

From: **"Singh, Sandra"**

To: **"Direct to Mayor and Council - DL"**

Date: 2024-07-30 12:58:30 PM

Subject: Memo (Council) - Better Together: Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot - Final Update (RTS 14811)

Attachments: **ACCS - GM - Memo (Council) - Better Together_Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot - RTS 14811 (2024-07-30).pdf**

Good afternoon Mayor and Council,

Please find attached a memo from Branislav Henselmann, Acting GM, Arts Culture and Community Services regarding a summary of the implementation of Better Together: Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot taking place in Mount Pleasant, the Downtown South and Olympic Village. Of note:

- The Pilot consisted of five components that together looked to address the impacts of poverty, unsheltered homelessness, mental health and addictions.
- The Pilot was based on a collective impact approach that builds up and supports neighbours, community agencies and business to advance common goals and create positive change in their neighbourhood.

Should Council have any further questions please contact Branislav directly at branislav.henselmann@vancouver.ca and he will ensure questions are addressed through the weekly Q&A.

Thank you,
Sandra

Sandra Singh | Deputy City Manager

Pronouns: she/her

Assistant: Alix Kivlin

Phone: 604-873-7774

E-mail: alix.kivlin@vancouver.ca

Pronouns: she/her

The City of Vancouver acknowledges the unceded homelands of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sk̓wx̓wú7mesh (Squamish), and Seɫ̓l̓wítulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations.

MEMORANDUM

July 30, 2024

TO: Mayor & Council

CC: Paul Mochrie, City Manager
Armin Amrolia, Deputy City Manager
Karen Levitt, Deputy City Manager
Sandra Singh, Deputy City Manager
Katrina Leckovic, City Clerk
Maria Pontikis, Chief Communications Officer, CEC
Teresa Jong, Administration Services Manager, City Manager's Office
Trevor Ford, Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Mellisa Morphy, Director of Policy & Deputy Chief of Staff, Mayor's Office
Lon LaClaire, General Manager, Engineering Services

FROM: Branislav Henselmann, Acting General Manager, Arts, Culture and Community Services

SUBJECT: Better Together: Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot – Final Update

RTS #: 14811

PURPOSE

This memo provides a final update on the implementation and outcomes of the [Better Together: Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot](#) (RTS 14811) approved by Council on March 2, 2022. Please refer [here](#) for the first update.

BACKGROUND

On March 2, 2022 City Council approved the *Better Together: Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot* in the neighbourhoods of Mount Pleasant, Downtown South and Olympic Village. The approximately two-year pilot built on existing partnerships to collectively address specific neighbourhood concerns/issues, increase community engagement and awareness, and problem solve issues related to the impacts of poverty, unsheltered homelessness, mental health and addiction.

DISCUSSION

Overview

After the Pilot was approved at Council, further developmental work occurred as well as the hiring of a temporary full-time staff resource to lead the coordination of this multi-tiered pilot. The pilot was operational in September 2022 and concluded at the end of June 2024.

The Pilot was based on a collective impact approach that builds up and supports neighbours, community agencies and business to advance common goals and create positive change in their neighbourhood. A fact-sheet about the pilot is in [Appendix A](#).

There were five core components to the Pilot:

1. Neighbourhood Collective Action Tables ('Tables'), Agency-Led and Resident-Led
2. Peer Stewardship Program
3. Education and Training
4. Outreach and Coordination
5. Neighbourhood Cleanliness

The Pilot also included an evaluation through an external consultant, an internal advisory committee, and a communications strategy.

The Neighbourhoods

The Pilot was implemented in three Vancouver neighbourhoods: Olympic Village, Downtown South, and Mount Pleasant. These neighbourhoods were chosen to build on existing efforts and identified need in three different areas: a recently re-developed light industrial area, a busy downtown city centre, and a primarily residential neighbourhood outside of the downtown core.

Overall Pilot Summary:

Table 1 provides a summary of highlights for each of the core components. More detailed, neighbourhood specific outcomes are included in [Appendix B](#).

Table 1: Review of Core Components¹

Core Components	Pilot Neighbourhoods		
	Mount Pleasant	Downtown South	Olympic Village
Agency-Led Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11 meetings • 12-14 attendees per meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 9 meetings • 11-13 attendees per meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 meetings • 7-9 attendees per meeting
Resident-Led Tables	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 12 meetings • 6-8 members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 meetings² • 4-6 members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 15 meetings • 7-9 members

¹ Status through September 2022-March 2024.

² Significant additional efforts were required to recruit members to attend.

