

Memorial unveiled to those lost to overdose crisis

(Penticton, BC – August 31, 2023) – A memorial bench designed to provide a place of solitude to remember those lost to the ongoing overdose crisis was officially unveiled today on International Overdose Awareness Day.

“When Gord Portman came to Council and asked for the City of Penticton’s support to honour, recognize and remember those who have lost their lives to this deadly crisis it was such an easy decision to get behind,” says Mayor Julius Bloomfield. “The impact of the opioid crisis is far-reaching and strikes across all social and economic lines. It is a symbol of our shared responsibility to work together to build a stronger and more connected community.”

The installation features a bench with an interlocking design that represents the woven fabric of a community. An empty space in the middle, and separate seating, symbolize the isolation and loneliness of those struggling with addiction.

Portman began the process for the memorial and raised more than \$8,300 towards the cost of the bench and the City covered the rest.

“When I started this project, I had lost 104 friends to overdose and now it’s up to 127,” says Portman, who recalls the pain of losing his best friend. “Brad and I grew up together. He was number one on a waitlist to get into a treatment centre. He was eight months clean, and relapsed in a Walmart bathroom and died.”

The bench is located near a spot where Portman used to sleep rough. “This is even better than I imagined, it’s a perfect location for people to come,” says Portman. “Sometimes you just need a moment of peace so you can remember the good times and help wash away some of the sadness.”

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