



HEROWORKTM
CANADA

Charity Infrastructure Renewal

SOCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPACT

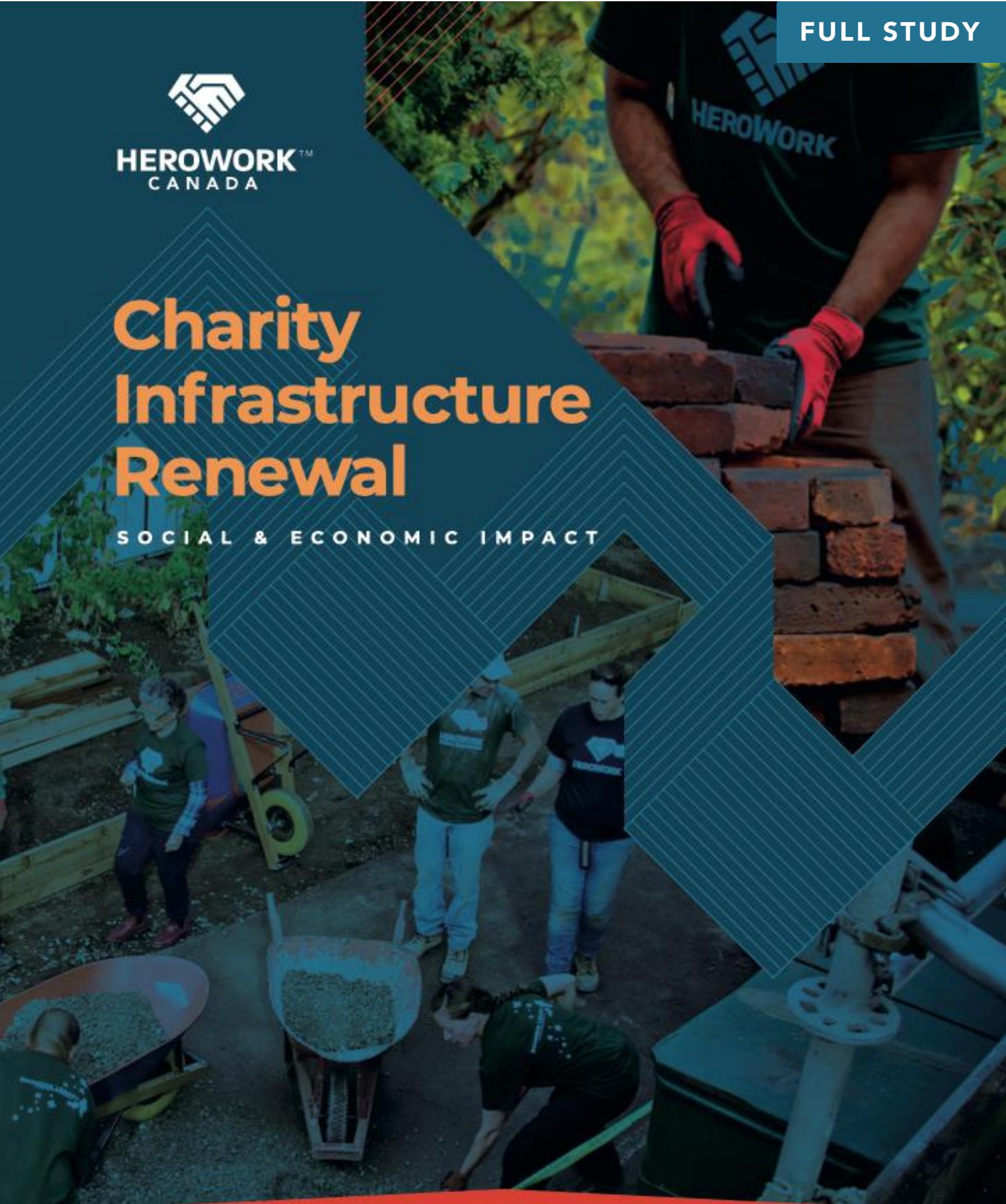


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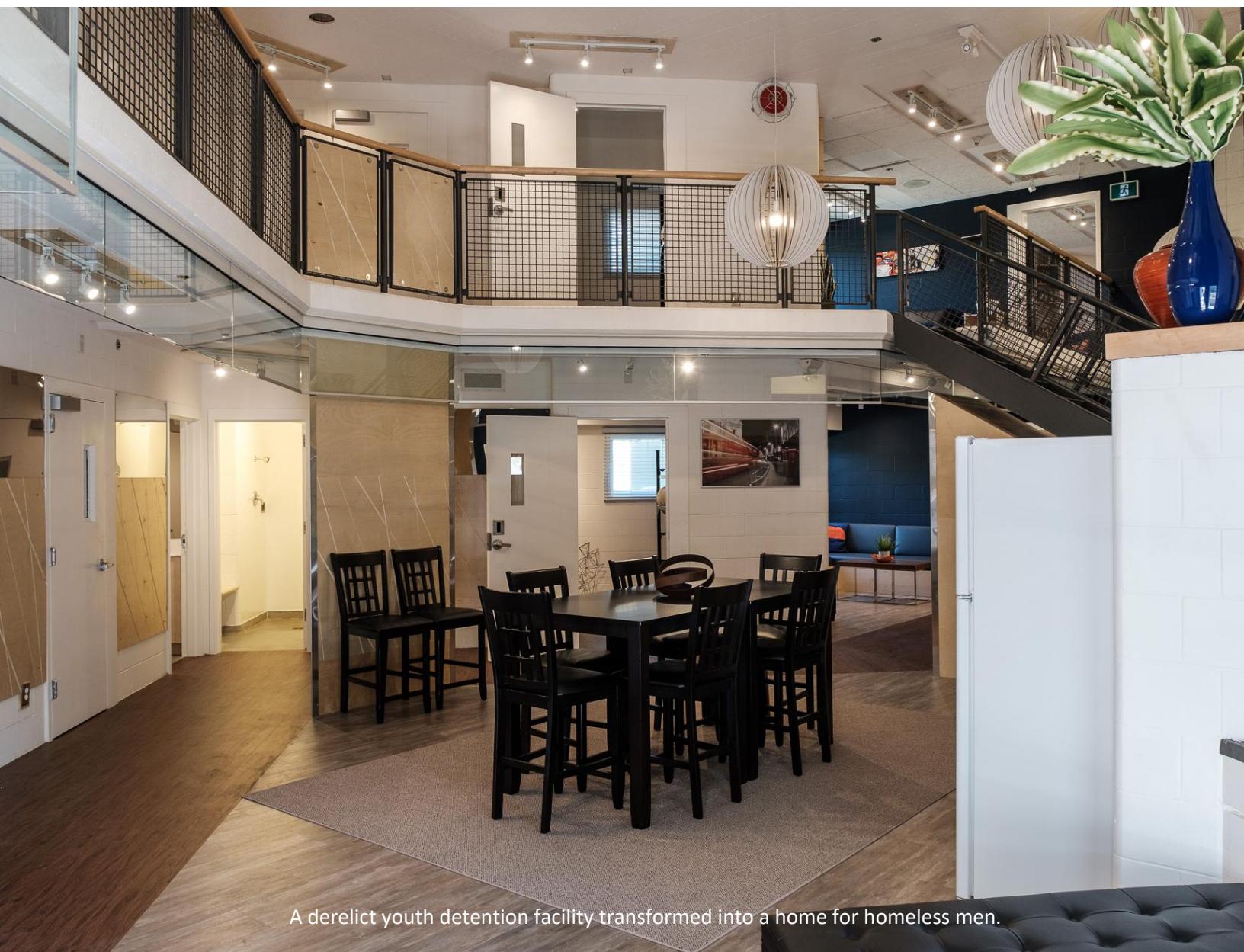
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We acknowledge and respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territories we reside and the Songhees, Esquimalt, and the WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Numerous colleagues have been involved in this research partnership project including HeroWork Canada, CIFAL Victoria at the University of Victoria, and the Victoria Foundation. A special thanks to Dr. Crystal Tremblay, Director of CIFAL Victoria and faculty in the Department of Geography at the University of Victoria, who supported the project as advisor. Dr. Jennifer Hall was the lead researcher, working closely with HeroWork Canada partners Annette Wall, Paul Latour, and Sharlene Smith.

