

COME AWAY WITH ME

...and Help Me Create A NuVo World in NDG

*A Community-Building Invitation Born from Early Mornings, Everyday Encounters, and
the Power of Presence*

*What if the foundation of a better world is not something we have to invent —
but something already appearing whenever neighbours see one another, greet
one another, and choose to care?*

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An Invitation

Come Away With Me is more than the title of a film and more than the story of one life. To me, it is an invitation: come away from isolation, indifference, hurry, suspicion, and the belief that someone else must build the world we want. Come with me into the streets, sidewalks, shops, lobbies, parks, school-bus stops, and ordinary gathering places of NDG. Look closely at what happens when people are simply seen.

For months, I have been trying to imagine A NuVo World — a world organized around love, dignity, belonging, service, health, opportunity, and the conviction that every person matters. Increasingly, I have come to believe that the most important proof of concept is already happening on a very small scale in my own neighbourhood.

It happens early in the morning at what I affectionately call my “office”: the benches outside Metro on Somerled. It happens in the lobby of my building over a mug of tea. It happens during my walks through NDG. Nothing about these places is grand. That is precisely the point. Community is not first a building, a budget, a program, or an institution. Community begins when one human being recognizes another.

The Evidence Is in Ordinary Life

My mornings have become a living laboratory in belonging. I arrive early, often before much of the neighbourhood is awake, and I greet the people whose paths cross mine. Some encounters last seconds. Others become conversations. Over time, strangers acquire names, stories, families, worries, hopes, routines, and a place in my day.

At the Office

Darren, who works at Metro, has become a familiar part of the morning. Jack, a Parmalat driver, has his route and rhythm. George once told me that after I greeted him, the rest of his day was filled with joy. A deliveryman stocking Lay's products was genuinely touched when I simply told him that I thought he did a great job.

Then there are the families waiting for the school bus. I have watched parents and children become part of this little morning community. I met Stefania, whose family history is woven into Montreal through Momesso's Restaurant, and learned about her daughters, including Victoria. And there is the young boy whose ever-present smile, friendliness, and awareness inspired me to write Choose Love. I still do not know his name — but he has already taught me something important: a person does not need status, wealth, or even adulthood to change the emotional temperature of a place.

In the Lobby

Back home, I often take my tea downstairs and spend time in the lobby. Again, the formula is almost embarrassingly simple: be there, be open, remember people, listen, and care. Jonah, a teacher who makes a demanding commute to Montreal North, has shared pieces of his life with

me. Residents, staff members, dog owners, workers, and neighbours pass through. Repetition turns recognition into familiarity; familiarity creates trust; trust opens the door to relationship.

On the Walks

The same pattern continues on my walks. I meet people at the dog park, the outdoor gym, on residential streets, and in local businesses. Ben told me about his wife Diana. Aaron at Metro shared the challenges of back pain. Susan has been recovering from hip surgery. Jay, whom I once drove to Snowdon Metro, told me about his growing family, his dog, and his three cats. These details may appear small. They are not. Remembering them says: I heard you. I remember you. You matter here.

What These Mornings Have Taught Me

I used to think about transforming a community primarily in terms of large systems: food, transportation, health, recreation, education, coaching, technology, and major community facilities. I still believe those systems matter enormously. But my mornings have shown me what must come first.

Infrastructure can serve a community. It cannot manufacture one.

A true community is built from thousands of small human signals: a wave, a name remembered, a question sincerely asked, a compliment freely given, a few minutes of listening, a ride offered, a child acknowledged, an elderly neighbour noticed, a worker thanked, a person welcomed back the next morning.

The lesson is profound because it is so accessible. We do not have to wait for permission, funding, construction, legislation, or technology to begin. We can begin tomorrow morning.

The NuVo Principle: Presence Before Programs

The foundation I now see for A NuVo World in NDG is intentional presence. Before asking, “What service can we provide?” we should ask, “How can we make sure every person in this neighbourhood is known, welcomed, and connected?”

This does not replace ambitious programs. It makes them human. A free grocery initiative is more powerful when the recipient is known by name. Transportation is more meaningful when it connects people rather than merely moving them. A LifeStyle Centre becomes transformative when it feels like a home for the neighbourhood rather than a facility. Coaches become valuable not because they administer a system, but because they know the people they serve.

The NuVo Way, therefore, should begin with a culture: see people; greet people; learn names; remember stories; notice absence; celebrate progress; offer help; connect neighbours; and keep showing up.

From One Man's Morning to a Neighbourhood Culture

Imagine if this were multiplied across NDG. Not one person on one bench, but hundreds of residents choosing to become points of welcome and connection.

