

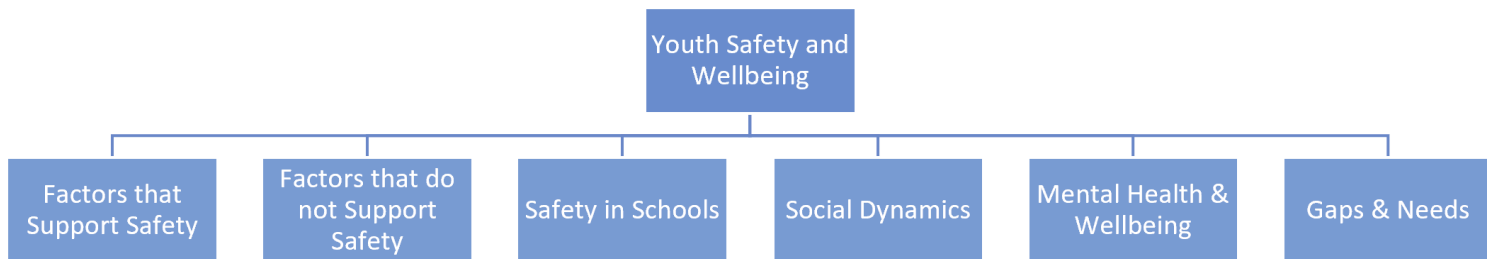
# Youth Focus Groups: Youth Safer Communities Report

## Executive Summary

**Project:** To explain and clarify some results from the Youth Safer Communities Survey and to gather a deeper understanding of youth safety and wellbeing in Chestermere, Langdon, and SE Rocky View County.

**How:** We conducted 13 semi-structured focus groups with 87 youth in grades 5-12. These focus groups were held in 11 schools in Chestermere, two schools in Langdon, and two community groups in Chestermere. Ethics approval was given by the Rocky View Schools Division and the Calgary Catholic Schools Division. Informed consent was obtained from parents and youth participants before each focus group.

**Results:** The analysis produced 6 themes that provided insight into experiences of youth safety and wellbeing.



### Theme 1: Factors in the community that support safety

This theme included information about locations and/or circumstances where youth feel safe in

- (1) Chestermere
- (2) Langdon
- (3) generally
- (4) how people contribute to youth feeling safe
- (5) other contributors to feeling safe

We discovered that there is a variety of spaces where youth in our communities feel safe. The reasons for a location feeling safe can vary among youth, but it is often the people in these spaces that contribute to their sense of safety.

*"If I was ever in a situation that I need to like go to [my friend's] house in a hurry, but I needed like um to get somewhere so I can be safe, then they would [always] accept me, um, for as long as I needed."*

### Theme 2: Factors in the community that do not support safety

This theme included information about locations and/or circumstances where youth do not feel safe in:

- (1) Chestermere
- (2) Langdon
- (3) generally
- (4) how people contribute to youth feeling less safe
- (5) other contributors youth feeling less safe

We identified a variety of spaces and behaviours that can make youth feel less safe. Factors such as groups of youth causing conflict, peer group disputes, fighting, substance use, and online interactions with adults all pose significant safety concerns for youth. When these people or behaviours are present in certain locations, those areas become less safe.

*"You can probably tell if somebody's not gonna keep an area safe judging by how they're behaving. So I guess what makes it unsafe is just general behaviour of people."*

### Theme 3: Safety in Schools

This theme included information about

- (1) perceptions and experiences of safety in schools
- (2) changes to schools (system)
- (3) changes to education (learning)

There were various safety concerns in schools discussed by youth, with conflict and physical violence between peer groups being among the most serious. Youth expressed a desire for a shift in how consequences are handled. They had ideas about creating change and urged school staff to implement these changes.

*"I didn't really feel safe a lot at school... because I felt like... nobody really agreed with me or like, wanted me as like my personality. So I felt like I had to change myself."*

### Theme 4: Relationship Dynamics

This theme included information about

- (1) understanding of bullying
- (2) social relationships between youth
- (3) bullying online
- (4) safety online
- (5) racism

Bullying, both in-person and online, remains a serious concern for youth. On a positive note, there appears to be a deeper understanding of bullying, and many youth have developed strategies to stay safe online. Additionally, some youth in our communities may experience racism from their peers.

*"All the beef and the fights, like the mace... stuff like the weapons"*

### Theme 5: Mental Health and Wellbeing

This theme included information about

- (1) attitudes towards mental health & wellbeing
- (2) suicide
- (3) barriers to expressing needs
- (4) youth support characteristics

Stigma around mental health can be a significant barrier for youth seeking help, including uncertainty about how someone might react. However, when youth do reach out for support, they tend to confide in individuals with whom they have strong, empathetic relationships.

*"...if you ever try opening up to anyone, it's like they don't even listen anymore... it's "Oh but I've also been through this..." but this is a 'me' moment. Just listen."*

### Theme 6: Gaps and Needs

This theme included information about

- (1) facility enhancements
- (2) social programming
- (3) social support services
- (4) shift in culture
- (5) a safe youth hangout space
- (6) support for local businesses
- (7) perceived safety improvements

Youth outlined specific strategies to address the issues described previously and suggested ways to enhance community belonging.

*"...a place where like kids can hang out, accept you're different... and like do what comes to mind."*

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Four overarching recommendations are provided below.

Please see the Appendix E for specific next steps for different systems in our communities.

1. **Community Effort:** Addressing these issues will require sustained collaboration on all levels of the community and open lines of communication
2. **Youth Engagement:** Youth are experts in their experience, so consult them when responding to safety concerns.
3. **Address the Lack of Empathy:** A holistic approach is necessary to facilitate change in multiple domains (i.e., mental health, bullying, asking for help).
4. **Continuous Evaluation:** Assess and improve interventions based on feedback from youth and involve youth in the evaluation process.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to this project. If you have any questions or concerns about the following findings, please contact Synergy at 403-212-0242 or via email at [involved@yoursynergy.ca](mailto:involved@yoursynergy.ca).

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