A very special thanks to all the participants who generously gave their time for this research.



Community gathering space for healing and transformation.

PARTNERS

[**HeroWork Canada**](#) is a registered charity with a mission to enhance other charities by transforming their buildings. HeroWork does this through large-scale community events called Radical Renovations, which result in community-based, quality renovations for and with charity partners. In turn, these projects lead to increased capacity and efficiency to serve the most vulnerable populations in our communities. Across Canada, charity buildings providing housing, food security, counselling, safe shelters, Indigenous programs, mental health, community centres, and more are often in disrepair, inefficient, and inadequate, thereby affecting the social fabric of our communities. There is a deficit of resources—financial, technical, and human—to refurbish and maintain the places where people receive critical social services. To help solve this growing problem, HeroWork leverages funds, resources, and people to achieve exceptional transformations of charity buildings at a fraction of traditional costs and time, creating a legacy of renewed infrastructure.

[**CIFAL Victoria**](#) is an initiative of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research and the University of Victoria, which serves as a regional nexus for capacity building, networking, training, and mobilizing research and other initiatives that advance the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The CIFAL Global Network consists of a series of globally located hubs, managed by the host institutions, that aim to build capacities for sustainable development by teaching implementation solutions for the SDGs and sharing knowledge among the academics, government authorities, international organizations, the private sector, and civil society. CIFAL Victoria connects the region with the global community and supports international knowledge-sharing and partnerships, taking a holistic approach to the SDGs, with a strong focus on upholding Indigenous knowledges and self-determination, social justice, equity, and inclusion.

[**The Victoria Foundation**](#) is a registered charity accredited by [**Imagine Canada**](#) and the second oldest of Canada's 191 Community Foundations. Since 1936, the Victoria Foundation has been managing charitable gifts to create permanent, income-earning funds that support hundreds of charities each year. We grant nearly a million dollars a month, and to-date, we have distributed more than \$269 million to support charities locally and across Canada. The Victoria Foundation has a vision to make our community stronger, and our shared quality of life better now and for the long term. By connecting visionary donors with causes that truly matter, we are able to make positive changes in Greater Victoria and in communities across B.C. and Canada, and we have been doing so since 1936. This vision is embedded in our tag line: Connecting People Who Care With Causes That Matter®.



Transformed commercial kitchen to serve thousands.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Canada's non-profit sector provides many social programs with significant economic impact. These social-driven organizations contribute \$192 billion dollars in economic activity to Canada annually and account for almost 9% of the country's GDP. The sector employs 2.4 million people, which is more than the mining, oil and gas, agriculture, transportation, and retail sectors combined.¹

Across Canada, charity buildings providing housing, food security, counselling, safe shelters, Indigenous programs, mental health, community centres, and more are often in disrepair, inefficient, and inadequate, thereby affecting the social fabric of our communities. There is a deficit of resources—financial, technical, and human—to refurbish and maintain the places where people receive critical social services. As reported by charities in this study, infrastructure renewal leads to increased capacity and efficiency to serve the most vulnerable populations in our communities. To support and substantiate the need for this investment, HeroWork Canada, CIFAL Victoria, and the Victoria Foundation partnered on a study to better understand the social and economic impact of charity infrastructure renewal. The study was done using a case study of HeroWork's infrastructure renewal projects (Radical Renovations) between 2012 and 2021, through qualitative and quantitative analysis.

The objectives of this research were to:

1. Demonstrate the social and economic impact of charity infrastructure renewal;
2. Advocate for increased investment in charity infrastructure; and
3. Promote support for the charitable sector.

The study consisted of surveying charity leadership (executives and board members), staff, clients, and volunteers as well as HeroWork volunteers on the social impact of having their facilities renovated. Economic impact data were collected from the leaders of six renovated charities.

The Research Approach

A literature review was conducted as part of this study, highlighting the various approaches and tools used to measure and understand social and economic impact as it applies to charity infrastructure renewal. The Canadian Index of Wellbeing² and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals³ were chosen as helpful guiding frameworks to better understand these interconnected dimensions of impact. A draft research framework was developed and shared with some of the participating charitable organizations for their input to ensure all aspects of impact were included.

Using this framework, a survey and follow-up interviews were administered between February and March 2022. The survey was sent to 13 charity organizations, who had experienced 15 separate infrastructure renewal renovations, inviting their leadership, staff, volunteers, and clients to participate. In addition, a survey was sent to HeroWork volunteers. A total of 121 surveys were completed. Economic data were provided by the leadership of participating charitable organizations.

¹ Imagine Canada, 2015 and 2018.

² CIW: <https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/>

³ UN SDGs: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

Key Findings

Social Impacts

The following social impacts are conclusions of the data collected from survey responses from charity clients, leaders, staff, and volunteers.

- Increased Services
 - 100% of clients said they were able to participate in more activities or services after the renovation.
 - 89% of leaders said they expanded services as a result of the renovation.
- Higher Quality Services
 - 100% of staff said the renovations enhanced their client service.
 - 95% of leaders said the renovations improved the quality of their services.
- Better Client Access
 - 100% of clients said they felt more secure and had better access to services.
 - 88% of clients said they felt more comfortable in the space after the renovations.
- Improved Organizational Efficiency
 - 100% of staff said the renovations enhanced team relationships and the effectiveness, community relations, and safety aspects of their work.
 - 93% of volunteers said the renovations impacted their effectiveness, efficiency, safety, and volunteer relationships.
 - 89% of leaders said the renovations enabled service innovation.
- Enhanced Ability to Achieve the Organization's Mission
 - 95% of leaders said the renovations enabled them to better meet their organization's mission and goals.

Economic Impacts

The following economic impacts are conclusions from data collected from the survey responses of 27 charity leaders as well as interviews with six of the 13 charities renovated.

- Increased Revenue
 - 44% of leaders said they were able to attract new sources of revenue and/or increase their revenue as a result of the renovations.
 - Four of the six charities interviewed reported an increase in revenue through grants, contributions, and donations as a result of the renovations.
 - Three of the charities interviewed reported increased revenue from space rental/sharing with other charities.
 - 90% of leaders said relations improved with funders, sponsors, or donors as a result of the renovation.
- Reduced Costs
 - 81% of leaders said the renovations reduced their maintenance and utility costs.
 - 95% of leaders said building efficiency was improved.
- More Economies of Scale
 - Leaders reported that improved space use and capacity resulted in a significant increase in the number of clients served and the number and types of services offered.
- Increased Human Resources
 - Leaders reported the renovations led to an increase in the number of staff and service hours.

