

Youth Safer Communities Survey Report

2021/2022



CHESTERMERE &
AREA COMMUNITY
COALITION

Chestermere and Area are known as communities where residents enjoy a high quality of life with small-town appeal. Criminal code offences are decreasing year over year (source: RCMP Chestermere Municipal Crime Gauge) indicating these communities are safe places to live. However, tracked statistics cannot always capture critical aspects of youth mental health and wellbeing.

Youth Safer Communities Survey Report

In September 2020, our community was rocked by the suicide of a teenage girl. It was not the first such unspeakable loss of a young community member, but it was certainly a wake-up call for many adults who, in response, became determined to create a safer, more supportive community culture for our youth.

Synergy put out a call to action and over two dozen cross-sector leaders from the for-profit, non-profit, health, education, faith, protective services, business, recreation, and voluntary sectors, came together to discuss how we might collectively make a difference. After three such meetings, it was determined that we needed a baseline from which to start.

The Youth (Safer Communities) Survey was collaboratively developed by what has become known as the Chestermere and Area Community Coalition, under the expert mentorship of consultants from MNP, with a goal to collect input from almost 1700 youth and almost 360 adults regarding their perspectives on physical, social, emotional, and mental health safety in our community. The Canadian Mental Health Association - Alberta Division Rural Mental Health Project has generously funded this study to date.

We were fortunate to develop a research partnership with Rocky View Schools and Calgary Catholic School Division for administration of the survey (youth version). For the adult version, we reached out to local youth-serving professionals and through an extensive social media campaign asking for input.



1694 Students completed the survey
Grades 5-12

359 Adults completed the survey
Adults who care about youth



8 local schools participated in the youth
survey, to varying degrees

Adult survey was translated into Arabic,
Spanish, Tagalog, Punjabi & Vietnamese



Classes who completed the survey were
entered into a draw for a pizza lunch

10 Gifts Cards were offered as an
incentive for adults to participate



40

Adult & Youth
Participants
took part in a
workshop to
review the results

What We Heard at the Workshop

- Youth have repeatedly told us that they need more accessible supports
- There was a preference for peer-to-peer support programs that would be available where they spend most of their time (school and youth community gathering places)
- They emphasized the importance of holding aggressive youth accountable through the application of restorative justice practices

We discovered that the concepts of

Emotional, Social, and Mental Health Safety

are not common considerations for youth, but they do now recognize the merit of learning to give those factors attention which is at least equal to that of physical safety. As we came to understand the data further, we realized that youth fears about their physical safety are often based on the unknown as well as on their lacking confidence about preventing physical harm. Additionally, they told us there is still considerable stigma around asking for help.

SAFER SPACES

VS

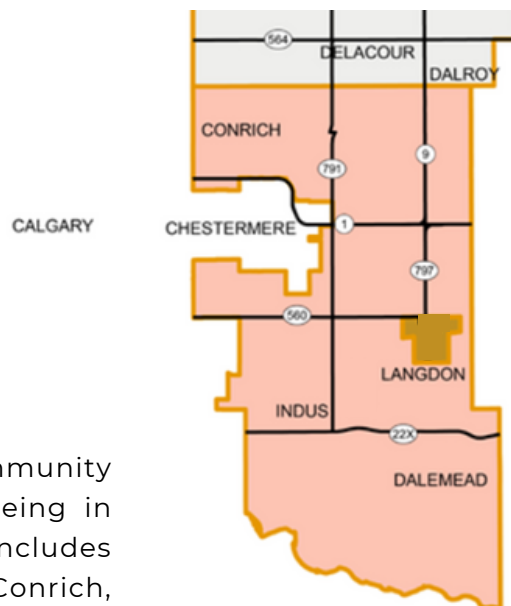
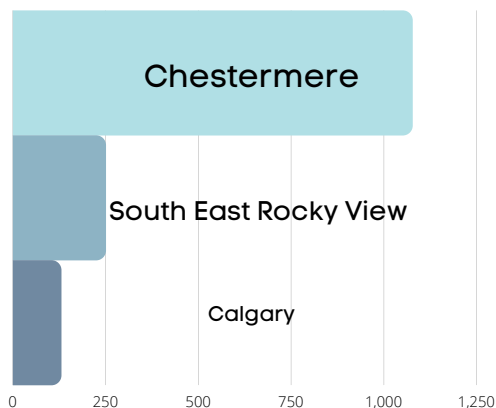
SAFE SPACES

There were as many definitions of safe spaces as there were participants and generally, the term 'Safe Space' was not popular amongst the youth – SafeR spaces may be better accepted. Their preference would be to have designated and approved resource locations to be commonly identified by a recognizable logo.

