



LAWSON  
FOUNDATION

**Strategic Direction**



Healthy  
development  
of children  
and youth.



**OUR  
PURPOSE**

# Our Areas of Focus



In addition to these areas of focus, the Foundation also supports selected initiatives that strengthen philanthropy and support the broader charitable and nonprofit sector in Canada.

# Our Approach

At the Lawson Foundation, we believe that:

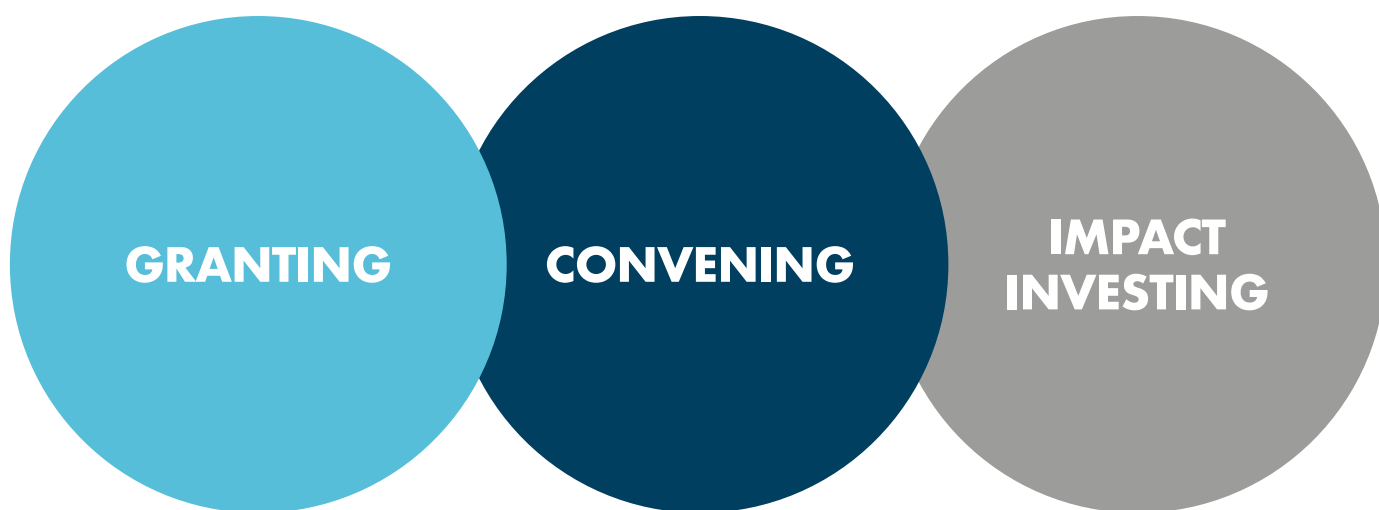
- Working upstream and investing in prevention and early intervention lead to improved outcomes.
- Mobilizing knowledge to get information into the hands of people and organizations that can use it is central to social change.
- Bold leadership is crucial to making change happen.
- Multi-year funding helps provide stability for organizations to deliver on their missions.
- Influencing public policy is often necessary for transformational change.
- Support for capacity building helps charities further strengthen their competencies to do their work effectively.
- Investing in robust evaluation is crucial for learning, building evidence and increasing impact.
- Impact is difficult to achieve by working alone. Collaboration and partnership are integral to our approach.
- Innovation and taking risks can lead to critical breakthroughs. Curiosity should be encouraged.
- Amplifying the voices and sharing the work of grantees and partners is critical to achieving broader impact.
- Good governance and transparency are essential ingredients for success.
- Equity and inclusion are key to our decision-making.







# Our Tools



## **We grant**

We provide grants to charities for a variety of activities including community action, knowledge development and mobilization, monitoring, leadership, public policy, 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 (impact) invest**

We seek to use our broader financial resources to achieve both social and financial returns 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 grantmakers, 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.



Photo courtesy of Child and Nature Alliance of Canada





Every child should grow up in caring, supportive, healthy environments and have access to high-quality early childhood education 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 general wellbeing 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. Investing in healthy development right from the start makes the best social and economic sense.

If we want to see progress in the Early Childhood Education field in Canada, shifting public policy is essential. We will work nationally and across jurisdictions to improve public policy, including

our participation in the Early Child Development Funders Working Group and by supporting initiatives that impact the development of sound public policy. We will also 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.



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, 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. A growing outdoor play sector in Canada seeks to increase opportunities for outdoor play in all settings. We have learned the importance of working with multiple sectors and stakeholders in order to create opportunities for outdoor play in distinct settings. As we move forward, we are focusing our multi-sector

approach to benefit children's outdoor play in early child education programs. Through our funding, we support adult education, training, and policy development to increase children's opportunities for outdoor play. We convene our grantees to support sharing and learning, and we use robust evaluation and knowledge mobilization to measure and leverage our results.



Our Child & Youth Diabetes Strategy focuses on the prevention of type 2 diabetes and its complications affecting Indigenous Peoples and communities in northern, rural and remote regions of Canada.

