

Collaboration, action keys to creating safe community

BY LEE-ANN CHEVRETTE

DO YOU wonder how our community is working together to address some of our most pressing safety and well-being challenges? Community Safety and Well-Being (CSWB) Thunder Bay creates a framework for collaboration and action.

In 2019, the province mandated all Ontario municipalities to develop and implement a CSWB Plan that identifies key local priorities to address safety and well-being challenges. The province developed a comprehensive framework to guide the CSWB planning process.

Between 2019 and 2021, the City of Thunder Bay, in collaboration with numerous community partners, undertook a comprehensive community engagement process, which included a public survey, and several focus groups, interviews and community forums, to gather diverse experiences and perspectives about our community's most pressing safety and well-being challenges. People with lived and living experience made very important contributions to this process.

At the same time, the City worked with data experts to develop a Population Level Health Indicators Report, identifying 30 indicators that, collectively, tell the story of community safety and well-being in Thunder Bay. This report also makes important connections between many of these indicators and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals indicators.

Together, the consultation data and population level data informed the identification of six priorities for Community Safety and Well-Being. They are: anti-racism and anti-discrimination; housing and homelessness; mental health and substance use health; poverty reduction and financial empowerment; community violence and gender-based violence; and supports for children, youth and families.

Outcomes related to each of the six priority areas were



ONE CITY,
MANY VOICES

The Thunder Bay Anti-Racism and Equity Advisory Committee and Diversity Thunder Bay produce this monthly column to promote greater understanding of race relations in Northwestern Ontario

subsequently identified based on community input. Early in this planning process, a decision was made to not create additional committees or planning tables to undertake this work, but rather to leverage the knowledge, expertise, and established collective action of existing multi-sectoral community planning tables to champion these priority areas and their key outcomes. Seven local groups agreed to take on the role of Action Tables, based on their alignment and existing work with these priorities, and include: Diversity Thunder Bay; the Thunder Bay Housing and Homelessness Coalition; the Thunder Bay Mental Health and Addictions Network/Child and Youth Mental Health Planning Table; the Poverty Reduction Strategy; Project Prevent; the Thunder Bay and District Coordinating Committee to End Woman Abuse; and the Healthy Kids HOME Steering Committee.

In addition to the outstanding efforts of community partners, some early wins, supported by CSWB Action Tables, other City divisions and additional partners include:

- Successful wrap-up of the five-year federally funded Youth Inclusion Program.
- Development of a Youth Gang Prevention Strategy, including the new Youth and Family Support Program with funding from Public Safety Canada.
- Establishment of City Studio Thunder Bay.
- Establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Working

Group to develop a community toolkit.

- Resolution of City Council to declare intimate partner violence and gender-based violence an epidemic.
- Establishment of an Upstream Community of Interest.
- Ongoing implementation of several Seven Youth Inquest recommendations.
- Completion of a research project on adverse childhood experiences in partnership with the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.
- Completion of a voluntary local review on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, in partnership with Lakehead University, Lakehead Social Planning Council, and United Way Thunder Bay.
- Facilitation of two annual fall CSWB forums and other learning/education opportunities.

• Support for the Youth in Solidarity Against Racism and Hate project.

The CSWB Thunder Bay program includes the CSWB advisory committee — a formal advisory committee to city council. It also includes a CSWB roundtable, comprised of approximately 50 community partners from across sectors, who meet to network and share information, and identify priorities, service gaps, and opportunities for collaboration.

While much good work has been achieved, many of the top challenges facing our community are complex, and require time, effort, and significant investments to see change. This includes upstream investments to address systemic and structural factors to address equity so that everyone in our community has access to the services, supports and opportunities needed to thrive.

A report outlining the first two years of implementation will go to city council at the end of March 2024.

Lee-Ann Chevrette is the City of Thunder Bay's community safety and well-being specialist. The views and opinions expressed in this column are those of the author.