

# Lessons of a Community Geographer:

## Building Effective Cross-Sector Collaborations around Food and Nutrition



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# What is a Community Geographer?





# Community Geography is Collaborative & Participatory



A group of people are seated around a table in a meeting room. The room has a brick wall on the right and a wall with several framed pictures on the left. A semi-transparent white rounded rectangle is overlaid on the image, containing text. The text is in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The background image shows a group of people, mostly seen from the back or side, sitting around a table. There are some papers and a small whiteboard visible in the background.

## **Community Geography is Collaborative & Participatory**

“Research involving collaboration and the participation of those of an area affected by an issue for purposes of education and action toward affecting positive (social, economic, or environmental) change”



A group of people are seated around a table in a room with a brick wall and framed pictures. The scene is dimly lit, with a single light fixture visible above. The text is overlaid on a semi-transparent white box.

## Community Geography is Collaborative & Participatory

“**Research** involving **collaboration** and the **participation** of those of an **area** affected by an issue for purposes of education and **action** toward affecting positive (social, economic, or environmental) change”



# (Integrated) Knowledge Translation (and Exchange)

## 2. Historical evolution of a 'food desert'



# Why a Participatory & Collaborative Approach?





# Why a Participatory & Collaborative Approach?

- Mutual frustration with traditional research approach ...
- Complexity of today's problems too big for a single 'outside expert' ...





# What is the HEAL?

ABOUT US PROJECTS



EDUCATION EMPLOYMENT



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### Addressing Food Security both Locally and on a National Scale

Dr. Jason Gilliland, Western Geography and Director of the Urban Development Program, contributed insights into the issue of food security in Canada, and London, Ontario specifically, as he addressed the media at the ...

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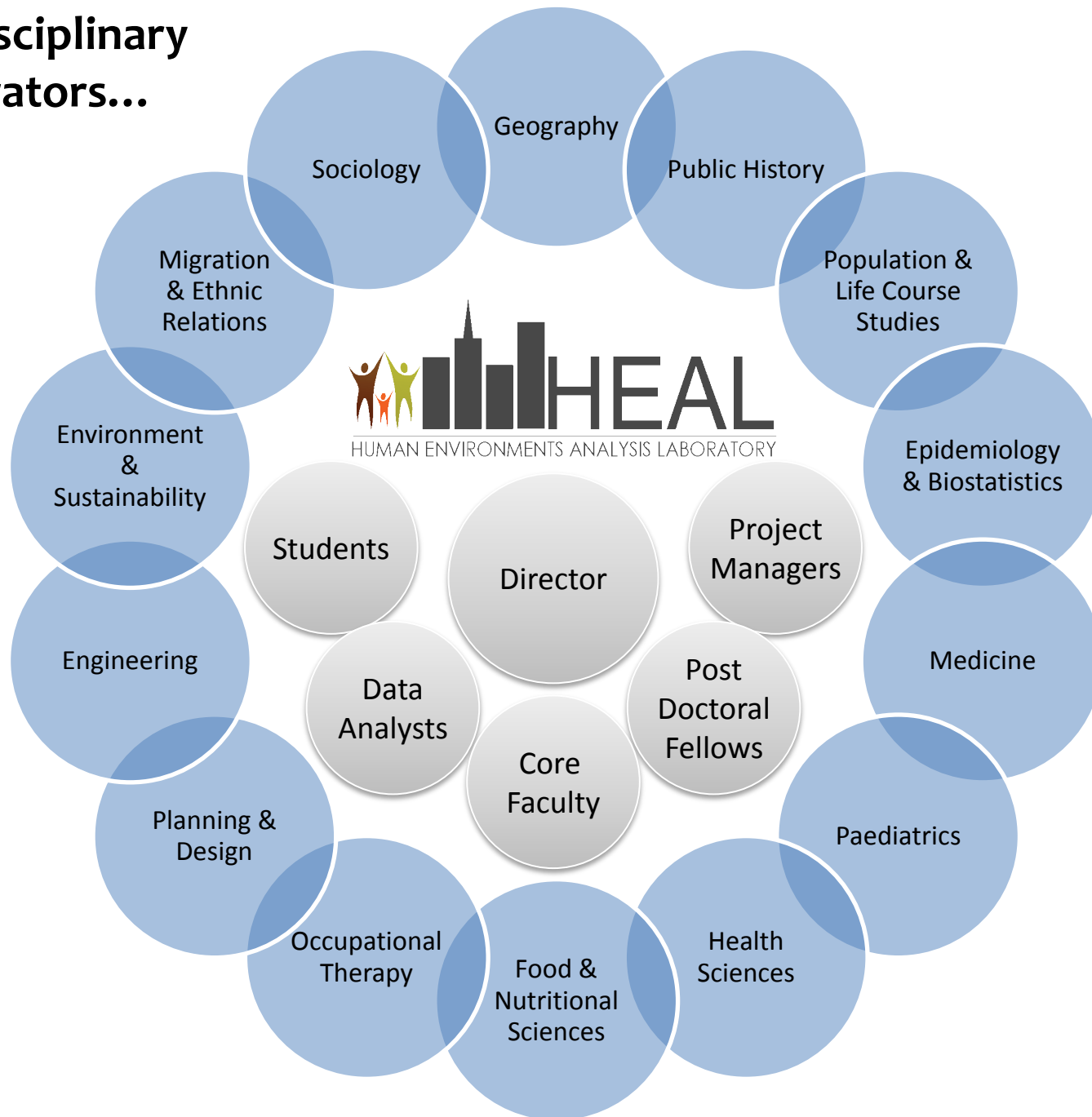
### ACT-i-Pass program receives funding from Ontario Government

