If the world was divvied up into groundhogs and guinea pigs, Hayley Irving might well be the ringleader of the muddle. Hired to act as a guinea pig for a new role called the Connector, Irving knew little of what to expect other than that system demand would be high.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty five days a year, the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team responded to calls by and about individuals in distress, on the streets, in the winter cold or summer heat. Rather than send police or ambulances, the Crisis Diversion Team sent community workers equipped with socks, slacks, sandwiches, sterilized supplies, and a seat to shelters. Repeat use was high. 22% of all service delivery are used by 0.8% of repeat clients.* As the first Connector with REACH Edmonton, Irving was looking for fresh ways to interrupt the crisis cycle; to free the groundhog from its shadow.

* This statistic is from 2018

Vernon couldn’t seem to get far from his shadow. Confined to a walker, he shuffled between the low-mobility shelter and liquor store off 107A street, sometimes losing track of time and space along the way. “I was lost and they found me,” Vernon said, describing his interactions with the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Team.

Coming into the Connector prototype, the assumption was that folks like Vernon hadn’t just lost their way, but that the service system had lost them. Irving could reconnect people with needed services, and help them to navigate health and housing systems. If only people had the right referrals, they might not be stuck on the crisis merry-go-round. So there was real surprise when, at the end of lunch with Vernon – during which he reminisced about growing up with his sister in Saskatchewan, going to the gym and working with his hands – he extracted a crumpled note from his wallet with a phone number for his case manager. He was uncertain of her name and her role.
Irving’s research team realized Vernon didn’t need to be reconnected with services. He was already in the service queue receiving housing and health support. And Vernon wasn’t the only frequent 24/7 client with links to existing services. Of ten profiles of 24/7 clients, eight were well known to inner city services. The relative well connectedness of repeat clients reflects research on frequent inner city users of emergency room departments in Toronto.

“We had hypothesized that this population was not connected to services in the community, and if we offered them case management it would decrease their use of emergency departments,” Dr. Vicky Stergiopoulos, a clinician scientist at the Centre for Research on Inner City Health in Toronto, said.

That hypothesis proved wrong. Many study participants were already connected, with links to multiple social services and case managers. The challenge wasn’t the quantity of service, so much as the focus of those services. Few services were addressing deep underlying needs—like the fact that people whose only option was to repeatedly use emergency rooms were actually quite sick, and didn’t feel listened to or cared for.

While connection to service wasn’t necessarily the gap repeat 24/7 clients like Vernon experienced, connection to family and community, body and self, land and culture, purpose and spirit were deep unmet needs. Vernon longed to reconnect with his sister and go back to his lands.

Two years of ethnographic research and analysis with street-involved adults, stewarded by the City of Edmonton’s Recover Team, found urban wellness wasn’t so much about the acquisition of resources—it be in money, housing or services, though all three were significant stresses if unmet—but about the strength of relationships. To be well is to be balanced: to feel one with land and culture, self and community, human potentiality and the sacred.

Given services and institutional connections were often not the weakest links, Irving and the researchers wondered how to refocus the connector role on these six points of connection.

It wasn’t that referrals, case management and service coordination were unnecessary or unimportant. They played a key role. But, without also nurturing deeper connections, love, care, meaning and purpose cannot be the sole responsibility of services and institutions, the team came to understand, because existential and relational needs can only be satiated in community.

Then, COVID-19 hit. Production halted. Slides cleared Social isolation shifted from the fringes to the mainstream. Economic precarity shook middle class illusions of safety and equality. Class, race, gender and disability determined life and death. Communities rallied against instances of police violence in Canada and the United States, and anti-racism protests erupted. At Edmonton City Council meetings and community league gatherings, citizens showed up and made their voices heard.

For Irving and the design team, it was a powerful reminder. The antipode to marginalization must be deliberate reconnection, not simply outsourcing social problems to police and professionals. “The city council hearings were really exciting—it’s a TV drama,” Irving said. “I started thinking about inviting all these inspiring people addressing Council into a conversation with us, to learn more about what’s driving them right now.”

What’s driving Edmontonian Robin McClung is a growing sense of we’re really has shifted, I think, whether we acknowledge it or not... In some ways the community has become more abundant because it’s just some intangible world outside of my bubble, which is my house. But in other ways, it’s become a lot more real because now the community is at my doorstep in a different way. Neighbours are more aware of each other. There’s more intentional connection over fences and across the street than there was before.”

How long the fences and gates remain open is itself an open question.

For Vernon, it took another bout in hospital to open-up a window to reconnect with his family, land, and culture. Nearly a year after lunch with Vernon, and with the support of his case manager, he headed back to his sister and ancestral lands. How do we create the conditions for more such connection? How might it look without acute crisis as the precursor? That’s where Natalie Napier, InWithForward’s Lead of Storytelling and Research, sees fresh possibility. “Has there ever been more license to shape resilient and just communities?” Napier asked. “Yes, the spring of 2020 has delivered a powerful moment, which just might lead us to rethink how we operate as communities and support each other. That’s what the connector role affords us the opportunity to do. But, it’s also a vulnerable moment. What we do now will make the difference.”

ON PARTICIPANTS

18 Co-designers engaged so far

People who said they’d engage as co-designers again

3 Participants from cold calls to community members with talents and practices we’d like to leverage

QUICK STATS

ON OUR ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES

07 New “episodes” written by co-designers

People who could imagine themselves or someone they know interacting with the solution idea

10 Why this is significant

We realized we needed to do some story-telling to bring alive the vision of a deeply connected Edmonton: a city resilient with relationships across lines of difference. It wasn’t so obvious what this could look like.

That’s where the analogy of Netflix came in. We decided to package our ideas as a fictitious Netflix documentary to open-up space for narrative building, plot and character development. Rather than ‘pitch’ our ideas as a service, we wanted to explore how an idea might unfold, tapping into people’s intuition and aspiration.

