





about

Community Living Essex County



## Who We Are

Community Living Essex County is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to supporting people with intellectual disabilities and their families throughout Essex County. For over six decades, we have been driven by a belief in inclusion, dignity, and the right of every person to direct their own life. Through a wide range of individualized supports, services, and partnerships, we work alongside people to help them live meaningful lives in their communities—connected, valued, and empowered. Our team of compassionate support workers, dedicated employees, volunteers, and engaged community members all play a vital role in creating a more inclusive future where everyone belongs.

Community Living Essex County currently provides personalized supports to **just over 700 children, youth, and adults** with intellectual disabilities. Our services are tailored to meet individual needs and include **accommodation supports, respite care, supported independent living, community participation, and employment supports**. Whether assisting someone in finding meaningful work, offering a safe and enriching place to live, or helping families access much-needed respite, our team is committed to walking alongside each person as they pursue their goals, grow their independence, and build connections in their community.

## Our Mission

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We are committed to supporting people with an intellectual disability to achieve their goals and dreams, empowering them to flourish as full citizens who are valued in their community.

## Our Vision

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A community that celebrates inclusion and inspires possibilities.

## Board of Directors

On behalf of the Board of Directors, I'm pleased to present our Annual Report for the period of April 1, 2024, to March 31, 2025. This year, we've refreshed, modernized, and expanded the report to better reflect the depth and breadth of our work—something our Board Chair, Sue Desjarlais, would have been so proud to see. Her passing in April 2025 has left a deep void—a testament to the profound impact she had on each of us and on this agency. Sue's leadership, spirit, dedication, and tireless advocacy will continue to guide and inspire all that we do.

As we reflect on the past year, the Board is once again filled with pride and gratitude for all we've accomplished together. Each year brings new challenges, but what remains constant is the strength, resilience, and compassion that define this organization and propel us toward our vision.

There was also much to celebrate this year:

- We increased the number of people accessing respite services.
- We broke fundraising records at several events.
- We successfully launched a brand-new Human Resources Information System (HRIS) and rolled out a major update to our case management software—both designed to streamline operations and better support our teams.

- We achieved full compliance with the updated Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act.
- And we proudly welcomed someone into our very first Additional Dwelling Unit — our tiny home dream brought to life.

These are just a few of the highlights from a year full of meaningful progress.

We extend our deepest thanks to the people we support, their families, our employees, leadership team, senior leaders, volunteers, donors, members, and community partners. You are the heart of this organization, and your commitment continues to inspire possibilities every day.

On behalf of the Board, I invite you to enjoy this Annual Report — celebrating all we've accomplished and looking ahead with continued optimism, inclusion, and opportunity for all.



**Chad Sutherland**  
*1<sup>st</sup> Vice Chair,  
Board of Directors*

## Executive Director



**Karen Bolger**  
*Executive Director*

This year's Annual Report is both a tribute and a testament. A tribute to the incredible leadership of our late Board Chair, Sue Desjarlais—whose presence is deeply missed and whose legacy continues to inspire everything we do. And a testament to the strength of our community—our employees, leaders, families, partners, and the people we support—who show us every day what's possible when we lead with heart, vision, and determination.

Together, we navigated change, embraced new ways of working, and stayed grounded in what matters most: inclusion, dignity, and belonging. I continue to be humbled by the resilience and dedication I see across our organization and am filled with gratitude for the people who make it all happen.

Thank you for your continued support and belief in our mission. I hope you enjoy this look back at a year defined by progress, purpose, and possibility.

Warmly,  
Karen

# facts about

## Community Living Essex County



Over  
**700**  
People  
Served

**17%**

of people served  
between the ages  
of **10 – 19 years**

**66%**

of people served  
between the ages  
of **20 – 55 years**

**17%**

of people  
served **55+**



**94%**

Satisfaction  
-People we support



**97%**

Satisfaction  
-Families we support



**69**

people  
competitively  
employed



**731**  
Employees

**306**

employees  
celebrating  
10+ years

**437**

employees attended  
employee  
appreciation events

**607**

virtual support  
sessions  
delivered



**32** tech devices provided to people  
through Giving Tuesday campaign



**224** goals set by  
people we support



**21**

partnerships  
with local  
agencies

**22**

partnerships with  
regional/provincial groups



**14**

Artificial  
Intelligence  
Labs delivered

**8799**

total followers on  
social media (4 platforms)

**98.6%**

Compliance with  
all MCCSS measures



CAREER  
COMPASS

## Empowering Pathways to Employment

Career Compass continues to support people in achieving their employment goals and building skills for the future. As an Employment Ontario service provider under the Windsor Regional Employment Network (WREN), we connect job seekers with meaningful employment opportunities across Essex County.