It was clear that more awareness of existing supports is required before contemplating the addition of extensive new resources, but a virtual portal was often mentioned as something youth would respond to.

Following is a more detailed summary of the data that was mined from the youth survey results.

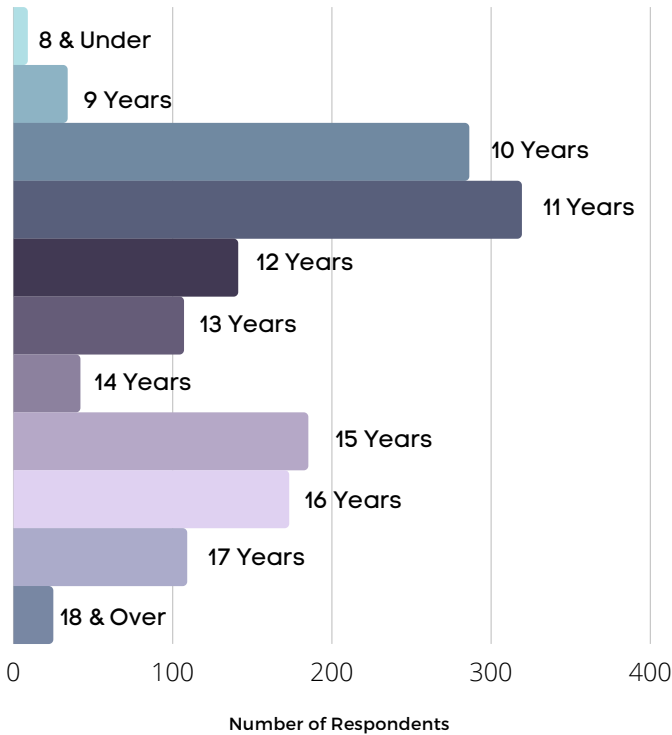
DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS



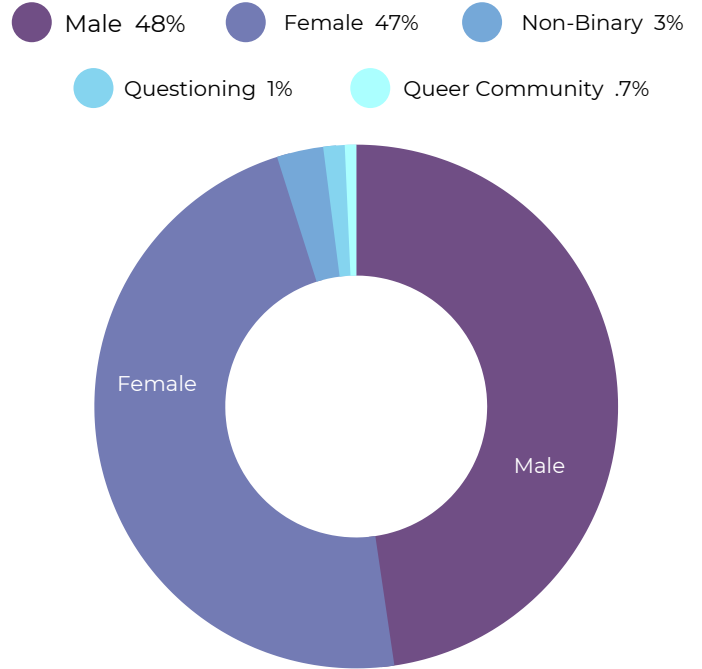
Respondents were asked which community they live in. The majority of them being in Chestermere. South East Rocky View includes Langdon, Indus, Dalemead, Dalroy, Conrich, Delacour, and surrounding rural areas.

DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

Respondents were asked to share their ages. Majority of them were aged 10-11.