- Every street could have people who intentionally know their neighbours.
- Every apartment building could cultivate welcoming common spaces rather than anonymous passageways.
- Schools and school-bus stops could become places where families know and support one another.
- Local merchants and workers could be recognized as essential members of community life.
- Seniors living alone could have dependable human contact.
- Newcomers could quickly discover that they belong.
- People facing hardship could be noticed before they become invisible.
- Children could grow up surrounded by adults who know their names and are glad to see them.

This is not surveillance and it is not forced togetherness. It is voluntary, joyful neighbourliness — a social fabric strong enough to hold people while still respecting privacy and individuality.

A Practical Foundation for A NuVo World in NDG

I envision this culture of presence becoming the human foundation beneath the larger NDG pilot. The practical architecture could develop in layers:

1. The Presence Network

Invite residents to spend a small, regular amount of time simply being present in the places where neighbourhood life already occurs: parks, benches, lobbies, libraries, cafés, dog parks, school areas, community centres, and walking routes. The objective is not recruitment. It is relationship.

2. NuVoWay LifeStyle Coaches

My larger vision includes hundreds of LifeStyle Coaches, ideally creating a ratio in which no resident is far from someone who can help connect them to resources, encouragement, opportunity, and community. Their first qualification should not be administrative expertise. It should be the ability to listen, care, remember, encourage, and connect.

3. Neighbour-to-Neighbour Connections

Create simple ways for people to offer what they can: companionship, a ride, tutoring, a meal, a skill, a small repair, an introduction, time with a senior, help for a parent, or encouragement for someone going through a difficult season. The community itself contains an enormous reservoir of unused capacity.

4. Free and Accessible Essentials

Build outward into the larger NuVo vision: food security, transportation, recreation, health and wellness, learning, arts, community gathering, and support for families and seniors. The goal is not simply to make services free. It is to make life feel less transactional and more relational.

5. A Flagship Community Home

Ultimately, I envision a major NuVoWay LifeStyle Centre in NDG: a place for movement, healing, learning, creativity, food, conversation, children, seniors, reflection, and joy. But its spirit should be the same spirit I experience on a bench at 5:30 in the morning: “I am glad you are here.”

How We Would Know It Is Working

The success of A NuVo World should not be measured only by dollars raised, meals served, rides provided, memberships created, or buildings constructed. We should also measure the human outcomes that precede and transcend those numbers.

- Do more residents know the names of their neighbours?
- Do people report feeling less alone?
- Are children surrounded by more trusted, caring adults?
- Are seniors more connected?
- Are people more likely to ask for help before reaching a crisis?
- Are neighbours volunteering help without being asked?
- Do public spaces feel warmer, safer, and more welcoming?
- Are people from different generations and backgrounds speaking to one another more often?

If those things begin to change, then NDG is not merely receiving new programs. It is becoming a different kind of community.

Why NDG

NDG is the right place to begin because it is already rich in the ingredients of community: families, seniors, students, schools, faith communities, local businesses, parks, sports, cultural diversity, long-time residents, newcomers, and people who care deeply about where they live. The opportunity is not to impose a new identity on NDG. It is to uncover, connect, and amplify the best of what is already here.

I want NDG to become a living demonstration that a modern urban neighbourhood can be organized around abundance of relationship rather than scarcity of attention. If we can show that people become healthier, happier, safer, more generous, and more hopeful when they truly belong, the model can travel far beyond Montreal.

Come Away With Me

That brings me back to the invitation.

Come away with me — not away from NDG, but more deeply into it. Come meet the people who wake before dawn to stock shelves, deliver food, drive routes, teach children, walk dogs, raise families, care for loved ones, and quietly hold the neighbourhood together.

Come discover what I have discovered: there are extraordinary people everywhere, hidden inside ordinary mornings.

Come help me turn greetings into relationships, relationships into trust, trust into cooperation, cooperation into systems of care, and systems of care into a community where nobody has to wonder whether they matter.

I believe the large vision of A NuVo World can begin with something very small: one person deciding to show up with love, day after day.

That is what my early mornings are teaching me. That is the foundation I want to build upon. And that is my invitation to NDG.

We do not build community by announcing that community exists. We build it by repeatedly giving people the experience of belonging.

The First Invitation

For anyone who wants to help, the first step requires no money and no title. Choose one place in your normal life. Show up consistently. Greet people. Learn three names. Remember one story. Thank someone whose work is usually overlooked. Introduce two neighbours who should know one another. Notice who may need encouragement. Then return.

Do that long enough, and a place changes.

Do it together, across an entire neighbourhood, and perhaps a world can change.

A NuVo World begins here.

In NDG.

With us.