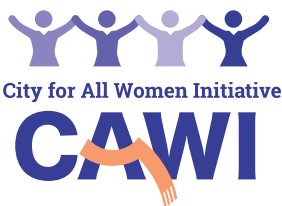


what
we heard

WALKED

In Vanier,
together:
walking,
listening,
and learning
in place



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This document provides a summary of the Vanier Caring City's walk completed on November 27th, 2024.

Thank You

This walk was made possible through the generous support of VCSC and Bara Thiom, with funding from WAGE. Most importantly, we are deeply grateful to the community members who joined us on this walk. Your lived experience, expert knowledge, and strong ties to the community have been the heart of this work. We honor the trust you placed in us.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the place now known as Vanier, exists within unceded, unsurrendered, and treaty lands whose history is shaped by the stewardship and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, including the Algonquin Anishinaabe. As a community organization, we recognize our role in listening to this land's stories, both those of enduring Indigenous presence and those of the vibrant, caring community here today. We commit to using our research not just to document, but to advocate for conditions that honor this legacy of strength and solidarity. Let this work be guided by reciprocity: learning the treaties that shaped this place, uplifting Indigenous voices in our efforts, and acting in ways that foster collective care for the land and its peoples; past, present, and future.

Community Accountability

This report is part of an ongoing conversation. Community accountability means staying in dialogue; not just reporting to you, but learning *with you*. We welcome your reflections, feedback, and questions. Your input helps us stay rooted in community priorities and ensures that what we share reflects your experiences, stories, and knowledge. Please reach out to info@cawi-ivtf.org if you have comments or concerns.

Research Statement

In nature, learning doesn't happen in a single sense. It happens through full-bodied attention. Trees respond to changes in light and soil. Rivers adapt to changes in terrain. Animals move through the world guided by sight, sound, smell, touch, and instinct. Guided by this, our approach to research extends beyond what we hear in the recordings from this walk. Our learning was shaped by what we noticed and felt: the energy of the group, the generosity of collaboration, the interactions between participants, and the stories that emerged between stops. In this way, our research became not just an act of observation, but a shared practice of being and learning together in place. The following pages reflect what we heard, felt, and learned together.



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This section shares the key themes that emerged during our community walk in Vanier. Each theme is supported by 5-6 summary points, along with quotes from participants that reflect lived experience. These stories speak to the day-to-day realities of walk participants and highlight both challenges and deep community strengths.

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This section includes reflections from the research team who participated in the walk. These are included to offer transparency around our process, acknowledge how our identities and relationships shaped this work, and highlight the importance of learning with community.

Part 1: What we heard

These themes reflect the stories, concerns, and hopes shared during our walk through Vanier. They highlight not only the challenges faced by residents, but also the deep resilience, care, and creativity that shape this community.

Key Themes:

1. Youth Needs and Underinvestment in Recreational Infrastructure
2. Infrastructure Inequities
3. Income Security
4. Housing Precarity
5. Community Collaboration, Solidarity, and Local Leadership
6. Shifting Community Landscapes (Part 2)

Note: The information in this report was summarized from voice recordings that were originally in French and later translated into English. As a result, some nuances, expressions, or meanings may have been affected during the translation and summarization process.



Theme 1: Youth Needs and Underinvestment in Recreational Infrastructure

Community members emphasized a gap in safe, affordable, and youth-focused spaces in Vanier. Participants spoke to the emotional and practical impacts this has on youth, as well as the community's creative efforts to fill the gap. Still, there is a shared call for lasting, dedicated infrastructure that prioritizes youth wellbeing.

- Youth lack free, safe, and consistent spaces for recreation, connection, and preventative health programming. The neighborhood's recreation centre has operated as a shelter for several years, reducing access to public space for youth.
- A community driven basketball program (3 teams including one for girls) is helping meet youth needs despite limited space.
- A social pediatric program, led by VCSC is filling a gap in youth health care. Residents speak of it as a model that could benefit other parts of the city.
- Two former school buildings in Vanier remain empty and could potentially be transformed into community-serving spaces.
- The loss of a local secondary school and the lack of youth specific services contributes to a growing sense of disconnection among young people.

“Our only arena, and recreation space in fact, the only one, has been turned into a shelter and that's been for some years now.”

“We have a program for youth health that we do with Centre Richelieu-Vanier and the VCSC. A basketball program, we have three of them, one girls team, two boys, different ages...it's really progressing...it's an example of how we found a solution.”

“In Vanier, we only have spaces for rent, but there is nothing for health prevention activities...that's what's missing.”

Theme 2: Infrastructure Inequities

Residents repeatedly highlight that Vanier lacks essential services and infrastructure. This includes recreational, cultural, transit, health, and green spaces. Many expressed that they feel Vanier is being left behind other parts of the City – a perpetuation of inequity in planning given that Vanier is a historically low-income, diverse, and centrally located neighbourhood.