After offering impressions and snippets of each of our ideas as episodes, we asked participants to act as “co-writers” to design their own episode to address any gaps and questions they identified.
Dear Auntie Goo,

My family and friends would describe me as warm, reliable, and a friend in need. I was raised to value relationships with the people around me, but also to volunteer to help others. Recently, I’ve been rethinking the relationship I have to people who live or spend time in my neighbourhood who may be experiencing homelessness. I have recently been using drugs/alcohol/substances, and living with a mental illness or a mental health issue. I am always friendly, and that leads to really superficial relationships. The other day I saw a young man whom I have greeted many times before. He was with a dog and the dog wasn’t obeying and he was getting really frustrated and yelling. He seemed to be crying at times. My initial reaction was discomfort because he was loud and agitated, probably my neighbours were displaced with the commotion (and watching from their windows), and I don’t really know anything about dealing with dogs. But after, when I was back home, I kept thinking that it was an opportunity to connect with Edmonton. But there is only so much to learn from a book. My dream is to connect with a knowledge holder around medicinal plants and their uses, and to respectfully learn from them, including about appropriate ways to use that knowledge. It strikes me that, as a settler, pursuing that knowledge is a privilege that a lot of Indigenous Edmontonians live with living with unresolved trauma. I don’t know. I think this discomfort is keeping me from acting. I sense that I am waiting for permission, or confirmation that it’s okay to ask someone to share this knowledge with me, but I don’t want to abuse my social privilege. Is there a way to pursue this that could feel more just?

Cordially,
Nervous knowledge-Seeker

Sincerely,
Bushtah Neighbour

Dear Bushtah Neighbour,

It sounds like you are seeking deeper connections with your neighbours, I think that can bring anxiety as well as the benefit of relationship building. We have a fixed address. When I worked in schools, I would coach kids on how to make friends, to quick scan other students to see if they noticed anything that felt unreliable, or maybe they said something in common to them, if we looked at your neighbour and rather than focusing on his lack of stable housing, and having a dog both of which you can’t relate to, look at him as someone struggling with their pet, and in emotional distress.

Because of your kind nature, checking on him might be a good start, perhaps simply acknowledging his frustration and showing compassion could break the ice. This doesn’t always come easy for me, but sometimes starting small when there is less tension, a simple gesture that creates a conduit for a deeper connection, personalize need, food, blanket, dog treat? These are simple ways to open the door to a surface chat, and proper introduction. I have a habit of giving you the doubt that you can’t really trust anyone in the community that we serve. My hope is that our intentions and hard work translate into something really unique and special for our community.

I would say that because of being raised by my mom, my whole life was around interesting ideas about healing yourself and helping others and it was maybe not what was normally accepted. I was raised around alternative healing. This part was comfortable. And working with the community was also comfortable as this is my experience.

The part that was a challenge for me and forced me to grow was using all of the tools IWF uses, all of the prompts that they invited us to look at about the home, and the resources that we didn’t think was something I was skilled at, however that being said I endured, kind of, sort of, maybe…

Worst memory: trying to arrange Zoom sessions Best memory: our first community leader co-design session with someone who wasn’t familiar with our work – it helped me to see how far we had come and how much we had done! It cemented how much potential there is in our work and how important it is to push through.

Yours truly,
Hagley Irwin

Dear Inspiration Gazette,

As a member of the City’s Recovery team, its been really interesting to be able to do more of the work. It’s been a learning curve that didn’t just work, just to be immersed in it, and see the contrast from our work with Recover. I have appreciated the time to dive into the research but also wanted more time with it. The tensions I experience emerge from the pressure of other work alongside this.

I have enjoyed googling and contacting strangers who do interesting things, and inviting them to codesign. I also really enjoy working with Mental Health (web-based visual & design application) and I use that for the purposes of people to know one another. I have tried to research different pieces of our work together - 6 types of connections, international, ethnographic data, academic concepts - and see how they fit together. My nerdy puzzle-loving self really got into that.

Working through the codesign sessions and trying to get the type of creative response we’re looking for is a challenge. People used to engage with that way, just to be immersed in it, and see the contrast from our work with Recover. I have appreciated the time to dive into the research but also wanted more time with it. The tensions I experience emerge from the pressure of other work alongside this.

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We're three months into a nine-month learning process to figure out the elements of and conditions for a Connector role. Our process will culminate in a set of products documenting key interactions and insights for how to foster well-being and interrupt cyclical crisis. This timeline illustrates some of the milestones we've hit so far!

- Click on some of the visual diagrams to learn more about the artefacts.
- Click on the diagram directly on the right to learn more about how this project came to be in the first place.

**INSPIRATION PHASE**

**International research**

During the inspiration stage, we brought together the perspectives of three organizations (Reach, Recover, and found it forward) and multiple disciplines (design, social work, social psychology, cultural studies). Our focus was to surface key themes, concepts and examples to help us shape what our practice could look like.

**Script-writing our ideas**

We each wrote a script for each of our ideas that covers three core scenes:

- How the connector meets people with lived experience of homelessness
- How the connector reaches out and involves broader community members
- How people with lived experience of homelessness and those without are brought together

**THINGS WE MADE**

**Three scene scripts**

We each wrote a script for each of our ideas that covers three core scenes:

- How the connector meets people with lived experience of homelessness
- How the connector reaches out and involves broader community members
- How people with lived experience of homelessness and those without are brought together

**Visualization of our idea spread**

This diagram maps our ideas against the six types of connections and illustrate each idea’s focus areas. The overlay then informed how we merged certain ideas together.

**METHODS WE USED**

**International Inspiration Treasure Hunt**

We set a challenge for each other to get creative in how we could get inspired and see examples of what building our horizons of what building our practice might entail.

