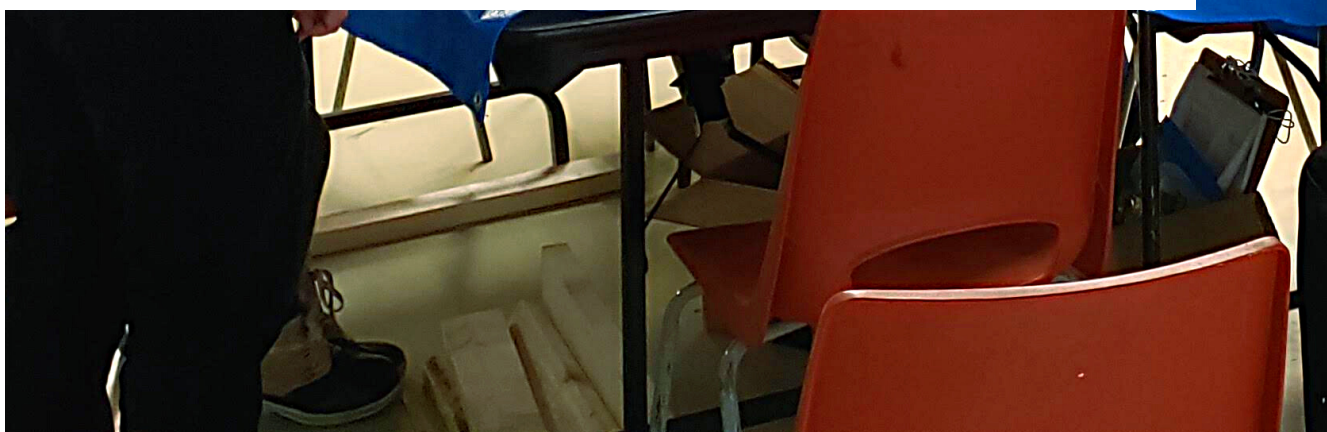
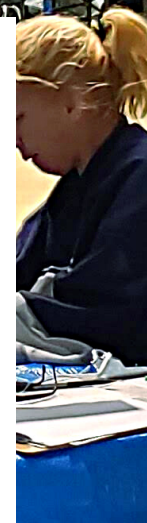


# RECOVER



## 2019 HIGHLIGHTS

DRIVEN BY ON-THE-GROUND RESEARCH AND STRONG EVALUATION





The City of Edmonton and RECOVER acknowledge the traditional land on which we work, is on Treaty 6 Territory. We would like to thank the diverse Indigenous Peoples whose ancestors' footsteps have marked this territory for centuries such as: Cree, Dene, Anishnaabe (Saulteaux), Nakota Sioux and Blackfoot peoples. We also acknowledge this as the Métis' homeland and the home of one of the largest communities of Inuit south of the 60th parallel. Together, we call upon our collective honoured traditions and spirits to work together towards building a city for today and future generations.

## MESSAGE FROM ROB SMYTH DEPUTY CITY MANAGER CITY OF EDMONTON

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The City of Edmonton has a bold goal in its 2019-2028 strategic plan, called CONNECTEDMONTON. This Healthy City Goal - that “Edmonton is a neighbourly city with community and personal wellness that embodies and promotes equity for all Edmontonians” - is advanced through the work of RECOVER.

Over the past two years, RECOVER has convened many people from different sectors including business, community and nonprofits to work on improving individual and community wellness. They have been focused on not just writing a plan or strategy, but on doing things from research, to co-designing prototypes, and to testing prototypes in the community. These small scale actions or prototypes are demonstrating what it looks like to get towards urban wellness.

2019 was a year of growth as a sixth neighbourhood was added to RECOVER's scope. With its partners, RECOVER did more research, designed and tested more prototypes, supported the local social innovation community, tested prototype evaluation tools and took time to evaluate RECOVER's work. Cities across North America are tackling complex urban challenges differently and RECOVER is on a similar journey of learning, trying, measuring and adjusting.

Thank you to everyone who's given their time, expertise, thoughtfulness, and commitment.