- The municipal community centre has no gym or basketball court.
- Residents identified a gap in community health services and the need for a community medical center.
- The renovation of Montreal road resulted in a reduction of the number of bus stops, making transit less accessible for seniors, families, and people with disabilities; especially in the winter.
- Public transit is increasingly unaffordable for many residents. One local bike lending program reported a surge in demand, with residents borrowing bikes with baskets to do their grocery shopping and run errands.
- Corner stores and small restaurants have closed and are not being replaced, leaving service gaps.
- There's only one community garden in Vanier. Residents suggest more mini-gardens but raise concerns about soil contamination from historical industrial activity.

“We lack... many of the “dépanneurs”, the corner stores, have been closed. There used to be lots of those but many have been closed. That’s something that’s missing. Also, unexpensive restaurants. Often, they close down and they aren’t replaced. The neighbourhood used to be full of small restaurants.”

“On Montreal Road, we used to have 12 bus stops on one side, and 10 on the other. After the renovation, at least 8 were removed. I don’t understand...we talk about 15-minute neighbourhoods, but this is not that. For people with mobility issues, strollers, wheelchairs... and don’t forget, we have winter! It makes it very hard to get around.”

“There’s an empty lot near VCSC that would be perfect for a park. It’s right there, unused.”

Theme 3: Income Security

The impact of poverty is felt throughout the community and more residents are facing economic struggle. There are many competing needs and not enough resources to ensure residents have the care that they need. Creativity is a strength of the community and problem-solving despite limited resources.

- There are different services to meet needs of residents, for example seniors have specific and tailored services like Centre Richelieu-Vanier, however, there are huge gaps, services for youth is one of them.
- Poverty is impacting residents across demographics - seeing middle class struggle and low income residents becoming at risk of houselessness.
- Community services are overburdened, including mental health support. It is hard for these services to collaborate because they are so focused on addressing the day-to-day needs. VCSC is the main one coordinating care.
- Food security is a growing concern in Vanier, with limited access to community gardens and soil contamination making home food growing difficult. In response, residents and organizations have built a strong network of mutual aid that includes: fundraisers for the food bank, initiatives like Snowflakes Breakfast, and local partnerships ensuring access to essentials like milk, Halal meat, bread, and fresh produce.

“That’s something that worries me and we know that, today, people are getting poorer. The middle class is getting poorer... we must broaden the scope of the needs of the community as a whole, there are lots of people who are in need.”

“There’s only one community garden in all of Vanier, on Peres-Blancs. That’s not much for this whole neighbourhood...There’s a lot of soil contamination in Vanier. The land was used as a dumping ground. We’re told not to eat what we grow in our own yards unless it’s elevated.”

Theme 4: Housing Precarity

Fear of losing a home and lack of housing came up as key themes during the walk. Walk participants shared concerns about new apartment buildings coming into the neighbourhood and displacing existing residents and the lack of transitional housing for families and individuals in need of shelter.

- Displacement, losing home, is an ongoing fear for residents.
- Transitional and temporary shelters are not housing solutions or adequate to meet the needs of families. Ottawa Inn operates as a family shelter, Salvation Army used to before it was closed, and the recreation centre/arena has been used as shelter for the past couple of years.
- Families are placed in shelter in Vanier without being given any neighbourhood context or understanding of resources.
- Vanier has always been an affordable neighbourhood, residents call it a “naturally occurring affordable housing neighborhood”, given the neighbourhood’s supply of affordable rental housing, but with the zoning changes (increased densification) this is at risk, especially for low-income residents.
- Resident spoke about a shortage of community housing in Vanier, describing the number of units as low relative to both population and need

“The neighbourhood is becoming dense, there are apartment buildings, but low income people might leave the neighbourhood, a neighbourhood that they loved so much. There are all these difficult things that we find when it comes to housing; it might be a bit scary for some populations in Vanier.”

“With intensification, that will change, rents will continue to rise and drive more and more people out and make them homeless in some cases. So, this is a huge challenge facing us.”

“And usually, when I meet families here, they have no clue this is Vanier.”

Theme 5: Community Collaboration, Solidarity, and Local Leadership

Residents and community organizations are at the forefront of meeting local needs. These community organizations are often stepping in where systemic support falls short. These acts of solidarity reflect a deeply rooted culture of mutual care and local leadership.

- Residents and community organizations in Vanier are stepping in to meet needs, especially around food security, sharing information & resources, and youth programming.
- The community electronic board is seen as a highly effective tool for sharing information and mobilizing support.
- Key community organizations include: Vanier Community Service Center, The Royal Canadian Legion, Centre Richelieu-Vanier, Vanier Community Association, Vanier Food Bank, Jardin Vanier and Partage Vanier.
- The theme of community collaboration, solidarity, and local leadership runs through every story we heard during our time in Vanier.

“Altogether, it’s what we call community solidarity. People believe in this solidarity. They will donate to people in need.”

“We face challenges, but we try to be creative with what we have.”

