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News

Pop-up toilets provide safety and dignity to Winnipeg's most vulnerable (/news/pop-up-toilets-in-winnipeg-providing-safety-and-dignity-for-winnipeg-s-most-vulnerable)

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The pop-up toilet is back in Winnipeg for its second year of cleaning up the city in more ways than one.

Wins Bridgman, the architect of the Winnipeg Public Toilet Pop-up says Bridgman Collaborative has been working on this pop-up toilet for over 10 years and is excited to have it hit the streets of Winnipeg for the second year.

Bridgman saw the need for public toilets in Winnipeg: "Several things happening, one, in Winnipeg so many of the public toilets disappeared and a lot of the people who needed washrooms were forced to not have washrooms which led to ... in the worst-case scenarios the

humiliation of having to urinate or defecate outside. So we could definitely see that as a real need for everyone but especially the vulnerable."

The design of the pop-up was carefully thought out to make sure it had the most positive impact on the community.

"We didn't want to hide it, pretend it was somber, dangerous or unpleasant but we wanted it to be bright and fun and reminding us that we are a city that really figures things out, we are a go-to city," says Bridgman.

You can't miss this pop-up partly because of its bright colour and the crowd around it but mainly because of the 20-foot high sign letting everyone know just what it is. The building is bright orange like the old Winnipeg streetcars and made out of a shipping container.

Another special aspect of these public toilets is the fact that there is a built-in space for a kiosk where a couple of volunteers can help out people in need, clean washrooms and make sure everyone is safe.

This is the part of the washroom that really sets the concept apart from your average public washroom says, Bridgman. "Its always a people relationship which is really what defines us."

Rance Lilley works with Main Street Project and volunteers at this kiosk. He says that during his morning shift he saw about 40 people come to use the washroom and around another 40 people who were just curious to learn more.



This eye-catching popup is helping clean up the streets of Winnipeg and providing safety and connection in the most unlikely of places. (Supplied)

"I think it is a good idea and is something that is needed in the area," says Lilley as many people in the area are thankful and also think it is a great idea.

Bridgman recalls one story from one of the locations the toilets were set up last year where they had a really positive impact. The pop-up was set up across from a church downtown that had struggled with loitering, vandalism, and misuse of the property. One of the main concerns became the possibility of attracting more of this kind of behaviour.

However, the presence of the public toilets actually drastically decreased the amount of littering, vandalism, and miss-use of the property as the space around the church was actually taken care of and respected while the public washroom was nearby.

Bridgman says he remembers getting a letter from the church inviting them back anytime as the public toilet being there even lowered their maintenance costs.

This project was made possible by several partners, including the Downtown Biz and the Main Street Project.

The pop-up also has a great effect on the businesses around it, according to Donald Froese from Lighthouse Mission.

"It has been an answer to prayer," he says. "People have no place where they can really access a public washroom so it has really helped us in helping the people first and getting rid of the defecation on our property."

"Public toilets don't have to be dangerous they don't have to be stinky they don't have to be a thing with negative qualities they can be civic, they can be a thing that brings us together," says Bridgman.

The public toilets will be at Main Street and Henry Avenue until the

weather forces the pop-up to shut down.

Make sure you check them out when you get a chance or when you have to go.