**Script read-through**

After writing our scripts, we got familiar with the content by inviting our team to stand in the characters’ shoes and read the dialogue aloud.

**Design Principle Bingo**

We designed our own version of Bingo as a means of analyzing each other’s ideas, determining how closely they align with our design principles and informing our next iterations.

**INTERACTIONS PHASE**

**Interviews with resources**

During the interaction phase, we are co-designing and testing these versions of the Connector role, building on research from ethnography and the prototype inspiration phase. Our goal is to build on early ideas, flesh out scenarios, and identify potential champions for prototyping and implementation.

**Connector Prototypes presented as Netflix shows**

To better demonstrate the roles and actions of our Connectors, we’re storytelling. We took inspiration from Netflix and shared our ideas of the Connector as if they were captured in a documentary series, as something already available.

**“Write Your Own Episode” Co-Design Canvas**

For our co-design sessions, we guided community members to share their expertise with us by writing their own episode. This way, we enabled the participants to fill in gaps they hear in the story and interpret our early ideas in ways that make more sense to them.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

**Sarah Schulman**

Illustrated with themes, concepts, examples that feel fresh. Not the old ideas of the problem space!

**Jane Slesser**

It’s not really a natural process for me, it’s not really a collaborative process, but it is required by the nature of the task!

**Jaime Calayo**

Opening up with exercises was new, maybe even a bit scary, with the help of the strong framework and design systems established by the divergent and ethnographic research.

**Nor’Ali McDaniel**

It was quite awkward doing cold calls to get people to join our co-design sessions. I tried not to rely on my personal and professional contacts, but it really seemed as if other than a few, others who may not have a conditioned connection to this work. During the conversation, I’m trying to think of who’s not involved in the project and who’s not going to be involved, to build that understanding.

**Milestone**

**Commentary from internal team**

This is phenomenal work. Thank you so much for reaching out. I had been thinking more about community service when you’re message arrived...

**Commentary from co-designers**

- Bobby-Jo Haibin
- Robin McCull
- Karen Bruno
- Gina Vlat
- Jill Kesley
- Skye Perry
- Chelsea Evans
- Alison Thurley
- Marissa Nolan
- Sebouin Benoît
- Brittani Kallinen
- Christie Purse
- Richard Thomsen
- Paul Carvermore
- Sharen Dymond
- Don Zimmerman
- Jordan Muskie
- Lisa Ward

**JUL 2020**

**JUNE 2020**

**MAY 2020**

**WWW.INWITHFORWARD.COM/CONNECTOR**

WWW.INWITHFORWARD.COM/CONNECTOR

- **Three scene scripts**
- **Visualization of our idea spread**
- **Development of four-track prototyping plan**
- **Interviews with resources**
- **Connector Prototypes presented as Netflix shows**
- **“Write Your Own Episode” Co-Design Canvas**

**PEOPLE WE INVOLVED**

- Sarah Schulman
- Jane Slesser
- Jaime Calayo
- Nor’Ali McDaniel
- Natalie Nogier
- Alaina Thursby
- Chelsea Boos
- Jill Koziey
- Karen Bruno
- Bobby-Jo Haibin
- Robin McCull
- Karen Bruno
- Gina Vlat
- Jill Kesley
- Skye Perry
- Chelsea Evans
- Alison Thurley
- Marissa Nolan
- Sebouin Benoît
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- Sharen Dymond
- Don Zimmerman
- Jordan Muskie
- Lisa Ward

**Digital Co-design Session**

For our co-design sessions, we guided community members to share their expertise with us by writing an episode. This way, we enabled the participants to fill in gaps they hear in the story and interpret our early ideas in ways that make more sense to them.

**WHAT WE ARE LEARNING**

- Feeling: Enthusiastic
- Jaime Calayo
- Nor’Ali McDaniel
- Jane Slesser
EDMONTON’S HOROSCOPE FOR 2020

It’s a year to go down in the history books, but in the midst of it, we might well wonder what to make of 2020. Naturally, in times of soul-searching, we can gain perspective by looking to the stars. 2020 is undoubtedly a year of multiple opportunities for earth dwellers. Edmonton, of course, is a Libra, if you take its founding date of October 8, 1905 at face value. But as the land and people have a history dating long before that, our team of astrologists have hedged their bets, paying as much attention to the planetary motions shaping all of our realities in 2020, as to Libran tendencies dating long before that.

SPRING: Spring in Saturn

Looking back to the first half of the year, we can now appreciate how deeply celestial motions have made their influence felt. As our first Lunar Eclipse arrived on January 10 in vulnerable Cancer we should have acted quickly to defend ourselves sitting in opposition, as we were, to communicative Mercury, calculating Saturn, and disruptive Pluto. The viral pandemic was making contact, and we took self-protective action slowly.

As Saturn, the planet of rules, moved into objective, and novelty-seeking Aquarius on March 21, we were hunkering down under a new set of physical distancing rules. However, a shift in mindset was called for as justice-seeking Pluto went retrograde on April 25 (until October 4) in systems-oriented Capricorn. Edmontonians took to the streets, joining Black Lives Matter protests, and later addressed their Council members in a move to address systemic inequities. Even the ever diplomatic Libra was pushed to outrage, reassessing power relations in our community.

SUMMER: Get visionary like Neptune

Finally, the cosmos are energizing Edmontonians to connect with their physicality. Be prepared for a noticeable shift from a previous over-emphasis on talk and abstract thinking towards embodied mindfulness. If well supported, we can anticipate that as Venus moves retrograde we’ll be showing our own bodies more loving attentiveness, and seeing a city-wide reduction in incidents rooted in unaddressed trauma, moving into 2021.

So there you have it! As lucky Jupiter stays in Capricorn until December 19, a tumultuous year will yield uncommon growth in unexpected and rewarding relationships.

