

Social Exclusion and Youth Who Engage in High-Risk Behaviour

The Safe Streets Project, Phase 3

Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

The Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee (OSCMAP) is a committee of youth-serving agencies who provide services to youth who engage in high-risk behaviours. Youth who engage in high-risk behaviours or who do not have secure housing have limited safe places where they are welcome to spend time. OSCMAP's Safe Streets projects explore how youth navigate their environment and safety, given these constrictions.

This third phase of Safe Streets was designed to learn more about where youth travel to on a typical day, and their perceptions of safety and social exclusion. Thirty-six youth at six youth-serving agencies completed a mapping activity and an interview.

Research Questions:

1. What are the typical daily travel routes and destinations of youth who engage in high-risk behaviour?
2. What is the impact of social exclusion on decision-making when it comes to routes and destinations?
3. What factors contribute to a youth's perception that a space is safe or unsafe?
4. What recommendations do youth have to help youth feel safer in areas surrounding youth services?

Findings

Youth travels were concentrated in central Edmonton and many youth reported using public transit. Youth-serving agencies were the most common destination for youth, and where they said they felt the most welcome.

Thirty of the thirty-six youth participants reported being banned from at least one location, most frequently shopping malls, libraries and agencies. Notably, a number of youth indicated confusion around their bans, stating they did not know how long they were banned for, or describing bans which did not reflect organizational policies.

The main determinant of safety for the youth participants was the other people present at the location. Demonstrating the complexity of navigating safety on the streets, youth warned youth new to the streets to stay away from others, but also not go anywhere alone. Youth also advised youth new to the streets to avoid entrenchment, to be very cautious about minding their own business, and to be aware of their surroundings.

Youth participants were impacted by social exclusion, saying they felt judged by others for multiple reasons, and “not part of civilization” when homeless. Feeling unwelcome can magnify feelings of unworthiness, resulting in further isolation of youth who are already severely marginalized, making escaping street entrenchment more difficult.

Recommendations include:

1. Training and education for people interacting with youth who engage in high-risk behaviours to promote inclusion and reduce altercations.
2. Further investigation into the extent and impact of banning vulnerable youth, about which little is known.
3. Suitable, sustainable funding for youth-serving agencies to ensure services and supports are available when youth need them.
4. Appropriate housing for youth that is available when needed.

Project Summary

Agencies providing services to youth who engage in high-risk behaviours were interested in learning more about where youth travel to on a typical day, what they do at their destination, their strategies for navigating personal safety, and their perceptions of social exclusion. In this 2014 research project, 36 youth at six youth-serving agencies completed a mapping activity and interview. Youth most frequently reported traveling to youth-serving agencies, where they also felt most welcome. They reported feeling judged by others, and “not part of civilization” when homeless. They advised other youth to avoid entrenchment, and to be cautious of whom you trust on the streets. Recommendations from this research include training and education to promote inclusion of youth who engage in high-risk behaviour, and reduce altercations.

Project Background

The OSCMAP Safe Streets projects were conducted by youth-serving agencies in Edmonton, Alberta to learn more about where youth who engage in high-risk behaviours travel to on a typical day, and their perceptions of safety and social exclusion. By understanding how youth experience and navigate social exclusion and safety, service providers can enhance services available to the youth- for example, by working with other community programs to offer enhanced inclusive services.

Youth who engage in high-risk behaviour are often also without secure housing (High Risk Youth Unit, 2012). The 2014 Edmonton Homeless Count recorded 241 homeless youth aged 24 or under who were unaccompanied by adults (Homeward Trust Edmonton, 2014). Homeless youth commonly lack the skills needed for independent living, and youth living on the streets can quickly become entrenched. Youth may find themselves trying to survive high-risk

OSCMAP

The Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee (OSCMAP) is a committee of youth-serving agencies who work with youth who engage in high-risk behaviour. Members include Edmonton & Area Child and Family Services, Old Strathcona Youth Society, Youth Empowerment and Support Services, MAPS Alberta Capital Region, iHuman Youth Society, Edmonton Public Library, Neighbourhood Empowerment Team, and Catholic Social Services. The committee is interested in the impact of social exclusion on youth who engage in high-risk behaviour, and who have insecure or no housing.

situations with limited options, which can lead to engaging in high-risk behaviours.

Homeless youth report being perceived by others as worthless, criminal or dangerous (Government of Alberta, 2015), making the youth unwelcome in many public areas. Researcher Stephen Gaetz argues that limited access to shelter, employment and public spaces means “being young and homeless invariably means winding up in dangerous places, engaging in risky behaviours, and being exposed to potential offenders” (Gaetz 2004, p. 445). The OSCMAP Safe Streets projects explore the impact of social exclusion with Edmonton youth who engage in high-risk behaviours.