- Enhanced Community Service
 - Leaders reported an increase in community partnerships and support for other, non-renovated charities (e.g., food services).
 - 100% of staff, 90% of charity leaders, and 85% of volunteers said community relationships improved as a result of the renovation.

Recommendations

This research demonstrates that investing in charity infrastructure strengthens communities. To that end, there are several recommendations that will facilitate future focus on the need for charitable infrastructure renewal.

Recommendation 1: Build a sustainable program for infrastructure improvement into charitable funding at all government levels (federal, provincial, municipal), so that organizations can achieve and maintain healthy, safe, efficient, and effective (purpose-designed) buildings in which to deliver critical services.

Recommendation 2: Undertake and maintain national data collection on the value and quality of charity infrastructure, similar to data collected on Canada's housing stock.

Recommendation 3: Continue to examine the social and economic impact of infrastructure renewal through routine data collection and evaluation of the changes to services resulting from infrastructure renewal.

Recommendation 4: Educate and support charitable organizations to understand the strategic and service delivery importance of infrastructure renewal, how to achieve it, and how to advocate for it.

Summary

This study confirms that improving charitable infrastructure has a significant impact on delivering critical services to our most vulnerable community members. Using the model designed by HeroWork Canada as a demonstration of the powerful change created by renewed infrastructure, this study shows that renovating charity buildings is a fast and transformative pathway to a charity's success:

- For clients: improved, innovative, enhanced, and/or expanded service;
- For organizations: lowered upkeep costs, healthy and safe workplaces, purpose-built environments leading to efficiencies, "greening" of facilities, increased community awareness, improved client, staff, and volunteer perception, and increased revenue;
- For communities: improved neighbourhoods and neighbour relations, eager participation of volunteers and sponsors, and increased community commitment and support; and
- For funders: monies allocated to infrastructure are a one-time cost that pays big dividends for community social services and the vulnerable populations they serve.

Our research has shown that charity infrastructure renewal can have a profound impact on client service, the quality of that service, and the organization's efficiency—further enhancing their contributions to social and economic well-being.

By investing in charity infrastructure, we can improve service delivery and program innovation and respond to the changing and increasing needs of vulnerable populations.⁴

⁴ Victoria Foundation. (2018).

INTRODUCTION

The charity sector is vital to both the well-being of Canada's citizens and its economy. Indeed, we are all enriched by the work of charities, whether we recognize it or not. Imagine Canada reports that Canadian charities and non-profits contribute \$192 billion dollars annually in economic activity, accounting for 8.7% of Canada's GDP.⁵ Over 2.5 million Canadians are employed in the charitable and non-profit sector, making up 12% of the economically active population.⁶ We are also very generous in our support of charitable organizations, with over 13 million volunteers giving 1.7 billion hours per year.⁷ Imagine Canada has calculated this contribution as the equivalent of 860,000 full-time jobs.⁸ Finally, from 2007 to 2019, GDP from this sector grew at a rate of 4.8%, while the overall economy grew by 3.2%.

Although the charitable sector provides significant social and economic benefit, as noted in the 2018 Civil Society Impact report⁹, limited research has been conducted on the infrastructure renewal challenges and needs of the sector. While there is substantial literature on assessing the impacts of charity organizations, it is primarily focused on the ineffectiveness of current evaluation and research frameworks and methods (Emmett & Emmett, 2015; Grieco et al., 2015; Imagine Canada, 2018; Noble et al., 2020; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2021; Sivesind, 2015). To support and substantiate the need for infrastructure renewal investment, HeroWork Canada, CIFAL Victoria, and the Victoria Foundation partnered on a study to better understand the social and economic impact of charity infrastructure renewal.

This study aims to narrow the research gap by assessing the social and economic impacts of charity infrastructural renewal as evidenced by a case study using HeroWork Canada. The report first provides some background on the evidence and literature related to the impacts that charity infrastructure renewal has on service delivery. It then outlines the research methods and key findings on social and economic impact. The data are analyzed in the conclusion with accompanying recommendations.

⁵ About the Sector | Imagine Canada. (2021a). *Canada's Charities and Nonprofits*.

<https://www.imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/Infographic-sector-stat-2021.pdf> (Data derived from Statistics Canada).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Victoria Foundation (2018).

HEROWORK RADICAL RENOVATIONS: CHARITY INFRASTRUCTURE RENEWAL

For its charity partners, HeroWork Canada completes Radical Renovations, which are a short series of large community events in which a wide array of community members come together. These events look like a modern-day barn raising or extreme makeover, in which dozens of companies and hundreds of volunteers (both trades and non-trades) work in cooperation to complete renovations in a fraction of the time and cost.

A HeroWork chapter works closely with local partner charity organizations to create an infrastructure strategy to aid in realizing the vision and goals of the charity for excellence and innovation. Purposeful design of the physical infrastructure supports the charities to provide services to their vulnerable clients in safe and supportive facilities. It also enables expansion and innovation of services and efficient and economical facilities. A critical element in infrastructure renewal is being able to envision the future possibilities and then collaborating on the design of the facilities to work towards achieving the best outcomes.

Through 2021, HeroWork has completed 15 charity infrastructure renewal renovations in the Capital Region District (CRD) of B.C. In typical year, this HeroWork chapter engages well over 100 companies, more than 50 coordinators, and in excess of 700 individual volunteers, who all provide either goods and/or labour in kind.

As of 2021, HeroWork has completed \$6,835,000 in infrastructure renewal, providing charities with a savings of \$5,103,000 compared to fair market valuations (Appendix 1).

BACKGROUND

Many charities are constrained by outdated facilities that are in poor and sometimes unsafe conditions and have little or no funding capacity to address their infrastructure needs. With their facilities in poor condition, the ability of these charities to deliver important social services, be innovative, and respond to changing needs of vulnerable populations is significantly diminished.¹⁰ Notwithstanding poor facility design, charities continue to deliver critical services to the most vulnerable citizens in Canada without the same capital expenditures recognized as critical for other government-provided public services such as health, education, and public service. Since 2016, HeroWork has been doing Radical Renovations of existing charities that serve vulnerable populations in the Victoria, BC region. HeroWork harnesses the power of community by engaging volunteers who donate their time and resources to improve charity buildings and help address their needs.

The literature on the impacts of infrastructure renewal for charity organizations is almost non-existent. Research on the needs and challenges of non-profit and charitable organizations generally fails to highlight the critical state of space or building infrastructure. A few references were found that suggest space, infrastructure, operational, or building needs are a priority for charitable organizations. The literature does, however, note that it is not uncommon for these organizations to identify funding challenges for administrative costs (often including any building maintenance, repair, and capital

¹⁰ HeroWork Needs Assessment Survey (2017 and 2022).

expenditures) versus program delivery (Carman, 2009; City of Vancouver, 2020; Cordery & Sinclair, 2013; Gregory & Howard, 2009; Hall et al., 2003; Imagine Canada, 2016; Ricciuti & Calo, 2018).

