Impact of the Supportive Downtown Project

Includes:

Final Report

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Abstract

The Unity Project was created to alleviate rising tensions within downtown Peterborough by offering an alternative to traditional emergency response systems in non-violent crisis scenarios. This multifaceted program is designed to cater to the diverse needs of downtown stakeholders, including business owners, employees, and marginalized individuals, through a collection of support services. Utilizing surveys given to downtown businesses and employing a thematic analysis approach of survey results, this research evaluates the current outreach requirements of downtown businesses compared to the services provided by the Unity Project. Furthermore, it evaluates the efficacy of outreach workers' interventions, responses, and presence in the downtown area. The findings indicate an alignment of needs between businesses and the Unity Project, with positive perceptions of the program's presence, response and crisis intervention capabilities. However, gaps exist in aligning business hours and increasing awareness of the Unity Project, alongside a pressing need for additional funding to expand its reach. Overall, this assessment shows the significance of the Unity Project in addressing downtown tensions, while also highlighting avenues for improvement and expansion through increased funding and awareness efforts.

Introduction

As urban cores and downtowns continue to expand, they face an array of challenges, including the far-reaching impacts of COVID-19 and ongoing economic struggles. These difficulties have highlighted a pressing demand for critical necessities such as housing, employment opportunities, and essential services. As the availability of resources diminishes, the shortage of essential necessities has impacted the standard of living for numerous individuals. These resources encompass a diverse range of essentials, from accessible housing and mental health support to addiction treatment, healthcare services, and requirements such as food and clothing. While many individuals have been forced to scale back and reallocate resources, vulnerable and marginalized communities find it increasingly difficult to adapt to the evolving standards of living. According to the most recent cycle of the Canadian Social Survey on Quality

of Life and Cost of Living (conducted between October 21 and December 4, 2022) one-third of Canadians reported having trouble in meeting their household financial needs [1].

A 2022 report conducted in Peterborough, revealed a staggering count of approximately 300 individuals without homes, with more than half of them, specifically 156, enduring chronic homelessness [2]. In comparison, Peterborough's shelter system has a total of 106 available beds, spread across three primary shelters: Brock Mission, Cameron House, and YES Shelter, along with one supplementary Overflow Shelter Bed Program, encompassing 74 beds operating 24/7 and an additional 32 beds accessible for 12 hours each night [3,4]. Notably, ninety-four percent of the shelter space is occupied every evening [2].

Formerly, Peterborough's Warming Room (a shelter) served as a refuge for many unsheltered individuals until its closure in July 2019. Consequently, more than 40 individuals were forced back into the reality of unsheltered living [3]. Following the closure of the Warming Room, Peterborough City Council passed two bylaws, namely, a new parks and facilities bylaw and a trespassing bylaw, with the intent of curbing tenting and encampments within the city. Section 12 of the newly implemented parks and facilities bylaw explicitly stipulates that "no person in a park without a permit can erect or be within a structure, hut, or tent,"[4] effectively extending this regulation to all 108 of the city's parks [4].

The implementation of stringent bylaws and policies coupled with limited shelter space has contributed to the unjust criminalization of unhoused individuals. These unhoused individuals' day-to-day activities are now exposed to the public eye due to their presence in public or semi-public spaces. Consequently, a significant increase in the deployment of police resources and time has been observed to control this marginalized population. Nevertheless, there is evident lack of education and acknowledgment of police impacts on marginalized individuals hindering their ability to address the specific needs of these groups. These systems lack the specialized expertise provided by professions such as outreach workers, mental health counselors, and addiction specialists, making it challenging for them to serve as effective substitutes. In various communities, police officers find themselves forced to fulfill these roles. By recognizing the complex interplay between policing, homelessness, and the legal system it is imperative to the formulation of new and effective systems and policies [5].

In the central area of Peterborough, the downtown core alone recorded a total of 7,768 incidents requiring a police response during the 2021-2022 period. Notably, the same year

witnessed an 8.3% increase in 911 calls, with approximately 55 % of these calls related to needed police interventions [6]. This increase in criminal activities within Peterborough's downtown area serves as a clear indication of the pressing need for transformative measures to halt the current escalation in perceived 'criminal' behaviors and activities.

Amidst a rise in marginalized individuals and an increase in crime rates in Peterborough, the urgency to alleviate tensions has become increasingly apparent. The Unity Project emerges as a targeted community response to address the escalating conflicts and apprehensions among business owners, employees, and marginalized individuals in downtown. Notably, downtown businesses frequently resort to calling the police to manage various situations involving marginalized individuals. In this context, the role of outreach workers comes to the forefront. Employed through One City Peterborough, these outreach workers actively engage with marginalized individuals, offering vital support, facilitating access to resources and programs, and directly responding to businesses' calls. The outreach workers effectively de-escalate a wide array of nonviolent scenarios, mitigating the need for law enforcement intervention, and actively encourage a sense of community among individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, further enhancing social cohesion within the downtown core.

This research project aims to support the advancement of downtown Peterborough by fostering unity and safety among business employees, owners, and marginalized individuals during nonviolent crises. This project conducts a thorough assessment to understand the outreach requirements of downtown businesses in Peterborough and compares them with the services provided by the Unity Project. Furthermore, it seeks to assess the impact of outreach workers' interventions, responses, and presence. Ultimately, the goal is to determine whether additional funding is necessary to enhance and extend the outreach efforts of the Unity Project in the future.

Background & Literature review

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on re-evaluating the effectiveness and equality of traditional policing methods, requiring a search for alternative strategies to ensure community safety and crime prevention. Heightened scrutiny of law enforcement practices has generated a broader conversation about the role of policing in contemporary society. This shift has emphasized the importance of community-centered approaches, alternative policing responses, and increased attention to social services.

The prevalence of homelessness has continued to surge, particularly in downtown and urban areas nationwide. As a result, business owners and residents have increased their calls for immediate action to address these issues. Unfortunately, these calls for action frequently involve law enforcement leading to punitive measures, and often unjust criminalization of individuals without shelter. Consequently, this cycle can perpetuate a pattern of imprisonment and continued homelessness for many affected individuals. Urgent reforms within law enforcement and the legal system are imperative to mitigate the punitive measures faced by the unhoused population.

Problem-oriented policing (POP) serves as the foundation for a range of alternative policing practices, with its start tracing back to 1979 when Herman Goldstein first introduced the concept in an influential article [7]. In essence, the philosophy of POP advocates for a shift in focus within law enforcement, emphasizing the importance of addressing underlying problems rather than merely responding to isolated incidents.[7] Instead of viewing the enforcement of criminal law as the ultimate objective, POP encourages the use of legal measures as a tool for proactive policing [7,8]. This proactive approach discourages unnecessary arrests and prioritizes active engagement and collaborative problem-solving within communities. The evolution of POP has led to the development of numerous other models and alternative policing methodologies.

One model influenced by problem-oriented policing is the Co-Responders model. The Co-responders model involves coordinated efforts of specialized police units collaborating closely with non-police personnel. In this model, the police within the unit quickly address basic public safety concerns, while non-police personnel are equipped with specialized training in areas such as outreach, crisis intervention, and mental health support [9,10]. This approach yields a multitude of benefits, including a significant reduction in arrests specifically with nonviolent crisis scenarios, a decrease in the use of force by officers, a notable decrease in unnecessary psychiatric hospitalizations. Additionally it has the benefit of lowered costs and reduction in emergency calls. Furthermore, this model facilitates improved access to care for individuals experiencing crises, fostering enhanced collaboration and communication between law enforcement and their non-police counterparts [9]. Beyond its direct application, this model also contributes to the enhancement of mental health and behavioral crisis education for first responders. However, it's important to note that the success of this model centers on the collective acceptance and effective implementation by all involved parties, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive and cooperative approach [9,10].

Co-response models commonly come into play during mental health crises, primarily due to the complex power dynamics between law enforcement and marginalized individuals. Historically, the absence of dedicated mental health professionals and adequate training within policing has compelled law enforcement to assume the role of de facto mental health interventionists. [11]. This systemic gap in integrating specialized mental health workers and educational programs into policing has created what scholars refer to as the "grey area" in policing [11, 12].

J. Wood and colleagues [12] shed light on the intricacies of this phenomenon, emphasizing three critical observations that shape law enforcement's approach within this "grey area." Firstly, officers often find themselves compelled to provide temporary solutions for the most vulnerable individuals. Secondly, their decision-making relies heavily on their knowledge of the specific areas they patrol, overlooking broader external issues influencing the community. Lastly, resolutions for officers frequently fall within a delicate spectrum between making arrests and resorting to emergency apprehensions. In such circumstances, officers are not merely enforcing the law; rather, they are often trying to negotiate peace in complex situations.

This article illiterates the intricacies of the "grey area" that the Peterborough police often encounter, stressing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the roles played by law enforcement in addressing individuals with mental health concerns. Moreover, it underlines the necessity for supporting, understanding, and establishing accountability within this unclear environment [12]. Targeted programs key when looking at the need to bolster police efforts.