In Phase 1 of Safe Streets (2009-2012), youth engaged in high-risk behaviours completed a mapping activity to illustrate where they traveled on a typical day, and the safe and unsafe areas they encountered on their routes. This project demonstrated the surprisingly extensive routes youth travel, and the areas they felt were safe or unsafe. However, how the youth determined spaces to be safe or unsafe was not explored with the youth. Lack of transportation (for these youth, primarily an inability to pay for public transit) was identified as a significant barrier.

Phase 2, Routes to Homes: A Transit and Social Support Intervention for Homeless Youth (2013), was conducted in partnership with the University of Alberta and funded by Homeward Trust Edmonton to pilot a transit access program for youth. 40 youth were provided with transit access (tickets or passes) for a three-month intervention. During the intervention, a decrease in interactions with transit authorities and an increase in employment and stable housing for the youth was observed.

For this current third phase of Safe Streets (2013-2015), the themes in Phase 1 were revisited in further depth. Youth were asked how they determine if a place is safe or unsafe, and social exclusion was explored by discussing places the youth feel welcome, places they avoid, where they've been banned, and about fitting in and feeling judged.

Research Questions

1. What are the typical daily travel routes and destinations of youth who are engaged in high-risk behaviour?
2. What is the impact of social exclusion on decision-making when it comes to routes and destinations?

3. What factors contribute to a youth's perception that a space is safe or unsafe?
4. What recommendations do youth have to help other youth feel safer in the areas surrounding youth services?

Data Collection

Youth were invited to participate in the project at six youth-serving agency sites in Edmonton, Alberta. Each youth-serving agency offers services to youth who engage in high-risk behaviours (also known as high-risk youth, as defined by the High Risk Youth Unit of the Edmonton and Area Child and Family Services Region), and youth who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness.

A Research Assistant with the Serving Communities Internship Program and a staff member from each youth-serving agency conducted the mapping activities and interviews together with participating youth. The interviewers explained the project rationale and that participation was voluntary. An agency staff the youth knew and trusted was present to support the youth, and to allow for follow-up with the youth where necessary. During the interview, youth were reminded they could decline answering any questions they did not feel comfortable answering.

36 youth participated in the project, and created a total of 34 maps. 2 of the maps were created with 2 youth working together.

Number of Interviews Conducted at Each Site

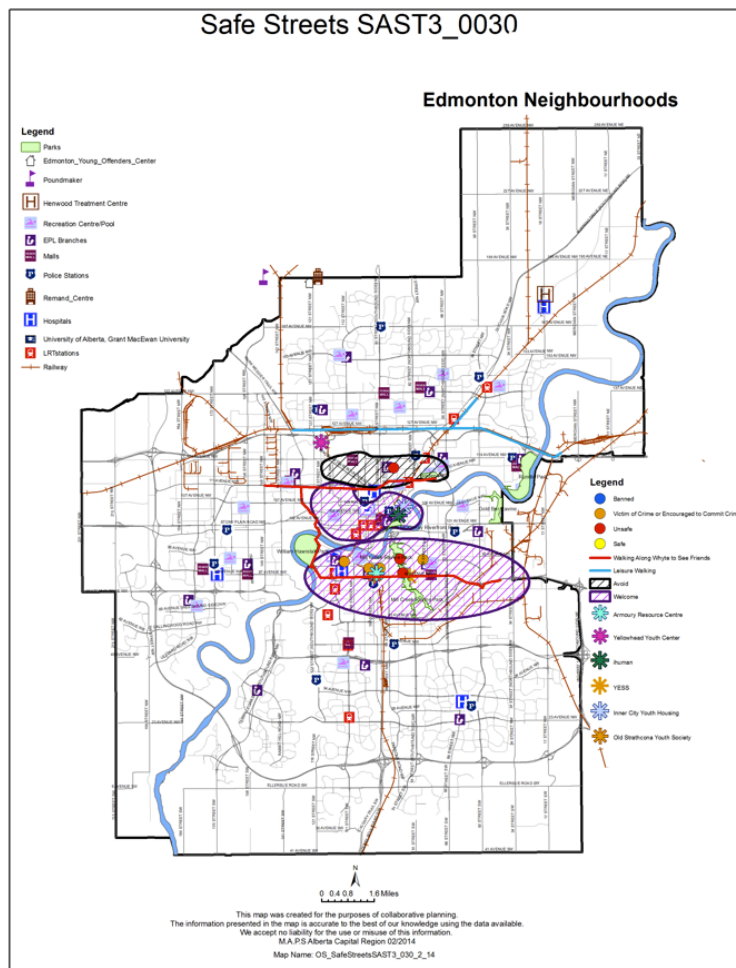
Youth-Serving Agency	Number of Participants
Old Strathcona Youth Society (OSYS)	6
iHuman Youth Society	8 (7 maps)
Youth Empowerment and Support Services (YESS)	7
Edmonton John Howard Society	6
Catholic Social Services	6
Inner City Youth Housing Project (ICYHP)	3 (2 maps)
Total	36 youth, 34 maps

Data Analysis

The qualitative research analysis software NVIVO 10 was used to analyze the verbal responses from the youth, and discover themes in the findings.

