In 2019 the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) received support through the Provost’s Strategic Alignment Fund to develop a Community Research Platform (CRP). In March 2021, the CRP was recognized as a Core Research Platform at McMaster.

In alignment with McMaster’s strategic research plan and the FSS’ strategic goals and priorities, the CRP develops, leverages, and mobilizes infrastructure and expertise from across McMaster and local community organizations to build capacity and foster mutually beneficial research collaborations. Through the CRP, interdisciplinary researchers, students, staff, and community partners work collaboratively to advance research with a social purpose (i.e., improving societal wellbeing and resilience, shedding light on social issues, supporting innovation, contributing to the public good, and/or providing guidance for policy).
CRP Partners

Following consultation with faculty members, a wide range of key community organizations, and the Office of Community Engagement, we identified several Hamilton area community organizations interested in co-developing the CRP. Current platform partners include: Canadian Mental Health Association of Hamilton (CMHA) — a non-profit that provides mental health services, Hamilton Public Library (HPL), Young Women’s Christian Association of Hamilton (YWCA) — a non-profit that advocates for and provides essential services to women, girls, non-binary, gender-fluid and trans folks of all genders, and Centre [3] for Artistic and Social Practice (C3) — an artist-run non-profit that uses the arts and art education to promote social practice and social change.

Platform partners share an interest in building research capacity within their organization in partnership with McMaster and are committed to the delivery of evidenced based programs and services. All CRP partners are well networked locally, regionally, and nationally thus increasing the scalability and impact of collaborative projects and knowledge mobilization activities.

In addition to the four partners, the CRP has also collaborated with the Canadian Urban Library Council (CULC), Canadian Mental Health Association Ontario, St. Joseph’s Healthcare Hamilton, City of Hamilton Housing Services, 541 Eatery, Food for Life, and Hamilton Community Foundation. The CRP continues to explore opportunities to involve additional partners and collaborators based on the interests and needs of faculty members and of local community organizations.
CRP Model

The CRP is a unique ‘platform’ model of community-university research partnership as it aims to develop and foster long term, sustainable, ‘programs of research’ that extend far beyond one-off research projects. Stakeholders share research infrastructure in the form of space, software, data, equipment, and expertise. Four key thematic research areas have emerged that align with the expertise and interests of McMaster researchers and the mandates of community partner organizations. They include Mental Health (CMHA); Social Engagement and Community Resilience (HPL); Gender and Intersectionality (YWCA), and Arts-informed Research (C3). For each thematic area, the CRP has formed research groups comprised of interdisciplinary scholars, students, staff, and community experts. Each group works to advance research that informs organizational practice and contributes to social impact.

The CRP offers support and unique opportunities for faculty, students and community organizations interested in working on partnered research including:

- Support with the development of project MOUs, workplans and service contracts.
- Facilitated access to diverse communities and datasets.
- Facilitated access to research infrastructure and expertise.
- Research project coordination and support from project conception, through project development, to funding application, to project execution and to knowledge mobilization.
- Participation in a community of practice involving researchers, students and community practitioners committed to advancing scholarly knowledge that benefits the community.
CRP Strategic Goals

The CRP’s main goals include:

• Increase the research capacity of all stakeholders by developing, sharing, and mobilizing infrastructure, resources, and expertise.

• Expand upon faculty research strengths and advance interdisciplinary and intersectoral research groups.

• Facilitate mutually beneficial research collaborations between researchers and community organizations.

• Advance research that responds to needs and aspirations of local communities.

• Provide unique community-engaged research, training, and professional networking opportunities for students.

• Leverage programs such as Mitacs and increase access to academic, community and government grants.
CRP Governance and Research Groups

The CRP is co-led by James Gillett, Associate Dean of Research and Grad Studies, FSS and Leora Sas van der Linden, CRP Program Manager and is governed by a Steering Committee comprised of McMaster and community partner representatives. The Steering Committee is responsible for advancing the strategic vision of the CRP, decision making and conflict resolution, identifying new opportunities and sharing best practices, supporting research projects between the university and community partners, guiding and promoting knowledge mobilization activities, and seeking opportunities to expand and sustain the CRP.

