

LEGACY

Leading the Foundation forward

On September 1, 2024, Rudi Wallace formally began his tenure as Hamilton Community Foundation's President & CEO. Rudi shares his thoughts on how he will lead HCF in addressing our city's big issues.



What is your overall vision for the Foundation?

Rudi: I want to keep building on HCF's legacy and work. I want to see our values in action more and more — particularly Equity and Reconciliation — for instance, how we unlearn some of our traditional practices and increasingly centre the voices and lived experiences of those we serve for lasting impact and real systemic change.

In Victoria — and now in Hamilton — I saw the intersection of the housing, mental health and opioid crises and the need for change in traditional funding models. This ultimately led me to philanthropy, where I want to shift how funders work with community.

I'm proud that, with our Indigenous partners, we have co-created a Declaration of Action on Truth and Reconciliation. It is our responsibility to build on the work of those who came before us: bringing folks together, renewing old partnerships and forging new ones around critical issues.

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On track

A new report highlights what HCF has learned from students in Grad Track, a pilot program of the Foundation's ABACUS initiative, and how these insights can further shape our education work.

ABACUS focuses on the middle-school years and the transition into and out of middle school, with the goal of increasing the likelihood that young Hamiltonians who face multiple barriers will graduate from high school and access post-secondary opportunities. Grad Track, a pilot program for students in Grades 6 to 9, ran from 2016 to 2020 in both the Hamilton public and Catholic school boards. It combined mentoring, enrichment opportunities, goal setting, peer interaction and parent involvement to encourage each student's social, emotional, cognitive and academic growth.

In late 2023, HCF staff interviewed 26 of the original 41 Grad Track students to gather their perspectives and lessons learned, including:

- Trusted adults played a crucial role in their journeys through high school and beyond.
- Most students struggled with return to in-person learning after pandemic-related school closures.
- Grad Track trips helped students learn about new jobs and practice teamwork.
- Grad Track helped students imagine a different future and care about school.

Of the 26 students interviewed, 22 graduated high school and the same number plan to attend post-secondary, with 12 already accepted at the time of the interview.

They grow up so fast!

ABACUS, the foundation's education initiative to increase the likelihood that students will access postsecondary education, is marking a decade of making a difference.

The initiative launched in 2014 as a partnership with The Fairmount Foundation. ABACUS granting is funded primarily through HCF's Community Fund. It has evolved over time with a review in 2021 that deepened HCF's focus on equity-deserving communities and transitions into and out of middle-school. Last summer, HCF granted almost \$1.3 million from ABACUS to 28 different programs, including:

- Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg's NYA:WEH program that supports First Nation, Métis and Inuit middle-school students and their families with holistic programming within an inclusive Indigenous educational framework, by helping them to transition to secondary school and by exploring pathways to post-secondary education.
- Mathstronauts' STEAM Engine program that helps hundreds of students in Grades 5 to 8 at high-priority schools learn fundamental computer programming concepts.

- Compass Community Health's PATH program that helps students transition into high school with in-class workshops in Grade 8, goal setting with a mentor during the summer transition to high school and leadership training.

ABACUS intervenes early at a crucial time in students' lives," says President & CEO Rudi Wallace. "It supports local providers in a focused way so that they can give students what they need to succeed later in life."

**ABACUS
is funded
primarily
through the
Community
Fund.**

Cooke helps kick off Corktown co-op

In his final act as Hamilton Community Foundation's President & CEO, Terry Cooke helped kick off construction at a Corktown Co-operative Homes Inc. project at 221 and 223 Charlton Ave. East.

The Foundation supported the co-op in 2017 with a loan to buy an adjacent property for redevelopment into affordable housing. Impact investing allows HCF to align more of its endowed assets with its mission by seeking social impact in addition to financial returns.

In August, Corktown Co-op celebrated receipt of a City building permit with a construction kick-off. Terry, equipped with helmet and shovel, helped with the festivities.

"In my last official act as @HamCommFdn CEO I had the honour of turning the sod for the 17-unit expansion of the Corktown Co-op in my hometown," Terry posted on X. "I was also present as a young City Councillor in 1989 for the opening of the original Corktown Coop. All my life's a circle!"