The 2015 guidelines released by the Mental Health Commission of Canada shed light on the critical collaboration between police officers and individuals with mental illness [13]. These guidelines emphasize the importance of addressing the intricate "grey area," as discussed by Wood, J., and colleagues [12]. While the guidelines stress the shared ground between mental health and policing, they also emphasize the necessity for programs to be tailored to the unique demographics and specific circumstances of each community. Particularly, for Unity Project's outreach workers, this resource serves as a fundamental introduction providing valuable insights into the expectations placed on police officers when responding to mental health crises. The Mental Health Commission [13] also delves into the nuances surrounding 911 calls to emergency services, highlighting the crucial mechanisms that need to be established to ensure an effective and appropriate response [13]. Given the Unity project's pivotal objective of reducing calls to the

police from downtown businesses, this resource can serve as a guiding framework, aiding in the development of a comprehensive guideline. It can help outline the criteria for when it's appropriate to use specific outreach workers as per the program's objectives and when to engage emergency response personnel.

Since November 2022, Peterborough has created an impactful community partnership between the Peterborough Police Service and the Canadian Mental Health Association, as shown by the establishment of a Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT) [14]. This collaborative initiative serves as a compelling demonstration of a co-response partnership, wherein a mental health professional or nurse joins forces with a police officer to rapidly respond to mental health crisis calls and provide necessary follow-up care [14]. Notably, in 2022, Peterborough encountered a total of 668 mental health-related incidents. However, with the official inception of this cooperative team, the city has witnessed a remarkable 26 percent decrease in apprehensions, coupled with a notable 15 percent increase in diversions to other resources than arrest [6].

As evident by the literature, the implementation of mental health community support in Peterborough, coupled with the marked success of this collaborative program, shows the city's proactive approach to community policing. While that project's forthcoming program may not be identical, it shows similarities to the Unity Project. Furthermore, the presence of a dedicated mental health team significantly alleviates the load on the project's outreach workers, enabling them to effectively prioritize and attend to the diverse needs of the marginalized population within Peterborough's downtown core. The two programs coupled together provide a great base for comprehensive alternative policing measures.

Another model influenced by problem-oriented policing [7,8] is the community responders' model, this model represents an exceptionally effective approach, proficient at managing a substantial portion of low-priority 911 emergency calls related to general well-being and quality of life concerns [15]. Recognizing the complex nature of these calls, the community response model dispatches civilian responders who are often better equipped to handle these situations than police officers. This model designates two key areas of focus for these responders: first, they address low-risk 911 calls involving homelessness, addiction, and mental health concerns, and second, they attend to behavioral disturbances such as noise complaints and wellness checks [15]. The underlying principle of deploying civilian responders is to prioritize

mediation skills over law enforcement in crises. Operational coordination of this model is facilitated through 911 dispatchers, who have the discretion to assign either an emergency first responder or a community responder (CR) based on the specific nature of the call. In instances where additional support is deemed necessary, community responders can call for police backup via radio communication [15]. One notable advantage of this model is that community responders are not rushed to the next scene, allowing them the time to work towards sustainable, long-term solutions and follow up with individuals in crisis. Establishing this model effectively centers on creating a mutually respectful relationship between the police force and community responders, ensuring unified information sharing between the two groups. However, a potential challenge highlighted by program director Anne Larsen is the risk of community responders being perceived as informants, which may undermine the effectiveness of the model [15].

The relationship between certain demographics and law enforcement remains an intricately nuanced and multifaceted. For individuals grappling with homelessness, interactions with law enforcement can often evoke feelings of fear, apprehension, and deep-seated mistrust. Given the prevalent presence of police in urban environments, their role in ensuring community safety and well-being is undeniably significant. However, negative personal encounters with law enforcement personnel can amplify harmful happenstances and worsen existing levels of distrust. A comprehensive study conducted in Toronto [16] investigated the perceptions of police held by unhoused individuals, employing a combination of surveys and face-to-face interviews. The findings revealed alarmingly low levels of trust in law enforcement, with one out of every ten respondents recounting distressing accounts of physical assault by police officers [16]. This project recognizes the crucial need to acknowledge and address the adverse impact that individuals may experience because of traditional policing practices. By implementing measures that reduce the police presence for individuals residing in downtown areas, the project aims to adopt a heightened sense of support and security within the community. This initiative endeavors to mitigate the negative repercussions of previous encounters, aiming to instill a sense of trust and safety among those most vulnerable in the community.

While the project places a strong emphasis on understanding the perspectives of unhoused individuals, it remains vital to recognize and support the well-being of law enforcement officers in their critical roles. Achieving comprehensive research necessitates a balanced consideration of the perspectives from both sides. Front-line officers play an

indispensable role in upholding societal safety, yet they often grapple with the challenges of meeting public demands while navigating the constraints imposed by larger institutional frameworks. A recent article published in 2023 [17] highlights how certain police officers acknowledged the ineffectiveness of employing punitive measures, they recognized the sentiment that the criminal legal system offers no tangible benefits for individuals experiencing homelessness. Nonetheless, these officers often felt compelled to act in ways that may be perceived as authoritative, as they are driven by the need to comply with public expectations and institutional protocols [17]. Moreover, the article reveals that while many officers acknowledge the systemic factors contributing to homelessness, they remain hesitant to advocate for a reduction in police funding to facilitate more effective interventions for the unhoused population [17]. This complex interplay of factors accentuates the need for a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the multifaceted challenges faced by both law enforcement officers and individuals experiencing homelessness.

Taking both perspectives into account shows the profound relevance of the community responders' model. One notable example of such a program is the Crisis Assistance Helping Out On The Streets (CAHOOTS) initiative, established by the White Bird Society in Eugene, Oregon [18]. CAHOOTS operates in close coordination with the police, fire, and ambulance dispatch center. When responding to a call, dispatchers assess whether the situation warrants the deployment of a CAHOOTS team comprising of a community medic and a crisis worker, or if police intervention is necessary. In 2017, the CAHOOTS team successfully addressed a remarkable 17% of the 911 calls, demonstrating the substantial impact of this intervention [18]. Building on the success of CAHOOTS, similar programs have been launched in several cities, reflecting the growing recognition of the efficacy of this approach [18].

Notably, programs like CAHOOTS [18] serve as a compelling testament to the significance of adopting a response model that considers the perceptions of law enforcement, striving to mitigate negative police interactions and fostering a sense of safety and support for all parties involved. While envisioning CAHOOTS implementation in downtown Peterborough, it is essential to consider specific adaptations to the model, such as the establishment of a separate dedicated calling system distinct from the standard 911 emergency services. This ensures an optimized and seamless response tailored to the unique needs of the community.

The examination of the two programs features the pivotal role that crisis workers, particularly outreach workers, play in offering viable alternatives to traditional policing methods. Outreach workers establish meaningful connections with marginalized individuals, assuming multifaceted roles as mentors, counselors, program facilitators, and mediators [19]. Within the realm of outreach, the specific category of street outreach workers (SOW) proves to be an invaluable asset in the context of alternative policing strategies. Employing a three-pronged approach, these workers skillfully identify and mediate conflicts, endorse collaboration, and teamwork within their own ranks, and cultivate community relationships based on trust and mutual understanding [20]. By adopting a non-punitive approach, street outreach workers effectively manage both short-term crises and lay the groundwork for long-term solutions. For the implementation of street outreach, as outlined in the project's operational steps, a comprehensive and well-structured plan is essential. Effective and impactful street outreach necessitates the establishment of rapport, addressing immediate needs without fostering dependency, prioritizing long-term solutions through access to programs and stable housing, and employing data-driven decision-making processes [21]. The impact of outreach workers extends beyond the individuals they directly assist, resonating throughout the broader community and positively influencing everyone within range. Successful implementation of effective street outreach programs demands a paradigm shift in housing policies and homelessness prevention strategies [22]. While the past few decades have predominantly focused on managing homelessness and crisis intervention post-homelessness, the emphasis must shift towards proactive prevention measures before individuals find themselves without homes and resources [21, 22]. It is crucial to recognize that outreach workers should not merely be regarded as pseudo-first responders rushing from one place to another. In the absence of impactful engagement, valuable opportunities may be missed, leading to a gradual destruction of program attention and resources [23].

Within urban cores, the intricate challenges, encompassing homelessness, substance use disorders, and limited access to healthcare and stable housing, has solidified itself as a pressing social concern. Against this environment of complexity, the collaborative endeavors between street outreach workers and professionals specializing in healthcare, addiction treatment, and housing have emerged as focal points of sizeable significance. The interplay between these distinct yet interrelated domains not only facilitates the improvement of immediate adversities

encountered by marginalized communities, but also holds the promise of producing comprehensive and sustainable solutions that target the underlying causes of these persistent societal issues.

