

The logo for the City of Edmonton, featuring the word "Edmonton" in white text on a blue rectangular background.

Edmonton

The background of the report cover is a warm, golden-hour photograph of a garden. In the foreground, there is a vase filled with light-colored flowers. In the background, a person is visible, partially obscured by a dark red semi-transparent overlay. The overall mood is peaceful and hopeful.

# RECOVER 2020 Highlights Report

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RECOVER is honoured to acknowledge that we learn, grow, and gather on Treaty 6 territory and Métis Nation of Alberta Region IV, which is the traditional and contemporary home of many Indigenous peoples including the nehiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, Dene, Métis, and Inuit among many others. It is a privilege to find ourselves in relationship to this ancient gathering place, and we commit to do all we can to recognize and renew those relations.



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The header features large, stylized letters 'M', 'L', 'C', 'U', 'W', 'W' in various colors (green, blue, orange, grey) with semi-transparent photographs of people and nature integrated into them.

## The 2020 Context

### The Pandemic and All the Flaws in our Systems

Almost overnight, “physical distancing” became part of the Canadian lexicon. We all learned we must distance ourselves from others to slow the spread of COVID-19. In 2020, we all faced a sobering reminder that life is fragile. No one was immune to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, be it emotional, economical, mental, physical, or otherwise. We were reminded that vulnerability is a shared human condition.

2020 revealed so many flaws in our current systems. The death of George Floyd and many other Black community members sparked world-wide Black Lives Matter protests. Demands to recognize and address systemic racism were loud and clear. Long-term care homes for seniors were ravaged by COVID-19, resulting in calls for reform. Stay-in-place orders brought to the forefront the challenge for street-involved folks, who had no place *to* stay. Work deemed “essential” starkly called into question what type of work -- and the people who do it -- is valued and undervalued. There was growing recognition that people must work together - using their individual and collective capacities - to reform aspects of these systems, and in some cases to dismantle them. There was greater pressure on everyone to push the envelope of creativity and innovation; to try to do things differently. The RECOVER team also became more aware of the flaws in our systems and made an effort to understand and address them better.



## Reset the Course

### Revisited and Revised Assumptions

In the beginning of 2020, the RECOVER Team set out to synthesize their learnings from the past few years, and revisit and revise their assumptions. They started by asking:

- What do we really mean by wellness and wellbeing?
- What contributes to it?
- What does it take to improve it?

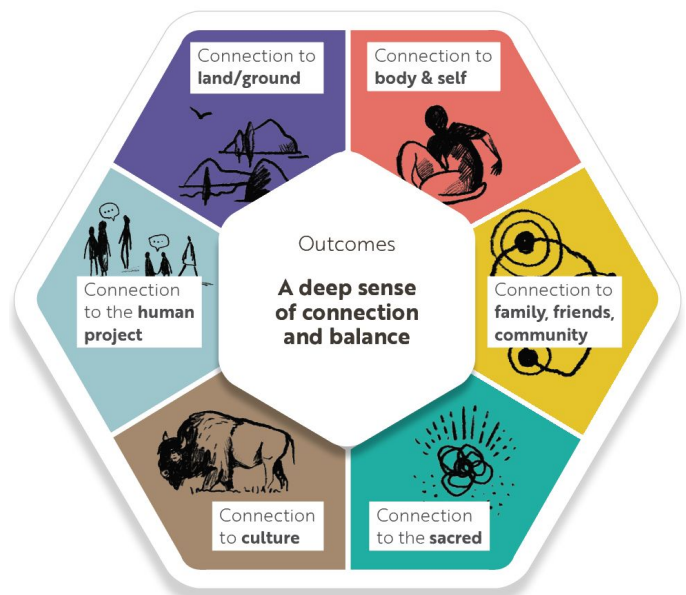
These big questions inspired RECOVER to work together with ethnographers, social design firm [InWithForward](#), to sift through all the research and learnings they had gathered in the previous years, and put together a wellbeing framework to guide RECOVER in future work.

The resulting document, [The Soulful City](#), is a deep dive into historical and Edmonton based contexts that examines what we really mean by urban wellness and wellbeing. It combines the stories and lived experiences of street-involved Edmontonians, and draws on their wisdom about what wellbeing means through their eyes. It also pulls together cultural and philosophical teachings from Indigenous, Eastern, and Western perspectives, to provide a deep understanding of what it means to be well and necessary conditions on the journey of wellbeing.