**WHAT IF...** shelters had minimum standards for sleep - hours, space between beds, storage for people's belongings, air quality and bedding standards to ensure people have the best chance at a good night?

**WHAT IF...** there were easy-to-access places for people experiencing homelessness to store their stuff for short periods of time, making it easier for them to find work or access services and other opportunities?

**WHAT IF...** community leagues became hubs to foster connections and otherwise unlikely interactions between neighbours, including those who might not be housed?

These are more than just wishful thoughts. These ideas were the starting points for three 'prototypes', Sleep Hygiene, Stow & Go, Neighbour Match, three of 13 different RECOVER solution ideas that were rapidly tested, evaluated, and re-designed for another try, by groups of Edmonton community members, people with lived experience, business owners, social agency workers, and city government representatives.

This is RECOVER - Edmonton's Urban Wellness Plan - in action.

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# WHAT IS RECOVER

**RECOVER** is Edmonton's Urban Wellness Plan that's tackling complex problems in our city's core neighbourhoods.

These communities are home to families, couples, individuals, and many business owners. However, some of these folks are marginalized, living in poverty, and/or experiencing homelessness. They have trouble finding a place they feel safe to sleep each night, much less a job.. As a result, these communities are also home to many supports and services for those who need and want help.

This mix can cause tension between residents and business owners, and people who are vulnerable and the agencies working with them.

## RESEARCHING

RECOVER works with leading researchers and designers to do deep ethnographic research in the target neighbourhoods. We look to discover the stories behind people and places. The insights that are generated allow for promising solutions to surface. (summaries of the 2019 research [here](#)).

## COLLABORATING

RECOVER works with community members - people who live and work in the six neighbourhoods - to understand what wellness means for them, and together come up with ideas to make their community a better place for all.

## EDMONTON'S 6 RECOVER NEIGHBOURHOODS

Boyle Street  
Central McDougall  
Downtown  
McCauley  
Queen Mary Park  
Strathcona

## ETH·NO·GRAPH·IC

adjective

*relating to the scientific description of peoples and cultures with their customs, habits, and mutual differences*

**Ethnographic research** is on-the-ground, qualitative work, in which researchers meet people being studied in their own environments, like their neighbourhoods and the places they hang out.

Ethnographers spend time with them learning their stories, experiences, dreams, challenges, what drives them, and what wellness means for them.

This research helps RECOVER and community members better understand the people living in the neighbourhoods, their histories, issues they deal with, and opportunities their stories present for finding new solutions to community issues.

## DEVELOPING PROTOTYPES

RECOVER uses ethnographic research, lots of public engagement, qualitative data, expert guidance and end-user perspectives to collaborate, and then develop and implement smaller-scale prototypes (see 2018/19 RECOVER prototypes [here](#)). These are solution ideas, meant to be quickly tested, evaluated, discarded if they don't work, re-designed if they're promising, and tried again.

## TESTING, EVALUATING, RETESTING

RECOVER and a group of community members become the prototype team that tries out the idea. They evaluate it, discard some, and re-think and re-test the promising ideas. If the prototype is deemed successful, it requires further investments to become a building block in a larger-scale solution.

# HOW IT ALL STARTED

## THE RECOVER STORY

*RECOVER: Edmonton's Urban Wellness Plan project began in August 2017 after people living in 5 downtown neighbourhoods - Boyle Street, Central McDougall, Downtown, McCauley, and Queen Mary Park - expressed concern about the impacts of existing and planned social service agencies in their community.*

*The RECOVER team used its first year (2017-18) to*

- *build relationships with community leaders and social service providers*
- *understand the unique contexts of each neighbourhood and the social services system*
- *develop a process and tools for co-designing and testing solution ideas*

*The team also used ethnographic research to learn about people - primarily people experiencing homelessness and those who access the social service agencies in these neighbourhoods.*

*Combining this research and the new tools, the RECOVER team and community members rapidly tested 13 prototypes - or solution ideas. Everyone involved learned, and several who were skeptical at first changed their minds and expressed optimism about RECOVER's new approach for fostering urban wellness.*

