



# 2024 **Abbotsford** **VitalSigns.**



ABBOTSFORD  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

# Welcome & Methodology



## Welcome Message from ACF

On behalf of the Abbotsford Community Foundation (ACF), welcome to the sixth edition of our Vital Signs report. Alongside community foundations across the country, we participate in Vital Signs as a means of checking in on the well-being of our community. This allows us to present data in areas of housing, health, safety, and economy. We do not provide an analysis of the statistics, facts, and our own community's perceptions presented here; this is something we leave to readers of this report.

**Over the years, our Vital Signs program has evolved, and we are proud to announce this year's spotlight. For the first time, we have devoted nearly half of our report to one topic - food security. Why? Because Abbotsford is uniquely positioned.** We are considered "the bread basket of BC." Our agricultural lands are some of the most productive in Canada and our temperate climate allows us to raise a variety of

crops and food products. Yet, there are still members of our community that go hungry.

We spoke with leaders of a local Indigenous nation, agriculture and government, local charities that provide food security programs, and many others to better understand today's food security challenges as well as gather collaborative and innovative solutions being employed in our community to reach a place of food security for all. We hope the perspectives in this report help us cultivate a deeper understanding of the issue and how we may collectively address it.

We are grateful to everyone who took the time to participate in surveys, interviews, and chats. Every single opportunity to engage our community was critical to this report. Thank you all for sharing your time, knowledge, and lived wisdom with us.



Areni Kelleppan  
Executive Director

## Methodology of the Report

Vital Signs relies on statistical data from sources including Statistics Canada, BC Stats, local governments, other local authorities, and local organizations including charities and non-profits. This data comprises the indicators within the report, which have been selected for their ability to support a deeper understanding of trends and changes in various topics essential to community health and well-being. These topics align with specific UN Sustainability Development Goals that ACF has reported on in past Vital Signs reports. These indicators enable us to track changes over time. In our reporting, we always use the most recent data available,

but not all data is updated annually. In addition to the statistical data, Vital Signs uses a community survey to collect both quantitative and qualitative input on important issues facing Abbotsford. Our community survey was open from May - July 2024 and garnered 504 responses. Survey respondents generally reflected community demographics, especially in regards to sex, race, and household income. Survey responses are reported under the "Your Voice" heading, and reflect community perception rather than inarguable fact.

A complete citation list can be found at <https://abbotsfordcf.org/VS2024>.



# Land Acknowledgement Mayor's Message Table of Contents

## Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge that we are located on the traditional and unceded territory of the Stó:lō people, the Semá:th First Nation and Mathxwí First Nation. As treaty People, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, we share the responsibility for the continued stewardship of this beautiful land.

## Mayor's Message

The Abbotsford Community Foundation's Vital Signs Report is an informative snapshot of our community. It highlights our successes and points out areas that need improvement. Through its data and survey responses, we can learn a lot about our residents and the issues that matter most to them. This strategic partnership helps Council advance its advocacy work with senior levels of government and our private sector service providers.

The Vital Signs report can help identify community needs and priorities as we address social issues and regional concerns like food security. Our residents enjoy eating healthy, locally-grown food, but not everyone has access to our farmers' bounty and food banks are facing increased demand.

Food security is also important to poverty reduction, and as the economy continues to get more challenging for families, seniors and all our residents, it is an important item to tackle. One tool is the City's Abbotsford ACCESS program. Through Abbotsford ACCESS, City staff and community partners come together to provide leadership on the topic and develop food security initiatives.

We appreciate the work of the Abbotsford Community Foundation to raise awareness of food security. It is an issue that affects our community in many ways and is certainly deserving of our attention.



*Ross Siemens*

Ross Siemens  
Mayor, City of Abbotsford

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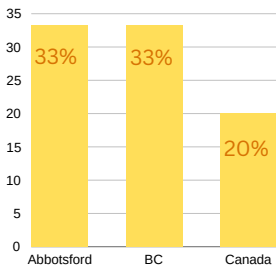


# Abbotsford: A Snapshot of Our Community

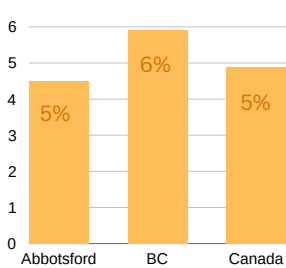


## Demographics of Our City

% of Visible Minority Pop., 2021



% of the Pop. with Indigenous identity, 2021



There are over 50 languages spoken in Abbotsford. Here are the top 5 non-official languages & how to say "how are you?" in each:



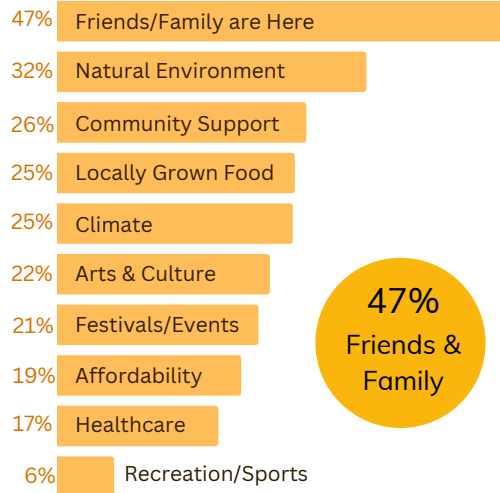
- Punjabi: Tusī kivēṁ hō
- Chinese: Nǐ hǎo ma
- Spanish: Cómo estás
- German: Wie geht es dir
- Tagalog: Kamusta ka

## YOUR VOICE

We asked Abbotsford residents to identify up to three of the community's **strengths** & up to three of the community's biggest **issues**.

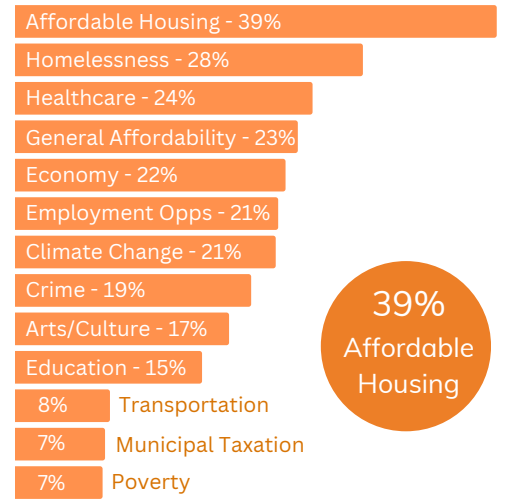
As in 2022, friends and family were chosen as the **best** thing about living in Abbotsford, and affordable housing/homelessness were the most important issues.

“What are the best things about living in Abbotsford?”



47% Friends & Family

“What are the most important issues facing Abbotsford today?”



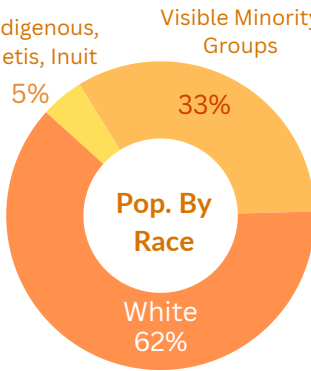
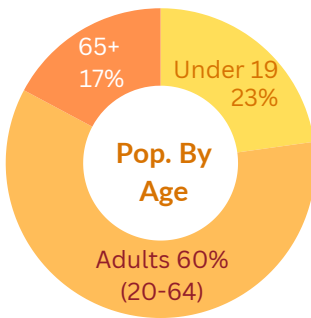
39% Affordable Housing

POPULATION:  
**166,847**

Between 2021-2023, the pop. grew by **8.7%**. This rate of growth locally outpaces BC in general, which grew by 5.4% in the same period.

Abbotsford's median age dropped from 39.2 years in 2021 to **38 years** in 2023. In the same time frame, BC's median age dropped from 42.8 years to 41 years.

Between 2016 -2021, the City welcomed **40,560** new residents. 79.3% were from elsewhere in Canada & 20.7% were from outside of Canada.

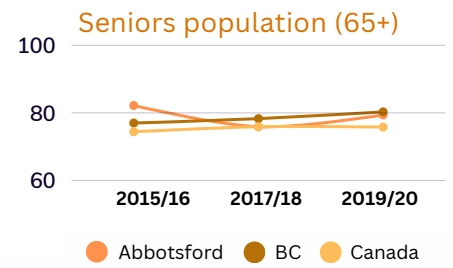
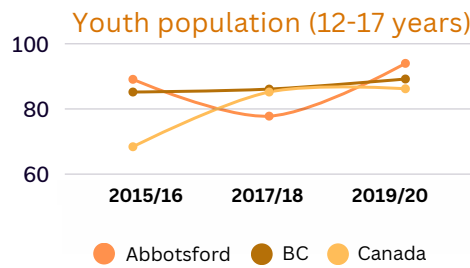
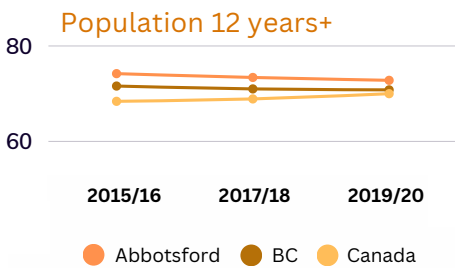


Notable changes: a significant increase in respondents who chose "Festivals and Events" as the best thing about life in Abbotsford, and an equally significant increase in the number of respondents who listed "Healthcare" as an important issue facing Abbotsford, compared to 2022.