RECOVER's work has grown to understand that wellness is about relationships and connection both within and beyond self. *The Soulful City* document puts forward a framework for wellbeing.

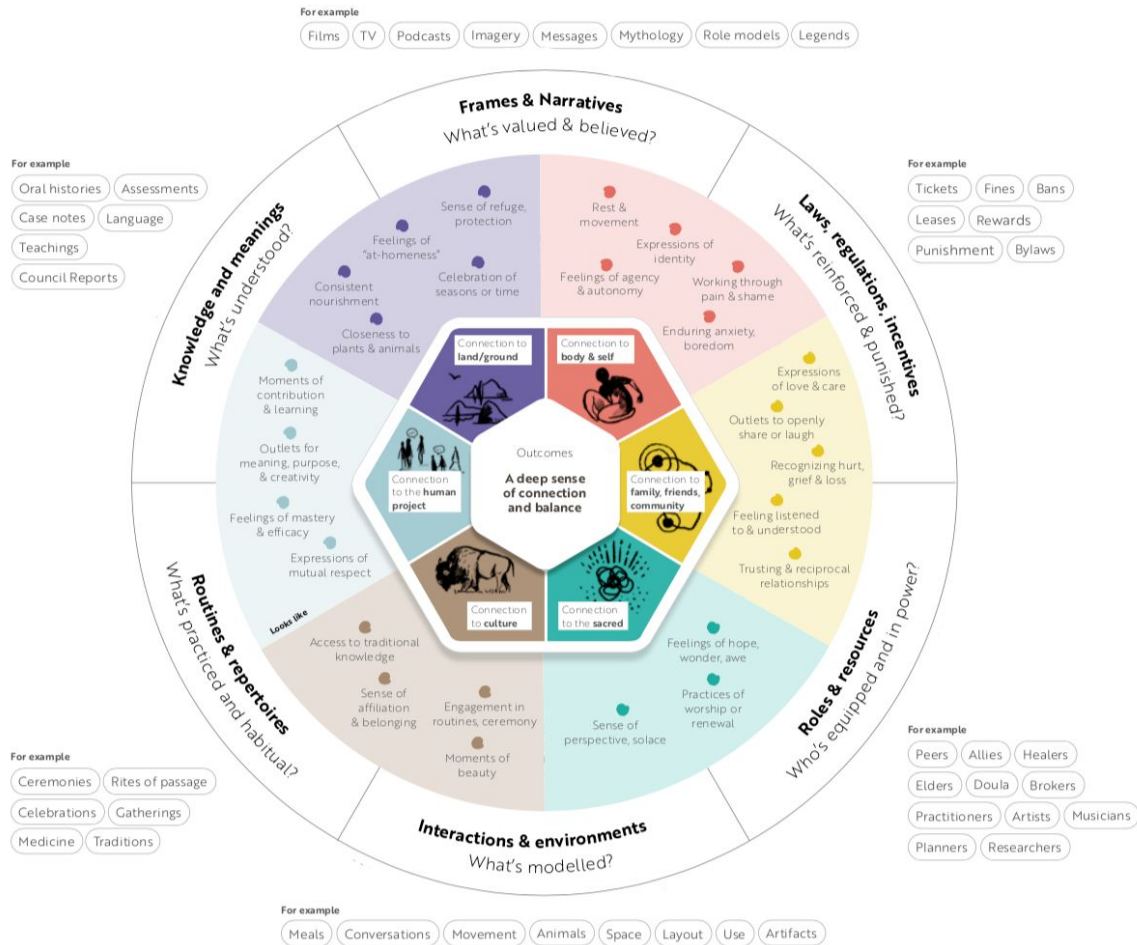
At the heart of the wellbeing framework are targeted outcomes based on six kinds of connection:

- to land and ground
- to body and self
- to family, friends and community;
- to the sacred (however one defines it)
- to culture
- to the human project (one's ability to grow and develop; realize their potential)



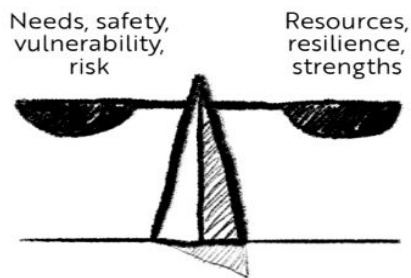
The whole wellbeing framework, shown on the next page, provides examples of what the outcomes might look and feel like. In the centre, is a deep sense of connection and balance. The six kinds of connection are the means to reach this. It lays out sample behaviours and attitudes to demonstrate each of the six types of connection in the middle ring. On the outermost ring, are the tools for change. These tools (or levers) correspond to culture or systems to be shifted. The levers are not attached to any specific outcome, but influence them all, as part of the overarching system.