### Human Environments Analysis Laboratory

The HEAL is a state-of-the-art, inter-disciplinary research and training environment which specializes in the production, evaluation, synthesis, dissemination and mobilization of evidence to support effective policies, programs and professional practice aimed at creating healthy and vibrant communities. We examine social and physical environments from the scale of entire regions down to the level of individual buildings or open spaces and their inhabitants. We specialize in community-based participatory research and applications of GIS for urban

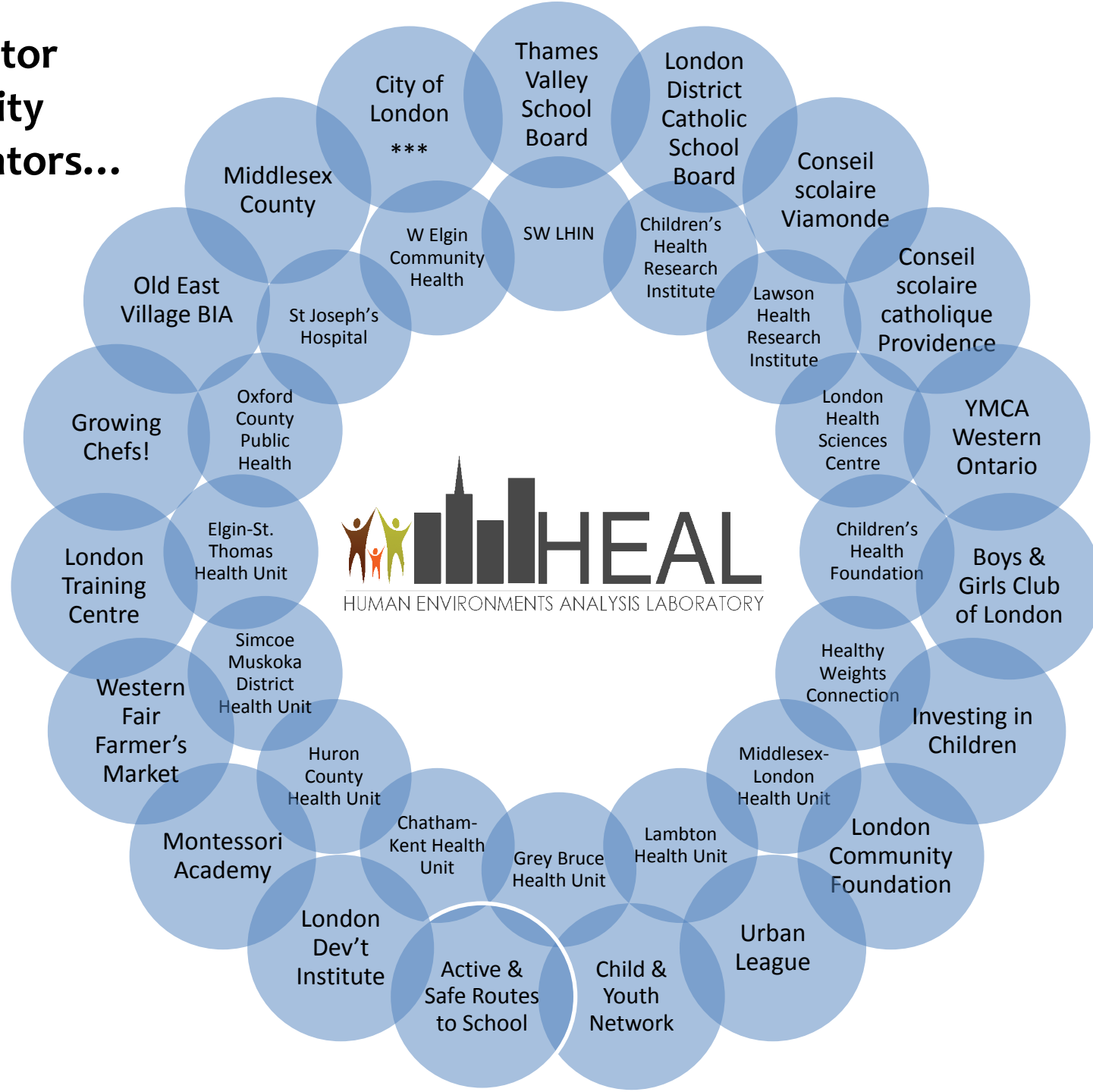
[www.theheal.ca](http://www.theheal.ca)

# Multi-Disciplinary Collaborators...





# Cross-sector Community Collaborators...



An aerial photograph of a city street grid is the background. It is covered with numerous small, colorful circular markers in red, yellow, green, blue, and purple. A semi-transparent white rectangular box with rounded corners is centered over the map. Inside this box, the text 'Case Studies of Community Collaborations around Food' is written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. To the right of the text box, a person's hands are visible, holding a pair of scissors and cutting a piece of white paper. The person is wearing a dark t-shirt with 'VOLLEYBALL' printed on it and several colorful wristbands. On the left side of the map, there are several sheets of paper with colorful star and dot patterns. A green marker and a red marker are also visible on the map surface.