Gregory and Howard (2009) found that organizations, including non-profits that built robust infrastructure—which includes information technology systems, financial systems, skills training, fundraising processes, and other essential overhead—are more likely to succeed than those that do not. Yet it is well known that most non-profits do not spend enough money on overhead.¹¹ In addition, these results can be somewhat misleading when taking in the definition of cost for administration or overhead. For example, in Bridgespan's definition of overhead, there is no mention of rent, lease, or building maintenance costs.¹² In their consulting work, Gregory and Howard (2009) frequently find that their clients agree with the idea of improving infrastructure, yet they resist making these changes because they do not want to increase their overhead spending.

Underfunding overhead can have disastrous effects according to the *Non-Profit Overhead Cost Study* (Urban Institute National Center for Charitable Statistics, 2004). Among the findings of this study were non-functioning computers, staff members who lacked the training needed for their positions, and furniture so old that movers refused to move it. The effects of such limited overhead investment are felt far beyond the office: for example, when non-functioning computers cannot track program outcomes and show what is working and what is not. Despite findings such as these, many non-profits intended to continue skimping on overhead following the 2008 recession (Bedsworth et al., 2008).

Why do non-profits and funders alike continue to shortchange overhead? Research reveals that a vicious cycle fuels this persistent underfunding.¹³ The first step in the cycle is funders' unrealistic expectations about how much it costs to run a non-profit. Second, non-profits feel pressure to conform to funders' unrealistic expectations. Finally, non-profits respond to this pressure in two ways. They spend too little on overhead, and they underreport their expenditures on tax forms and in fundraising materials. This underspending and underreporting, in turn, perpetuate funders' unrealistic expectations. Over time, funders expect grantees to do more and more with less and less—a cycle that slowly starves non-profits and has a significant impact on their operating environment, with detrimental impacts on quality and effectiveness of service (Bedsworth et al., 2008).

ASSESSING IMPACT

We know that Canada's charitable sector plays a vital role in building communities, social networks, and economic growth by mobilizing paid and volunteer resources to achieve social and community benefits. The Canadian charitable sector has been growing steadily even through the pandemic.¹⁴ It has attracted policy and political interest because of its extensive involvement in the solution of public problems and

¹¹ Bedsworth et al. (2008).

¹² Ibid: p. 21. The definition of overhead includes accounting, human resources, and legal, finance, insurance, office management, investment expenses, board meetings, annual reports, accounting/auditing, and other centralized services.

¹³ Gregory and Howard (2009).

¹⁴ Imagine Canada. (2021b). *Sector Monitor, Ongoing Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic*.

<https://www.imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/Sector-Monitor-Ongoing-Effects-COVID-19-Pandemic-EN.pdf>

growing economic presence.¹⁵ However, the COVID-19 pandemic has stretched local charity organizations to the point of breaking as they struggle to deliver their programs and services.¹⁶

With this important, yet vulnerable, role in the Canadian social and economic fabric, charities are being asked to demonstrate the impact of the programs and services they deliver. Stakeholders such as funders and donors, board members, policymakers, the media, and individual Canadians need information to help them understand how the charities they support impact their communities and to ensure that the funds they contribute are having an impact where it is needed most.

Despite the significant role of the charitable sector, there has been limited empirical analysis because they are not easily identified in national statistical data systems.¹⁷ Imagine Canada's work to support the charitable sector found that being able to demonstrate impact is critical to "successfully reshaping the charitable sector's conversation with Canadians."¹⁸ However, many charity leaders, particularly those leading smaller charities, say they struggle to do this: not because they are not measuring and evaluating their work; instead, they struggle with demonstrating impact as part of a broader set of challenges related to measurement and evaluation.

THE RESEARCH APPROACH: MEASURING SOCIAL & ECONOMIC IMPACT

Social Impact Analysis

Social impact can be defined as "the effect an organization's actions have on the well-being of the community."¹⁹ Measuring social impact is a way for organizations to know their effectiveness and their benefit to communities (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015; 2021). Promoting the benefits of good impact measurement across the charitable sector can improve their services, deliver the best programming for their beneficiaries, and contribute to community well-being.²⁰ It communicates value to funders, sponsors, and the potential donors, being able to share evidence that demonstrates effective program and service delivery.

Given the breadth and scope of measuring these activities, several indicators have been proposed to measure social impact. A well-known and adopted framework is the Canadian Index of Wellbeing (CIW), which was developed by Waterloo University in 2011.²¹ The eight indicators identified in the CIW are a particularly useful framing for better understanding social impact given the nature of our study, as it relates to charitable organizations and the communities in which they serve.

The CIW measures social impact based on eight domains that reflect how Canadians are doing in several areas of their lives.²² These domains are intended to be comprehensive and provide a basis for assessing

¹⁵ United Nations (2018).

¹⁶ <https://victoriafoundation.bc.ca/understanding-the-pandemic-effect/>

¹⁷ United Nations (2018, p.2).

¹⁸ Imagine Canada (2019, p. 1).

¹⁹ Keith Weigelt video at <http://kwhs.wharton.upenn.edu/term/social-impact/>

²⁰ Kazimirski & Pritchard (2014).

²¹ https://uwaterloo.ca/canadian-index-wellbeing/sites/ca.canadian-index-wellbeing/files/uploads/files/c011676-nationalreport-ciw_final-s_0.pdf

²² Ibid.

social impact and can be aligned with the broader context of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an important and complimentary framework in which we have aligned our study. We chose the CIW and UN SDGs as indicators of social impact, given the diversity of charitable organizations in our sample size and the different ways that impact is being experienced.

Economic Impact Analysis

Economic impact analysis (EIA) has been used to examine the effect of an event on the economy in a specified area, ranging from a single neighbourhood to the entire globe. EIA often estimates multiple types of impacts such as changes in revenue, profit, wages, and/or jobs. Charitable organizations, however, are not like other firms or business entities in an economy. Although charitable organizations can have positive balance sheets, they are driven by their social mission and goals as opposed to profit returns to owners and shareholders, and thus, their economic impact is often not measured in the same way as for-profit organizations. However, there are some useful similarities for the purposes of assessing the economic value of charitable organizations.

Charities use inputs such as labour (volunteers and paid staff), capital, material, and energy to produce outputs in pursuit of goals.²³ In the absence of profit and share value, it is difficult to develop a way of measuring the performance of one charity compared to another. However, over the past 15–20 years, proof of efficiency, effectiveness, and value for money in the non-profit sector have gained more importance (Sivesind, 2015).

Some research points to the sector's contribution to GDP and employment.²⁴ Another measure is the *labour income impact*, which represents the increase in total money paid to local employees in the form of salaries and wages. A similar measure is the *employment impact*, which measures the increase in the number of total employees in the local region. Instead of measuring the economic impact in terms of money, this measure presents the impact on the number of jobs in the region. A couple of local studies have demonstrated the economic impact of charitable organizations in Vancouver Island communities.

