

Inclusive Cities – Houselink Co-design Session: Summary and Results

As part of our continued efforts to include diverse perspectives in creation of inclusive cities, IDRC partnered with Houselink and organized an embedded co-design session at their Bloor Street location. The session included thirteen participants with lived experience of a mental illness or drug abuse/addiction who engaged in various activities over two separate sessions. The sessions were facilitated by the Houselink coordinator who received prior instruction and a facilitation guide from the IDRC team.

Activity Overview

The co-design activity was developed in collaboration with the Houselink coordinator and members. It was based on previous experience working with the Houselink team members to ensure the activity was tailored to the interests and needs of the members. The activity had three parts: individual journey maps, city hot spots, and a large group discussion.

Journey Maps

Objective: Reflect on most and least welcoming places they have visited in the city

Participants were given a journey map to identify three places they have visited in the past week, and then to identify other places they may have visited in between those three destinations (e.g. walk past the homeless shelter on your way to work). The participants then identified the *most* and *least welcoming* places of the places they had previously identified, and reflected on the following questions:

- What does this place mean to me?
- How has visiting this place changed over time? (e.g. seasons)
- How can this place be more welcoming to me or others?

Large Group Discussion

As a large group the participants discussed the following questions:

- How can we educate the city about our needs?
- How can I feel like I am being listened to by the city?
- How can the city not get in my way when I want change?
- How could the city make you feel empowered?

- What do you want the city to know about you/your community?

Hotspots

In this activity, the participants individually reflected on the following questions:

- Areas that make me feel safe
- Areas that make me feel unwelcome
- Areas that make me feel excited
- Areas that make me feel welcome

Results

Journey Map Themes

Participants reported places they had visited in the past week and reflected on which of these places were most welcoming or least welcoming to them. The places listed as welcoming included the local grocery stores, various subway stations in the city, wheeltrans services, outdoor places like fire pits and parks, restaurants and places of entertainment like movie theatres, bars and pubs. The participants identified local restaurants and theatres to be the most welcoming places because of they offered entertainment and opportunities for social interactions. Other places identified to be least welcoming included subway stations due to over crowded conditions, train delays and lack of accessibility due to broken or absent elevators.

Large Group Discussion- Themes

How can we educate the city about our needs

The group discussed developing a relationship with city councillors to better communicate the needs of their community. Some suggestions included contacting the city mayor directly through email, while other ideas employed more indirect approaches, such as starting a petition, rallying for a cause or collecting data through surveys that can be used to inform the city about specific needs.

How can I feel like I am being listened to by the city

The group discussed strategies to ensure that their feedback was reaching the intended recipient and some action was being taken in response. Some suggestions included making it mandatory for city officials to provide responses to each petition submitted or email sent by the community. The groups also discussed creating a committee of people with the same concerns to increase the impact on government officials, and generate more attention towards a particular

problem. Issues around maintaining people's privacy and confidentiality in this process of providing feedback were also discussed among group members.

How can the city not get in my way when I want change

The groups discussed the ways in which the city has limited their urban experience and brainstormed ideas around how the city can better enable them. The participants reported challenges with accessing subway stations as they are not compatible with tokens or metropasses and only open with presto cards. They also reported having difficulty accessing city buildings due to lack of elevators and safety issues associated with the design. The groups also discussed improving availability of services throughout the city, such as wheeltrans, longer hours for grocery stores and restaurants, and an easier more accessible navigation system for health care systems. The groups also discussed issues around affordability of services in the city especially for people on ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program), and suggested more affordable services (grocery stores) and more free public services like parks for everyone to benefit from. One challenge that directly impacted the people's ability to receive services and provide feedback was the inaccessibility of 211 and 311 helplines due to long wait times.

Hotspots Themes

The participants reflected on the places they had visited that made them feel safe, excited, welcome or unwelcome. Many participants reported their home community or their own apartment to be a safe place for them because it offered privacy, quiet, and control over who entered their personal space. In contrast, some participants reported feeling unsafe in the subsidized housing they lived in for fear of other tenants who are violent, and reported having experienced a lot of trauma in these spaces. Many participants also reported feeling safe in public spaces, such as parks, movie theatres, friend's place, streetcars/buses/subways, restaurants, hospitals and doctors' offices. Most participants reported feeling safe in these places because of the presence of others in the community. They also reported that they are better able to understand situations when they are in a social group or gathering. Participants however, reported libraries and universities/colleges to be unsafe places, and reported that these spaces were once safe but have become increasingly unsafe. No further reasoning was provided for this experience.

Participants reported feeling unwelcome in places where they are discriminated against or treated poorly by others (e.g. workplaces, soup kitchens, public transit), areas of privilege and places that have security or police officials in uniforms. Some participants reported feeling unwelcome in the larger society they live in because of how poorly they have been treated by others in the past. They also expressed feeling unwelcome in public places that are either overly crowded (public transit, festivals, small communities, bars, hospitals, restaurants and shopping malls) or places that are too quiet and isolated from their surroundings.

When reflecting on places they find exciting, participants reported places that offer opportunities for social interactions, such as a friend's home, drop in centres, soup kitchens and work/community parties. The participants also reported places that provide opportunities for

entertainment, such as theatres, shopping malls, sport events, fashion shows and places with music and dancing.

Places that were reported to be welcoming included home/home community, community agencies that provide support to people with addictions and mental health, outdoor spaces (e.g. parks), museums, downtown area, local cafes and doctor's office. The participants also reported feeling welcomed in places with people, which has a sense of community.