

COWD advances the 17 UN SDGs through partnerships and collaborations to provide access to education, training and employment for all

This article is about a five-minute read.

Humber's Community Outreach and Workforce Development (COWD) department advances the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the work they do. "Sustainability is connected to everything in development work," says Nivedita Lane, Manager, Community and Partnership Development.

"COWD operates very similar to international development, except our focus is on local development to help build thriving, healthy, and inclusive local communities," explains Nivedita.

COWD has an equity mandate to advance access to education, training, and the workforce for underrepresented individuals who face barriers within our local communities, "we do this by applying an assets-based approach to individuals as we develop innovative partnerships, collaborations and initiatives with community and industry partners that helps to drive positive long-term economic and social outcomes locally and regionally," Nivedita adds.

Nivedita and her colleagues in the COWD department have used the SDGs as a framework to help others understand their mandate, believing that COWD advances more than one SDG at a time through various interventions and initiatives. In particular, "the community development initiatives we lead strive to address issues of equitable access by removing barriers and providing alternative and flexible pathways for skill development. These often involve systems level coordination so we can test and deliver interventions that lead to meaningful change and more sustainable human and environmental outcomes," explains Nivedita.

These initiatives include Newcomer services, Pre-apprenticeships, Employment Services, the Humber College Community Partnership Fund, and more. "We seek to involve Humber students, faculty and experts to bring Humber to the community and the community to Humber," Nivedita says.

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Nivedita values referencing the SDGs framework to help others understand that addressing issues such as poverty (Goal 1) is connected to advancing education for all (Goal 4), and that in and of itself is connected to so many of the other SDGs, such as Decent Work and Economic Growth (Goal 8), Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (Goal 9), and more.

Ongoing or past community development projects that the COWD team has led include developing and leading Humber’s Youth Transition Program (in partnership with FLA), facilitating a Social Hackathon for Access to Higher Education, Humber’s Digital Fluency for the Workforce micro-credentials project, and more recently, supporting the implementation of a COVID-19 Community Coordination Plan with the City of Toronto and United Way of Greater Toronto.

Nivedita believes that SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals, really encompasses the community development work that happens through COWD, because “nothing we undertake can be effective if we take a siloed approach that does not include educators, students, community and industry working together.” Nivedita credits her exceptional colleagues, especially COWD Director Geraldine, for their commitment, passion, and expertise, as well as the larger Humber community of staff, faculty and student collaborators.

“A core community development principle is to build on local assets when addressing social needs and Humber is a significant local asset in our communities” says Geraldine Babcock, COWD Director.

Geraldine continues, “the COWD department has been effective at facilitating strong collaborative relations through a collective impact approach. The expertise of both the college and community are drawn on to develop meaningful responses to address local social needs. Through the work carried out by Nivedita on our team, together with the COWD program leads, Humber is afforded the opportunity to improve the equity, diversity and inclusion of our communities and by doing so meet its own strategic goals and demonstrate a commitment to the UN Sustainable Development Goals.”



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To learn more about COWD’s goals, mission and programs and services, visit their website.