## Case Studies of Community Collaborations around Food



# Food & Children's Health



# Background & Objectives

- Over 25% of London's children and youth are overweight or obese...
- Work with CYN partners to gather evidence & promote healthier eating (HEHPA)
- CYN members since inception ~2007
- Objectives: Improving healthy eating & PA through engagement and influencing habits





# HEHPA - Westminster Demonstration Project

Testing strategies for influencing 'culture' of a neighbourhood

## Background

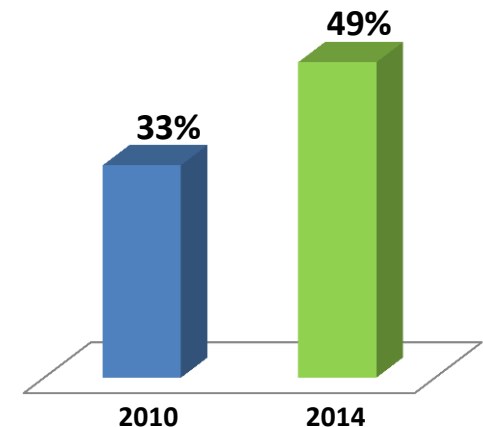
- 2010 - Baseline measures for healthy bodyweights & lifestyles
- Programs (gardening, market...)
- 2014 – Follow-up measures



## Some findings, 2010-2014\*

- ↓ obesity levels (-13%)
- ↑ meeting CFG guidelines for fruit & vegetables (+16%)
- ↓ sugary pop (-15%)

