to be achieved. As we walk the path of reconciliation, we are learners and listeners first.

Our journey is grounded in the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Along with a number of other philanthropic foundations and grant-makers, we have also signed the Philanthropic Community's Declaration of Action, signaling our commitment to ensuring that positive action on reconciliation continues through our philanthropy and related work.

# *Our Impact Areas*



## Early Child Development

Every child should grow up in caring, supportive, healthy environments and have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

For almost 20 years, the Lawson Foundation has been at the forefront of supporting the science of early human development which shows that experiences during the prenatal and early childhood periods are key to the health, education, behaviour and the general well-being of children throughout their lives and even across generations. Research points to sensitive and critical periods in early brain development when children have the greatest ability to acquire certain developmental skills. The kinds of positive experiences children have early in life influence how they develop, and the benefits play out across later childhood, adolescence and adult life. So investing in healthy development right from the start makes the best social and economic sense.



For the coming years our focus in this impact area will be on these three priorities:

## **Knowledge mobilization**

Canada has been a leader in the development of sound knowledge in the area of early child development. Now we need to focus on disseminating that knowledge more effectively to those who need it. We will invest in initiatives and partnerships that seek to broadly and effectively disseminate knowledge and understanding about the importance and value of early child development for improved practice and policy, and ultimately, for better child outcomes.

## **Public policy**

We recognize that if we want to see progress in the early child development field in Canada, influencing and helping to shape public policy is essential. We will work nationally and across jurisdictions to improve public policy for all young children in Canada, including our participation in the Early Child Development Funders Working Group and by supporting initiatives that impact the development of sound public policy.

## **Convening and collaborating**

Canada is a large and complex country with multiple actors and initiatives relating to early child development. In recent years there have been limited opportunities to connect leaders across the country. We will support and reignite connections and foster collaboration for action on early child development at a national level.



## Healthy Active Children & Youth

Increasing opportunities for all children and youth to play outdoors and contributing to the prevention of chronic disease, in particular diabetes, will go a long way in ensuring their full potential as well as enhancing health outcomes with lifelong benefits.

Outdoor play and the prevention of chronic disease are key ingredients for a healthy and productive life. The Lawson Foundation aspires to enhancing positive health and wellbeing outcomes, including physical, cognitive, social and emotional development, combating sedentarism, and minimizing the risk of chronic disease. This is a good thing for children and youth as well as for families and society as a whole.

We want to contribute to creating an environment that will support and promote the importance of the healthy development of children and youth in Canada.

While much is known about the importance of healthy living behaviours, more needs to be done in Canada to raise awareness, eliminate social and economic barriers, improve accessibility, and create a context for positive change.

For the coming years our focus in this impact area will be on these two strategic areas:

## **Our Outdoor Play Strategy**

Our Outdoor Play Strategy is built on the scientific evidence base that establishes outdoor play, with its risks, as essential to healthy child development. While play may be perceived as simply fun for kids, it is a whole lot more. Outdoor play supports multiple developmental benefits: healthier, more active children; self-regulation and resilience; social skills through interacting and negotiating with others; and, learning through play. Given the critical importance to development, all children from all social, ethnic and economic backgrounds require play-rich opportunities in the outdoors.

But children's experiences in the world are increasingly structured, technology-based, and divorced from nature. We are missing a healthy balance between letting kids explore and take risks, and taking reasonable measures to keep them safe. Our broad multi-sector approach seeks to increase children's opportunities for outdoor play in all settings - at home, at school, in child care, the community and nature. Our partners are developing tools, resources and training to build adult capacity to support outdoor play, testing community implementation models, fostering changes in policy, and using research and evaluation to measure the effectiveness of various approaches.

## Our Child & Youth Diabetes Strategy

This strategy aims to improve health outcomes for children and youth with diabetes or who are at risk of developing diabetes and diabetes-related complications; to optimize the health of women with a history of gestational diabetes; and to ensure equitable access to high-quality diabetes prevention, treatment and support programs for children, youth and their families.

We are supporting and investing in projects that strengthen the delivery of programs and services by translating knowledge into clinical practice and community programming. Projects are based in various settings, including rural communities, inner-city neighbourhoods, schools and clinics, and range in scope from local to regional to national. They serve high-risk, vulnerable populations including Indigenous communities, South Asian and other ethno-cultural populations, youth who are transitioning from pediatric to adult services, and families who are dealing with issues of poverty and food insecurity. Our project partners are piloting new community-based interventions, expanding existing evidence-based programs, and creating tools, resources and training to engage and support children and youth, parents, health professionals, teachers and school staff, community representatives and policy makers. We provide support for project evaluation and sharing of results and learning. We also convene our partners to share, learn and collaborate with each other and with other influencers in the field.

Diabetes has reached epidemic levels in some Indigenous communities, which have also seen higher rates of type 2 diabetes in children and gestational diabetes in women than in non-Indigenous communities. Given the significance of this health issue, the Strategy will support a number of Indigenous communities across Canada in their efforts to prevent and manage diabetes and its complications. The Lawson Foundation believes it is important to support the work of these communities as part of the Foundation's commitment to Reconciliation.

