



PIER LABS

IMPACT REPORT

2019-2023



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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Pier Labs acknowledges that our organization operates on Mi'kma'ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq people. We are all Treaty people.

We recognize that African Nova Scotians are a distinct people whose histories, legacies and contributions have enriched the part of Mi'kma'ki known as Nova Scotia for over 400 years.

We acknowledge the historical and ongoing harm caused by racism and white supremacy, both systemic and overt, against Black people, Indigenous people, and People of Colour.

Given our mission to solve complex societal issues, we realize our privilege and the voice we have to advise and influence decision makers on policy direction and the design of programs and services.



CHANGEMAKERS: IDEA AT PIER LABS

Our organization is committed to embedding Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Accessibility (IDEA) into all of our work and within our organization in ways that build a sense of stewardship and belonging. We recognize this ongoing effort is essential to dismantling systemic racism, inequity, and discrimination, and we believe that critical reflection, direct action, and accountability are essential in promoting positive change.

We work collaboratively with a diversity of partners (first voice participants, equity-deserving groups, community advocates, governments, and academia) to enable thoughtful and meaningful participation that reflects the needs of populations at the centre of the initiatives.

Using practices from community-based participatory research and an intersectional understanding of systemic barriers, we hold iterative workshops with our partners to develop effective and appropriate implementation strategies to roll-out service delivery at both the system and community levels. We share our findings with all participants to ensure we accurately reflect their lived experiences, perspectives, and insights. All reports are provided to the communities in which this program served.

Inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility is integral to our core values and drives the impactful, changemaking work we do!

Foreword

We are proud to share the inaugural Pier Labs Impact Report. While this report summarizes just over three years of operations, Pier Labs was much longer in-the-making. It is the culmination of years of supporting government initiatives and the commitment to focus on improving the lives of equity-deserving groups, and the investment in new approaches to solving complex social challenges. We believe social impact is about informed advocacy and collective action for policy change that benefits equity-deserving people and their communities.

Having had the opportunity to observe and experience the outcomes from social innovation and social research through Davis Pier, there was no doubt that this was an area that required more time and focus. We have designed and prototyped online tools to inform those most in need about important financial decisions – in partnership with those most in need. We have co-designed better ways to address food insecurity with hundreds of Nova Scotians. We have used behavioural science to address issues like financial empowerment and child support payments. Each of these experiences further convinced us that more of this work was needed if we wanted to have a greater impact.

Pier Labs was founded early in 2019. Since then we have formed a Board of Directors, comprised of community leaders from the public, private, and non-profit sector, all with a desire to champion positive social change. We have built a team of expert researchers with experience in psychology, behavioural science, neuroscience, economics, criminology, and health care. We have developed meaningful partnerships that connect community impact organizations and academic institutions with government policy-makers. Perhaps most importantly, we have solidified research funding to work alongside people and community partners to understand important social policy issues affecting people in community and find ways to solve them.

I welcome you to read our 2022/23 Impact Report with interest and curiosity. Our mission of furthering policy experimentation, innovation, and research for social good requires the efforts of many and would not be possible without participants with lived/living expertise and community partners.



Jennifer McGill
Executive Director

Board of Directors

Comprised of the founders of Davis Pier Consulting and three external members coming from diverse backgrounds in business, government, health, and academia, the Board members contribute strategically to the governance of Pier Labs, volunteering their time to provide public accountability, insight, leadership, and mission-driven decision making.



Mike Davis
Chair of the Board

Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Davis Pier Consulting, Mike was the visionary of Pier Labs and continues to support the organization’s continued efforts to drive impact through policy and create positive societal change.



Darryl Pierrynowski
Board Member

Co-Founder and Chief Operating Officer of Davis Pier Consulting, Darryl’s focus is the delivery of business and technology advisory services to clients in healthcare social services.



The founding of Pier Labs is one of the single most important things we’ve done at Davis Pier to improve government decision-making. Its application of evidence and use of community-focused social innovation has contributed significantly to improving societal outcomes.

- Mike Davis



Joanne Bath
Board Member

Public Relations expert, Joanne has worked diligently to build and lead high-performing teams, and has raised millions of dollars through entrepreneurial thinking, meticulous vision, fundraising acumen, and thoughtful leadership.