Steering Committee membership includes:

James Gillett
Associate Dean of Research and Grad Studies

Lisa Weaver
Director of Collections and Program Development, Hamilton Public Library (HPL)

Leora Sas van der Linden
Manager, Community Research Platform

Violetta Nikolskaya
Senior Analyst, Programs and Advocacy, YWCA of Hamilton

Sue Phipps
Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Mental Health Association Hamilton (CMHA)

Colina Maxwell
Executive Director, Centre 3 for Artistic and Social Practice
In addition to the Steering Committee, research groups affiliated with the CRP’s four thematic areas (Mental Health, Social Engagement and Community Resilience, Gender and Intersectionality, and Arts-Informed Research) have emerged. Research groups are made up of interdisciplinary researchers, students, staff, and community practitioners. Membership shifts based on the interests and needs of those involved in ongoing collaborative projects. Below is a summary of research group involvement in the reporting year.

**Mental Health (with CMHAs)**

- **Marisa Young**, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology
- **Ameil Joseph**, Associate Professor, School of Social Work
- **Diana Singh**, Post-doctoral Fellow, Sociology
- **Shaila Kumbhare**, PhD, School or Social Work
- **Samantha Perrotta**, PhD, Health, Aging and Society
- **Jeff Black**, PhD, School of Social Work
- **Rachel VanEvery**, PhD, Health Aging and Society
- **Sue Phipps**, CEO, CMHA Hamilton
- **James Gillett**, Associate Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Leora Sas van der Linden**, Manager Community Research Platform

**Arts-informed Research (with Centre 3)**

- **Tara La Rose**, Assistant Professor, School of Social Work
- **Carmela Alfaro-Laganse**, Associate Professor, School of Arts
- **Colina Maxwell**, Executive Director, Centre 3 for Artistic and Social Practice
- **James Gillett**, Associate Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Leora Sas van der Linden**, Manager Community Research Platform

**Social Engagement and Community Resilience (with HPL)**

- **Nicole Dalmer**, Assistant Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Meridith Griffin**, Associate Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Brian Detlor**, Professor, DeGroote School of Business
- **Kaitlin Wynia**, Post-Doctoral Fellow, Health, Aging and Society
- **Felicity Niles**, Undergrad, Health, Aging and Society
- **Lisa Weaver**, Director, Collections and Program Development, Hamilton Public Library
- **James Gillett**, Associate Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Leora Sas van der Linden**, Manager Community Research Platform

**Gender and Intersectionality (with YWCA)**

- **Tina Moffat**, Associate Professor, Anthropology
- **Karen Bird**, Professor, Political Science
- **Jennie Vengris**, Assistant professor, School of Social Work
- **Mary Vaccaro**, PhD, Candidate, School of Social Work
- **Sara Adjekum**, PhD, Health, Aging and Society
- **Grace Huang**, Undergrad, Health Sciences
- **Isabel Dewey**, MA, Candidate, Anthropology
- **Violetta Nikolskaya**, Senior Analyst, Programs and Advocacy, YWCA
- **Medora Uppal**, Director of Operations, YWCA
- **James Gillett**, Associate Professor, Health, Aging and Society
- **Leora Sas van der Linden**, Manager Community Research Platform
CRP Alignment with FSS and McMaster Strategic Plans

The CRP brings together faculty, students, and staff from across campus to form interdisciplinary and intersectoral research groups that work to advance scholarly knowledge that addresses critical societal challenges (FSS priority 1, McMaster priority 3).

Provides the infrastructure to advance partnered research that responds to needs/aspirations of local community; builds long-term, sustainable partnerships that allow for the development of new projects; new avenues for knowledge mobilization and ability to demonstrate research impact (FSS priority 3, McMaster priority 3 & 4).

The CRP connects faculty, students and staff to community organizations working with diverse populations to address issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion in our communities; ability to tap into community expertise working to address EDI (FSS priority 2, McMaster priority 1).

Increased opportunities for unique CER student RA positions, Mitacs internships and placements with strong mentorship and support; increased opportunity to incorporate experiential learning into social sciences courses; students gain research skills and professional networks (FSS priority 4, McMaster priority 2).

Faculty and students are well supported in their partnered research; leverage opportunities such as Mitacs and increase access to academic and community grants (FSS priority 5, McMaster priority 5).
CRP Highlights and Impacts

During the past year, the CRP has advanced work in the areas of Research, Training and Social Impact.

Research Advancements

• Recognition as a Core Research Platform.