*Their results were presented to Edmonton City Council in August 2018, and RECOVER now has secure funding through 2022.*

# 2019

## EXPANDING, CAPACITY- BUILDING, AND NEW SOLUTION IDEAS

Building on RECOVER's solid first year of work, the team used 2019 to:

- Welcome a new community into the project and new partners into our work
- Refine the RECOVER approach and tools
- Do more research and rapid testing of prototypes - solution ideas like Alley Arts and Gardens and the Odd Job Squad
- Grow a stronger understanding and practice of ethnographic research
- Engage more community members in leading social change
- Improve our Developmental Evaluation Framework to assess and guide our work





Imagine if we could **rethink a back alley** as a **gathering place** to **foster community healing**.

## MCCAULEY ALLEY ARTS & GARDENS

2019 PROTOTYPE HIGHLIGHT



Some residents in McCauley knew they shared common negative experiences in their back alleys and streets and other community unrest, but many felt they didn't share much else as neighbours. Their solution idea, or prototype, was to rethink back alleys. What if they became gathering places that foster community healing? They organized a pop-up event where people met, shared food, fun and some honest conversations about fears and hopes for their neighbourhood.

It was a great success – people stayed for hours. Since then, other McCauley blocks have asked about hosting their own back-alley gathering. And the original group is planning its second party.

**Interesting Fact:** This prototype also served as a “proof of concept” for handmade lockable garbage can sheds, so City funding has been set aside to build more. There are also now conversations at the City about funding to plant flowers and other plants in back alleys.

# EXPANDING RECOVER'S REACH

## WELCOMING STRATHCONA

The community of Strathcona was added to the RECOVER project in 2019.

Strathcona is a vibrant retail/residential district south of the river from downtown. People living and working there are experiencing many emerging issues similar to the more established issues in the downtown core. The RECOVER goal is to prevent these issues from becoming entrenched.

## STRATHCONA RECOVER INITIATIVES

- Ethnographic research (called a research sprint) which produced a number of [People](#), [Business](#) and [Places](#) Profile Story Cards – brief summaries of interview results.
- Community engagements with residents, neighbourhood businesses and community groups to welcome them into the RECOVER process.
  - The [Starting with Research Workshop Summary](#) from January 2019 provides an overview of the community workshop introducing people to the RECOVER approach to ethnographic research, and exploring early insights from the two week research sprint.
  - The [Sensemaking Community Workshop Summary](#) summarized a March 2019 workshop, where more than 100 people took a deeper look at the research findings and explored opportunities to improve urban wellness.
- Developing and testing prototypes like the Strathcona Odd Job Squad

## WHAT WE LEARNED

Ethnographic research in Strathcona revealed that emerging social issues there may appear similar to those in the downtown core, but there are distinct differences. There's also surprisingly little crossover from Strathcona to downtown by people in need of services, even though most services are located downtown. The [Playback Book](#) combines research from Strathcona with RECOVER's 2018 research in the 5 downtown core neighborhoods.



Imagine if everyone had the **opportunity to contribute to their community, build relationships with their neighbours,** and be **valued for their presence.**

**STRATCHONA ODD JOB SQUAD**  
2019 PROTOTYPE HIGHLIGHT



Our research found that low self esteem and lack of dignity can be an issue for folks who are experiencing homelessness, and those who are housed often have apprehensions about their unhoused neighbours. This creates a divided community. Our Strathcona Odd Jobs prototype bridges this gap by connecting people who are looking for casual work with neighbouring businesses who have odd jobs that need to be done, building relationships and a unified community along the way. This citizen-led team continues to work on their idea by reviewing, refining, and gathering new information, and by building relationships with local organizations, businesses and community leagues.

## CITY CENTRE MALL

RECOVER's first opportunity to work with a large private business on pseudo-public spaces came with City Centre Mall. The collaboration explored how private/public spaces could better support people experiencing vulnerability, and what supports private business needs to do this.