Respondents were asked to tell us their gender identity.

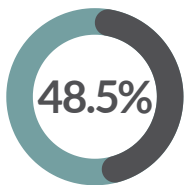


SURVEY RESPONSES

The Youth Survey consisted of 29 questions. Of those, 22 questions focused on definitions of safety, where they feel safe, access to safe people, awareness of local supports, and self-harm. The remaining 7 questions focused on demographic information. Response rate was between 1038 and 1694 depending on the question. Respondents had the option to skip questions. Below are the responses to some of the questions youth were asked.

"WHAT DOES 'SAFE' MEAN TO YOU?"

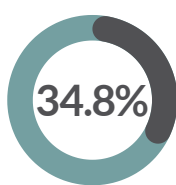
TOP RESPONSES*



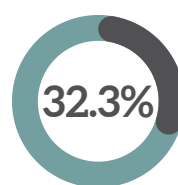
My body won't be harmed



I have access to emergency services



I have access to basic necessities



I won't feel scared or anxious

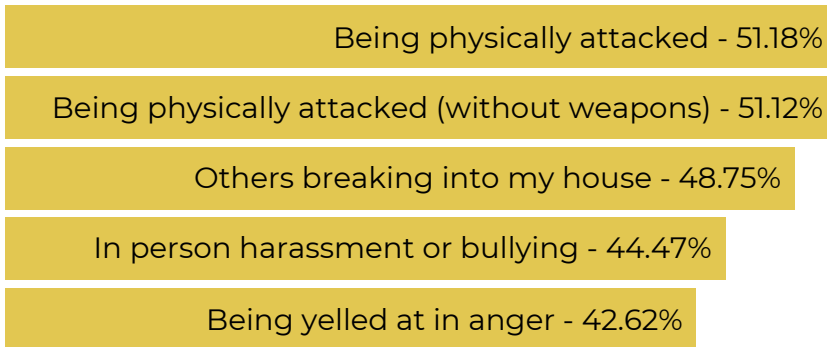


I have a place or person I can go to anytime I need them

*Top 5 responses out of 14 options

" WHAT ARE THINGS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL UNSAFE?"

TOP RESPONSES**



Through these results, we discovered that physical safety seemed to be the youth's main focus when discussing what 'safe' means to them. This was a recurring theme noticed throughout the survey results. Discussions of a follow-up survey included focusing solely on emotional and mental safety.

**Top 5 responses out of 14 options



They predominately connect with their safe people at home or at school.



Most indicated that they felt unsafe in community spaces. When asked how often they feel unsafe, more than 50% of youth report 1-3 days throughout an average week.



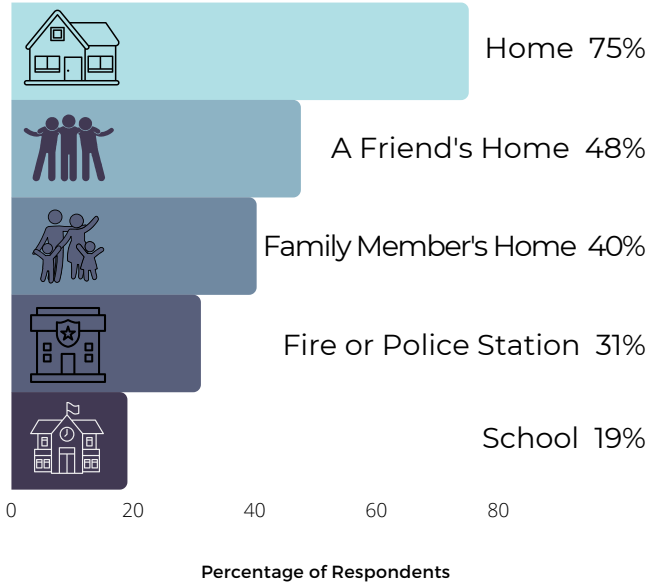
Many of the youth felt that the safe spaces in the community need to be made more noticeable and accessible.