Respondents reporting 6 servings of F&V per day



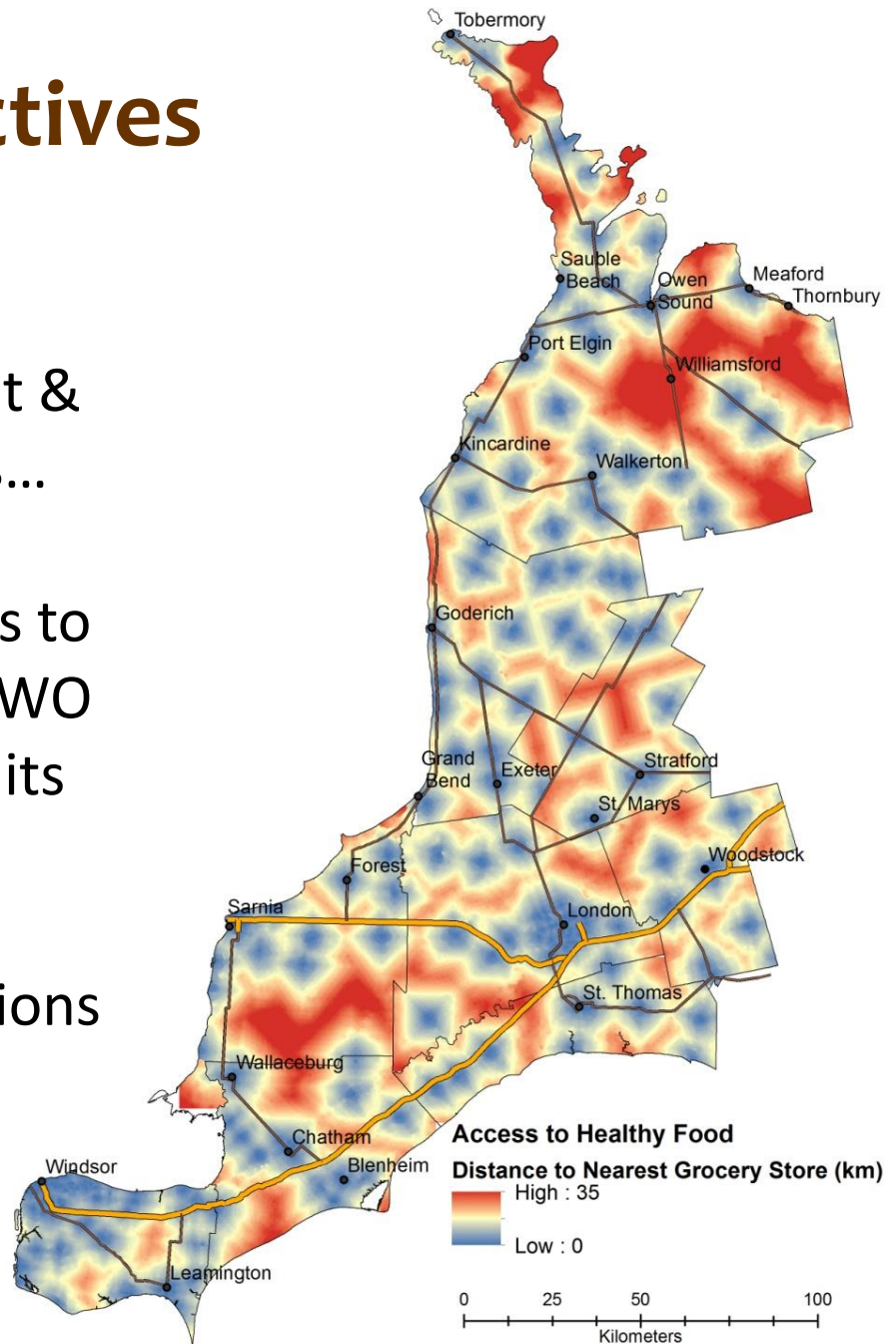
# Community Food Assessments





# Background & Objectives

- Unhealthy community food environments linked to poor diet & rise of diet-related health issues...
- mapping and evaluating access to healthy and unhealthy food in SWO
- generate reports for health units
- Objective: evidence re food deserts/swamps, recommendations for policy & EIDM



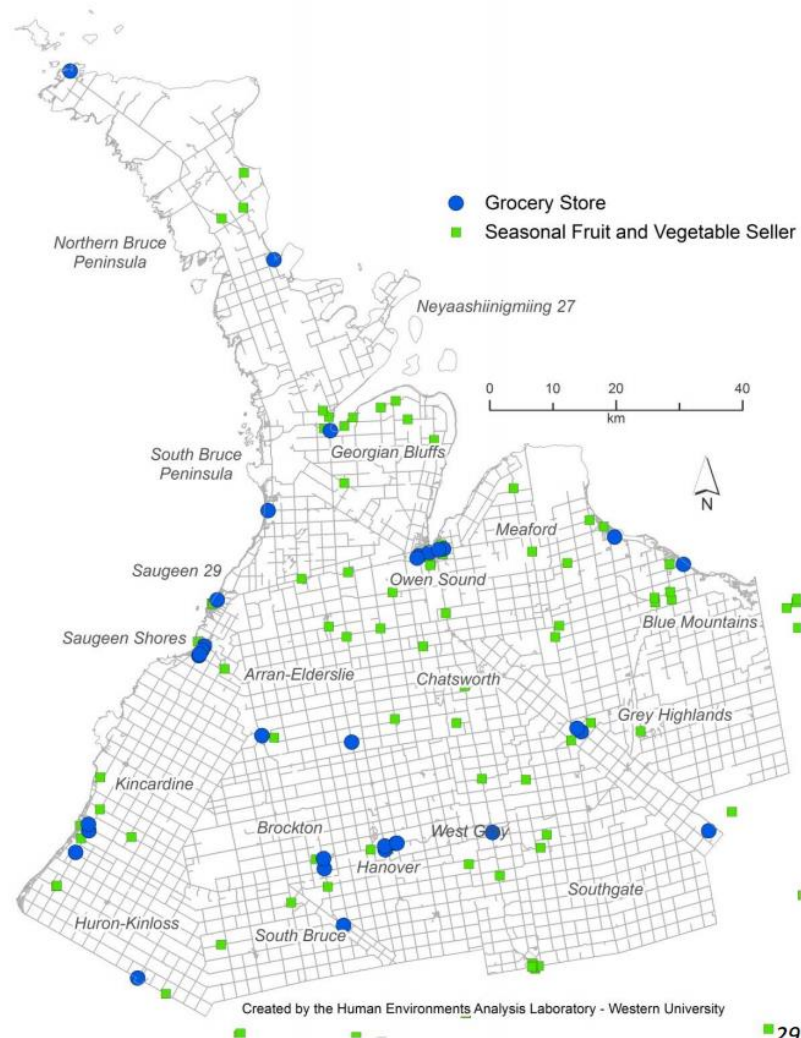
# Mapping healthy food outlets

## *Opportunities for Healthy Eating*

### **Nutritious Food**

A portion of the population in southern Grey County, the Township of Chatsworth and northern Bruce County are a significant distance from a grocery store. When considering seasonal fruit and vegetable sellers, from the Foodlink Grey-Bruce database, opportunities for healthy eating are enhanced. Many of these seasonal facilities are present in rural areas, with poor access to grocery stores, and some may serve to provide local residents with easily accessible fresh food.