# Our Sense of Community Belonging

## Perceptions on Community Belonging

Proportion of population that rate their sense of belonging as 'strong' or 'somewhat strong':

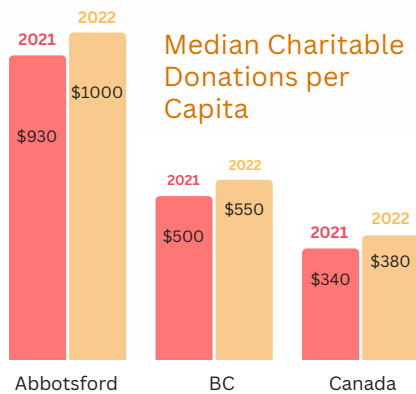


## Community Philanthropy

In 2022, Abbotsford residents made charitable donations totalling :

**\$130,060,000\***

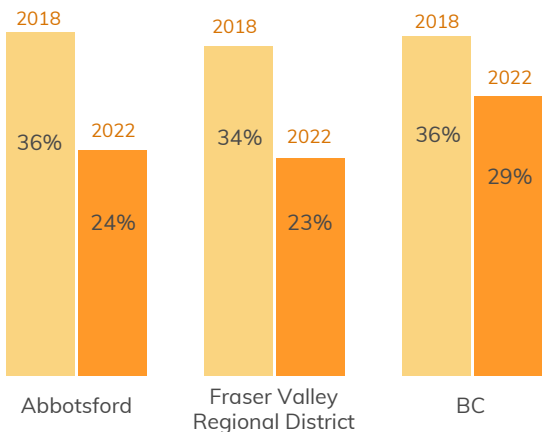
\*Charitable donations made by Abbotsford residents to charities anywhere in Canada



Changes to the Sector Since 2022

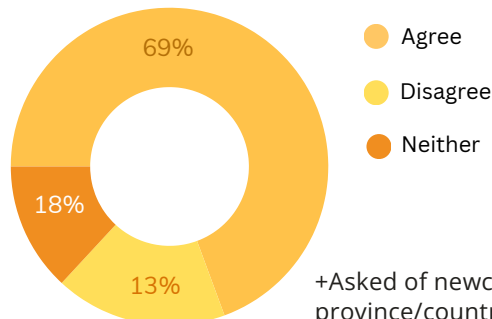
## Civic Engagement

Voter turnout for last 2 municipal, district & provincial elections:



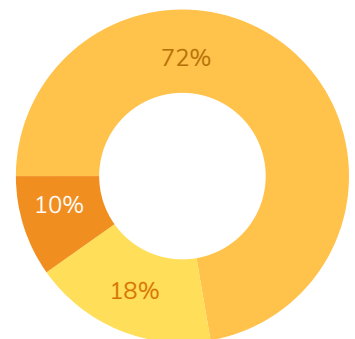
## YOUR VOICE

“ Newcomers to Abbotsford are welcomed by current residents.+ ”



+Asked of newcomers from another province/country, who have lived in Abbotsford for less than 5 years.

“ In general, I am optimistic about my future in Abbotsford. ”



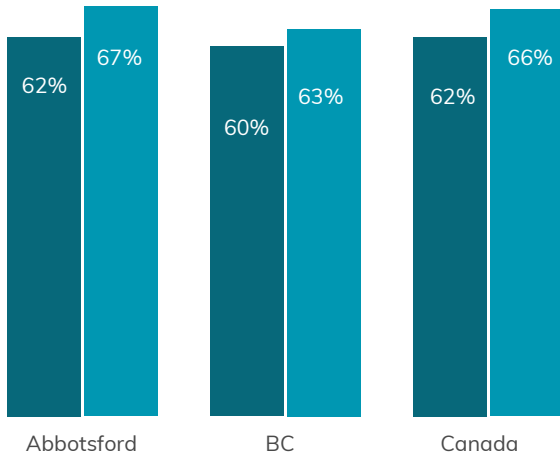
# Health & Well-being



## Health Statistics by Region

% of population 12 years+ that perceive their health to be very good or excellent

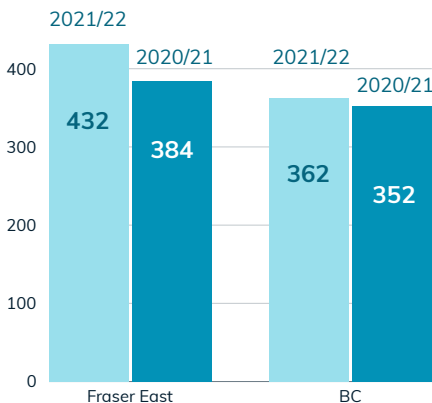
● Physical health ● Mental health



Alcohol consumption by litres per capita (aged 15 years or older)



Incidence of substance use disorder, per 100,000 pop.



**Foundry Abbotsford** provides physical and mental health care, substance use supports, social services and peer support to local youth and young adults along with their families. 2024 marks their 6th year of operation.

“ Foundry is a life changing place that helps me better navigate the world & my life. ”

Foundry Youth Client



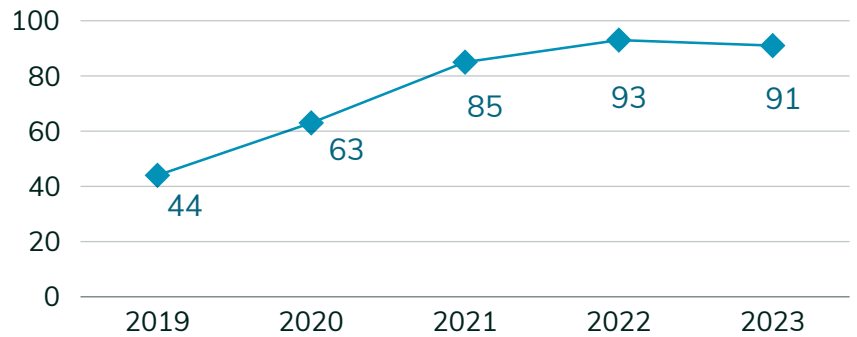
LIFE EXPECTANCY:

**82.6 years**

In 2023, BC's life expectancy was **82.6** years, representing a return to pre-pandemic life expectancy rates, which reached a high of **82.8** years in 2019.

The Abbotsford Division of Family Practice reported that, as of March 2023, **2,208** patients had become attached to a health care provider sometime within the previous year.

Unregulated Toxic Drug Deaths, Abbotsford

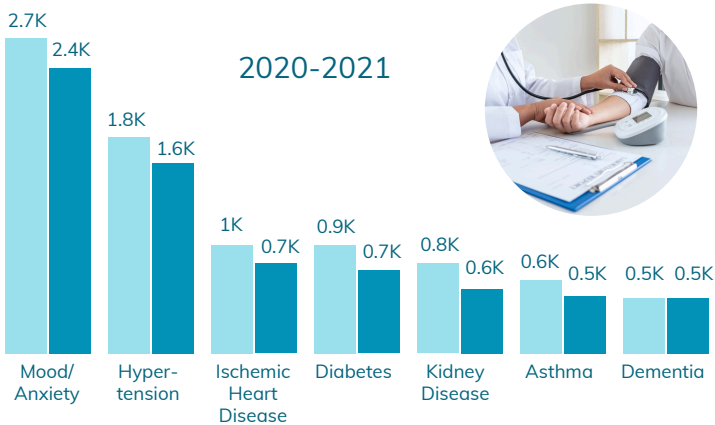




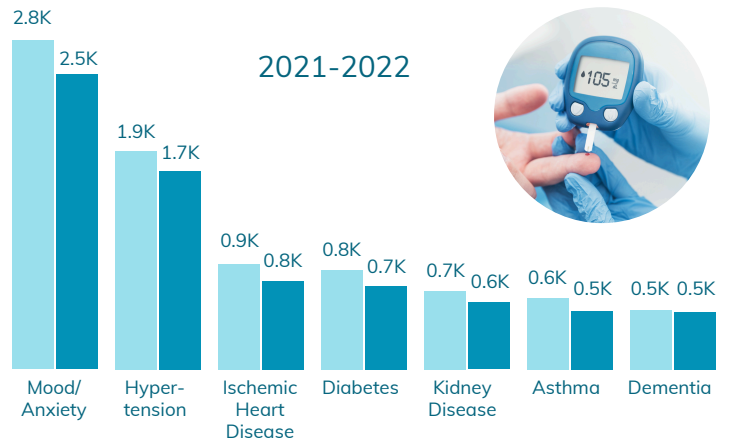
# Health & Well-being

## Incidence of Chronic Disease

per 100,000 pop. ● Fraser Valley East\* ● BC

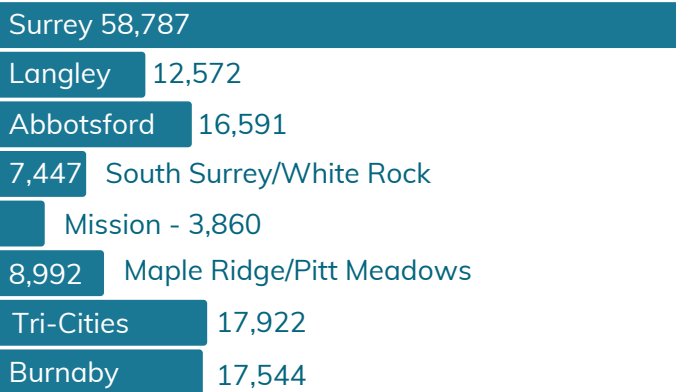


\*Fraser East Health Services Delivery Area (includes Abbotsford)



