SUNSHINE COAST'S

VitalSigns® 2016

SUNSHINE COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

A community perception of where we live

THE SUNSHINE COAST COMMUNITY FOUNDATION PRESENTS VITAL SIGNS 2016

The Sunshine Coast Community Foundation is a charitable organization that brings together people who care about the Sunshine Coast community.

Our mission is "to contribute to the quality of life on the Sunshine Coast by building endowments, making meaningful grants and inspiring community leadership."

The Foundation has published full Vital Signs reports in 2009, 2011 and 2014, bringing community knowledge to life in one location. Each report is a snapshot of the Sunshine Coast that presents our challenges and celebrates our accomplishments. This year, the Vancouver Foundation invited all 51 BC Community Foundations to take part in a survey which focused on where they live. Respondents told us what they most loved about living where they live and gave us an insight into some of their concerns.

Unlike the traditional Vital Signs full report based on statistical data, this report is based only on the participant's perceptions. This survey has given us valuable information prior to the next full report, scheduled for 2018. By providing this information at this time, it is our hope that we will encourage individuals and organizations to take action in areas of primary concern which may influence positive change in our community.

This province wide survey captured 7000 BC residents and was broken down into communities.

Thanks to the 426 Sunshine Coast residents who participated in the survey, we were able to get a glimpse of why people have chosen to live in this amazing community. Demographically, the majority of respondents (71%) **were female, over 84% were over 45 years old and 55% lived with a spouse with no dependents.**

What attracts you to a community? Is it the beauty of the landscape? Is it the feeling of belonging? Or maybe it's a feeling of safety? We have highlighted some examples of the survey responses and three stories which capture the essence of the survey findings and showcase some initiatives which are happening here on the coast.

Sunshine Coasters like our natural beauty, are good volunteers and donors but are concerned about employment, housing and the environment.

Highlighted below are some of the most significant survey responses ranging from protecting our environment and wildlife to acknowledging the need for more full-time employment opportunities. What is consistent throughout is the sense of shared responsibility, community spirit and pride in where we live.

In the 2014 Vital Signs report, the lack of housing, both for renters and mortgage holders was flagged as a concern. Also in that report, some key economic indicators were trending upwards, however the struggle for finding more employment opportunities for young adults was evident. In this survey, employment remains a concern and is exacerbated still by the lack of affordable housing.

The number shown first is our community percentage whereas the provincial number is shown in brackets following. For example: Concern for full time employment **opportunities 57% local response (53%) provincial response.**

From a list, respondents selected their 3 most important issues or concerns in their community.

- **Employment 45% (30%)**
- **Housing 34% (41%)**
- **Environment 34% (24%)**

Since 2008 the Sunshine Coast Community Foundation has funded Affordable Housing Forums and continues to support programs which contribute to economic development from entrepreneurship to tourism.

What attracts you to a community? Again, from a list, respondents selected their three most important reasons for living on the Sunshine Coast.

- **Natural Beauty/Scenery 63% (36%)**
- **Overall Quality of Life 44% (30%)**
- **Sense of Community 32% (13%)**

For many people, being socially connected is a key component to being part of a community or neighbourhood.

Again from a list, respondents chose things that they had done in the past 12 months. The top 3 were:

- **Visited local library or community centre 89% (72%)**
- **Donated to a cause 79% (67%)**
- **Volunteered 75% (50%)**

NATURAL BEAUTY OUR NUMBER ONE ATTRACTION

For many of us living on the Sunshine Coast it is about natural beauty and scenery that is present every day and every season here. After all we are the poster perfect location to boast *"Super Natural British Columbia."* For Becky Wayte, living here is about being close to nature.

"I am in the forest every day with my dogs and it really restores me. It has become necessary in my life."

Becky first visited the coast when she was a young child and later moved here with her family where she finished high school. Leaving the coast to finish university, she came back to stay in 1989 with her husband and young son.

"It just seemed like the best place to raise a family. I'll never forget how welcome I felt only a few weeks after we moved here. I was walking down the street in my new neighbourhood and a woman almost pounced on me because our kids were the same age. It was the start of a great network of friendships which continue today."