Figure 2.1 Locations of Nutritious Food Retailers, Grey-Bruce, 2012





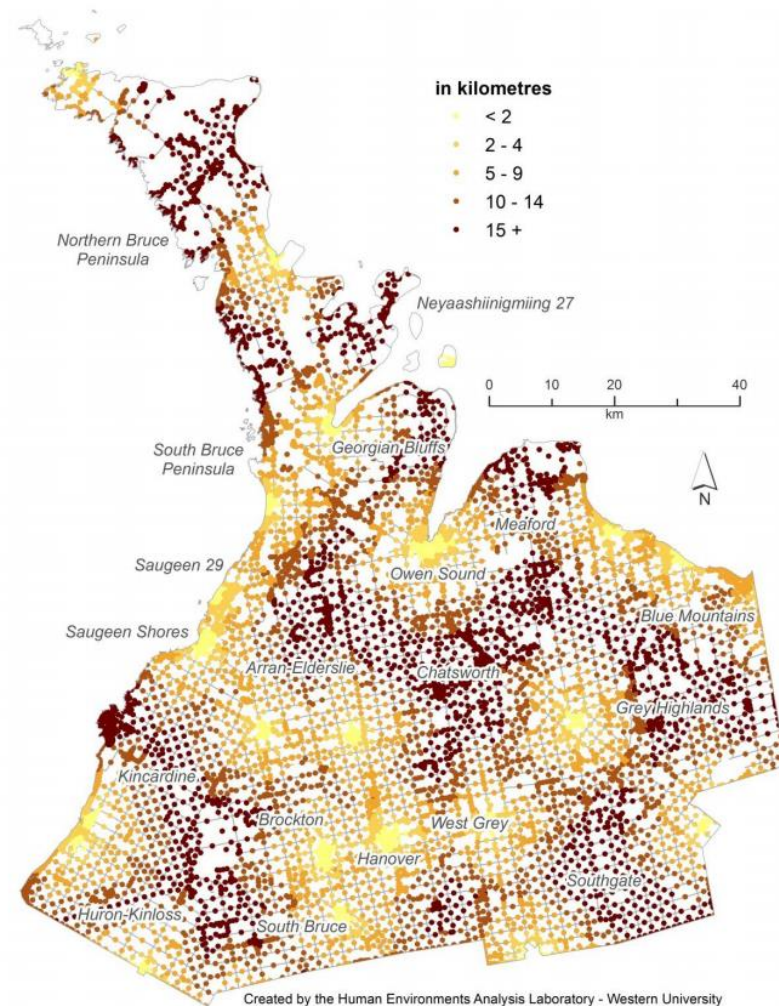
# Spatial analysis of food access

## *Opportunities for Healthy Eating*

### **Access to Grocery Stores**

Pedestrian accessibility to grocery stores (within 1000 m) is limited to the core areas of population centres. Even within these areas, residents in some neighbourhoods are still outside of walking distance. In rural areas, the distance is so great that even with an automobile, accessing nutritious foods like those found at a grocery store would require traveling a great distance (over 10 kilometres in many cases).

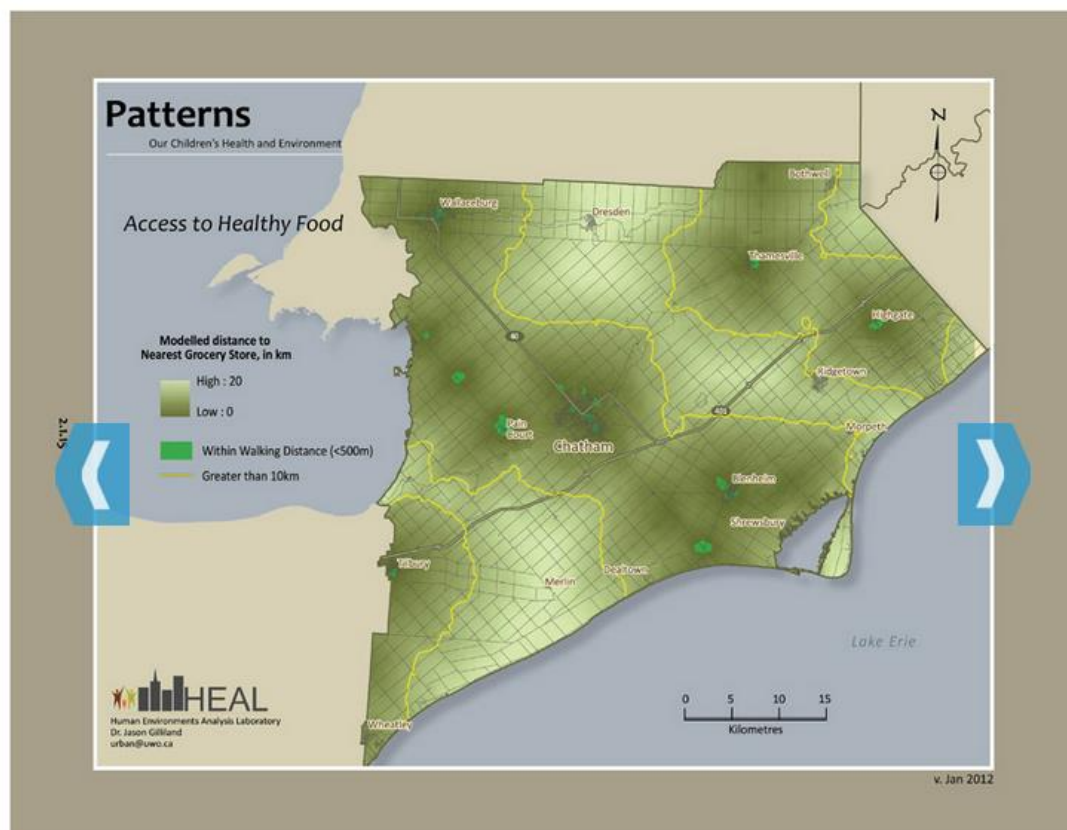
Figure 2.3 Distance to Nearest Grocery Store, Grey-Bruce, 2012





## Putting Children's Health On The Map

Funded by the Green Shield Canada Foundation and the Children's Health Foundation, with additional support from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Children's Health Atlas was a collaborative project between the Human Environments Analysis Laboratory (HEAL) and the Children's Health Research Institute (CHRI).



