



## Ontario Communities walkON: a Model for Canada

Case Study of Progress  
from Nov 2009 to Nov 2011

The project described in this document was led by Canada Walks, a department of Green Communities Canada. Canada Walks envisions a Canada where everyone can enjoyably, easily and safely walk to school, work, play, shopping and transit. The Mission of Canada Walks is to help communities become walk friendly by:

- Raising awareness of the health, economic, social and environmental benefits,
- Inspiring and celebrating success,
- Sharing resources and best practice on infrastructure, policy and programs,
- Bringing partners together to make walking happen.

See Appendix I for more information about Canada Walks.

## Acknowledgements

The Ontario Communities walkON project was possible thanks to financial support from the Government of Ontario's Healthy Communities Fund and the Ontario Trillium Foundation as well as in kind support from the Ontario Professional Planners Institute, the Heart and Stroke Foundation, and Dr. Kim Bergeron, Queen's University. We thank them for their generous support of this work.

Thanks also go to the project partners that helped in the delivery of the walkON components: the six health units in Central West Ontario that conceived and implemented walkON initially and 8-80 Cities that partnered with Green Communities Canada to disseminate the project across Ontario. See Appendix I for more information about the project delivery partners.

Finally, we also wish to thank the various stakeholders at the community level that worked tirelessly to bring the walkON model to their communities. See the table on pages 4 and 5 for a list of the communities that were actively involved in this dissemination project.

### For More Information:

Green Communities Canada  
416 Chambers Street, 2nd Floor  
Peterborough ON K9J 3V1  
Phone: 416-488-7263  
Email: [info@canadawalks.ca](mailto:info@canadawalks.ca)  
Website: [www.canadawalks.ca](http://www.canadawalks.ca)

 <https://www.facebook.com/CanadaWalks?ref=hl>

 [@canadawalks](https://twitter.com/canadawalks)

# Background

From the spring of 2005 until December 2007, a partnership of Ontario Heart Health professionals in the Central West region of the province came together to create walkON to engage communities in the work of creating environments that support walking. To establish a strong foundation for the program, a review of the literature was completed in the spring of 2005 and a needs assessment was conducted in four communities. Based on this initial work, the walkON model consisted of:

- A common look and identity to use on all walkON materials
- Information session presentation to raise awareness of the issue of the built environment and walkON
- A walkability workshop to bring together local community members, elected officials and community organizations to facilitate action planning at the local level
- A walkability toolkit to encourage and support local citizens to form citizen groups to work on walkability issues on an ongoing basis
- A walkability checklist to encourage and support individuals in assessing the walkability of their neighbourhood
- A newsletter to communicate local activities and provide local updates to partners
- A website to provide information about walkON and walkability to professionals and the community at large.

The individual walkON components were evaluated in 2007 and a needs assessment was conducted to establish the feasibility of rolling out the model across

the diverse landscape and four distinct regions of Ontario. The walkON model was found to be effective and there was a high degree of interest from key stakeholders in utilizing the model and its component resources. By 2007, 17 different citizens groups were active across Central West in promoting the goals of walkON:

