



MENDING THE CHASM

BUILDING INCLUSIVE CULTURES FROM THE INSIDE OUT.

Report: Project Welcoming Community - Stratford

Date: February 28th, 2023

Presented to: Destination Stratford and Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area

Prepared by: Leena Sharma Seth, Founder and Principal
Mending the Chasm Inc.

Table of Contents

Acknowledging the Land _____ 1

Introduction _____ 2

Community Consultation Process Overview _____ 4

Community Consultation Goals _____ 4

Guiding Questions _____ 4

Community Engagement Process _____ 4

Insights from the Community Consultations _____ 5

DRAFT Welcoming Community Statement - Stratford _____ 8

Action Items _____ 9

Timeline _____ 10

Contact Information _____ 11

Acknowledging the Land

We acknowledge that Stratford is positioned on the traditional territory of the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and the Neutral (Attawandaron) peoples.

As we gather, we are reminded that the City of Stratford is situated on treaty land that is steeped in rich Indigenous history and home to many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples today.

We acknowledge that Stratford is situated on land that was shared between the Haudenosaunee, Anishinaabe and the Neutral (Attawandaron) peoples. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live, work, and play on this land.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Introduction

This document, and the enclosed draft Welcoming Community Statement, reflect a true labour of love and commitment to equity, inclusion and belonging on the part of the community.

From the humble conveners, Destination Stratford and the Downtown Stratford Business Improvement Area (BIA), various businesses and community organizations, and community members, who saw what was unfolding in the community and wanted to use their resources, their care for community, and their circles of influence to foster deeper conversations about what community means to them, what belonging means to them, and how they were either disrupting and speaking out against the hate and discrimination they were seeing flow in the community, decided to take action for their community. There was an intention set, somewhere along the journey of these discussions, to use their privilege and platform to speak out against the hate and discrimination, and to come together to work towards the creation of a [community collective](#) which will work together to create a community that experiences dignity, safety and belonging (Staci Haines, author, *The Politics of Trauma*).

This document will provide a brief overview of the community consultations goals process, as well as a draft of the Welcoming Community Statement.

BACKGROUND

Destination Stratford initiated an equity, diversity, and inclusion capacity-building process in 2021 that had two goals:

- To engage and empower leaders within the Stratford business, public and community catchment area to identify and dismantle personal and systemic racism and other biases within organizational structures, practices, and policies;
- To provide internal Stratford board members and stakeholders access to learning experiences (skills, language, and tools) designed to understand how to identify and dismantle racism and bias.

Coming out of this work and the community discussions that happened, Destination Stratford retained Mending the Chasm to serve as the consulting team to support a collective of leaders, organizations and community members in Stratford to work together to initiate a community consultation process for the purpose of exploring what it means to be a welcoming community, and to co-create a welcoming community statement.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

The vision is to bring a welcoming community statement to Stratford City Council for formal recognition as a means to support and amplify ongoing equity, inclusion, anti-racism and belonging work and action within our community.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Community Consultation Process Overview

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION GOALS

The overall goals of this process are to:

- Reach out to prospective partners, activating involvement from deeper reaches of our community, to join us in working with a facilitator to lay the groundwork for defining what “welcoming community” means to our community.
- Collectively define “welcoming community” for Stratford with those drawn to join in
- Present our definition to Stratford City Council for formal recognition of Stratford’s vision of being a “welcoming community” using this collaboratively developed, living and evolving definition.
- Reach out to the local workforce and community stakeholders, especially businesses with public-facing staff and those in the manufacturing sector, to work towards the aspirational goal of being a truly welcoming community with everyone drawing from the collective definition.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

The questions we used to guide our process, both in the virtual community consultations, as well as through the Engage Platform offered by the City of Stratford were:

- What comes to mind when you hear the word community? What does community mean to you?
- What does it mean to be a welcoming community?
- Can you remember a time when you truly felt welcomed? What is present when you feel welcomed and included? What does it feel like to be welcomed? What is absent when you do not feel welcomed and included?
- What are some examples of communities and spaces where you have felt welcomed?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