Core Components	Pilot Neighbourhoods		
	Mount Pleasant	Downtown South	Olympic Village
Peer Stewardship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started May 2023 7 Peer Stewards 192 3-hr shifts 14,036 contacts with people experiencing homelessness 1,216 referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started March 2023 12 Peer Stewards 215 4-hr shifts 7,013 contacts with people experiencing homelessness 1,979 referrals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Started December 2022 6 Peer Stewards 453 3-hr shifts 2,078 contacts with people experiencing homelessness 1,586 referrals
Education & Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 trainings 154 participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 trainings 96 participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 14 trainings 99 participants
Outreach & Coordination	Limited activity due to competing priorities for Outreach staff.	In progress	Limited activity due to competing priorities for Outreach staff.
Neighbourhood Cleanliness	Sanitation branch of Engineering Services Operations		

Highlights of Core Components

Neighbourhood Collective Action Tables ('Tables')

In each neighbourhood, an Agency Tables was established to develop relationships between service providers, businesses, and residents, to support effective communication at the neighbourhood level, and to improve neighbourhood systems for identifying and proactively solving issues of local concern. Separate Resident Tables met monthly and included a diverse mix of neighbourhood residents, including People with Lived Experience (PWLE).

Outcomes

There was strong attendance and commitment to action by all stakeholders at the Agency Tables. The Tables increased communication and solution sharing between service providers and business about current trends in their neighbourhoods. As a result of collaborations between Agencies, resources and supports available for people experiencing homelessness increased. Members valued the time to meet, sharing of information about their programs, and collaboration on solutions to concerns and issues they faced. Table members reported that the neighbourhood focus made the discussions more manageable and helped with defining realistic outcomes.

The Resident Tables have an advisory role to the Agency Tables, sharing on the ground experiences of issues of concern, challenges, and opportunities they experienced first-hand.

Despite limited resident interest initially, staff were successful in hosting a three-workshop series with the Downtown South Resident Table. The Downtown South Residents took an active role in shaping the workshops and requested information about the City's response to

homelessness and development of affordable housing. Residents of the Table reported an increased understanding of these issues and learning more about how they can better support people experiencing homelessness in their community.

Peer Stewardship Program

The Peer Stewardship Program was operated by non-profit agencies in the three respective pilot neighbourhoods. Peers (who were People with Lived Experience) were out in community 4-5 days per week; they connected with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness to provide support and served as a touch point for other neighbours as well as promoting Better Together Pilot Activities. The Peer Stewards used their lived expertise as a tool to support people experiencing homelessness in navigating the continuum of low-income resources. The Peer Stewards also assisted businesses by tending to community issues as they arose. The Peer Steward program will continue until remaining funds are utilized, likely at the end of August.

Outcomes

The program had strong support from BIAs and businesses in all three neighbourhoods. There was a positive impact on people experiencing homelessness, demonstrated by the number of connections and referrals to services (e.g., Warming Centre and EWR activations, distribution of harm reduction supplies, free and low-cost food programs). The Peer Steward program created a gateway for peer training to further employment opportunities. Peers reported feeling pride in their work and enjoyed the opportunities to learn from one another's experiences during collective debrief sessions and team building events.

Education and Training

This free public education and training series was delivered through the Homelessness Services Association of BC (HSABC) and facilitated by subject matter experts on the following five topics: Poverty, Trauma, Mental Health and Addictions, Indigenous Cultural Safety, Gender-Based Violence, and De-escalation and Introductory Helping Skills. The objective was to increase knowledge and understanding of the causes and solutions to homelessness, building skills to improve communication and understanding, and increase confidence in the ability to de-escalate situations locally without further stigmatizing unsheltered neighbours.

Forty-three (43) Education and Training sessions were held from October 2022-February 2024. Participants who completed the trainings reported feeling better equipped to discuss issues related to homelessness, poverty, mental health and addictions.

Outreach and Coordination

The City's Homelessness Services Outreach Team ('Outreach Team') aimed to conduct targeted early morning outreach to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness in each Pilot neighbourhood. The Outreach Team provided a variety of supports, including accessing income and health supports, obtaining ID, and exploring shelter and housing options. This component did not occur consistently during the pilot project due to other priorities for the Homelessness Services Outreach Team.

Neighbourhood Cleanliness

This component of the Better Together Pilot was delivered through existing City Sanitation street cleaning services, and supplemented through existing annual Street Cleaning Grants to non-profit agencies for ongoing micro-cleaning.

Additional neighbourhood specific highlights are in [Appendix B](#), and external feedback about the pilot is included in [Appendix C](#).

The Better Together Pilot Project implemented a community-based approach, informed by understanding and de-escalation that promoted public safety and prioritized community-led harm reduction and safety initiatives as a response to mental health, homelessness, and substance use.