WINTER: Welcome a year for the body

The year is now closing, and as the last sign of the zodiac, Aquarius, begins a new year in a new season, we begin to confront the illusions that divide our fair city.

In the fall and winter of 2020, we’ll be continuing with the ‘year of awakening’ theme. The outer planets will not change houses, helping us to better adjust to new thought patterns and behaviours. As inventive Uranus stays on in material Taurus, and Neptune in Pisces, we have an unusual opportunity to re-imagine how we can grow spiritually and relationally while in pursuit of our everyday, earthly needs. The focus here is on connections between diverse individuals, supported but not substituted by government and social services.

As romantic Mars enters retrograde in Aries this September, our focus should shift to deepening platonic love, connecting to our neighbours and fellow Edmontonians to deepen the ties that bind, and struggling through the fears we began confronting in July, to emerge a tighter knit citizenry than we’ve seen before. This will mean shifting away from our unbalanced focus on systems and rules (remember Saturn is under the influence of Aquarius) to see the potential in informal, organic relationships to protect and advance our wellbeing.

Another likely shift wrought by the continued mingling of Uranus in Taurus is our heightened capacity to subvert social hierarchies and reframe our potential kinship, shifting from charitable acts such as donating goods, or our time as ‘helpers’, towards acts of reciprocity that engage people of very different privilege in shared learning. By late fall, Edmonton, you may find strange paintings puzzling over a mutual challenge - an Edmontonian who has lacked a home and social support alongside another who has amassed stability and social capital. And you will gaze with pride and wide-eyed wonder as they wade through their uncertainty and discomfort, never fully emerging, nor sinking below the surface.

WORLD SEARCH

ACROSS
1. The ceaseless pursuit of potential, growth, and mutual understanding among our species
2. One that helps produce or bring forth something
3. A typical example or pattern of something

DOWN
1. Relating to the body, especially as distinct from the mind
2. The process of making or becoming sound or healthy again
3. Intense sorrow
4. The expression of sorrow
5. Addressing the root causes of social problems, which are often intractable and embedded in networks of cause and effect
6. An area of ground, especially in terms of its ownership or use

CROSSWORD PUZZLE

ACROSS: human project, midwife, paradigm

DOWN: somatic, healing, grief, mourning, system change, land.
The Idea Guide

A comprehensive analysis of our prototypes, from inspiration to integration.

What makes a concept?

If opportunity is like a blank canvas, ideas offer colour and concepts give shape. The opportunity for the Connector prototype is to (re)connect people with and without lived experience of the streets to six sources of wellness: friends, family & community, self & body, land, culture, the human project, and the sacred. But, how? “You have to have an idea of what you are going to do, but it should be a vague idea,” the prolific Pablo Picasso suggests.

Mashing together imagination with stories from the streets, international examples and social science research, the Connector prototype team brainstormed shards of ideas: a job title, a setting, an object, a practice – connecting these elements into the beginnings of ideas. Piecing scenes together, a fuller picture or concept for the Connector role emerged.

One week, team member Natalie Napier brought forward portrait therapy: a practice where therapeutic conversations give way to a creative process, yielding paintings and sculptures which give feelings form. Another team member recounted an ethnographic moment with Earl as he described learning to carve from his grandfather, and how bereft he felt without material in his hands from the lands. A third team member shared their experience as a grief doula in hospices, where there was attention to good dying, but what about good mourning? With each of these fragments, the team began to see a version of the Connector role centred on loss, grief, mourning and healing using objects, materials, breath, body and nature.

Over three months, the team continued to experiment with different sources of inspiration, ultimately coalescing into three concepts. These three concepts of the Connector are not static still lives, but evolving collages. They are starting points for deeper co-creation with the community. “If you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas,” George Bernard Shaw famously said.

Our five principles

Outward
The Connector Role connects street-involved adults out to community.

Connective
The Connector Role furthers at least one of six types of connection (connection to body & self, culture, the sacred, ground/land, the human project, and family).

Dual Level
The Connector Role operates at two or more scales (eg. individual, community, institutional, systemic, etc.)

Reciprocal
The Connector Role engages people as equals and experts in a two-way relationship where we give as we receive.

Organic
The Connector Role feels organic, grounded, empowering, not clinical

Our spread of ideas
THE MOURNING MIDWIFE

Nobody had time to listen— even as Marjorie screamed for help. "I missed it. I fucked up again," she gasped over the roar of her tears.

Marjorie had left her last for her marriage, her children, her career, her village, her home. And no one had time to listen— even as she tried to drown is to drift in beer and vodka.

"When a griever is disenfranchised, they feel like they can't share their pain or feelings with others— that their grief is unacceptable, unworthy or wrong and that they don't have the right to be feeling the way they do."

- MARIE HOAGARTH, AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT SPECIALIST

People like Marjorie: The current griever

At St J, Marjorie has been battered by grief. Her husband's suicide shook the contents of her life. But no matter your intimacy with death, it can still take your breath away. Days before we met, Marjorie learned that her brother has passed. She wasn't there. And she couldn't make it there. Her absence and her absence gnaws at her. A row, open wound.

What's the need?

Grief and loss runs deep. One hundred per cent of the 60 street-involved adults whose stories the InWithForward team has documented carry the hurt, pain, and trauma of losing husbands, wives, partners, parents, children, friends, cousins, street family, pets, and belongings. For most, this grief is not openly acknowledged, socially accepted, or publicly mourned—even as its effects are all too visible: insomnia, physical pain, mood swings, anxiety, depression, substance misuse, shame, and diminished self-esteem.

"When a griever is disenfranchised, they feel like they can't share their pain or feelings with others— that their grief is unacceptable, unworthy or wrong and that they don't have the right to be feeling the way they do," says Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Specialist Marie Hoagarth. Professor Thomas Atiyeh frames disenfranchisement of grief as a serious societal failure: not only a failure of empathy, but a "pathological failure involving abuse of power and serious neglect."

