

The Connector Role Prototype

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The Connector Prototype is being developed by social design organization **InWithForward** and **REACH Edmonton**, with the **City of Edmonton** and the **Edmonton Police Service** joining-in to take stock of the lessons learned.

Our goal is to explore how we can support more authentic connections between street-involved Edmontonians and the rest of the community, as one part of the city's journey to greater urban wellbeing for all of its citizens. The aim is to test a new role (the Connector) that interfaces with street involved adults and the wider community, opening-up pathways away from repeated crisis and trauma.

01. About The Project

Where does the Connector Prototype fit in?

Entering the summer of 2020, there's a lot to talk about in community safety. Chief McFee of the Edmonton Police Service has addressed municipal and national audiences in the wake of antiracism protests and calls to defund the police. As Chief McFee pointed out in a June 12 interview, "Systemic racism is in our communities. It's right across."

The Connector Prototype holds this to be true. Not just racism, but other aspects of colonial logic, class bias, and a culture of materialism and individualism, pervade both police and social services. Much work lies ahead of us to build more equitable systems for community wellbeing. We see the Connector Prototype as part of that (vast) body of work.



02. What Is A Prototype?

What to expect

The primary output of a prototype is documented and shareable learning. Rather than a finalized solution, prototypes help us to hone the features of and conditions for new support models.

Through experimentation, we will better understand the opportunity to intervene and have impact, including specifics, such as what kinds of interactions are effective for whom, and under what circumstances. This will be codified in artifacts like role descriptions, principles, user journey maps, and tools.

Likely products include:

- **Role framing:** What is the function of the Connector role? How do they relate to existing systems, authority and resource flows? What kinds of relationships does the Connector have? What mindsets are key to the work? To what more familiar role can a Connector be compared?
- **Role description:** A job posting that reflects the tone and feel, rhythms of the work, capacities and knowledge.
- **Tools and techniques.** Bodies of knowledge and practice the Connector, and other roles in the prototype, are drawing on.
- **Resource base:** How the role might be funded, community assets to be leveraged.
- **Rules and regulations:** Any requirements to give the Connector and other actors permission to engage.

03. Three Versions We're Exploring

1 The Mourning Midwife

A role focused on supporting grief and loss that leverages somatic therapeutic practitioners in the community, and brings private grief into collective mourning practices.

Why?

To create social space for grief & healing, a precondition of collective well-being, and support reconnection to the sacred, the body and the self.

2 The Alchemist

An Alchemist who matches community artists with street involved adults reclaiming their own creative practice. Together they make maps and reclaim spaces in the city through art.

Why?

To include marginalized perspectives in placemaking, creating more inclusive and equitably designed spaces, and to support connection to community, culture, and the human project (a sense of human potentiality, growth, and renewal).

3 A Garden Network Guide

A Garden Network Guide who recruits, trains, and supports owners and managers of natural spaces to host street-involved adults for informal retreats from the inner city.

Why?

To make the uncommon skill of connecting across differences more common, to socialize the idea that discomfort and awkwardness can be endured and rewarding, and to reconnect street-involved people with land, the self, and community.

04. Key Messaging About The Connector Prototype

General

The Connector Prototype is helping us learn how to foster community wellbeing through meaningful & authentic connection across class and cultural lines.

Relationship to City and Police Partners

The Police and the City are part of the Connector Prototype to take stock of lessons learned.

How the work intersects with current events

The pandemic and wave of anti-racism protests have exposed the importance of informal, community-based relationships that foster wellbeing. We can't depend on police and services to substitute inclusive & connected communities. But we do need to find ways to kindle and support community connections: the Connector Prototype is one way we are learning about how to do that.

Research Driven

The Connector Prototype is drawing on observations and insights from two years of ethnographic research, including with the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Vans, along with international research on healing, trauma, grief and loss. This data helped identify a gap: few street involved adults had ways to repair and forge new connections to the broader community. While there is important ongoing work to link street-involved adults to services and coordinate responses, services alone cannot connect people to the sources of wellbeing: to land, to culture, to the sacred, to community, to the human project, or to the body/self. That's why the Connector Prototype seeks to complement service-driven responses to acute crisis with a community-driven response focused on the medium to longer term.

What the Connector is not

- A process to produce a solution to social disorder.
- A police or city-driven prototype.
- The answer to social unrest.
- A role focused on the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Service.

05. How does the Connector Prototype help us explore alternatives?

Shifts that underpin the Connector Prototype	
From...	To...
<p>Individual & government responsibility for wellbeing</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Human services connect individuals to professional help</p>	<p>Whole community responsibility for wellbeing</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Human services connect individuals to professional help and back to community</p>
<p>Wellbeing as provision of material needs</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Services focused on provision of meals, emergency & permanent housing, income benefits</p>	<p>Wellbeing as connection to non-material needs (and access to material needs)</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Services that support or connect people to spiritual rituals, mind-body practices, relationship building & repair beyond the street-involved community, learning & feedback, time in nature.</p>
<p>Broader community & street-involved people connected through charitable acts</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Donating used goods, volunteering to serve community meals</p>	<p>Broader community & street-involved people connected through acts of reciprocity and shared learning</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Sharing & building new skills together, finding ways to navigate discomfort</p>
<p>Biomedical & talk therapy</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Referrals to psychiatrists and psychologists</p>	<p>Somatic therapies</p> <p><i>Looks like:</i> Referrals to mindful body practices (tai chi, yoga, etc.) sound therapy, acupuncture...</p>

