

Respect Gets Respect Workshop

Working Towards a Community Values Agreement

About the event

On August 25th, 2021, The Gap Committee in collaboration with the Back Door Mission and the Region of Durham hosted a 3-hour workshop called "Respect-Gets-Respect." This initiative was held for community members to share their recommendations on how we can live together using a framework based on values and respect.

Workshop purpose

This workshop aimed to collect community suggestions for creating a values-based community agreement.

Who attended?

Gap committee members, street- engaged community members, service providers, public sector employees, and local faith organizations.

What questions were covered?

The attendees were divided into six groups and were asked to answer the following questions:

1. Do you find there is a lack of value and respect for one another in our community?
2. What do community members need to do to value and respect one another?
3. What would a Community Values Agreement look like to you?

This document provides a summary of the responses from those who attended and outlines key ideas towards building a values-based and respect-oriented community agreement.

1. Do you find there is a lack of value and respect for one another in our community?

Participants noted that respectful behavior exists within groups, but not across the community as a whole.

Participants notice a lack of understanding of the plight of the street-engaged community. There is also observable negative stereo-typing and stigma pertaining to this community. The street-engaged population who engage in littering, drug use, camping in privately-owned spots- show lack of respect to the neighbourhood community.

Following are some of the actual responses from the participants:

- There is a lack of empathy for the homeless community
- The greater community does not understand decisions made by people who are in fight or flight/ survival mode.
- Lack of helping others out when they are in trouble because of a "me first" attitude
- Lack of respect for property (littering, camping, graffiti, drugs)
- Street-engaged individuals have a lack of respect for themselves and people who are trying to help them
- Lack of responsibility and respect among the street-engaged towards people offering help (e.g. being rude and disrespectful towards volunteers and service providers)
- There is burnout and compassion fatigue among the service providers which leads to lack of respect towards street-engaged individuals
- There is no respect for people who are unsheltered and lack of kindness
- The business community has a lack of education and understanding of the complexities of homelessness
- There is a lack of dual perspectives to understand one-another
- Too many committees, too much red tape and not enough action

Negative Stereotyping and Stigma Themes:

- Stereotyping based on appearance
- People are brushed off
- ("you don't count")
- Generalizations made about homelessness (homeless person=bad)
- What's spoken of you becomes you
- Lack of respect makes you give up-"self-fulfilling prophecy"

2. What do community members need to do to value and respect one another?

To help value and respect one another, it was discussed that the community needs to be educated on social issues such as homelessness, mental health and substance abuse. This will help people have a better understanding of the challenges that street-engaged people are facing. The participants highlighted the need for a venue where voices of community members are heard and concerns are validated. Ultimately, we need to find common ground in addressing community issues and decreasing negative stereo-typing and stigma.

Below are some of the notes gathered on how to value and respect one another:

- Respect and value other's perspectives and opinions
- Hear with the intent to listen and understand, and with an open mind

- Use respectful language
- Don't judge/pre-judge someone based on their life situations and appearance
- Advocate for individuals in the community
- Try to understand an individuals' situation and find out why they are homeless
- In terms of policy making: policy makers need to listen to the community before developing policies
- Set healthy boundaries: when a person says "no," it must be respected
- Respecting one-another means not to
- steal, walk all over them, and not to abuse them (verbal, financial, physical and mental)
- Improve communication by making it relatable and increase public awareness
- Make one-on-one case management more accessible. People should have someone to talk with, to have a safespace to be heard and to feel like they matter and someone is interested in their well-being
- Understand that people need and deserve second chances
- Make people feel visible and seen
- Have integrity: do what you say, and say what you do

3. What would a Community Values Agreement look like to you?

Participants provided clear and specific ideas as to the recommended intent, process, language to be used, scope of participation and implementation of the Community Values Agreement. Below is the input gathered:

Intent

- Share the stories of the different layers of the community members (housed, unhoused, precariously housed, business community, etc.)
- Develop trust and mutual friendships
- Educate the greater community that good work is being done but that people have a choice
- Provide guidance to business owners on how to deal with conflicts with compassion
- Provide guidance for people in enforcement positions (e.g. security) on how to engage with people with compassion and respect
- Find common ground among various community groups
- Educate other community groups such as youth and schools on community values

Scope of Participation

- All community members involved in the process and treated equally
- Engage with people and share with them the benefits of having a community values agreement

Process

The process should include a survey to all the community members- street-engaged individuals, businesses members, police officers, and service providers.

- Poll # 1: Identify top five needs among the community groups
- Poll # 2: Identify solutions to address these concerns
- Poll # 3: identify participation willingness (e.g: if we....will you..., if we provide a porta potty will you use them appropriately?)
- The resulting document should not be set in stone, but be a moving document
- Should be based on the principle "nothing about us without us." No agreement can be made for a community, it should be made with the community

Language

- Consist of simple and accessible language, easy to remember, and not wordy
- Strength-based and focus on positives
- No negative or hateful put downs

Implementation

- The document should be reviewed by all community members
- Customize the distribution of document based on the accessibility needs of community groups

Workshop Conclusion

The participants collectively agreed that the workshop was a good start in creating a values-based and respect-oriented community agreement. The Gap Committee will continue to engage and work with the community towards this aim.