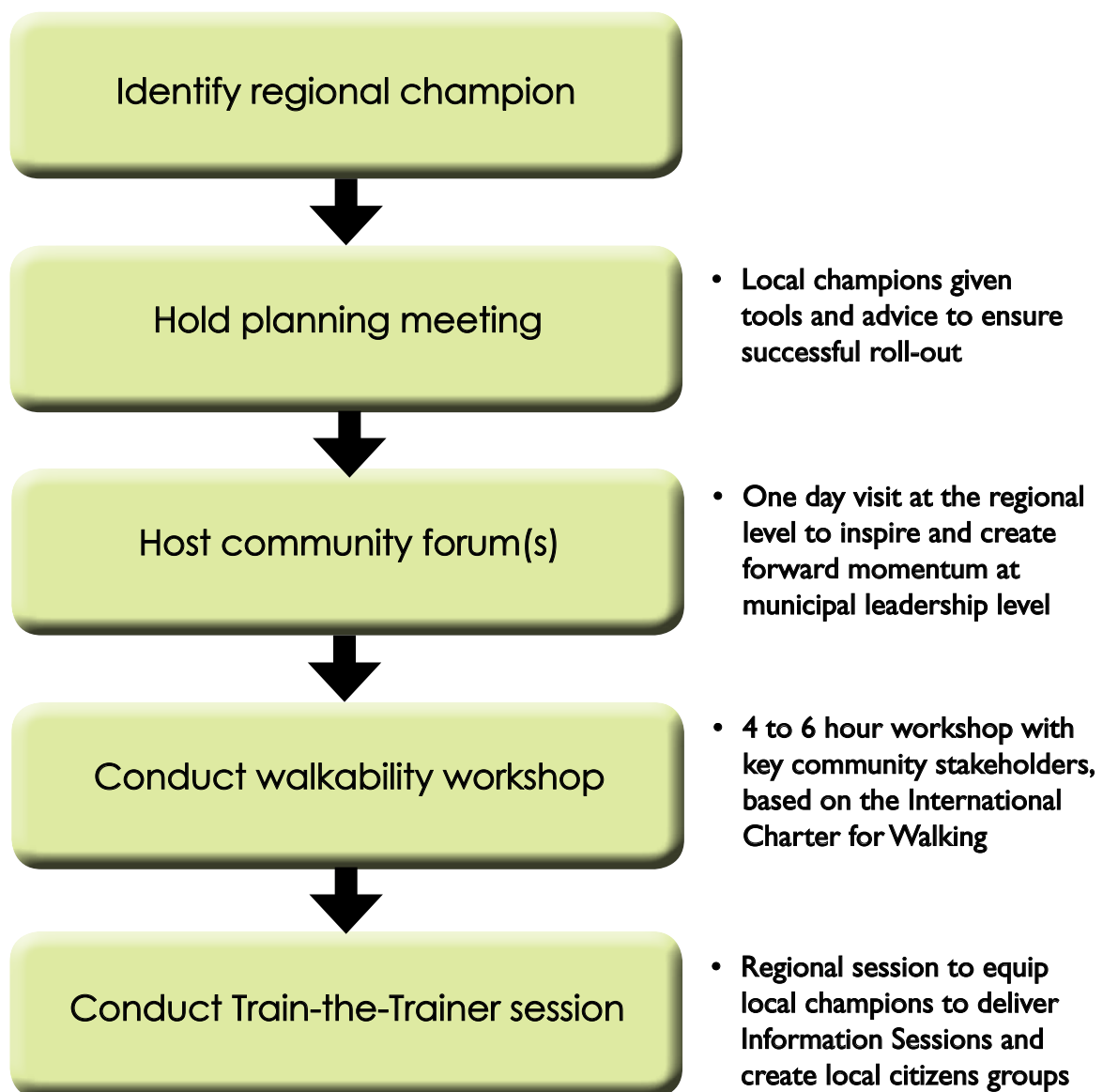
- Mobilize communities to focus on improving the built environment through education and access to resources
- Improve the built environment in order to support walking as a form of functional, everyday and recreational transportation
- Increase the proportion of residents in Central West communities who choose walking as a way to be active.

Based on the 2007 needs assessment, Green Communities Canada submitted a funding proposal to the Ontario Trillium Foundation to disseminate the walkON model across Ontario. The project, Ontario Communities walkON, was launched with the goal of working in diverse communities (including First Nations communities) across all four regions of the province and working with no less than 24 communities on action planning to improve the policies, planning, promotion, and infrastructure to support increased walking.

See Appendix I for information about the people and organizations that helped deliver the walkON model for this project.

# Process

## Ontario Communities walkON Process at a Glance





## Process Details

### 1 Identify regional champion

Identify which organization or person will take the lead role in the walkON process.

### 2 Hold planning meeting

Local champions are given tools and advice to help them in promoting the project and ensuring successful roll-out of the process. This meeting can be face-to-face or virtual, depending on the available travel budget.

### 3 Host community forum(s)

Canada Walks spends a full day in the community and one to three forums are held. Typically, a breakfast meeting is held with municipal staff and politicians, and a community forum is hosted in the evening to attract a broad cross-section of the community such as seniors associations, schools and local business associations.