*Free download at:*

[http://www.theheal.ca/healthatlas\\_project.php](http://www.theheal.ca/healthatlas_project.php)

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# Food & Community Development



## Revitalization of London's Old East Village

# Background & Objectives

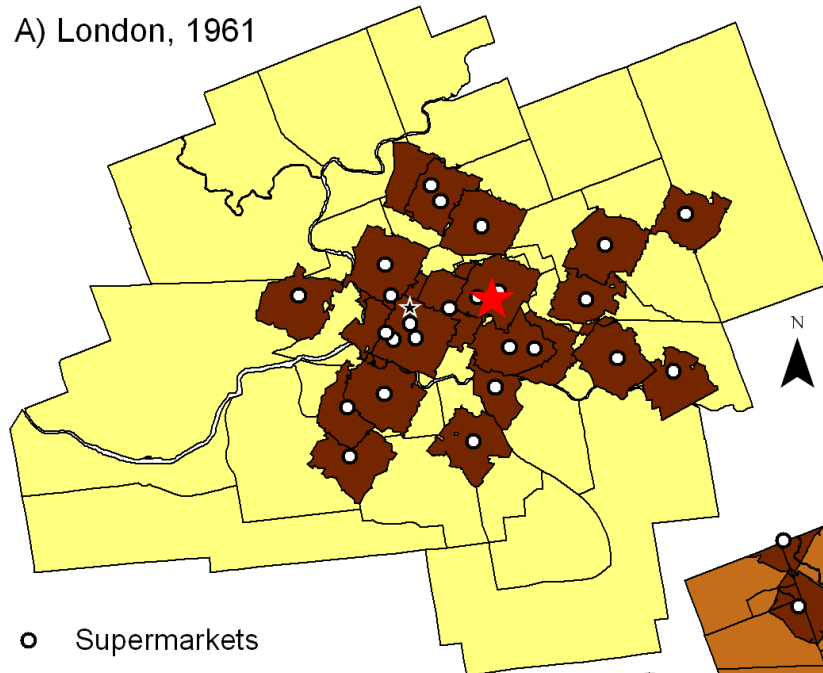
- OEV in 2004: Historic neighbourhood facing major socio-economic issues, struggling business corridor, lack of employment opportunities, lack of investment... supermarket closed
- Ongoing *Community Action Research* ~20 yrs
- JG board member / advisor since 2004
- Students doing CSL (esp. food) in OEV since 2004
- Objective: “to create a vibrant commercial corridor at the heart of a diverse and inclusive community where more people live, work, shop, show, sell and have fun”