# The Wellbeing Framework

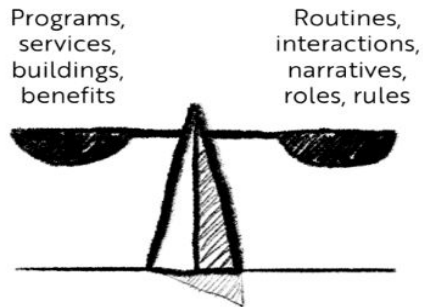


Based on this framework, RECOVER focused on connection as the target outcome and through prototypes and sharing of the framework, worked to strengthen the connections that lead to wellbeing, throughout 2020.

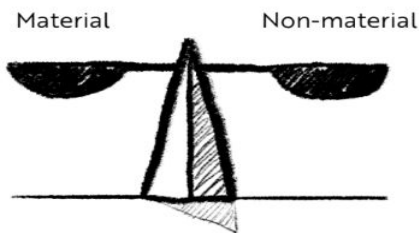
In addition to the six types of connection and the levers for change, the wellbeing framework delves into the imbalances that have become apparent in our systems. Currently, the left sides of the following scales have too much emphasis.



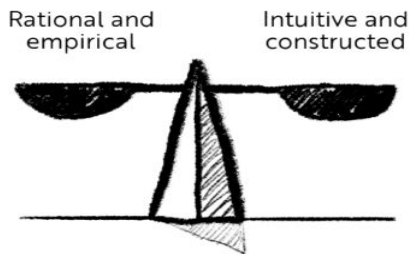
Language of ...



Solutions focused on ...



Problems frames as ...



Knowledge expressed as ...

Rebalancing these scales is articulated in the shifts that RECOVER is striving to achieve.

## Shifts that Underpin Recover's Approach

### FROM...

Individual & government responsibility for wellbeing

Wellbeing as provision of **material** needs

Broader community connected through **charitable acts**

Wellbeing as managing **needs/deficits**

Wellbeing through **Settler** eyes

### TO...

**Whole community** responsibility for wellbeing

As connection to **non-material** needs (and access to material needs)

Connected through acts of **reciprocity** and **shared learning**

Wellbeing as building **capabilities**

Creating space for **Indigenous** ways of knowing (along with non-Indigenous)





## Key 2020 Activities

In 2020, RECOVER worked on the following:

- Strengthened their **Indigenous lens** and relationships. RECOVER worked with the Indigenous consulting firm, Naheyawin, to examine Indigenous traditions and practices that enhance wellbeing, in order to better integrate Indigenous and Western ideas, a practice known as Two-Eyed Seeing.
- Tested **Soulful City**, the **framework for urban wellbeing**. RECOVER presented to a wide variety of audiences and asked questions like: Does it make sense to people? Does it resonate with their experiences? Are there parts of it that make people uncomfortable?
- Developed ways to **apply the framework**, and **tell stories** encountered through it, to share experiences, and to help people see how the wellbeing framework can create positive community change.
- Built **post-secondary partnerships** with faculty and staff, to explore applications of the wellbeing framework in classrooms and communities.
- Evolved our approach to **evaluation**, so that it could align with the wellbeing framework.
- Supported the **Catalyst Group**, the advisory and learning group.
- Led and supported a variety of **prototypes**, intentionally incorporating the wellbeing framework into this work.

More information on these activities follows.



## Embraced Two-Eyed Seeing

At the outset, RECOVER recognized that a significant and disproportionate number of street-involved people self-identify as Indigenous. These people represent communities from all over Turtle Island (North America), carrying with them vibrant and diverse traditions, worldviews, and stories, as well as the direct and intergenerational effects of historic and ongoing colonization.


RECOVER believes that Indigenous peoples have unique and complete knowledge sets, well-suited to healing wounds and creating thriving communities. Our team, which is comprised of people who have grown up primarily with a Westernized perspective, has much to unlearn from our knowledge system, and relearn from Indigenous perspectives and ways of coming into wellbeing.