### 4 Conduct walkability workshop

This 4-6 hour workshop includes an introduction to the International Charter for Walking ([www.walk21.com/charter/default.asp](http://www.walk21.com/charter/default.asp)) as well as examples of best practices from Canada and around the world. A review is conducted of what actions have been completed under each of the eight principles of the Charter and what still needs to be done. Action steps are prioritized and the beginnings of an action plan are formulated.

### 5 Conduct Train-the-Trainer session

In this session, keen volunteers and/or municipal staff members are given tools and information to form a working group to move forward with the action plan and continue to educate community members about the importance of walk friendly communities. This is a key step because long term success is dependent on a core group of people in the community carrying the process forward.

# Communities

## Participating Communities & Champions

Between 2009 and 2011, Canada Walks worked extensively in 24 communities across Ontario, reaching over 50 communities with regional Ontario Communities walkON events. For example, key political and municipal leaders from all 17 of Grey-Bruce's communities attended a regional forum and most were also represented at the Train-the-Trainer event. Ontario Communities walkON travelled as far north as Thunder Bay and to Ontario's "West Coast" communities in Huron County. We touched the far eastern end of the province, working with the Eastern Ontario Health Unit in Cornwall and the Physical Activity Network of Renfrew County. We carefully planned our work to include rural and

urban communities, small towns and prominent cities such as London and Oshawa. We were privileged to work with Goderich at a crucial time in the re-design of their community after it was devastated by a tornado in August of 2011. We were delighted to deliver a well received Walkability Workshop to the Mohawk Council of Akwesasne, representing a major breakthrough in working with Ontario Aboriginal communities on active transportation. Thanks to a cash contribution from the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, we were able to translate our materials into French and delivered a Train-the-Trainer session in French in the Township of Prescott-Russell.

Region	Communities & Population (2011)	Key Champions
Durham Region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Town of Ajax (109,600)</li> <li>• Brock Township (11,341)</li> <li>• Oshawa (356,180)</li> <li>• Uxbridge Township (20,620)</li> </ul>	<p>Community Champions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Active Living Coordinator</li> <li>• Physical Activity Network Coordinator</li> <li>• City Planner</li> <li>• Recreation Coordinator</li> </ul>
Eastern Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cornwall (5,160)</li> <li>• Mohawk Council of Akwesasne (12,000)</li> <li>• Pembroke (14,360)</li> <li>• Petawawa (15,985)</li> <li>• United Counties of Prescott-Russell (85,381) – delivered in French</li> </ul>	<p>Regional Champions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Renfrew Physical Activity Network</li> <li>• Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation Community Mission Specialist</li> <li>• Eastern Ontario Health Unit</li> </ul> <p>Community Champions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation Community Mission Specialist/Health Unit Physical Activity Promoter</li> <li>• Community Health Promoter</li> <li>• Recreation Coordinator</li> <li>• Manager of Parks &amp; Recreation</li> <li>• Heart &amp; Stroke Foundation Community Mission Specialist/Health Unit Physical Activity Promoter</li> </ul>

Region	Communities & Population (2011)	Key Champions
Grey-Bruce Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meaford (11,100)</li> <li>• Owen Sound (21,685)</li> <li>• Saugeen Shores (12,665)</li> <li>• Town of the Blue Mountains (6,455)</li> <li>• Hanover (7,147)</li> <li>• Walkerton (4,970)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Regional Champion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grey Bruce Health Unit</li> </ul> <p><b>Community Champion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Play Bruce-Grey Coordinator</li> </ul>
Huron County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blyth (part of South Huron 9,945)</li> <li>• Exeter (4,785)</li> <li>• Goderich (7,520)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Regional Champion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huron County Planning Department</li> </ul> <p><b>Community Champions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Huron County Planner</li> <li>• Main Street Exeter Coordinator</li> <li>• Huron County Planner</li> </ul>
Middlesex London	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• London (366,150)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Champions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our Street London (OSL)</li> <li>• Middlesex London Health Unit (MLHU)</li> <li>• Thames Region Ecological Association (TREA)</li> </ul>
Northern Ontario	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Bay (53,650)</li> <li>• Thunder Bay (121,595)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Community Champions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Northwatch</li> <li>• Thunder Bay District Health Unit/ City of Thunder Bay</li> </ul>
Perth County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• North Perth population (6,000)</li> <li>• West Perth (8,920)</li> <li>• East Perth (12,030)</li> <li>• South Perth (3,993)</li> <li>• Stratford (30,000)</li> <li>• St. Marys (2,354)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Regional Champion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perth County District Health Unit</li> </ul> <p><b>Community Champions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Perth District Health Unit</li> </ul>
Simcoe County	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearview Township (13,735)</li> <li>• Tay Township (9,740)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Regional Champion:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit</li> </ul> <p><b>Community Champions:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clearview Township Recreation Coordinator</li> <li>• Tay Township Recreation Coordinator</li> </ul>

