

CASE STUDY | EMPOWERING STRONG COMMUNITIES IN A CAMBRIDGE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Greenway-Chaplin's Re-engagement with Neighbours

WRITTEN BY: *Emily Jaarsma & Kathleen Cameron, Greenway-Chaplin, Connor Judge, Tamarack Institute*

INTRODUCTION

[Greenway-Chaplin](#) is a community centre located in the [City of Cambridge, Ontario](#). Cambridge is a rapidly growing city and one of three cities located within the Region of Waterloo. It has become a popular spot for filming locations, with its beautiful historic downtown being featured in TV Show *Handmaid's Tale*. The people of Cambridge are proud of their home, and this pride carries down to the neighbourhood level, where residents find a sense of identity.

Greenway-Chaplin was born out of a Neighbourhood Association policy created by the City in the early 1980s. Prior to becoming a community centre, Greenway-Chaplin operated out of an elementary school with a volunteer Board of Directors. In 1990, Greenway-Chaplin became a community centre and incorporated to help them acquire some additional seed funding. It is now located in a social housing unit that was provided by the Region of Waterloo. In 2000, Greenway-Chaplin received its charitable status as a non-profit in Canada.



Greenway-Chaplin is situated upon the traditional lands of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and Neutral Peoples. The City of Cambridge's population is just over 140,000. The neighbourhood which Greenway-Chaplin operates within is estimated to be just over 14,000 people.



The Role of Neighbourhood Community Centres in Belonging

Community centres can be found in municipalities across Canada and act as a crucial gathering place for people to connect, learn together, play together, and support one another. With indoor and outdoor spaces, there are opportunities for everyone to connect at any time of year. Like a library, community centres are keepers of knowledge and information; however, this knowledge is localized to the neighbourhood out of which it operates.

Community centres are considered to be [social infrastructure](#), where the safe space they create and the activities they host fosters the development of relationships being built at the community level. In addition, community centres can also play a critical role in our democracy in bringing it down to the neighbourhood level.

Greenway-Chaplin has created spaces for elected officials such as councillors to engage with neighbourhoods. Hosting these discussions in a community centre as opposed to the townhall allow residents who aren't comfortable attending larger political events to participate in a more safe, proximate, and familiar setting. These spaces are also often used to host voter polling stations in municipal, provincial, and federal elections.

The Green-way to Community Centres

Volunteering is central to Greenway-Chaplin's approach to their operation as a Community Centre. The community centre still offers services such as youth summer camps, tutoring, after school programs, and drop-in sessions. However, at Greenway-Chaplin, there has been a real shift in their role as a community centre. Rather than being a service provider, the community centre has created opportunities for residents to design and implement their own program or activity and to develop skills such as leadership, planning, management and more.



Not everyone's passion can be their job, so volunteering gives them an outlet for that.

Kathleen Cameron – Community Engagement Coordinator



The bottom-up approach to community development which Greenway-Chaplin champions allows for residents to have a say in what occurs in their neighbourhood, builds their skills and capacities and creates more opportunities to volunteer and connect with other residents. This approach empowers neighbours to share their gifts and shifts the nature of the invitation.

Rather than an invitation to participate, it is an invitation to collaborate. Providing residents with a seat at the table creates buy-in from the community, which will contribute to the sustainability of the activity and the relationship between

resident and community centre.

Connecting With Youth & Community Through Volunteering

Greenway-Chaplin provides a range of programs tailored to meet the diverse needs of its community. Although the city mandates that a considerable portion of their programs focus on children and youth, their main funding source, the organization's approach emphasizes



community-building and putting community members at the centre of their programming.

Below are three of their programs that exemplify this approach.

1. Youth Council

This program is part of the Youth Development Program that had been implemented from the mandate of the city. Youth Council mirrors the typical drop-in, program-based activities that are seen in recreational programming across Canada. Greenway-Chaplin wanted to build the capacity of their youth to develop a variety of skills that could be used in potential volunteer or career opportunities. There was a real desire to empower youth to make decisions about the types of programming that happens in their community and doing this in a manner that builds connection between youth and their community.

Rather than just creating programming for youth, Greenway-Chaplin supports the youth council to create its own focused programming. The role of the community centre is to provide space, both in-person and virtually and to facilitate and support the council's learning journey. The application requirement to join the youth council ensures buy-in from the youth and allows for a level of trust to be built. Not only are the youth responsible for their programming, but they also manage the recruitment of the council when opportunities open. The youth council is built by youth, for youth, within a safe space created by Greenway-Chaplin



[The best part was] participating in scaring kids [...].! But also getting to set up and seeing how many people would attend. Watching the whole thing form itself and adapting to the way in which we made it function the best it could. The best thing was working with my neighborhood friends the whole time.

Youth Council member about their event





Getting to do something new and have fun with family and connecting with others!

A parent on answering what the was best thing about our Greenway Children Create Art event.



Neighbourhood Action Grants (NAGs)

Neighbourhood Action Grants are a micro-granting program that was co-designed by residents, community organizations, leaders in community development and the [Lyle S. Hallman Foundation \(LSHF\)](#). Beginning in 2018, LSHF invited the first two neighbourhoods to participate: Greenway-Chaplin (Cambridge) and Courtland-Shelley (Kitchener). Two new neighbourhoods were added in 2019, and this year two additional neighbourhoods are coming on board for a total of six

within the Region of Waterloo. The purpose of these grants is to support residents, especially youth, in leading projects in their neighbourhoods, creating connections, and developing skills.

Turn your neighbourhood dreams into reality.