The Better Together Pilot actively engaged and facilitated collaboration amongst a range of community members in each neighbourhood, along with agencies, and the broader residential and business community. Throughout the Pilot Project other neighbourhoods in the city and other communities in the province have expressed interest in the Better Together concept.

NEXT STEPS

While the pilot has come to an end, the goal is to sustain the relationships built in each of the neighbourhoods and incorporate learnings into ongoing work as is possible:

- Homelessness Services staff will continue to convene Agency Tables in each neighbourhood every two months given the overwhelmingly positive feedback and requests from Table members.
- Staff will also integrate the positive learnings from the pilot to support the development of interdepartmental and inter-agency tactical teams to respond to neighbourhood specific challenges in the Downtown South related to public realm and outdoor management. The current Downtown South Agency Table will be included in the tactical team.
- The Peer Stewardship component will continue until all previously allocated funds are utilized, likely by the end of November 2024. Staff will also explore some targeted continuation of the peer program through existing grant programs.
- Staff will also continue working with partner agencies and the senior governments to explore ongoing funding for learning opportunities for residents and business.

FINAL REMARKS

If Council requires further information, please feel free to contact me directly at branslav.henselmann@vancouver.ca and we will provide response through the weekly Council Q&A.



Branslav Henselmann, Acting General Manager
Arts, Culture, and Community Services

branslav.henselmann@vancouver.ca

APPENDIX A: Better Together Fact Sheet

Better Together

Neighbourhood Collective Action Pilot

Better Together is a neighbourhood based pilot that will work to collectively problem-solve issues related to poverty, unsheltered homelessness, and mental health. Better Together will increase awareness, collaborate on solutions, improve the sense of belonging and develop positive relationships.

Pilot Neighbourhoods

Better Together is a two-year pilot that will take place in three neighbourhoods.



There are five key parts to the pilot:



Neighbourhood Collective Action Tables
Increase communication and information sharing



Peer Stewardship Program
Extra support for businesses and people in the neighbourhood



Education and Training
Build skills and confidence to improve communication and understanding



Outreach and Coordination
Additional support for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness



Neighbourhood Cleanliness
Enhance sanitation through existing micro-cleaning grants to non-profits

For more information:

better.together@vancouver.ca
vancouver.ca/bettertogether



12/18

APPENDIX B: Additional Outcomes by Neighbourhood

Mount Pleasant

Agency-led Tables

- Canadian Mental Health Association peer navigators visited the Mount Pleasant VPL branch to connect with potential clients.
- Income Assistance workers (via Collingwood Community Policing Centre) and Vancouver Recovery Club Homeless Outreach staff actively attended the Mount Pleasant Community Centre free lunch program to connect with those needing their support.
- Two Community Resource Fairs were held at Kingsgate Mall with 21 organizations sharing information about their support and low-income services.
- Agency members reported that the Table helped them to reconnect with organizations post COVID-19 by finding out what services still exist, where to refer people based on the organization's mandates (not available online), and to assure them they are not alone in providing supports for vulnerable populations.

“The Roundtable has been beneficial for networking; I can do my job better because of the connections I have now. I know the Neighbourhood House, folks at the Community Centre, the BIA. Knowing the organizations can offer some solutions to the issues we face.”

Mount Pleasant Business

Resident-led Tables

- PWLE members supported the development and distribution of a comprehensive low-income resource list to outdoor locations frequented by people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
- Participants created a visual art project focused on destigmatizing homelessness, displayed at Kingsgate Mall.
- Mount Pleasant Agency Table members were engaged by providing space and printed resources to the Resident Table.

Peer Stewardship Program (ongoing)

- The program was implemented by Connective Support Society in Mount Pleasant and started in April 2023.
- Stewards connected with people experiencing homelessness in key hot spots (e.g. Robson Park, Dude Chilling/Guelph Park, Jonathan Rogers Park).
- Stewards regularly checked in with many organizations/businesses to offer support including: Tenth Church (location of Temporary Winter Shelter), Mount Pleasant Community Centre, Kingsgate Mall, Broadway Youth Resource Centre (BYRC), Yummy Slice Pizza, and Dollarama, among others.

Peer Steward data through March 2024:

- 1,405 contacts with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
- 452 contacts with business
- 576 contacts with residents who are housed and tourists
- 1,216 referrals to shelters and services
- 3,004 harm reduction supplies distributed

Education and Training

Fifteen (15) education and training sessions were held in Mount Pleasant from October 2022 – February 2024. Of the 134 participants that responded to the HSABC survey:

- 84% (112) of participants reported an increased understanding of issues related to homelessness;
- 89% (119) of participants agreed they increased their understanding of the workshop topic;
- 74% (99) of participants agreed they built connections with others in their community;
- 82% (110) agreed they learned ways to make their neighbourhood better.