ArcMap software was used to electronically reproduce the individual maps created during the mapping activity. Heat mapping and graduated symbology were used to collate maps to compare results.

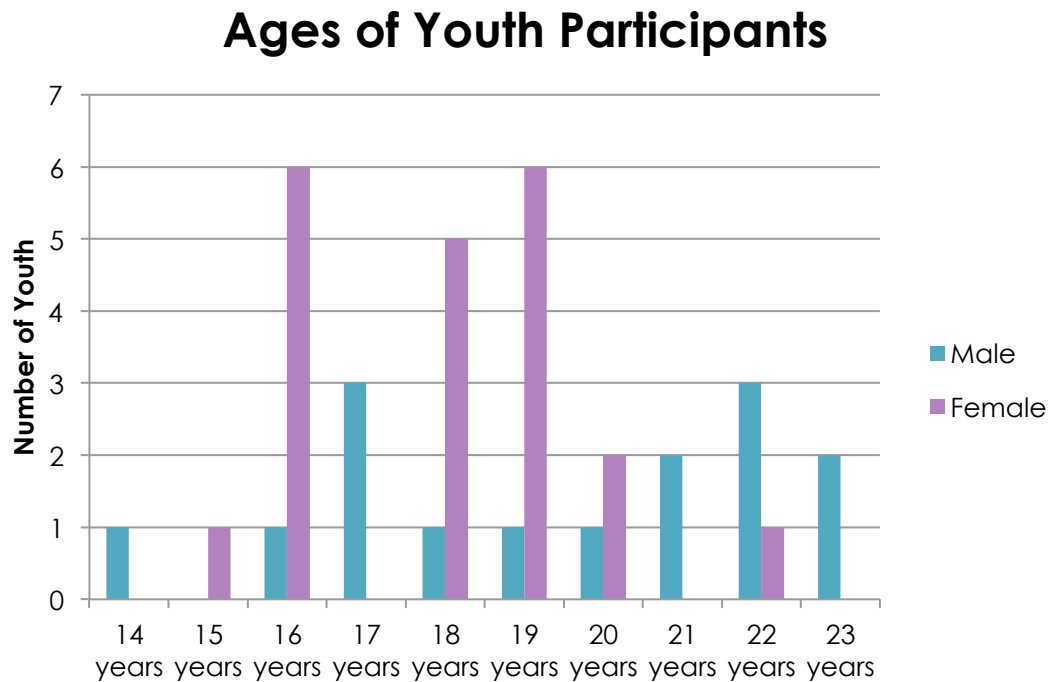
Sample map created by a youth and digitized:



Participant Demographics

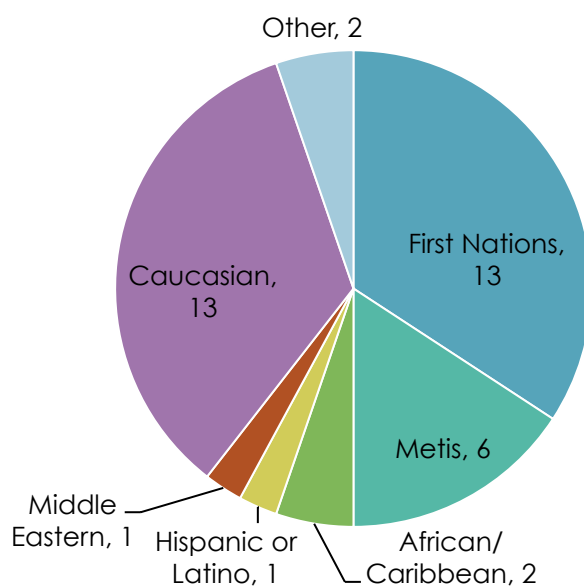
Ages and Gender

21 of the youth participants were female, and 15 were male. Participants were ages 14 - 24 years, with 23 of the 36 youth being between the ages of 16 and 19 years of age.



Ethnicity

19 of the youth participants identified as First Nations or Metis. 13 youth identified as Caucasian, 2 youth as African/Caribbean, 1 youth as Middle Eastern and 1 youth as Hispanic or Latino. 2 youth selected Other as their ethnicity. 2 youth selected more than one ethnicity as part of their ethnic identity.



