

Investing in Children – Wednesday, June 7, 2023

Annual General Meeting - Fiscal Year End Report

Our Mission

Investing in Children is committed to improving the well-being and learning of ALL children.

Our Vision

We collaborate with our local communities to provide inclusive opportunities for children and youth to thrive emotionally, physically, artistically and academically. Our impact will support all children to reach their full potential and accomplish their goals.



We are elated that beginning in January 2024, Investing in Children will be celebrating the start of its 25th year of service to the children, youth and families within the community of London, as well as its surrounding counties! This report is just a small sampling of our impact.

Whereas most charities and non-profits focus on one or two themes, we at Investing in Children are committed to answer the needs of our community's children and youth through the delivery of more than a dozen different programs!

Our main reason for existing is to fill the gaps of need as evidenced by children, youth, and families in the City of London, and its surrounding area, in terms of:

- mitigating hunger (through our **Snack Stop, Children's Nutrition Network** and **partnership with the OSNP**). One of the most imperative goals is to provide nutritious food and snacks for children and youth in London and the surrounding area. This is critical, given that 1 in 4 students come to school hungry, and 1 in 3 children and youth experience poverty first hand. We realize that children and youth require a decent foundation of nutrition in order to experience success while in school, or even while active in a summer activity. With this in mind, we have continued to nurture a very strong partnership with the VON/Ontario Student Nutrition Program (OSNP). We collaborate with this group to lead the **Children's Nutrition Network (CNN)**; a construct of Investing in Children. Together with the MLHU, and InterCommunity Health, the CNN meets regularly to make decisions as to what schools and/or child/youth based groups require emergent nutrition assistance. Together we analyze situations and requests, and award funding and/or other support as needed, to ensure all children and youth have access to nutrition as required. Predominantly, the CNN serves school communities which either do not fit in the OSNP criteria, or they simply have not applied for OSNP assistance within the proper time frame. Our "**Snack Stop**" program has grown exponentially over the past 4 years. This program began in 2018, when our staff realized a gap of need related to serving children and youth during their summer vacation. We adopted the mantra that "hunger does not take a holiday". We also realized that children and youth in London and area need nutritious starts to their day, whether they attend a City Camp, Playground, Library, Family Centre, or Community Centre. We started purchasing, preparing and providing grocery buckets of food to targeted areas of need in London. We piloted 8 locations, and quickly realized that the need was far greater than what we initially realized. In 2019, we increased our reach to 14 locations. In 2021, we increased our reach to 20 locations, providing approximately 9,000 servings of nutritional snacks – throughout the City of London. In 2022, the program again increased its

reach to 33 locations, adding 2 Indigenous Centres, offering more than 14,000 servings of nutritious snacks – an increase of almost 65%! At the start of 2023, we have experienced an unprecedented number of telephone calls and emails from various groups requesting assistance from this program. Several others requested an increase from one to several more buckets of food. *Serving the youth of London by continually working at breaking the trajectory of child and youth hunger and poverty is absolutely one of our proudest pillars!*

- including ALL our children and youth in positive opportunities (through our **Kids First Day program**). The OSNP also assists us with our “**Kids 1st Day**” program. On this day, approximately 8,000 nutritious snacks (clementines and bananas) were provided to the children and youth attending more than 50 businesses and locations which participate on this day. All the participants (more than 7,000 children, youth and families) are invited to experience these different venues – with the vast majority allowing entry without any costs. While visiting these businesses and organizations, children and youth are invited to eat bananas and clementines; enticing them to choose a healthy snack!





- breaking exclusive barriers preventing children and youth from participating in a variety of events, by instead offering them a full welcome, celebration, support and inclusion (through our **Special Olympics** collaboration with the TVDSB, and our After School Program, “**Hark** – Healthy, Active, Resilient Kids”) – without experiencing any costs whatsoever. Above are just some of the more than 200 volunteers we have registered with our Charity – working here at the Special Olympics – where more than 1,000 students with special needs – plus 1,000 mentors – participate in activities specially designed to nurture their spirit of striving, competition, resilience, and unending ambition to succeed! In addition to volunteers, we have numerous Interns – coming to us from UWO, Fanshawe College, and even Brescia and Kings University Colleges. Even local high schools choose to send their Specialist High Skills Major students, studying the Non-Profit world, our way!



