RECOVER: EDMONTON'S URBAN WELLNESS PLAN

Executive Summary

TABLE OF CONTENTS

04 **THE BACKSTORY**

05 **OUR PRINCIPLES**

06 **OUR APPROACH AT-A-GLANCE**

08 **WHAT WE DID**

10 **WHAT WE LEARNED**

12 **WHAT'S NEXT**

13 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE BACKSTORY

In most major cities, issues of homelessness and poverty have a tendency to be focused on a small number of neighbourhoods. Edmonton is no exception, with many marginalized people living in the "inner city". Charities and government services are invariably located in the same areas in attempts to help and support those who need and want it. Historically, this has created tensions between different groups. Businesses struggle to address cleanliness and aesthetic issues. Neighbourhood residents are concerned about criminal activity and personal safety. Social agencies feel that they and the people they serve are unwanted, further marginalizing them. With so many activities and strategies in place to tackle the issues, people are feeling overwhelmed. The sentiment was, "How much can one community take?"

Systems mapping of policies and strategies was just part of the approach to understand the cumulative impact of activities and services in the urban core.

In July 2017, City Council directed Administration to look at how to best serve our very vulnerable population (*including consideration of a wellness centre that would house several social service agencies in one location*), and to create an urban wellness plan. Council named this work RECOVER: Edmonton's Urban Wellness Plan, and invited many to participate including several provincial ministries.

We took a new approach to address issues in the urban core and mend relationships with those who felt they were not heard. We understood that existing policy papers and strategic plans didn't hold all of the information needed. We knew that we had to work with communities, businesses, government, and social agencies to build a shared understanding of the affected neighbourhoods, to understand the cumulative impact of activities and services in the urban core, and identify solutions for improvement.

RECOVER focused on building shared understanding of the perspectives of community members, folks living rough, businesses, social service agencies, and government.

OUR PRINCIPLES

A complex issue like urban wellness requires a different kind of solution and attitude. In RECOVER, we took a risk and jumped right into an approach that focused on trial and error and constant learning. This "social innovation" approach is rooted in strong and meaningful community engagement, and an iterative process that cycles between knowledge and action. The following 7 principles guided our work to achieve wellness for all, from the marginalized, to residents, businesses, and service agencies:

Members of the Community Advisory and External Partners Committees during the October 2017 kick-off workshop.

Data-Driven

We amassed and explored a variety of data in new and different ways to inform our search for solutions. This evidence-based process is experimental and fluid. The data was the foundation on which we layered our efforts.

People-centred and Inclusive

We privileged lived experiences, community leadership, building relationships and trust. Our committees transcended sectors and perspectives.

Asset or Strength Based

Our understanding of wellness extended beyond services and the clinical lens. We acknowledged multiple forms of wellbeing and built solutions based on assets in the neighbourhoods.

Place Based

There is no "one size fits all" solution. We developed a made-in-Edmonton approach, so that our solutions will come from and reflect our neighbourhoods.

Innovative

We explored and tested small rapid solutions as a first step to shift systems. This iterative process was murky, non-linear, and ambiguous at times.

Transparent and Collaborative

We engaged Edmontonians throughout the process, meeting them where they are at and constantly sharing what we learn and test.

Starting Small and Scaling Up

We began our work with the 5 core communities with the intent to broaden the scope of wellness innovation city-wide.

OUR APPROACH AT-A-GLANCE

What If... *We used social innovation to improve Edmonton's urban wellness?*

In Edmonton, we value wellness, which means ensuring the right supports are in place to promote and sustain the conditions for people and neighbourhoods to thrive.

This isn't about replacing existing strategies, policies, programs or services. It means working together with residents, businesses and government to build on what's already working, co-designing and testing solutions that can improve the well-being of our residents.

This has helped us find ways to better align and collaborate across different orders of government, social agencies, local businesses and the community, improving urban wellness for all Edmontonians.