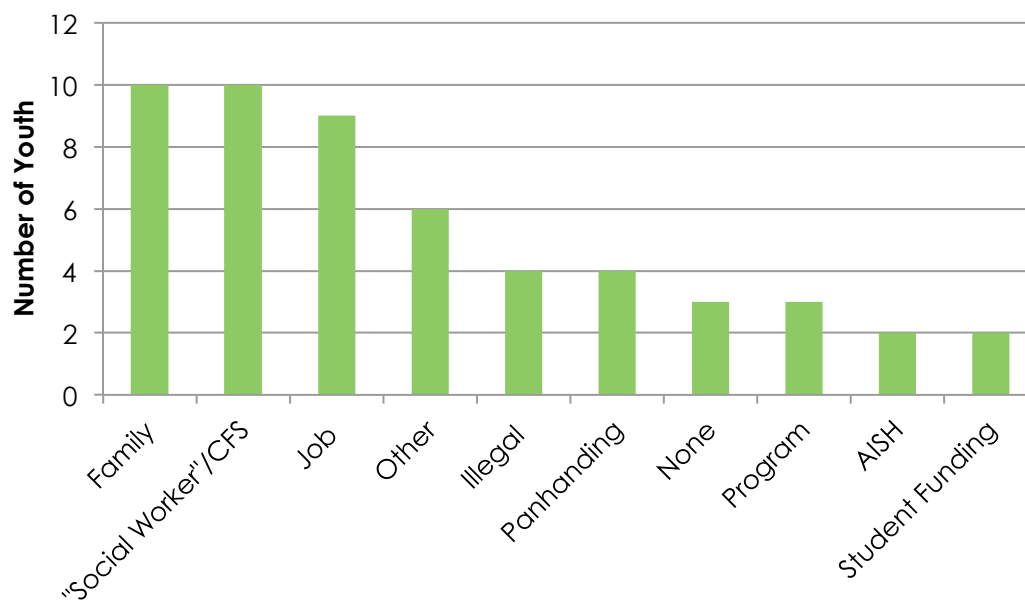
Note: two youth selected more than one response

Child Welfare Status

13 youth (36% of all participants, 52% of participants ages 19 and under) self-reported Child Welfare status.

Where do you get your money?

Youth most frequently reported receiving money from their family, a social worker, or from a job.



The “Other” category includes responses that were written in by the youth on the survey. For example:

- Social Assistance
- “Hustling”
- Snow shoveling
- “Whenever it appears”
- Medical welfare

Current Housing

Youth were asked where they were currently staying. Some youth chose more than one response (e.g. “with relatives/friends, shelter”). Different youth in the same program might also refer to the program as a group home, or as a shelter. The below results are as reported by the youth during the interviews completed October – December 2013.

Currently Staying	Number of Youth
Group home	13
Shelter	12
Shared housing with relatives/friends	7
Other	4
Homeless	3
Rent	1
River Valley	1
Somebody's couch	1
Motel or Hotel	1

Previous Housing in the Last Year

Youth were asked where they have lived or stayed during the previous 12 months. These results are also as reported by the youth. Youth may sleep outdoors during warmer months, and use shelters when it is too cold to sleep outside.

Previous Housing	Number of Youth
Shared housing with relatives/friends	14
Shelter	14
Somebody's couch	11

Rent	9
Outside	8
Group home	7
River Valley	7
Motel or Hotel	6
Treatment Centre	5
Remand or Other Corrections	2
Homeless	1

Q1. What are the typical daily travel routes and destinations of youth who are engaged in high-risk behaviour?