Harm reduction strategies encompass a diverse array of principles, spanning from risk reduction and crisis management to health services that prioritize the concept of meeting individuals at their current stage [24]. Central to this approach is the vital collaboration of alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment initiatives. On the front lines, outreach workers provide essential services such as short-term treatments like naloxone administration and drug safety measures. Yet, it's clear that this immediate care doesn't sufficiently address the need for comprehensive, long-term AOD treatment. To truly make a lasting impact, street outreach workers must be equipped to offer both first-response short-term interventions and enduring preventive strategies. Effective collaboration across both street outreach workers (SOW) and AOD treatment facilities and professionals can ensure that marginalized individuals receive sustained support, thereby mitigating the risk of relapse and effectively addressing the escalating drug and opioid crisis [25]. Additionally, AOD research, while not directly engaging with street outreach workers, plays a crucial role in this collaboration. Researchers should actively incorporate the insights and practices currently employed to propose evidence-based prevention and treatment methodologies. It's imperative for these researchers, when developing new protocols and legislation, to draw from the insights of the community and real-world challenges, gathered through their collaboration with street outreach workers [26].

Recent statistics from Peterborough shows the urgency of these efforts. In the past 12 months alone, there have been 65 recorded cases of drug overdoses, equating to roughly one overdose every six days [27]. It is evident that collaboration between outreach workers and the available resources in Peterborough is imperative to curbing this alarming number and effectively guiding individuals towards long-term treatment options.

The health struggles faced by unhoused individuals are complex, especially in urban areas. [28]. Effective collaboration between street outreach workers (SOW) and healthcare professionals necessitates a tailored and inventive approach when addressing the needs of these marginalized groups. Unhoused individuals often resort to seeking assistance from emergency rooms and healthcare facilities [29]. Yet universal stigmatization and the criminalization of substance abuse and mental health disorders frequently deter them from accessing necessary

healthcare services [5]. In this context, the interaction between healthcare institutions and street outreach workers can spark initiatives, such as the establishment of shelter-based clinics and independent healthcare facilities. Leveraging the outreach workers' presence to endorse and facilitate healthcare services fosters a sense of trust between these clinics and the marginalized individuals they aim to serve. Furthermore, the concept of tertiary care allows proficient healthcare experts to provide treatment to individuals without the complexities typically associated with traditional primary and secondary healthcare structures [5]. Gaining insights into alternative approaches to healthcare, coupled with the collaborative efforts between healthcare workers and SOW, offers valuable prospects for shaping the future trajectory of the project. Additionally, the integration of healthcare workers into the community responders' model [15], working in tandem with SOW, could potentially serve as a secondary phase in implementing a similar model once the project has been established.

As the availability of housing options continues to dwindle and crises escalate, marginalized individuals are increasingly vulnerable to homelessness. Often individuals are lacking access to essential housing resources and rental assistance, many individuals grappling with homelessness face significant challenges in securing stable accommodation. Considering this pressing reality, street outreach workers must remain cognizant of these issues and collaborate closely with a diverse array of housing services, with the aim of catering to the specific needs of the unhoused population they serve.

This collaborative effort may encompass a range of housing solutions, including transitional housing, temporary or long-term housing arrangements, and community-based housing initiatives. A pivotal objective for outreach workers is the implementation of a "housing first" approach, wherein the emphasis is placed on ensuring that individuals are provided with shelter, as this has proven to yield more successful outcomes with substance abuse and mental wellness [30]. In recent years, the focus of outreach efforts has transitioned from merely providing clothing and food to the homeless population to actively facilitating access to stable housing. This process typically commences with assisting access to shelters and drop-in programs, gradually transitioning individuals to transitional facilities, and ultimately working towards securing long-term housing solutions [31]. However, a notable source of frustration for some outreach workers lies in the stringent requirements necessitating the demonstration of chronic homelessness to access housing benefits [32]. The challenging task of documenting

clients' homelessness, including the duration and specific circumstances to meet the criteria, poses an ongoing obstacle. Curtis Smith and Leon Anderson's article [32] sheds light on two key strategies deployed by outreach workers specializing in homelessness: the first involves engaging resistant clients in constructing narratives that, despite initial resistance, offer practical advantages. The second operates at the organizational level, where outreach workers negotiate their clients' identities and life stories within the parameters set by institutional criteria and agency gatekeepers [32].

While the dedication of outreach workers to secure housing for their clients remains unwavering, the persisting lack of transformative social policies and the grueling bureaucratic procedures they must navigate to secure funding for housing often render housing inaccessible. Nevertheless, the challenges, a noticeable co-operation between housing services and street outreach workers is undeniably at play. Within the scope of the project, it is imperative for outreach workers to comprehend the critical necessity of delivering housing services to the individuals they engage with. This understanding is rooted not only in the prevalent housing crisis but also in the continuous interaction and collaboration between the outreach workers, shelters, and housing initiatives within the Peterborough community, aimed at devising sustainable solutions for the marginalized populations.

The collaboration between street outreach workers and professionals in healthcare, housing, and addiction counseling forms the foundation of a comprehensive and integrated support system for marginalized individuals. This collaborative union harnesses the collective understanding and skills from diverse fields, enabling a multifaceted approach that effectively attends to the intricate needs of individuals confronting a range of complex challenges. By fostering such inter-professional collaboration, not only can tailored and cohesive services be provided, but a sustainable support structure can be established, placing the well-being and enduring recovery of individuals at the forefront of community initiatives.

The essence of this collaborative effort lies in its capacity to create an inclusive and empathetic environment, where street outreach workers, in cooperation with multiple professions, advocate for a holistic approach that nurtures positive outcomes and cultivates the overall stability of the communities they provide support too. Through ongoing collaboration and a shared commitment to mutual respect, these professionals work hand in hand to build a more

interconnected and compassionate support network that leaves a lasting and transformative impact on the lives of the marginalized.

The analyzed literature demonstrates the vital role of street outreach workers as a pivotal element in the implementation of alternative policing approaches. With their enduring presence, these workers establish and nurture thoughtful trust and meaningful relationships within marginalized communities, thereby enabling effective short- and long-term crisis management and prevention strategies. Emphasizing a holistic approach, outreach workers prioritize multidisciplinary practices encompassing healthcare, alcohol and addiction treatment, research, and housing services, aimed at providing comprehensive support to marginalized populations.

The findings from the research significantly contribute to the foundational understanding required for the current project, confirming the potential of outreach workers to contribute to the revitalization of Peterborough's downtown core through a holistic and innovative framework. This review serves to propose detailed concepts that foster collaboration among individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, thereby strengthening the safety and well-being of the downtown area, while simultaneously devising sustainable mechanisms to uplift and support marginalized communities.

Ethical & Safety Considerations

Recognizing the power dynamics, cultural intricacies, and vulnerabilities within communities is fundamental in safeguarding human rights and ensuring the well-being of all involved in this endeavor. It is vital to place informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy at the forefront, while fostering a transparent and inclusive approach that upholds the autonomy and dignity of every participant. Moreover, it is paramount to remain committed to the dedication to equity, justice, and the dissemination of research findings for the betterment of the community, thereby upholding the integrity of the research.

The topics under inspection in this project might have evoked a sense of discomfort for some individuals. Participants were given the choice to voluntarily provide their input through surveys. It is important to emphasize that individuals had the right to revoke their consent at any point without needing to provide a justification. In the event of such a decision, the individual's response was promptly discarded, and their autonomy was fully protected, without any adverse consequences.

An integral ethical consideration in this project revolves around the dynamics of power. It is imperative to recognize and address any existing power differentials to ensure that communication and interaction are conducted on a fair and respectful basis. Failure to address such imbalances may result in potential exploitation, manipulation, or biased reporting.

Throughout the duration of the project, there was a persistent commitment to transparency, open communication, and inclusivity, aimed at mitigating any adverse effects stemming from uneven power dynamics. The central goal of the project remains the promotion of empowerment and autonomy for all participating groups.

To uphold the confidentiality of all participants no personal identifying information was collected, such as name, age, and gender. Information was only recorded if individuals provided their explicit consent during surveys. Additionally, all participants were informed of the information being collected and what the potential risks and implications of their decision to consent to participate.

Methodology

The first phase of the project entailed an extensive and thorough review of approximately 30 diverse sources, comprising a range of materials such as peer-reviewed articles, journals, newspaper articles, resources from community, provincial, and federal websites, legal documents, annual reports, and relevant books. The literature review served as the foundational framework for the project, offering an understanding of various research areas. The littrature review dove into topics concerning alternative approaches to policing, explaining models that were particularly pertinent to the unique context of Peterborough's downtown community. Additionally, it shed light on numerous successful programs that have been effectively implemented in relevant contexts. Furthermore, the project involves an in-depth exploration of alternative policing outreach methods, drawing insights from peer reviewed literature that highlights the role of street outreach workers and emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts among various sectors beyond the realm of policing.

The exploration into the ideas on homelessness and outreach remained open- ended, as the project inherently tries to accommodate diverse perspectives and experiences across different populations. Nevertheless, the scope of the information gathering process was constrained by the limitations imposed by restricted access. Such as direct interaction with marginalized populations

was unfeasible within the confines of this study, thus inevitably limiting the scope of individuals who could have been directly engaged with during the research process.

