

## **Placing Inclusion at the Heart of a Growing City: How Fredericton is Evolving its Practices from the Inside**

- **By Margaret Schwartz**

When cities grow and change, thoughtful and deliberate steps are necessary to ensure no one is left behind.

From re-imagining access and use of infrastructure like parks, clear air, and transportation to questioning and transforming social policies and public engagement, the team at the City of Fredericton knew they had to slow down to meet the everyday needs of people.

“We are seeing unprecedented growth in our City, particularly with welcoming newcomers,” says Sara DeGrace, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer at the City of Fredericton. “Fredericton is home to a diversifying population and is also situated on the land of the Wolastoqey Nation. It’s important for us to be reflective of the cultures and demographics that make our community so dynamic. We know we need to do things differently.”

This is why the City of Fredericton joined the [UNESCO Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities](#) in 2021, and established the [Office of Community Inclusion \(OCI\)](#), to ensure that all citizens have a voice in the future of their city.

“We created the OCI as the City was receiving a lot of questions and requests of a social nature that needed the time and space to be made a priority,” says DeGrace. “Also, to do this work well we knew we would need a strategy informed by the expertise in the community.”

This opened a door to Crayon Strategies, which is supporting the City in the development of a practical diversity, equity, and inclusion roadmap. Through this partnership, more doors opened.

One of them was [Placemaking 4G \(P4G\)](#), an award-winning socially conscious recruitment service and leader in workplace culture education company, based on the East Coast.

### **Rethinking Recruitment**

“Since establishing the Office of Community Inclusion, we learned if we were going to hire someone to support it, we needed to cast our net wide and make our process as human-centric as possible,” says DeGrace.

Candice McIntyre, the HR Advisor at the City of Fredericton, says she doesn’t often have the opportunity to watch someone else facilitate an interview.

She worked closely with Matt Thomson, Founder and CEO at P4G, to find the ideal candidate to lead the work of the OCI.

“I realized I’ve been doing the same things for five years,” says Candice. “It’s not often I am asked as a member of an interview panel to think about the privileges we hold, and how it can impact the hiring process.”

“What amazed me, was that by the time I met candidates, they were already so comfortable because of the relationships they had built with P4G. The stories shared and authenticity of the candidates was unlike anything we’ve ever been involved in.”

This is why P4G goes beyond relying on what is traditionally found in a resume.

“Our process is designed to uncover more about what makes a person who they are,’ says Thomson. “This depth of understanding helps us align people and organizations who are motivated by the same things, who share a vision for what can happen when they come together.”

They even heard from a candidate who reached out with thanks despite not being selected for the role. They shared ‘it was the most human job interview [they’ve] had, and that they felt genuinely listened to [in the process].

The successful candidate, Gwen McIntyre, joined the City in February as their Community Inclusion Program Manager. Since then, Gwen has been connecting people and communities to the resources and solutions they need. From navigating snow removal conversations with the disabled community to moving forward with recommendations set by the Anti-Racism Task Force, Gwen has been taking steps to ensure no one feels left behind.

“My previous work with an Indigenous non-profit was a life-changing experience. I am bringing a lens of understanding how colonization, intergenerational trauma, and Canadian history impact everything about how a society operates,” says Gwen. “As a fairly new role within the City, I have the opportunity to help guide it in a direction that has a major impact over time. Systems change doesn’t happen overnight, which is why the vision for our work is long-term.”

The hiring process with Gwen was so impactful, that the City knew they had to equip hiring managers across the organization with the tools to carry inclusive hiring practices forward on their own.

### **Expanding the Learnings**

So they did just that.

In March, over 80 staff at the City engaged in a series of equitable hiring workshops hosted by Thomson and his Co-Founder and Co-CEO, Bradley Daye.

“If you were involved in any kind of interview panel we wanted you there,” says Candice. “For us to really change as a City, everyone needs to be a part of the effort. With such a large

organization there's always a risk of work feeling isolated. We are trying to move beyond that. I appreciated the practical tools to help us write job ads, check for biases, and replicate the learning."

"It's common in workshops like this for us to feel the armour people are wearing in the room. But it didn't take long to disarm," says Daye. "There was a deep willingness to engage and unlearn. They came with an eagerness to be challenged, and challenge each other with compassion."

"And sometimes this means challenging us as facilitators," says Thomson. "We have no problem saying we aren't experts in all things diversity and inclusion. We are on our own journeys as well. We are facilitators of courageous conversations that prompt us to stop and question why things have always been done a certain way, or whose voice may be ignored. Every one of us is learning all the time."

Candice quickly learned that this was an environment where it was okay to get curious.

"At the lunch break, I offered Bradley to get some food and he shared that he and Matt were observing Ramadan. I pretended like I knew what he meant. But then I realized, there is so much for me to know about Ramadan," says Candice. "I went back and asked him more about it, and I learned things I might not have otherwise."

Hiring managers weren't the only ones to get curious and dive into P4G's thought-provoking sessions.

### **Seeing a New Perspective**

In the fall of 2023, P4G partnered with the Fredericton Police Department and hosted four Disrupting Bias Workshops attended by 109 sworn members, 1 auxiliary officer, 15 civilian members, and 8 dispatchers.

"Things can be very formulaic in law," says Daye. "It was important for us to get to a place where there was mutual curiosity in the room. We all come with very different life experiences, and lenses through which we see the world. There was some group storming until we could meet in a place where we could learn together - this is important for building trust across differences."

"This isn't hard skills training," says Chief of Police, Martin Gaudet. "It's about opening the heart and mind and being available to feedback you might not want to hear. This is an example of officers being exposed to things early in their career, that I wasn't."

Daye says interest and understanding grew over the four sessions.

"We explored making it a practice to not jump to default settings," he says. "When we operate from that place of awareness it becomes easier to see people for who they are, not who we

judge them to be.”

Clea Ward, an Employee Advisor for the Police Department agreed. She said that officers can put learnings into practice right away. “They are out there communicating with the public every day and now have some of the culturally appropriate language and tools for recognizing snap judgments and rewiring thinking patterns. For changes to really stick, the training needs to be a continuous journey of practice and implementation, which is why we revisit these topics again and again.”

## **Looking Ahead**

“Our collective work with P4G has been humbling,” says DeGrace. “It’s created a non-judgemental space and an opportunity to expand our knowledge and really ask ourselves questions like ‘*who benefits and why?*’

“It can be easy to fall back to what is comfortable, in this case; the sometimes overly bureaucratic ways of doing things in a governing system like a municipality,” says Thomson. “But there is power in recognizing where you are, and how to challenge and evolve the systems we work in. We can all make a difference, and I was reminded of that through this project and working with folks who are trying to make systems and processes more equitable. The best time to start this kind of work was hundreds of years ago. But, the second best time to start is now, and it’s humbling to be part of it.”

To learn more about what’s happening at the City of Fredericton’s Office of Community Inclusion, [visit them here](#).

To learn more about P4G, and how they help to foster workplace cultures where people want to be and stay, [check out their website and services here](#).

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*The City of Fredericton is situated in the traditional homeland of the Wolastoqey Nation since time immemorial. The Wolastoq (St. John River) which runs through our City means “Beautiful and Bountiful River” from which the Wolastoqiyik People take their name. This homeland is covered by the “Treaties of Peace and Friendship” that Wolastoqiyik, Peskotomuhkatiyik (Passamaquoddy) and Mi'kmaq (Mi'kmaq) first signed with the British Crown in 1725. These treaties did not deal with surrender of lands and resources but in fact recognized Wapnakiyik (Wabanaki) title and established the rules for what was meant to be an ongoing relationship between nations.*