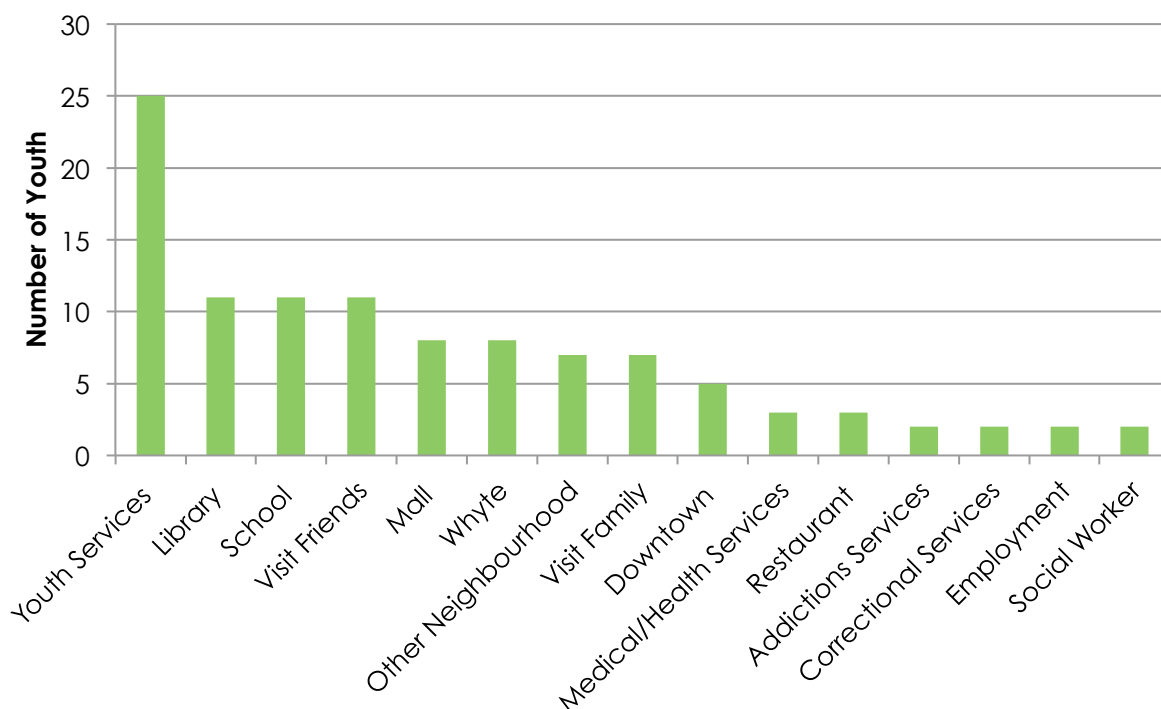
Youth were provided with large paper maps of the City of Edmonton with icons for landmarks such as transit centres, shopping malls, libraries, recreation centres, and youth-serving agencies. Youth were asked to record the following on their maps:

- Where they travel on a typical day
- Safe and unsafe areas
- Places they feel welcome
- Places they avoid
- Places they have been banned from
- Places they may have been victimized by crime or encouraged to commit a crime

On a Typical Day, Where Do You Go?

Youth were asked where they go on a typical day. The most common response was youth-serving agencies, followed by going to the library, to school, and to visit friends.

Female youth participants mapped traveling farther on a typical day than male youth participants (whereas in Phase 1, where the male participants mapped traveling farther).



How Do You Get There?

Almost all the youth reported using public transit, either Light Rail Transit (LRT) and/or the bus. Five youth did not indicate how they traveled, and one youth noted only walking.

Why Are You Going There? What Will You Do There?

Youth were asked why they were going to the places they traveled to, a piece of information missing from the earlier Safe Streets projects. For example, youth accessed libraries mainly to use the computers, but also to sleep without being bothered¹, read, and meet with workers.

The most frequent place youth reported traveling to was youth-serving agencies. Youth most commonly reported accessing youth-serving agencies for music (7 youth), to sleep (6 youth), hang out (6 youth), eat (5 youth), and socialize (5 youth).

¹ Youth can no longer sleep in Edmonton Public Library branches (a change in policy effective May 2015).

Why Youth Travel to Youth Services



This word cloud depicts why youth said they were traveling to youth-serving agencies. Larger words were used more frequently, with “music” being used by 7 youth.

Places Youth Travel To	# of Youth	What They Do There
Youth Service	25	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See Word Cloud (above)
Library	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the computer (most common answer) • Use Wi-Fi • Read • "Nice public space" • Meet addiction worker
School	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend school
Visit Friends	11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit friends
Mall	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shop • Socialize • Work • Hang out until shelter opens • Read at bookstore • Listen to music at music store

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make money returning carts • Visit nearby libraries which don't bother you if you're sleeping² • Visit family
Whyte Avenue	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hang out until shelter opens • Wander • Look for friends • Just try to stay safe • Read at bookstore • Go to the library • Socialize • Find drugs • Panhandle
Other Neighbourhood	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hang out • Shop • Leisurely walk • Meditate • Avoid bad spots during the night • Visit friends • Get smokes • Record music
Visit Family	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit family
Downtown	5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet people • Attend festivals • Hang out • Visit friends • School • Library • Socialize • Walk around
Medical/Health Services	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy-related appointments for two youth
Restaurant(s)	3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eat • Talk with friends
Addictions Services	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NA meetings • Meet Addictions worker
Correctional Services	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visit probation worker • Visit boyfriend
Employment	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Go to work
Social Worker	2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get bus tickets • Pick up cheque • Meet for appts

It is worth noting that while youth who engage in high-risk behaviours report

² As noted previously, youth can no longer sleep in Edmonton Public Library branches (a change in policy effective May 2015).

activities typical to almost all youth (such as visiting friends, work and school), some participants are traveling to destinations just to spend time before shelters open or to try to keep safe.

