



Strategic Direction

January 2015

Vision, Mission and Focus

Vision (The WHY)

We envision a Canada where all people have the opportunity to thrive and fully participate in and contribute to community and society.

Mission Statement (The HOW)

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

Focus (The WHAT)

We focus our work on the well-being of children and youth, who represent Canada's future, both socially and economically. We invest in three inter-related strategic areas that we believe will have a significant impact on the healthy, optimal development of children and youth:

- Early child development
- Healthy active living
- 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;
- Support for human development across the whole life course is essential;
- Mobilizing knowledge and getting information into the hands of people who can utilize it at the community level is key to improving practices;
- Convening and creating conversations are important means to advance knowledge and improve outcomes;
- Collaborating with the right partners at the right time will increase impact;
- Supporting innovation and change is crucial, but long-standing impactful approaches should also be supported;
- Systemic change is key to long-lasting change, but responding to immediate needs and issues that are playing out on the ground today is also essential;
- Learning from both successes and failures strengthens an organization's ability to succeed;
- Bold leadership is crucial to making change happen and leadership needs to be supported;
- Good governance and transparency have become essential for charities to succeed and thrive in today's environment.

The Lawson Foundation believes that all children and youth deserve an equitable start in life and support through childhood and adolescence within a framework of "proportionate universality." We recognize that universal programs and approaches must also specifically meet the needs of vulnerable populations and address barriers to access.

Our Tools

The Lawson Foundation has three broad means of supporting the work of Canadian registered charities in our areas of interest. The Foundation:

- provides **grants** to charities for a variety of activities including community action, knowledge mobilization, monitoring, leadership, knowledge development, capacity building, and evaluation.
- acts as a **convenor**, a **connector** and a **collaborator** to create bridges and conversations, by bringing leaders and organizations together to share knowledge and learn from one another;
- actively engages in **impact investing** through both program-related investments (PRI) and mission-related investments (MRI) to maximize its resources for greater impact in Canadian communities.

Our Three Areas of Interest

1. Early Child Development

Why this matters...

For almost 20 years, the Lawson Foundation has been at the forefront of supporting the emerging 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 transgenerationally. Research points to “sensitive or critical periods” in early brain development when children have the greatest ability to acquire certain developmental skills. The kinds of positive experiences kids 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.

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

...and what we want to do about it?

We want to be part of promoting and enhancing early child development for the benefit of children, families and Canadian society.

Much progress is being made with regard to awareness of the critical importance of the early years and in the provision of high quality programs and services. Provinces and territories are increasing their investments in the early years, developing integrated systems of early learning and family supports, and increasing access to quality early learning provided by qualified educators.

But much more needs to be done. As a country, if we care for our children and want to position ourselves for the future, we need to understand what enables success elsewhere. Canada must benchmark itself against the best because we know that benchmarking ourselves is an effective way to set goals and create momentum for change. Unfortunately, Canada as a whole, is lagging behind many of its Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) partners. This knowledge should spur us to action.

In order to contribute to early childhood development in Canada and to help ensure universal access to high quality programs and services for children across the country, the Lawson Foundation will support innovative community-based initiatives, new public policy approaches, and ongoing knowledge development and monitoring that will strengthen our ability to act effectively. Moreover, the Foundation will encourage the mobilization of knowledge that will help young families, practitioners, and decision makers create healthy, high quality environments for our children.

This is a challenge for the 21st century, but also a huge opportunity that we should embrace.

2. Healthy Active Living

Why this matters...

Physical activity and good nutrition are key ingredients for a healthy and productive life. And today's youth will become the parents of the next generation of children. The Lawson Foundation aspires to enhancing positive health outcomes, including cognitive function and mental health, minimizing the risk of chronic disease and combatting the childhood obesity epidemic. Increasing opportunities for all children and youth to be active and make healthy food choices will go a long way in ensuring their full potential, as well as positive health outcomes with lifelong benefits. This is a good thing for individuals, and also for society as a whole.

Moreover, the Foundation's 14 year experience funding diabetes prevention and management has reinforced our understanding and our resolve that physical activity and good nutrition are key in the battle against type 2 diabetes, one of the fastest growing chronic diseases in Canada, and one increasingly seen at a young age. We also know that they are important for children and youth in the management of type 1 diabetes. Advances in diabetes self-care and management have been a model for dealing with other chronic conditions. We want to continue to build on this work and learn from it.

Behaviours are learned early in life. Acting throughout childhood, from the early years on, will go a long way in shaping a society that not only recognizes the importance of being active and of eating well, but engages in healthy behaviours.

...and what we want to do about it?

Solutions are well within the reach of Canadians. At the Lawson Foundation, we want to contribute to making those solutions better known and acted upon.

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.

