

TOWN OF STONY PLAIN COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

# VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

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## SUMMARY REPORT

Building the Awareness to Action  
Community Training Program



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In the winter of 2026, the Town of Stony Plain engaged residents, community organizations, businesses, and individuals with lived experience to develop the **Awareness to Action: Building a Safer, More Connected Community** training program. This training was developed to address concerns from vulnerable residents and community partners about the treatment and support of individuals within the community.

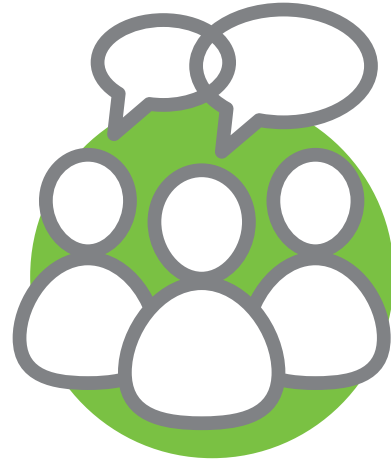
Feedback highlighted that people with lived experience had interactions where they felt misunderstood, disrespected, or discriminated against. Experiences that can negatively affect a person's sense of safety, dignity, and belonging. Conversely, they emphasized the positive impact of being acknowledged, accepted, and treated with respect, demonstrating how informed and compassionate interactions can significantly improve community experiences.

Community organizations and businesses also reported challenges in supporting vulnerable residents facing barriers such as housing, accessing mental health services, or meeting basic needs. These groups stressed the importance of developing greater awareness, understanding, and practical skills to respond effectively to complex situations. Safety concerns were raised for both vulnerable residents and individuals working with or serving the public.

The training was developed to bridge these perspectives by strengthening knowledge, awareness, and practical skills, enabling community members to respond to vulnerable residents with greater understanding, respect, and confidence—supporting a safer, more inclusive community. By fostering understanding of the challenges vulnerable residents may face and promoting inclusive practices, the program supports the broader goal of creating a safer community where all residents feel valued, supported, and included.

This project aligns with the Town's Connecting Community and Increasing Belonging to Reduce Violence initiative, funded by the Government of Canada. The report highlights the importance of collaborating with community members directly impacted by programs and services to create meaningful change, empower residents, and strengthen community capacity.

# Value of co-creation



This initiative demonstrates the critical value of co-creating programs with individuals who have lived experience. Direct engagement ensures that programs reflect real-world needs and perspectives rather than assumptions, resulting in more authentic and relevant outcomes.

Participants' insights help build empathy and awareness among service providers and community members by illustrating the systemic challenges people face. Co-creation also promotes dignity and shared ownership by recognizing participants' time, knowledge, and expertise as valuable contributions. Overall, programs developed alongside people with lived experience are more likely to resonate with the community, foster sustainable change, strengthen social connections, and support safer, more compassionate communities.

## METHODOLOGY

The program was co-created with 10 individuals with lived experience through focus groups, material reviews, and a pilot phase to ensure it accurately reflected community needs. Participants were actively supported throughout the process and received an honorarium for each session, recognizing the value of their time and expertise.

By involving individuals with lived experience at every stage, the program captured nuanced perspectives, fostered empathy, and ensured the training resonated with all community members, including those directly affected by vulnerability during the program pilot.

Engagement and program activities took place at the Stony Plain Community and Social Development Office, providing a safe, accessible space for participants to share openly.

## Outcomes

Throughout the development of the Awareness to Action training program, all 10 participants reported feeling heard, valued, and optimistic about their contributions. Although not every participant was present at each session, feedback consistently indicated that co-creating the training fostered empowerment, strengthened connections, and created a sense of meaningful impact.



## FEELING HEARD

**100%** of participants responded “Yes” to feeling heard, with one noting, “It’s a start.”

**100%** of respondents confirmed their perspectives were reflected in the training materials

## FEELING VALUED IN THE COMMUNITY

**100%** of respondents felt their voices were valued as a result of participating

## ONE WORD TO DESCRIBE THE EXPERIENCE

*Exhilarated | Encouraging |  
Empowering | Optimistic |  
Overwhelming | Hopeful | Peaceful*

### Participant Quote:

*“You’re asking really good questions that we can honestly answer.”*



# What we heard

## Key Themes from Stories Shared

Participants shared stories illustrating how fear, assumptions, and systemic responses can impact vulnerable individuals. One example involved a person who was unhoused, whose shopping cart triggered a large emergency response, highlighting the consequences of misperception and overreaction.

These experiences emphasized the need for compassionate, informed approaches grounded in an understanding of lived experiences and trauma. Participants also expressed feelings of fatigue and hurt related to local decisions affecting access to nature and community spaces, underscoring the importance of connection to land and environment for well-being.

*"You can't let people see you're vulnerable."*

*"I am not a lost cause."*

## Sources of Resilience

Participants described a range of ways they cope and push through difficult times, from personal strategies like temporarily disconnecting and resting, to relational supports such as community and friendship. Connections to loved ones who have passed, daily routines, and caring for pets were cited as important sources of motivation. These examples reflect the creativity, endurance, and adaptability of participants as they navigate systemic challenges.



*"If it wasn't for my dog, I wouldn't be here."*

*"I am so grateful for other friends who have taught me how to survive."*



## Barriers and Experiences of Stigma

Participants described systemic barriers and stigma in daily life. Being watched, singled out, or treated with suspicion in public spaces contributed to feelings of shame, anxiety, and invisibility, particularly when basic needs—like access to showers, clean clothing, or safe shelter were unmet. Policies restricting animals from indoor spaces also created barriers, as pets provide emotional support.

*"I am not a monster; I am a person."*

Participants described a "Catch-22" in which losing a job could quickly lead to losing housing, and without an address, employment became nearly impossible, creating a cycle of difficulty made worse by complex administrative requirements. Despite these challenges, peer support within unhoused communities provided critical survival skills and mutual aid, demonstrating resilience and compassion.

## Experiences of Respect

Respect was described as fundamental to dignity, belonging, and emotional well-being. Feeling respected allowed participants to feel valued, accepted, and fully human, encouraging them to open up, listen deeply, and support others. Respect strengthened connections and fostered equality in relationships.

*"I feel good and I open up more."*

*"I see more because I don't shut myself down."*

## Personal Strengths and Identity

Participants shared their personal strengths, resilience, and values, highlighting generosity, emotional depth, and care for others. They emphasized the desire to be recognized as full, capable individuals, not defined solely by circumstances such as trauma, loss, or marginalization. Survivorship, personal growth, and a commitment to learning from past pain were recurring themes.

*"I'm a survivor."*

*"I would do anything I could for the people I love."*

*"I try really hard to be good."*

## Hopes, Needs, and Aspirations

Participants articulated both basic and deeper needs, including housing, food, safety, love, acceptance, and compassion. They stressed the importance of being seen, treated with dignity, and having their voices and visions recognized and acted upon. Communities grounded in empathy and kindness were seen as essential for fostering belonging and reducing isolation.

If the answer was yes, what would be one thing you would ask for:

*"For everyone to be seen and accepted."*



# What's next

The Community and Social Development Department will fully launch the program to the public in Spring 2026, supported by four trained facilitators. The department will also actively monitor program outcomes and effectiveness to ensure it meets its goals.

The valuable feedback from people with lived experience will continue to inform and strengthen CSD programs and guide ongoing improvements to better meet community needs.

The department will also explore opportunities for long-term sustainability, including continued engagement and advocacy for participants with lived experience, fostering lasting connection, inclusion, and positive community impact.





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