# Mapping Emergence of 'Food Deserts'

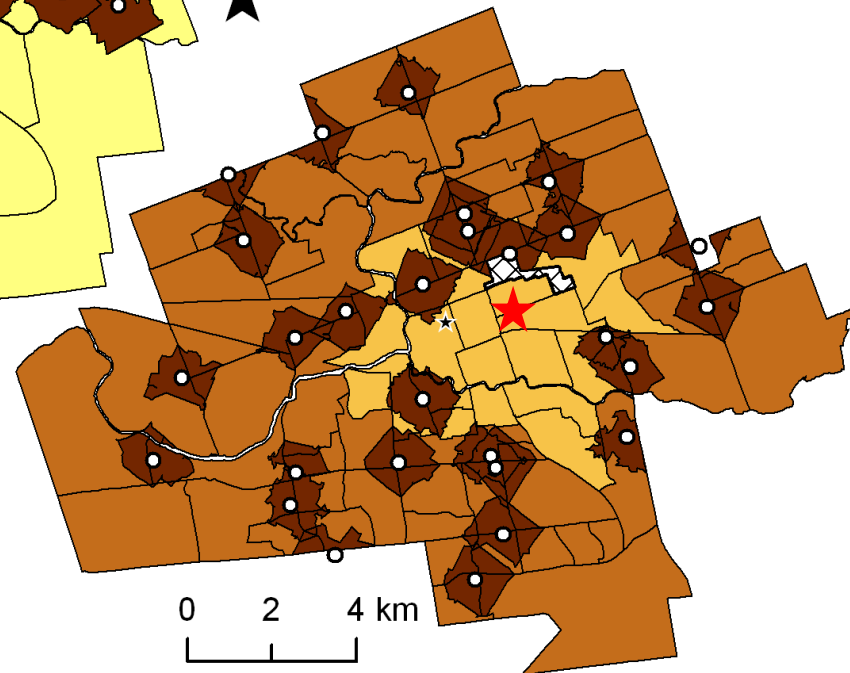
A) London, 1961



Location of Supermarkets  
in 1961 & 2005  
London, Ontario

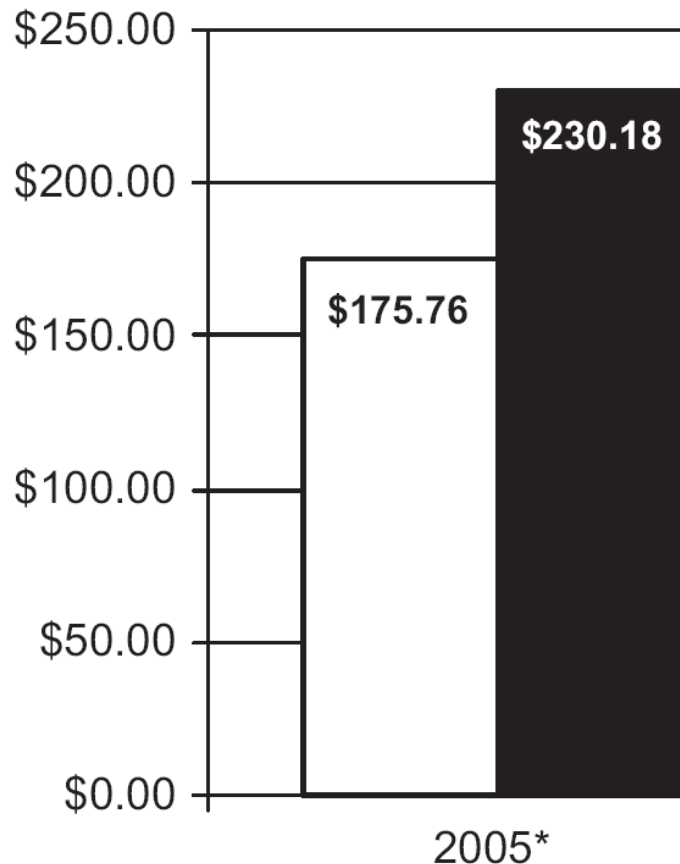
B) London, 2005

- Supermarkets
- ★ City hall
- Service area
- London, 1961
- Urban neighbourhoods, 2005
- Suburban neighbourhoods, 2005
- ▨ Non residential



0 2 4 km

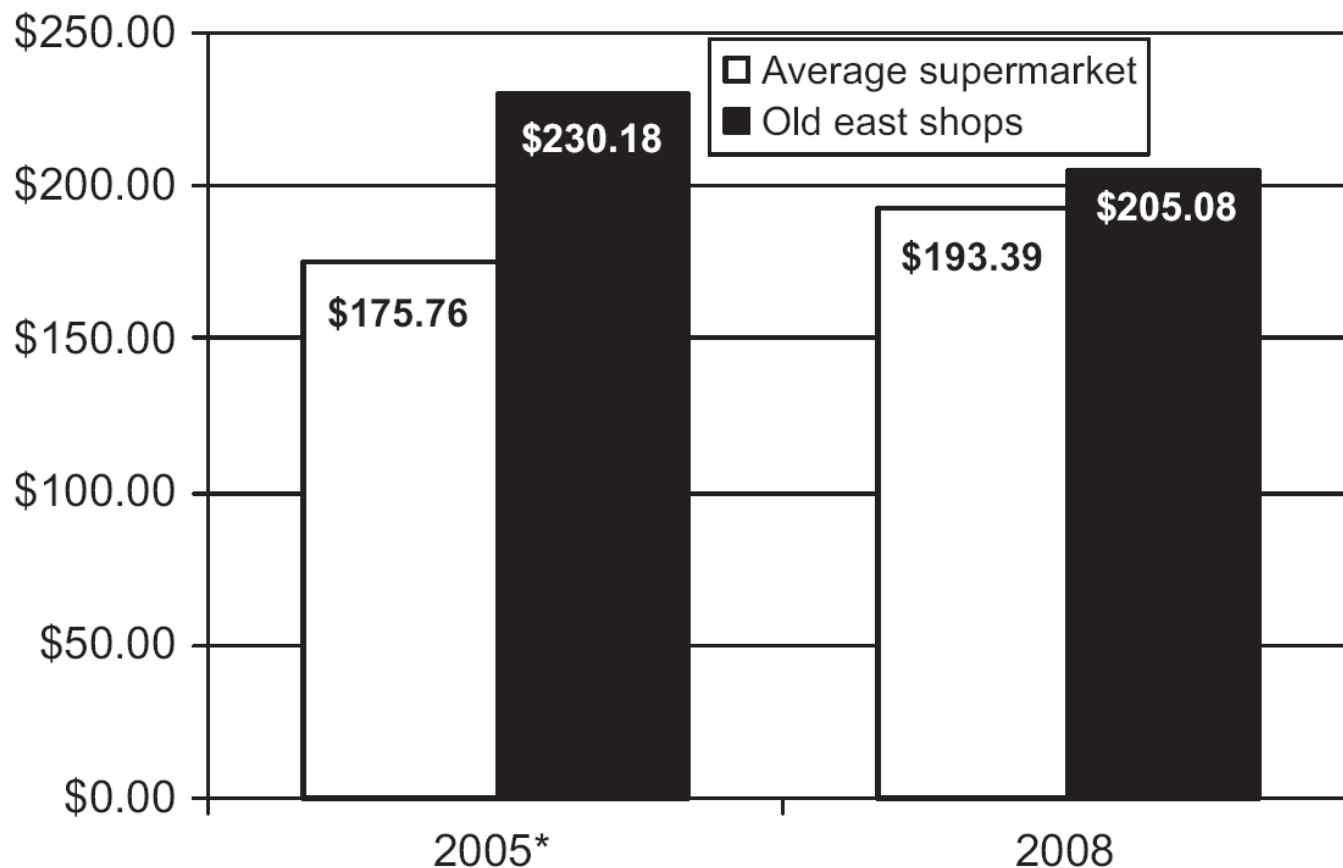
# Comparing the Price of Healthy Food



Cost of a healthy food basket at grocery stores (white) and the Old East food desert (black)