To support meaningful engagement with a diverse group of local citizens and community members, four community consultation sessions were held.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

During these sessions, participants were offered separate breakout room spaces for community members to participate from their experience from an aspect of their identity. These breakout groups included:

- Black Indigenous, and Racialized community
- 2SLGBTQIA+ community
- Youth community
- Seniors' community
- Disabled community
- Migrant Workers/Immigrants/Newcomers to Canada community
- Seasonal Residents/Tourists community
- Residents with Lived Experience of Poverty
- Faith community
- General community

INSIGHTS FROM THE COMMUNITY CONSULTATIONS

In total 163 Community members participated in the consultation process.	113 community members participated in the facilitated sessions.
	50 contributions were received via the online Engage Survey.

The responses below were drawn from the Engage Survey, and the facilitated consultation process, including Jam Board inputs, dialogue, and contributions in Zoom chat. The responses to each of the consultation questions are distilled to show the themes that emerged.

These themes form the basis for the draft Stratford Welcoming Community Statement that the community is encouraged to review, reflect on, and provide feedback during general community consultations in March.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Question 1: What comes to mind when you hear the word community? What does community mean to you?

- Participants described the concept of community as bringing forward notions of safety, mutual support, belonging, comfort, concern for the wellbeing of members, sharing of space and resources.
- Members of minority groups that were consulted highlighted the desire to be seen as individuals, and not solely as representatives of a group.
- Feeling the ability to contribute and having contribution recognized.
- A space that allows individuals to belong as their full, authentic, selves.
- Committed to a culture of accountability.

Question 2: What does it mean to be a welcoming community?

- Key themes that emerged included: increased visible diversity, accessibility of spaces and resources, acceptance, sharing, an open and friendly demeanor from those present.
- The ability to anticipate, request clarity on, and meet the needs of others.
- A recurring theme was the value of being a learning community: one that is curious, open to change, and accountable to harm when identified.
- Being a welcoming community means moving beyond tolerance. Diversity, in all its forms, is sought after, encouraged, and embraced.

Question 3: Can you remember a time when you truly felt welcomed? (Additional prompts)

What is present when you feel welcomed and included? What does it feel like to be welcomed? What is absent when you do not feel welcomed and included?

- Present in welcoming community: being acknowledged, being greeted, curiosity, inclusion, thoughtful language, accountability for harm, acceptance.
- Clear signage to navigate the community, visual cues (e.g., Pride flag), clarity and awareness of rules within the community.
- Power dynamics are recognized, a single dominant group or culture is not centred. All groups and cultures present are celebrated.
- Community members are engaged in decision making, their capacity to contribute is actively acknowledged and utilized.
- There is an active effort to recognize and accept the intersectionality of identities.
- Barriers are reduced, accessibility is prioritized, individuals with disabilities are not treated as a burden.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Question 4: What are some examples of communities and spaces where you have felt welcomed?

- Several specific spaces within Stratford were named. The most frequently mentioned were Stratford Public Library, Pride events, cultural celebrations, community meals, schools and Faith based spaces.
- Many participants named feeling welcomed in spaces that allow for *ad hoc*, informal, gatherings.
- People feel welcome where diversity is visible, where action to include is visible, and where signage is visible and clear.

DRAFT Welcoming Community Statement - Stratford

Although there is a history of exclusion and harm within Stratford that continues to oppress people in our community, there is a collective desire to address these acts and ways of thinking to move forward as a welcoming community for all. This current draft statement has come together through a process of broad community consultations and discussions in the Fall of 2022 and the Winter of 2023. This statement will continue to evolve as we invite further community feedback in the coming weeks.

Welcoming Community Statement

Stratford strives to be a welcoming community: healthy, vibrant, and accessible, where everyone's sense of belonging, dignity, and safety is a shared priority. In Stratford, we work collectively to ensure all individuals feel valued and included.