Neighbourhood Action Grants give up to \$500 for you to do a project for your neighbourhood.



Greenway-Chaplin plays a supportive and administrative role with the NAGs. The NAG Coach (Greenway Staff) promotes the grants to help residents understand the goals and the scope of what is possible. The NAG coach supports leadership and capacity development of residents to vision, plan, problem solve, and implement a neighbourhood-based project.

Greenway Chaplin staff are available to answer questions and act as a sounding board for NAG project leaders.

Neighbourhood Action Grant Timeline

1. **Submitting a NAG Application** – The application requires a minimum of two residents from the neighbourhood.
2. **Brainstorming and Coaching** – The residents will begin to brainstorm with the community engagement coordinator on how to bring their idea to life.
3. **Preparing for the Event** – Residents are responsible for planning, purchasing supplies and submitting invoices and collaborating with Greenway Chaplin for outreach.
4. **Host their Event** – With the support of Greenway Chaplin, the resident leaders host their planned activities/event
5. **Follow-up Report** – Residents collect information, such as attendance at the event, and provide a brief overview of their experience in a report to the Lyle S. Hallman Foundation .

Community Events

As Emily Jaarsma, Executive Director of Greenway-Chaplin says: “Events are a good entry point into community”, and that is exactly why Greenway hosts a variety of community events. Their purpose is to create spaces for people to come together, to meet new neighbours and to create community. Providing these opportunities for neighbours with the community has been part of what Greenway does for the past 10 plus years.





The idea for an event is either brought forward by a resident of the community, or it is identified as a potential interest through the close-knit relationship the community centre has with its community. There are also events that are created in partnership with other local organizations. These organizations are not limited to: [Muslim Women of Cambridge](#), [Rhythm & Blues Cambridge](#), [Community Justice Initiatives](#), and the [Canadian Arab Women's Association](#).

The onset of the pandemic forced these activities to go virtual or to be distanced. Now, Greenway-Chaplin is working towards restoring the level of engagement that existed prior to the pandemic such as:

- Dances open to students in Grades 2 to 7 to celebrate together.
- Opportunities to learn more about gardening and pollinator station through the Greenway Gardening Gathering
- Neighbourhood Day Street Party in June.
- Haunted centre for Halloween led by staff and the Youth Council.

Lessons Learned

Since their work began in the 1980s, Greenway-Chaplin has experienced many successes, but also many challenges. As a unique community centre born out of a social housing unit, they've had to get creative and build strong partnerships with other organizations and institutions to meet the demands of their community. In those 20+ years of experience, some of the lessons they have learned are:

- **Take your Time** – It takes time to build community. Greenway-Chaplin has had to shift multiple times in the last 5 years due to the pandemic, neighbourhood turnover and staff turnover. Respect and acknowledge the time required to build relationships with residents. The solution is time and building awareness and educating people.
- **A Reflexive State of Mind** – Be in the mindset of always trying to understand how you can improve your events and programs. The goal is to never settle and always strive to create the most meaningful and impactful events and programming.
- **Work Smarter Not Harder** – Build strong relationships with community partners to identify already existing opportunities. Instead of duplicating work, find gaps or identify synergies to maximize the impact. Take a strengths-based approach, such as [Asset-Based Community Development](#).

- **Be Considerate of the Calendar** – Don't book on events that matter for youth, such as Valentine's day or other important dates regarding school. Be aware of cultural and religious celebrations, before booking to ensure everyone is able to participate.
- **Be Strategic, Keep it Simple** – By not overcomplicating processes, for your partners and residents, keep it simple and realistic and this then also creates better conditions for things to be resident-led.
- **Don't be afraid of Failure** – When doing community work, there is more value to their capacity building in failure than there is in a successful event. Failure is a way to build capacity. It's not always about the event being a success, it's about the tertiary goals, building relationships and connecting.

What's Next for Greenway-Chaplin

Greenway-Chaplin plans to continue its existing program, with the goal of growing the level of programming to meet our community demographics. A new direction the community centre is exploring opportunities for older adults within the neighbourhood. Rather than create new programming, Greenway-Chaplin is looking to expand its existing programs to be inclusive to older adults by removing barriers. They acknowledge that the age range of 55 to 105 is both broad and diverse population, so they are beginning with building connections, understanding their needs and how they want to be involved. Adhering to their own lessons learned, they are also scoping out the existing programming within the community, to ensure that programs are not duplicated. While the next steps aren't predetermined, Greenway-Chaplin still aims to imbed the same community development approach present in all their work.

Conclusion

With the mission of empowering strong community, Greenway-Chaplin has flipped the traditional role of community centres to focus on capacity building and resident led activities. Community centers are a critical source of social infrastructure, which is clearly displayed in the success that Greenway



continues to find. The caveat of their success is their non-conventional location in a small social housing complex. Through their emphasis on relationship building, collaboration and embracing the ideals of Asset-Based community development, they have been able to leverage the existing assets in their community to create spaces of belonging. Greenway-Chaplin is continuing to redefine the role of community centres as it continues to expand its programming and grow with the community it supports.

Learn More

- [Learn more about Greenway-Chaplin by visiting their website](#)
- [Learn more about the work of other Neighbourhood Associations in Cambridge](#)
- [Visit the Deepening Community website to learn more about this movement](#)
- [Checkout the Deepening Community Membership brochure to learn more about our services](#)

Funded by the Government of Canada's Sustainable Development Goals Funding Program.

Canada

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Copyright © 2022 by **Tamarack Institute**
tamarackcommunity.ca