

RECOVER
Urban Wellbeing
**2022 Annual
Highlights Report**

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

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Land Acknowledgement

RECOVER is honoured to acknowledge that we learn, grow, and gather on Treaty 6 territory and Métis Homeland, which is the traditional and contemporary home of many Indigenous peoples including the nehiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakota Sioux, Sauteaux, 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 Year in Context

RECOVER Urban Wellbeing continued to evolve and grow amidst the ongoing challenges posed by the pandemic, amidst greater concerns related to community safety and wellbeing, a growing opioid epidemic, and greater housing and food insecurity.

In many ways, 2022 was a year of change. Several changes had an impact on what RECOVER was able to achieve during the year. Some of the changes included:

- 1) Team composition: we said goodbye to a core team member and eventually welcomed a new one; for several months, RECOVER only had one full time staff resource.
- 2) Leadership: the Community Services Department where RECOVER resides gained a new Deputy City Manager and a new Branch Manager.
- 3) City context: a new Community Safety and Well Being Strategy was approved by City Council and RECOVER was listed as an initiative under the Well-being pillar. This brought stable funding to RECOVER's work, as well as a different level of accountability.
- 4) Partnerships: RECOVER continued to foster new relationships and partnerships; one example was a new learning relationship with Dr. Tim Barlott at the University of Alberta.

All of these changes had ripple effects on the work and what the team was able to do.

In other ways, 2022 was a year of doubling down. We continued to use the wellbeing framework and dig deeper - trying to apply it with discernment to the prototypes, some of which yielded great learnings. We also looked to support other Sections within City Administration. We made a concerted effort to support complex work internal to the City of Edmonton, and we offered Critical Design Ethnography workshops for staff across a few departments. New prototypes came into view, and we learned more about conditions in the system that support and also hinder innovation.

What Was Our Work Mainly About?



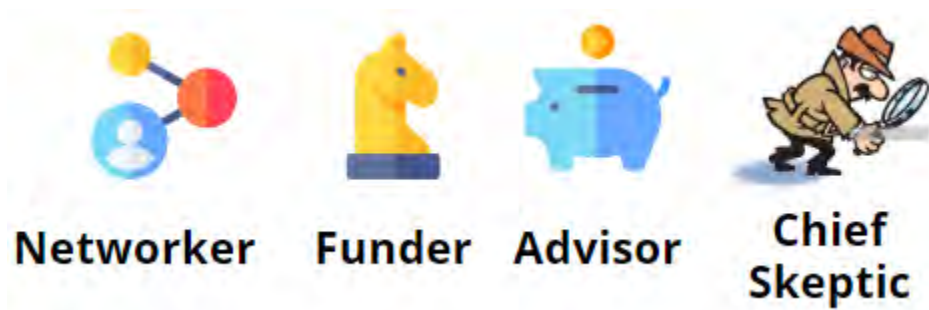
RECOVER focused and continues to focus on essentially three things:

- A Process - This is largely a Social Research & Development (R&D) approach which involves spending considerable time understanding problems from the perspectives of people at the heart of them.
- A Wellbeing Framework - that has emerged from our research and experience and is the North Star for everything RECOVER does.
- A Set of Experiments - called “prototypes” to test out ideas, to see what works, what doesn’t work, for whom, under what conditions. To learn. To then retest and also to hopefully help grow the promising ones.

Relationships & Partnerships

At the core of RECOVER's work is the understanding that wellbeing is relational, and we seek to embody that understanding in how we work. This year we continued to nurture and evolve existing partnerships, while also developing new ones. We appreciate all those that we are in relationship with.

Catalysts



The [Catalyst group](#) (a group of community leaders that RECOVER convenes) were created to play four roles: networker, funder, advisor and chief skeptic for the RECOVER project. The group met twice in 2022 with a focus on evaluation and learning. In January 2022, the Catalyst meeting was dedicated to reviewing the Catalyst journey to-date, and to explore the path forward. They had been meeting for two years, and it was a good time to pause and reflect, as well as to discuss options for the Catalyst group going forward into the future. The May meeting was an “Ethical Space Making and Space Taking” workshop with Naheyawin in-person at Victoria Park (for more details on the workshop, see the Focused Learning Opportunities section below).