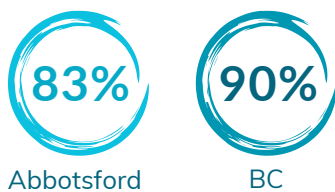
## Covid-19 Cases, Impacts & Vaccination Rates

Fraser Health - Cumulative Covid-19 Cases, Jan 2020 - Oct 2022

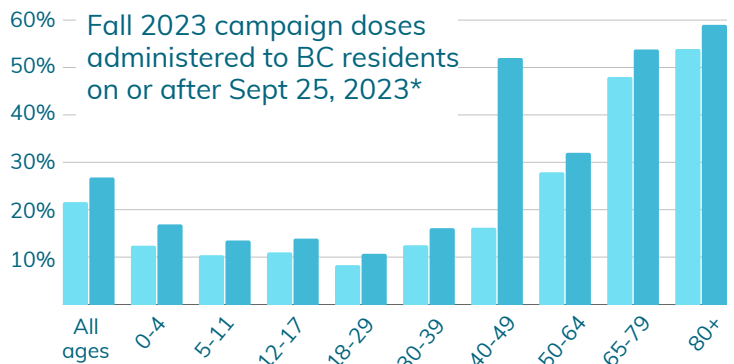


Fraser Health Authority had amongst the highest Covid-19 reported rates per 100,000 pop. in comparison to the rest of BC during this period. N = number of cases.

% of pop. 5 years and older who received second dose of Covid-19 vaccine, Jan - Jun 2022

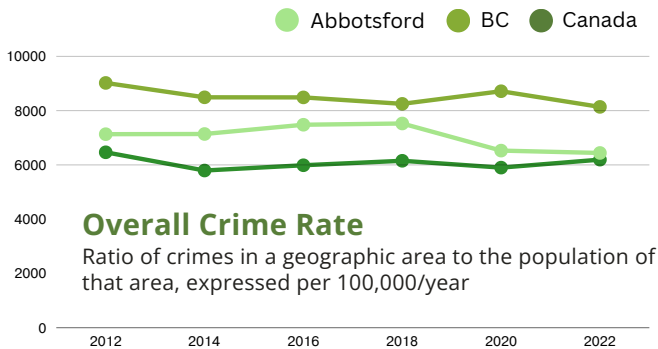


More than 188,000 adults in BC completed the **BC COVID-19 Survey on Population Experiences, Action and Knowledge (SPEAK)** in April-May of 2021. The survey was the second to measure the populations' perceptions of risk, acceptability of public health response and recovery measures, and the broader impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. BC residents self-reported worse mental health, increased stress, greater household conflict, more challenges with access to health care, and decreased connections to community in the time between this survey and its predecessor in 2020.



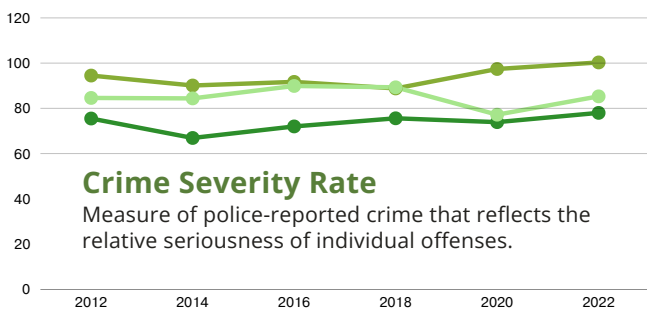
\*Data as of Mar 31, 2024

# Safety, Crime & Perceptions



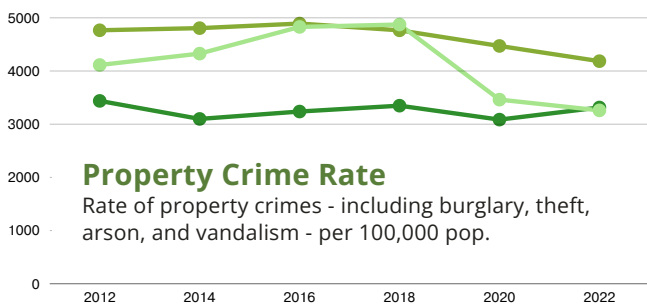
## Overall Crime Rate

Ratio of crimes in a geographic area to the population of that area, expressed per 100,000/year



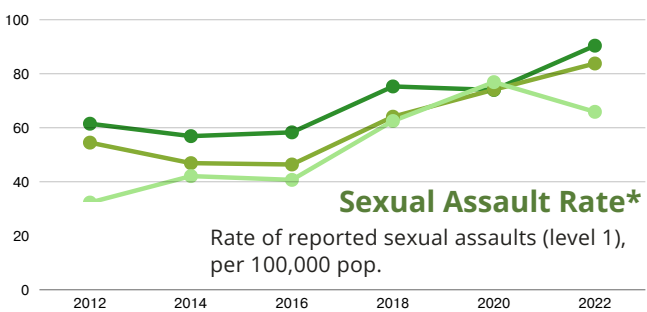
## Crime Severity Rate

Measure of police-reported crime that reflects the relative seriousness of individual offenses.



## Property Crime Rate

Rate of property crimes - including burglary, theft, arson, and vandalism - per 100,000 pop.



## Sexual Assault Rate\*

Rate of reported sexual assaults (level 1), per 100,000 pop.

12

For those fleeing abuse, there are 18 shelter beds for local women & their children.



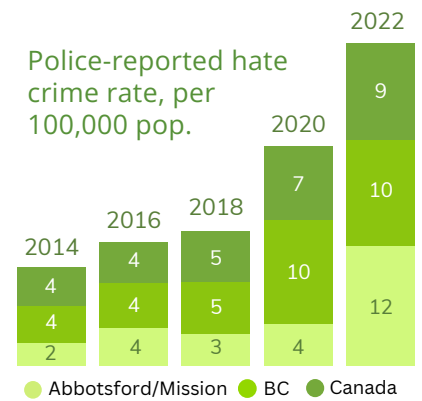
53

# of units

Second-stage options offer stability & safety to families trying to rebuild their lives after fleeing an unsafe situation.

## Hate Crimes

Victims who had prior experiences with police discrimination were significantly less likely to report hate crimes to police compared to victims of non-hate-based crimes.



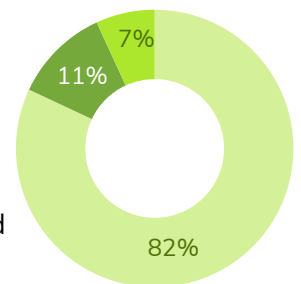
## YOUR VOICE

Compared to 2022, the number of people who would report to police has decreased by 12 percentage points. At the same time, residents feel safer in their neighbourhoods.



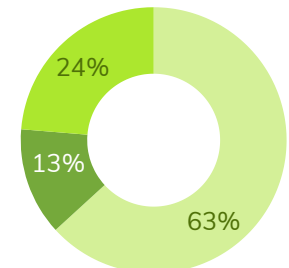
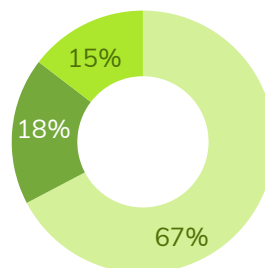
- Strongly Agree/Agree
- Strongly Disagree/Disagree
- Neither

“If I saw a crime committed, I would report it to the Abbotsford Police Department.”



“I feel safe walking alone in my neighbourhood after dark.”

“There is enough police presence throughout the community.”



\*Note: Both sexual assaults and hate crimes are under-reported. A Statistics Canada report from 2008 concluded that less than 10% of sexual assaults are reported to police.





# Safety, Crime & Perceptions

## Victims Services

The Victims Services Unit (VSU) of the Abbotsford Police Department (APD) is responsible for identifying and reaching out to victims of crime, providing them with emotional support, resources and information. Offering 24/7 crisis response, they can deploy to the scene to offer immediate support to victims and witnesses.

### Why We May Perceive or Feel Increases in Crime

While statistics for many different types of reported crime indicate a downward trend, just over 40% of survey respondents indicated crime had **“Increased slightly”** or **“Increased significantly”**.

When asked to consider why they feel crime may have increased, six broad themes emerged in the 175 responses to this question.

#### SOCIOECONOMIC

*“Economic hardship may lead people to obtain funds through illegal means...”*

Many respondents link increased crime rates to economic instability, such as unemployment, poverty, and rising cost of living. They suggest that economic hardships lead people to commit crimes out of desperation.

#### HOMELESSNESS

*“Homelessness has increased, leading to more petty theft and vandalism.”*

Homelessness is seen as both a symptom and a cause of community crime issues. While the need for support for homeless individuals is acknowledged, their presence is also associated with increased crime in the vicinity. There is a call to adequately address homelessness without exacerbating crime rates.