# Results

All participating communities made great progress in raising the profile of walking among stakeholders and beginning the process of transforming their communities into walkable places. In this section we highlight some of the many accomplishments walkON communities have made, some as a direct result of project activities and some as a result of the broader active transportation movement, of which this project was a key part.

## Durham Region

### Ajax:

- School Travel Planning pilot community (2010)
- Pedestrian & Cycling Master Plan (2010)
- Active Transportation Committee of Council established (2011)
- Ajax Moves 3 Ways Campaign (2012): see <http://ajaxmoves3ways.ca/>

### Brock:

- Walkability a priority of Brock Physical Activity Network (2011-2012)
- Town hired Active Living Coordinator (July 2012)
- Walkability audits conducted (2011): see <http://tinyurl.com/cozmyee>

### Oshawa:

- Council signed International Charter for Walking (2012): see <http://tinyurl.com/cwj8k68>
- Planning to make walkability integral to Strategic Plan (Sept 2012)
- Canada Walks Walkability Workshop Report accepted by Oshawa Council: see <http://tinyurl.com/bq5vf7a>

### Uxbridge:

- Continued to build reputation as “Trails Capital of Canada” (2009-2012)



*Mayor of Oshawa signing the International Charter for Walking*



*Action planning in Brock Township*



## Huron County

### Blyth:

- Master Streetscape Plan completed, incorporating many walkable features (2012)

### Municipality of South Huron:

- International Charter for Walking signed (2012)
- Report on the Walkability Workshop, with a copy of the International Charter, was received by Municipality of South Huron Council and the Charter was endorsed: see <http://tinyurl.com/d9xcmgy>

### Exeter:

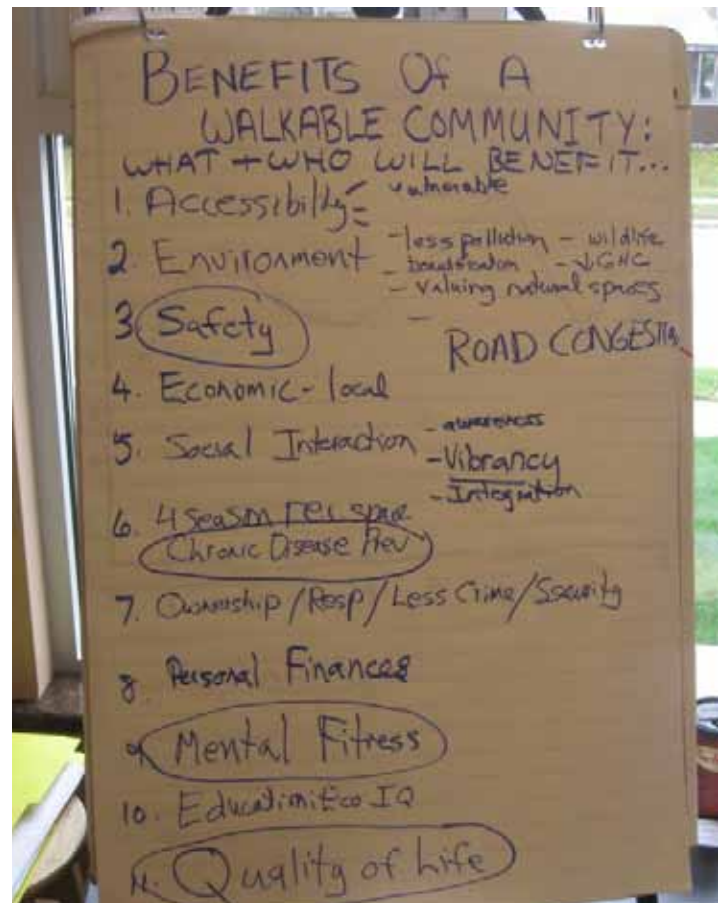
- Master Streetscape Plan completed for Main Street, incorporating many walk friendly features (2012): see <http://tinyurl.com/cdlmty7> for a draft of the plan.

