

Jasper Community Team: Backgrounder

Purpose/Membership: The Municipality of Jasper has a municipal-lead but more community-based network called the Jasper Community Team (JCT). JCT is comprised of members from across all sectors, working together to promote optimal wellbeing across the lifespan for all Jasper residents. So, while the group does not focus exclusively on diversity and inclusion, members recognize that achieving optimal wellbeing at any age is inextricably linked to a person's sense of belonging and connection to community life. With that in mind, trends and opportunities regarding diversity and inclusion are raised often and the group frequently problem solves around how to better connect with harder-to-reach residents like those at risk of discrimination or exclusion, those living with mental health issues, residents facing adversity or newcomers to the community.

JCT takes a person-centered, whole systems approach rather than setting one issue to focus on. This way, the group is poised to prevent or respond in a coordinated way to any social issue, trend or opportunity that presents itself.

Activities/ Frequency of Meetings: JCT recognizes that there is vulnerability inherent in every distinct life-stage and that no one social issue will be resolved without looking at the needs of the whole person and without engaging all sectors of the community in the process. JCT members are invited to participate in four Community Conversations per month nine months of the year (excluding July, August and December). Each conversation is focused on one life-stage: Early Childhood, School-Age, Adult and Senior. At each conversation, the group identifies social trends they are noticing and opportunities to take collaborative action to prevent or respond to social trends being identified. By meeting regularly, the group prioritizes prevention and attempts to address social trends before they become harder-to-tackle social issues.

Municipality's Involvement: The Municipality of Jasper's Community Development Manager is tasked with recruiting JCT members, engaging members, retaining members, facilitating the monthly conversations, documenting the social trends being identified, documenting the action planning that occurs and communicating with members. The Community Development Manager also reports to the Director of Community and Family Services on the monthly trends being identified. The Director then circulates that report to the Chief Administrative Officer and to Mayor and Council. In that monthly report, the Community Development Manager will highlight any trends that may have municipal implications down the road. The Community Development Manager is responsible for documenting the trends brought forward by the community and then seeking opportunities to address those trends whether that be through applying for external grant funding or proposing a change to internal programs or policy. JCT allows the community to keep a finger on its own pulse and stay ahead of trends that may have an adverse impact on residents down the road.

Member's Involvement: Members of JCT bring unique and diverse perspectives to the conversations. At the same time, all members can use the information they hear to inform their

own work within their own realm. For example, a human resource manager at a large hotel can learn about social trends impacting the community and then use that knowledge to inform their human resource programs and policies within that company.

Example activities:

In 2017, JCT members identified that local youth were reporting high levels of stress and anxiety. In the process of researching and problem solving, members suggested that local teens may benefit from free access to recreation at the local facilities. Jasper’s Council approved a pilot project in 2018 granting local youth free access to the municipal recreation facilities and during the nine month trial period, there was a marked improvement in the local teen population’s sense of belonging and connection to the community. While the presenting issue was more along the lines of mental health issues, free access to unstructured recreation options promoted inclusion and bolstered local youth’s sense of connection to their community. The percentage of youth who reported feeling connect to their community increased from 27 per cent to 52 per cent. Many parents and facility staff remarked that they noted an increase in diversity among facility users and that the change was really positive for all users. In July 2019, Council voted in favour of keeping the free passes for all local youth – a move that promotes inclusion and recognizes the value of diversity in promoting health and wellbeing for Jasper’s teens.

In 2018, JCT members identified the need to have more a diverse range of perspectives around the table. JCT members asked people who do not join the JCT, what the reasons were that they could not participate. A number of barriers were identified and the *'Host Your Own Conversation'* idea was born. Armed with that collaboratively developed idea, the Community Development Manager was able to secure external funding to make that initiative happen. Now in its pilot year, the *Host Your Own Conversation* initiative encourages groups of people to have their own conversation about the community at a time that works for them, in a place that feels right and in a language of their choice. The Municipality of Jasper, with funding from Alberta Health Services, offers snacks as an incentive to participate. So far, 3 out of 6 conversations have taken place. JCT has been able to glean the unique and harder-to-reach perspective of youth, marginalized adults and marginalized seniors through this initiative. In the process, JCT has also built a stronger relationship with the folks who chose to take the lead and host their own conversation.

More information:

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