Two-Eyed Seeing embraces “learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all,” as envisaged by Elder Dr. Albert Marshall.

RECOVER sees it as a part of their goal to not only approach the work with an eye towards respectful and appropriate inclusion, but to go further in transforming processes through Indigenous ways of knowing, as the work and the shared wellbeing journey continues.

In 2020, RECOVER found itself at a critical juncture in its journey where building understanding and taking action must begin to coexist. To support this transition, RECOVER partnered with [Naheyawin](#).

Naheyawin prepared [A Guide to Indigenous Concepts of Wellness and Wellbeing](#), as well as [Strategic Recommendations](#). These included a map of actions, roles, and concepts that also allow for an understanding of success to be formed. The strategic recommendations focus on the following key areas:


- 
- Becoming storytelling allies;
  - Nurturing ethical spaces;
  - Rooting the Catalyst group;
  - Calling-in Indigenous communities; and
  - Aligning with Indigenous leadership.

In 2021, RECOVER will continue this work with guidance and coaching support from Naheyawin.

## Tested the Wellbeing Framework

RECOVER team members socialized the wellbeing framework with people from a variety of groups and organizations. This included City Councillors, City staff, stakeholder groups in the community such as EndPoverty Edmonton and REACH Edmonton, various communities of practice such as the Tamarack Neighbourhood Learning Community of Practice, the Centre for Public Impact's staff lunch and learn, and SDX Edmonton, as well as at conferences such as the Wellbeing Cities Forum and the Alberta Professional Planners Institute conference.

All were asked if they thought the framework applied to their personal lives, to others they know and to people struggling to thrive. There has been overwhelming acceptance of the wellbeing framework and agreement that a culture shift is needed to apply the framework. It resonates, and many understand the transformational implications on our existing systems. Some comments made were that "the framework is a depolarizer"; "there's a lot of unifying fodder"; and "the framework needs to be incorporated into everything we do".




Nonetheless, people were not sure how to apply the framework, what it meant for them and what exactly they might do differently. The RECOVER team knows that to apply the framework meaningfully they have to develop application tools and guide people through the process and learning, as well as shift the approach to evaluation to take into account the six kinds of connection at the heart of the wellbeing framework.

## Learned about the Application of the Framework and Storytelling

As RECOVER tested the wellbeing framework with different audiences, it became clear that although people said they liked the framework, it was not clear how the framework could change current service delivery, or help with conceptualizing what an alternative model might look like. To bridge this gap and better understand what the application of the framework looks like, RECOVER contracted InWithForward to create five speculative stories. Speculative stories are learning stories that depict an alternative future. In RECOVER's case, this alternative future is one in which the levers in the framework are applied to achieve the connection outcomes. These stories will be used to generate conversations in 2021, build understanding and acceptance of the wellbeing framework and provide support to the culture shift required to realize the outcomes.

To further their own understanding of wellbeing framework, the RECOVER team used workshops, book club meetings, and working through exercises to apply the framework with different audiences, in an effort to learn from and with each other. The application exercises included the Socially Conscious Business prototype, a collaboration between REACH and The Nook based on a 2018 RECOVER prototype, City staff working on a new Financial Navigator role, and others within and outside the City.

The RECOVER team learned that it is important to be intentional and specific in the design of solution ideas, that the right levers need to be selected for the problem



that is being addressed. There is much more to be learned in how solutions and approaches can be strengthened, and how the wellbeing framework can help to design interventions that intentionally link levers and outcomes. In 2021, it is hoped that RECOVER will develop more tools for understanding and applying the framework meaningfully.

## Built Post-Secondary Partnerships


In 2020, MacEwan University and RECOVER drafted a plan with the aim to bring together students and faculty at post-secondary institutions, as well as community stakeholders, to research and create socially innovative projects that improve the quality of life for Edmontonians. Together, they started the process of learning how to match post-secondary institutions, individuals, classrooms and teams to community-engaged learning opportunities.

The objectives of the strategy were to:

- Strengthen the partnership between RECOVER and post-secondary institutions.
- Build a larger pool of innovators equipped to engage in urban wellness projects.
- Build capacity of post secondaries to support scaling of pilots and understanding of urban wellness.
- Better equip post secondary students with Social Innovation tools.

