



PRESS RELEASE

**Welcoming Streets Program Progressing in Downtown
Belleville**

Belleville, Ontario, July 9, 2021 - The Downtown Belleville Business Improvement Area (BIA) has been hard at work to support our local businesses and vulnerable population to create Welcoming Streets in the Downtown District.

Since June, the BIA's Welcoming Streets Steward, Sara Behring, has been Downtown daily, offering direct outreach to members and visitors by establishing relationships and offering resources. Behring has engaged in multiple interactions with members and visitors that have been valuable in further creating a vibrant Downtown.

The presence of a Welcoming Streets Steward has had a positive effect on the community as seen through being able to assist individuals in de-escalation, member and visitor safety and support, and in member and visitor referrals.

"It is important to remember that everyone has a story, and everyone has experienced a unique journey, especially during this pandemic," says Behring. "For most, they're looking for someone to guide them as they may not know what services are available and how to access them. As the Welcoming Streets Steward, I am striving to create a safe space where everyone feels comfortable and welcome to express how they feel and what their needs are. In taking the time to build relationships with people, I am more able to not only address immediate needs but am more informed in my approach when responding to certain situations and when integrating other services."

As a proactive measure, Behring frequents the Downtown District with either a bright yellow or orange shirt, connecting with individuals by offering immediate supplies, supporting businesses and individuals in times of conflict and/or distress, and connecting individuals to local social services, based on their unique needs.

Behring has spent the last few weeks creating strong working relationships with surrounding social services agencies in order to provide a collaborative, direct approach to offering

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support. In working together, the community is able to better address the unique needs of all of our members and visitors. She has also been working closely with several business owners in offering resources and materials in order to address the needs of the community. The new Sharing Spaces posters and Welcoming Streets postcards offer information on housing, food, harm-reduction, and mental health and addictions resources. Behring will continue this effort by offering workshops and training sessions pertaining to mental health and addictions in the future.

“Sara’s experience in the past few weeks has been so positive. She has been able to connect several individuals to local services, been able to address immediate needs and concerns and has begun laying the groundwork for individuals to receive long-term support,” says Luisa Sorrentino, Executive Director of the BIA. “We will be monitoring and gathering data and information throughout this pilot project to make informed decisions in order to apply for funding in March 2022 for the extension of the program.”

For more information please contact:

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