

2021

Post-secondary Strategy Year End Reflection Brief





What this document is...

Hi!

Welcome to our year end review of RECOVER's Post-Secondary Strategy. RECOVER is the City of Edmonton's approach to improving urban wellbeing.

RECOVER is multi-faceted, and involves working with people in a wide variety of settings. One of those settings is in the post-secondary system. This reflection on the 2021 Post-Secondary Strategy is part of RECOVER's larger approach to evaluation, wherein we evaluate "on the go," for the purpose of learning about our work, and to guide future strategic direction and decisions.

Thanks for your interest in reading it!

RECOVER is honoured to acknowledge that we learn, grow, and gather on Treaty 6 territory and Métis Nation of Alberta Region IV, which is the traditional and contemporary home of many Indigenous peoples including the nehiyawak, Niitsitapi, Nakota Sioux, Saulteaux, Dene, Métis, and Inuit among many others. It is a privilege to find ourselves in relationship to this ancient gathering place, and we commit to do all we can to recognize and renew those relations.

Where we started

In the [2020 Post-Secondary Strategy Evaluation report](#), RECOVER reported on three key lessons that were learned through post-secondary work that year:

Lesson #1:

*Gifts Emerge From
Relational Work*

Lesson #2:

*Practical application of the
framework can be tricky*

Lesson #3:

*RECOVER's involvement in
the classroom can be
either "off-the-shelf" or
"custom built"*

The Context of 2021

Over the past year, MacEwan University students and staff have grappled with constantly changing expectations, an unpredictable environment, and profound fatigue due to the COVID-19 pandemic. There have been switches between in-person and online learning, asynchronous and synchronous learning environments, and a reconfiguration of what a 'campus community' means. With this lens and the understanding that the context at MacEwan was constantly changing over the year, students and staff were tired, burnt-out, and saving energy for their recovery and wellbeing.

RECOVER's work within the post-secondary context was primarily spent on sharing the wellness framework, educating people on how it was developed, and thinking about how it might be integrated into things happening at MacEwan. However, given the challenges presented by the pandemic, there was little space and capacity to do the work at a large scale.

As a result of the key learnings from 2020 -- and due to larger contextual challenges in the time of the pandemic, **in 2021 RECOVER focused its work on scaling scree*** in three contexts:

- the classroom
- the MacEwan Community, and
- within the RECOVER team

*See pages 7-8 of [this report](#) for an explanation of how RECOVER understands the different dimensions of scaling

In the classroom

MacEwan Studio Arts Course: 2D Foundations Theory & Structure

Through Careers & Experience at MacEwan University, RECOVER was brought in as a community partner to build a community-engaged learning project in the class. Students were given a presentation about RECOVER and then designed collages that shared their understanding and interpretation of the story behind RECOVER. The Recover team was then invited into the studio to view and provide feedback on the student's collages. We were able to pick art that would be used for future Recover work and had a student complete a [blog post](#) about her experience and reflection on urban wellbeing themes with the creation of art.

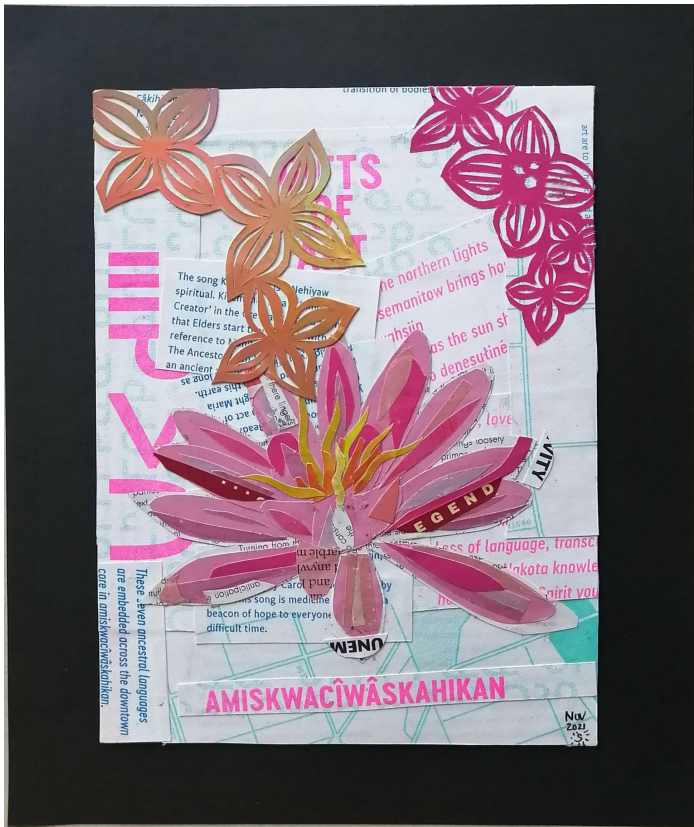
MacEwan Ethnographic Methods Course: Single-Participant Ethnography meets Organizational Ethnography