Due to the changes in leadership, the Catalysts were not convened for the remainder of the year. However, RECOVER team members conducted 1-1 evaluations with most of the Catalyst members. These 1-1’s helped us to learn about the experience of each Catalyst group member, how the Catalysts can add the most value, and to help determine the direction of the Catalyst group. [This](#) is a summary of the information from the 1-1’s. Many Catalysts expressed appreciation for the journey thus far, as well as challenges and desires for the future. The co-chairs, one of whom is new, are presently reviewing the information and determining the way ahead for 2023.

MacEwan University

RECOVER continued to partner with [MacEwan University](#) through its relationship with [Dr. Jennifer Long](#). Dr. Long has been a key member of RECOVER’s core team, providing insight across topics at regular team meetings and providing opportunities for MacEwan Anthropology students to take part in City projects. Her Fall 2022 ANTH 394-Ethnographic Research Methods students learned about the wellbeing framework, about the unique role that City Hall plays in our city, and then conducted their own ethnographic research related to the purpose of the City Hall space. [Here](#) is an article about this work. This was meant to support further research and subsequent prototyping in the City Hall space. However, the context within City Hall had shifted, reducing the need for prototyping, and the additional

work in City Hall did not end up proceeding. RECOVER continued to learn about the tremendous benefits that small bite-sized projects have for students.

In 2022, RECOVER wrapped up its former partnership with the [Social Innovation Institute](#) at MacEwan University as a result of organizational changes. The team was grateful to meet with the newly hired Director of the Institute and looks forward to supporting their journey ahead.

Edmonton Social Planning Council

In 2022, RECOVER developed a learning partnership with the [Edmonton Social Planning Council \(ESPC\)](#), a local independent research organisation. ESPC developed a Wellbeing Tracker and the RECOVER team has been advising on developing better measures for social inclusion and wellbeing. This partnership continues to meet quarterly to share learnings, resources and ideas on how to balance perspectives from a deficit led to an asset focused lens.

Canadian Wellbeing Knowledges Network (CWKN)



The RECOVER project manager, Sue Holdsworth, became an active participant of the [CWKN](#) in 2022. It is a newly formed network that aims to foster mutual understanding of wellbeing among diverse stakeholders who appreciate the need for wellbeing-oriented policies. This is important as a new wellbeing agenda is being embraced by governments and organisations in Canada and around the world. However, the “new” objectives implied by “wellbeing” are not always well-defined, and also vary across different spheres. The CWKN brings together different knowledge systems, disciplines, and practitioner groups to build a community with appreciation for each other’s language around wellbeing, and which fosters a vision of reconciliation-minded, evidence-informed, and practical approaches to wellbeing policy. It is supported by a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) grant and coordinated by McGill School of Population and Global Health’s Department of Equity, Ethics and Policy. In mid and late 2022, the CWKN hosted a series of dialogues, workshops and other knowledge-sharing activities. Sue Holdsworth functioned as a co-chair of the Local Initiatives Dialogue Group, as well as a key participant on the Inclusion Working Group. The CWKN continues to explore a range of wellbeing frameworks and ways to measure wellbeing. Sue will share learnings with the RECOVER team and other City colleagues.

EndPoverty Edmonton

The RECOVER team connected with the new Director of Lived Experience at [EndPoverty Edmonton](#), Dunsie Strohschein, to share our experiences with ethnography and to develop a learning partnership. We shared our different techniques of ethnography and community based research. The RECOVER team and EPE hope to support each other in bringing more lived experience into policy planning and development.

Edmonton City Centre Mall

RECOVER continued to evolve in its relationship with the [Edmonton City Centre Mall](#); in 2022, the mall continued to support RECOVER through prototyping. In fall 2022, a brief prototype called Connect Studio was run in the mall and The Gallery prototype continued to offer space for learning and exchange between the downtown business community and lived experience, of which the mall was an active participant.