In researching the economic impacts of charities in the Cowichan Region of BC, Sheppard (2015) found that the economic impact of charitable organizations in the Cowichan Region is significant.²⁵ Collectively, these organizations accounted for over \$119 million in annual revenue and employed nearly 1,800 individuals in 2013 (p. 2). For 2013, the economic reach of both the total annual revenues and the compensation paid to employees was greater than that of local governments in the Cowichan Region. More recent research by the Victoria Foundation (Victoria Foundation, 2018) found that the total economic activity of registered charities in the Greater Victoria Region is just over \$4 billion. The authors determined that this level of spending supported the equivalent of 63,000 jobs and a contribution of over \$300 million in municipal taxes (Victoria Foundation, 2018).

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGS) were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. The SDGS provide a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, recognizing that ending poverty and other social ills must be accompanied by strategies that improve

²³ Emmett and Emmett (2015).

²⁴ Sims et al. (2014).

²⁵ Sheppard (2015).

health and education, reduce inequality, spur economic growth, and protect the environment. The plan includes 17 goals and 169 targets to measure global progress, most of which are aligned with relevant CIW domains (see Appendix 2 for a comparison of the two frameworks). The CIW and UN SDGs offer important guideposts to measure the impact of charity infrastructural renewal and are helpful in thinking about the broad impact areas and ripple effects of these important investments. Both these impact frameworks together offer a robust and globally identifiable measurement system.

Methods

Through a case study of HeroWork Canada's Radical Renovations, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to better understand the social and economic impact of these efforts. In doing so, the project was undertaken in two phases.

Phase I consisted of a literature review and development of an assessment framework to measure the social and economic impact of charitable infrastructure renewal programs or organizations. The literature included an extensive online search for best practices, research, data, and theoretical frameworks that focused on assessing the impact of similar programs and to understand the indicators and models that have been used to measure the impact of charitable infrastructure renewal.

A draft impact assessment framework was developed and reviewed by partners in this study. Several senior leaders of charity organizations who had received a Radical Renovation from HeroWork were invited to provide feedback and suggestions. Based on this revised framework, surveys were designed to capture assessments of impact from the following groups:

- charity organization leaders (executive and board members),
- charity staff,
- charity clients, and
- HeroWork Canada volunteers.

Phase II was the collection and analysis of data using SurveyMonkey (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/>). With support from HeroWork Canada, the partner organizations (see Appendix 3 for list of charity partners to whom the survey was sent) were contacted by phone to inform them of the study and invite their support for distributing the survey to the relevant groups above and collection of data related to economic impacts. HeroWork Canada then distributed the survey to its Victoria volunteers. A total of 121 surveys were completed by 13 organizations (Table 1).

Also part of the data collection and analysis, a separate survey for economic indicators was developed for the economic impact assessment, followed by direct interviews. In total, data were collected from six of the charity partners (Appendix 3).

Table 1: Number of Respondents by Audience Type

Audience Type	# of Responses
Charity Partner Leaders (Executive & Board)	27
Charity Partner Clients	11*
Charity Partner Staff	23
Charity Partner Volunteers	27
HeroWork Canada Volunteers	33
Total number of respondents	121

* Note: the low number of clients participating is due to the vulnerable nature of clients from participating charity organizations.

RESULTS

Social Impact Results

Charitable Organization Leaders

Almost all organizational leaders (95%) confirmed that the Radical Renovation both addressed the intended goals of the renovation and enabled them to better meet the mission and goals of their organization. Leaders shared that:

The larger space has allowed them to serve more clients and have more staff on site.

Staff have been able to have dedicated offices, which makes meeting clients and intra-organizational communications that much better.

The renovations were a key factor in establishing an ethos of an authentic therapeutic community. It transformed the space from one that seemed coldly institutional to a place one could call home, in which healthy relationships and positive values could be fostered. Lives that had been distorted by addictions are being transformed.

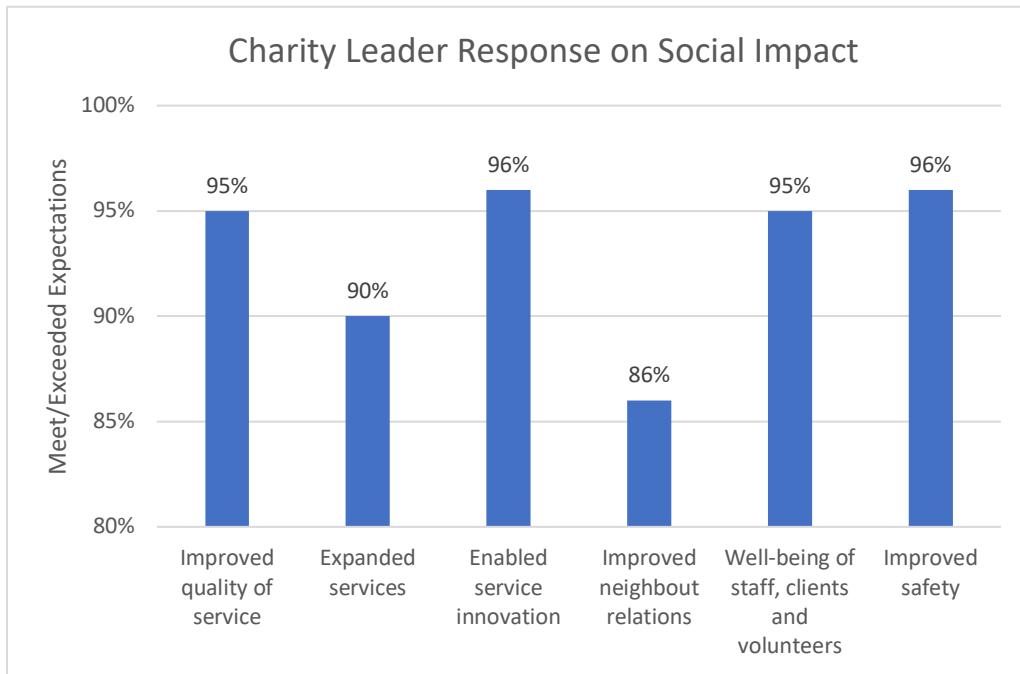
Having a large separate kitchen has improved food safe and our ability to serve more clients.

The responses from charity leaders on the impacts of the Radical Renovation are shown in Figure 1. Key among them is an improved quality of service, well-being of staff, and improved building efficiency.



Detail of outside round house pavilion for people with barriers to experience nature.

Figure 1: Social Impact – Charity Leaders



Also notable is that organizational leaders felt that improved, more cohesive, and engaged relationships exceeded their expectations for staff, volunteers, clients, funders, sponsors, and donors. Examples of this impact include leaders' comments that:

The number of clients has been enabled to steadily grow.

The quality of the renovation made men feel valued and helped them get through some tough times.

The creation of a closed-door shared space for volunteers and staff to work together, feed themselves, and build community has been really good for organizational culture.

The renovation positively impacted organizational culture and client experience.”

Client experience has been quite improved.

Our services expanded exponentially during covid, so the larger space has been essential to accommodate this work.

The HeroWork team transformed a jail into a beautiful, warm, uplifting accommodation space for men going through recovery from addictions.