In continued partnership with MacEwan's Anthropology, Economic, and Political Science Department, RECOVER was invited to be the key stakeholder (community partner) in another student-led research project. The goal of this project was to capture Susan Coward's experiences and tacit knowledge of working with RECOVER.

Susan and the RECOVER team participated in a series of interviews with Dr. Jennifer Long (instructor for the course), members presented the Wellbeing Framework to the 40-member class, and participated in the final presentation or rather, 'unveiling of student prototypes'. Outputs of this project included a transcription of Susan's stories, a code book of latent meanings (including an analysis as related to the wellbeing framework), and prototyped artifacts.

How we applied the lessons from 2020: Within both of courses, RECOVER leaned into the "custom built" approach to working with professors and students in the classroom. By doing so, course participants were better able to reflect on and apply insights from the wellbeing framework, and how it could be applied to their coursework.

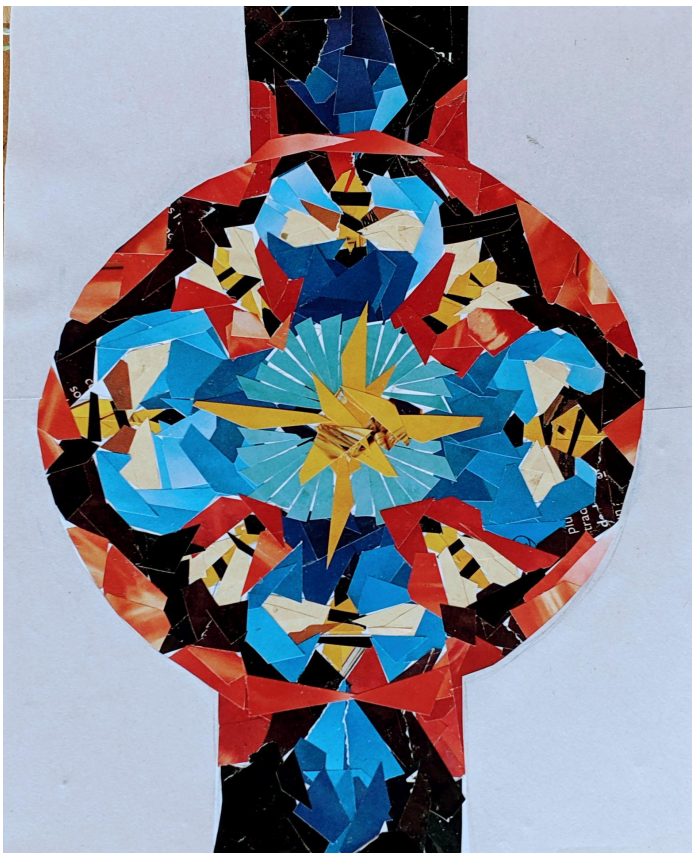
Student artwork examples from 2D Foundations Theory & Structure course



