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Harm Reduction & Addressing Stigma

Housing and social services are usually outside of the realm of the work that the NeighbourPLAN program engages in. However, we learned early in our engagement that these concerns are critical to the people living in the neighbourhood, and are tied to the use of public space.

The NeighbourPLAN program wants to create public spaces and services that support all people, including individuals experiencing addictions, poverty, and homelessness, or who are sex workers. People in these communities have a right to safe spaces and **harm reduction** services. There is also a need to build understanding and empathy between different communities, and to help people co-exist happily and safely in public spaces.

Some of the conversations we had in the neighbourhood suggested that **stigma** may play a role in how the neighbourhood is viewed and used. We heard residents make negative comments about people living in poverty or experiencing homelessness in the neighbourhood, people experiencing alcohol and drug addictions, and people engaged in sex work. Sometimes, people making these comments said sharing public space with people from these communities makes them fear for their own personal safety, though the majority of residents hadn't actually experienced an unsafe encounter. This sense of fear can be addressed both through changes to the built environment (e.g., adding lighting in key areas), and through building empathy and understanding between different communities and users of space.

To better understand and address these concerns, we worked with partners like PARN: Your Community AIDS Resource Network to hear from people with lived experience of engaging in sex work, illicit drug use, and/or the trafficking of drugs. Partners from Peterborough Public Health and Community Mediation Peterborough also facilitated a table about these subjects at the design workshop. Collaboratively, workshop participants came up with some ideas to address social concerns in the neighbourhood. We also worked with PARN to discuss and validate these ideas with individuals with lived experience, who may have faced barriers to attending the design workshop.





What is Harm Reduction?

Harm reduction is an approach to reducing the health and safety risks associated with activities including drug use and sex work. It is a movement that is based in respecting the dignity and autonomy of individuals who use drugs or are employed as sex workers, while also working to “meet people where they are at” and provide non-judgemental services and supports to keep people safer. A harm reduction framework gives individuals the materials they need to minimize the risks associated with activities that are inherently risky. These activities are risky for a range of reasons, including the potential of exposure to blood borne infections, overdose risk, and criminalization.

For people engaged in substance use, harm reduction strategies could include things like needle and equipment exchanges, safer injection sites, training for overdose prevention, publicly accessible sharps disposal bins, and more. For sex workers, harm reduction approaches could include providing condoms, lube, and other safer sex supplies, regular STI screening and treatment, and drop-in safe spaces.

What is Stigma?

Stigma is a negative stereotype that people hold against certain communities or individuals, based on factors like their social or economic status, mental health, addictions, or more. These stereotypes are based on assumptions or misconceptions, and are a form of discrimination and prejudice. Stigma is harmful to the people who are on the receiving end of these judgments.

RESIDENT QUOTES

“The bridge [in Rubidge Park] is peaceful. People might look “sketchy”, but if you say hi they are nice!”

What does the Harm Reduction landscape look like in Peterborough?

Many organizations in Peterborough are working together to support harm reduction. Some of the ideas that residents put forward to address harm reduction are already underway or in the works for the Downtown Jackson Creek neighbourhood. Some of these organizations and services are highlighted below:

PARN - Your Community AIDS Resource Network has a Harm Reduction Works program, which provides people with free access to harm reduction supplies, including safer injection equipment and safer inhalation equipment. These resources can be found at locations throughout the city. **Learn more at www.parn.ca.**

The Nogojiwanong Friendship Centre has a program called the All Our Relations Outreach Program, which works in partnership with other agencies, including PARN, Salvation Army, and the City of Peterborough to provide outreach and harm reduction supplies to Indigenous women and girls involved in sex work, and Indigenous people experiencing homelessness. This program has outreach vans and they offer well-being and life-skills workshops. **Learn more at www.nogofc.ca.**

Peterborough Public Health supports harm reduction through initiatives such as the installation of public sharps disposal bins, and has made public statements in support of a safe injection/consumption site. They also manage and facilitate the distribution of Naloxone (an overdose reversal medication) via service providers at multiple points of contact throughout the city.

Learn more at www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca

The Peterborough Drug Strategy is a “locally-based approach that involves stakeholders from various sectors to identify and address gaps in the local system, with the goal of reducing the negative impacts of substance use for individuals, families and the community as a whole.” The Drug Strategy brings together key players like Peterborough Public Health, PARN, FourCAST (Four Counties Addictions Services Team), Peterborough Police Services, the Ontario Provincial Police, Peterborough Social Services, the Peterborough Family Health Team, and more to work together towards four pillars: prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and enforcement. **Learn more at www.peterboroughdrugstrategy.com**



DESIGN CONCEPTS

"Good idea if the gardens are kept up by Anishinaabe Kwe"

Sites to re-develop for housing or community services

Encourage the future development of mixed-income housing in open or underused lots. Develop a by-law to ensure that a portion of units in all housing developed is affordable. As church congregations decline, consider re-purposing the church buildings for housing or community uses, but maintain the heritage buildings.



Community-Oriented

Outreach trucks

Mobile trucks to provide food, safer sex supplies, clean needles, naloxone, and other harm reduction supplies.



Accessible



Safe



Community-Oriented

Sharps (needle) disposal bins

Support the proper and safe disposal of needles. Helps keep public spaces cleaner



Vibrant & Clean



Safe Neighbourhood

Flower and garden plantings

Plant native flower and plant species. In partnership with Indigenous communities and organizations, create a Indigenous-led native plant garden or raised garden



Natural & Green



Community-Oriented



Hub for social services

The abandoned school building on Hunter St. and Rubidge St. could become a site for a new social services hub.



Community-Oriented

Water stations/water refill stations

Provide clean drinking water to anyone that needs it.



Community-Oriented

"Awesome idea for water! Also have some lower for animals, like dogs!"