Q2. What is the impact of social exclusion on decision-making when it comes to routes & destinations?

Youth perceptions of social exclusion were explored by asking youth where they felt welcome, and if they felt they fit in there. Youth also mapped places they avoided, places they felt were safe or unsafe, where they were banned, and where they had been victimized by crime or encouraged to commit a crime.

Where Youth Feel Welcome

Youth reported feeling the most welcome at youth-serving agencies, which was also the most common destination youth reported traveling to. Responses shared by more than one youth are included in the table below, and digital maps collating where youth mapped feeling welcome are provided in Appendix 1.

Places Youth Feel Welcome	Number of Youth
Youth Service Interviewed At*	23
Other Youth Service(s)	12
Mall(s)	8
Neighbourhood or Area, Other**	7
Whyte Avenue Area	6
Library/Libraries	5

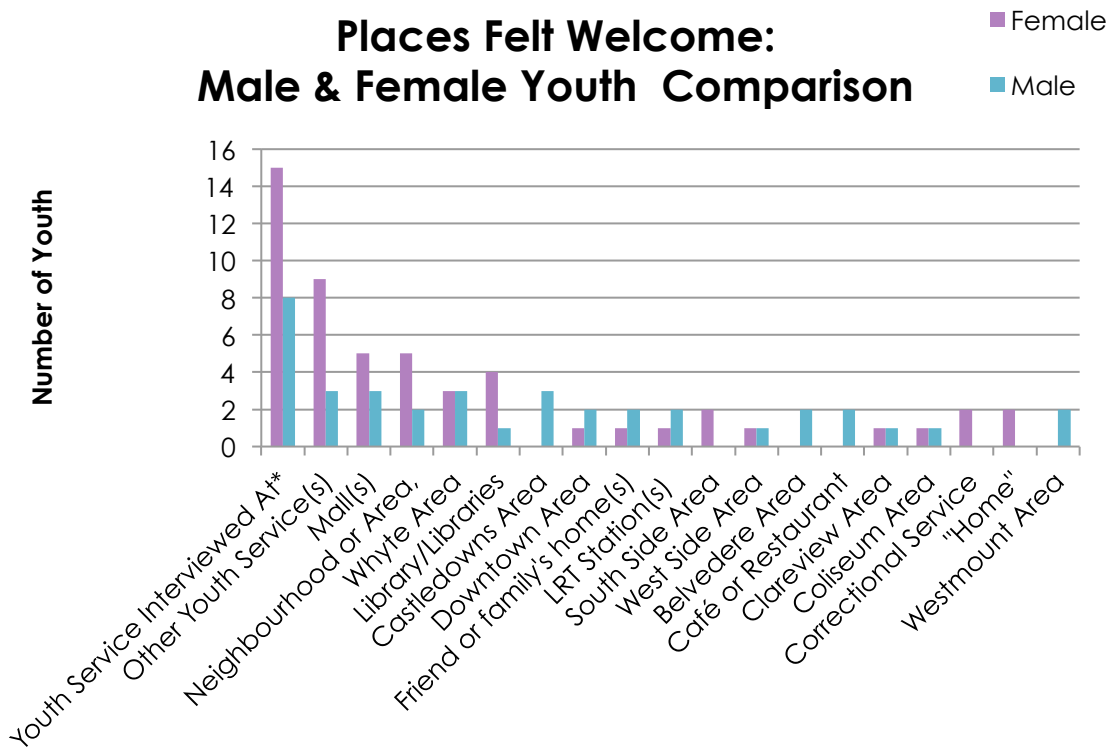
* 12 of these 23 youth were currently staying/living at the youth service they were interviewed at

** This category includes neighbourhoods or areas noted by only one youth, e.g. Terwillegar, Capilano

Areas where three youth reported feeling welcome included the Castedowns area, downtown, at a friend or family home and at the LRT station.

Two youth reported feeling welcome in areas such as the “south side”, “west side”, Belvedere, a specific café or restaurant, Clareview, Coliseum area, a correctional services centre, “home”, and the Westmount area.

One youth each reported feeling welcome at an addictions service, in the entire city except Whyte avenue area, “nowhere”, a specific recreation centre, at school, Whyte Avenue area during the day, and at work.