People like William: The continuous griever

Every day he lines up for a meal and a bed, William is reminded of what he's lost: his identity as a police officer, his street family, pets, and belongings. The unmoored scrambles to find some sense of 'righting' wrongs, his mother, Indigenous culture and traditional lands. Indignity and shame feel as constant as the tides. The only way not to drown is to drift in beer and vodka.

People like Patrick: The unmoored

Patrick marvels at how tenuous life can be. He had a house, a truck, a business. And then, over two short years, he lost his wife, brother, and nephew. The house, the truck, and the business soon fell too. Marjorie was one of the only things he could hold onto. He wonders what might have been had he accessed an outlet verus a numbing agent.

What's different about The Mourning Midwife?

Guides people from private grieving through to public mourning

Mourning Midwife knocks down the fear, discomfort, impatience, and shame that too often shrouds grief and loss. By naming and acknowledging grief in 1:1 and group settings, the Mourning Midwife helps normalize grief as a part of the human experience, experienced with the full range of human emotions. Rather than propagating a "right" and "wrong" way to grieve, the Mourning Midwife holds space for a blend of cultural and spiritual ceremonies, body-based practices, and experiential wisdom.

Unites community members (including street-involved adults) through shared experience

Grief hits all of us. None of us are immune to its unpredictable tentacles.

That's why the Mourning Midwife brings together community members for public ceremonies, commemorative walks, and cathartic gatherings. Instead of treating grief and loss as a marginal experience, the Mourning Midwife sees it as a vehicle for empathy, a way to foster recognition and solidarity, while de-stigmatizing the bereavement process.

Challenges medicalized models of grief and loss

Medications or prescriptions and talk-based therapy That's the dominant response Western societies have to grief and loss, and even then, catharsis doesn't come cheap.

But, alternative ways abound. From somatic (body-based) therapies to prayer, meditation, art, music and cultural practices, the Mourning Midwife makes space for heart, soul, mind, memory, and nature— drawing on the know-how of Elders, faith-based leaders, pro-bono practitioners, artists, musicians and fellow humans.

How might it work?

1 Recruiting

Mourning Midwife builds a network of body-based therapists, practitioners of secular and religious healing arts, including connections to Indigenous communities/Elders, and other cultural groups. The Network gives visibility to practitioners' work, and hosts a newsletter, learning moments, and open events.

2 Linking

Mourning Midwife links street-involved adults to group healing events, troubleshooting barriers. Mourning Midwife brokers connections between griever from different backgrounds.

3 Supporting and Coaching

Mourning Midwife supports griever 1:1 in ceremony or practice of their choice: writing obituaries, creating portrait art, constructing soundscapes, practicing breathing techniques, etc. Mourning Midwife pulls together tools and resources to coach community members in uncomfortable conversations, hosting active listening and grief acknowledgement coaching sessions.

What's the business case?

How Mourning Midwife interrupts cyclical crisis and might prevent downstream effects

Grief and loss is a root cause of homelessness, mental illness, and criminality—and yet, most of our interventions (from hospital stays to jail time to housing work) treat the acute symptoms. The Mourning Midwife plugs a gap: addressing a chronic experience that too often goes unacknowledged.

The Mourning Midwife gives cultural leaders, faith-based practitioners, somatic therapists and their procur students tangible opportunities to learn, share, and shape public discourse on healing.

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What's the need?

Grief and loss runs deep. One hundred per cent of the 60 street-involved adults whose stories the InWithForward team has documented carry the hurt, pain, and trauma of losing husbands, wives, partners, parents, children, friends, cousins, street family, pets, and belongings. For most, this grief is not openly acknowledged, socially accepted, or publicly mourned—even as its effects are all too visible: insomnia, physical pain, mood swings, anxiety, depression, substance misuse, shame, and diminished self-esteem.

"When a griever is disenfranchised, they feel like they can't share their pain or feelings with others— that their grief is unacceptable, unworthy or wrong and that they don't have the right to be feeling the way they do," says Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Specialist Marie Hoagarth. Professor Thomas Atiyeh frames disenfranchisement of grief as a serious societal failure: not only a failure of empathy, but a "pathological failure involving abuse of power and serious neglect."

People like William: The continuous griever

Every day he lines up for a meal and a bed, William is reminded of what he's lost: his identity as a police officer, his street family, pets, and belongings. The unmoored scrambles to find some sense of 'righting' wrongs, his mother, Indigenous culture and traditional lands. Indignity and shame feel as constant as the tides. The only way not to drown is to drift in beer and vodka.

People like Patrick: The unmoored

Patrick marvels at how tenuous life can be. He had a house, a truck, a business. And then, over two short years, he lost his wife, brother, and nephew. The house, the truck, and the business soon fell too. Marjorie was one of the only things he could hold onto. He wonders what might have been had he accessed an outlet verus a numbing agent.

What's different about The Mourning Midwife?

Guides people from private grieving through to public mourning

Mourning Midwife knocks down the fear, discomfort, impatience, and shame that too often shrouds grief and loss. By naming and acknowledging grief in 1:1 and group settings, the Mourning Midwife helps normalize grief as a part of the human experience, experienced with the full range of human emotions. Rather than propagating a "right" and "wrong" way to grieve, the Mourning Midwife holds space for a blend of cultural and spiritual ceremonies, body-based practices, and experiential wisdom.

Unites community members (including street-involved adults) through shared experience

Grief hits all of us. None of us are immune to its unpredictable tentacles. That's why the Mourning Midwife brings together community members for public ceremonies, commemorative walks, and cathartic gatherings. Instead of treating grief and loss as a marginal experience, the Mourning Midwife sees it as a vehicle for empathy, a way to foster recognition and solidarity, while de-stigmatizing the bereavement process.