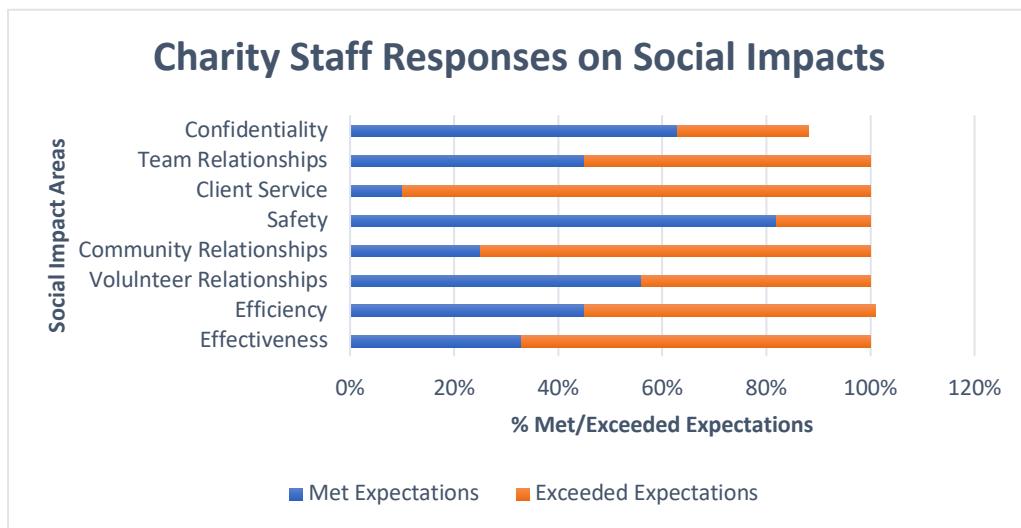
It fixed many many different little problems and helped beautify the house.

People learned about our organization through the events and have gotten involved as a volunteer or referred people to our services. We have seen aspects of our building that need modifications to make it more user friendly. We have the ability to offer people with diverse abilities the opportunity to be in nature and in our programs in a way that connects them to the site and creates a sense of belonging.

Charity Organization Staff

Overwhelmingly, staff felt that the renovations improved the client service aspect of their work (90%) while enhanced community relationships (100%), and increased effectiveness (100%) also met or exceeded their expectations (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Social Impact: Charity Staff



Staff were positively impacted by the changes resulting from the renovations. Some of the staff shared that they were able to work more efficiently, safely, and cooperatively and that the renovation created a *“holistic view of health and wellbeing” as well as a “holistic approach (which was) inviting to Indigenous communities.”*

The physical space ... is a gathering space for intentional conversations, it is a space that offers access to those living with barriers, and it has created efficiencies for our team so they can move our impact forward.

I so appreciate what HeroWork has done to support our mission. All the buildings and upgrades that were done continue to serve our mission to this day.

Our home at Prospect is game changing. The programs, services, and opportunities we have the potential to offer now provide opportunities for many.

When asked if they had any client feedback, a number of staff shared the following:

In one respondent’s words, the renovations were life changing!

Our clients and staff have expressed such enthusiasm for the new facility and the offerings available as a result. Visiting the site is one of the most desired partnerships we offer.

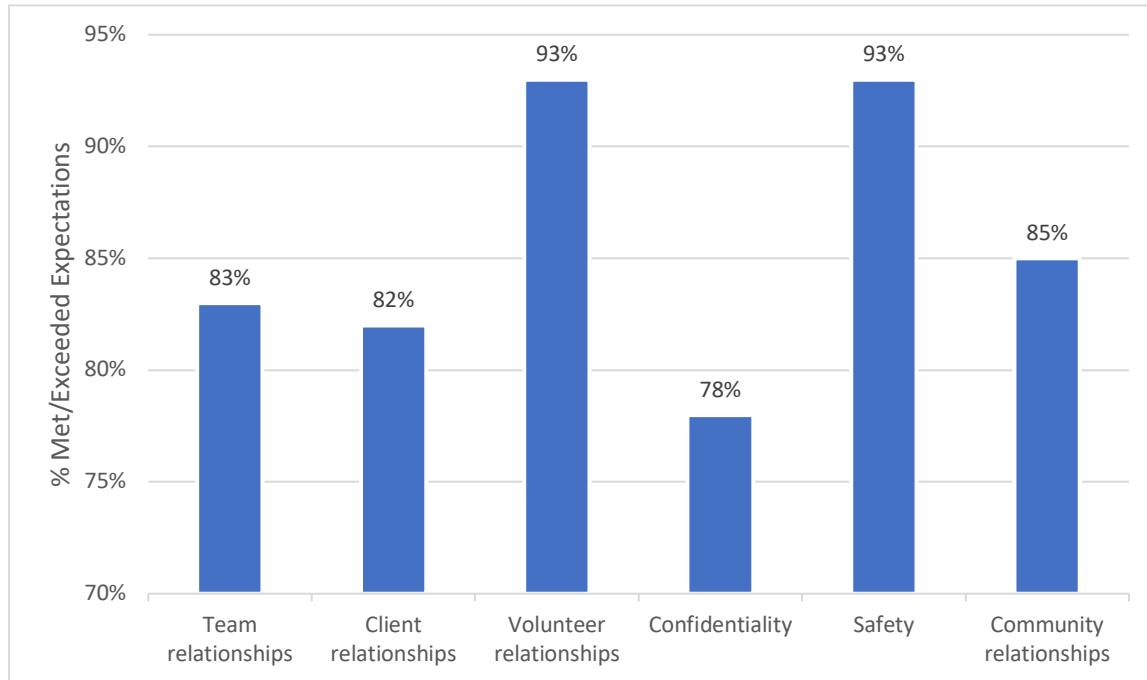
They love seeing the function and flow of our buildings and how they interact with the natural landscapes and programmatic design.

The renovation led Peers to becoming a more welcoming space and increased moral as an employee.

Charity Organization Volunteers

Volunteers felt that the most significant impacts, where results met or exceeded expectations, were on program effectiveness (93%), efficiency (93%), volunteer relationships (93%), and safety (93%) (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Charity Volunteer Responses on Work Impacts



These results are reflected in the comments and examples below:

The new cupboards made organizing the front of the house much better for work flow.

... improved cleanliness and efficiency in preparation areas.

... able to work more efficiently.

The reno of the Rainbow Kitchen has made our work ... so much more efficient and easy ... [and] allowed us to broaden out our scope of service to the community.

When the guests and volunteers are happier and better able to do their work, the charity makes friends of the neighbourhood instead of enemies.

Charity Organization Clients

Although the number of respondents in this category is quite small (11)²⁶, clients expressed the following regarding impact:

- significantly more comfortable in the space (7/8 – 87.5%);
- significantly better ability to participate in more activities (6/8 – 75%); and
- significantly better access to the services or programs (8/8 – 100%).

Additional Comments from Clients

Desire ... to uphold a high level of maintenance of the facility.

Builds a feeling of community and connection.

Better accessibility around the property and better places to have secure counselling meetings. The free store has been made so we can properly use it now.

I feel that since the renovation all other clients choose to be over in the freshly renovated space because of the "home" vibe.

I feel happy and safe.

All the client respondents said that they were very likely to tell others about the organization from which they receive services.

HeroWork Volunteers

HeroWork has a great reputation among its volunteers. When asked to tell us about their experiences, almost all (96%) said they had a great time. Most (93%) said that they would absolutely contribute to or support a HeroWork project in the future, with the remaining sharing that they were likely to do so.

