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**BELONGING: EXPLORING CONNECTION TO COMMUNITY**  
**LAUNCH OF 'NEWCOMER EXPERIENCES' STUDY**  
**KEYNOTE SPEAKER BROCK HART**  
**GUEST PANEL AND GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

**May 9, 2017**– Stratford, ON – The [Stratford Perth Community Foundation](#) has partnered with several local organizations to host their inaugural Stratford Perth Vital Conversation about sense of belonging in our community.

“A Vital Conversation is a facilitated discussion with community members to learn more about the social, economic and natural/built environmental trends impacting local quality of life,” notes SPCF Executive Director, Tracy Van Kalsbeek. “We chose ‘sense of belonging’ as the topic for our first conversation because it is a fundamental human need – just like food or shelter – and is essential to our sense of happiness and well-being.”

The Stratford Perth Vital Conversation will be taking place on June 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017 in conjunction with the [Social Research & Planning Council \(SRPC\) Perth-Huron’s](#) launch of their new report, ‘Embracing Diversity, Newcomer Experiences in Huron and Perth Counties.’ As such, the Community Foundation is placing a specific focus on ‘newcomer belonging’ during the discussion.

“Newcomers are essential to the creation of diverse and economically sustainable communities, however, attracting newcomers to rural regions is a difficult task that is compounded by the challenge of retaining those that do come,” shares Tracy Birtch, Director of the SRPC. “The SRPC study explores the experiences of newcomers and helps to identify how local employers, service providers and community-based organizations can work toward the goal of fully integrating newcomers into society.”

Through large and small group discussions and with the help of keynote speaker Brock Hart of [Overlap & Associates](#), Vital Conversation attendees will be taken on an exploration of community connection. The goal will be to identify areas for improvement and opportunities for civic action.

Creative software company, [Powernoodle](#), is collaborating to support the initiative with an online, engagement platform to involve people before, during and after the event. The tool will aid in capturing information to be shared in a final report back to the community. Citizens, organizations and businesses can then use this data to create community impact.

Also featured will be a panel of local citizens to share personal details about their move to our community and what factors made an impact on their sense of belonging.

“Whether from a different country, city, business, school or community, we have all been newcomers at least once in our lives and understand the isolation it can bring,” adds Ms. Van Kalsbeek. “It is well documented that loneliness and low social status can harm a person's personal sense of well-being, as well as his or her intellectual achievement, immune function

and health. By having this conversation we can help ensure that together we are building an environment where people truly feel they belong.”

The Community Foundation is planning to host a Vital Conversation annually about a key topic of importance. The conversations can then be used as starting points to identify local priorities and mobilize citizens into action.

Other Vital Conversations partners include: University of Waterloo’s [Community, Health, Environment, Communications \(CHEC\) Initiative](#), [Stratford Perth YMCA](#), [Stratford Public Library](#), [University of Waterloo Stratford Campus](#), [United Way Perth-Huron](#), [Choices for Change](#), [Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs \(OMAFRA\)](#) and [Facile Perth](#).

**Date:** June 9, 2017

**Venue:** University of Waterloo, Stratford Campus

**Time:** 8:30 am – noon

**Spaces:** 115 spots available

**Click [HERE](#) to register**

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### **About the [Stratford Perth Community Foundation](#)**

The Stratford Perth Community Foundation (SPCF) is an organization for everyone; and unique because donations, large or small, are never spent but are combined and invested. The earned income is used to make grants to local charities year after year to build a vibrant not-for-profit sector in Stratford, St. Marys and Perth County. To make all this work, we share our unique understanding of community needs and help mobilize and guide donors to specific community initiatives. For more information about SPCF please visit [www.spccf.ca](http://www.spccf.ca)

**Facebook:** <https://www.facebook.com/StratfordPerthCommFdn>

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