- discovering, nurturing and developing leadership skills and talents (through our **Kids Power Conference**). Back in 2020, we received significant accolades for our “**Kids Power Conference**” with the creation of a dozen videos sponsored by various London area “VIP” leaders. Politicians, Educators, Business, and Police leaders share their wisdom regarding what skills, traits, talents and persona effective leaders possess and exhibit. Because we believed these treasured leadership videos are timeless, we decided to let them be available online indefinitely. Try to find time to view these! Even several schools are using them!



- enhancing Literacy and Numeracy skills for area children and youth (through our **Family Literacy and Math Events, Young Authors Camp, and our Blue Boxes for Books program**), Our **Blue Boxes for Books**



Program is an incredible testament of how committed our volunteers and staff are to nurturing Literacy! Dozens participated in the advertising, collection, cleaning, sorting and delivery of more than 10,000 donated books last year – and close to 6,000 already this year – going to 45 locations!





➤ coaching and supporting our children, families and schools in regard to developing both literacy and math skills. In 2022-23 we served 31 schools, with approximately 5,500 participants - 3,000 children, and almost 2500 adults! This upcoming year 35 of 38 events are already booked – and 7 for 2024-25 - demonstrating the importance and need to offer external foundational math and literacy resources. It also speaks to the desire of parents searching for strategies and skills to nurture their child’s learning at home!



- celebrate arts and music education through our **Free Youth Guitar** (for youth from Gr. 7-10), **Free Youth Song Writing** programs(for youth Gr. 10-12), and our newest program, **“Rhymes and Rhythm”**, designed for pre-school children at our Family Centres. To date, our Free Youth Guitar program – which gives our children and youth free lessons and free use of a guitar for 3 months, has had 541 graduates to date! Many come back to do the program a second – or even third time!



- collaborating with and supporting the City of London by providing several of our programs at various Family Centre locations, Libraries, and Community Centres. We proudly support the City’s AFL/CYN (Age Friendly London and Child and Youth Network programs) by presenting our Guitar Program, Song Writing program, Rhythm and Rhymes program (for pre-school children). We also offer our Snack Stop (summer food security for children and youth), Kids First Day (more than 50 area businesses and activities at no or little cost, open to the public on a shared PA day), and Blue Boxes for Books, at all of the above City based

facilities! We have a strong desire to support the City support others, even through our civic duty – by committing to cleaning parks, and creating “public spaces”.



So much has changed over the last 24 years – but our mandate has always remained undaunting; our *raison d’etre* remains as it always has been – focused on doing all we can to support, engage and offer positive growth experiences for all children and youth in London and area! Another of our main pillars is to help resolve child and teen negative physical and/or mental challenges impacting our children and youth. This theme provides a strong essence – and drive - for our program development – and the Pandemic reaffirmed for us that this pillar – sustaining child and youth mental health and positive mindsets – is indeed imperative!

Despite the crisis the recent Pandemic caused, we have remained strong and resolute in our Mission and Vision. Our staff was well tested; but in that they hold high levels of resilience, skills and talents, they quickly manoeuvred, made adjustments, realigned, and adapted; to learn about and

experimented with new technologies; and ultimately navigated their delivery to answer the challenges presented to them.

We also continue to cherish our relationship and partnership with the **VON/OSNP**. Not only do we collaborate in regard to leading the CNN, but we also assist each other in our unique programs; whether it involves getting nutrition and food materials to our school communities, searching for new grants and funding opportunities, or simply “combining forces” to ensure that ALL children, youth and families of London and the surrounding area are very well served!