#### SOCIAL & CULTURAL TENSIONS

Responses indicate that racial, cultural, and social tensions contribute to feelings of insecurity and crime. There are mentions of increased racial tension and cultural conflict affecting community safety.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT ISSUES

There is a perceived disconnect between the needs of the community and the effectiveness of law enforcement. Concerns were raised about perceived insufficient police resources and how this may have an impact of law enforcement being able to reduce crime rates.

#### GROWTH & CAPACITY

*“Our population has grown over the past several years, and I don't believe our police force has grown in relation to the population increase.”*

The rapid growth of the population is seen as outpacing expansion of resources, including law enforcement and social services. This imbalance is believed to contribute to crime as communities struggle to adapt.

#### SUBSTANCE USE

*“Drug use, addictions, ...have increased petty crimes.”*

Drugs are perceived as both a direct cause of criminal activity (e.g., drug-related crimes) and indirectly contributing to broader issues such as poverty and homelessness.



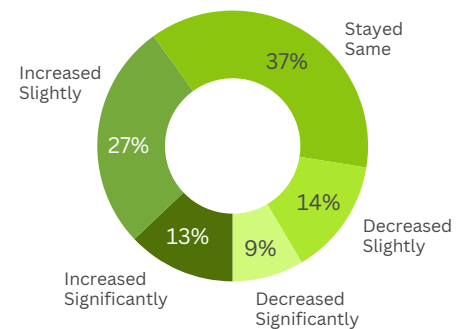
In 2022, VSU was made up of:

- 2 F/T Coordinators
- 25 volunteer staff

## YOUR VOICE



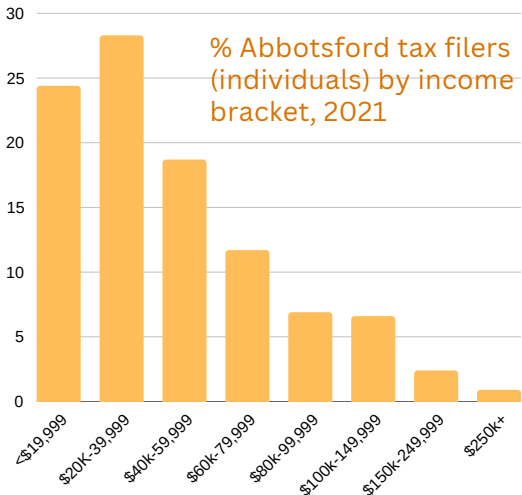
“ In the last 24 months, I feel that crime in Abbotsford has...”



# Income, Work & Economy



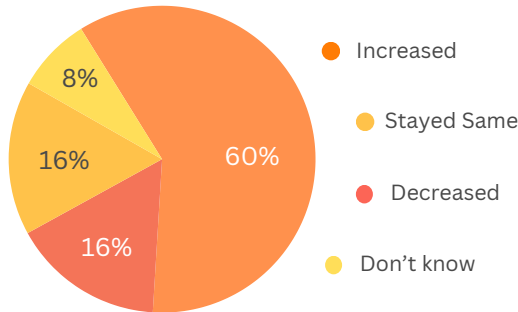
## Household Income Data



The median household income in Abbotsford was \$90,000 in 2021, while the median after-tax household income was \$81,000 per year.

## YOUR VOICE

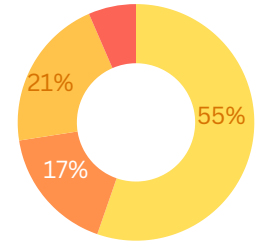
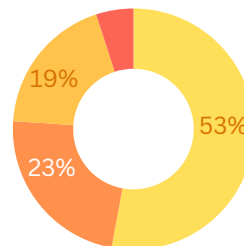
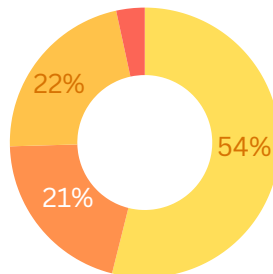
When asked to compare from five years ago, respondents felt the gap between the rich and the poor in Abbotsford has...



“ There are adequate services and supports for the lowest income earners... ”

“ Abbotsford is an affordable place to raise a family. ”

“ Abbotsford is an affordable place to retire. ”



Legend: Agree (Yellow), Neither (Orange), Disagree (Light Yellow), Don't Know (Red)



## Child Poverty Rate

Per the Abbotsford-Mission Census Metropolitan Area (CMA) data in 2021 for those under the age of 19. This compares with 14.3% across BC. Locally, neighbourhoods with the highest prevalence of child poverty were found along South Fraser Way, from West Abbotsford to Downtown Abbotsford.

## LIVING WAGE

**\$20.66\***

\*The Fraser Valley's Living Wage has risen from \$16.75 in 2021 to **\$20.66/hr** in 2023. The number of certified living wage employers in the region has risen, too - from 12 in 2021 to **30** in 2023. The living wage is \$25.68/hr in Metro Vancouver.

## Employment

**107,300** Abbotsford-Mission residents reported employment in 2023. This is a slight decrease from 2022 (110,000) and 2021 (108,000).

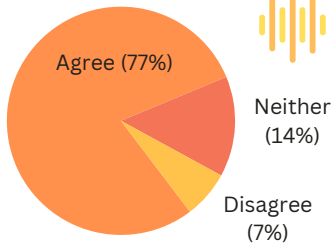
Abbotsford-Mission reported the same unemployment rate as BC: **5.2%**. For Abbotsford-Mission, this was a slight increase over 2022 (4.8%) & an improvement over 2020 and 2021 (7.9% and 6.8%, respectively).



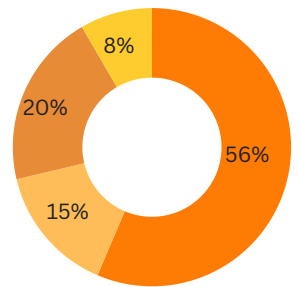
# Income, Work & Economy

## YOUR VOICE

“ My friend group includes people from different economic backgrounds than my own. ”

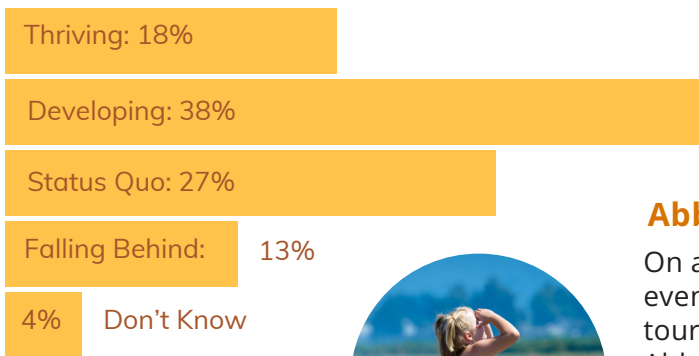


“ There are a number of options for me to work in my chosen career/vocation here in Abbotsford. ”

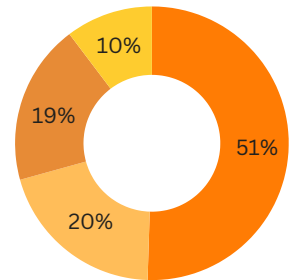


- Strongly Agree/Agree
- Strongly Disagree/Disagree
- Neither
- Don't Know

“ Which of the following adjectives best describes Abbotsford's economy? ”



“ I don't have to leave Abbotsford for training, upskilling, or re-skilling to support my career development. ”



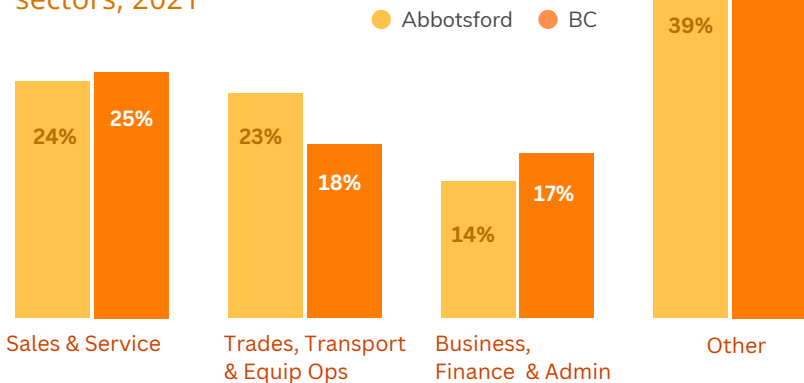
## Abbotsford Tourism

On average, the economic impact of hosting 270+ events/year generates approximately **\$55 million**. Event tourism is a strong economic driver locally, benefiting Abbotsford and its guests.

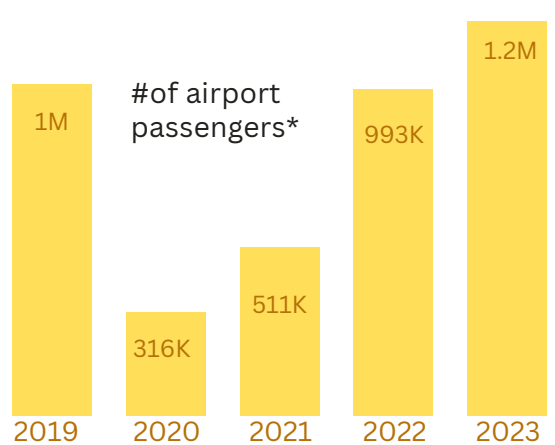


## Economy

Top three employment sectors, 2021



## Abbotsford International Airport



\*2023 was the Abbotsford International Airport (YXX)'s most successful year to date. YXX is one of the first airports to fully rebound from the pandemic and has also surpassed its pre-pandemic figures.