***this is 70% of the remaining 5% above that stated they do not have one or more safe person

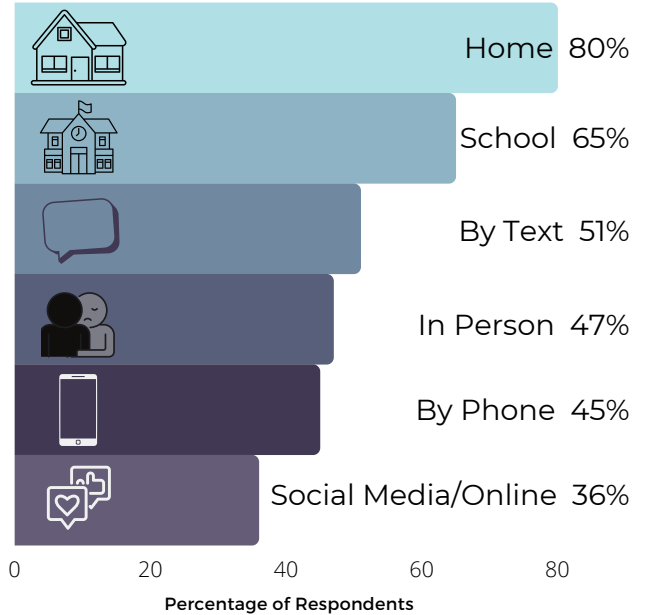
"WHERE WOULD YOU GO FOR HELP IF YOU FEEL UNSAFE?"

Respondents selected all that apply. Following are the top 5 selections.



"WHERE DO YOU CONNECT WITH YOUR SAFE PERSON?"

Responses are from those who stated they have one or more safe people. Respondents selected all that apply. Following are the top 6 selections.



The majority of youth respondents reported that neither language or gender identity/sexual orientation are factors that play a role in feeling unsafe or that they don't belong.

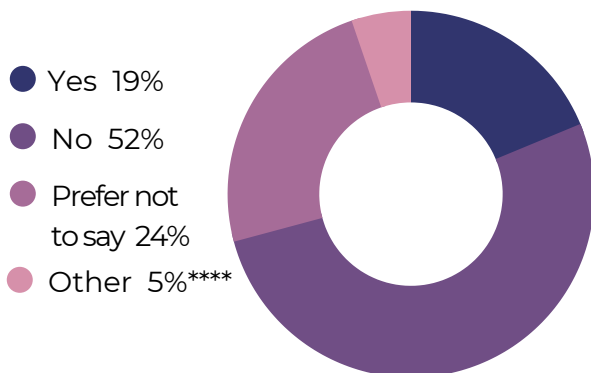
17.2%

Said YES that having a different first language than others makes them feel like they do not belong

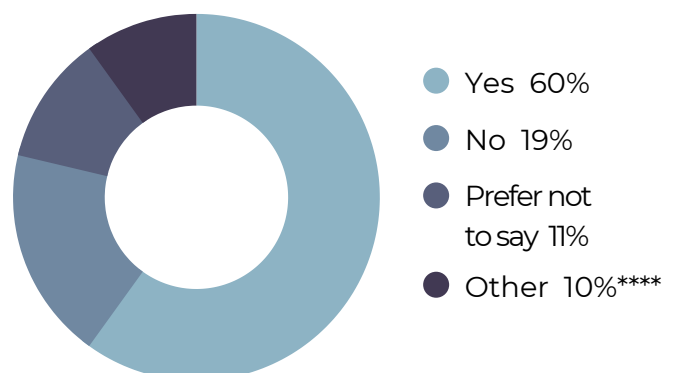
15.2%

Said YES to feeling unsafe due to gender identity and/or sexual orientation

"HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HARMING YOURSELF?"



"IF YES, HAVE YOU EVER CONSIDERED HARMING YOURSELF DURING THE LAST YEAR?"



****Respondents included to personal responses under "Other"

"What makes someone a safe person?"

stands up for you
listens family trust peace officer
UNDERSTANDS mom
gentle person
relatable **HELPS** honest
relatable private values **FRIEND**
kind true self keeps promises
respect others

"What do you like in a safe place?"

think freely
non-judgmental feel happy
privacy **ACCEPTING** feel loved
quiet friends **WELCOMING**
POSITIVE IDEAS
express myself respected
fun things comfortable

Youth were asked to share a story or a situation to help us better understand their perspectives on safety in their community.