"[From the trainings I realized] how easy it is to forget the impact or effect of poverty on individuals less fortunate. I recognized my childhood traumas and my struggles as a single parent as I related to the five ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences). I have since been using what I learned from the De-escalation and Helping Skills course by checking on homeless individuals to make sure they are OK if they need anything such as an ambulance. I even brought one young man some food the other day and his face lit up he was so happy. It made me realize at the very moment how many people take what they have for granted."

Post Training Online Survey Response

Olympic Village

Agency-led Tables

- Lookout Housing and Health Society shared valuable information with Creekside Community Centre with regard to warming centre logistics and challenges, as Creekside was a first-time warming centre provider.
- The Table continues to enable local supportive housing providers to connect their tenants with Parks Board Leisure Access Program.

"It is good for business to show up at the table – it is our community, the problems here are our problems not just the city's problems."

Olympic Village Business

"We run a business in the area, we're always donating, and we are conscious of waste and we're looking for opportunities to give back. We have seen change in the neighborhood - early on right after the Olympics there was increased theft in the area. We had to change our washrooms. We have had to balance being supportive and protecting our facility. We have increased our awareness overtime and become more involved. It's personal you have to educate yourself. Better Together is a good opportunity to hear other's updates and information. Homelessness and addiction can be overwhelming. The neighborhood focus of Better Together makes the issues not quite so overwhelming."

Olympic Village Business

Resident-led Tables

- Resident Table members wrote welcome letters for the tenants of the recently opened modular temporary transitional housing: Dovetail Annex building and 1525 & 1535 Modular buildings - 89 letters in total.
- Participants created DIY plant kits in the works to distribute to new supportive housing in the neighbourhood.

- The Table was viewed as an “organized” voice in the community. City of Vancouver Park Planners approached the Resident Roundtable as part of their engagement strategy for East Park, a new park in the neighbourhood.

“I have learned more about the community [at the Resident Roundtable] than anywhere else.”

Olympic Village Resident Table Member

Peer Stewardship Program (ongoing)

- This program was implemented by Lookout Housing and Health Society and began in December 2022.
- Stewards referred directly to Lookout shelters nearby.
- Peer Steward Data through March 2024:
 - 2,078 contacts with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
 - 577 contacts with business
 - 207 contacts with residents who are housed and tourists
 - 1,586 referrals to shelters and services
 - 1,300 harm reduction supplies distributed

Education and Training

Fourteen (14) education and training sessions were held in Olympic Village from October 2022 – February 2024. Of the 90 participants that responded to the HSABC survey:

- 82% (74) of participants reported an increased understanding of issues related to homelessness;
- 90% (81) of participants agreed they increased their understanding of the workshop topic;
- 69% (62) of participants agreed they built connections with others in their community;
- 76% (68) agreed they learned ways to make their neighbourhood better.

“For example, a friend of mine went to the training. She used to cross the street to avoid homeless people. After the training she felt empowered. When she came across a person screaming and yelling, she said “it looks like you have lost something, and you are upset – can I help you?” The person responded “no” and walked away. – this was a complete shift since she took the de-escalation training. She learned how to use language in a non aggravating way. You can empower people to change their ways.”

Post Training Online Survey Response

Downtown South

Agency-led Tables

- Several Agencies highlighted a critical emergent issue related to an increase demand on services from newcomers and refugee claimants. Agencies shared how they were coping internally with the challenge and identified a potential advocacy approach with senior levels of government.
- Agencies members reported working in siloes and that this Table was a great opportunity to work together and break down barriers to share valuable information

“Attending this table helps us learn what is happening in real time (websites don’t always get updated). Just learned about the shower program at the Community Centre. The updates are great, and the resources are great. It helps to put a name and a face to an organization. I am more likely to reach out afterwards.”

Agency Table Member

“There is so much value in bringing people together to talk at the roundtable. For people not in a homeless situation it can be tough to understand and empathize. The roundtable helps to break down stigma.”

Agency Table Member

Resident-led Tables

- Recruitment efforts to initiate the Downtown South Table included: targeted social media (Threads, Facebook, COV website), posters with pull-tabs put up around Downtown South with information and a link to Downtown South Resident Roundtable application, in person and online invitations extended to SRO & Supportive housing tenants through management and support staff for six Downtown South buildings, invitations extended to residents involved with DVBI & Granville Community Policing Centre, recruitment stand at the Roundhouse Community Centre.
- Initial Resident Table members decided to take on recruitment in their community to bring more market housing residents to the Table.
- Residents requested information about the City’s response to homelessness and affordable housing including a discussion on the 2023 Homeless Count in order to understand these issues better. Staff responded by presenting on these topics and facilitating a post-presentation discussion.
- A three-workshop series facilitated by staff allowed for Residents to gain knowledge, pose questions, and provide feedback on the issues and share their learning with others.