Additionally, it's important to acknowledge various characteristics that may be found within the research. These characteristics need to be acknowledged to properly be measured, described, and interpreted. The study incorporates various qualitative variables, including nominal variables that outlines categories that cannot be inherently ordered, such as gender and race. Subsequently, the study also involves ordinal variables, allowing for the ordering of variables, such as examination of social status, economic standing, age or job titles. The study introduces independent variables, which are factors or conditions manipulated, controlled, or studied to observe their effects. For instance, the businesses themselves serve as independent variables within the study. Conversely, dependent variables represent outcomes or responses influenced or affected by independent variables. In this context, dependent variables include various aspects of businesses' experiences, perceptions, or needs examined concerning their interaction with the Unity Project in downtown Peterborough. These variables may encompass the specific needs of different businesses and the frequency of 911 calls. Within the experimental framework, certain aspects remained consistent providing controlled variables throughout the research. This consistency is reflected in the standardized set of questions presented during the survey processes, ensuring uniformity among the individuals within the same population. It is essential to emphasize that throughout the surveys, the surveyor abstained from providing any personal opinions to uphold the neutrality and objectivity of the research process.

The research is susceptible to various types of biases, each necessitating specific measures to ensure the integrity and accuracy of the findings. The study acknowledges the likelihood of response bias, wherein participants may be inclined to provide inaccurate or misleading information during surveys. Factors contributing to this bias may include the phrasing of questions, participant comfort levels, and the social desirability effect. Although reducing this bias poses a considerable challenge, proactive steps were taken to foster an environment that assures participants high levels of confidentiality and autonomy, thereby encouraging honest and authentic responses. Furthermore, the possibility of non-response bias is recognized, arising from the non-participation of certain individuals in the survey portion. To address this, the research will prioritize measures such as ensuring confidentiality, enhancing accessibility, and employing diverse formatting strategies to encourage widespread participation

and minimize the impact of this bias. Similarly, the study is mindful of the potential presence of sampling or ascertainment bias, which may arise when the selected study participants, Peterborough's downtown businesses, are not fully representative of the broader population under analysis. To combat this, a comprehensive approach was adopted, encompassing an examination of the entire target population to ensure the fair and balanced selection of participants, thereby allowing for a diverse and inclusive representation in the study sample. This was done by ensuring the surveys provided are distributed to all downtown businesses not focusing on one area or business sector, allowing for fair sampling.

Lastly, the study recognizes the potential for self-selection bias, whereby individuals volunteering to respond to surveys may not accurately represent the overall population being analyzed. To counteract this, the research actively encouraged and facilitate the participation of a diverse and extensive range of individuals, ensuring that the sample is as inclusive and representative as possible.

To execute the project, the initial phase involved a comprehensive literature review encompassing both peer-reviewed and grey literature, culminating in a inclusive document spanning approximately 3,000 words. Continuous research efforts persisted beyond this stage, ensuring the project remained firmly grounded in the most recent and pertinent developments in the field, thus sustaining its relevance and currency with respect to the latest news and advancements. After completion of the literature review there was execution of an ethics review before the researcher moved into the practical survey work. Ethics number and statement was provided in all surveys and consent was to be acknowledged and signed on for all survey participants before providing answers to any questions.

The first survey "Welcome businesses to the Unity Project!" was sent out in mid-January 2024, this google survey was designed to gather insights from participating businesses. Featuring eleven questions, the survey was structured to ensure completion within a reasonable timeframe of twelve minutes. It had a diverse range of question types, including multiple-choice, range from one to five, and open-ended short answer questions. These questions delved into various aspects, such as businesses' familiarity with the Unity Project and outreach initiatives, their past experiences with 911 calls for non-violent crises, and their interactions with outreach workers.

The survey was distributed to downtown business owners and workers in the core area of Peterborough. Participation in the survey process was entirely voluntary, ensuring that

respondents provided their input willingly. Distribution methods included the use of QR codes by One City outreach workers during their regular routes (appendix A), facilitating easy access to the survey. Paper copies of the survey were made available upon request to accommodate businesses preferring traditional paper methods.

In addition to gathering responses related to the Unity Project, the survey also collected certain information pertaining to storefront name and job positions of the individual taking the survey. This additional data aimed to provide context and deeper insights into the perspectives of different stakeholders within the downtown business community.

Furthermore, at the conclusion of the survey, businesses were given the opportunity to express their interest in participating in a more in-depth survey. Those interested provided their email addresses for further correspondence, allowing for a deeper exploration of their experiences and perspectives regarding the Unity Project and related outreach initiatives. This approach ensured that businesses had the chance to provide more detailed feedback, contributing to a richer understanding of the program's impact and effectiveness.

After the completion of the initial welcome survey, businesses that opted to provide their email addresses were extended an invitation to participate in a secondary, in-depth Google survey. This follow-up questionnaire was provided to delve into the multifaceted aspects of businesses' interactions with the Unity Project and related outreach endeavors. Comprising eight expansive long-answer questions, the survey aimed to extract insights and perspectives regarding the program. The questions were strategically designed to encourage participants to articulate detailed accounts of their experiences, covering a spectrum of themes including but not limited to the specific needs and challenges faced by their businesses, instances of successful collaborations or interventions facilitated by the Unity Project, constructive criticisms or areas for improvement, and recommendations pertaining to funding strategies and resource allocation.

By providing businesses with ample space and opportunity to express their thoughts, concerns, and suggestions in a free-flowing manner, the secondary survey sought to capture the complexity of their experiences. It served as a platform for businesses to reflect deeply on their engagement with the Unity Project.

The survey data collected through the online surveys contained seven questions between both surveys designed to elicit open-ended responses from participants. Following data collection, thematic analysis was conducted on the textual data to identify recurring themes and

patterns. The analysis involved iterative stages, including data familiarization, coding, theme identification, review, refinement, and interpretation, ensuring a systematic approach to uncovering meaningful insights within the written responses.

All gathered data remains strictly confidential and inaccessible to the public. At the conclusion of the project, all direct survey responses will be permanently deleted to uphold the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Upon the completion of the research, findings from all facets of the study will be accurately collated and synthesized into this final report, poster and oral presentation. These materials will be distributed to the host organization, One City Peterborough, and Trent University. To assure confidentiality and privacy, survey responses will be deleted from the researcher's computer at the conclusion of the project. This critical step emphasises the researcher's dedication to upholding the confidentiality and privacy of the participants.

Results

Table 1: Results over the reporting period from January 17, 2024 - February 17, 2024, showing statistics from the Unity Project regarding services and interactions with downtown Peterborough businesses.

Business Visits	608
Calls for support from businesses	14
Declined services	1
Naloxone trainings	20
Sharps cleanup/training	3

Table 2: Results over the reporting period from January 17, 2024 - February 17, 2024, showing statistics from the Unity Project regarding services and interactions with downtown Peterborough Community Members.

a. Interactions on patrol	279
b. Referrals to supports	19

c. Naloxone handed out	35

The results from Figure one indicates that out of 21 respondents, 14 (66.7%) reported having called 911 for a non-emergency situation involving community safety, while 7 (33.3%) stated they had not.
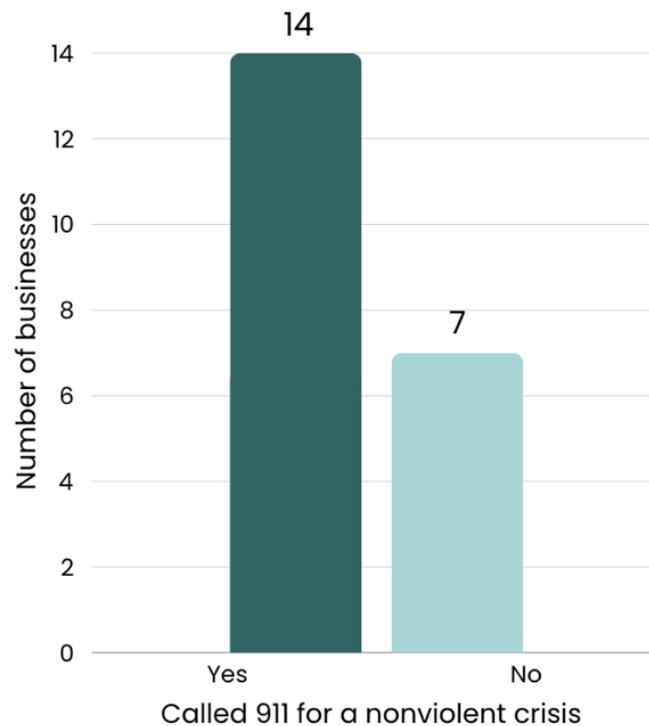

Figure 1: Bar graph showing 21 responses to survey question "Have you or someone from your business had to call 911 for a non-emergency situation involving community safety?".

Out of the 22 businesses surveyed, 21 responded to the "Have you or any of your employees had interaction without reach workers from One city?". Among the respondents, 15 (71.4%) reported having personally had an interaction with outreach workers, while 6 (28.6%) indicated no interaction.

Twenty-two businesses responded to a question "How familiar are you with the roles and responsibilities of an outreach worker?". The responses were distributed across a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "very familiar" and 5 indicating "very unfamiliar". The majority of businesses exhibited varying degrees of familiarity, with 8 (36.4%) indicating being "very

familiar" (rating 1), 5 (22.7%) rating 2, 6 (27.3%) rating 3, 2 (9.1%) rating 4, and 1 (4.5%) rating 5 as "very unfamiliar".