## Grey-Bruce Counties

- Walkability is a priority of the Grey Bruce Health Department's "All Play in Bruce Grey" initiative (2011-2012): see <http://tinyurl.com/d6tuc87>
- Grey Bruce Health received Heart & Stroke Foundation Spark Funding for Youth Moving Safely Project; Grey Bruce planners and public health staff conducted walkability audits with 100-120 high school students
- Downtown Owen Sound to be "rebranded as walkable" (2012): See Owen Sound Economic Development Report at <http://tinyurl.com/c23pzdw>
- Walkability to be important element of Official Plan Review
- Grey Bruce Health Unit passed a resolution on Active Transportation: see <http://tinyurl.com/c37xsg7>
- Canada Walks played a role in the Youth Moving Safely Project: see page 5 at <http://tinyurl.com/7xwnwd5>
- Walkability attracted attention in *Owen Sound Sun Times* article, "Chamber makes wish list for city" (May 14, 2012)

## Middlesex London

- Our Street London, community advocacy group, has established vision, mission and values, with a big focus on walkability. Their first project Walk London, a new guerilla wayfinding project, has launched (June 2012). See <http://walklondon.ca/> and <http://londonfuse.ca/blog/walk-london>.
- Middlesex London Health Unit motion to endorse Toronto Charter for Physical Activity was passed by council (June 26, 2012)
- Many Ontario Communities walkON champions are playing an active role in London's Official Plan review (underway in summer 2012)



# More Results

## Eastern Ontario

### Renfrew County:

- Canada Walks initiatives highlighted in Draft County of Renfrew Active Transportation Strategy (2012)

### Cornwall:

- Presented recommendations from Walkability Workshop to Board of Health (2012)
- Pushing for an Active Transportation Committee of Council (2012)
- Supporting Transition Cornwall in starting a working group on walkability (2012)

### Petawawa:

- Initiating a “Walking Loops” program to encourage walking in the community (2012)

## Northern Ontario

### North Bay:

- Made improvements to multi-use pathways and pedestrian connectors (2011)

### Thunder Bay:

- Walkability committee formalized as sub-committee of Thunder Bay’s EarthWise Community Environmental Action Plan, a committee of council (fall 2012)
- Strategic plan and mission developed
- Sustainable Happiness workshop held (spring 2012)
- New campaign will launch in the fall of 2012 with the tag line “Join the Walk-Friendly Revolution.”
- School Travel Planning project initiated in two Thunder Bay schools
- Municipal staff are in the process of writing a report with recommendations for an “open streets” strategy for 2013
- See Active Transportation Thunder Bay: <http://tinyurl.com/bow3kfx>



*Cornwall stakeholders on walkabout*



*Walkabout in Akwesasne*



*Stakeholders regroup to discuss walkabout findings in Thunder Bay*

## Perth County

- Perth District Health Unit created a Walkable & Bikeable Community Planning Guide (2010)
- County-wide Active Transportation committee of Council established (2012)
- Region-wide trail network under development
- Strong community advocacy group formed in Stratford: movinON (2010)
- Held a “Walk ‘n Roll” car free event (2012)
- Signed International Charter for Walking (2010)
- St. Marys signed Active Communities Charter (2010)
- North Perth signed International Charter for Walking (2009)
- For a Perth County Update, see <http://tinyurl.com/d5gpkvr>