Today, more than 11 million Canadians are living with diabetes or prediabetes - and rates are on the rise, with type 2 diabetes in Indigenous youth recognized as the fastest growing pediatric chronic disease world wide. For First Nations individuals at 20 years of age in Canada, the lifetime risk of diabetes is about 80%.

Given the magnitude of the challenge, the number of actors who have a role to play, and our commitment to working toward reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Foundation has narrowed its Child & Youth Diabetes Strategy to focus on the prevention of type 2 diabetes and its complications in Indigenous Peoples and communities in northern, rural and remote areas of the country. In addition, we will work with partners on public policy related to the prevention of diabetes and its complications more broadly, as a way to create systems change.

**The Foundation is committed to investing in this Strategy for the next 10 years.**

Our recent work in partnership with Indigenous communities tackling the type 2 diabetes epidemic has given us a much stronger understanding of the opportunities and needs in those communities. It has also enabled important relationship- and trust-building with Indigenous partners. Our experience so far reinforces the importance of working differently, recognizing the unique cultural and social characteristics of individual communities and the impact of colonialism and intergenerational trauma. This work can and must only be undertaken in collaboration with Indigenous partners.

This Strategy will focus on initiatives that support and enable community-based projects and action research, promote the mobilization and sharing of knowledge, and inform and influence shifts in public policy.



All young people should have opportunities to connect with nature and contribute 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 is also a time when young people's innate capacities for creativity, innovation and collaboration could be engaged to enrich the work of communities OR could be engaged to benefit society. 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 that 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 spending less time outdoors. Studies have shown that youth believe a healthy, sustainable environment should be a top priority for governments. However, this belief does not necessarily translate into action by youth to take on leadership roles on environmental matters.

To address these issues, the Foundation is investing in diverse projects that support and amplify the voices of youth aged 15-25 years old. These projects are located across Canada and focus on environmental issues of importance to youth and their communities. The Foundation will periodically bring together a cohort of

youth representatives from the projects, to connect with each other and to share stories and learning from their projects. Through this work, the Foundation and our grantee partners are committed to achieving a double bottom line: strengthening youth leadership and civic engagement, and enabling a connection to nature and environmental action. A developmental evaluation will both guide and be informed by the projects' own evaluations. It will help develop understanding about how the Foundation can maximize its impact in this area and best support its grantees and the youth cohort through grant-making, convening and connecting.







Photo courtesy of Vivo

## Strengthening philanthropy and supporting the charitable and nonprofit sector

The promotion of a dynamic philanthropic culture and a strong charitable sector to serve Canadians and communities is essential to our country. We will provide funding to selected infrastructure organizations for capacity-building initiatives that support a healthy charitable sector.

The Foundation believes that individual charities and nonprofits can have more impact when they are working in an enabling environment that allows them to deploy their resources and their expertise to more effectively serve their communities.

That enabling environment is in large part created through the actions of infrastructure organizations that work to ensure better funding, accessible research and evidence, and a supportive public policy environment for charities and nonprofits to do their work. It is also created through their role in bringing organizations together to share expertise and learn from each other. Without strong and effective infrastructure organizations, charities and nonprofits would be left on their own and would have less impact and less reach.



*Photo courtesy of Lawson Family*

## Miggsie Fund

During her lifetime, Margaret Anna Lawson (Otton), wife of Tom Lawson Sr., the son of Foundation founder Ray Lawson, brought her special vitality to a variety of interests and organizations in and around London, Ontario.

She is fondly remembered by many as Magnificent Miggsie, a compassionate listener who was always ready when needed to provide financial support to help address community issues. A tireless fund-raiser for local causes, she loved to be out and about in her signature fire-engine red convertible.

We believe that supporting rural communities is important, and that is one of the reasons we made the decision to expand our catchment area to include London-Elgin-Middlesex.

With the assistance of community advisors, the Fund will continue Miggsie's philanthropic legacy by supporting a broad range of initiatives in both rural and urban areas through two complimentary granting streams:

**Community Grants** funding of projects that support a broad range of initiatives and activities that benefit the community. Generally, small, multi-year grants.

**Opportunity Grants** working collaboratively with other funders and charitable organizations, we will help support broader initiatives whose potential impacts have been identified as strategically significant to the community. These projects will support innovative, transformational change at the systems level. Generally, larger grants; funding time frame will vary.

The purpose of this fund is to contribute to initiatives that create stimulating environments and inclusive, equitable and accessible programs to help community thrive.







## 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:

- Amplifying the voices and visibility of our grantees, their work, and the communities and people they serve.
- Communicating innovative and exciting developments in our areas of focus with the goal of building new partnerships and collaborations.
- Increasing the Foundation's profile as a grantmaker, convenor and investor in order to raise awareness of the Foundation and its work beyond our immediate network of collaborators, partners and grantees.
- Keeping our members informed and abreast of our work in order to keep them engaged and committed to the Foundation and its philanthropy.

## 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 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 often deal with complex and sometimes 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.

## **The Lawson Foundation**

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