J5 Design

The RECOVER team established a new partnership with [J5 Design](#), a design studio, to test a new space for connection in Edmonton City Centre called Connect Studio (see the prototype section below for more information).

Neighbourhood Empowerment Team (NET) and Chimo Animal Assisted Wellness and Learning Society (CAAWLS)

RECOVER developed a new partnership with [NET](#) and [CAAWLS](#) to test a new prototype called PAWSibilities to foster connection in the downtown context through the presence of wellbeing dogs (see the prototype section below for more information).

REACH and InWithForward

Both [REACH](#) (Edmonton's Safety Council) and [InWithForward](#) (a social design firm that acts as a consultant as well) share RECOVER's passion for improving wellbeing. They continued to partner with RECOVER over the course of the year. In particular, significant effort was placed on testing a second round of the Soloss prototype (see the prototype section below for more information).

The Soloss Network

As another round of prototyping Soloss took place in 2022, the Soloss network grew - inviting in a new cohort of Losstenders, Sharers and Sounding Board members. This network of Soloss people began to emerge as a new partner in their own right. They have expressed interest in helping Soloss to grow and in stewarding its further development. This developing network will have a role to play in the future of Soloss.

University of Alberta

RECOVER, [REACH](#), and [InWithForward](#) partnered with [Dr. Tim Barlott](#) from the [University of Alberta](#) to conduct research with funding from a Killam Grant. Tim specialises in community-based research that explores transformative relationships and the development of caring community networks in the field of mental health. Research shows that as grassroots care movements become programmatized, they often lose their transformative energy. This research partnership sought to deepen the intellectual foundations of Soloss, re-conceptualize scale, and develop a framework for growth. The research question was: how do we grow Soloss from a promising prototype to a city-wide intervention without losing what makes Soloss so impactful?

Prototypes

Prototypes are for learning. They are for testing ideas out and seeing what parts work or don't work, for whom, and under what conditions. [Here](#) is a visual overview of our prototypes over the years. In 2022, we dug deeper with two of our prototypes (Soloss and The Gallery), and began work on three new prototypes (City Hall, Connect Studio, and PAWSibilities). One other prototype, Expectant, was revisioned as it experienced some transition.

Soloss

With partners at [REACH](#) and [InWithForward](#) (and with support from the [Bissell Centre](#), [The Mustard Seed](#), and [The Stollery Foundation](#)), RECOVER supported the testing of [Soloss](#) as a form of employee assistance. During the first prototype in 2021, frontline social service workers emerged as a user group. Compassion fatigue, burnout, and vicarious trauma are urgent concerns for staff on the frontlines. Soloss tested how it



might offer a different kind of support, rooted in cultural healing versus clinical problem solving. This iteration will be evaluated in early 2023.

Snapshot of learnings:

- Timing is a key condition that needs to be considered when prototyping; winter was not the best time for self-care, not the best time to launch an employee service program given heightened demands on frontline staff of social service agencies
- Leadership direction matters; if leadership is not on board, then it is much harder to garner staff participation and the currency of relationship matters even more
- The Sounding Board members wanted to expand their role to be providing direct support for the Losstenders. This role will evolve in the future

In partnership with [Dr. Tim Barlott](#) at the University of Alberta, RECOVER also explored new governance models to support Soloss and other innovative solutions. This is ongoing work, the team is still in the process of trying to find alternative structures and decision-making processes that are more conducive to different logics, values and roles - ones that will preserve the transformative energy of Soloss and other community-led prototypes. (for more information, see the partnership section above)

The Gallery

RECOVER held a second [Gallery](#) workshop series in August with artist Donna Robilliard. She has experience being street involved, and as a part of leading the workshop, shared her experiences of challenge and change while also teaching people basic elements of her art practice. The goal of these workshops was to create opportunities for people (office and business workers) with perhaps quite different life experiences to see each other as more full and complex people - as an opportunity for connection across these differences.



A second part of The Gallery prototype was a physical sidewalk gallery space that shared art from various Indigenous artists. As the team reflected on the year, one of the most profound stories surfaced from this prototype – this story is shared below.