Among the 22 businesses surveyed, all responded to "How comfortable would you feel interacting with an outreach worker?". The responses were distributed across a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "very comfortable" and 5 indicating "very uncomfortable". The results reveal a high level of comfort among the surveyed businesses when it comes to interacting with outreach workers. Among the 22 respondents, the vast majority (90.9%) indicated feeling "very comfortable" engaging with outreach workers, while only one respondent each reported feeling moderately comfortable (Rating 2) or somewhat uncomfortable (Rating 3). No businesses expressed significant discomfort, with none selecting Ratings 4 or 5 on the comfort scale.

When asked to select all that apply to the question "What kind of support would you like to receive from the outreach workers?". The results indicate that among 21 respondents, there is a unanimous preference for de-escalation support from outreach workers, with all participants selecting this option. Additionally, a substantial proportion of respondents expressed interest in receiving mediation (71.4%), connecting with resources, such as housing, mental health support and AOD treatments (66.7%), and sharps cleanup & disposal (66.7%) support. Furthermore, over half of the respondents (52.4%) indicated a desire for harm reduction and naloxone training from outreach workers.

The survey results (Figure 2) reveal a strong inclination among respondents to consider calling the outreach workers from One City Peterborough in non-violent crisis situations as an alternative or addition to dialing 911. Specifically, the majority of respondents (77.3%) indicated a high likelihood of considering this option, with 17 out of 22 respondents selecting "Very likely." Furthermore, 18.2% of respondents expressed a moderate likelihood, with 4 respondents choosing option 2. Notably, none of the respondents indicated a neutral or negative likelihood of considering this alternative, with no selections for options 3 or 4. Only one respondent (4.5%) indicated a low likelihood, selecting "Very unlikely."
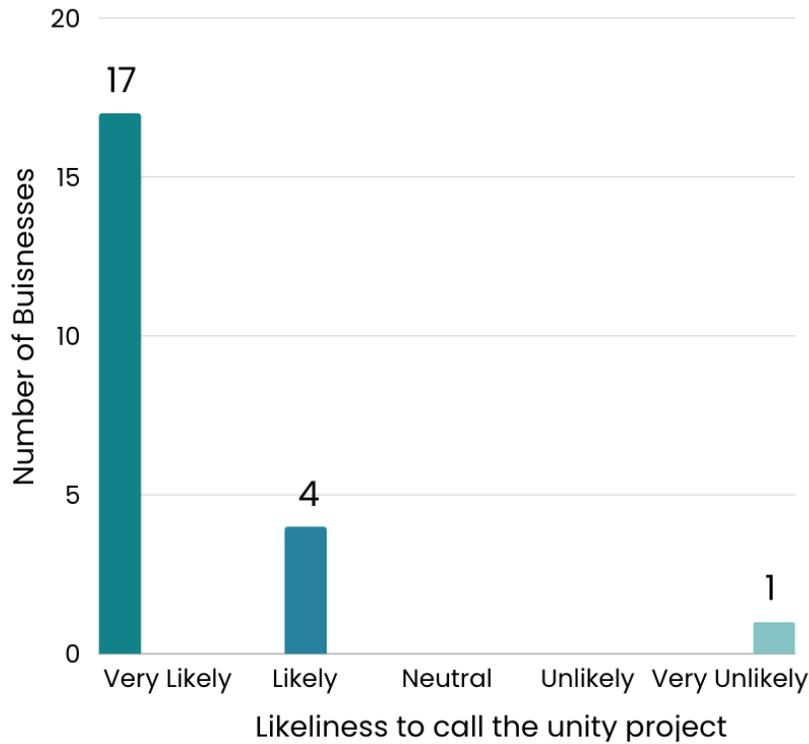
Figure 2: Bar graph showing 22 survey responses to the question "In a non-violent crisis situation, would you consider calling the outreach workers from One City instead of (or addition) to 911?" With 1 being very likely and 5 being very unlikely.

The thematic analysis (Figure 3) of responses to the question regarding how One City's outreach workers can best meet the needs of businesses revealed several key themes. The most prevalent theme identified was "De-escalation/crisis support," mentioned 8 times (21% of total responses). Following closely, "Response" and "Presence" each mentioned by 7 times (20% of total responses), indicating the importance of timely and visible assistance from outreach workers. "Trust" and "Safety" were cited by 5 times each (14% of total responses), highlighting the significance of establishing trust and ensuring a safe environment for businesses. Finally, "Resources" received mention 4 times (11% of total responses), resources within this context means the provision of supports such as food, shelter, and clothing as well as mental health resources, housing and AOD supports.
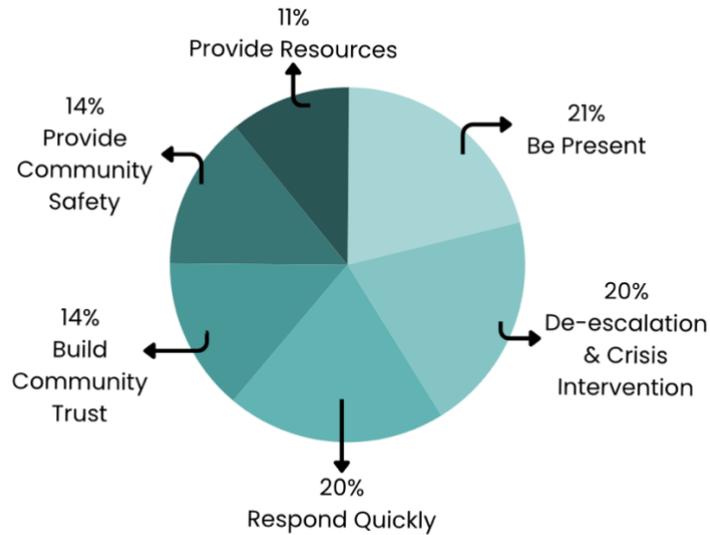
Figure 3: Pie chart showing thematic analysis of the question "How can One City's outreach workers best meet the needs of your business?"

Table 3 presents a summary of responses from five downtown businesses in Peterborough, focusing on six key questions related to the effectiveness and impact of the unity project. The table outlines the themes identified within the written survey responses provided by these businesses.

Table 3: Table showing six questions asked and the themes identified within the written responses provided by five Peterborough's downtown businesses.

Question Asked	Themes Identified from Written Survey Responses					
How would you rate the effectiveness of current community safety initiatives (if any) other than the Unity Project in addressing the needs of businesses in your area?	No other initiatives 5/5*	No police presence 2/5*				

Question						
Are there any specific improvements or adjustments you would recommend for the Unity Project to better serve the needs of downtown businesses?	Better lighting 1/5*	Cameras 1/5*	More awareness 5/5*	Expand hours 4/5*		
How would you measure the success of the Unity Project in terms of its impact on businesses?	More foot traffic downtown 5/5*	Lower crime rates 2/5*	Outreach worker presence 5/5*	Breaking stigma 1/5*	Less frequent 911 calls 3/5*	
What long-term benefits do you foresee for your business and the downtown community because of this project?	Resources 4/5*	Decrease in petty theft 2/5*	Community Safety 5/5*	Mental health support 2/5*	Employee safety 5/5*	Less dependance on police 4/5*
How important do you believe it is to continue funding the Unity Project for the next year to sustain and expand its outreach efforts?	Extremely important 5/5*	More outreach workers 3/5*	Expand hours 5/5*	More availability 5/5 *	Need more funding 5/5*	
Please provide any criticism or critiques you have regarding the Unity Project.	Limited hours 4/5*	Limited awareness 4/5*	Too early to say 2/5*			

* Number of times the theme was identified within the 5 responses.

Discussion

The results show the need for alternative support systems for non-violent crises in downtown areas, as evident by the high reliance on 911 calls by businesses. Despite this reliance, there is a clear preference for the services offered by the Unity Project, indicating growing recognition of its efficacy. Businesses emphasize the importance of presence and rapid response, areas where the Unity Project excels compared to traditional emergency services. Additionally, outreach workers play a crucial role not only in providing resources to marginalized individuals but also in supporting businesses and promoting community support systems. The project's success is measured not only in numerical outcomes like crime reduction but also in qualitative shifts in attitudes and long-term benefits such as addressing systemic issues and ensuring safety for business employees. Despite these successes, critiques regarding misalignment of operational hours need to be addressed. Additionally challenges such as low awareness about general outreach, the Unity project and funding constraints need to be addressed.

Preference for the Unity Project

Figure one illustrates the reality that a significant proportion, 66%, of downtown businesses have found themselves in situations necessitating a call to 911, even in instances categorized as non-violent crises. This statistic highlights a pressing need for a non 911 support system within the downtown area. The reliance on emergency services for non-violent incidents not only strains resources within law enforcement but also suggests gaps in the available support structure. When analyzing the police data spanning from 2021 to 2022, a concerning trend emerges, revealing an 8.3% increase in 911 calls over the decade [6]. This escalation signals the urgency for proactive measures to address the root causes behind these non-violent emergencies. Without intervention, this trend may persist and worsen in the coming years, further burdening emergency services and potentially compromising public safety. In comparison when presented with the choice between contacting the Unity Project or dialing 911, an overwhelming 77% of businesses expressed a preference for utilizing the services offered by the Unity Project as seen within Figure two. This resounding majority emphasizes a growing recognition of the efficacy and suitability of the Unity Project as an alternative avenue for seeking assistance in non-violent crises.