We continued with our annual “**Book Camp**”, which is always a popular program - especially for those students searching for interests other than sports. In 2021 and 2022 we needed to move to an online version, (called the **Young Authors’ Virtual Camp**) which proved that the need and interest of this program keeps it in high demand! This August, we will again be presenting this program on a virtual platform, because it works well!



We always look toward partnering with other community groups, such as the London Knights, and Harrison Pensa; who graciously covered the costs of ice time for the “Free Skate Night” with the London Knights. More than 150 people participated in that event. The London Knights also help us collect food donations from their patrons for our CNN program.



Our **Song Writing** program shined the light on a few “aspiring composers”. With a little guidance, our young musicians studied the background of Tim Hortons, created lyrics, composed an incredible melody and catchy harmony, and professionally recorded their “Smile” song; giving our local Tim Hortons store owners a “gift of thanks” for once again choosing us as a beneficiary (along with the Children’s Health Foundation), for their Smile Cookie Program. The SMILE song can be heard on the “Smile Cookie” page of our website www.investinginchildren.on.ca

This is the least we could do for our good friends at Tim Hortons! Their benevolence, generosity, and caring for our community is simply incredible! We are amazed – and completely indebted – to their support and belief in our mission and vision of helping, supporting, coaching, teaching, and caring for all children and youth in our area!

Our “Guiding Imperatives”:

- the importance of branding / building awareness,
- keeping all 12 programs sustained – thriving – and growing!
- the importance of providing relevant and top-quality programming,
- the importance of networking,
- the importance of maintaining a collaboration with the VON (OSNP), (New 2021)
- searching for funds, building relationships with donors,
- effective grant writing,
- brainstorming and developing new, innovative, valuable and relevant programming,
- appraising the strengths of the staff, moving toward cross-collaboration,
- discovering what challenges and pressure points we are and will be facing
- supporting and reporting to our Board of Directors
- continue to search out where needs exist (gaps) to serve children and youth in London and the surrounding counties. We are committed to effectively filling those gaps with our programs to serve their:
 - Positive Mind set and promoting personal wellness, and mental health (a highlighted focus resulting directly from the Pandemic)
 - Capacity to change negative life trajectories of our children and youth, in regard to fighting poverty and hunger

- Ability to understand what healthy nutrition is, and ensuring that our programs do whatever possible to get children and youth nutritious food whenever, and wherever, possible
- Literacy and Math skills and needs. We continue to promote and nurture effective Family Literacy programming (especially in light of the fact that London will soon see a new influx of Newcomer families). Focus on “The Science of Reading”, and new Ministry of Education Math initiatives.
 - Develop early, effective and collaborative plans for City Funding Application
 - Given the very latest (Nov. 2022) Standardized Literacy and Math scores (showing only 47% of Gr. 6 students in the province meeting the provincial standard), enhancing the Math component of the FLME program to serve the students better, from a foundational perspective – in that this program serves students from K-3.
 - Consider adding a Financial Literacy and/or Coding aspect to FLME
 - Reaching out to offer our programs in areas beyond the City of London boundaries
 - We need to continually search out new ways of ensuring the public knows of us – and our work

Here at Investing in Children, we are truly a “small but mighty” staff. When I think of our core staff of 5 individuals, and the reach this core impacts – I remain amazed. Our staff is fully committed to our Vision and Mission statements, and their foundational beliefs. All of us here at Investing in Children are fully committed to nurturing child and youth mental health, nutrition, literacy, leadership, music, and eliminating all barriers so that all of London’s children and youth may grow and thrive; through experiencing a wide array of programs, activities and/or learning that invite participation and foster full inclusion, without experiencing any limitations, boundaries, or pressures, of any sort.

