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# NEWS RELEASE

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## **ACCESS initiative strengthens collaborative efforts of service groups, in support of a healthier community**

**ABBOTSFORD – April 6, 2023** – The City of Abbotsford is taking an action-oriented approach to addressing key social issues through a new community-driven initiative that brings together local health and social service providers to share information, create resources and support each other to improve overall service delivery in the City.

Abbotsford ACCESS (Action-oriented Community Collaborative for Equitable Services & Supports) was developed by the City's Housing, Homelessness and Community Development team and builds on work already taking place by increasing collaboration between non-profit organizations, local government, health care providers, educational institutions, law enforcement and businesses aimed at improving the quality of life of all community members.

The collaborative focuses on increasing awareness of resources in the community, for both service providers and for the community at large. This is achieved through the work of small, task-focused working groups of front line service providers who draw on their knowledge of gaps in services and collaborate on projects to address those gaps, including specific issues like food equity and distribution; shelter and outreach; and, seniors' resources and supports.

One of the goal of Abbotsford ACCESS is to improve collaboration and synergy among service groups and providers, increasing their knowledge of all the other services available within the community, so when a person in need comes looking for help, they can find it, wherever they look first.

Abbotsford ACCESS grew out of the City's Homelessness Action Plan, which was adopted by the previous Council in June 2022, after hearing from community stakeholders the need for service providers to come together to strengthen responses to homelessness, and for the City to be the backbone of this collaboration. Starting in July 2022, the ACCESS Partner Group, Working Groups, and network members have been meeting, creating resource materials and holding events, while actively connecting and finding ways to work together to effect better service delivery. The group's next agency awareness event is April 12 on Mental Health.

The effects of Abbotsford ACCESS aligns with the City's goal of facilitating action to mitigate social issues that impact the community, which falls under the Guiding Principle of building a Safe and Sustainable City, as outlined in Council's newly released Strategic Plan for the 2022-2026 term. More information on Abbotsford ACCESS is available at [www.abbotsford.ca/abbotsfordaccess](http://www.abbotsford.ca/abbotsfordaccess).

## Quotes:

### **Ross Siemens, City of Abbotsford Mayor**

"Our society is experiencing a mental health crisis. Ensuring that individuals in crisis and who are most vulnerable have the ability to access support when they need it is crucial. By ACCESS enabling the service groups and providers in our City to build partnerships, and share knowledge and resources, it means that when someone in need shows up at their door, they can help them. This is how we're going to be able to effect change and positively tackle the complex social issues impacting our community."

### **Inspector Kevin Murray, Abbotsford Police Department**

"The benefits of having a central mechanism through which ideas and challenges that are experienced in delivering critical services to the citizens of Abbotsford cannot be overstated. Abbotsford ACCESS has helped identify and remedy communication gaps that had existed and promotes a multi-agency approach to solving an array of issues in real-time."

### **Neil Stark, Archway Community Services Director of Advocacy & Social Equity**

"In the backdrop of a complex and distinct ecosystem, the Abbotsford Access Partner Group works to ensure that we critically identify, prioritize, and explore key community development issues, including increased household food insecurity, a housing supply shortage, the opioid crises, transportation barriers, increased demand for mental health services and advancing the calls for action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. For me, this work provides a holistic approach and an organized effort to uplift the lives of some of our communities most traditionally marginalized individuals. While we all know that much heavy lifting remains, we are encouraged that our collective experience, expertise, and efforts will help create a more equitable and inclusive community and outcome for us all."

### **Coletta Holmes, LIFE Recovery Association Director**

"LIFE Recovery Association has seen a great benefit to participating in the Abbotsford ACCESS initiative over the last few months. The initiative has reached service providers and agencies that had not been at the table previously, increased capacity in our roles and organizations and most importantly, created collaborations that are already making a difference in the community."

### **Leonard Levy, Lookout Housing & Health Society Director Operations - Fraser**

"Abbotsford ACCESS has provided us a venue to connect, learn and network with more community services providers and agencies. The presentations and information sharing has been fantastic."

### **Darcy Halber, Abbotsford Restorative Justice Community Restorative Practice Coordinator**

"Abbotsford Restorative Justice and Advocacy Association (ARJAA) has been a part of the Abbotsford ACCESS initiative since its inception. As an organization whose vision is to transform the community of Abbotsford through the restoration of relationships, the collaborative nature of ACCESS has been a great fit. ACCESS has provided a platform that allows our organization to expand on the work that we're already doing by creating opportunities for partnership and collaboration amongst our fellow service providers. We're grateful to be a part of this initiative."

### **Al Breikreuz, Salvation Army Centre of Hope Program Manager**

"We at the Salvation Army have appreciated how the Abbotsford ACCESS initiative has facilitated an open dialogue with the various agencies in Abbotsford. While recognizing that the complex challenges to the current social crisis require a nuanced, multi-faceted response from local agencies, Abbotsford Access has welcomed diverse responses toward a collective goal."

### **Sue Kupp, Mennonite Central Committee Director of Programs**

"We have appreciated the opportunity at the Abbotsford ACCESS gatherings to find out what others are doing, the resources available and to be invited in to collaborate on some important projects. The weekly email updates are also a great way to get information out to the whole community of service providers."

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