Progress to Date

We listened to people to understand their needs & motivations

We took some small first steps with potential for much bigger impact

People We Met

Jen, Adventurer

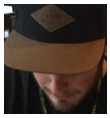
Lee-Anne, Inductive Service Designer

Crazy, Lonely Actor

Wayne, Contemplator

Brandon, Newbie

Sammy, immigrant Spirit

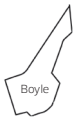

Brett, Old Timer

What We Heard in Neighbourhoods

Establishing Yourself

Connectedness

Vibrancy



Pay it Forward

Nurturing Environment

What Is Important to Edmontonians

Safety

Built and Natural Environment

Basic Amenities

Opportunities We Identified

Wellness as a Service

Open Collaboration

Work & Learning

Vibrant Neighbourhoods

Community Supports

Actions We Tested

Project Welcome Mat

Wellness Council

Universal Basic Income

Empty Storefront

Service Navigators

Job Skills Matching

Meet & Eat

Culture Club

Socially Conscious Businesses

It Takes A Village

Public Washrooms

Greenhouse

Community Hub

It's All About Connections

Progress So Far

Out of the 13 initial prototypes, four are progressing with community partner leads and six with City leads

In the Edmonton Journal, two Boyle Street Community Services community members were interviewed about Project Welcome Mat:

"*People were happy and involved. They felt like they belonged*" - Whitford Skani

Public washroom and Culture Club prototypes have also been featured in the Edmonton Journal.

Ethnographic research, materials, funding, along with co-design with Boyle Street clients have led to a larger Project Welcome Mat pilot, aspects of which are spreading to other sites.

Private post-secondary funding partnership secured to support students to work on Empty Storefront and Socially Conscious Businesses

Next Steps

1. Moving existing and new prototyping forward .
2. Building a formal local social innovation network .
3. Convening and facilitating strategy and program alignment.
4. Refine key indices to measure change in urban wellness.
5. Implement a shared leadership structure for RECOVER.
6. Attract funding from philanthropy and other orders of government.
7. Undertake ongoing evaluation of what is working and not working.

City Leadership Commitments

✚ Engage and convene stakeholders in RECOVER for community-driven action with a long-term commitment to systems change

✚ Assign City staff to advance the work of RECOVER

✚ Secure funding for implementing and expanding RECOVER

✚ Ensure RECOVER is open and transparent with ongoing communications

Shared Leadership Opportunities

We are asking for representatives of all of these groups to be involved:

✚ **Community Members:** Articulate a collective urban wellness vision and get involved in a prototype
✚ **Community organizations:** Align work with partners and government for collective action on urban wellness
✚ **Businesses:** Get involved in or sponsor a prototype
✚ **Social Innovators:** Join our social innovation network and coach a prototype team
✚ **Post-secondary Institutions:** Partner in research, community engagement, analytics, and prototyping
✚ **Provincial Government:** Participation in governance and align work to improve the urban wellness system
✚ **Federal Government:** Begin conversations about alignment and funding community prototyping
✚ **Funders:** Invest in actions for change in urban wellness

WHAT WE DID

Recognizing that strong action and good decision-making need to be grounded in solid data, we worked with researchers and social innovation experts using a variety of methods to better understand the five core neighbourhoods. We adopted a people-centred, social innovation approach, and conducted multi-faceted research that propelled the development of prototypes, which are central to this work.

Wellness walks gave an opportunity to explore the strengths, gaps, and opportunities for each of the five core neighbourhoods.

What social innovation means to us

Social innovation is about finding new ways to address social needs, with government, businesses and communities working together to create better social outcomes. It is a means of using research to generate and test ideas, working with people as partners, that would affect the bigger picture. It is about:

- Unraveling complex problems from the people's perspectives and experiences;
- Honouring different ways of knowing, recognizing conflict and connection;
- Making interrelationships visible while searching for leverage points and quick small tests;
- Building shared understanding and collaborative cultures of trust and respect; and,
- Staying connected with people and learning together in a constantly iterative cycle of experiencing, reflecting, understanding, and acting.

How we are people-centred

In this project, we honed in on the people in the core – their stories, perspectives, hopes and dreams. We flipped from focusing on problems to wellness outcomes, identified factors that shape those outcomes, and worked with, not for, people to design solutions together. We brought tools that are often missing in public policy discussions, such as rapid testing and co-creation of solutions.

Through research including ethnographic fieldwork with nearly 150 people, we immersed ourselves in the lives of those who live, work, and play in the core neighbourhoods and came to deeply understand their needs. We used a variety of ways to learn from people, going out to where they were, and talking to those that can be hard to reach, giving them the opportunity to share their voice and perspectives about their communities. Focused conversations on the doorsteps, in cafes, parks, and community centres, culminated in wellness walks that allowed us to gain a strong understanding about these neighbourhoods, their strengths, gaps, and opportunities. Together with communities, we then tailor-made the solutions to work for the people rather than institutions.