Volunteers said they saw the most significant improvements in building efficiency, service, building safety and security, and the well-being of staff, clients, and volunteers. Almost all (93%) felt that they received a personal benefit, such as community, social, spiritual, emotional, physical and educational.

Had fun and felt like my contribution was useful.

Profound sense of accomplishment.

I felt I was valued and treated the same as much younger volunteers.

HeroWork built my confidence in leading groups and teaching others.

Restoring dignity to the individuals who access the resources.

Building enhancement. Great aesthetic addition to a neighbourhood.

²⁶ The denominators are smaller than the total number of responses due to those questions being skipped by a respondent.

A lot about community: just a sense of well-being giving back to the community ... a better connection to my community ... a greater sense of community and feeling of team work to accomplish a goal ... a sense of belonging to a community.

Given their experience with HeroWork, all the respondents said they would tell others about the charities they supported through the Radical Renovations.

Social Impact Themes

Higher Quality Client Service

The renovation enabled the staff and volunteers to focus on the quality of the conversations in the programs and services delivered, as well as the ability for staff and clients to feel safe in the environment. The Counselling and Psychotherapy Central Awarding Body sets out qualities of an ideal counselling environment (<https://counsellingtutor.com/how-to-create-a-good-counselling-environment/>). Safety is both physical and psychological and includes components delivered by the renovations, such as improved accessibility, availability of private and confidential space, buildings that meet health and safety requirements, and spaces that are appropriately and professionally furnished.

Increased Services

More availability of programming was reported by each of the respondent groups. The renovation helped to redesign space to create more special purpose areas, larger rooms for group activities, efficiency in welcoming clients and volunteers, and creating a “gathering space” for holistic and intentional conversations not possible previously.

Higher Quality of Service from Enhanced Work Culture and Staff Cohesion

Key to offering critical services to a vulnerable population is the ability for employees and volunteers to build a caring culture. The survey demonstrates a high (95%+) agreement among leaders, staff, and volunteers that the renovations contributed directly to staff morale, cohesion, improved teamwork, as well as reflecting that: “When the guests and volunteers are happier and better able to do their work, the charity makes friends of the neighbourhood instead of enemies.” The renovation supported the creation of an “authentic therapeutic community” and “has made our work ... so much more efficient and easy ... allowed us to broaden out our scope of service to the community.”

Better Client Access to Activities and Service

Respondents reported a steady increase in the number of clients able to access services. The renovations considered, as a priority, the physical accessibility of space, building efficiency, and how the “function and flow of ... buildings ... interact with the natural landscapes and programmatic design.”

Improved Organizational Efficiency

From physical changes, such as storage to design and purpose-built spaces, respondents in all groups reported significant enhancements in the use of space and the resultant contribution to organizational efficiency. The space also allowed for expansion and innovation of services as well as the ability for

charity organizations to quickly adapt to a shift in the style of service delivery as a result of covid restrictions.

Enhanced Ability to Achieve Organization's Mission

The thoughtful design stage and then delivery of the renovation helped the organization to more clearly achieve their mission and goals. Respondents reported a better connection with the physical space for clients as creating a “sense of belonging;” the transformation of the space helped the organization realize “the potential to ... provide opportunities for many.”

Economic Impact Results

Economic impact of charity infrastructure renewal can be measured by numerous indicators, such as revenue, number of employees, compensation, taxes paid on property owned, equipment and supplies purchased, project value (goods and services purchased), value of donated labour and in-kind services, and value of volunteer hours. A key financial benefit to the charity organizations themselves and the local economy more generally is the value of the renovation and the money saved by the charity by having critical work done by HeroWork. ***The value of the 15 completed HeroWork Canada projects is estimated to be almost \$6.9 million; saving the partner charities over \$5.1 million in direct costs (see Appendix 1 for a detailed breakdown).***

Six charity organizations provided information and data through the survey and interviews, which contributed to the assessment of the economic impact of infrastructure improvements. Researchers focused on two years prior to the renovation as compared with post renovation. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on programs, services, and funding of participating charities has been significant²⁷ and, in some cases, impacted the ability to attribute shifts in services to a specific event such as the renovation. However, researchers were able to consider both pre-pandemic impacts for those charities receiving a renovation pre-2020 as well as resiliency, adaptation, and innovation during the pandemic, which reportedly arose at least, in part, due to the improved structural design and capacity. Some significant impacts we are able to provide with confidence include:

Increased Revenue

- Ninety percent (90%) of respondents stated an improved relationship with funders, sponsors, or donors as a result of the renovation. Four of the six charities reported an increase in revenue through increased grants, contributions, and donations. The additional revenue was reportedly a result of the charity’s ability to expand and/or enhance existing services as well as to provide new and innovative programs and services.
- Higher community profile facilitated success in major fundraising initiatives, including:
 - the ability to attract high-profile champions to sponsor major events, and
 - more intentional and higher profile on social media, which resulted in engaging more donors and sponsors.
- Three of the organizations included in this analysis of economic impact reported an increase in revenue through renting out and/or sharing space with other charity programs.

²⁷ City of Vancouver. (2020). *Vancouver's Nonprofit Sector, Current State Analysis*.

Reduced Costs

- Reduced maintenance requirements and costs. Prior to renovations, organizations reported the need to do costly repairs just to keep the facility operating. During the renovation, the facilities were improved, eliminating the ongoing costs of repairs as well as reducing the building footprint through use of “green” technologies: for example, new HVAC systems. In the survey data, 95% of respondents reported reduction in maintenance and utility costs, while 81% confirmed an improvement in building efficiency.
- Efficient space utilization led to a significant improvement in access and availability of food, leading to a reduction in food waste. Food services are often a big part of renovations, as many charities’ clients are also among the hungry in our communities. Renovated kitchens not only include food preparation but also food storage.

More Economies of Scale

- Improved space utilization and capacity, resulting in a significant increase in the number of clients served
 - One organization reported an increase from 100–125 clients served meals per day to over 200, as well as the capacity to offer support to new types of vulnerable clients, including the working poor and those affected by job loss during COVID 19 restrictions.
- Expanded number and types of services offered, for example:
 - distribution of prepared meals to other community organizations,
 - start-up of breakfast programs for neighbourhood schools,
 - ability to offer private care through nursing and other healthcare support services on premises for vulnerable and at-risk clients, and
 - expanded services for those living in poverty through ability to use newly renovated space for new programs, including in partnership with other charities.

Increased Human Resources

- Improved space utilization and capacity contributed to expanded and/or enhanced programs, which subsequently led to an increase in the number of staff, service hours, and ultimately, the number of clients served.
- Increased efficiency and redesign of the space allowed organizations to increase the number of staff, often as a result of new and/or expanded programs.

Enhanced Community Service

- More outreach and support for other charities was reported (e.g., outreach food services from renovated kitchens) and improved community partnerships and efficiency. For example, two agencies reported an improved food network system for the community, and another reported the ability to offer space for other charities to deliver programs and services on site.
- Improved neighbourhood harmony after elimination of unsightly outdoor areas that were perceived to reduce surrounding land values, coinciding with improvement in land beautification and utilization (e.g., kitchen gardens, sheltered gathering areas). 100% of staff respondents and 90% of volunteers reported that community relationships were improved as a result of the renovation.