### CITY CENTRE MALL RECOVER INITIATIVES

- Ethnographic research in and around the mall to understand the mall's role in the lives of people who gather there. Results are summarized in [City Centre Mall People](#) and [City Centre Mall Places Profile Cards](#). The research and opportunities are also summarized in the [City Centre Playback Book](#). This information was shared in a workshop with mall managers and business owners.
- A week-long design sprint to test several of the ideas for improving wellness in the mall.
- Design and testing of a City Centre Mall prototype on the sidewalk on 101 Street.

### WHAT WE LEARNED

People working and living downtown are keenly interested in improving public spaces and relationships there, and there's desire for more rapid testing of different prototypes. Plans are underway to continue partnering with City Centre Mall and Downtown Business Association for more downtown sidewalk prototypes.



Imagine if Edmonton's downtown was a **safe and vibrant place**, where different people could **all feel like they belong** and **interact without fear of the other**.

#### CITY CENTRE SIDEWALK

2019 PROTOTYPE HIGHLIGHT



Photo Credit: [Edmonton Journal](#)

How can public spaces be redesigned to foster these interactions? The City Centre prototype involved setting up benches, solar lighting, ashtrays, planters and art on a public sidewalk to create an inviting, comfortable, safe space for people to enjoy. For seven days, three MacEwan University students observed and talked to people who used this new space, to evaluate what worked, and what could be improved.

# CAPACITY BUILDING

## SUPPORTING LOCAL CAPACITY

RECOVER's collaborative approach to urban wellness, using ethnographic research, human-centred design, rapid-testing and re-testing of solution ideas is being used by more and more cities and requires skill sets that are new to the public sector and the way cities do their work.

In 2019, RECOVER worked with local and national partners to train Edmonton-based ethnographers and prototype team coaches. Community members learned how to do the research, generate ideas based on the research, and learned to do rapid testing using RECOVER's framework and tools, evaluation, and re-testing of prototypes.

RECOVER also co-sponsored several events in 2019, including an SDX workshop titled Living with Tension where participants learned about ways to channel tension in our systems towards transformation.

## THE CATALYST TEAM

Collaboration and partnership are the foundations of RECOVER's work, and so from its start RECOVER was guided by three advisory committees: a community committee, an external partner committee and an integrated corporate committee. Together, members represented city departments, community members and leagues, organizations, social agencies, business owners and business improvement areas, and the provincial government. The committees welcomed anyone who wanted to join.

In 2019, a collective decision was made to try a new approach, which they called Catalyst Group. This shared-leadership group's members (some who were on the previous advisory committees) come from various community, business, and government sectors. They will use their skills, networks, and rich experiences to improve and amplify RECOVER's work. The Catalyst Group was envisioned to mobilize and launch successful RECOVER prototypes into long-term, sustainable programs.

Imagine knowing that your **stuff is safe**, so you can **get a good sleep** or **access the services you need**.

## STOW & GO

2019 PROTOTYPE HIGHLIGHT



Safe, secure, weather-proof, big enough for... If storage units were set-up for people who carry their life belongings with them every day, everywhere they go, what features would be needed for people to feel comfortable leaving their stuff there? That's what the RECOVER prototype team set out to learn from the people at Jasper Place Wellness Centre and Boyle Street Community Services. They learned that there's need for two storage models: a smaller one people can use during the day, that would allow them to store their things while they access services, look for work, and carry out the tasks of daily life; and a longer-term one for larger belongings (e.g. bicycle, shopping cart, household goods), that can be used until the person finds a permanent home. The next step is revising the prototype to focus on the smaller, short-term model, which will help people in need access services more easily.

## **PUBLIC REALM RESEARCH**

Two workshops were held in 2019 to explore how to improve publicly accessible outdoor space (parks, vacant lots, streets and sidewalks, parking lots, storefronts, etc.) in RECOVER's six neighbourhoods. Community members, business owners, artists, representatives from the development industry and the City, architects and others created an inventory of existing tools for improving the public realm in Edmonton, and developed ideas for potential tools that might spur public and private investment into these areas. The knowledge gained and inventories developed in this project will be used in future RECOVER prototypes relating to the public realm.