# Housing



## Home Prices, Rentals & Vacancy Statistics

BC Assessment 2024 average assessed value, single family residential home in Abbotsford = \$1,139,000 (increase of 5.5% since 2022, and a decrease of 3% between 2023 and 2024)

Benchmark House Prices by type	Abbotsford	% Change since 2022	Vancouver	% Change since 2022
Detached House	\$1,530,200	↑ 7.5%	\$2,062,200	↑ 1.1%
Townhouse	\$853,800	↑ 12.8%	\$1,145,500	↑ 0.4%
Apartment	\$555,100	↑ 12.4%	\$776,200	↑ 0.5%

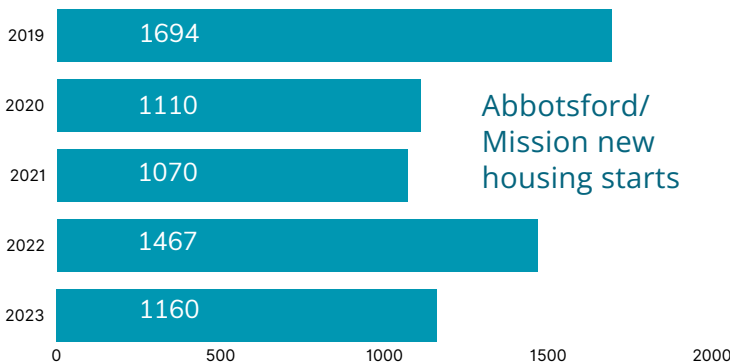
### VACANCY RATE:

**0.9%\***

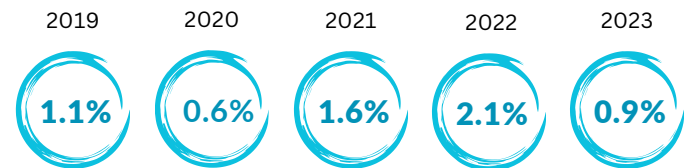
\*Vacancy rate varies by housing type. Bachelor apartment suites have the highest vacancy (2.5%) while 1-bed apartment suites are the lowest (0.8%).



+Total households, 2021



### Abbotsford/Mission rental vacancy rate



Abbotsford/Mission, 2023 average rent

1 Bedroom Apt:

**\$1,224**

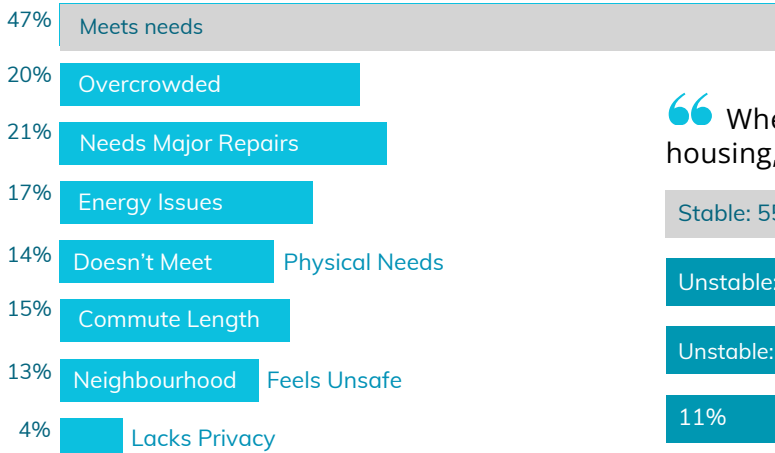
2 Bedroom Apt:

**\$1,483**

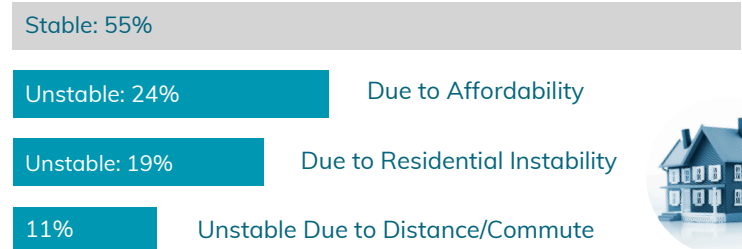


## YOUR VOICE

“When asked to identify factors that prevent their housing from meeting their needs, respondents said:”



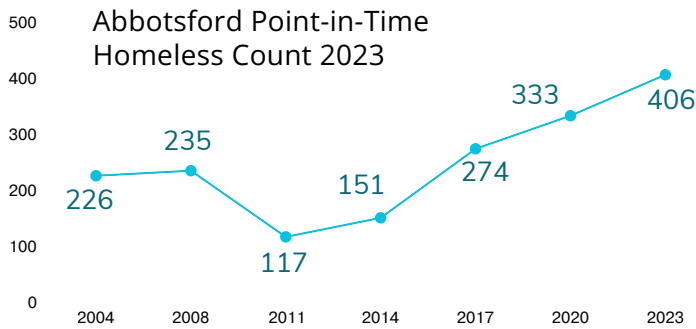
“When asked to describe the **stability** of their housing, respondents said their housing was...”



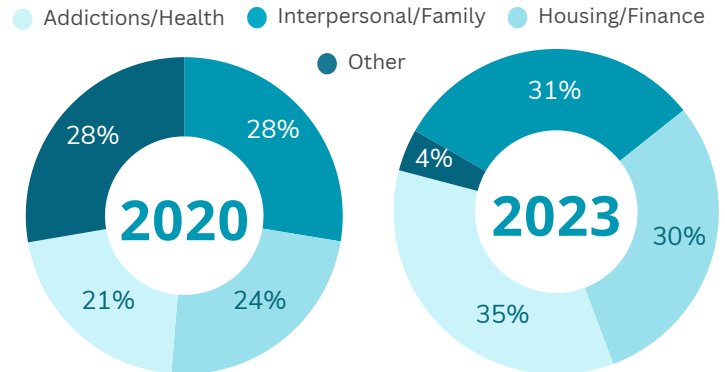


# Homelessness

## Homelessness Statistics

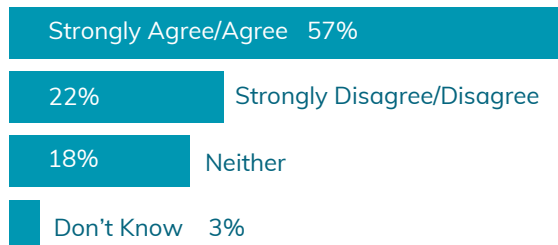


## Top Three Reasons for Homelessness

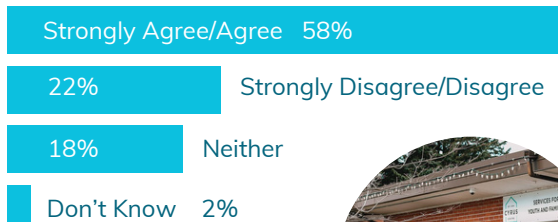


## YOUR VOICE

“ The **City of Abbotsford** takes homelessness seriously and demonstrates this through action. ”



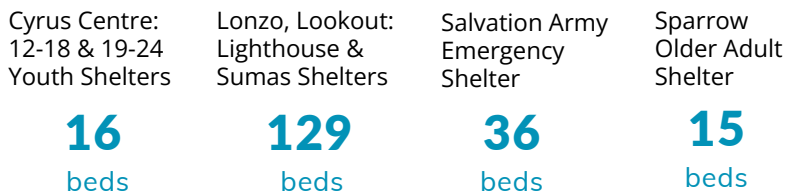
“ The **community** takes homelessness seriously and demonstrates this through action. ”



# of youth  
Cyrus  
Centre  
served in  
2023



## Number of Emergency Shelters (Year-Round Shelter Beds), 2023



SARA for Women: Emergency Shelter & Penny's Place (for women & children fleeing family violence) offers 18 beds.

## Winter Shelters Beds\*, 2023-2024

\*This number varies from year-to-year.

Open nightly during winter (seasonal)



Extreme weather nightly shelter beds (during activations)



Since 2004, **Cyrus Centre** has been providing 24-hour shelter, support, and services to youth aged 12-24 who are without a safe and stable place to live. Their services include a variety of supports including shelter, meals, advocacy, shower, laundry services & more.

“ Cyrus was like a home to me, the first thing like a real home I've had. I love you Cyrus and everyone that works here. ”

- Youth Client

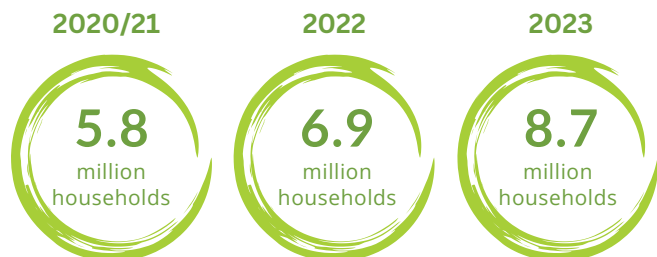
# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Introduction



## Abbotsford's Paradox: Breadbasket of BC & Growing Hunger

Food security: A state in which individuals and households not only have physical access to enough nutritious food but also the economic and social means to obtain it. In plainer terms, the ability of all people to access food that is nutritious, affordable, and appropriate. The inverse of this is **food insecurity**, or the condition of not having access to sufficient food to meet one's basic needs.