This year, 69 people supported by Career Compass are working throughout the region. We now have people permanently employed in 3 of Essex County's

7 municipalities, with 4 municipalities committed to participating in our Youth in Action: Summer Work Experience Program.

We also partnered with North Star High School and Leamington District Secondary School to deliver JobPath, our pre-employment workshop for youth. Through these partnerships and tailored supports, Career Compass continues to help people build confidence, develop skills, and find their place in the workforce.



# some key highlights

## 2024-25



### **Expanding Support Options for People and Families**

- Successfully launched our first Additional Dwelling Unit (ADU), with two more builds approved and in planning.
- Resumed flexible respite options for children, adults, and families, including daytime and overnight stays.
- Developed new database tracking to capture families expressing interest in services, shaping future fee-for-service offerings.
- Partnered with People Minded Business on the Future Proof project, gathering insights from families, people supported, and employees through focus groups, helping shape service offerings, inform fee-for-service planning, and guide long-term strategy.



### **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB)**

- Launched a call for participation in the DEIB Committee to strengthen engagement and inclusivity across the agency.
- Strengthened DEIB efforts through regular committee meetings, a refreshed annual workplan, and collaborative partnerships with community organizations.
- Held a dedicated brainstorming session to clarify DEIB priorities and establish a clear direction for the year ahead.
- Partnered with the University of Windsor's Continuing Education Department to provide "DEI in the Workplace" training for DEIB Committee members and organizational leaders.



### **Advancing Innovation and Technology in Service Delivery**

- Transitioned to ADP WorkForce Now for payroll and HR services, streamlining processes and adding new employee benefits.
- Launched a fully updated ShareVision database, shaped by input from 11 working groups, offering faster page loads, an intuitive layout, and improved user experience for staff.
- Demonstrated sector leadership in the use of artificial intelligence, offering AI Labs training to both our own employees and to other agencies in Ontario. We remain on top of AI advancements, creating our own custom GPTs, and embedding automations into our processes.



### **Advocacy and Government Relations**

- Championed the province-wide #WaitingToBelong campaign through media appearances, raising awareness about the urgent need for increased funding and inclusive supports.
- Participated in pre-budget consultations with the Standing Committee on Finance and the Minister of Finance to advocate for the needs of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.
- Engaged our Director, Community Living Operations in the provincial Working Group on Sector Response and Readiness for MCCSS's Journey to Belonging implementation, ensuring agency alignment with emerging policies.

# impact stories

## Reaching Goals, Realizing Dreams

### Arthur, Karl, and Bill's Dream Trip to Disney

In the fall, Arthur, Karl, and Bill achieved a long-held dream: a magical vacation to Walt Disney World in Orlando. With the help of dedicated support workers, they carefully planned every detail—choosing parks, booking a character breakfast, and creating an itinerary that reflected their interests and wishes. Their adventure included two fun-filled days at Magic Kingdom and EPCOT, dazzling fireworks, and the joy of meeting beloved characters. Support workers ensured the trip was not only safe and smooth, but also filled with moments of laughter, independence, and new experiences. Between park visits, they relaxed by the hotel pool, soaking in the magic of their achievement—proof that with the right support, dreams really do come true.



### Steven's Journey to Earning His Full G License

Earlier this year, Steven reached a major personal milestone: earning his full G driver's license, a goal he had been working towards with dedication and determination for several years. Through the encouragement and guidance of his support team, Steven developed a clear plan, practiced consistently, and stayed focused on his dream of driving independently. His achievement is a testament to how tailored support can empower people to set goals, overcome challenges, and celebrate success. Congratulations, Steven—your hard work has paid off, and we can't wait to see where the road takes you next!

### Dream It, Do It: Marlayna's Story of Determination

With the help of a wonderful support team, Marlayna is currently working toward her diploma in Gerontology – Social Service Worker at St. Clair College. Her goal is to become a motivational speaker, inspiring others to believe in themselves and to go after their dreams—no matter their abilities or the challenges they face. Marlayna is passionate about encouraging people to keep moving forward, and her journey is a great example of how determination and the right support can help turn goals into reality.



### More Than a Home: Kyle's Path to Greater Independence

This year, Kyle took an important step toward greater independence by moving into an Additional Dwelling Unit (ADU) in Essex. More than just a change of address, this innovative living arrangement is designed to support his health, safety, and well-being—empowering him to live independently in a space tailored to his needs. It's a meaningful step forward, celebrating autonomy and embracing new ways to ensure independence thrives through thoughtful design and support.