The tests conducted in 2020, uncovered that:

- The undergraduate students introduced to the Wellbeing Framework in a classroom setting understood it in theory, however putting it into practice was more challenging.

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- Because the framework was built and is communicated through the lens of marginalized populations, it was difficult for students to conceptualize applying it in other, more broad community contexts and systemic issues, such as racism.
  - While people who currently work in strategy and systemic change have learned how to interpret frameworks and tools, and how they can be applied, most undergraduate students have not.


## Dug into Evaluation

In 2020, RECOVER dug further into evaluation and came to some important conclusions. In 2017, RECOVER's original plan was to measure impact using five indicator categories, closely related to the social determinants of health. A subset of three were selected to measure progress as they were deemed most important to monitor regularly. These measures were:

- Social Capacity Index - a measure of citizen connectedness, engagement, and inclusion, drawn from the Citizen Perception Survey.
- Social Vulnerability Index - a composite measure of nine elements from census data commonly associated with neighbourhood vulnerability, such as unemployment rate, low income, lone parent families, and home ownership.
- Safety Perception Index - a measure of citizens' feelings of safety.

RECOVER has come to understand that these measures do not reflect the evolved understanding of wellbeing. In 2020, four key insights that emerged related to evaluation:

1. The RECOVER activities/prototypes have generated recognized value for the people who have participated in them.

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2. The RECOVER approach requires time to make an impact. There are no “quick fixes.”
  3. The RECOVER approach can contribute to - but not drive - changes in wellbeing at the community or population level.

The RECOVER team concluded that their framing and indicators of wellbeing needed to evolve along with the understanding of wellbeing and align with the new framework.


Based on the wellbeing framework, RECOVER has moved to align its evaluation focus to be on outcomes for individuals, as opposed to the community or population level, as well as capturing the experiences of people focused on improving individual wellbeing and community wellness.

## Supported the Catalyst Group

The Catalyst Group, a group of community and institutional leaders convened to advise and support RECOVER, met five times in 2020. They spent time learning about:

- The wellbeing framework and its application
- The RECOVER prototypes
- Indigenous perspectives and the strategic recommendations related to understanding of the layers of place, self-location, ethical space making and Two-Eyed Seeing.
- They also discussed their roles and the particular interest areas of individual members.

Grounding the group in a shared understanding of RECOVER's wellbeing framework and approach was important, as the group will begin to support prototype teams in



2021. Some Catalyst members have expressed appreciation for the opportunity to learn together, and all are keen to dig into supporting prototypes.

## Supported Prototyping


The process of researching, designing small practices, testing them and then evaluating is called prototyping. The primary output of a prototype is a documented and shareable learning. Through experimentation, participants better understand the opportunity to intervene and have impact, including specifics, such as what kind of interactions are effective for whom and under what circumstances.

After testing more than two dozen prototypes through 2018-2019, in 2020, RECOVER narrowed down the field to focus on further developing a few promising prototypes. All the 2020 prototypes explore ways to increase the connections of the framework.

**The Connector** - In partnership, REACH, Edmonton Police Service (EPS) and RECOVER, along with InWithForward, delved deep into the research to flesh out three very different proposed “connector” roles. The roles were, ‘The Mourning Midwife’ to help guide people through grief and loss, ‘The Alchemist’ to engage street-involved artists in adding new dimensions to known streets, and a ‘Garden Network Guide’ who nurtures relationships through gardening in unconventional greenspaces. They did rigorous testing of each of these three roles with different audiences, in order to test ways to connect marginalized individuals to sources of healing and build authentic relationships in community. These were based on the recognition that the current crisis and triage approach does not get at the root causes of dislocation and marginalization. In 2021, they will narrow down to one connector role that will move forward into higher fidelity testing, including recruitment into test versions of the role.

**Clareview Recreation Centre** - In August 2019, the Director at Clareview Recreation Centre approached the Integrated Strategic Development Branch (ISD)






to conduct an evaluation of patrons' perceptions of safety at the recreation centre. Understanding that safety, and perceptions of, is a multifaceted issue, ISD recommended using the RECOVER ethnographic research methodology and broadening the research question. Starting with the research question, "What role does Clareview Community Recreation Centre play in your life?" our researchers interviewed patrons, staff, and partners of the facility. These interviews, combined with field observations, and internal and external research were used to develop descriptive segments of the patrons of Clareview and identified a number of opportunity areas for testing. The next phase in 2020 would have been using this information to co-design solutions with facility staff, partners and patrons, however, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the closure of the city recreation centres in March 2020 and this work was placed on hold.

