

Say Hello in Hampstead

If you can't remember the last time a stranger said hello to you, you're not alone. Maureen Douglas, one of the organizers of Vancouver's Healthy City Conference, says, "Whether you live in a big city or a small town, recent research finds that we don't feel very connected to our neighbours and fellow citizens these days. We don't say hello in the street. We don't look each other in the eye. We don't connect."

Saying "hello" to the people you encounter in your community helps build a sense of connection. That feeling of being connected is really important – it can make our community friendlier, healthier and safer.

A few years ago, [when I wrote the article, "Say hello in Hampstead," for the Free Press](#), I didn't realize that "Say hello" would become a movement adopted by more and more communities. Today, websites and pledges to say "hello" are popping up all over, from Atlantic City to towns like Waterloo and to the Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education in Vancouver.

These communities are embracing a simple way to make themselves stronger – just say "hello" to the people you meet as you go about your daily life.

So what about Hampstead? We all chose to live here because Hampstead offers the benefits of a small community, even if it's surrounded on all sides by one of Canada's largest cities. The sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies, tells us that small towns are supposed to do things differently because the community is an end to itself. Most of us could live anywhere we want in Montreal but we're all here because we want to be here, in Hampstead.

One of my responsibilities as Town Councillor has been to strengthen our sense of community spirit and pride. I have arranged for Hampstead to work with charities, synagogues, and other community groups to offer joint events. We have built relationships with high schools so that teens — our children and our future leaders — learn the importance of giving back to their community. The success of these activities needs the continued support of all residents, so I welcome and encourage citizen involvement.

I believe that our town is the ideal environment to become a "true neighbourhood," one where people greet each other and talk and work together. We share many of the same hopes and concerns. Let's transform our town into a better community, one that embraces friendliness, openness, accountability and transparency.

Let's say "hello" in Hampstead – to the people we come across from day to day. You would be surprised that most are pleased to say "hello" right back and at how good it will make you feel. Remember, "Almost every friendship starts with a simple hello."

For myself, I am continuing on my project of saying "hello" in Hampstead. I encourage you to do the same. Put on your smile and take up the challenge.

I promise, I will say "hi" back!