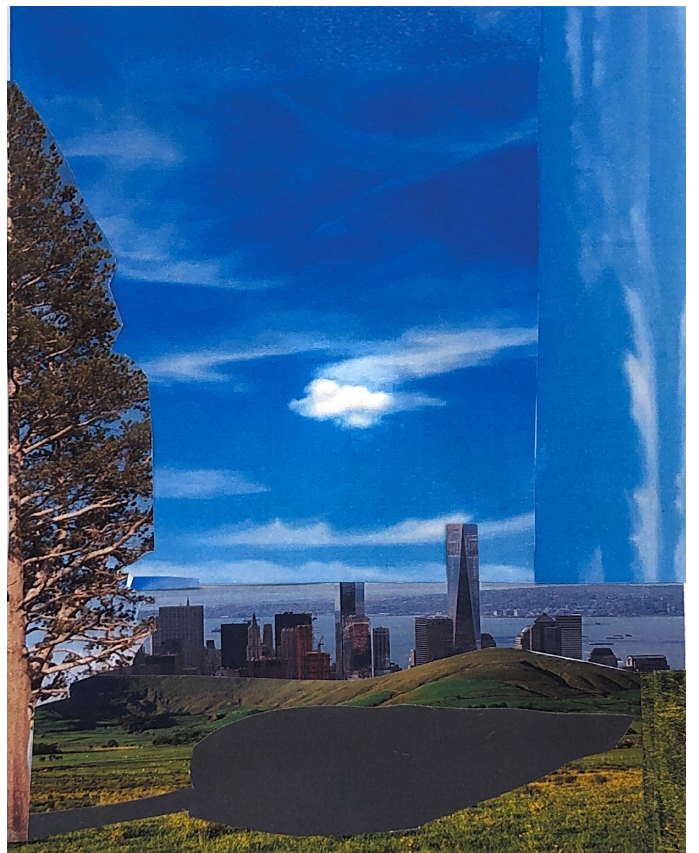
by Shyla Pellandini



by Alanna Henker



by Hanh Nguyen



by Dexter Jordan

In the MacEwan Community

The Interdisciplinary Dialogue Project

The annual Interdisciplinary Dialogue Project is an initiative at MacEwan that brings together faculty, students, and staff from different disciplines and members of the broader public to explore a social justice issue. This year, the topic was RECOVERY. The project was launched focusing on colonialism and urban wellness and what that means for RECOVERY. At the launch, RECOVER core team member Azkaa Rahman presented RECOVER Urban Wellbeing to students, staff, and the community. There was also a dialogue with Dr. Jill Stein, who works in decolonization and community advocacy.

Community Gardens

A student approached the Social Innovation Institute to learn more about RECOVER and the wellbeing framework because she took a course in social innovation and psychological wellbeing. Her paper was meant to explore a social innovation project tied to psychological concepts to think about how wellbeing could be explored in a community project. It was a theoretical proposal, but she integrated the Wellbeing Framework into a proposed community garden for her class. This created an interesting conversation for the professor and her class about how they could learn about real work occurring in the community and the theory taught in classrooms.

How we applied the lessons from 2020: In understanding that the practical application of the Wellbeing Framework can be tricky for people, our work within the MacEwan community this year was in part, an attempt to help bring the Framework “to life” for people.

Within the RECOVER Urban Wellbeing Team

Between May and August of 2021, RECOVER welcomed two MacEwan University students to the core team, through the Mitacs Business Strategy Internship (BSI). The four-month internship program is designed to give students an experiential learning opportunity within a business setting to help organizations restore, modify, or innovate their operations in response to challenges brought on by COVID-19.

The students were key contributors to RECOVER's work in 2021, contributing directly to the initiative's research, design, and data collection and analysis. The students helped the core team to deepen and sharpen its understanding and application of the wellbeing framework in different contexts.

The students were especially instrumental to the success of the [Auricle](#) prototype, wherein RECOVER, together with our partners tested out a new form of listening infrastructure for the City.

In addition, Heather Braid, and then Rhea Kachroo from MacEwan University's Social Innovation Institute joined RECOVER as core team members, attending weekly meetings and working as key contributors to RECOVER's work.

