

New: Urban Isolation/Mental Health

Initiative Title:	Urban Isolation/Mental Health
City Council Sponsor(s):	Councillor S. McKeen
Supporting Department and Lead Staff:	Community Services, Heather McRae / Jenny Kain

BACKGROUND:

The Urban Isolation/Mental Health initiative was approved by Council on December 11th, 2013. Sponsored by Councillor S. McKeen, awareness of the need to explore this issue stems from both constituent concerns and personal experience as a resident of the city. The impetus for this initiative is also informed by the experiences of other large municipalities, most recently Vancouver, with the release of the publication “Connections and Engagement”, Vancouver Foundation. June 2012. This report cites ‘isolation from neighbours’ as the number one issue among those surveyed.

There is a strong link between social connectedness and wellbeing. When people feel connected to a supportive community, when they know their neighbours and when their neighbours know them, people are less likely to experience stress, depression, loneliness and isolation. Social connectedness, one of the cornerstones of individual and family resiliency, helps support strong communities, families and individuals. In addition, it ties into the City’s broader goal of renewing and improving civic engagement.

This initiative is based on the observation that for a significant portion of our population, daily contact with others in our urban setting fails to achieve the level of human connection and sense of belonging that establishes social connectedness as a protective factor.

Councillor McKeen has established a steering committee to advance the goals of this initiative. Steering Committee members include:

- Scott McKeen, Councillor
- Heather McRae, Branch Manager, Neighbourhoods, Parks and Community Recreation
- Jenny Kain, Director, Family and Community Supports
- Dean McKellar, Supervisor, Assessment and Short term Counselling
- Kris Andreychuk, Supervisor, Community Safety
- Jan Fox, Executive Director, REACH Edmonton
- Erick Ambtman, Executive Director, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Glynnis Lieb, Executive Director, Lieutenant Governor’s Circle on Mental Health and Addiction
- Catherine Bloomfield, Executive Director, iHuman
- Howard Lawrence, Abundant Communities Initiative

DESIRED OUTCOMES:

The Steering Committee has identified the following preliminary outcomes but will confirm final desired outcomes with completion of the project plan.

The Mental Health/Urban Isolation Initiative will:

- Create awareness of, and increase understanding about urban isolation
- Accelerate innovative ideas to address urban isolation
- Increase connectedness amongst citizens
- Build a more connected and engaged community
- Build on, and increase awareness of, existing initiatives that align with the desired outcomes of the initiative

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC DIRECTION:

The Way Ahead: Edmonton's Strategic Plan 2009-2018, identifies Livability as one of the four principles. The Urban Isolation/Mental Health initiative contributes to Edmonton's Strategic Plan by enhancing liveability within the municipality through fostering increased opportunities for engagement and connectedness thereby contributing to mental wellness.

The Urban Isolation/Mental Health initiative supports Edmonton's People Plan - The Way We Live by advancing the following goals:

Goal #1: Edmonton Is A Vibrant, Connected, Engaged and Welcoming Community. The plan cites connecting individuals, families, groups, cultures and communities to the services they need to thrive and realize their potential. This initiative, with a focus on enhancing connectedness and fostering connection will advance this goal.

Goal #3 Edmonton Is A Caring Inclusive and Affordable Community. Objective 3.1 asserts that the City of Edmonton nurtures a caring and inclusive society. Advancing efforts to reduce isolation and increase connectedness furthers this goal and objective. This goal recognizes that a caring community is one that extends itself to residents to promote inclusion, to increase understanding and to provide and partner with others to offer services to citizens in need of support.

Goal #4 Edmonton is a Safe City. This initiative will further support the creation of conditions for a safe and secure environment in which to live, work and play.

START-UP BUDGET REQUIREMENTS:

- There is no budget required for development of the project plan.
- It is anticipated that budget will be required once the project plan is completed and specific events and activities have been identified.

TARGET DATE FOR COMPLETION OF PROJECT PLAN:

- The estimated date for completion of the project plan is May 2014.