### **WHAT WE LEARNED**

Shifting the public realm in the RECOVER neighbourhoods will require a dedicated and multi-faceted approach. The array of existing tools aimed at improving wellness in the public realm may meet program objectives, but deeper evaluation is required to understand if they're achieving optimal wellness outcomes for people and communities.

## **JOINING THE GLOBAL INNOVATION COMMUNITIES**

In 2019, RECOVER was invited by Bloomberg Philanthropies to join a gathering in Washington D.C. of 100 Chief Innovators from cities around the world. They shared and learned from each other, and then joined international mayors, policymakers and business leaders, artists and activists at the annual international [CityLab](#) conference focused on urban innovation. RECOVER has now been invited to join the Chief Innovator Network which is convened by [Bloomberg Philanthropies](#) to participate in ongoing discussions and shared learning.



Imagine if folks with lived experience could provide **doula-like support** to newly housed folks, helping them to **navigate hurdles** and **form healthy relationships** in their new community.

## HOUSING DOULA

2019 PROTOTYPE HIGHLIGHT



Some of the biggest challenges faced by people who are newly housed (who have previously been living on the streets) is loneliness, feeling isolated, and learning how to navigate new relationships with landlords and housing first workers. The RECOVER prototype team worked with people experiencing homelessness to develop a doula profile. They landed on someone who has experienced homelessness in the past, speaks the same language, comes from the same background and culture. The next step is to pilot the prototype, in partnership with a social serving agency(s).

# (MORE) 2019 PROTOTYPE SOLUTION IDEAS

Five RECOVER prototype workshops were held in 2019 to co-design new solution ideas and recruit prototype teams who would start the implementation process. The teams tested 12 ideas, each based on the in-depth ethnographic research that's been undertaken in the 6 RECOVER communities. Each is being evaluated, and next steps determined.

## RECOVER 2019 PROTOTYPES – A FEW MORE EXAMPLES

**Good Sleep Kits:** providing people experiencing homelessness with sleep aids that help them learn and practice good sleep hygiene – and hopefully get a good night's sleep. Things like masks, herbal tea, and for those staying in shelters a safe place to wind-down and relax and guided grounding exercises to ease anxiety and insomnia.

**Expectant:** helping new parents-to-be, who are isolated and feel alone, to find the support networks they need to help them transition successfully into parenthood.

**Neighbour Connect:** bringing marginalized and non-marginalized community members together (some have homes, some are experiencing homelessness, some are new to the neighbourhood, some have lived there for years) to share food, put names to faces, connect over music and importantly just get to know one another.

**Community Business Exchange:** letting community members know about local business that are doing good and giving back to the neighbourhood, and helping businesses learn things they could do to benefit their neighbours.

Each prototype is founded in solid understanding of our research, businesses and places in the community, making sense of the insights gained through these learnings, and exploring features of the challenges AND opportunities involved. Click [here](#) for a complete list of RECOVER's 2018 and 2019 prototypes.



# EVALUATION

Recover's work has been data driven and supported, from the beginning. In 2019, we increased our capacity in using a developmental approach to evaluation, in which “real time” data is collected and analyzed to inform on-going decision making. This evaluation informs the full process, from when prototype solution ideas are generated and selected, during their design and testing, and then to consider their future. Should the prototypes be modified? Which are worth moving to a pilot project? Which should be set aside?

In the first year, RECOVER identified five indicators to use in evaluating whether a prototype was positively impacting a community:

- Social Capacity
- Economic Vitality
- Physical and Mental Health
- Safety and Security
- Built and Natural Environments

Each contributes to urban wellness and is a good tool for comparing a neighbourhood’s wellbeing to that in another community.

In 2019 the RECOVER team determined that in addition to these five indicators, a more robust, developmental evaluation approach was needed. Working with external experts, new evaluation rubrics were developed.

The rubrics outline detailed, meaningful questions that elicit a better understanding of how the prototypes will impact one or more of the five indicator categories. The new rubrics were then used to do a comprehensive analysis of all 24 RECOVER prototypes from our first two years.