Importantly, Dr. Jennifer Long continued to participate regularly in core team meetings throughout 2021. Dr. Long also helped the core team and other City of Edmonton employees develop and refine their ethnographic research skills by leading a two-day training in ethnographic research methods.

What is the Mitacs Business Strategy Internship?

The BSI program aims to:

- Provide students with the opportunity to apply learned concepts and theories to real-world scenarios
- Provide support to organizations that need additional assistance in modifying their business operations to recover from challenges due to COVID-19 and adapt to the new economic reality
- Build students' skills in communication, problem solving, innovation, resilience, managing complexity, navigating change, business continuity planning, and allow them to apply their education through an experiential learning opportunity
- Provide training and career opportunities for students by creating new connections with faculty, businesses, and communities
- Encourage collaborations and strengthen connections

How we applied the lessons from 2020: In understanding the importance of relational ways of being to nourish the conditions for wellbeing, in 2021, RECOVER intentionally worked to deepen relationships -- finding ways to foster trust, belonging, and connection.

Lessons Learned in 2021

Words to describe the conditions of being unwell can be accessed and understood easily.

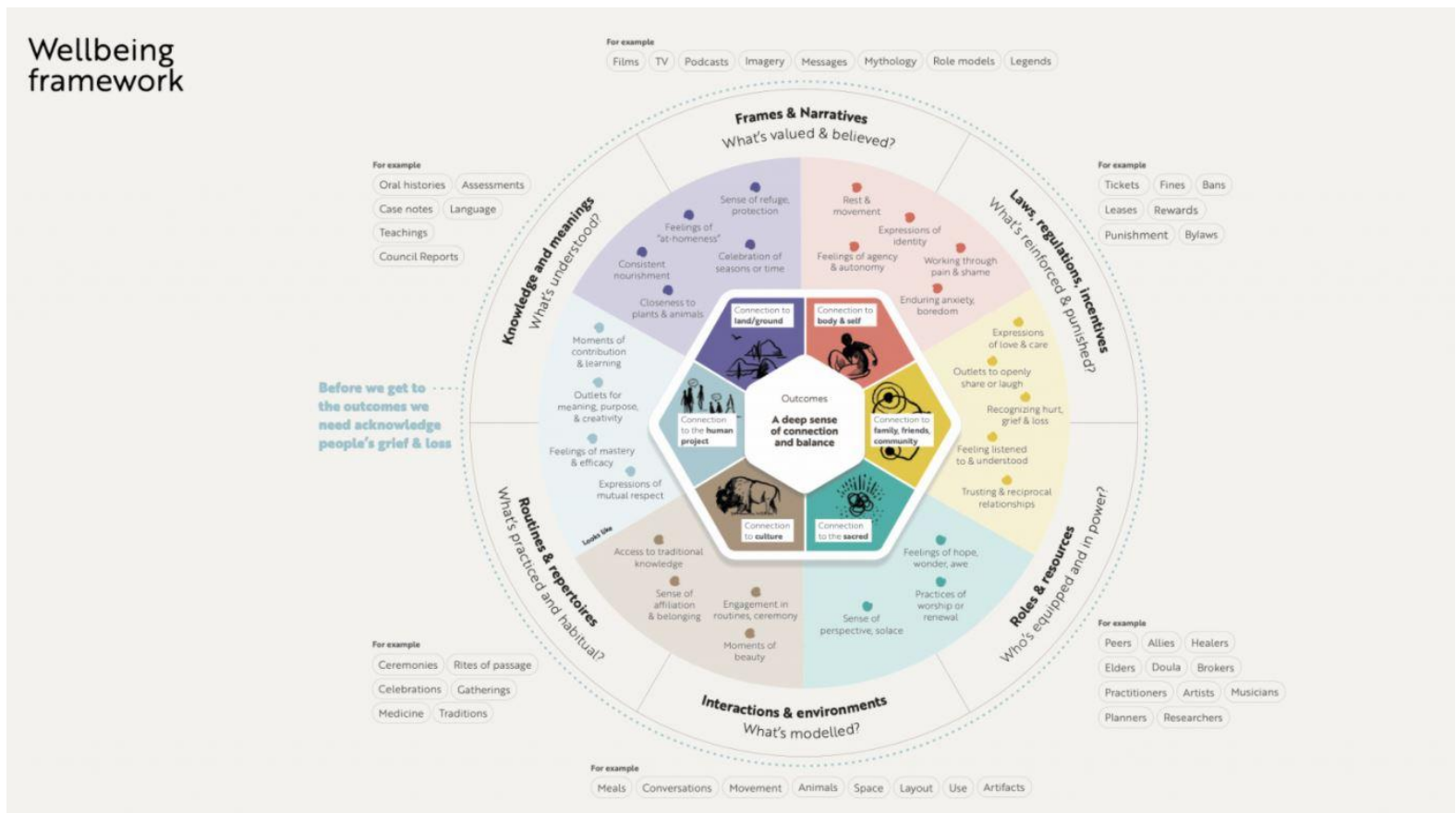
Social isolation, burnout, languishing, physical and mental illness are all examples of the unwellness that students and staff at MacEwan experienced in 2021.