Grants at a Glance

Class act

A decade-long partnership between Good Shepherd Centres and the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board is helping young parents balance the demands of home and school.

The Jeanne Scott Parent and Child Resource Centre provides parents aged 18 to 25 with support to complete their Ontario Secondary School Diploma, including classes and free onsite child-minding services.

A school liaison support worker, funded in part by HCF, uses an integrated and personalized case management approach to connect students to resources such as housing and life skills programming. Results include

improved mental health for parents and children, reduced involvement with child welfare and greater achievement of educational goals.

"I wasn't even thinking about college," says one graduate, who has enrolled in a trades program. "This school really pushed me to do that, because they're just there for you every step of the way."



Wheels keep on turning

Can a bike ride feel like a vacation? Absolutely, thanks to Cycling Without Age, a worldwide initiative that gives seniors and others with restricted mobility the opportunity to have a slow, safe bicycle ride through their community.

"It's calming. It's communing with nature. Everyone you pass wants to say 'hi'," says passenger Jan Finch. "The whole experience is just awesome."



The Hamilton-Burlington chapter is run by New Hope Community Bikes and gave more than 1,000 passengers almost 700 rides in 2023. This year it's expanding to Dundas thanks to an HCF grant that enables them to purchase a fourth electric-assist trishaw.

Research has shown the benefits, says New Hope's executive director Tammy Heidbuurt: social stimulation, developing relationships, feeling engaged with the community and experiencing the joy of "the wind in their hair."

A fresh start

Deciding to drop out of school often starts with a difficult experience like a suspension. The YMCA Alternative Suspension program offers suspended students another option: the opportunity to transform their time away from school into a positive experience that encourages personal growth, including enhanced social skills and self esteem.

Founded in 1999 by the YMCAs of Quebec, the program has helped 20,000 students worldwide. Hamilton's program began last year in eight public middle schools with support from HCF's Community Fund.

Students attend day-long programming that includes one-on-one support, group workshops, connection to a youth worker for follow up meetings, and referrals to other programs and services including summer activities.

Evaluation showed that all the youth who participated in Hamilton's first year were more engaged in their academics and there was a 43 percent reduction in the severity of their behaviours. As one said, "This program made me think about my actions and how I can handle them better in the future."

Announcing: Open Grants

Until now, charities looking for HCF funding opportunities have had to keep a lookout and apply to different funds throughout the year. Now, HCF is amalgamating most of its open calls into one program with two annual deadlines, and we will help find where you fit. Open Grants will launch this spring; stay tuned!



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What drew you to Hamilton – and HCF?

Rudi: I heard Terry Cooke speak at Victoria Foundation's board retreat. He painted a vivid picture of a different way of operating as a foundation — one that was striving to use all its assets for mission and mandate. And it crystallized for me the responsibility foundations have to think differently. So when the VP of Grants & Community Initiatives role came up, I threw my name into the mix. My partner and I packed up and moved across the country in the dead of winter and the middle of the pandemic. Four years later here we are, committed to the city we now call home. We love the histories, legacies, diversity, institutions, the neighbourhoods, the escarpment (it's not a "mountain" when you're from BC, but it's still a topographical wonder!), the innovative non-profits. There is much good going on, so many intrinsic strengths and assets.

But, like many Canadian cities, Hamilton faces intersecting crises not limited to growing economic disparity, racism, homophobia, displacement, the rise of populism and polarization and the threat of climate change. To say we have work to do is an understatement.

So how do you want to lead HCF in this mix?

Rudi: HCF has a history of stepping into messy, hard work with intentionality and care, and taking risks other institutions wouldn't. We have made progress on behalf of our city and will continue to do so but, again, there is hard work to do.

I consistently come back to one word when thinking about this challenge and opportunity: sobering. The work ahead will challenge our practices and ways of thinking. It will be difficult, and likely will make us feel uncomfortable. But it's up to us to demonstrate our values and I am honoured and deeply humbled that I get to go on this journey with all of you.



Read Rudi's inaugural AGM speech at:
hamiltoncommunityfoundation.ca/2024agm

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