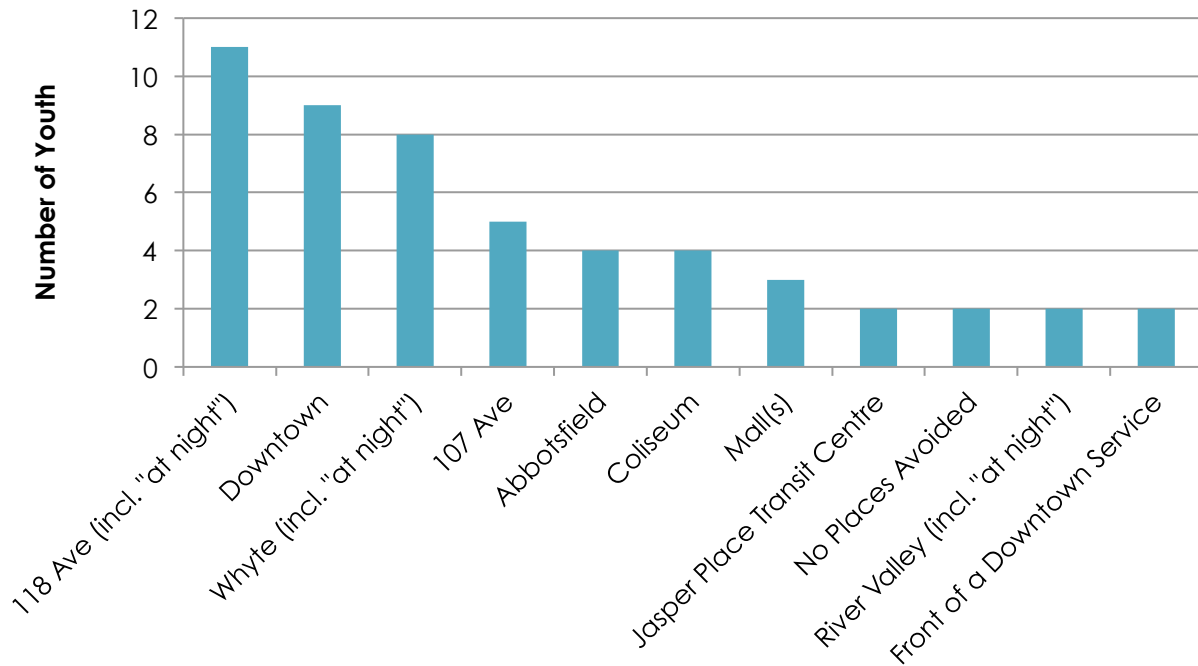


* 12 of these 23 youth were currently staying/living at the youth service they were interviewed at

Places Youth Avoid

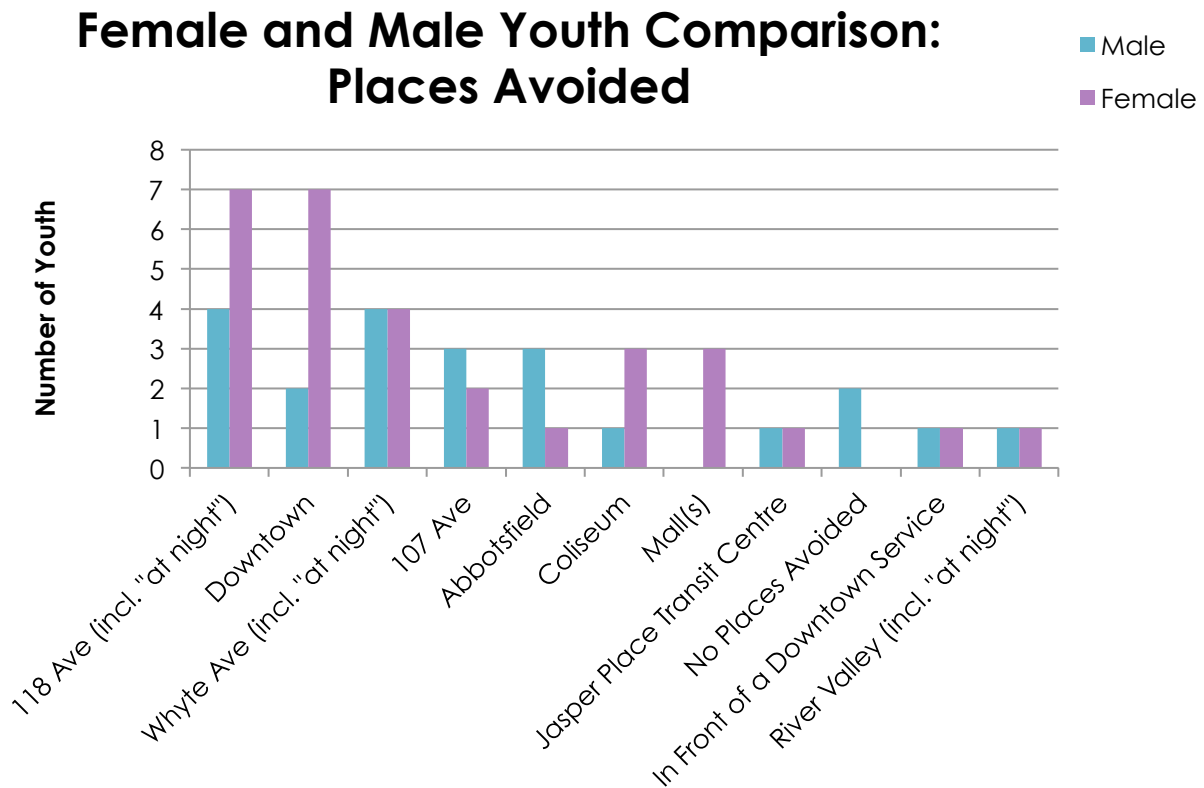
Youth were asked to map the places they avoided (collated digital maps available in Appendix 1). Responses shared by more than one youth are recorded in the chart below.