Additionally, a welcoming community is committed to:

1. Curiosity and an increasing capacity to change as our community continues to grow and thrive.
2. Meaningful and visible inclusion of all newcomers.
3. Nurturing a community ecosystem where access to information, connections, spaces, and resources is open to everyone.
4. Celebrating and valuing everyone for their presence, gifts, and their inherent capacity to contribute to and shape community.
5. Building and supporting a culture of measurable and appropriate accountability to address harm and hurt, and ensuring safe and effective mechanisms are in place to report harm.

Upon adoption of the Welcoming Community Statement by Stratford City Council, the commitment is made to review and update this living statement every two years to ensure it continues to reflect the aspirations and vision of the community. This review and update will identify progress toward the successful implementation of the Statement through measurable actions which have had an impact on the community, including recording and sharing data from a variety of sources, anecdotal evidence, and best practices.

If a community is a tree, a welcoming community holds a collective responsibility to tend to the roots (history), the trunk (present), and the branches (future) of our community tree.

Action Items

To assist community members with the statement above, we offer some ideas to get businesses, organizations, and individuals thinking about how to begin to integrate this welcoming statement into our corners of the community.

Idea #1: Create spaces for conversations about what a welcoming community means to members of your work teams, community groups, and dinner tables. Compare those ideas with the other groups that you take part in daily around the community, respecting individual confidence as you expand from one circle to the next. Keep having these conversations until this becomes a regular presence.

Idea #2: Talk within your daily groups about what to do if you see harm or if you experience harm in your community. What supports would a victim need in different situations? What barriers are there to getting that support? Where can you report harmful acts that require further intervention? Stratford Police Services have expanded their team and can be a great urgent resource using their non-emergency number 519-271-4141. If an incident occurred within an AMDSB learning environment, anonymous reporting can be done using [this form](#).

Idea #3: Familiarize your teams, groups and loved ones on how to get supports for those in need. 211 confidentially connects people to social services and community programs across Ontario. Call or text 211 or visit 211ontario.ca for many resources. Depending on the need, the City of Stratford Social Services Department can be a great resource for accessing income, housing services, and childcare supports 519-271-3773.

Idea #4: Establish a group within your workplace or community group that addresses diversity, equity, and inclusion. Engage in learning with this group and bringing that learning to others that you engage with through your workplace or group. Once the group and learning are established, explore equity, diversity and inclusion policies for your workplace or community group. Ensure that all voices are included in this work and reach out beyond your members to bring in a perspective that will connect beyond the usual participants to lay the groundwork for future members of your groups. Revisit these policies at regular, planned intervals with new members of your group to include everyone.

PROJECT: WELCOMING COMMUNITY

Timeline

Date/Time Frame	Activity & Supporters	Purpose
December 2022	Finalize Consultation Dates and Communications	Prepare promotion and communications to support registration for community consultations.
January 2nd - 19th 2023	Promote community consultations via member networks, collaboration tables, and distribution lists	Widely promote community consultations, support registration and community participation in community consultations.
January 23rd - February 4th, 2023	Host 4 Community Consultations with three identity-based breakout groups in each session. Launch Survey on Engage Platform	Host community consultations and harvest feedback and input to support drafting of the Welcoming Community statement.
February 6th - 17th, 2023	Summarize Community Consultation Feedback and prepare draft Welcoming Community Statement.	Distil insights and feedback from community consultations to inform development of statement.
February 27th - March 3rd	Review Draft Welcoming Community Statement Project Stakeholder Team	Present high-level findings from the Community Consultation process and Draft Welcoming Statement for feedback and discussion.
Monday, April 3 rd & Tuesday, April 4 th	Host 2 general community consultations to seek feedback on draft statements. Launch survey on Engage to invite more community feedback on draft Welcoming Community statement.	Transparent communication of draft statement and opportunity to pressure test the draft to confirm we've accurately captured the essence of the community's contributions.
TBC	Present Final draft of Welcoming Community Statement to project stakeholders.	Prepare stakeholders to present findings to Stratford City Council.

Contact Information

Mending the Chasm Inc.

Leena Sharma Seth, Founder &

Principal 416-230-5449

admin@mendingthechasm.ca