Challenges medicalized models of grief and loss

Medications or prescriptions and talk-based therapy That's the dominant response Western societies have to grief and loss, and even then, catharsis doesn't come cheap. But, alternative ways abound. From somatic (body-based) therapies to prayer, meditation, art, music and cultural practices, the Mourning Midwife makes space for heart, soul, mind, memory, and nature— drawing on the know-how of Elders, faith-based leaders, pro-bono practitioners, artists, musicians and fellow humans.

How might it work?

1 Recruiting

Mourning Midwife builds a network of body-based therapists, practitioners of secular and religious healing arts, including connections to Indigenous communities/Elders, and other cultural groups. The Network gives visibility to practitioners' work, and hosts a newsletter, learning moments, and open events.

2 Linking

Mourning Midwife links street-involved adults to group healing events, troubleshooting barriers. Mourning Midwife brokers connections between griever from different backgrounds.

3 Supporting and Coaching

Mourning Midwife supports griever 1:1 in ceremony or practice of their choice: writing obituaries, creating portrait art, constructing soundscapes, practicing breathing techniques, etc. Mourning Midwife pulls together tools and resources to coach community members in uncomfortable conversations, hosting active listening and grief acknowledgement coaching sessions.

What's the business case?

How Mourning Midwife interrupts cyclical crisis and might prevent downstream effects

Grief and loss is a root cause of homelessness, mental illness, and criminality—and yet, most of our interventions (from hospital stays to jail time to housing work) treat the acute symptoms. The Mourning Midwife plugs a gap: addressing a chronic experience that too often goes unacknowledged.

The Mourning Midwife gives cultural leaders, faith-based practitioners, somatic therapists and their procur students tangible opportunities to learn, share, and shape public discourse on healing.
The Mourning Midwife sets out to...

What’s the change?

What inspirations does this draw on?

Culturally syncronic four-day psychoeducational intervention and grief resolution process in a Lakota community

What is it? A four-day grief resolution initiative focused on culturally appropriate and accessible strategies to support grief resolution.

How does it kinda sorta work? Think key roles, props, scripts, settings.

What’s most different? What are its defining features? It is a trauma-informed approach that integrates cultural knowledge and practices.

What are the intended outcomes? It aims to help participants develop a sense of connection to their community and ancestors, and to foster resilience and healing.

Himalayan Singing Bowls

What is it? A practice involving the use of singing bowls to promote relaxation and peacefulness.

How does it kinda sorta work? Think props, roles, script, settings.

What’s most different? What are its defining features? It involves a unique combination of sound and vibration to create a therapeutic atmosphere.

What are the intended outcomes? It is designed to promote relaxation, reduce stress, and enhance well-being.

Portrait Therapy

What is it? A therapy that explores the use of art and creativity to facilitate self-expression and healing.

How does it kinda sorta work? Think key roles, props, scripts, settings.

What’s most different? What are its defining features? It encourages clients to use art as a means of communication and self-discovery.

What are the intended outcomes? It aims to help clients gain greater insight into their emotions and experiences.

The Mourning Midwife draws inspiration from a diverse set of practices — from portrait therapy to somatic therapy to ritual design to the death café movement. Here’s some of what has influenced the thinking:

Connections & repertoires: making grieving practices and healing ceremony more commonplace

Environment & Interactions: creating cross-cultural, community-wide spaces to mourn

Knowledge & meanings: legitimising multiple ways of processing feelings and making meaning

Drawing on these behaviour change mechanisms

Barrier busting: reducing pragmatic barriers to engagement (timing, transit, etc.)

Bridging relationships: introducing people with different backgrounds but common experiences

Story editing: integrating grief into one’s story of self, rather than ignoring or dismissing

Modeling & rehearsing: practising ways to talk about and respond to the pain of loss

What are the intended outcomes?

1. Grief resolution initiated
2. Resolution of grief affects over time
3. Greater positive identity
4. Commitment to individual and community healing

Where can I learn more?

https://www.themourningsmidwife.com/
THE GARDEN HOST NETWORK

Who is it for?

People like Marjorie: The nostalgic hopfuls

Marjorie, 51, remembers a time when her life was in order: she was a teacher, had a good relationship and a close knit family. She knows she is capable. Looking around her now, she often feels dragged down by her friends and her environment, and her anger rises. She’d like to stop drinking, get housed and get her “self respect and dignity back” but “it is hard” - is this the person who can make her own destiny?

People like Vernon: The interruption seekers

Vernon, 60, has a deep memory for things that have supported him in the past: a mother, a sister, painting, singing, and helping others. He can imagine himself sobering up. But none of these people or activities are present in his life right now. Instead, there’s a lot of waiting and opportunities to drink. They win out every time.

People like Bonnie: The fearful yearners

Bonnie, 55, says “I’m not strong enough.” She has survived an awful lot but has little sense of self efficacy when it comes to the change she most wants for herself. “Life is struggling to quit drinking. Sometimes I drink just to pass out. It’s hard to escape when you’re trapped. I’m aging.” For Bonnie, contemplation always gives way to a feeling peters away, which quickly becomes a cycle.

What’s different?

Helps people contemplating change build sense of commitment

The Garden Host Network is a short retreat triggered by an expression of interest in an intentional behaviour change. Interactions are geared to increase self-efficacy, reduce the noise and distraction of the environment in which the existing behaviour takes place, and open up people’s sense of possibility.

Creates a network to support informal relationship building

Garden host volunteers are coached and supported to develop healing-focused relational skills based in empathy, humility, and deep listening.

Focuses on connection to land, self, and multiple communities without agenda

The Garden Host Network creates space for informal experiences and interactions. There is no program, no expectation, only a desire to create the conditions for these three types of connection.

How might it work?

1 Recruiting

The Garden Connector draws on peer and people with lived experience, to ensure strong feedback loops.