• University-level relationship with organizations builds capacity, ensures sustainability, and makes it easier and more meaningful for faculty and students to engage in partnered research.

• Identified faculty working in the areas of mental health, arts-informed research, community engagement and gender equity and brought them together to form interdisciplinary research groups in collaboration with CRP partners.

• Involved more than 25 researchers over four Faculties in CRP projects.

• Initiated, developed, and/or advanced 18 collaborative research projects.

• SSHRC Grants: 2 PEGs, 1 IG; Community and Government Grants: 1 Hamilton Community Foundation, 1 Public Health Agency of Canada (anticipated), 1 Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada (anticipated); 4 Mitacs Internships.

• Received $45,000 through service contracts with community organizations.

• Adjunct position created for one community practitioner, more to come.

• Facilitated connections to regional library systems to scale up projects.

• CMHA to partner on the development of a Masters in Community Mental Health

Training

• Long term relationships built on mutual trust and benefit means organizations are more willing to take on our students and create meaningful opportunities for them.

• 4 Mitacs Internships for a total of $150,000 in research funding.

• Provided research and training opportunities for 4 post-docs, 10 graduate students, 6 undergrad students, and 2 placement students.

• 2 students (1 grad, 1 undergrad) completed courses through involvement in CRP initiatives.
• Created a Post-Doctoral Fellowship/Researcher in Residence program with HPL (Mitacs funded)

• Students received mentorship and training from faculty, staff, and community practitioners.

• Peer to peer learning and mentorship among graduate students.

Social Impact

• Surveyed faculty members on their CER activity in 2019. Survey found that more than 25% of respondents engaged in CER in that year.

• Developed the Mapping Community Engaged Research Partnerships (https://arcg.is/1PySD1) interactive tool to highlight and share the FSS' CER work and to foster new interdisciplinary and intersectoral research partnerships.

• Engaged and developed trusting relationships with leadership and front-line representatives from key partner organizations in the Hamilton region.

• Co-hosted a 'Call to Action' Forum on Reproductive Health, Pregnancy and Homelessness in partnership with the YWCA.

• Program Assessment and report provided to CMHA Hamilton for the Intensive Supports Pilot project on housing and health supports for Hamilton folks with high acuity.
CRP Projects

The following funded projects were either initiated, supported, or advanced through the Community Research Platform:

SSHRC funded:

**PEG: Toward the Development of a framework for research collaboration between public libraries and universities.**
James Gillett, PI ($24,055).

**PEG: Emotions Matter: Skill Building, Emotional Resilience and Social Support for Care Workers.**
Diana Singh, PI. ($22,228)

Mitacs Internships:

**Grief, Memorials, and Loss through COVID-19: Resources for caring while physical distancing.**
Ameil Joseph (Supervisor) and Shaila Kumbhare (Intern) in collaboration with CMHA Hamilton ($45,000).

**Managing Mental Health: A Survey-Based Research Evaluation of a COVID-19 Emergency Mental Health Counselling Program.**
Marisa Young (Supervisor) and Diana Singh (Intern) in collaboration with CMHA Hamilton ($30,000).

**Direct [Message]: Understanding Mediated Engagement in the Arts for Marginalized Older Adults in Hamilton, Guelph, and London, Ontario.**
Tara La Rose (Supervisor) and Christina Vizius-Vanin (Intern) in collaboration with Centre 3 for Artistic and Social Practice ($30,000).

**Toward the development of a framework for research collaboration between public libraries and universities.**
James Gillett (Supervisor) and Kaitlin Wynia (Intern) in collaboration with Hamilton Public Library ($45,000).
Other funding:

James Gillett, Samantha Perrotta, Jeff Black and Rachel VanEvery ($3,500)

Loneliness & Mental Health Through COVID-19 and Beyond.
Ameil Joseph and Shaila Kumbhare. ($12,000).

Call to Action on Reproductive Health, Pregnancy and Homelessness with YWCA Hamilton.
James Gillett, Grace Huang ($5,000).

Nurturing Good Beginnings: Evaluating and Assessing the YWCA’s community care program for new mothers/birthing parents.
Tina Moffat, James Gillett, Isabel Dewey and Sarah McDonald. ($33,900).

Assessing the impact of the YWCA’s Women’s Enterprise Centre programs and services.
($10,000).