## Simcoe County

- Simcoe Muskoka Health Unit led an iCANwalk campaign using Ontario Communities walkON resources (2011)
- Simcoe has a well established county Active Transportation committee, and most municipalities within the county have Active Transportation committees that have completed Active Transportation plans or have them under development
- Simcoe County report referencing iCANwalk: <http://tinyurl.com/c83ghd4>



# Next Steps

In April of 2010, the Transportation Association of Canada released a detailed study entitled *Active Transportation: Making it Work in Canadian Communities*. The study verified what Canada Walks had hypothesized – walking is often overlooked in transportation planning, despite its multiple benefits to health, the environment, local economies and vulnerable populations. Even when municipalities have an active transportation or transportation demand management planner, the focus is often on cycling. The vast majority of Canadian municipalities have not identified a department or champion for pedestrian issues.

The original walkON model developed and implemented in Central West Ontario (2004 -2007) was evaluated and found to be an effective change agent. The Ontario-wide roll-out extended the model to the four diverse regions of the province engaging communities and regions that were urban, suburban, rural, and Francophone. We feel the greatest impact of this program to date has been making walking a priority within the regions and communities we have worked with and the subsequent formation of committees of council or community

action groups that have formed to champion the ongoing work of improving walkability. The Transportation Association of Canada report emphasized the importance of these extensive collaborations engaging politicians, municipal staff, stakeholders, and community members as a critical success factor. The response we had from some of the 50 communities we worked with across Ontario gives us confidence that this is a model that will work across Canada.

Canada Walks is committed to making this model available for further dissemination across the country via our website, where the walkON tools can be accessed and used by communities independently, and via fee-for-service workshops and consulting. To explore how you can bring walkON to your community, visit [www.canadawalks.ca](http://www.canadawalks.ca), or email us at [info@canadawalks.ca](mailto:info@canadawalks.ca).

## Community Feedback

“I wanted to thank you all so very very much for sharing your passion, energy and knowledge with us. The wheels had started to turn, but this event has really created that spark of inspiration that we needed to get those wheels whirling. Bringing the mayor together with key decision makers in our community was essential to putting this issue on the agenda. But the key was bringing them together to see and hear the pictures and words of hope & transformation that Gil created for us. Gil, I really can't believe the energy and passion that you brought to each & every event that we attended together. Jacky - your thought provoking and comprehensive School Travel Planning presentation was exactly what we needed to bring the key community partners together. Mandy - I am so eagerly looking forward to our continued work together. Your enthusiasm for this project and for helping communities move forward is amazing! It was so refreshing to see decision makers get excited about change. In fact, one of the city planners commented that she'd never seen the variety of key decision makers all in one room.”  
*Stasia Starr RN, PHN, Thunder Bay District Health Unit*

# Appendix 1

## Project Delivery Partners

The following organizations/people participated in delivering the walkON model in this project.

### ▶ Canada Walks Department of Green Communities Canada

Green Communities Canada was the lead organization for this project. Canada Walks ([www.canadawalks.ca](http://www.canadawalks.ca)) was established in 2008 to give a national structure to the fantastic work being done in Canada by numerous organizations and government departments around walkability. With the creation of one main source for walkability in Canada, efforts have been streamlined and coordinated, reducing duplication of work and connecting the many important contributors. Canada Walks consultants have evolved to be national and international leaders providing expertise on engaging communities in the important work of creating and improving walk friendly communities.

Green Communities Canada (GCC) is a national association of community non-profit organizations that deliver environmental programs and services with measurable results. They focus on household and community action. GCC has over 25 member organizations in all regions of the country. ([www.greencommunitiescanada.org](http://www.greencommunitiescanada.org))

### ▶ 8-80 Cities

8 - 80 Cities ([8-80cities.org](http://8-80cities.org)) is a Canadian non-profit organization dedicated to transforming cities into places where people can walk, bike, access public transit and visit vibrant parks, streets and other public places.

### ▶ Central West Ontario Health Units

The following six Ontario Health Units were involved in the development and testing of the walkON model, and provided in-kind support for this project which further disseminated the model they had created:

- Brant County Health Unit
- Haldimand-Norfolk Public Health
- Halton Region Health Unit
- Niagara Region Public Health
- Region of Waterloo Public Health
- Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health