It is trickier in our westernized, capitalist way of understanding the world to be able to find the language to describe what it means to be well.

The wellbeing framework (pictured below) provided a helpful way for the Social Innovation Institute to make sense of wellbeing in real-time.

As we explored how the framework and the work of RECOVER could be connected to the campus community, we noticed that thinking about wellness and what students and staff were dealing with through the lens of the framework allowed us to understand how a lack of wellbeing impacted their ability to fully engage in their work at MacEwan.

Over the course of the year, the importance of sharing the framework widely, and thinking about it could inform how we talk about wellbeing and wellness at MacEwan became the key focus of our work. The framework provided staff and students the language they needed to talk about their wellbeing more holistically.



Key Questions for 2022

As we move forward into 2022, the following questions are top of mind for how RECOVER and MacEwan will continue to work together:

1. How might we bring the **language of wellbeing** and the framework to MacEwan as they talk about student wellbeing at an institutional level?
2. How can we create content and share the wellbeing framework widely so that it is **easy for people to understand & use** it in describing the connections and cultures they work, live, and play within?
3. How might we **support a culture of wellbeing** in the way we work? And the language we use and how we ask people to engage with us?
4. What does it mean to **create space** for people to talk about their wellbeing in a time of crisis and volatility?
5. How might we develop the relationships between academia and community to **bridge the gap of power differentials** that institutional organizations like post-secondaries hold?
6. How might we **foster understanding** for students and staff what RECOVER means to the city, what it means to the community, and how support is required from large institutions to move the projects and ideas forward?

Where to from here?

Our key questions are big ones, and obviously can't be answered in a year. However, they provide important points of reflection as the relationship between RECOVER and MacEwan continues to be developed. They also reflect the more significant questions which are being uncovered: how does a system get influenced in different ways, how can we create intentional systemic change in the ways we work, and how can we continue to impact other parts of a more extensive system to address complex social issues?

It is also important to note that involving other post-secondary institutions will continue to expand and transform this work moving forward. We have a lot to do in thinking about the roles of these institutions in this work. To shift the cultural understanding of wellbeing and wellness, we must find ways to share RECOVER's work and what we are learning, including what we are learning with students and staff at post-secondary institutions.

We continue to learn more deeply about the importance of intentional reflection and introspection at both the personal and institutional level about the significance of wellbeing and how we may -- or may not -- be nourishing the conditions for wellbeing.

In 2022, it will be important for both the City of Edmonton and the MacEwan Social Innovation institute to intentionally explore how the wellbeing framework can be further integrated within their own practices and programming. By doing the work of aligning our institutions activities and cultures with the RECOVER wellbeing framework, collectively we can better showcase what that exploratory process could look like for MacEwan University, other departments, and post-secondary institutions. Using the wellbeing framework as the lens through which future SII strategic direction is developed, would also enable the creation of further shared language around wellbeing which could be potentially unique to MacEwan University or reflect a language that is accessible to other post-secondary institutions and stakeholders.

We are excited to continue on this co-learning journey together.

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