**The Gallery** - Through experimentation in the sidewalk space on 102A Avenue between 100 and 101 Streets, a busy intersectional hub that is an aggregation point for a wide variety of people. This prototype aims to better understand how to intervene in spaces to improve wellbeing, and support positive interactions. This prototype hopes to hone in on features and conditions that make a difference to people (and for which people) so that these learnings can be applied elsewhere, to other spaces in the downtown. In 2020, plans were made for lighting and art. A Development Permit was obtained and art by street-involved artists was commissioned. The artists' stories were collected to accompany their works.

**Old Strathcona Neighbours Project (formerly Odd Jobs)** - This prototype aims to reduce tensions between housed and unhoused neighbours in Old Strathcona. It originated as an idea about finding odd jobs for unhoused people, but has evolved into a deeper notion about connection, aiming to build healthy relationships across differences. In 2020, the community prototype team received a grant from Social Innovation Canada to tell their [social innovation research and development story](#). Although COVID-19 delayed their next iteration of testing, they are ready to go as soon as restrictions are lifted enough for the in-person contact required.




**Expectant** - This community-led prototype explored ways to support people in their transition to parenthood. In 2020, the team tested the idea of using a box filled with items for parents-to-be as a way to launch the development of relationships with the people who provide support expectant parents need, and find ways to heal from trauma or grief they might have experienced. The team has learned that the specific items in the box are not as important as the deeper connection that the items are meant to tap into. The next phase of the team's work will involve testing how to enter into conversations in "the heart space" with parents-to-be.

Also, towards the end of the year, RECOVER partnered with the **Affordable Housing Solutions Lab** so that the Catalyst group could support three of their housing prototypes: one led by the Multicultural Health Brokers and two led by Green Violin, a housing nonprofit focused on inclusion and sustainability.

## Developed Other Sources of Funding

RECOVER's funding from City Council was designed to diminish each year as relationships were built and alternative and innovative sources developed. Alternative funding opportunities that RECOVER has been able to tap into in 2020 include the following financial and in-kind support:


- A partnership with REACH Edmonton, InWithForward and the Edmonton Police Service, to develop The Connector prototype - each contributing financially to support the work and learn together
- Two McConnell Foundation grants:
  - \$24,600 for the hosting of a Participatory City Symposium - co-organized with the Neighbourhood Services Section and the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues. It is planned for March 2021
  - \$62,700 to support the social research and design work of The Connector prototype

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- A \$2,000 grant that the Odd Jobs prototype received - \$1,000 from Jayne Engle (Director, Cities & Places Portfolio at the McConnell Foundation) and a matching amount from the McConnell Foundation
  - A \$5,000 grant from Social Innovation Canada for the Odd Jobs prototype in support of Social Innovation R&D
  - A partnership with MacEwan University where they contributed \$37,710 in in-kind support, working on supporting the Catalyst group and developing post-secondary partnerships.

## Solid Direction for 2021

RECOVER achieved a lot in 2020. The wellbeing framework provides focus on desired connection outcomes, as well as clarity on the levers for change. Two-Eyed Seeing will enrich the framework through bringing together Indigenous and western knowledge of wellbeing. New tools will be developed and refined to help guide people in applying the framework in their work. Partnerships that have formed will deepen the understanding and application of the wellbeing framework, including through post-secondary institutions. Present and future-oriented stories will bring the framework to life in new ways and make it more accessible to different audiences. And RECOVER will work to redefine the ways that wellbeing is evaluated and measured, to one that is more concerned with subjective, qualitative measures than with quantitative ones.

In early 2020, RECOVER learned how integral connection is to wellbeing. It became the centre of Recover's framework and the guiding force in all of their work. Shortly after this recentering, a pandemic hit and the whole world was thrown into the experience of isolation and disconnection. It made many of the RECOVER engagement processes nearly impossible and forced the RECOVER team to change the way they work. Despite this, the pandemic also provided the team with the opportunity to dive into and share the wellbeing framework with a depth and



breadth that normal circumstances would not likely have allowed. When our city begins to emerge from the restrictions that have kept us disconnected for so long - the centering of connection, a deep understanding of its necessity to the good life, and the tools to better integrate it into our society and systems, will be more important than ever.



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