I continue to be proud of our staff from the point of view that not only has each shown incredible resilience through the Pandemic; but each has kept the mission alive by adapting the programs to make them all *more* effective. While some in-person events needed to understandably be paused, they focused on sparking new ideas and programs – like “Live Different Circles” – aimed at keeping kids communicating sharing, and most importantly I believe, fed their spirit, and their mental health overall. Each continually examined what the needs of our children, youth and families is – and developed strategies as to how best to address these needs. Our staff has lived true collaboration in all they do. They support each other by sharing their knowledge, passion, and simple advice. They remain constantly in touch with each other, share concepts, ideas and opinions, and support each other in thoughts and tasks. I am also proud in the way that we have enhanced our capacities to collaborate more powerfully. Our Volunteer list stands at 200 people; which is a feat in its own, given the crisis we are hopefully leaving behind. It is incredible to see our office buzzing with several volunteers – often happy to do menial tasks, like “cutting paper skeletons”, or sanitizing donated books; all seemingly simple chores – but very necessary.

Our staff also continues to use their talents, knowledge, contacts and skills from their personal training and education; Janet, as a Field Supervisor in the area of Early Childhood Education at the College level, and Sarah, in the areas of studying Journalism and Digital Marketing. Lucy graduated recently from Accounting at Fanshawe, and Amy, not only a graduate from Fanshawe’s Early Childhood Leadership program, but also a UWO student – recently graduating with a Masters of Arts in Education Studies, in the field of critical policy, equity and leadership studies.

Undoubtedly the most significant financial celebration we have experienced in our history is to humbly be chosen as one of two area recipients of the “Tim Hortons Smile Cookie” campaign. While this program has undoubtedly resulted in significant income for us, it also assists us in putting investing on the “community stage” – helping to build our public community recognition – letting people know of the fantastic impact we have on all children and youth in our area! This is priceless! We continue to appeal to the folks at Tim Hortons that being partnered with Children’s Health Foundation exhibits a natural support of the CHF critical role of saving baby’s lives, and also our role in nurturing children and youth on their continued life journey; continuing to nurture the minds and bodies of children and youth, in numerous ways. People have noted that both of our non-profit entities support children from “birth to teen years”. Hopefully Tim Hortons will allow us to remain their choice of charity for years to come!

In closing, I would like to share a HUGE thank you to our staff, interns, and volunteers for their commitment to excellence, their passion, their creativity, and their efforts!

I am also very thankful to our Board, most of whom have been with me throughout my 6 year tenure. Tony has been an excellent Chair – being always available to listen, to suggest, to support, and to act. All of our members truly and sincerely care about the mission – and the workings – of our Charity. They obviously are fully committed to making the lives of children and youth in London and the surrounding counties better – by supporting decisions that make a significant difference in the lives of children and youth in London, Middlesex, Elgin and Oxford!

And our DONORS! WOW!!!

Thank you for all you do – for when you support us, you are supporting thousands of children, youth and families in London and the surrounding communities!!

In terms of donations, we appreciate the incredible support of:

Tim Hortons Smile Cookie Campaign	The Sisters of St. Joseph	Kiwanis Club of Ingersoll
The Harry E. Foster Foundation	The Magna Corporation	Lions Club of Woodstock
The Miggsie Foundation	Ontario Min. Tourism, Sport, Culture	Cargill
Lutheran Social Services of London	Subway – Adelaide North	SelectPath
The Westminster Foundation	Kiwanis Club of Rodney	City of London - CYN
The London St. Thomas Assoc. of Realtors	Kiwanis Club of Forest City London	Maple Leaf
The Agape Foundation	Jill Wilcox Foundation	Dr. Richard Haddad
Kiwanis Club Forest City	Hydro One	Lerners LLP
Kiwanis Club of West Lorne	London Food Bank	Law Society Foundation
London Community Foundation	London Police Association	The Good Foundation
Ilderton District Lions Club	Excellence in Literacy Foundation	

I would also like to extend my deepest “Thank you” to our wonderful Board of Directors, who are quick to offer advice, assistance and support, whenever we call for it! A sincere “Thank You” from us all!!

Respectfully submitted by Ted Gorski, Executive Director of Investing in Children



Investing in Children

Best Children's Charitable Program 2021