Nationally, food insecurity is on the rise. Statistics Canada data indicates that household food insecurity is increasing:



Provincially, the most recent data is from 2022. At that time, nearly **857,000** British Columbians - or 17% of the province - lived in a food insecure household. Children are at a higher risk of food insecurity, with 22% of children and youth (under 18) experiencing food insecurity.

Food banks across BC are seeing increased use, especially compared to pre-pandemic. In March 2023, BC food banks reported 195,925 total visits. This is an increase of **20%** over 2022, and an increase of 57.1% over 2019.

The average monthly cost of a nutritious diet for a family of four living in the Fraser Valley in 2022:



Of the **8.7 million** food insecure Canadians, their level of food insecurity is categorized as:



### Marginal Food Insecurity

Worried about running out of food or limited food selection due to income



### Moderate Food Insecurity

Quality/quantity of food compromised due to a lack of money for food



### Severe Food Insecurity

Missing meals, reducing intake, going without food regularly

Growing levels of food insecurity are also reflected in Food Banks Canada's 2023 Hunger Count, which includes this shocking statistic: in March 2023, there were **2 million visits** to food banks across Canada. This represents an increase of 32% compared to March 2022, and an increase of 78.5% compared to March 2019.

In Abbotsford, we know:

- In 2018, the prevalence of food insecurity in Fraser Valley East was **13%** (1 in 7.5 people)
- Archway Food Bank reports a dramatic increase: from 2,500 users/month in 2021 to **4,000+ users/month** in 2023
- Abbotsford's agricultural lands are the most productive in Canada
- Agricultural growth has outpaced pop. growth and generated **\$3.83 billion** in revenue in 2021

**Given all of the above, a question emerges: If Abbotsford is the bread basket of BC, how come our people are going hungry?**

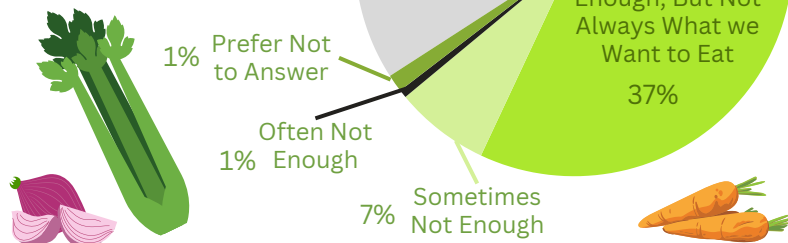


# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Your Voice

## YOUR VOICE

Our community survey, which ran from May-July 2024, garnered 504 responses. One page of the survey was dedicated to food security. This is what Abbotsford residents had to say about the issue.

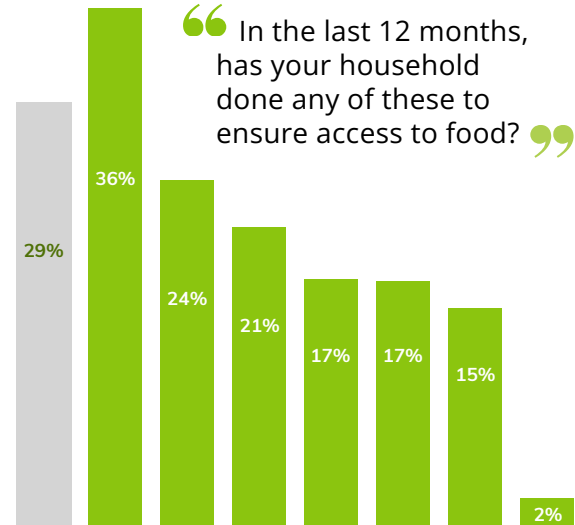
“ In the last 12 months, which of these statements best describes the food eaten in your household? ”



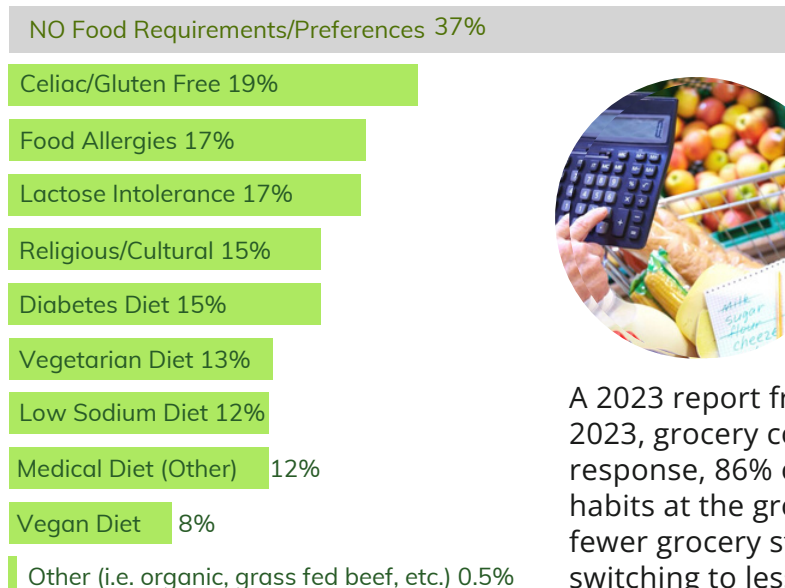
“ Is there a food security issue in Abbotsford? ”



“ In the last 12 months, has your household done any of these to ensure access to food? ”



“ Do you have any of the following food requirements or preferences? ”



- 29% - My household has not done any of these
- 36% - Purchased less expensive food/drinks
- 24% - Used the services of a community agency (i.e. food bank, food pantry, etc.)
- 21% - Grew food in our own garden
- 17% - Purchased more unhealthy food/drinks
- 17% - Got help from friends or extended family
- 15% - Skipped or reduced the size of meals
- 2% - Other (responses included eating less meat, used flyers to find deals, etc)

A 2023 report from Statistics Canada noted that in Spring 2023, grocery costs were **20%** higher than two years prior. In response, 86% of Canadians have changed their spending habits at the grocery store. Of those, 71% are purchasing fewer grocery store items than before. Nearly 50% are switching to less expensive brands.

# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Community Programs



## A Snapshot of Community Supporting Food Security

Food programs in Abbotsford are facing increasing demand, with significant pressure observed from 2019 onwards as indicated by *Archway's Food Bank Usage*. There are many organizations that provide access to either food or meals for vulnerable populations. Below is an example of the types of programs available in Abbotsford:



### Cyrus Centre

A 24-hour youth homeless shelter. Among their services, they provide free hot meals to youth. They provided **10,053** such meals in 2023.

### Gathering Markit

Offers support to families struggling to purchase healthy food. Providing low-cost meal kits that feed a family of 4, they have provided over **7,000** meal kits since 2022.

### Salvation Army Meal Centre

Open daily, they provide up to **300** nutritious meals per week to anyone who is hungry.

### Inasmuch Society

Distributes a weekly food program of fresh fruits & vegetables to newcomers. In 2023, they gave out **5,261** produce packs.

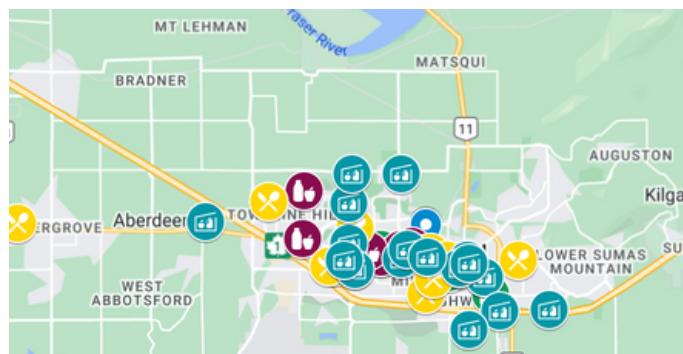
### School Meal Program

The Abbotsford School District runs a School Meal Program that provides lunches & snacks to students who come to school hungry.

### Starfish Backpack

Stocks a backpack with two breakfasts, lunches, dinners, and snacks for students who do not have food at home over the weekend. **730** school children were enrolled in the 2023/24 school year.

Archway's Food Justice program maintains a map of **50+ places** that offer low/no-cost food including grocery stores, free meals & no-cost food programs around the City.



Low Cost Grocery Stores



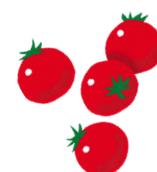
Low Cost Culturally Appropriate Grocery Stores



Free Meals



No Cost Food Options



### Seva Food Program

Ensures culturally preferred foods are accessible through the Food Bank. Currently, there are 3 cultural food hampers that are supported:

- South Asian food hamper
- halal food hamper
- Ukrainian food hamper

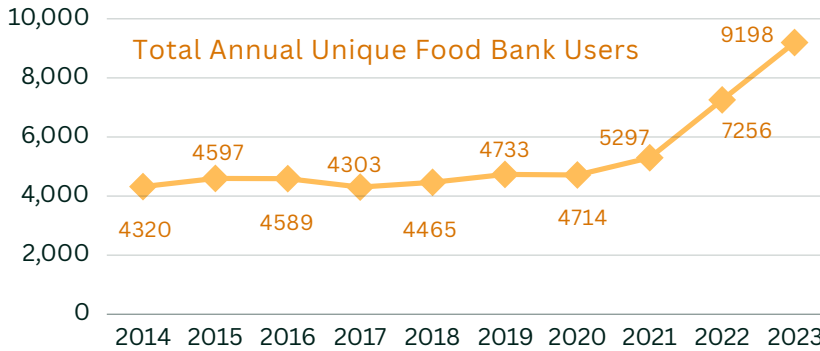
These hampers are distributed through designated days at the Food Bank, through Neighbourhood Satellites, and in collaboration with Archway's multicultural programming. Of the 9,198 Food Bank users in 2023, **1,822** (almost 20%) were those accessing the Seva Food program.





## SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Case Study: Seva

### Archway Food Bank Usage\*



\*Provides pantry staples, fresh produce, a choice of protein, & baby supplies.



17%

users are seniors

50%

users are families with children

With food insecurity on the rise and often overwhelming many local agencies, there are hot meals served everyday at local Gurdwaras, as part of Seva - a religious practice of service.

### CASE STUDY: Seva - Selfless Service

In Abbotsford, 25% of the population belongs to the Sikh faith (this compares to 5.9% provincially). The Sikh religion originated in the Punjab region of India and advocates equality, social justice, service to humanity, and tolerance for other religions. The concept of seva, or selfless service, is manifested in the free meals offered by members of the local temples, or Gurdwaras, everyday.

If you visit the Khalsa Diwan Society Gurdwara on South Fraser Way in Abbotsford, you'll be greeted with a homemade, vegetarian meal. Staples of the meal include chai tea, pakoras (similar to fritters), a savory Indian yogurt, daal (a lentil curry dish), rice, and roti (bread). The rotating menu also features a curry dish (perhaps potatoes, chickpeas, or paneer) and a dessert (likely rice pudding, sweet yellow rice, or speciality Indian sweets or candies).

This is in service of the teaching of the first Guru, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, who founded

Sikhism. He established a principle that no one should go hungry - the person who has more should give to the person who has less. All that the Gurdwara asks of diners is that they do not show up under the influence of substances, and they cover their head (per Sikh teachings).

The majority of the food served in Gurdwaras all over the world, is often made by volunteers. This food is procured through donations - temple members are asked to offer what they can when they come to pray - and those funds are then used to feed the community.

Gurdwara doors are open to all, with a space that is informal, casual, and welcoming. In Abbotsford, many of our most vulnerable, including homeless youth, share, by word of mouth, this opportunity for a hot meal available everyday. For some of those same individuals, seva has become something that they participate in by also volunteering to prepare food and serve it to others.

Special thanks to:



# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Legislation



## YOUR VOICE

Our community survey asked how respondents felt about locally grown food and land use as it related to food security. This is what Abbotsford residents had to say.

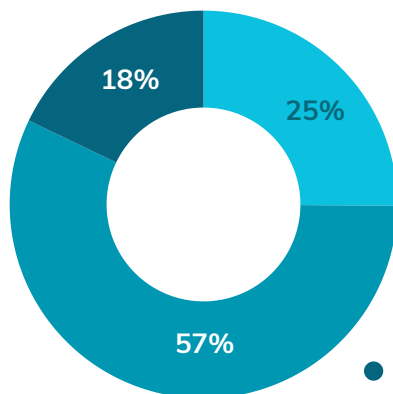
“ Future development policies should favour... ”

**18%** Building Housing Over Protecting Agricultural Land

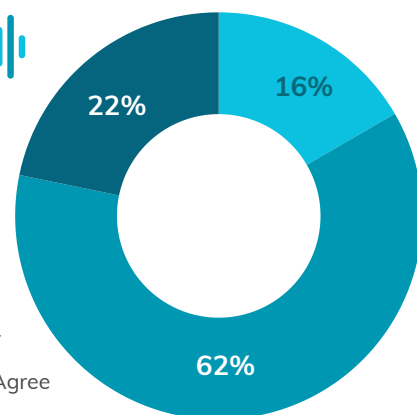
**26%** Protecting Agricultural Land Over Building Housing

A Balanced Approach Between Agricultural Land & Building Housing **54%**

“ The cost of locally grown food is comparable to the cost of food grown elsewhere. ”



“ I am willing and able to pay more for locally grown food to support local farmers and food producers. ”



## Food Security & Legislation

One of the challenges of increasing food security in Abbotsford is navigating municipal, regional, provincial, and federal government bylaws, regulations, and legislation regarding the growth, production, and sale of food.

In Abbotsford, the 2022 AgRefresh Project resulted in updated bylaws regarding local food production. They include AgRefresh OCP Amendments, AgRefresh Zoning Bylaw Amendments, Council Policy for Agricultural Areas, and Standing Council Resolutions for select ALC Applications.

In the Fraser Valley Regional District, the Regional Growth Strategy guides decisions on “growth, changes, and development” in the area. One indicator that the Strategy is on-track is that total farm operating revenues increase. As of April 2024, this indicator was “On Track.”

### Public Health Act      Fish & Seafood Act Food Safety Act      Milk Industry Act

Provincially, the complexity grows. Among food safety legislation there is the Food Safety Act, Public Health Act, Milk Industry Act, and Fish and Seafood Act. Depending on the category of food and agriculture, the contact organizations for questions about these Acts could be Fraser Health, the BC Centre for Disease Control, or the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Federally, the Canadian Food Inspection Agency is responsible for the administration and enforcement of ten different acts, covering topics including food inspection, feeds, fertilizers, health of animals, safe food, and seeds. The regulations that support these acts are updated semi-regularly.

What follows is a case study that illustrates some legislative issues around food security.



# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Case Study: Gleaners

## CASE STUDY: Fraser Valley Gleaners

Special thanks to:



On Winson Road, near the Canada-US border, are the headquarters for the Fraser Valley Gleaners, a charitable organization that accepts donated surplus and non-market vegetables to make dehydrated soup mix, to be sent to hungry people around the world.

As their name implies, they rescue or ‘glean’ **2+ million** pounds of unmarketable and surplus produce each year from local farmers.

On any given weekday, you’ll find about 60 volunteers buzzing around, chopping, putting everything on drying racks, measuring various dehydrated ingredients, bagging soup mix, packing pallets, and more. Some volunteers are regulars, coming every Tuesday, for example. Other volunteers have traveled from outside of the region to give back, perhaps with their families or with a small group from their church. Volunteers come because they connect with the mission and purpose of the organization: feed people who are hungry by utilizing food that would otherwise be wasted.

In June 2024, Fraser Valley Gleaners hit a major milestone: **250,000,000** - or one-

quarter billion - soup servings packaged since opening their doors in 2001. In that time, soup packets have been sent to **76** countries. These packets are shipped outside of Canada for two reasons. First, an awareness that “we live in a place of abundance and feel a responsibility to share it with those less fortunate than ourselves.” Second, because of food packaging and distribution regulations.

For the Gleaners to share their soup packets with hungry people locally, some regulatory requirements would need to be met - namely, packets would need to be sorted into batches, then numbered. Each numbered batch would be assigned to distribution partners. This would allow for soup packet consumers to be notified if there were any health and safety issues with a batch.

However, as the Gleaners run on donations and mostly volunteers, they don’t have the capacity to meet the added costs of these legal requirements. Instead, they choose feed those they can.



## The Problem and Potential of Food Waste

On average, British Columbians throw away 1 out of every 4 bags of groceries that we buy.



**= \$1,100**

worth of food thrown away each year by individual household.

In Abbotsford, the City partners with *Love Food, Hate Waste* to provide education about how to reduce household food waste. There are also several local organizations focused on rescuing, recovering, and repurposing food that would otherwise be wasted/thrown out such as: *FoodMesh* and *Second Harvest* in addition to the *Food Bank* and community food programs.

# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Agriculture



## Opportunities and Challenges in Growing Our Food

Abbotsford’s land base is nearly **400km<sup>2</sup>**, and nearly three-quarters of that land is in the Agricultural Land Reserve (ALR). The community’s rich farming history has an inverse: the need to continually innovate to overcome current and ongoing challenges. Three different perspectives are highlighted below, each with an idea about how to ensure the agricultural sector in Abbotsford remains strong.



The **Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce** sees a synergy between the desire to process more food in Abbotsford and the usage of poorly zoned ALR lands. In an interview, CEO Alex Mitchell explained a key challenge for local growers: due to land shortage and to restrictive ALR uses, there are not enough facilities to process locally grown food. “The Fraser Valley is key to Canada’s food security,” the Chamber says, and in Mitchell’s words “Now is the time to position Abbotsford as BC’s leading hub for food production with increased funding and food processing to become a super-cluster.”

Carson Li, agrologist and researcher with the **BC Centre for Agritech Innovation (BCCAI)**, housed at Simon Fraser University, asserts that ongoing development and deployment of new technologies is required if BC farms want to survive increasing drought, other effects of climate change, numerous microclimates, and address food insecurity. At BCCAI, Li and others are trying to support technological innovation by “operating on a cost-sharing model with agritech companies, producers and farmers to de-risk the development and adoption in their processes.” As Li puts forth, “Dairy farms are decked out with robots and sensors... [Farmers are] open to using new technologies as long as it justifies the cost, increases their profit margins, and reduces expenses. But you have to account for the funds to help them to risk trying that, while still investing in innovation.”