Jim Hanlon
Board Member

Jim brings 40-years of experience in the Canadian tech industry and a personal passion for the positive impact of innovation, design, marketing, and research to Canadian businesses and communities.



Susan McDougall
Board Member

Chief Executive Officer of the Windsor Elms Village (a long-term care community in Nova Scotia), Sue brings a strong spirit of leadership and innovation to all her endeavours.

The heartbeat of Pier Labs is its people, who have a deep passion for doing good in and for the world and the communities within it. This drives hope and possibility forward.

- Susan McDougall



We would also like to thank Sandra McKenzie, Kevin Hamm, the late Dr. David Gass and outgoing member Jim Hanlon for all their contributions and leadership while serving on the board over the past few years. They have been instrumental in the initial establishment and evolution of Pier Labs.

Our Story

Twenty-first century problems have outgrown the systems we have in place to respond. Over the past century we have experienced a rapid pace of change, leading to new, more complex social challenges and greater demand for programs and services to support our most vulnerable. Crises like a global pandemic, the climate emergency, growing inequalities, chronic disease and cyber security risks are a testament to how our society is struggling to adapt.

Governments at all levels are increasingly realizing that more innovative, sustainable solutions are required, and they are committing resources to apply innovation practices to address social issues. This increased investment includes integrating more rigorous evidence, engaging people and community partners more actively, and using prototyping to gather feedback and iterate.

In response to these changing needs, Davis Pier Consulting began strengthening its capabilities in human-centered design, behavioural science, and broader social innovation. Davis Pier invested in several flagstone initiatives, working with new partners that demonstrated promising results and the importance of this type of work.

We learned first-hand the value of engaging people with lived expertise throughout the project design process to co-create ideas and gain a deeper understanding of what programming works (and what doesn't).

The success of these initial projects further convinced the leadership at Davis Pier that, to achieve our mission of solving governments' and society's most complex problems, we needed the ability to work like this more often. We needed to create a new model that allowed us to work differently with existing and new partners interested in true social innovation that creates lasting impact.

It was these learnings and insights that inspired and catalyzed the creation of Pier Labs in 2019.

ABOUT PIER LABS

Pier Labs is committed to evidence-based social science and action-oriented research to:

- Generate high-quality, robust evidence that we can use to design, test, scale and evaluate programming.
- Collaborate with the people and communities most affected by making them co-creators in finding the solutions to support them.
- Share our findings to influence policy and to apply our work to make a real-life impact.



The relationships that we have with our partners, and that organizations and their staff have with the people they serve, are foundational to our ability to support impact.

Bryan Daniels
Research Principal

**PIER Labs = Policy Innovation,
Experimentation and Research**

WE EXIST TO:

Influence equitable systemic change that empowers and improves the wellbeing of people and communities.

WE ACHIEVE THIS BY:

Connecting social science and action-oriented research, we aim to inspire community-led solutions and inform policy pathways that address societal inequities and complexity.



Finding evidence-based solutions to social challenges requires a continuous learning approach. Throughout the design and implementation, we gather valuable evidence about what works and what doesn't. This evidence can then be used to create policy and make decisions that will have a positive impact on people's lives.

Sitting at the intersection of private and non-profit sectors, Pier Labs and Davis Pier are uniquely positioned to bring together partners from across the public sector, community impact sector, post-secondary institutions, and private sector to co-create innovative solutions that can be tested, iterated, and scaled alongside the people who are directly impacted by these programs.

I can honestly say I have never seen a group of people so passionate about what they do. Every Team member is excited about the work and their co-workers. The compassion that is expressed on a day to day basis is amazing. It's an environment that is energizing and entices you to want to accomplish more.

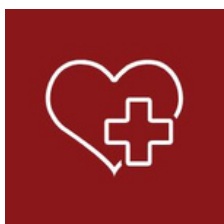
Marianne Stewart
Manager of Financial Administration



Our Research

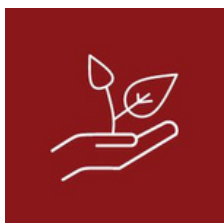
Everything we do is about connecting an ecosystem of partners, and everything we achieve is a shared success with the village of partners.