# Testimonials

“

It has been an honour to be part of the incredible work of this organization. I joined the Board during the pandemic and was in awe of how Community Living Essex County navigated the uncertainty and challenges of that time, emerging stronger. We continue to forge ahead, providing extraordinary care for those we serve and setting an example for other agencies across the province.

Personal highlights for me this year include the opportunity to listen to the powerful voices of self-advocates at our Mayors' Luncheon, as well as the New Day representatives who serve on our Board of Directors. These perspectives ensure our mission stays clear and remains at the heart of all we do. Another favourite moment for me is celebrating the accomplishments of our incredible employees at the Employee Appreciation Event—an inspiring reminder of the dedication and passion that fuels our organization.

**Sharon O'Hagan-Wong**  
Board Member



”

“

As parents, there is no greater relief than knowing my son has a home where he feels safe, supported, and truly valued. The compassionate individuals around him ensure that he is not only cared for but also included in a way that honors his unique strengths. It's more than just housing—it's a community where he belongs. Knowing that we are always part of a dedicated team working toward his happiness and success gives me peace of mind every day.

**Audrey Bajic**  
Parent

”

“

I like doing my own shopping. I get my board ready. Erin (support worker) grabbed that board for me and put the pictures on it. I picked the pictures out, cut them, stuck them on the board. Then I pick them up in the store. Erin stays back in the next isle. I put the groceries on the belt and in the bag. I like cooking my own food. I cook on the BBQ sometimes. I made homemade hamburgers - staff showed me. We cook on Wednesday with Yvonne (support worker). I do my own laundry too. I do bike rides, walks, and staff drive me to work. I like my staff.

**Issac F**



”

“

I love working for CLEC because it gives me the opportunity to experience true joy every day. It's a joy we don't often allow ourselves to feel in our own lives, because we tend to hold back or follow a script we've created for ourselves—how we think we should look, sound, or act. But working directly with the people I'm honoured to support, and seeing them achieve their dreams, reminds me how life is meant to be lived—fully, joyfully, and celebrating every moment, no matter how small.

It's incredibly rewarding to be part of helping people reach their goals and dreams, even in the small ways—by keeping them safe, offering support, and doing all the little things that make the big things possible.

**Maryann McManemy**  
Support Worker



”

## From House to Home – Reflections of People We Support



“Everything is going great at my new house. I am happy to be living here. It is much bigger - gives me lots of more room to walk around.”

– Ray M



“I like living at my new house. I like sitting on the back porch (it's my favourite spot) to look at the birds.”

– Larry S



“I like it here. I like the walking trail behind the house. I walk there lots of times during the day. I like that there are two living rooms. When it gets noisy I can have some quiet time in the other one.”

– Stephen M

# with gratitude:

## Celebrating Our Donors, Sponsors, and Volunteers

At Community Living Essex County, we are deeply grateful for the generosity, time, and energy of the many individuals, businesses, and community partners who make our work possible. Together, we are creating a community where everyone belongs, and where people with intellectual disabilities are supported in achieving their goals and dreams.

### The power of community:

#### Our Fundraising Highlights

##### **The 2024 Ruthven Apple Festival:**

Despite challenging weather, our community came together once again to make the 45th Ruthven Apple Festival a resounding success. With the support of countless volunteers and local sponsors, the festival raised an incredible \$71,000—funds that directly support the purchase and maintenance of accessible vehicles to help people we serve get around in their communities.

##### **Annual Charity Golf Classic:**

Last July, we proudly hosted our 32nd Annual Charity Golf Classic at Sutton Creek Golf Club in McGregor. The event brought together 116 golfers from across Essex County, including four municipal teams who competed for the coveted Municipal Cup. Last year, Team Lakeshore claimed the Municipal Cup for the first time!

Proceeds from this annual tournament support our Summer Support program, which provides inclusive and meaningful experiences for children and youth with intellectual disabilities during the summer months. We are thrilled to announce that last year's event raised \$17,000, thanks to the incredible generosity of our sponsors & participants.

##### **Giving Tuesday: A Record-Breaking Success:**

This year's Giving Tuesday campaign shattered records (\$22,600), thanks to the generosity of our donors and the support of sponsors like Libro Credit Union, Uni-Fab, and Vernon's Tap & Grill. The funds raised enabled us to purchase iPads, Apple Watches, smartphones, and wearable technology for people we support—tools that promote independence, connection, and inclusion in today's digital world.