Challenges with contacting emergency services

Anecdotal testimony of a business employee sheds light on the internal dynamics that often deter individuals from promptly reaching out to emergency services. The need to obtain approval from superiors before dialing 911 can create a dilemma, compelling individuals to prioritize organizational matters over personal safety. The requirement to seek approval from superiors before dialing 911 presents individuals with an ethical and practical dilemma, as it forces individuals to navigate conflicting priorities between organizational directives and their own well-being. In the urgency of an emergency, individuals may find themselves torn between personal safety and the obligation to adhere to established protocols. This dilemma places individuals in a position where they must weigh the potential consequences of deviating from organizational guidelines against the immediate threat to their own safety or that of others. The pressure to prioritize organizational matters over personal safety can lead to hesitation, delays in seeking assistance, and heightened levels of stress and anxiety, furthering the already challenging circumstances of the emergency.

This delay in seeking help can impede timely intervention in non-violent crises. Moreover, the formalities associated with contacting emergency services, including the requirement for prior approval, can heighten these concerns, further tilting the balance in favor of organizational considerations over individual well-being. Additionally, apprehensions about potential workplace repercussions or disruptions, particularly in non-violent or internally manageable situations, may dissuade business employees or workers from engaging with law enforcement through 911. Furthermore, individuals may hesitate to call 911 in non-violent crises out of concern that they might be wasting police time and resources. This apprehension arises from the belief that their situation may not warrant immediate police intervention compared to more urgent emergencies. Consequently, individuals may refrain from troubling law enforcement with what they perceive as minor issues, this reluctance to avoid inconveniencing emergency services or worsening already strained resources, this may cause owners and employees a lack of options regarding their safety.

Addressing Symbolic Calling and Psychological Barriers

Offering an alternative contact number to 911, holds promise in addressing these challenges. By providing a dedicated support channel tailored to non-violent crises, the Unity

project can alleviate the burden on emergency services and foster a more accessible avenue for assistance. Additionally, by circumventing the formalities associated with 911 calls, individuals may feel more empowered to seek help without apprehensions about inconveniencing their employers or the symbolic stigma attached to calling 911. In addition to the practical challenges, there's often a symbolic stigma attached to calling 911, especially in non-violent or seemingly minor crises. Many people hesitate to make the call due to a fear of being seen as overreacting, causing unnecessary trouble, or drawing attention to themselves or their situation. This stigma can stem from societal norms that prioritize self-sufficiency and downplay the importance of seeking outside help. As a result, individuals may internalize this stigma and hesitate to reach out for assistance, even when it's urgently needed, further complicating the decision-making process during emergencies. This symbolic idea around 911 shows the concept of "symbolic calling," [33] this idea shows the interaction of social norms and individual decisions surrounding calling emergency response personal. This idea of "symbolic calling" speaks to the emotional weight attached to dialing 911 and the societal expectations that come with placing this call. By providing an alternative support framework that can offer a less formal yet equally effective recourse in times of crisis this may eliminate the stigma and emotional barrier to phoning 911. By providing a rapid and convenient option for seeking assistance, the Unity Project mitigates the psychological barriers associated with traditional emergency calls. The implementation of the Unity Project holds the potential to alleviate the escalating trend of non-violent 911 calls while providing individuals with a supportive and accessible safety net. By prioritizing personal well-being over organizational concerns and addressing the stigma surrounding emergency calls, the project can promote a safer and more inclusive downtown environment for businessowners, employers and marginalized individuals.

To facilitate calls for rapid alternative response, it's imperative that both businesses and individuals are not only acquainted with the Unity Project but also understand the roles and responsibilities of outreach workers. When individuals grasp the distinction between the emotional gravity of dialing 911 and the supportive assistance, they can receive from reaching out to outreach workers, the system can function optimally. However, for this to succeed, individuals must be well-versed in the workings of the project and feel sufficiently at ease entrusting their safety to the outreach workers.

Enhancing Awareness and Familiarity

The responses from businesses regarding their familiarity with the roles and responsibilities of outreach workers were considered with 22 businesses surveyed, only 8 indicated awareness of these roles, while 14 admitted their lack of familiarity. This disparity highlights a significant gap in general outreach knowledge. By enhancing awareness about outreach services there is a potential for increased utilization of services, as individuals may develop a better understanding and feel more at ease accessing these resources.

The familiarity effect, also known as the mere-exposure effect, explains our inclination to develop preferences for things merely by being exposed to them [34]. Therefore, by fostering heightened awareness and familiarity with the Unity Project, both individuals and businesses will naturally gravitate towards engaging with them, feeling at ease in doing so.

When asked about businesses' interactions with outreach workers at the time of the survey, 15 businesses reported having had such interactions, while 6 did not. Considering that over 600 business visits have now been conducted, it's expected that all businesses would have had an interaction with an outreach worker by now, increasing their awareness and familiarity. If businesses were to respond to this question at the current time the results would likely increase as the Unity project is now well established, and business may have had the chance to interact with an outreach worker.

Comfort Level and Interaction with Outreach Workers

The comfort level of businesses in interacting with outreach workers is showcased within the results encouragingly, 20 out of 22 businesses expressed comfort, with only 2 indicating discomfort. This is promising, as it suggests that individuals may be more inclined to seek assistance if they feel comfortable interacting with outreach workers. Over time, as more interactions occur, this comfort level is likely to increase, developing trust and normalizing interactions between outreach workers and businesses.

Benefits of Outreach Workers over Police Intervention

Offering crisis response workers whom businesses feel comfortable interacting with provides a crucial service that policing services may not be able to deliver. Many individuals may feel uneasy interacting with police officers due to various factors such as racial biases, stigma surrounding mental health, power dynamics, and gender biases. According to Statistics Canada, less than half of Canadians believe their local police are approachable and easy to talk to, highlighting a significant issue in community policing [35]. The preference for interacting

with outreach workers over police officers' stems from the perception of trust and safety. Outreach workers are often seen as more trustworthy and less intimidating, thanks to their non-authoritarian approach. One respondent mentioned in the survey that having this option provides support, especially when working alone, as calling the police can sometimes be intimidating and may not always result in the desired assistance.

Lack of police presence& other initiatives

Within a survey response a business highlighted the significance of presence, revealing that over their many years of operation, they had only once seen a police officer patrolling their business area. This shows a critical deficiency in law enforcement visibility and engagement within the community. It suggests a concerning absence of proactive policing and deterrence against potential criminal activities. For this business, the rarity of police patrols symbolizes a broader issue of underrepresentation and neglect in law enforcement efforts directed towards ensuring public safety. Such a lack of police visibility not only undermines the perceived safety of businesses and residents but also diminishes trust in the efficacy of law enforcement in addressing and preventing crime.

Additionally in a brief survey response, businesses expressed unawareness of other community safety initiatives apart from the Unity Project. This indicates either a lack of awareness regarding existing programs or the absence of alternative initiatives within Peterborough specifically focused on downtown outreach while supporting businesses with non-emergency responses. This observation is noteworthy, especially considering the presence of programs like the Peterborough Police Service's Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT) [14], which operates similarly but seems to be less known among businesses. Lacking the knowledge for police provided services such as the MCIT shows an interesting acknowledgement that presence of law enforcement in downtown is lacking.

This scarcity of police presence highlights the Unity Project's advantage in presence, numerous businesses have observed the outreach workers consistently building connections downtown. This observation is substantiated by the extensive network of over 600 business connections and 280 community member interaction established by the Unity Project workers. The lack of police presence shows the advantage of the Unity Project in providing presence within downtown.

Efficiency in Low-Priority Calls and Naloxone Administration

For law enforcement low-priority calls (Priority 3-4), which do not necessitate active emergency lights and sirens and are generally perceived as less urgent, often relating to non-violent situations such as nuisance complaints or disturbances. These low priority calls, average a 16-minute response time from the Peterborough police and are said to tie up officer resources and time that could be allocated to more critical matters [6]. A study by the University of Fraser Valley advocated for a more effective response to low-priority calls, suggesting the utilization of formalized liaisons from specific community agencies, particularly for mental health-related incidents [36]. This approach fosters consistency and familiarity, nurturing relationships within the community. Having outreach workers from one city respond to such calls offers a secondary level of support, enabling police officers to offload low-priority tasks, thereby reducing costs and workloads associated with these calls. Moreover, if police were to handle low-priority calls, the response time could be lengthier compared to outreach workers from one city, who can swiftly respond within approximately 14 minutes via bicycle across a 4.8 km route (Appendix A). This rapid service not only enhances response times but also contributes to overall efficiency by having a two-service response team each being able to respond to their prioritized calls.

In many critical situations, prioritization and swift outreach play a pivotal role, especially when it comes to responding to alcohol and drug-related emergencies. With the escalating prevalence of fatal drugs like fentanyl in downtown communities, a proactive approach becomes imperative. Specifically, there's a pressing need for rapid response, in the administration of Narcan/Naloxone.