## *Exploring the connection between food security and diabetes prevention in Indigenous communities*

We know that access to healthy food leads to better outcomes for diabetes prevention and management. We also know that Indigenous communities experience higher levels of food insecurity and increased rates of diabetes. Given this reality, the Lawson Foundation will be engaging with a growing network of Indigenous communities, social enterprises and funders who are working to address these issues with a particular focus on Indigenous communities in Northern Manitoba.

This, like all of our work with Indigenous communities, will be undertaken in collaboration with Indigenous partners whose work, leadership and experience in these areas and communities will guide the development and implementation of solutions that are culturally-informed and appropriate.



## Youth and the Environment

All young people should have opportunities to connect with nature and to contribute the power of their leadership and creativity to help ensure a healthy, sustainable environment.

Research tells us that adolescence and emerging adulthood is a critical period of brain development. During this time, it is important to support young people's cognitive, behavioural and psychological development. Doing so will have a positive impact on their overall healthy development. This period is also a time when youth possess innate capacities for creativity, innovative thinking and collaboration. However, organizations that work in the youth and environment space have indicated that there are not enough interventions focused on the healthy development of youth aged 15-25 years and there is a lack of funding to support innovation and big picture thinking.

Research also shows the importance of nature connection to healthy development. This link is becoming increasingly important, given rising rates of certain physical and mental health issues and the fact that young people are more sedentary and are spending less time outdoors. Studies have shown that youth think a healthy, sustainable environment should be a top priority for governments. However, this belief does not necessarily translate into action by youth to take leadership roles on environmental issues.

We want to support initiatives targeting young people who are 15-25 years old, given the developmental importance of this period and the lack of support for this cohort in the youth and environment space.

We will ensure that youth voices are integral to our approach and apply the dual lens of youth leadership and civic engagement to strengthen young people's connection to nature and support youth to take action as leaders and stewards of the environment. It is important to take a holistic approach to environmental issues, linking them to social justice concerns such as poverty and food security.

We will support initiatives which recognize youth as key contributors in decision making roles and amplify youth voices in meaningful ways.

We will support convening and intergenerational mentorship as key elements of our approach.

We will also prioritize equitable access and inclusion to help ensure all young people in Canada have opportunities to develop to their full potential, to value and accrue the health benefits from connection to nature, and to become leaders and stewards of a sustainable environment.

## Youth and the Environment



## Special Initiatives Fund

### **Supporting new ideas and ways of achieving impact**

We recognize that there are exciting prospects for impact that may go beyond our primary impact areas, but which may nonetheless hold promise for significant social change. Through the Special Initiatives Fund, we can explore and support these new ideas and opportunities independently or in collaboration with other partners and funders.

### **Strengthening philanthropy and charitable and nonprofit infrastructure**

We recognize that increasingly, the promotion of a dynamic philanthropic culture and a strong charitable and nonprofit sector will be essential to Canada and its communities if they are to succeed in the 21st century. We will provide support to selected organizations and initiatives that promote and encourage philanthropy in Canada and that help build the capacity of charities and nonprofits to succeed.





## Miggsie Fund

During her lifetime, Miggsie brought her special vitality to a variety of interests and organizations in the London, Ontario area. She is fondly remembered by many as Magnificent Miggsie, a compassionate listener who was also ready when needed to provide financial support to help address community issues. A tireless fund-raiser for London causes, she loved to be out and about in her signature fire engine red convertible.

Through the Fund, we will continue Miggsie's philanthropic legacy in the London area by providing small operating or seed grants as well as matching grants that can help charities leverage other donations from the community. We also will join with other funders to help support broader community initiatives whose potential impacts have been identified as strategically important to the London area. We will contribute to initiatives that create stimulating environments and inclusive, accessible programs to help citizens live healthy, active lives in a culturally rich and diverse community.



## Communicating our impact

We believe that engaging with various audiences is critical to our work and we will enhance our communications and engagement activities to reach a number of crucial goals.

Our communications and outreach activities will be focused on the following objectives:

- \* Increase the Lawson Foundation's profile as a grantmaker, convenor and investor in order to raise awareness of the Foundation beyond our immediate network of collaborators, partners and grantees.
- \* Increase the profile and visibility of grantees who are leading change in our impact areas in order to showcase their work, build and share knowledge and demonstrate their impact.
- \* Keep our members informed and abreast of our work in order to keep them engaged and committed to the Foundation and its philanthropy.



Photo provided by Philip Jessup

## Measuring our progress

We believe in the importance of monitoring, tracking and measuring progress. We are also committed to reporting back on the progress that is being made through our support to charities.

We want to build on success and learn from failure, and we expect the organizations that we support will do the same. While metrics and data are needed, this must not detract us from encouraging our grantees to tell stories about the work that they are doing and the difference that is being made in the lives of children and youth. It is often stories, rather than data, that create momentum for change and inspire others to contribute and get engaged.

The Foundation and our grantees are often dealing with complex and sometime intractable challenges. While measuring progress is crucial to our long term success, it must also be recognized that measuring social impact and social change is very difficult. Because we believe in the importance of measuring progress in a variety of ways, we will continue to recognize that there are real costs involved in undertaking meaningful evaluation and will remain committed to providing the necessary resources to our grantees to do this work. This will be an expectation for all of the projects and initiatives that we will support.

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