“Being able to attend the Downtown South Residence Table was informative in many ways. It was a great way to meet and learn from neighbours, peers and community leaders. Many had similar views: especially concerning the urgent need for more affordable housing. Topics discussed ranged from how the Homelessness Count is conducted, to how to search for subsidized housing, to learning where to find essential services. The opportunity to gather with community members and leaders to share knowledge and perspectives on these vital matters, was invaluable...I hope there will be more in the future.”

Downtown South Resident Table Member

Peer Stewardship Program (ongoing)

- This program was implemented by Coast Mental Health in Downtown South and started in March 2023.
- Stewards referred people to the Coast Resources which includes a continuum of services including meals, homeless outreach and recreational programming.
- Through the pilot, several Peer Stewards now have other paid employment.
- Peer Steward Data through March 2024:
 - 7,013 contacts with people experiencing unsheltered homelessness
 - 292 contacts with business
 - 33 contacts with residents who are housed and tourists
 - 1,979 referrals to shelters and services
 - 11,182 harm reduction supplies distributed

The following are quotes from a focus group conducted with the Downtown South Peer Stewards:

“I have been there. I have hit rock bottom myself and I know what it’s like. I know when to ask them difficult questions. It’s important to time it properly so that you catch them when they are open to change like moving into a shelter.”

“The 7/11 Store experiences a lot of theft, so I went in there and told them about the resource centre. I described how the resource centre provides a warm place, food, and an opportunity for showers and laundry. I give them brochures about the resource centre, which they can pass out to people who come into the store.”

“We feel a sense of pride being able to connect with people sleeping outside and direct them to our drop-in. I have seen someone get housed; that started with us talking with them and connecting them to our outreach staff.”

Education and Training

Fourteen (14) education and training sessions were held in Downtown South from October 2022 – February 2024. Of the 88 participants that responded to the HSABC survey:

- 84% (74) of participants reported an increased understanding of issues related to homelessness.
- 91% (80) of participants agreed they increased their understanding of the workshop topic.
- 65% (57) of participants agreed they built connections with others in their community.
- 76% (67) agreed they learned ways to make their neighbourhood better.

“I want to take the learnings from the trainings and pass them on to other business owners. Many feel they have had enough, and it is easy to get jaded. It’s partly about changing people’s mindset. The training could potentially change some people. They need to get away from NIMBY.”

Downtown South Training Participant

APPENDIX C: Feedback from External Parties

The Better Together Pilot has received interest from the following neighbourhoods in Vancouver:

- Gastown (via Embers Eastside Works)
- Kensington-Cedar Cottage (via Cedar Cottage Neighbourhood House)
- Yaletown (via Roundhouse Community Centre)
- DTES (via Whole Way House)
- Kitsilano (via Good Neighbour Kitsilano)

Better Together City of Vancouver staff were among select participants that presented to broad audiences of planners, developers, and representatives from provincial and federal governments at the Planners Institute of British Columbia Conference in June 2023, at the Canadian Institute of Planners Conference in July 2023, and locally at Housing Central, the annual conference of the BC Non-Profit Housing Association.

Interest in seeing the Better Together program implemented in the following communities was expressed based on feedback from the 3 different conferences in 2023:

- Surrey, B.C. (via The Metis Nation of BC – Ministry of Housing and Homelessness)
- North Vancouver, B.C. (via AHMA: Aboriginal Housing Management Association)
- Kelowna, B.C.
- Powell River, B.C.
- Victoria, B.C. (via Pinna Sustainability)
- Nanaimo, B.C.
- Prince George, B.C.
- City of Leduc, Alberta
- Halifax, Nova Scotia.
- Municipal District of St. Stephen, New Brunswick
- Winnipeg, Manitoba
- Yukon (via Yukon Housing Corporation)

“Yes [I would consider doing a similar pilot in my community]! This seems like exactly what is needed in my small rural community to channel people’s fears and stigma into connection and positive action. I live in Powell River BC and am a senior manager for a nonprofit that is the only local nonprofit agency working on homelessness and low barrier housing. We face a lot of opposition and blame from all parts of community for all challenges related to homelessness. I could see this type of initiative being extremely successful and embraced.”

Powell River Non-Profit