# Comparing the Price of Healthy Food



\* 2005 prices adjusted by 6.12 percent to account for inflation

Change in cost of a healthy food basket between 2005 and 2008 in London vs Old East Village

Source: Larsen & Gilliland, 2009

# Western Fair Farmers' Market (opened in 2006)

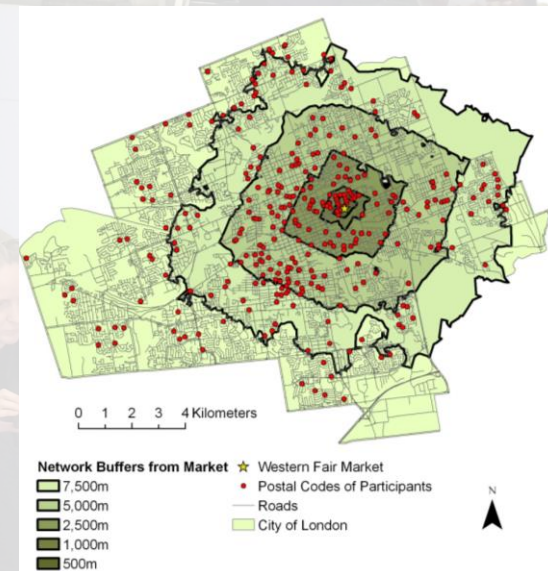
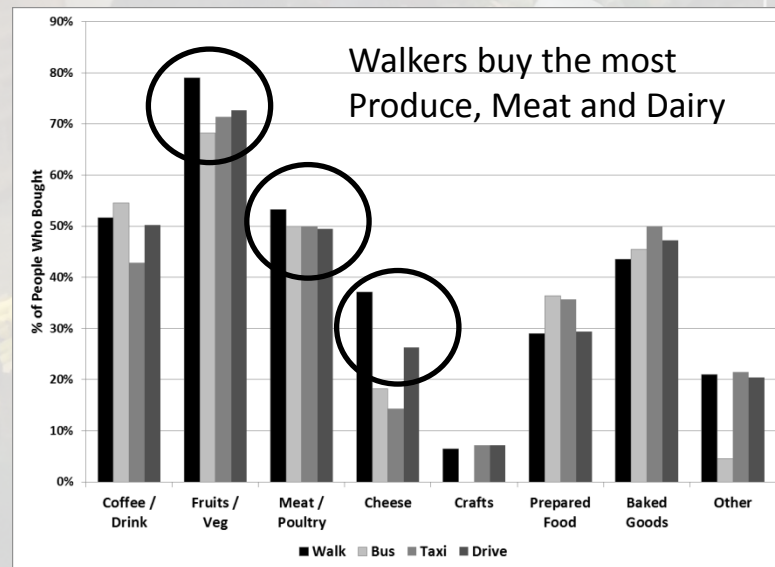




# Western Fair Farmers' Market

## Economic Impact Study (2011)

- Visitors > 2400 / day
- Weekly avg. spent in the market = \$40pp = \$95,500  
Estimated annual spending = \$4.8 million  
Estimated annual recycled spending = \$2.2 million



# Food Desert to Food District!

## Some outcomes...

- Market is incubating businesses
- Businesses are expanding on to the corridor
- Growth of alternate business models (co-ops)

## Ongoing support ...

- Customer surveying and mapping on the corridor
- Surveying business owners for best practices
- Creating a ***Local Economic Development Plan!***





Recap: Community Geography  
is not...







# Benefits to Researcher

- Helps identify worthwhile research questions
- Engagement improves recruitment and retention
- Ensures research is relevant & impactful (true KT)
- Meaningful experiences for students
- Privileged access to data
- Alternative sources of funding
- Co-learning opportunities

# Benefits to Community Collaborators

- Access to fresh ideas & free (or cheap) labour
- Access to up-to-date equipment, software & skills
- Highest/best use of resources
- Alternative sources of funding
- Co-learning and community capacity building
- Can enrich and improve outcomes





# General Challenges

- Restrictive data sharing agreements (gov't)
- Formalization means bureaucratic hurdles (university)
- Slower decision-making
- Timing mismatch
- Dilemmas of dissemination
- What counts at Uni?
- Funding / Cost recovery
- One-way relationships
- Volunteer burnout



# Overall Lessons Learned

- ‘Simple’ research often invaluable for community
- More open data needed
- Data sharing & IP agreements
- Define scope & expectations early
- MOUs / Letters of collaboration
- Seek funding together
- Find academic value, but don’t rush it
- Build long-term relationships & trust
- Consider sustainability/exit plan
- Celebrate successes!





# Thanks for the Support



Social Sciences and Humanities  
Research Council of Canada



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DES MALADIES  
DU CŒUR  
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