While acknowledging that such situations do not constitute low-priority calls, advocating for outreach workers to deliver rapid assistance to individuals experiencing active overdose is essential. Given their presence in downtown areas, outreach workers are well-positioned to provide immediate aid to those overdosing within the core of the city. This rapid intervention ideally serves as a crucial initial response, complementing the efforts of emergency services.

Naloxone, capable of restoring breathing within 2-5 minutes, stresses the urgency of prompt administration. By enabling outreach workers to quickly respond alongside emergency services, they establish an additional layer of community trust and safety. Moreover, apart from administering Narcan themselves, outreach workers have distributed 35 kits and trained 20 individuals on its usage. Historically, underutilization of naloxone may stem from stigma

surrounding its possession and limited availability [37]. By equipping businesses and community members with these resources, outreach workers can foster correct utilization of naloxone. Studies have shown that brief educational sessions on naloxone, opioids, and overdose lead to improved post-intervention outcomes [37]. Therefore, by providing resources and education, outreach workers play a vital role in safeguarding the community and addressing drug-related emergencies effectively.

Provision of Resources and Collaboration

Extending beyond providing Naloxone kits and training businesses advocate for the necessity of outreach workers not only extending their support marginalized individuals and community members but also to businesses themselves.

Leveraging their expertise at collaboration, outreach workers possess a wealth of community resources that can serve as a vital support system for both those in need and local businesses. Outreach initiatives should be meticulously tailored to cater to individuals encountering barriers in accessing essential services. Particularly, individuals grappling with homelessness and mental health issues are susceptible to being overlooked by conventional service channels due to the challenges in engaging them effectively [38]. Thus, the overarching objective of outreach endeavors is to access the layers of difficulty and reach those who would otherwise remain unreachable [39].

To actualize this outreach design effectively, fostering increased collaboration among outreach workers and other service providers within downtown Peterborough is imperative. A significant component enabling the facilitation of referrals lies in establishing robust connections with local businesses. Therefore, a primary recommendation would be to adopt interdisciplinary action, drawing upon the expertise and resources across various domains.

Critical resources encompass alcohol and other drug (AOD) treatment, mental health and wellness support, long-term housing solutions, access to healthcare services, as well as fundamental necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. By comprehensively addressing these needs, outreach programs can better serve marginalized individuals and foster a more inclusive and supportive community environment.

Moreover, equipping businesses with centralized resource connectors this enhances the efficacy of resource recommendations. By having a streamlined method to contact this central resource distributor, businesses can efficiently access the support needed to assist individuals in

crisis. In instances where individuals require assistance, businesses can readily connect them with outreach workers, thereby amplifying the distribution of resources. This approach fosters a sense of trust between individuals and businesses, as the latter demonstrate a commitment to offering alternatives to police interventions. Simultaneously, businesses can take pride in knowing they are actively contributing to supporting individuals in need. Ultimately, this collaborative framework aims to establish a secure and efficient mechanism through which individuals can rely on businesses for assistance, while businesses, in turn, can fulfill their role in providing support to those in need, thereby fostering a stronger sense of community cohesion and mutual support.

Building Trust and Safety

A need shown by businesses is the establishment of community trust and safety. This encompassed the safety of all community members and the cultivation of trust among them. The Unity Project is dedicated to advancing harm reduction strategies, which encompass a spectrum of principles ranging from risk mitigation and crisis management to prioritizing health services tailored to meet individuals at their current stage [24]. Furthermore, the Unity Project supports the utilization of peer workers, many of whom have lived through similar experiences. These practices serve to foster trust within the community, as peer workers can authentically connect with others by drawing from their own encounters and understanding.

The advantages of employing individuals with lived experiences as service providers are plenty. They bring empathy, tolerance of diverse behaviors, the ability to relate to service recipients, familiarity with available resources, positive role modeling, and a profound sense of responsibility for clients. Peer workers often deliver a range of services, including information and referrals, skills training, emotional support, self-exploration, problem identification, goal setting, action planning, and monitoring progress towards achieving goals [38]. Fundamental to effective outreach is respect for the client. To excel, the program must prioritize building trust and respect, thereby fostering continued interaction and engagement. Outreach workers thrive on establishing meaningful community connections, rather than simply rushing from one call to the next. Taking the time to truly understand individuals and forging trusting communication lays the foundation for enduring relationships [39]. This approach not only ensures the safety and confidence of businesses receiving support from outreach workers but also empowers

marginalized individuals to feel valued and supported in accessing resources, thereby fostering reciprocal respect towards the outreach workers.

It's crucial to recognize that as the program progresses, it's imperative that outreach workers avoid adopting a pseudo first responder role, merely going from one crisis to another [23]. Such a shift would undermine the principle of building engagements and connections within the community. Opportunities for meaningful interaction would diminish, potentially leading to the gradual letdown of the program's effectiveness. Failure to prioritize trust-building and community connections could result in the service devolving into an emergency response system akin to 911, but for lower priority calls. To prevent this scenario, two key suggestions are proposed. Firstly, businesses must understand and appreciate that this service operates differently from 911. While outreach workers can indeed respond to non-violent crisis situations, they require sufficient time to establish connections rather than hastily moving on from interactions. Expecting swift resolution without allowing for meaningful engagement will distort the outreach workers' true role and purpose. Secondly, for outreach workers to effectively uphold their responsibilities of fostering community trust and safety, there must be adequate staffing levels to ensure swift responses. Striking a balance between establishing connections and maintaining a rapid outreach response is essential. If outreach workers become too preoccupied with building connections and consequently fail to respond promptly to calls, it risks undermining trust and rapport with those seeking assistance. Thus, achieving an equilibrium between connection-building and rapid response remains top priority for the program's success.

Metrics of Success and Long-term Benefits

As this research strives to understand the needs of businesses understanding their perspective on how they view success is integral. Within the survey responses businesses have highlighted several key metrics they deem crucial in gauging the effectiveness of the Unity Project.

One such metric is the reduction of crime rates, which is commonly associated with enhancing public safety. While this is understandable, it may not fully capture the goals of the Unity Project, as crime prevention traditionally falls within the realm of law enforcement. While the Unity Project may contribute to a decrease in crime through fostering mutual respect among downtown individuals and businesses, as well as providing resources, it's essential to recognize that crime reduction alone may not fully capture the holistic impact of the project. However, some businesses thought the presence of Unity workers and their prompt response to community

needs are indicators of success. Seeing these workers actively engaged within the community not only signifies their impact but also cultivates a sense of security among residents and businesses. Measuring response times further reinforces the project's commitment to rapid assistance and accentuates its visibility. A reduction in non-violent crisis calls to 911 from downtown businesses serves as a concrete indication of the project's ability to ease the strain on municipal resources and enhance public safety more effectively.

Additionally, a metric business identified is an increase in downtown traffic and economic vitality, they believe this metric could show enhanced community safety and trust-building. This rational lies in the notion that safe downtown areas typically attract more foot traffic and economic activity, signaling a sense of vibrancy, prosperity, and protection. An improved downtown environment would raise a sense of community cohesion, as residents and visitors may feel drawn to communal spaces where they can interact, shop, and socialize without feeling unsafe. An uptick in downtown traffic and economic vitality can show not only a sign of businesses success but can also provide evidence of the broader positive impact of the Unity Project on the overall well-being and vibrancy of the community.

While numeric metrics offer concrete and easily quantifiable evidence of success, some businesses advocate for a more nuanced approach that incorporates qualitative measures. These qualitative indicators, though less tangible, are seen as equally important in assessing the true impact of the Unity Project. For instance, the breakdown of stigmas associated with marginalized individuals is considered a significant marker of success by many businesses. By challenging and dismantling negative stereotypes and biases, the Unity Project contributes to creating a more inclusive and empathetic community environment. This qualitative shift in attitudes and perceptions not only benefits marginalized individuals by greater acceptance and understanding but also enhances social cohesion and harmony within the community. Similarly, the promotion of community safety education and resource provision is viewed as an aspect of the project's success. By equipping community members with the knowledge and skills necessary to identify and address safety concerns effectively, the Unity Project empowers individuals to play an active role in protection of their neighborhoods. This educational component not only enhances community resilience and preparedness but also promotes a culture of collective responsibility and mutual support.

In essence, while numeric metrics provide valuable insights into the tangible outcomes of the Unity Project, qualitative measures offer a more holistic understanding of its broader societal impact. By embracing both quantitative and qualitative indicators of success, businesses can gain a comprehensive perspective on the effectiveness of the project in achieving its overarching goals of fostering community well-being, inclusivity, and safety.

In addition to inquiring about the metrics defining success for businesses, they were also asked to envision the potential long-term benefits of the Unity Project's sustained implementation. Businesses recognized a significant long-term benefit in the project's capacity to address systemic issues such as housing insecurity, addiction, and mental health challenges through its resource recommendations. While acknowledging the substantial work required for systemic dismantling, businesses noted the pivotal role the Unity Project plays in providing struggling individuals with access to resources they can utilize. Over time, this proactive approach is expected to contribute to the creation of a more supportive environment for both customers and employees.

