

ACTIVATE AURORA: Is being active enough?

By Ron Weese

Our objective of activating Aurora is a good one but it is only one piece of the 'well-being' puzzle. I would be misleading you by suggesting that just being more active was the 'cure' because, while it is important, it is only one aspect of well-being, which is the real goal.

The 2016 Canadian Index of Well-Being-How Are Canadians Really Doing? (<https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing>) was released from the University of Waterloo and while it is a lengthy and often complicated document, it is rich in important messages about what we should be considering regarding our health and happiness.

The most disturbing aspect of the Report is that the gap between our country's economic growth and well-being is widening. Simply put, 'When Canadians go to bed at night, they are not worrying about Gross Domestic Product (GDP). They are worried about stringing together enough hours of part-time jobs, rising tuition fees, and affordable housing. They are thinking about the last time they got together with friends or the next time they can take a vacation. Maybe that is why they are getting less sleep than 21 years ago.' Sound familiar?

The Ontario Trillium Foundation (OTF) commissioned a Report from this group regarding well-being in Ontario called 'Well-Being-How Are Ontarians Really Doing.' The OTF of course has a direct interest in impact, being a major funding agency in our Province. They fund activities such as Activate Aurora that are designed to create positive impact.

So what can we learn about our well-being from this Report on the Central Region? (Dufferin, Halton, Peel, Simcoe, Waterloo Wellington and York Counties) We learn that 7.4% of us report having diabetes; higher than the national rate of 6.7%. Thankfully almost three-quarters of the residents in the Central Region are living with no health or activity limitations; the highest in the province, indicating that fewer people are facing health-related difficulties in their day-to-day living. We volunteered for culture and recreation organizations for an average of 30.5 hours in the past year, which is quite a bit lower than the national average of 34.3 hours.

It is interesting to note that Adam Grant in his New York Times Bestseller, Give and Take, reports that the 'sweet spot' for annual volunteering, that contribution that gives the greatest personal satisfaction is 100 hours annually or about 2 hours per week. Time away on holiday has been steadily decreasing in recent years and, in our Region, we are down to only 2.8 nights per year spent away overnight and if the trend continues, residents will receive fewer of its benefits.

In the Central Region, 15.2% of residents are working 50 hours or more each week, well beyond the 35 to 40 hours of full-time employment recommended and the highest across Ontario. The average commute time of 55 minutes per day on average is one of the longest in Ontario, falling just short of commute times reported in Toronto.

One great piece of news is that smoking rates among teens (aged 12 to 19 years) have been steadily decreasing across Ontario over the years but almost six per cent of teens (5.9%) living in the Central Region report smoking, which is similar to the provincial rate. This report contains bellwether information that can help us as we move towards building a community that strives for well-being. We can and will compare how our community parallels others with respect to time in the service of others (volunteering), time we spend in healthy physical activity and we can also monitor the reduction of incidence of lifestyle-related diseases such as diabetes, osteoporosis and obesity.

It has been said that if you can't measure it, you can't manage it, so our direction is clear. We at Activate Aurora want to not only encourage an active community but also to measure that activity considering known, credible sources so we can one day boast to have 'Canada's Most Active Community.' We ask you to Join Us! at www.activateaurora.ca and learn how to participate.