The Lawson Foundation supports monitoring progress and the mobilization of knowledge to get the word out on the importance of healthy active living from prenatal onwards, and community action to get children and youth of all ages moving, combat sedentarism and make healthy food choices. We also support continued knowledge development that will lead to sound public policy to make it easier for Canadians to make healthy choices.

The Lawson Foundation will work with diverse partners to reach all children and youth, of all capabilities, in a variety of settings because we recognize that every setting has a role to play in shaping behaviour. We will also support families to model and encourage healthy active living for their children. By focusing on children and youth, we can help create a healthier society.

3. The Environment

Why this matters.....

The physical environment plays a central role in the health and development of children and youth. Research suggests that developmental opportunities for young people are expanded or diminished by their physical surroundings and their physical, emotional, intellectual and social health are positively affected by contact with nature. The Lawson Foundation aspires to a society in which children and youth breathe clean air, consume safe water and food, and are protected from the risks of environmental contaminants.

We believe in initiatives that promote the value of outdoor spaces and provide greater opportunities for children and youth to connect with, value and become stewards of their natural environment.

...and what we want to do about it....

This new area of interest builds on the Foundation's earlier work in early child development, diabetes and healthy active living. Over the course of 2015, we will explore the intersections between the environment and young people to determine where the Foundation can best focus its funding in this new area.

We will report back and post our findings on our website in the coming year, so please stay tuned!

Special Initiatives Fund

The Foundation recognizes that there are exciting prospects that may fall outside our main areas of focus.

Novel ideas and collaborations

Through the Special Initiatives Fund, the Foundation has the flexibility to explore new ideas and opportunities outside its main areas of action, and to partner with other funders to advance innovative and exciting initiatives.

Strengthening philanthropy

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

Miggsie Fund

During her lifetime, Miggsie brought her special vitality to a variety of interests and organizations in the London 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 legacy by providing small operating or seed grants as well as matching grants that can help charities leverage other donations from the London community. We will join with other funders to contribute to the success of community-wide initiatives whose broad 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.

Reaching Out and Communicating Our Impact

The Lawson Foundation believes that reaching out and engaging with various audiences is critical to its work. Going forward, we will enhance our communications and engagement activities to reach a number of crucial goals.

Broadening the Reach of our Grantees for More Impact

We will seek to disseminate more broadly the results of the work of our various grantees so that more people and organizations in Canada can benefit from the initiatives that we are supporting. Charities working in the same areas, practitioners and parents seeking evidence and better information, governments interested in improving public policy, media looking for great stories and experts for comment, will all benefit from access to this information. The Foundation will grow and strengthen these networks to get the word out and hopefully through this, increase the impact of the work that is being done in our areas of interest.

We will also be looking at more opportunities to deliberately convene and connect our grantees with one another so that they can learn from each other and create new relationships that will enhance their work and impact. This will be beneficial to the grantees, to the Foundation and to Canadian society in general.

Seeking out new Partners and Stakeholders

Canada is a large and multi-faceted country. There is activity happening in communities across the country but much of it is still unknown to the Foundation, and the Foundation is often unknown to a variety of actors who could benefit from our support or partnership.

We will be looking at new means of identifying those great ideas, great leaders and great projects worthy of our support and attention. We will be seeking to raise the visibility of the Foundation to the outside world so that leaders and organizations with whom we are not yet connected, will seek us out.

We will ensure that in our three broad areas of interest, the Foundation is seen as a thought leader so that when new ideas are being hatched, conversations are being started and action contemplated, we can be part of these developments. These new connections will allow the Foundation to broaden its reach and its relevance, and through this, increase its impact.

Measuring Our Progress

The Lawson Foundation believes 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 various supports to charities. While we want to build on the successes, we also want to learn from failures. And we expect the organizations that we fund will do the same.

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 to do. The Foundation and its grantees are often dealing with complex and sometime intractable challenges.

Despite this, the Foundation believes that it is important to support monitoring tools that will help us assess progress or lack of progress over the longer term as we know that social change takes time. We can do this in two different ways.

First, we will look at supporting outside monitoring and tracking tools in our areas of interest. Examples of such initiatives that the Foundation has supported, or is supporting, include: *the Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* and *the Early Childhood Education Report*. These kinds of initiatives are important tools to assess whether we are making progress as a country. But they are also essential to the Foundation itself to understand whether the work that we are doing is making a difference. These kinds of instruments play an important dual role.

Secondly, we will be developing a new approach to our *Monitoring Report* with a view to more clearly communicating the difference that we are making through our various grants and activities in a timelier and more useful way. We already obtain good and relevant information and data from our grantees so that we can report back on results. Now we need to ensure that we are presenting this information in the most appropriate way and that we target our various audiences effectively so that the learnings stemming from the initiatives that we are supporting are more widely-shared and used.

While metrics and hard numbers 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.

Moreover, because we believe in the importance of measuring progress in a variety of ways, the Foundation 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 indeed be an expectation for all of the projects and initiatives that we will support.