Part 2: Next steps

Shifting community landscape

Vanier is a neighbourhood in transition. Throughout the walk, residents described a shifting community landscape. Long-time residents are witnessing the disappearance of corner stores, affordable restaurants, and deeply rooted gathering places. These changes are reshaping how people connect, how information is shared, and how belonging is felt.

Some participants spoke of a community that feels more fragmented than before, segregated across income, culture, and services access. At the same time, fear around housing precarity and displacement weigh heavily, as rising costs and zoning changes threaten Vanier's long-standing identity.

Despite these challenges, we heard clear and actionable pathways for advocacy and future work:

- 1 Spaces for Youth:** There is a pressing need for a youth-focused recreation centre. One that offers free, safe, and culturally responsive programming, and addresses the current lack of space for young people to gather, move, and grow.
- 2 Food Security:** Soil contamination and a shortage of community gardens limits residents' ability to grow their own food. In Vanier, food programs must be designed with these realities in mind. That means developing initiatives and programs that reflect the community needs and overcome local barriers to food access.
- 3 Affordable Housing Protection:** Advocacy around zoning, rent control, and the preservation of "naturally occurring affordable housing" is vital to prevent further displacement and support long-term community stability.
- 4 Infrastructure Equity:** Continued pressure on local government is needed to invest in Vanier's health, transit, and recreational infrastructure. This includes gym access, active transit supports, parks and more accessible transit routes for seniors and people with mobility needs.

This report reflects only a small part of a much bigger story, one that is still unfolding and one that belongs to the people who live it. We hope this report helps make visible the voices, questions, and wisdom that shape Vanier. The next steps belong to all of us.

Appendix: Reflections from the Field

These personal reflections were written by members of the Vanier walk planning team. They represent individual perspectives, moments that lingered, and the emotional truths that don't always fit neatly into themes. Together, they offer a more intimate portrait of our time in Vanier: what we noticed, what moved us, and what we're still carrying with us. We include them here to honor the full-bodied nature of community-based research, where knowledge is shaped not just by what's said, but by how we show up, listen, and feel in place.

Reflection by Cassidy (they/she)

Civic Engagement Coordinator, City for All Women Initiative

"I was one of the voice recorders during the Vanier walk, but I was also soaking in everything around us; the tone of conversations, the way people greeted each other, the support offered as we navigated the streets of Vanier. I've also been involved in analyzing the data and shaping this report, so I've had the opportunity to revisit Vanier through multiple lenses.

What has really struck me, as I sit on my couch, coffee in hand, reading through the translated transcripts, is the deep sense of community solidarity and local leadership that exists in Vanier. There was a spirit of care and creativity woven through the walk; from the way participants interacted to the stories they chose to share. That's the Vanier I witnessed, and I hope that spirit comes through in this report.

One moment that stands out to me: people shared that many families staying at the Ottawa Inn shelter didn't even know they were in Vanier, let alone what services were nearby. And still, the community's response was immediate and generous. Centre Richelieu-Vanier opened its kitchen to support those families. The Royal Canadian Legion hosted a holiday party and meal for the children and their parents.

More than anything, I saw how deeply local leadership shapes this place. In Vanier, solidarity isn't abstract: it's practical, creative, and alive in the everyday."

Reflection by Cata (she/her)

Communications and Civic Engagement Coordinator, City for All Women Initiative

"The weather was starting to feel a bit colder. Winter was peeking through, and as we began to walk, snow started to fall. It felt magical in a way. The chill in the air was softened by the heartwarming sight of Vanier residents coming together to talk about their community and how they care for their neighbourhood.

They spoke about caring for affordable housing, making sure everyone has a roof over their heads, improving services for seniors, meeting the needs of youth, and ensuring access to food. These were just some of the priorities that residents generously shared with us.

Residents know their communities better than anyone else. They know the solutions they need to help their neighbourhoods thrive and to support care work, both paid and unpaid, because they care. Vanier is a powerful example of how communities come together for the greater good.”

Reflection by Marine Armstrong (she/her)

Translator and Member of CAWI

As a Francophone recently arrived in Ottawa thirty-some years ago, Vanier was where I took my young children to the public library and the nature path behind it, and where my citizenship ceremony was held when I became Canadian.

I “remotely” participated in the community walk: I transcribed and translated the conversations that were recorded during the walk. While listening attentively to decipher the comments sometimes obscured by the sounds of the wind blowing and the engines of passing vehicles, I enjoyed the easygoing back and forth between French and English and the space participants made for others to add to the conversation. As if everyone’s keen sense of purpose dwarfed all other considerations such as physical comfort, rank or status, or entitlement.

CAWI’s approach for its research on caring cities, with these community walks, demonstrates how important it is to zoom in on communities, to let them show their true nature beyond clichés, and to let outsiders see them from the inside. What struck me while working on the transcripts is how the challenges, while huge and real, end up being outshined by the kindness and resourcefulness of residents and community leaders. How hopeful!

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