As noted, attempts to measure the economic impacts of infrastructure renewal were hindered by the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw organizations reduce programming and staff, given the restrictions imposed by health authorities and various levels of government. However, there are some indicators that show promise for the continued measurement of economic impact.

Being able to quantify and then communicate the social and economic impact of charitable infrastructure renewal provides much needed evidence to advocate for and enhance financial support for this sector.



Traditional food bank warehouse transformed into a dignity-style market for food insecure people

CONCLUSIONS

Research on the needs and challenges of charitable organizations generally fails to encompass space or building infrastructure as an issue, but the limited research that does exist clearly shows that space, infrastructure, operational, or building needs are a priority for charitable organizations. This is supported by HeroWork Canada's own needs assessment in 2018 of greater Victoria charities, the 2022 infrastructure needs assessment and feasibility study for Greater Vancouver,²⁸ and this study.

This study demonstrates the impact that infrastructure renewal has in the charitable social sector. Our research has shown results consistent with others who found that charitable organizations that built robust infrastructure are more likely to succeed than those that do not.²⁹ Charitable infrastructure renewal, as demonstrated in this case study of HeroWork Canada's accomplishments, can have a profound, substantial, and broad social impact. Increased effectiveness was noted in a number of ways, including being able to serve more clients, provide improved service and program quality, and deliver more programming. There is not only a direct impact on providing more and better-quality programs and services, but there are indirect effects. Volunteers, staff, and leaders reported improved engagement, cohesion, and a positive work culture. They saw the changes as beneficial, contributing to a more positive and productive work environment.

Infrastructure Canada, through their plan *Building the Canada we Want in 2050*, has been focused on investing in inclusive and accessible infrastructure, but they have so far missed the needs and contributions of much of the social charitable sector. We know infrastructure renewal is vital given major investment in roads, hospitals, schools, etc. However, those who deliver critical social services to our most vulnerable populations are neglected, resulting in lost opportunities to enhance the quality of life for everyone. There is a major lack of knowledge and data about this sector, even though we know how important they are. This sector does not have the same access to capital funding; they operate and provide essential services frequently on limited funding and often precarious infrastructure conditions. This study has shown that charitable infrastructure renewal has significant social and economic benefits, not just to the people that use the services, but all to those involved in supporting them.

²⁸ City of Vancouver. (2022). *Vancouver Plan 2050*. <https://vancouverplan.ca/wp-content/uploads/Vancouver-Plan-2022-06-27.pdf>

²⁹ Gregory & Howard (2009).

RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has demonstrated that investing in charity infrastructure strengthens communities. To that end, there are several recommendations that will facilitate a future focus on the need for charitable infrastructure renewal.

Recommendation 1: Build a sustainable program for infrastructure improvement into charitable funding at all government levels (federal, provincial, municipal), so that organizations can achieve and maintain healthy, safe, efficient, and effective (purpose-designed) buildings in which to deliver critical services.

Recommendation 2: Undertake and maintain national data collection on the value and quality of charity infrastructure, similar to data collected on Canada's housing stock.

Recommendation 3: Continue to examine the social and economic impact of infrastructure renewal through routine data collection and evaluation of the changes to services resulting from infrastructure renewal.

Recommendation 4: Educate and support charitable organizations to understand the strategic and service delivery importance of infrastructure renewal, how to achieve it, and how to advocate for it.

SUMMARY

This study confirmed that improving charitable infrastructure has a significant impact on delivering critical services to our most vulnerable community members. Using the model designed by HeroWork Canada as a demonstration of the powerful change created by renewed infrastructure, this study has shown that renovating charity buildings is a fast and transformative pathway to a charity's success:

- For clients: improved, innovative, enhanced, and/or expanded services;
- For organizations: lowered upkeep costs, healthy and safe workplaces, purpose-built environments leading to efficiencies, "greening" of facilities, increased community awareness, improved client, staff and volunteer perception, and increased revenue;
- For communities: improved neighbourhoods and neighbour relations, eager participation of volunteers and sponsors, and increased community commitment and support; and
- For funders: monies allocated to infrastructure are a one-time cost that pays big dividends for community social services and the vulnerable populations they serve.

Our research has shown that charity infrastructure renewal has a profound impact on client service, the quality of that service, and the organization's efficiency—further enhancing their contributions to social and economic well-being.

By investing in charity infrastructure, we improve service delivery and program innovation and respond to the changing and increasing needs of vulnerable populations.³⁰

³⁰ Victoria Foundation (2018).

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APPENDIX 1: Value and Cost Benefit of Radical Renovations to Charitable Organizations

Charitable Organization	Date of RR	Value of RR	Cost Saving to Organization
Casa Maria Housing	2012	\$100,000	\$100,000
Mustard Seed	2013	500,000	500,000
Threshold Housing	2014	350,000	280,000
Citizens Counselling	2015	200,000	150,000
Camp Pringle	2016	100,000	80,000
Rainbow Kitchen	2016	630,000	535,000
Power To Be	2017	288,000	190,000
Anawim House	2017	272,000	224,000
Rescue Kitchen (Mustard Seed)		450,000	330,000
Mustard Seed (Dignity Market)	2018	650,000	518,000
PEERS	2019	624,000	437,000
Our Place	2019	650,000	500,000
Kiwanis/Young Moms	2020	633,000	424,000
Salvation Army	2021	760,000	509,000
Indigenous Perspectives Society (IPS)	2021	628,000	326,000
TOTAL		\$6,835,000	\$5,103,000

Notes to Table:

- Cost saving to charity organization is based on the amount of contribution by the charity organization, compared to the estimated fair market value of the renovation.
- HeroWork's financial model developed overtime as they built a sustainable program and, as a result, not all Charity Organizations contributed the same relative amount based on the value of the Radical Renovation.
- Past values of Radical Renovations was based on what a renovation of equivalent scope would cost at fair market value, estimated by experienced contractors. HeroWork is now using professional estimating services to determine fair market value.
- Normal current estimates of costs to charity organizations are between 35% and 40%, based on HeroWork's cost to deliver renovations in the Greater Victoria Region.
- IPS elected to contribute 50% of the value of the renovation, which was more than the initial estimate of required contribution.

APPENDIX 2: Comparison of CIW and UN Sustainable Development Goals

Canadian Index of Well-being	UN Sustainable Development Goals
Community Vitality	Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
Democratic Engagement	Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels
Education	Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
Environment	Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development
Healthy Population	Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
Leisure and Culture	Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.
Living Standards	Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture. Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries
Time Use	Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

APPENDIX 3: Charity Organizations Surveyed

Charitable Organization Surveyed	Date of RR
Casa Maria Housing	2012
Mustard Seed	2013
Threshold Housing	2014
Citizens Counselling	2015
Camp Pringle	2016
Rainbow Kitchen and Esquimalt United Church	2016
Power To Be	2017
Anawim House	2017
Rescue Kitchen (Mustard Seed)	2018
Mustard Seed (Dignity Market)	2018
PEERS	2019
Our Place	2019
Kiwanis/Young Moms	2020
Salvation Army	2021
Indigenous Perspectives Society (IPS)	2021

Economic Data Contributors

Economic Data Contributors
Citizens Counselling Centre
PEERS
Anawim House
Mustard Seed
Rainbow Kitchen
Power To Be

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