WHAT WE DID *(CONT.)*

How we tested out ideas

Beyond ethnographic research and public engagement, literature review, geographic information systems data, neighbourhood profiles, strategy mapping and policy analysis further grounded our understanding of the urban core. But simply understanding was not enough; we needed actions. The research blended qualitative and quantitative data, generating over 200 opportunities for actions to improve urban wellness. Ultimately, we selected and tested 13 of these small-scale solutions. We broke solution ideas into small pieces that could be tested to get user feedback quickly. They ranged from rejuvenating public spaces and creating community decision making structure, to changing service flow. This process of prototyping involved over 70 people from diverse sectors who brought them to life over a short, 8-week period.

The 13 prototypes sought to change the narrative, the network, and the system in the core. But did we move the dial? To measure our progress, we worked with our partners to create indicators for urban wellness: physical and mental health; safety and security; economic vitality; built and natural environments; and social capacity. These indicators, visualized in a dashboard, will track our progress over the long-term.

How we created a repeatable process

We knew from the outset that RECOVER needs to be repeatable in other parts of the City. Right from the beginning, we created templates and toolkits that can be used as starting points as RECOVER moves into other neighbourhoods. It is not a cookie-cutter approach as these tools can be constantly evaluated, adapted, and improved as people figure out how to make them work best for their own contexts. Our learnings could help other jurisdictions interested in tackling urban wellness to apply a similar approach.

Actions speak louder than words

RECOVER has involved so many people in so many ways. Here are some highlights:

- Three RECOVER stakeholder committees participated in eight workshops giving hundreds of hours collectively of their time and expertise as we moved through the process.

- The 13 prototypes brought more people in, each giving about 20 hours of their time to think through their solutions, develop a prototype, field test it and then re-group to talk about the data they gathered and decide next steps. Several of these prototypes are now moving into new programs and services; others are improving upon existing initiatives.

- While there have been lots of actions, it comes down to results. We want to move the dial on three performance indicators: safety, vulnerability, and social capacity. Measurable results in three years time will be a key source of data for determining the future of RECOVER.

WHAT WE LEARNED

In tackling urban wellness in a new way, we all stretched ourselves, learning different ways of knowing and a new language (e.g. prototyping, thick data, soft shoe shuffle, generative, iterative), and trusting the process. We also learned that there is an abundance of latent individual and community assets for achieving wellness that already exists in these neighbourhoods.

Go Deep

We learned that we cannot only think about issues and solutions. We have to dig down to the mental models and human stories that underpin the issues and explore root causes. It is tempting to jump from problems to solutions, but we learned about the value of having both "big" (quantitative) and "thick" (ethnographic) data in understanding people's needs, making interrelationships visible, and helping to get at meaningful solutions.

In "going deep", we learned about the importance of treating higher order needs as equal or more vital than food, shelter, and safety. These needs are all important, but it is critical to understand what drives human behaviour, such as beauty, belonging, and sense of purpose. We learned that we shouldn't pit these higher needs against food and shelter. Rather, we should see them as concurrent motivations, and that we should learn how to leverage them together.

In order to "go deep" effectively, we need to nurture curiosity, and we musn't be afraid of diversity or conflict. It is important to draw on different ways of knowing. We learned that co-creation of solutions is the most innovative aspect of this work. It is simple and low risk but yields promising change.

Power of People

Throughout RECOVER, our people-centred approach has constantly reminded us to go where people are at, listen deeply, design with not for, and match service access to needs. Yes, decisions grounded in good data is critical, but numbers alone are not enough. We knew we also needed the wisdom in lived experience – we knew that the combination of the two would get us closer to achieving urban wellness. Data can only mobilise people and change things when it becomes thick with social meaning that comes from people's stories and experiences because it cannot transcend the lively and contradictory social worlds that it measures.

Starting with people and their lived experiences also means we work backwards from outcomes that matter to them – this was central to our methodology. We started by trying to understand what people needed – those who live, work, and play in the core neighbourhoods. Then we worked backwards to find solutions. In the process, we involved them, making decisions together based on their needs, desires, and hopes. Ultimately, the success and impact of our prototypes were more defined by this participatory approach to problem solving than by the result. This co-creation meant that we all took responsibilities in this project, and worked nimbly across boundaries.

Focusing on people also taught us that we can design and rethink service delivery not based on traditional segmentation of vulnerability nor on assumptions that everyone has the same needs. Instead, we designed for motivational segments, recognizing that there is a spectrum of motivation for change, and that some folks like the "Adventurers" thrive on an independent lifestyle that does not tie them down to one place. Stories about people surfaced a surprising number of "positive deviants" in our communities, those silent heroes helping people survive on the streets.

