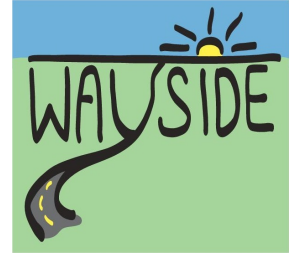


2025 Community Impact Report: Waterloo Wayside

Connecting Uptown: A Year of Dignity, Nutrition, and Belonging



Executive Summary

In 2025, Waterloo Wayside served as a critical anchor for Uptown Waterloo during a period of unprecedented regional demand. By leveraging an "Asset-Based" model, we transformed thousands of pounds of food and clothing into a platform for community connection. This year was defined not only by the scale of our relief efforts—including over **218,000 lbs** of food (valued at over **\$787,000**) for individuals and families and **2,500+** pairs of footwear—but by the inclusive volunteer ecosystem that makes our work possible.

Our Approach: Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)

At Waterloo Wayside, we operate on the principles of Asset-Based Community Development. We believe that every individual in our community—whether a guest, a volunteer, or a director—possesses unique gifts, skills, and capacities. Our goal is not to "fix" a neighbourhood, but to mobilize the assets that already exist within it.

Community Impact

- **Fostering Resilience through Connection:** The organization's impact is centred on reducing social isolation. By providing a space where people "know your name," Wayside helps marginalized individuals build connections that increase their ability to withstand adversity.
 - **Empowerment and Skill Building:** Many volunteers at the centre began as guests. This "restorative nature" allows individuals to move from receiving help to contributing their own skills, such as dish-washing, table setup, or even pursuing further education (e.g., nutrition) after their experiences at Wayside.
 - **Meeting Immediate and Long-term Needs:** While addressing immediate physical needs for food and clothing, Wayside's programs are designed to support the long-term goal of helping individuals live independently within an inclusive community.
 - **Integrated Support:** The centre augments food bank staples with fresh vegetables and essential hygiene items like toilet paper, soap, and shampoo (approximately 7,000 units annually) to provide a more holistic level of support.
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1. Food Security: A Lifeline in Uptown

As food insecurity reached record levels across the region, Wayside scaled its operations to ensure no neighbour was left behind.

- **Food Bag Program:**
 - **\$536,968** in total food value distributed.
 - **149,991 lbs** of food provided via The Food Bank of Waterloo Region.
 - **2,381 unique individuals** served, including **812 children** and **250 post-secondary students**.
 - **New Capacity:** Added **517 new families** to the program this year alone.
 - **Bridgeport Café:**
 - Distributed **68,830 lbs** of food with a service value of **\$250,541**.
 - Served an average of **40 guests per day** in December, with peak days reaching **90 guests**.
 - Beyond nutrition, the Café provided a "Third Space" for social interaction, cited by **76% of survey respondents** as a primary driver for attendance.
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2. Essential Needs & Physical Dignity

We recognize that dignity begins with basic comfort and safety in our climate.

- **The Footwear Milestone:** Distributed **2,500+ pairs of shoes and boots**, providing essential mobility and warmth.
 - **Sharewear & Hygiene:** Distributed **1,200+ pairs of socks** and hundreds of winter coats. Our partnership with the Waterloo Public Library (Teen Team) and University Gates ensured that "luxury" essentials like toiletries remained accessible to all.
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3. Healthy Aging & Wellness

Our wellness programs address the specific needs of our aging population in Uptown.

- **Chair Yoga for Healthy Aging:**
 - This program provided vital fall prevention and mobility support for local seniors.
 - Supported by **11 WLU CSL students**, fostering inter-generational connection.
 - Facilitated **over 650 Healthy Aging Connections** throughout the year.

- **Mental Health: 24% of survey respondents** identified as navigating a mental health condition, highlighting Wayside as a safe, non-judgmental space for emotional support.
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4. Our Inclusive Volunteer Ecosystem

Wayside is "powered by people" from every walk of life. In 2025, our operations were sustained by a unique mix of partners:

- **Academic Mentorship: Wilfrid Laurier University (CSL)** students provided hundreds of hours of service, learning firsthand about social justice.
 - **Vocational Inclusion: Karis Disability Services** volunteers were core to our Food Bag operations, finding purpose and community through service.
 - **Youth Engagement: KCI (ACE Program)** students provided the essential labor of unloading Food Bank deliveries, gaining work experience and community pride.
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5. The Geography of Need and Resilience

The 2025 Wayside Community Impact Survey provides a snapshot of the current living situations and economic realities of our community members:

- **City of Residence: A Regional Resource**

While physically located in Uptown Waterloo, the survey confirms that Wayside is a vital resource for the broader region.

- **Waterloo:** 52%
- **Kitchener:** 38%
- **Cambridge/Other:** 10%
- *Note: This regional draw underscores the unique role Wayside plays as a low-barrier "entry point" for services in the Tri-Cities.*

- **Housing Status: Addressing the Crisis**

The survey highlights the diverse housing needs of our participants, from those in stable housing to those on the front lines of the housing crisis.

- **Stably Housed:** 67%
- **Subsidized Housing:** 5%
- **Unsheltered:** 10%

- **Unstable Housing/Couch Surfing:** 5%
- *Impact Narrative: With 15% of surveyed participants currently lacking stable or permanent housing, our programs like ShareWear (boots/shoes) and the Bridgeport Café (daily warmth) are essential for survival and dignity.*
- **Primary Source of Income: Meeting the Gap**

Wayside supports those who are often overlooked by traditional systems or are struggling to make ends meet on fixed incomes.

- **Government Assistance (ODSP, OW, CPP):** 38%
- **No Income:** 19%
- **Employment Income:** 19%
- **Living on Savings/Other:** 5%
- *Context: Matching this with the Food Bag Program data (where 330 households reported no income), it is clear that Wayside serves as the primary safety net for those with the least financial flexibility.*

6. The Voice of the Community

Comments collected from our 2025 Wayside Community Impact Survey:

“Wayside can turn stressful afternoons into passable moments of rest and nourishment.”

"Been able to gain some weight back. Meeting people, getting connected through word of mouth."

"A place to belong, relax, drink coffee. Sharing life experience, recipes, etc. Checking on others and people to check on you. Good food, good company."

Our 2025 survey revealed that while guests come for the food, they stay for the **Respect, Friendship, and Safety**. Over **52% of guests** feel their personal skills are recognized here, proving that Waterloo Wayside is not just a service provider—it is a community where everyone belongs.