In November 2022, a new member of the RECOVER team, Kim, was talking with everyone involved in The Gallery prototype to be able to take it on as the lead. She met with Zaina, the Marketing Manager at Edmonton City Centre Mall, about the physical art gallery space on 102A Ave. At the end of their meeting, they went to The Gallery and found the door unlocked and most of the art missing! The painting, bead and applique art made by Virgil Grandbois, Donna Robillard, Darlene Cardinal, Vanessa Gladue, Kyla Wapass and Tracy Wilson - Indigenous artists who have experienced deep marginalisation and houselessness - had been in The Gallery since early 2021. This was especially unsettling, as the art had been on loan longer than expected due to the complications of COVID and construction in the area, and the art hadn't been treated with the care that it deserved. It was a devastating blow to an intervention intended to improve well being - by attempting to change the frames and narratives about those living on the margins by highlighting their artistic talents, and exploring ways to support more authentic connections between people with vastly different lived experiences.

The loss of the art invited deep reflection as the team grappled with the complexities of the realities we work in. We could have sent the artists cheques for the market value of the art and left it at that, but we knew that we had to honour our relationships with the artists, their intentions in participating in the prototype, their talents.

Tracy, the Manager of Cultural Support at Boyle Street Community Services and also one of the artists featured in The Gallery, was integral in supporting the artists to be a part of the prototype. Alongside Tracy, the RECOVER team helped convene Zaina and the other artists at Boyle Street to attend to the loss of the art. We smudged and held space. We listened as the artists shared what the loss of their art pieces meant to them. We came to better understand their experiences of not feeling prioritised, and of ways that the artists had felt undervalued in other elements of the prototype, and also about how important participating in The Gallery is to them.

This brought us into yet more reflection and a renewal of the importance of this project, and our committed advocacy for it and the artists. Details of the prototype that hadn't previously seemed as important stood out as priorities in ways we hadn't before realised. The importance of carrying forward with this prototype, in relationship, became so much more clear. While we had worried that the stolen art would break a fragile relationship of trust the artists had in us, they made clear that that was not happening. Rather, we were invited to deepen those relationships in ways that honoured them: to turn towards each other, not away, in the context of risks, challenges, and complexities.

Snapshot of learnings:

- The middle workshop of the series needs to be better curated somehow to encourage more dialogue
- The incident of the stolen art required the team to navigate the tension between corporate risk management and Indigenous relational systems thinking; had the RECOVER team not leaned into their relationships as well, instead of solely relying on the formal City mechanisms, their relationships would have been undermined and systems of oppression would have been perpetuated further
- Relational work requires a level of comfort with risk

PAWSibilities



In 2022, a staff member from the [Neighbourhood Empowerment Team](#) (NET), Connie Marciniuk, approached RECOVER with the idea of using wellness dogs to encourage connections between different folks in the downtown core. This idea linked to The Gallery prototype and fit with our research. We decided to focus the testing of this idea in the area around Churchill Square to 101 Street. In partnership with a dog handler from the wellness animal group, [Chimo Animal Assisted Wellness and Learning Society](#) (CAAWLS), a prototype plan was developed, for testing to begin in 2023.

Connect Studio

Following the success and positive reception of The Gallery prototype, Edmonton City Centre Mall was interested in additional work with RECOVER. Since COVID, there had been an increasing number of negative incidents and a decreasing sense of safety in the downtown area and mall. Edmonton City Centre had some vacant retail space that they offered for RECOVER to use as a prototype space. Working from the definition of safety as not only the absence of threat, but also the presence of connection, the idea of [Connect Studio](#) was born. It was envisioned as a space that would invite diverse visitors of the mall to contribute, co-design, and test ways to improve safety through connection. RECOVER partnered with design firm J5 to test options in the space. Unfortunately, a number of factors impaired the ability of the space to be as broadly inclusive as originally envisioned

and the testing that could be conducted in the mall. With the many constraints, it was determined that there was limited value in continuing the prototype and it was ended in December 2022.