RECOVER will continue, in 2020, by grounding ourselves and our work in the City of Edmonton's Indigenous framework. We will further strengthen our evaluation framework and share our learnings. We'll also pursue a deeper investigation into what wellness and wellbeing mean, particularly from the perspective of people living on the margins. The five indicators (and their sources such as the Social Determinants of Health), don't create a complete picture of wellness/wellbeing. They leave out non-material elements that contribute to a good life, such as connection, spirituality, purpose, and respect. Developing a more well-rounded understanding and approach to fostering and evaluating urban wellness will help ensure that new programs and services incorporate the range of conditions needed for people and communities to flourish.

# BRUNO, GIL AND THE MOBILE WORKSHOP STORY

In 2019, RECOVER ethnographers met people like Bruno and Gil.

Bruno had spent time homeless in more than eighteen cities since he left home at age 17 in search of work and adventure, a small-town Saskatchewan boy who's been from BC to Mexico, following jobs. Living in Strathcona, he was getting by bottle picking, binning, and doing cash work here and there through Kijiji, FaceBook or word of mouth. Bruno has a lot of energy and ideas for how to improve the system, and he wanted to channel the energy he was spending on surviving, into developing a business. He was excited about innovative shelving ideas and resin tables, or making a space where kids can learn to fix their bikes.

Gil's a mechanic who had been sleeping rough for about three months. He got a bit of support from AISH but also used his skills to fixing cars and bikes to make some extra money. He strived to be independent and earn people's respect. He had many informal supports and was planning to make changes.

In getting to know people like Bruno and Gil, certain gaps in their lives and opportunities for improvement surfaced. They both could use a space with tools they could access to help them earn an income. Researchers wondered "What if

*people could join a collective that gives them access to materials, tools, and space, to make and sell their work and mentor others while they get on their feet?"* We know, from the overall research, that there's real desire for spaces that bring people together based on shared passions, not troubles.

These sorts of insights and questions led us to identify an opportunity area called: New Pathways for Learning and Contributing in Community. Could there be "*thematic fellowships*" for people like Bruno and Gil that enable them to have structure and to build a network around something other than their struggles, instead focusing on their interests, skills, and next career moves? At RECOVER's May 2019 [Co-Design Community Workshops](#), teams discussed ways to help people like Gil and Bruno to build an identity around their skills and give them an opportunity to contribute to their community in a meaningful way.

A prototype team was formed and they decided to test out a workshop space with various tools and hobby supplies that also offered a place to develop relationships and share skills. This was how the Mobile Workshop prototype emerged from the research.

# LOOKING FORWARD

Two years of RECOVER's generative process has produced many ideas, from many different Edmontonians. Together we've co-created new solution ideas for pressing issues in our inner-city; new solution ideas informed by the "thick" data gathered through ethnography and tested using a prototyping process that allows less promising prototypes fall to the side and more promising ideas shine. It's time now to focus on these most promising ideas.

The next step is to move these promising ideas beyond the testing phase, to a pilot or program. The RECOVER prototype teams have learned this process will take time and will require even more connection and collaboration among individuals and organizations as they work together to embed new ways of approaching complex urban challenges.

In our first two years RECOVER has amassed a fair amount of data from its research, including the 59 stories of street-involved Edmontonians. In the coming year, this data will be aggregated, to give us a better understanding of what it says about the RECOVER approach to urban wellness.

We'll also take time to pursue deeper understanding of what wellness and wellbeing mean for our city, and for Edmontonians.

**What if...** is driving question behind RECOVER.

What if we could move every promising idea forward with input and support from a wide range of people and organizations?

What if we clearly understood the many different ways people experience wellbeing and embedded elements of these ways into every new urban project?

What if we could create a city where every person feels safe, can be healthy and can flourish?

**This is RECOVER.**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## **Nahewayin**

Jacquelyn Cardinal and Hunter Cardinal

It has been a pleasure to be on this learning journey with all of you.

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