



PRESS RELEASE

Creating Welcoming Streets in Downtown Belleville

Belleville, Ontario, June 8, 2021 - The Downtown Belleville Business Improvement Area (BIA) is furthering their promise to create welcoming streets in the District with the addition of their new outreach worker. As the Welcoming Streets Steward, Sara Behring will be responding to situations downtown that don't require police involvement, creating relationships with vulnerable people on our streets and recommending available services.

The program, modelled after the Guelph BIA's Welcoming Streets Initiative, will support street-involved individuals and support our local businesses simultaneously. By addressing concerns identified by business owners and the public, Sara will be helping to build capacity among downtown businesses to be better equipped to handle concerns and build empathy towards the individuals.

Marijo Cuerrier, former Executive Director of the BIA, was instrumental in pushing this cause forward and advocating for Sara's position.

"Mental health and addictions concerns, often paired with homelessness and food insecurity, are a challenge across Canada for downtown cores," says Marijo. "Belleville is no different. Previously, our only option for assistance in these scenarios was to call Belleville Police Service. This would temporarily ease the situation, but would result in vulnerable individuals spending time in jail or with a record, which is no help to them."

In cities where a similar program is already in place, including Guelph and Yonge Street, their pilot programs have been highly successful in reducing the number of calls to local police.

The Welcoming Streets Steward is being funded through the support of Hastings County.

"The County of Hastings is proud to support this initiative from the Downtown Belleville Business Improvement Area," says Warden Rick Phillips, Hastings County. "The introduction of a Welcoming Streets Steward is a vital support for the vulnerable population as well as the local businesses. Not only will this encourage critical support for people in need of help, but it

The
DOWNTOWN
18 DISTRICT 16
BELLEVILLE

will also assist in the improvement of Downtown Belleville as a welcoming place for all residents and visitors.”

The addition of Sara and this initiative is just one step closer to improving the downtown customer experience and making Downtown Belleville the place where people want to meet. While also providing resources, support and connection for the most vulnerable in our community.

“A priority of mine will be to work to implement safety initiatives for street-involved individuals and businesses through education and a harm-reduction model. I will be aiming to build trusting relationships while prioritizing their needs by connecting them to services,” says Sara. “The goal is to bridge the gap between businesses and street-involved individuals by being their direct line to these resources. I will be implementing new initiatives that help build a sense of belonging and inclusiveness but also that help the individuals and businesses build strong connections and partnerships built upon trust and empathy.”

“Sara will be the point person for any vulnerable individual in the downtown who is struggling,” says Luisa Sorrentino, Executive Director of the BIA. “She will be developing relationships and giving our vulnerable population a voice and an advocate. Ultimately, we want to connect them with social services and resources to get the support they deserve, but for those that cannot connect, for whatever reason, they know that they are a part of the community.”

For more information please contact:

Tiffany Spencer, Media & Marketing Officer (*Maternity leave for Kelsey Moniz*)

e-mail: hello@downtownbelleville.ca

Phone: 613-968-2242