Snapshot of learnings:

- Artists did not have the bandwidth to engage during the holiday season
- Intentions, expectations and tensions are important to name and work through

City Hall Safety

The RECOVER Urban Wellbeing team planned to support the work of the Safe and Healthy Communities Section of the Social Development Branch at the City of Edmonton in improving safety at [City Hall](#). The team was curious to learn what safety meant to the various users of the space and what it might look like in that context. Our hunch was that it is about much more than the absence of threat.



RECOVER partnered with [Dr. Jennifer Long](#) and the students in her Fall 2022 ANTH 394-Ethnographic Research Methods course at [MacEwan University](#). The students learned about the wellbeing framework, and then conducted an applied ethnographic research project in City Hall, where they observed visitors to the space and interviewed various people who work in City Hall, to explore the role City Hall plays in our city as a public space.

RECOVER also had planned to partner with the Director of Lived Experience at [EndPovertyEdmonton](#), Dunsin Strohschein, to conduct ethnographic research at City Hall. This would have given the team insights into opportunities for action - things to test in the space that would support safety. RECOVER had planned to test a solution idea and see what difference it makes, however the concerns around safety in the City Hall space had subsided. Together with staff in the Safe and Healthy Communities Section, the RECOVER team decided to redirect their resources elsewhere.

Snapshot of learnings:

- See the [student project website](#) for their findings

Expectant

This community-led prototype continued to explore ways to introduce and integrate the Wellbeing Framework to support people in their transition to parenthood while also allowing space for healing and nourishment through “the heart space,” rather than exclusively “head based” engagement.

In 2022, the prototype team revised the prototype and focused on creating a workbook to use with frontline workers, based in the [Wellbeing Framework](#). The workbook steps participants through reflective practices meant to enable a deepening of understanding and nourishing of wellbeing in daily life. The workbook's focus on wellbeing works in complement to current approaches - often based in harm reduction - in a way that allows for a more soulful approach to welcoming a new family into the world.

Snapshot of learnings:

- COVID posed long-term challenges on our capacities and momentum as a prototype team.
- Continuity of relationships is helpful; transition of staff from Miki Stricker-Talbot to Kim Smith disrupted the flow of this prototype
- Adopting wellbeing practices as a prototype team is important when seeking to nourish others with the Wellbeing Framework

Focused Learning Opportunities

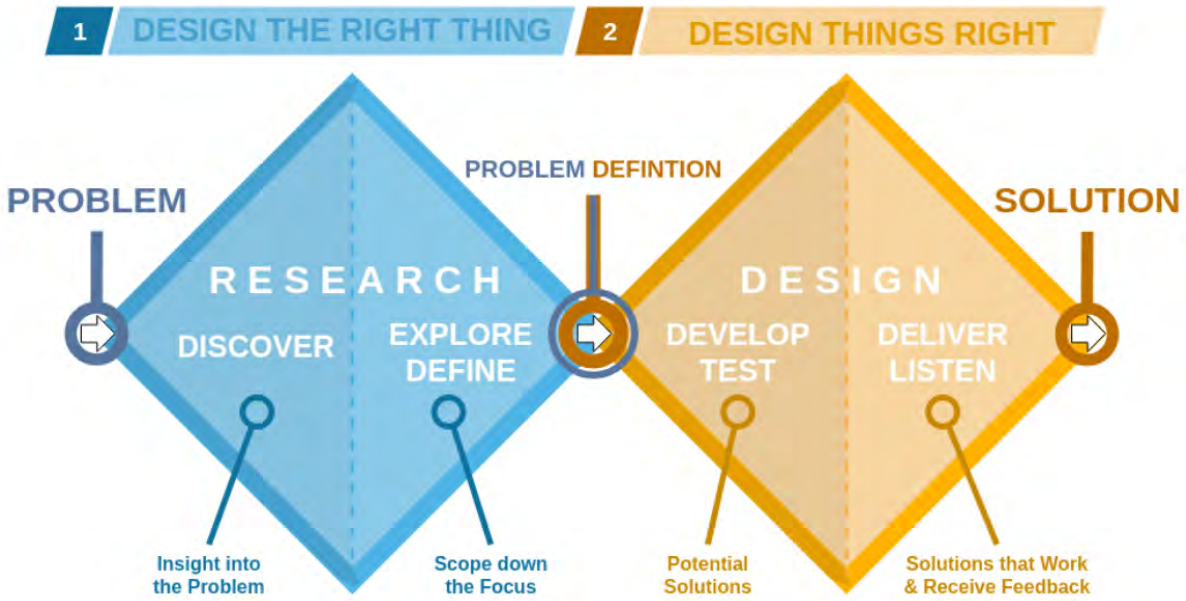
Given RECOVER Urban Wellbeing’s emphasis on learning, we are pleased to share that we were able to play a role in a few larger learning opportunities. These are described below.