##### **The Gift Wrapping Booth at Devonshire Mall:**

Every year, the success of our holiday gift wrapping booth is a true testament to the dedication of our volunteers. This year was no exception, as hundreds of volunteers came together to help us set a new record for funds raised - \$28,000! Their spirit of giving, especially during the busy holiday season, is truly inspiring.

##### **The Jingle Bell Run, Walk, and Wheel, Hosted by Ken Knapp Ford:**

The 30th annual Jingle Bell Run, Walk, and Wheel was another fantastic success, bringing our community together for a festive day of fun and fundraising. We are grateful to Ken Knapp Ford, our volunteers, sponsors, and everyone who participated to make this event possible.



Ruthven Apple Festival



Annual Charity Golf Classic



Giving Tuesday



Gift Wrapping Booth



Jingle Bell Run



##### **A Special Thank You to Our Donors**

We extend our heartfelt thanks to each and every person, family, and business who made a donation to Community Living Essex County this year. Your generosity helps us continue our mission, providing meaningful supports and opportunities for the people we serve.



Resources for the years ending March 31, 2025 and March 31, 2024 (in millions)

Revenues	2024/25	2023/24	Expenditures	2024/25	2023/24
MCCSS	41.7	39.6	Accommodation Supports	39.8	37.8
Fees for service	6.2	6.5	Employment/Community Participation supports	2.4	2.5
Fundraising/donations	0.4	0.4	In and Out of Home Respite	2.7	2.6
Other grants and revenues	0.5	0.4	Community Relations/Other	0.1	0.1
Investment income	0.7	0.8	Administration	4.0	3.8
TOTAL	49.5	47.7	TOTAL	48.9	46.8

grants at work: Building a Stronger Future

Grants play a vital role in helping us expand opportunities and create innovative solutions for the people we support. We are deeply grateful for the funders who believe in our mission and help turn ideas into action.

Here are just a few examples of grant-funded projects making a difference this year:

Connecting Seniors Through Technology

With a \$5,000 grant from the Levante Foundation c/o Stronger Philanthropy, we developed and launched a user-friendly technology toolkit for seniors supported by our agency and family members who are senior citizens of adults receiving services. This toolkit helps break down barriers to technology use, promotes understanding, and increases comfort with digital tools.

Tiny Homes, Big Impact

Thanks to funding from the City of Windsor and the Ontario Priorities Housing Initiative (OPHI), we have expanded housing options with the development of multiple Additional Dwelling Units (ADUs). The first tiny home in Essex is complete, and two more—in Amherstburg and Belle River—are now moving forward.

Future Proofing for Sustainability

A \$104,000 Resilient Communities Fund grant from the Ontario Trillium Foundation has supported our Future Proof project. Through in-depth surveys, focus groups, and collaborative sessions with People Minded Business, we are identifying strategies to adapt to a competitive, open-market service model and exploring new revenue streams to ensure long-term sustainability.

REAL Xchange

Community Living Essex County’s REAL Xchange (RX) online hub continues to be a trusted platform for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and professional learning across the developmental services sector.



2,845

Individual Members



664

Member Agencies



77

Learning Modules  
Available



2,207

Resources  
Available

## 2024-2025 Board of Directors

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(the late) **Sue Desjarlais**, *Chair*

**Chad Sutherland**, *1st Vice Chair*

**Michelle Mastellotto**, *2nd Vice Chair*

**Gillian Heisz**, *Treasurer*

**Robert Tomek**, *Past Chair*

**Diane Bourbeau**, *Director*

**Ron Giofu**, *Director*

**Sharon O'Hagan-Wong**, *Director*

**Brianne Taggart**, *Director*

**Ray Renaud**, *Director*

**Ian Phillips**, *Director*

**Karen Bolger**, *Secretary to the Board*

## Senior Leadership Team

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**Karen Bolger**, *Executive Director*

**Corey Dagleish**, *Director, Community Living Operations*

**Kirti Ladwa**, *Director, Finance*

**Christine Meriweather**, *Director, Human Resources*

**Julie LaSorda**, *Director, Marketing and Innovation*

**Elizabeth Raffoul**, *Director, Community Living Supports (Central Area)*

**Tim Davidson**, *Director, Community Living Supports (North Area)*

**Carmela Battisti**, *Director, Community Living Supports (South Area)*

**Jacquelyn Ciliska**, *Director, Community Living Supports (West Area)*







Together  
we thrive



*belonging.  
support.  
impact.*



## Head Office:

372 Talbot Street North,  
Essex, Ontario  
N8M 2W4

## Charitable Registration:

118901974RR0001

With thanks and in recognition of ...

Our major funder – the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services.  
And wish acknowledgement and appreciation to the Ontario Trillium Foundation.



## Contact us:

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social media*