WHAT WE LEARNED *(CONT.)*

Don't be linear. Be circular

We learned that in order to tackle a complex topic like urban wellness, we need to stop thinking in linear ways. There is no one path to wellness. There are a myriad of ways to achieving it and they are interrelated with too many variables to control. With a solid grounding in data, we need to develop various solutions and explore them simultaneously – instead of looking for a "silver bullet", we need to use a "silver buckshot" approach. What's more, we have to find ways to test the smaller ideas quickly and cheaply, providing us with rich fodder for learning and insight for bigger solutions. These are the "circles" that guided our cycle of learning.

The idea is to constantly learn, test out ideas, strengthen the best ones and abandon the ones that don't work. We learned about the importance of breaking down ideas that can be complex and intimidating into small things that can be tested, taking small risks, getting user feedback quickly, and not being afraid to fail fast. In fact, we learned that failing fast is a good thing, that failing on a small scale is a learning opportunity and one to celebrate. It is a good thing to scrap ideas if they test poorly.

Some early 'prototypes' that were tested included Project Welcome Mat (top) at Boyle Street Community Services and getting feedback on an early design of an integrated public washroom transit shelter (bottom).

Back to the beginning

The proposal for a wellness centre with integrated services for vulnerable people is where we started in July 2017. While RECOVER is not recommending a wellness centre in the core, that does not mean that facilities with services from multiple agencies are not effective. It's just that our research shows that other parts of the system significantly contribute to urban wellness as well.

Local businesses that take interest in and welcome marginalized people into their businesses are part of the solution. Our prototypes are part of the solution. We tested a prototype called Socially Conscious Businesses. We tested another prototype that connects people to services after they have been picked up from a 24/7 Crisis Diversion unit vehicle. Also, we learned from ethnographic research that current agencies are working quite well together as clients move from one service provider to another to access services. The ethnographic research did find gaps and helped identify solutions that could improve the wellness for marginalized people. RECOVER will continue to convene people to work on closing these gaps.

While the intent of improving lives of people faced with homelessness, complex mental health needs and addictions is a worthy goal for improving urban wellness, we have learned that we also need to consider the wellness of everyone who lives, works and uses services in the five core neighbourhoods. The more we dig into how we can improve urban wellness and test solutions, the more we will learn about the complexity of the problems. With a better understanding of this complexity, we can design and test solutions that will get us closer to urban wellness for all.

WHAT'S NEXT

Urban wellness is not an one-time action; it requires constantly checking in, learning, adjusting, and building the capacity of all those involved and impacted. This key learning informs our next steps and recommendations to City Council for continuing the work started and developing tools and structures to expand this work based on need for social change "With" not "For."

The prototype showcase event held in May 2018 featured a panel discussion where committee and community members who participated in the prototyping process shared their experiences and thoughts about the potential for social innovation to improve urban wellness.

We are going to City Council in August 2018 to explain what we have accomplished and how we plan on moving forward. The four recommendations on the following page need Council consideration for:

✚ Moving prototype work forward – supporting the existing prototyping and taking in a new round of prototypes informed by the current list of urban wellness opportunities.

✚ Building a formal local social innovation network including community, post-secondary institutions (students, faculty and research) and social innovation practitioners.

✚ Convening and facilitating strategy and program alignment work with provincial ministries, city and community service providers as we work on defining problems together.

✚ Further refining the data sets to develop some key indices to measure change in urban wellness. Baseline data will be gathered by end of 2018.

✚ Supporting a smooth transition as we work with partners to create and implement a shared-leadership structure for RECOVER.

✚ Exploring a funding model that will attract funding from philanthropy and other orders of government.

✚ Undertaking an evaluation that will inform RECOVER – what is working and not working – and inform changes for improvement.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we scale solutions up, we will think about the big picture and how to shift norms, rules, and values that make up urban wellness systems. RECOVER has implications for the way we work at the City in the long term. We will have to decide if we want to commit to this messier but likely more effective approach.

1. That Administration continue Recover in the neighbourhoods of Boyle Street, McCauley, Central McDougall, Queen Mary Park and Downtown for up to five years to allow more time to measure changes of the indicators measuring urban wellness.

2. That Recover begin work in the Strathcona neighbourhood.

3. That Administration, in collaboration with partners, develop a Recover governance structure, to replace the three existing committees, and report back to City Council by the end of March 2019.

4. That Administration advance a distributed model for serving marginalized people to ensure facilities and services are available in other areas of the city where need is evident, and that Administration explore tools and incentives – regulatory, policy and funding levers – that can contribute to more informed, human centered infrastructure to support wellness in the core.