Our specific **research domains** and **areas of expertise include:**



COMMUNITY HEALTH

(incl. health care, accessibility, and disability supports)



POVERTY & SOCIAL SERVICES

(incl. housing/homelessness, food security, public safety & justice)



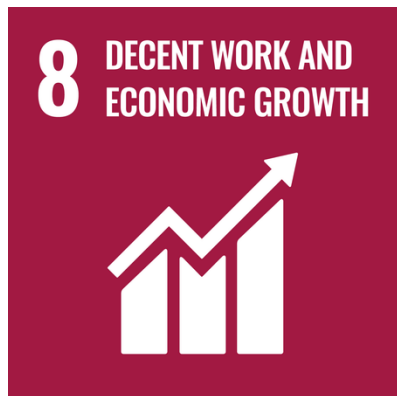
EMPLOYMENT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

(incl. employment services, income supports, and skills development)



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Our research aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs*) so we can ensure everything we do contributes to broader efforts to address the key challenges our society faces.



*The SDGs are a set of 17 goals with specific indicators agreed to by UN member states to achieve sustainable development. While the SDGs are intended to be measured at the national and global levels, they are a useful tool for us to communicate how we fit into a larger ecosystem dedicated to positive change.

Wellbeing

When most people think about their health, they think about their family doctor or a hospital emergency room. But we know that people's health and wellbeing is shaped by much more than the health care system. Wellness at its core is about keeping people healthy and resilient to navigate life's ups and downs. Low income households and equity-deserving communities are more likely to experience long-term chronic physical and mental health challenges.

An increased focus on policies and practices in the context of social determinants of health to address factors such as income equality, employment opportunities, physical health, mental health, quality of environment, among many others is paramount.

Embedding a wellbeing frame to guide our research is a vital lens we apply to all our projects in ways that influence equitable change.



Wellbeing Framework from *Understanding Local Needs for Wellbeing Data, 2017*

Years in Review

Over the past four years, our experimental journey has led to our research and innovation non-profit becoming reality. Along the way we've learned lessons that helped us build a sustainable foundation for our organization. This foundation enables us to be more strategic and intentional with our research so we can achieve even greater social impact.

Our key accomplishments from 2019 to 2022, include:

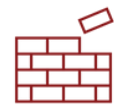
START UP ACTIVITIES



Established Pier Labs as a non-profit organization governed by an independent Board of Directors.



Forged new partnerships and built a pipeline of work to sustain the organization.



Hired employees and built a research agenda to guide our business development efforts.



Developed a business plan that built on our successes and charted a course for continued growth and sustainability.

Contributions in the service of community

350 \$148K

volunteer hours

of in-kind work

Collaborated and Partnered with

1250+



participants engaged with lived/living expertise

8



community impact organizations

3



academic institutions

4



government organizations

\$1.3M

of \$2.5M from out of province investments went to our partner community impact organizations.

With our partners, our collective efforts have positively contributed to

6

personal wellbeing indicators

7

UN Sustainable Development Goals



Placemaking Evaluation



COMMUNITY HEALTH

SDG AND WELLBEING INDICATORS



Social Relationships
Place

A thriving community is one that provides the support and amenities that enable a sense of belonging, where people can work, live, and play.

The direct impacts of placemaking investments in building stronger communities are currently not clear or obvious. To find out, Build Nova Scotia (formerly Develop Nova Scotia) enlisted Pier Labs's help to develop a framework to measure the value of placemaking initiatives.

This framework complements traditional economic measures and allows us to understand how placemaking initiatives impact personal wellbeing. The framework can be used as a tool to support infrastructure decisions and best position communities to attract people who are increasingly prioritizing the quality of their life experience.

FUNDER

Build Nova Scotia (formerly Develop Nova Scotia)



By bridging the gap between wellbeing research and practise we equip policy makers and practitioners with the tools to measure impact and invest in initiatives that matter to people's lives.

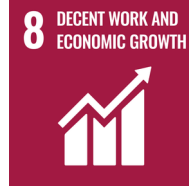
Ilse van Winssen
Research Principal

AspireAtlantic



EMPLOYMENT & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

SDG AND WELLBEING INDICATORS



Economy
Education
Equality

AspireAtlantic brought together service providers and sectoral partners to help connect jobseekers and employers in Nova Scotia to gather evidence and test the effectiveness of a sectoral workforce development program.