2 Linking

The Garden Connector takes urgent referrals from front line and crisis intervention workers who have identified someone contemplating change and meets the individual within 24 hours to propose a mini-retreat hosted by an on-call garden host.

3 Supporting and Coaching

The Garden Connector uses story editing and appreciative inquiry methods in short pre- and post-event check-ins with ‘Contemplators’ to boost self-efficacy and commitment.

What’s the business case?

How The Garden Connector interrupts cyclical crisis and might prevent downstream effects

The Garden Connector offers people who are contemplating change (often chronically so) targeted support to increase commitment. Timely supports that increase self-efficacy and motivation can help people commit to move forward in directions they value, decreasing use of supports over time.

How The Garden Connector draws on and amplifies community resources

The Garden Connector draws on under-utilized city assets that offer green space, and connects with community members who have a desire to put reconciliation into action.
The Garden Host Network sets out to...

Advance these outcomes...

Connection to land/ground
- Feeling of involvement in, or oneness with, the more than human world
- Connecting to the present moment
- Sense of calm
- Appreciation of beauty
- Recognizing bodily sensations and thought patterns
- Kindness towards self
- Recalling/tapping into less used, but valued, parts of self
- Feeling 'seen'
  - Experiencing reciprocal interactions based on curiosity, respect

Connection to the self and body
- Connection to friends, family, community

That looks like people...
- Using these cultural change levers
  - Routines & repertoires: Creating an interruption in the routines that facilitate the troubling behaviour, and offering a taste of alternatives
  - Environment & Interactions: offering respite from an environment wrapped up in the troubling behaviour
  - Knowledge & meanings: Offering an intense dose of messaging that recognizes and celebrates a person's self-efficacy, motivation, and potential
  - Roles & Resources: Processing empathetic and welcoming behaviours from one community member to another, despite differences. Moving from charity to reciprocity model

Drawing on these behaviour change mechanisms
- Barrier busting: connecting inner city community members to many different outdoor spaces and activities
- Bridging relationships: connecting street involved people to other community members to open up opportunities, while recognizing the value and contribution of both parties
- Story editing: integrating new learning and sense of possibility into the picture of self
- Modelin & rehearsing: practicing listening, curiosity, humility

What's the change? What inspirations does this draw on?

The Garden Host Network draws inspiration from a range of practices based in a philosophy of nature connectedness — from forest healing to the nordic concept of friluftsliv, to bird watching as therapy. Here's some of what has influenced the thinking:

**Bird therapy**

- What is it? A practice, program, process, platform, product, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.
- What does it look like? A practice, program, process, platform, product, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.
- How does it kinda sorta work? Think key roles, props, scripts, settings
- What's reinforced & punished? Laws, regulation, incentives
- What's valued & believed? What's valued & believed?
- What's understood? What's understood?
- Who's equipped and in power? Roles & resources
- What's modelled? Artifacts, Ceremonies, Celebrations, Medicine
- How do I even do this? What are the practical mechanisms? Routines & repertoires, Environment & Interactions, Knowledge & meanings, Roles & Resources
- What's the change? What inspirations does this draw on?

**Friluftsliv**

- What is it? A practice, program, process, platform, product, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.
- How does it kinda sorta work? Think key roles, props, scripts, settings
- What's reinforced & punished? Fines, Tickets, Leases, Bans
- What's valued & believed? Aliens, Healers, Doula Practitioners, Elders, Brokers, Musicians, Artists
- What's understood? Assessments, Films, Messages, Imagery, TV, Podcasts, Mythology
- Where can I learn more? https://www.bleedline.org/learn/too.html

**Healing Forest**

- What is it? A practice, program, process, platform, product, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.
- How does it kinda sorta work? Think key roles, props, scripts, settings
- What's reinforced & punished? Tickets, Fines
- What's valued & believed? Allies, Healers, Doula Practitioners, Elders, Brokers, Musicians, Artists
- What's understood? Assessments, Films, Messages, Imagery, TV, Podcasts, Mythology
- Where can I learn more? https://healingforest.org
Saskatchewan as well as Edmonton’s passed. Norman had been his link to and digital map. Vernon kept coming and their significance onto a physical recording his chosen place names and alleyways, corners and doorways, Alchemist revisited all the sidewalks several afternoons, Vernon and The moods, secrets and ambitions. Over backyard. He knew their tempo and they went for a meal and swapped got some rest in one of the sleep pods, received a different offer. Usually, the 24/7 Crisis Diversion Van, Vernon "Look what I’ve found -- a big box of rocks for our memory wall!" "Oh hey, Vernon," Katie called out. "I'm not so good with the task. "I'm not so good with my hands anymore," he said. The Alchemist invited him to meet Katie, a local sculptor, and Ian, a sound engineer. Together, they'd have a creative budget to create something befitting the Alchemist explained, was learning that meaningful reconciliation meant reckoning with all kinds of histories and experiences. The mostly white, male, place names and historical records kept the city and its citizens from a larger shared memory and mutual understanding.

Vernon wondered whether Vernon would be interested in creating a memory marker: a physical object or installation that would put Norman’s story on the city’s map. The city, the Alchemist explained, was learning that meaningful reconciliation meant reckoning with all kinds of histories and experiences. The mostly white, male, place names and historical records kept the city and its citizens from a larger shared memory and mutual understanding.

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Vernon worried he wouldn’t be up for the task. "I'm not so good with my hands anymore," he said. The Alchemist invited him to meet Katie, a local sculptor, and Ian, a sound engineer. Together, they'd have a creative budget to create something befitting Norman that could go on the street pavement, as a marker on the building, or in a park. The Alchemist would offer behind-the-scenes support. And so that's how Vernon found himself painting rocks with Norman’s words of wisdom and rediscovering threads of his culture. By matching local creatives with people with lived experience of marginalization, the Alchemist enables communities to reclaim and remake familiar places from multiple points of view. Together, collaborators make maps, public art, and provocative installations that tell a different personal and public story.