Critical Design Ethnography Workshops

Over two full days, November 22nd and 24th, RECOVER hosted a hands-on workshop on Critical Design Ethnography. City staff from various areas participated (from Public Engagement & Research, Community Resources, Safe Mobility, Service Innovation & Performance, and the Transit Safety Initiative), as well as staff from a few external organisations (EndPoverty Edmonton, Edmonton Social Planning Council, Islamic



Family and Social Services Association, and Africa Centre). The workshop explored how critical design ethnography responds to challenges they grapple with. It was an opportunity to reflect on how teams currently work to identify problems and relevant perspectives, what values and principles guide them, how to engage, make sense of data, and respond. The double diamond model of social research and development (R&D) was explained and used throughout the workshop.



We conducted an [evaluation of the workshops](#) - asking participants questions such as:

- If they thought what they learned was relevant to their work
- How it might have shifted their perspective
- What their most valuable learning was
- What they would like to see as a next step to the workshop

The RECOVER team is currently making plans for future learning opportunities.

Ethical Space Making and Space Taking Workshops

RECOVER convened the Catalyst group and held an ethical space making and space taking workshop led by Indigenous consultants, Jacquelyn and Hunter Cardinal from [Naheyawin](#). This gathering was about deep learning; it was an opportunity for us all to grow our abilities to engage with the intention of understanding each other, to travel between different knowledge systems, about interacting in respectful and generative ways. Naheyawin put together some materials ([Nurturing Ethical Spaces one-pager](#) & [video](#)) for us to review beforehand and to further digest afterwards. Over time - and with reflection - the wisdom within them - as shared at the workshop resonated deeply. What we learned together was enlightening and informative for making our work more equitable and inclusive.



Design Sprint Learning

In the summer of 2022, the RECOVER team was invited to shadow the ethnographic research that InWithForward was contracted to do for the City's Affordable Housing Needs Assessment. This was a wonderful learning opportunity to learn about a wide variety of things: how to warm up our curiosity and sense of adventure, how to lay bare our assumptions and biases about housing insecurity, how to explore fresh ways to actualize our values and deepen our approach, and how to create research props, questions, and tools.

The Year Ahead

RECOVER Urban Wellbeing will continue to evolve and adapt to its ever-changing context. We will maintain our focus on wellbeing, while exploring how best to support City priorities. This will include more testing of prototypes that align with the priorities, such as testing Soloss in an encampment setting, and testing Auricle (a prototype that was first tested in 2021 - it tests a way to collect data using a new community role called a Local Listener) in the transit space.

The team also hopes to meaningfully contribute to the City's Community Safety and Wellbeing Strategy. As the RECOVER team has been learning about the conditions in our systems that support and hinder wellbeing work in the community, they are well positioned to share these insights with others within the City system. (Examples of conditions in our City of Edmonton system include: what we are measuring, how information flows, what information is prioritised, how decisions are made, policies and practices, rules and regulations, what roles exist and what they focus on, relationship dynamics, pervasive narratives, beliefs, and logics and so on...) The RECOVER team also hopes to deepen its understanding of Indigenous perspectives on wellbeing, and this might lead to possible adjustments to the Wellbeing Framework. We hope to continue making space for the unknown, for different ways of seeing, thinking and acting in ways that will make space for more wellbeing.



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