In fact **61% (45%) feel new residents are welcomed into a new neighbourhood and (compared to 65% provincially) 81% feel a sense of belonging.**

"Being able to get out in nature is really important to me. When my dog, Nick, had issues with other dogs, I wanted to find trails where I could walk him and not run into a lot of people. This was really the catalyst for me creating my website, Sunshine Coast Trails."

The website took off and what she had hoped to be completed in 2 years, she finished in 6 months.

Now the website, along with the Facebook page has hundreds of followers featuring her personal photos, maps and trails along the entire coast.

"It's my personal contribution to our community. I feel very fortunate to live in such a beautiful place."

SAFETY AND SENSE OF BELONGING

"It's like traveling around the world but not having to leave the Coast." Maria Giltrow, an immigrant from Argentina says with a smile and sense of belonging. *"Living here, I am safe, my family is safe. My children can run and play outside, surrounded by nature and beauty. We have unobstructed views from our home. Where I came from, the fences were so high, many times you couldn't see the houses behind them."*

Maria is not alone, **86% (78%)** of respondents are **not afraid to walk alone in the dark** and the biggest concern **37% (8%) is wild animals** as opposed to being the victim of a violent attack. Maria, a Coordinator with Welcoming Communities, says her job focuses on welcoming new immigrants to the community. As an immigrant herself, Maria has a personal understanding of moving to a new country and feeling like she was an outsider.

"Being new to the community, it was hard to meet people. Getting a job helped me for sure. My first job was at the Gibson's Public Library. It helped me meet people and expand my sense of belonging here."

Libraries and Community Centres often act as a social hub which can expand beyond outreach programs. They are places for everyone to gather; seniors, young families and social groups of all kinds. Welcoming Communities has a range of initiatives to help new immigrants meet and grow their connections on the Sunshine Coast. The latest venture involves a number of ladies from all over the world.

"What is so special is that there is no one prominent group or culture," says Maria, *"we are all the same here."* The group met during a 3 month Multicultural Kitchen project. Every week, one person took the lead and shared a recipe from their home country. After the project was complete, their bond of friendship was so strong they wanted to keep meeting. This was the beginning of the new venture, the Multicultural Cookbook, which will feature the recipes they have shared with each other.

"We are so grateful to the Sunshine Coast Community Foundation who helped us fund the project. It is our hope that the cookbook will be a gateway for bringing people together, creating bonds with the immigrant community and help people to understand our cultures."

PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT

"It was like coming home." Lee-Ann Ennis recalls arriving on the Sunshine Coast. *"I arrived on a sailboat and knew this was the place I wanted to live and raise my family. The entire community was so welcoming, all of a sudden, it seemed like I had a whole network of friends. Friends who were my new family."* Lee-Ann, a marine biologist, recalls her job interview sitting on styrofoam blocks in front of what is now the Iris Griffiths Centre prior to its construction. *"I immediately felt I had found where I could make a difference."*

Since that day, Lee-Ann has shared her knowledge and passion with countless local school classes, visitors from all over the world and local residents. The Centre's icon, an amazing log building, is compliant with all the LEED building standards. *"People come here not only to see what we are doing for the environment but to see the facility itself."*

The facility boasts solar and wind technology and is surrounded by native plants and natural wetlands which are home to many species of insects and invertebrates. *"The centre is really a landmark on our coast having launched the careers of many up and coming biologists. This year we had 6 summer students."*

Since the centre opened, the activities have grown from awareness for environmental diversity, to preservation and education. Sharing responsibility is key says Lee-Ann. *"I have serious concerns over the threatened eradication of local painted turtle populations which are being poached illegally at an alarming rate from local lakes."*

Her thoughts are mirrored by many respondents. **27% (21%) feel a sense of shared responsibility** when it comes to **protecting our environment** and **45% (33%) feel that protecting our local wildlife** is essential.

The Foundation has played a significant role since the centre's inception. For over 10 years, grants have been given to support various aspects of environmental support. Whether it is driving the Duck Bus with a load of school children or hiking in the trails surrounding Ruby Lake to find rare species, it is clear. Lee-Ann Ennis is driven by passion and determination. She shares her extensive knowledge with everyone, inspiring young people to connect with nature and fostering awareness in environmental bio-diversity.

Thanks to all 426 participants who completed the survey. As communities change, so do priorities, so we will be continuing to gather information through similar surveys, document data and invite participants to give us their input through our next full Vital Signs report scheduled for 2018.

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