This large-scale project has a goal of moving unemployed and low-wage working individuals into sectors with middle-skill job openings and opportunities to advance their careers.

Our collaborative recruited over 100 participants and supported them with career readiness training, occupational skills training, and post-employment advancement coaching. So far, roughly 60 participants are either employed or in active interviews.



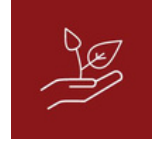
FUNDER

Future Skills Centre, NS Department of Labour, Skills, and Immigration

PARTNERS

Immigrant Services Association of NS (ISANS), Digby Adult Learning Association (DALA), MetroWorks, Nova Scotia Construction Sector Council – ICI, Atlantic Home Building and Renovation Sector Council, Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium

Project HALO



POVERTY & SOCIAL SERVICES

SDG AND WELLBEING INDICATORS



Place
Equality



The Housing Assistance and Life Outcomes (HALO) project is examining housing experiences and quality of life outcomes for households receiving portable and non-portable housing assistance.

Specifically, we are interested in learning about housing choice and housing discrimination, and how these factors are related to housing outcomes (i.e., housing and neighbourhood satisfaction) and other aspects of an individual's quality of life.

Findings from this research aim to better understand how tenant-based housing subsidies impact households and how they might be optimized to improve quality of life.

FUNDER

Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)

PARTNERS

Government housing agencies in Nova Scotia and Waterloo Ontario.

MyJobMatch Evaluation



POVERTY & SOCIAL SERVICES

SDG AND WELLBEING INDICATORS



Equality



Community Living Toronto, in partnership with Corbrook Awakening Abilities, and Placemaking 4G, designed and implemented an innovative and collaborative way to support job seekers and staff who provide employment support called MyJobMatch.

The pilot was developed to create new opportunities for job seekers with a developmental disability and to adapt to ongoing transformations in Ontario's Employment Supports Service.

Pier Labs is helping the team evaluate MyJobMatch by providing critical insights about the pilot's job development process changes, how its job-matching technology is being implemented, and the impact of the initiative on the employment support staff providing services and individuals accessing support.

Our findings were very positive and provided many valuable lessons for future consideration. MyJobMatch created increased interest and collaboration among employment support agencies involved in the project and in the sector more broadly.

The employment support staff providing services also saw value in the project, highlighting new opportunities to provide more tailored support for people with a developmental disability.

FUNDER

Ontario Government

PARTNERS

Community Living Toronto (lead proponent), Corbrook Awakening Abilities, Placemaking4G

Looking Ahead

The past few years have shown there is a desire and willingness to collaborate differently - one that puts people and community at the centre and nudges institutional research to inform policy development and program improvements. There is growing recognition that we need thoughtfully designed, developed and tested policy, and Pier Labs is well positioned to bring partners together to create that policy. Together in partnership, we can find solutions that will support equitable systemic change.

Our team would like to express our deep gratitude for the hundreds of people who choose to participate and entrust their lived/living expertise and knowledge in hopes of change for themselves and their community. We could not do what we do without the support of our community partners, academic advisors, and funders. A special thank you to our Board of Directors who remain steadfast in their commitment to our mission, generously contribute their time, and who offer their experience and expertise to guide the organization.



Pier Labs plays an important role in bridging research, evaluation, and innovation within the local social policy ecosystem. Pier Labs is purpose-built to help people, communities, and governments address complex problems collectively.

Chris Giacomantonio

Director at Dalhousie University of the
Clairmont Centre for Community Safety Research

Moving forward, Pier Labs will continue to develop its capacity to steward innovation and expand its strategic partnerships. We will continue to focus our efforts on research initiatives that align with government priorities for greater social impact in the areas of community health, social services, and employment and income supports. We will also increase our efforts to prioritize climate action research to inform policy and program development through a lens of social equity and inclusion.

Pier Labs is committed to bringing about positive change and working collaboratively to solve the most complex problems facing our communities. We are excited for the year ahead and for the opportunity to continue to build lasting relationships and partnerships. The challenges that face our communities are great, but together we are progressively pushing the needle towards a more sustainable, equitable, and **Brighter Future for All.**