The following are some of the responses:

- "Things like understanding if a kid is hurting on the inside but don't want anyone to worry about them and they act fine. Helping them mentally instead of physically."
- "I dream of a place where people believe the truth. Not even my mom does."
- "I have been sexually assaulted and it is really hard having to see the person who did it every day at school"
- "The school is structured for big friends groups and meant for all happy friend groups but the truth is there are a lot of people alone that just want a space that they can blend in without having a ton of friends. As well as you can't have extra help or sit in a different room without an ipp which isn't fair sometimes we all need it to be quiet or all need a safe space without a label on it"
- "...Anyway, I think that there should be a way for kids and other people to access a place or a thing where they can interact to feel safe, because when you're in a community or a park for example and you don't feel comfortable and you feel unsafe, it really swallows you up..."

RESEARCH PRIORITIES

More research is required, primarily in two areas:

- Focus groups with youth and with the adults who care about them, to gain clarification on the survey results, beginning with a definition of safety and safe spaces, and obtaining additional input to further define goals and objectives.
- Best practice reviews on successful programs, services, and initiatives within other municipalities. Data comparison with similar studies from Rocky View Schools and Calgary Catholic School Divisions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As is the case with most initial studies, the Youth (Safer Communities) Survey raised more questions than it offered answers...GOOD questions that have provided direction to the Chestermere and Area Community Coalition for a go-forward plan.

In an effort to be proactive, the following activities may be considered, in tandem with the next steps in survey data collection, to directly address some of the concerns raised in the survey:

- *Synergy has received a small grant to launch a Restorative Justice Program which will serve to hold young perpetrators accountable to their victims and provide supported referrals for these young people to receive remediation/counselling services. Synergy will be working with the RCMP, Peace Officers, the Crown Prosecutor, and the Chestermere Community Coalition to establish this service.*
- *A meaningful, impactful campaign to raise youth awareness regarding existing support, intervention, and emergency resources, especially those that are available 24 hours a day. Consideration could be given to developing a virtual portal.*
- *A meaningful, impactful campaign to reduce stigma regarding youth asking for help.*
- *Increase rewards for positive behaviours/choices – i.e. invest more funding into the Positive Ticketing Program.*
- *Free Training for community adults in Psychological First Aid, Suicide Prevention, De-escalation Techniques, etc. Make it a community norm for adults to have this training.*
- *Make WIFI available and passwords highly visible, in public places, so youth can search for support and contact resources during times of distress.*

- *Ensure youth are able to get to locations in the community that offer the support they need when they are in distress.*
- *Invest in the programs and services we already have, to ensure sustainability and adequate capacity.*
- *Increased engagement from the Southeast Rocky View Community including school survey responses.*

All the above action items will require varying levels of new funding

CONCLUSION

The Chestermere and Area Community Coalition is seeking partners who can offer resources of any kind to assist in achieving some or all the action items referred to above. We welcome your questions, thoughts, ideas, and/or financial support to help us make our goal for a safer community a reality.

Overall, the results of this survey were positive. We heard that while youth would like to further develop their relationships with protective services and in particular, the RCMP, the majority consider the Chestermere Detachment as a safe place to go for help. Likewise, despite negative media and social media perceptions about bullying in schools, most of the youth surveyed consider their schools to be one of the safest places they can turn to.

Perhaps most encouraging of all is the fact that home and family were consistently referred to as almost all the respondent's top safe place choices. Our Coalition is heartened by the positive messages we have heard in this survey but there remains work to be done to improve the community's approach toward youth and their needs.

It is important that we pay equal attention to the less vocal minority who clearly stated they need more and/or different help than we are presently able to offer them as a community. If only one child expresses fear of returning home to an abusive parent, only one speaks of feeling re-traumatized each time they see their abuser at school and only one states they self harm every day, that is one child too many. These youth are the voice for those untold numbers who, for whatever reason, do not feel they have one.

THANK YOU

Thank you to everyone who made this project possible!

Chestermere & Area Community Coalition Members
 CMHA - Rural Mental Health Project Community Grant
 MNP

Rocky View Schools & Calgary Catholic School Division
 Youth of Chestermere, Langdon & South East Rocky View
 Adults who care about Youth