



Plenary Designed to Get Us Working Together

The Process – How did we get here?

In September 2017, CRIHI Steering Committee recognized that it was time to update their Call to Action and to align their action items alongside the City's Updated Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness in Edmonton. In October 2017 CRIHI Steering Committee had a planning day facilitated by the City of Edmonton and Homeward Trust Edmonton to help design and organize a plenary that would sustain and grow CRIHI. The focus was to look at where the work of CRIHI fits with the three goals of the Update Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness. This planning session generated some new ideas for the movement to consider. This information was gathered and integrated with the CRIHI September 2017, *Revised Call to Action*. The information from the October Planning session and the integrated five approaches of *Engagement, Advocacy, Education, Support, and Volunteer* were brought to the Plenary Meeting for everyone to hear about, discuss and contribute their ideas. The goal and focus of the Plenary was to be participatory so that TOGETHER the faith groups would map out the prioritized action items.

The Plenary

More than eighty people representing at least sixteen different faiths and thirteen community organizations came to Beulah Alliance on November 28, 2017 to participate in a plenary gathering of the Interfaith Housing Initiative. We were greeted by Archbishop Richard Smith and Bishop Jane Alexander, and by our hosts at Beulah Alliance. Co-Chair Deborah acknowledged the presence of all the representation from the various faith groups and from the front line agencies. Rabbanit Batya refreshed us on the history of our movement as an Interfaith housing community and the work we have done so far together. She presented the updated Call to Action and informed us of the work ahead after we had heard a summary of the city's updated plan to end homelessness. Our partners at Homeward Trust introduced us to updates. And then we moved to working groups to design practical actions in five areas of our work together: Engage; Advocate; Educate; Support; Volunteer.

Here are some of the highlights coming out of our five working groups. Each group was asked to focus on a specific task and dig into some practical ideas and suggestions.

The full report is available on our website at:

<https://interfaithhousinginitiative.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/full-plenary-report-november-28-2017.pdf>

Engage:

Task: Build Network of faith, coordinated access screening, engage faith communities to become a stop-gap preventing potential homelessness.

1. The group considered how faith communities can be better equipped to address local needs.
2. One area that concerned the group was how faith communities could better be involved in preventing eviction; noting the plight of renters grappling with finances, cleanliness and pest control.
3. Suggested faith communities could provide funding and volunteers to aid tenants in crisis, and help them overcome barriers and gaps in knowledge or local services.



Advocate:

Task: Alleviate fear and misconceptions of permanent supportive housing.

1. The group recognized several key challenges, and suggested the best way to overcome fears and worries in the local community is to create opportunities for people to interact on a personal level with possible new neighbours.
2. Key action idea: Host a four-part speaker series. Partner with local community league and faith communities to plan and host it. Learn and laugh together with music, plan, and group building exercises. Series to cover mental health, addictions, support for those coming out of prison, and affordable housing.

Task: Generate videos and media capacity.

1. Bombard people with current information. Outline what you can do and where to donate items e.g. furniture. Use one sentence/message every morning.
2. Link with city—other stakeholders for support and longer term social marketing plan.
3. Engage with university campuses, and work toward a segment on Primetime Alberta

Task: Host a large-scale event.

1. Host forums or presentations framed around a direct question. Raise awareness of unjust systems; casting light on the roots of homelessness.
2. Make the event fun and less threatening and advertise to the public. Incorporate music, poetry and theatre and other activities to help bring the message.
3. A barrier will be finding where the money is to support a large-scale event.

Educate:

Task: Motivate and equip faith communities to connect with the local community.

1. Shared ideas and suggestions on how to nurture local connections between different faith communities, and also local organizations like community leagues.
2. Suggested meeting at different faith centres; finding joint projects (an interfaith version of "No Room in the Inn" campaign was suggested); spending time together so that we get to know each other, and inviting each other to special events and festivals.

Task: Action that will address the question: 'What is Housing First?'

1. Identified a need to educate on why we use this approach as a city.
2. Suggested identifying key individuals to be spokespersons who are more publicly known and respected.
3. Develop a range of materials, questions, speaking notes and videos for all audiences.
4. Suggested tapping faith communities to share knowledge, fact sheets and information with smaller groups

Support:

Task: Sustaining and expanding the Welcome Home program (including funding).

1. Suggested having volunteers and participants be part of the public face of the program.
2. Considered how the program might partner with Abundant Communities (a city-supported neighbouring movement taking root in over forty communities across the city).
3. Story telling was identified as a powerful promotion tool, and they suggested utilizing existing faith community networks to promote the program, and find both volunteers and fundraise for specific needs.

Volunteer:

Task: Actively working together as an Interfaith Community.

1. Prioritized enabling person to person first contact; equipping people for healthy engagement with people off the street or in social housing.
2. Suggested using social media to promote more volunteer opportunities, and setting up a calendar with various work taking place in faith communities.
3. Suggested hosting volunteer block connectors (Abundant Communities) within faith community to help grown and structure networks in local neighbourhoods.

Next Steps

The Governance committee will meet and discuss the full report and bring forward the suggested action items that are doable with suggested timelines and goals to the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee will then meet and the suggested ideas and decide on how to proceed. Participants are encouraged to watch for updates and opportunities related to this work in upcoming issues of *The Neighbourly*, and on CRIHI's website and facebook page.