Dr. Lenore Newman, head of the **University of the Fraser Valley’s Food and Agriculture Institute**, asserts that farming has an image problem. She says many Canadians “have an ‘Old Macdonald’ idea of farming that is no longer realistic or sustainable.” She states that “agriculture is now a technologically-advanced industry, requiring significant research and development capabilities to survive modern challenges, including climate change.” The evidence that those capabilities are not yet available? “The one area of technology that doesn’t have a national funding body for universities is agriculture.” From Newman’s perspective, this requires funding and participation from all levels of government.

### Agricultural Land Use in Abbotsford

Abbotsford farms are varied and produce copious volumes of poultry, eggs, dairy, fruits, and vegetables.

**33.3%**

BC’s blueberry crop

**14,000**

dairy cows

**54,000,000**

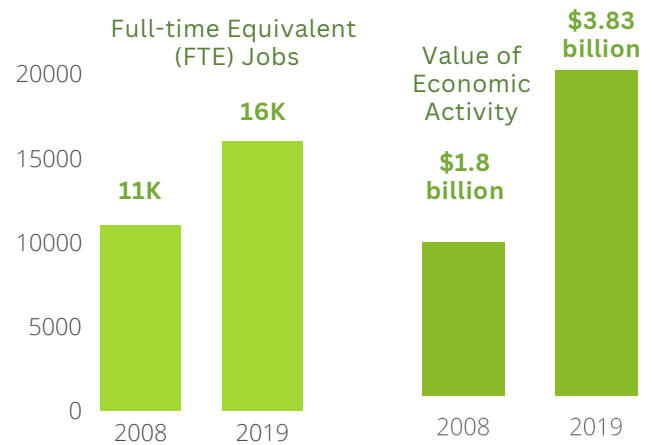
dozen eggs/year

Real growth in farm production has come from intensification and a shift to production of higher value crops such as the increase in greenhouses. The acreage in greenhouses increased by 45.7% between 2012 and 2020, over 80% of which was an increase in glass greenhouses growing vegetables. This represents a 37% increase in greenhouse growing capacity.



# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Case Study: The Hub

The economic impact of agriculture in Abbotsford is staggering. In just over a decade, the industry has grown twice as fast as the population of Abbotsford. The industry also supports nearly a quarter of all jobs in the city.



## CASE STUDY: Abbotsford Tech District

In 2020, Auguston Town Development Inc. launched an ambitious, multi-pronged project. The idea? Secure an Official Community Plan (OCP) amendment from the City of Abbotsford for the development of a mixed-use community and innovation hub. The hub, called Abbotsford Tech District (ATD), would offer high-density multi-family housing, compact urban development to reduce commute times and with a focus on active transportation, an innovation hub to house professionals from agriculture, aerospace, and technology, and the B.L. Au Centre for Innovation and Food Security, to address challenges including food insecurity and sustainability.

ATD envisioned the location and scale to attract a cluster of major high-tech companies, as well as a tech-focused post-secondary institution, such as an expansion of University of the Fraser Valley (*see rendering of the project above*).

**Special thanks to:** **Gavin Dew,** Abbotsford Tech District

ATD was not developed in a vacuum. Formal partnerships included the University of the Fraser Valley, the Pacific Agriculture Show, Abbotsford Chamber of Commerce, Tourism Abbotsford, and the Fraser Valley Mountain Bikers Association. These partners agreed on a vision and saw a future for the project, as did **93%** of Abbotsford residents who had an opinion on the development.

Ultimately, the OCP amendment was not successful, and the project is now shuttered. However, consultations and community engagement for the project support two conclusions:

1. The number and range of supporters indicate that this is a project whose time has come.
1. When it comes to issues of food security, agriculture, and innovation, we must consider the needs of today, tomorrow, and decades down the road.

# SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Case Study: Semá:th



## Climate Impact on Agriculture

On November 17, 2021, Abbotsford was hit with a catastrophic atmospheric river, which was the largest agricultural disaster in BC’s history. More than **1,100** farms (15,000 hectares) and **2.5 million** livestock were affected by the floods. The largest losses were reported by dairy, poultry, swine, beef, horticulture, and fruit and vegetable growers.

The atmospheric river came on the heels of the summer 2021 heat dome, with record high temperatures in the day paired with higher than average overnight temperatures. Droughts are another concern in a changing climate, and have made farming tough in agricultural hotspots.

### CASE STUDY: Semá:th Lake & Salmon

Special thanks to:



Sumas  
First  
Nation

The Sumas First Nation, home to the Semá:th people, has called Semá:th Lake area home since time immemorial. We spoke with Councillor Troy Ganzeveld, who shared some of the Nation’s history with Semá:th Lake and surrounding waterways which have been an integral part of the community and shaped the traditional way of life. Until recently, Semá:th Lake was a gathering place: in summer, people gathered to fish, and in doing so, spent time with family and friends, passed along traditions and long-held practices, and mentored younger members. At the heart of this togetherness was salmon.

But in 1920, engineers began a four year project to drain Semá:th Lake, to turn it into fertile land for settlers and farmers. The former lake was diverted through the Vedder Canal and into the Fraser River, and what stands today is a faint facsimile of the abundant lake of hundreds of years ago.

Today, the Sumas First Nation has both a right and an obligation to care for the Lake and its resources. Innovative projects including sonar imaging are helping the Nation and their partners determine how many salmon remain.

Still, there is no easy solution as federal, provincial, and local governments all have some jurisdiction over this land, and are often in opposition. Power, too, is distributed unequally between stakeholders: for example, Fisheries and Oceans Canada sets limits on who can fish, methods used, and what time of year.

Murray Ned, Executive Director of the Lower Fraser Fisheries Alliance, says that in the 1990s Sumas First Nation members could fish in the Fraser River 3 days per week all year. Currently, members fish approximately 15 days/year. “If we use time as the metric, this has essentially reduced our food security, economic opportunity, and cultural connection by 90%, over a period of three decades.”

In Murray’s words, “If we can save the fish, we can save our people. We’re that closely connected. I truly believe that when we are no longer able to fish, we’re no longer able to connect either to the tributary within our territory, the former lake, or the Fraser River, and be able to practice that fishery - our culture and identity will die. That’s how significant fish are to our people.”





## SPOTLIGHT: FOOD SECURITY Conclusions

### Abbotsford's Role in Addressing Food Insecurity

Food is complicated. From regulations to keep us safe and allow our agricultural industry to remain economically viable, to local land use pressures, overall affordability, food distribution, and so much more, it is clear there are many considerations in making food accessible for everyone. The findings in this report highlight some of the challenges including a changing climate, the need to modernize agriculture, a fractured agricultural system, complex legislation, and increasing food insecurity.

Food insecurity itself is a personal issue; so personal, in fact, that an individual or family could struggle in secret. It's an issue where dignity, justice, and equity intersect. It's also a community issue. Abbotsford's abundantly productive land and heritage of farming, coupled with the generosity of its people, confer a collective responsibility and desire to ensure everyone is fed.

While equitable food access is something every community in Canada is grappling with, Abbotsford's role in BC's and Canada's food system presents a unique opportunity to find solutions to feeding our community. In addition to the numerous challenges identified, our findings also indicate there is a significant investment in problem solving from a variety of perspectives and approaches. From farmers, to academics, to local Indigenous Peoples', to businesses, and community organizations, there is a strong and dedicated response to addressing what is a complicated and nuanced issue.

### How We Can Use This Report

Abbotsford is a community of many strengths. Like all communities, though, there is room for improvement. If you've been surprised, inspired, or curious about anything you've read in this report and would like to contribute to community well-being, here are some ideas for you:

#### COMMUNITY BELONGING

Cultivate cross-generational relationships with your neighbours. Consider block parties or community BBQs.

Attend cross-cultural events such as an open pow wow or international food celebrations.

#### HEALTH & WELL BEING

Take care of yourself. Your wellness supports the well-being and resilience of those around you. You can visit [bc.211.ca](http://bc.211.ca) for resources, including counselling and health care.

#### PUBLIC SAFETY

Get to know your neighbours, and look out for one another. We are stronger together.

#### HOUSING & HOMELESSNESS

Consider seasonal needs of Abbotsford residents in shelters and transition houses. In winter, donate mittens, hats, and hand warmers. In summer, sunscreen, sunglasses, and sun hats are appreciated.

#### INCOME, WORK & ECONOMY

Shop local! Small businesses are still in recovery mode. Dollars spent in Abbotsford-owned businesses stay in the community.

#### FOOD SECURITY

Volunteer or donate to local food programs. Share the bounty of your vegetable garden with others. You may not know when someone is going hungry.



# 2024 Abbotsford



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA

**VitalSigns**



ABBOTSFORD  
COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATION

☎ 604.850.3755  
✉ info@abbotsfordcf.org  
🌐 abbotsfordcf.org

Since its inception, Abbotsford Community Foundation has granted over \$20 million back into our community. By connecting donors with causes they care about, we're able to invest in Abbotsford, creating a lasting impact today, tomorrow, and forever. Not just a grant-maker, we're also a convener, connector & capacity builder for our local charitable sector.

📍 201 - 2890 Garden Street, Abbotsford, BC V2T 4W7

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