Furthermore, businesses foresaw the long-term benefit of ensuring safety and support for employees, particularly those working alone or during late hours. This assurance eliminates the need to depend solely on law enforcement interventions or compromise on personal safety boundaries to seek assistance. By providing a reliable support system, the Unity Project empowers employees to navigate challenging situations effectively, thereby fostering a safer work environment.

Additionally, businesses identified a potential positive outcome in the decreased dependence on traditional law enforcement interventions. Through its holistic approach to community safety and well-being, the Unity Project offers alternative avenues for addressing issues and conflicts, reducing the reliance on punitive measures. This shift towards collaborative problem-solving not only enhances community trust but also promotes a more inclusive and empathetic approach to addressing social challenges.

Funding

These ideas of success provide a lovely idealistic scenario; however, to achieve long-term benefits, this would require funding. When queried about increasing funding for the Unity Project, the resounding response from businesses was affirmative. Many cited the project's role in fostering a safer downtown environment, and a hope for an overall surge in foot traffic.

Consequently, businesses expressed a willingness to back the Unity Project, provided it translates into tangible business growth. However, for the Unity Project to reciprocate this support, adequate funding is imperative. Yet, a challenge arises if businesses refrain from contributing. Without their financial backing, the viability of the project hangs in the balance. Conversely, it's reasonable to expect that thriving businesses, sustained by increased patrons shopping and using the businesses, could then contribute to the Unity Project financially.

Currently, the Unity Project draws funding primarily from downtown businesses, supplemented by the Community Foundation of Greater Peterborough and United Way Peterborough and District [40]. Nevertheless, deliberations should ensue regarding the potential for external funding for social services. Initial discussions explored the Downtown Business Improvement Area (DBIA) funding the project for a year, although this proposal ultimately fell through. The strain on small businesses post-pandemic exacerbates this issue, compounded by their ongoing tax obligations to the city and levies to the DBIA [40].

In 2017, the DBIA piloted a project employing private security guards as "Downtown Ambassadors" to enhance shopper safety and deter "anti-social" behavior. Additionally, in 2022, city council endorsed funding for the DBIA to appoint a "navigator" facilitating collaboration between businesses and social service agencies [40]. However, this funding was subsequently withdrawn and reallocated. These initiatives show the DBIA's recognition of the need to address social issues downtown. Nonetheless, this dynamic places businesses in a quandary; while they fund programs to enhance downtown safety, they may argue that such responsibility should fall on the municipality [40].

When asked within a news interview the chair of the DBIA stated that the DBIA is pleased to see social service agencies stepping up to take on initiatives in the downtown [40]. If businesses perceive a disconnect between their levy fees to the DBIA and the lack of support for vital community programs, they may withdraw their support out of frustration with the perceived imbalance in responsibility. Resolving this tension requires careful negotiation and collaboration among stakeholders to ensure downtown's vitality and safety [40].

Stanford University has outlined ten nonprofit funding models, among which the "Public Provider" model emerges as the most promising for implementation [41]. This model involves nonprofit organizations collaborating with government agencies to deliver essential social services, a scenario particularly relevant for initiatives like community safety and resource

allocation. In certain instances, the government opts to outsource service delivery while stipulating specific criteria for nonprofits to secure funding. This may include reimbursement formulas or a request for proposal (RFP) process [41]. Adopting such a model for the Unity Project is advisable, however funding would ideally be sourced from the Downtown Business Improvement Area (DBIA). However, even with DBIA funding, adhering to this approach ensures that the project remains aligned with community service standards and protocols.

The funding aspect of this project directly correlates with the improvements and critiques businesses have provided in the feedback.

Critiques & Improvements

One notable challenge identified by businesses is the misalignment between the operational hours of the Unity Project and those of businesses. Currently, the Unity Project operates from Tuesday to Saturday, between 11:00 am and 6:00 pm. Numerous businesses are advocating for an extension of these hours into the evening, citing the heightened need for support during these times. Many businesses have highlighted that during the overnight hours, they often experience a surge in minor theft incidents, which, while seemingly insignificant, cumulatively amount to significant inventory losses and financial setbacks for small establishments. Moreover, businesses have expressed the desire for an increase in the number of employees to facilitate more efficient response to calls for assistance. However, both concerns emphasize the unrelenting need for additional funding. It's evident that businesses are voicing these requests not out of criticism, but rather as a testament to the support and demand for enhanced services provided by the Unity Project. Addressing these challenges will require strategic allocation of resources and collaborative efforts to ensure that the Unity Project can effectively meet the evolving needs of the community.

Furthermore, a secondary critique raised was the need for increased awareness and promotion of the Unity Project. Several businesses offered insightful suggestions for improvement, including featuring an article in the Peterborough Currents, hosting an open house at One City Peterborough, and enhancing social media presence, specifically through regular posts about the Unity Project. In response to these recommendations, the Unity Project has diligently implemented all three initiatives.

Despite the proactive measures taken by the Unity Project, it remains imperative that these efforts persist. Maintaining an active social media presence is particularly advantageous,

given its ability to reach a wide audience quickly in today's technologically driven age. However, it's essential to acknowledge that not all individuals have access to technology. To effectively address this, establishing a physical presence is vital. This entails not only having Unity workers actively engage with individuals in person making connections and educating but also ensuring an awareness presence, this could be by distributing flyers around downtown areas. This dual approach ensures visibility and accessibility for all community members, regardless of their technological access. By consistently reinforcing and reminding the community about the Unity Project, individuals are more likely to be aware of its existence and feel comfortable utilizing its services when needed. Therefore, ongoing representation and reminders are essential components in ensuring the Unity Project remains visible, accessible, and utilized by those who require assistance.

Assessment

The assessment of Peterborough's downtown businesses' outreach needs in relation to the services provided by the Unity Project reveals a strong alignment between demand and supply. The Unity Project effectively addresses these needs by offering rapid response, presence, and comprehensive assistance tailored to the community's requirements. Despite its effectiveness, the assessment also identifies areas for improvement, such as increasing awareness about outreach workers' roles and aligning operational hours with business needs. Considering the challenges in sustaining and scaling its services, there appears to be a clear need for future funding to expand the Unity Project's outreach efforts.

Limitations

There are several limitations that must be acknowledged within this research. Firstly, a significant constraint was the timing of the program assessment. Conducted just two weeks into the implementation of the Unity Project, businesses expressed difficulty in providing accurate responses due to the short duration of the program. This constraint is compounded by the small sample size, with only 22 responses for the first survey and 5 for the second. Such a limited sample may skew the data and fail to represent the full spectrum of business needs in downtown. Additionally, the voluntary nature of the survey introduces a selection bias, as businesses that are more inclined to engage with outreach workers or support the program may be more likely to respond. This lack of negative feedback may not accurately reflect the broader sentiments of all businesses in the community. Moreover, these limitations may be linked to the awareness of the

Unity Project among businesses. Many respondents noted a lack of social media presence or knowledge regarding the program, which could have deterred participation in the surveys. Consequently, businesses unaware of the project may not have had the opportunity to provide input, further limiting the comprehensiveness of the data. Recognizing these limitations is crucial for interpreting the findings accurately and understanding the scope of the research's conclusions.

While the insights gathered from the surveys offer valuable perspectives, they may not fully capture the diverse needs and opinions of all businesses in downtown areas. Therefore, future research should aim to address these limitations by conducting assessments over a longer duration, increasing outreach efforts to improve awareness among businesses, and employing strategies to mitigate selection bias in survey responses. By doing so, a more comprehensive understanding of the Unity Project's impact and effectiveness can be achieved.

Future recommendation

Several prospective studies could contribute to a deeper understanding of the Unity Project's impact. Firstly, annual evaluations utilizing metrics such as trends in 911 calls could provide insights into the program's long-term effectiveness. Additionally, there's a crucial need to explore funding strategies, potentially through the development of a sustainable funding model. This endeavor might entail investigating funding models such as public-private partnerships, grant opportunities, and crowdfunding techniques.

Additionally, conducting assessments from the perspective of community members, including both downtown business patrons and marginalized individuals, could offer invaluable perspectives on the project's efficacy and areas for improvement.

Lastly, Investigating the influence of the Unity Project on law enforcement, encompassing considerations such as law enforcement's receptiveness to the initiative, potential shifts in resource allocation and workload, as well as changes in response times.

Conclusion

Through the use of surveys distributed to downtown businesses and employing a thematic analysis methodology, this research has provided valuable insights into the current outreach landscape and the effectiveness of the Unity Project's interventions. The findings show a notable alignment of needs between businesses and the Unity Project, with widespread recognition of the program's positive impact on crisis resolution, presence, and community well-being. However,

identified areas for enhancement include the need for better coordination between business and outreach hours, as well as the enhancement of awareness initiatives for the Unity Project. Additionally, there is a requirement for increased funding. In essence, this assessment reaffirms the significance of the Unity Project in addressing downtown tensions while also providing valuable insights into avenues for improvement and expansion. By prioritizing increased funding and awareness efforts, stakeholders can further amplify the impact of the Unity Project, ensuring its sustained effectiveness in fostering a safer and more cohesive downtown community in Peterborough.

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Appendix A

Figure 4: Image of Unity Project boundaries