Vernon, the inner city streets were his living room, kitchen, bedroom and backyard. He knew their tempo and moods, secrets and ambitions. Over several afternoons, Vernon and The Alchemist revisited all the sidewalks and alleyways, corners and doorways, recording his chosen place names and their significance onto a physical and digital map. Vernon kept coming back to the doorway where Norman passed. Norman had been his link to home, a cousin who knew the plans of Saskatchewan as well as Edmonton's concrete jungle. Not honouring Norman kinda felt like not honouring a piece of himself.

Edmonton identify as Indigenous. Of the thirty three stories from urban Indigenous people collected by InWithForward, nearly all recounted the loss of culture and collective memory. Respect featured as one of the top three desired outcomes. This data is consistent with the literature on the long-term effects of colonization. Professor Mary Ellen Kelm writes that, “Colonization is a process that includes geographic incursion, socio-cultural dislocation, the establishment of external political control and economic dispossession, the provision of low-level social services and ultimately, the creation of ideological formulations around race and skin colour that sustain the colonizer at a higher evolution level than the colonized (Source)."

Gentrification uses similar playbook: geographic incursion, dislocation, economic dispossession, and place-based stigma. Reclaiming geographies, re-storaying stories, restoring local control, and rearticulating place-based narratives can be critical facets of personal and community healing. By exploring how unknowledged (and often, misrepresented) histories further conflict and division, we might start to repair relationships and foster more inclusive belonging. What if we could bring people living on and off the streets together, across the usual divides, to not only acknowledge but make visible the myriad stories of place?

What's different about The Alchemist?

Reclames place through the creation of maps, artefacts, etc.

The Alchemist applies storytelling techniques to the making of maps and physical artefacts that honour memories and speak to the personal meaning of place.

Supports personal and place-based storytelling

The Alchemist facilitates public expressions of personal, place-based stories that create windows of opportunity for increased belonging, shared understanding, and re-valuing of the inner city.

How might it work?

Recruiting

The Alchemist recruits a network of creatives who are wanting to collaborate across differences, and learn about artistic alshiyb. The Alchemist works with developers and business associations to find sites for installations, and curates professional opportunities for collaboratives with lived experience.

Supporting and Coaching

The Alchemist provides tools and resources to support artistic partnerships and relational development; coordinates field trips and other experiential learning opportunities; and helps navigate bureaucratic approval processes.

What's the business case?

Placemaking is a “collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value.” Both an outcome and a process, it “facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution (source: Project for Public Spaces).” The Alchemist is a decolonizing approach to placemaking that recognizes the value that comes from honouring the memories of people and place, reflecting the beauty and strength in a neighbourhood that is also the site of collective trauma and loss.

Taps into latent artistic talents of people with lived experience of homelessness while leveraging Edmonton’s artistic community to commemorate and engage citizens in the City’s present and history from under-represented viewpoints.
What’s the change?

The Alchemist sets out to...

What inspirations does this draw on?

The Alchemist draws inspiration from a range of artistic and storytelling responses to trauma, loss, and transition – from Burundi’s use of theatre to heal from genocide, to Mixed Methods Storytelling as a way to engage and connect with refugee women. Here’s some of what has influenced the thinking:

SEG’s The Rwanda Healing Project

What is it?

A practice, program, process, platform, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.

How does it kinda sorta work?

Three key roles, props, scripts, settings

What’s reinforced & punished?

Laws, regulations, incentives

Who’s equipped and in power?

Roles & resources

What’s valued & believed?

Integration, narratives, symbols/narratives

What’s understood?

Knowledge, teachings, memories, the subjective

What’s practiced and habitual?

Routines & repertoires

What’s modelled?

Artifacts, ceremonies, celebrations, medicine

What’s being framed?

Films, messages, imagery, TV, podcasts, mythology, role models

What’s the change?

Connection to friends, family, community

Experiencing reciprocal interactions based on shared interests and respect

Feeling more seen and valued in community

Feeling neighbourhood pride and belonging

Observing and paying homage to the life, spirits, and memories that animate a place

Identifying spaces of calm and reflection in one’s own environment

Sense of affiliation and belonging

Creating moments of beauty

Sharing meaning with community

Using these cultural change mechanisms

Frames & Narratives: challenging colonial logics and narratives by making visible different ways of knowing, alternative value sets, and agendas for social change.

Environment & Interactions: disrupting Edmontonians’ colonial, and class-based relationships to the inner city with surprising, emotive, and thought-provoking installations that transform interactions in space.

Knowledge & meanings: expanding what’s understood and commemorated to include place-based teachings, memories, and the subjective

Drewing on these behaviour change mechanisms

Contribution and re-occupying creative contributions of people with lived experience are awarded space and value.

Bringing relationships: relationships with practicing artists encourage people with lived experience of homelessness and latent creative talents to excavate that side of themselves. Practicing artists deepen their artistic and empathetic practice together.

Story editing: interactions in partnerships use narrative therapeutic technique to draw out stories of strength and love.

What is it?

A practice, program, process, platform, tool, space, event, rule, policy, etc.

How does it kinda sorta work?

Three key roles, props, scripts, settings

What’s reinforced & punished?

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Who’s equipped and in power?

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What’s the change?

Connection to land

Connection to culture

Connection to friends, family, community

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What’s reinforced & punished?

Laws, regulations, incentives

Who’s equipped and in power?

Roles & resources

What’s valued & believed?

Integration, narratives, symbols/narratives

What’s the change?

Connection to people

That looks like people...

Facilitating reciprocal interactions based on shared interests and respect

Feeling more seen and valued in community

Feeling neighbourhood pride and belonging

Observing and paying homage to the life, spirits, and memories that animate a place

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