Places Youth Avoid



Other places youth reported avoiding (1 response each):

- "Anywhere on the Northside LRT track"
- Belvedere
- Boyle
- Boyle Street and Hope Mission area
- Capilano
- Churchill LRT Station
- Clareview
- Coliseum LRT Station
- Downtown (last 4 days of the month)
- Duggan
- Hospital
- Kingsway area
- Mustard Seed Church area
- Northgate
- North Side
- Police Stations
- Stadium
- Stony Plain Road
- Weber Greens
- Windermere
- Youth Resource near Whyte Avenue



24 youth listed more places they felt welcome than they avoided, 7 youth reported more places they avoid than felt welcome, and 5 youth reported an equal number of places they felt welcome and places they avoided.

Youth and Bans

As discussed in the project background, youth who engage in high-risk behaviours and who do not have secure housing may have limited places they can spend time safely. Bans or restricted access (perceived or explicit) can further limit the number of places youth can spend time at.

Youth were asked if they had been banned from anywhere before, and if yes, they were asked where and why they had been banned, and if they had received a ticket. All bans described in this report are as self-disclosed by the youth. This study did not verify or investigate the nature or actuality of the bans shared by the youth.

Six youth had never been banned and the other 30 youth shared a cumulative total of 76 bans.

The number of bans noted by each youth ranged from none to seven; with one ban being the most frequent response. Most youth noted between 0-3 bans.

Number of Youth	Number of Bans
6	0
10	1
6	2
7	3
1	4
2	5
2	6
1	7

Youth reported being banned most frequently from shopping malls, with 19 different youth reporting 30 bans from shopping malls. After shopping malls, youth most frequently reported being banned from libraries and agencies.

Banned From	Number of Bans	Number of Youth
Mall/Malls	30	19
Library/Libraries	12	11
Agency/Agencies	10	4
Transit- LRT Station(s) or Bus	4	4
Stores (3 in malls)	4	3
University	3	3
Café or Restaurant	2	2
Churchill Square	2	2
Event Centre	2	2

Other places noted only once each for a ban included: downtown, a hospital, a swimming pool, a retail/office centre, and parkade(s), with a different youth reporting being banned from each location.

Shoplifting, altercations, and intoxication were the most frequent reasons youth shared for being banned. Less frequently shared reasons included trespassing, fighting, drugs, sleeping, and assault. Some youth did not disclose why they were banned.

Altercations include disturbances, aggressive behaviour not identified by the youth as fighting (e.g. “losing my temper” or “mouthing off” were recorded as altercations), and cursing.

The most frequent reason youth shared for being banned from malls for was shoplifting. From libraries, the most frequent reason given for bans was altercations, and youth most frequently reported being banned from agencies for intoxication.

Some youth were banned from a place for more than one reason, e.g. one youth was banned from a parkade for trespassing and mischief.

The length of bans as reported by the youth ranged from lifetime bans to 24 hours.

Length of Ban (listed most frequent to least frequent)	Number of Bans Reported, and by Number of Youth	Banned From
2 years	12 by 10 youth	Mall (8), Library (3), Downtown
Unknown	11 by 8 youth	Agency/Agencies (3); Café or Restaurant; Malls (4); University (3); Pool
1 year	11 by 9 youth	Transit (3), Library (3), Mall, Churchill Square, Event Centre, Hospital, Unclear
Indefinitely/Lifetime	9 by 7 youth	Agency/Agencies; Library* (2), Mall(s); Parkade (2); Stores in Malls (3)
3 years	7 by 5 youth	Malls (6), Retail/Office Building
1-2 months	5 by 3 youth	Agency/Agencies (4), Mall
9 - 10 years	4 by 4 youth	Mall (3); Café or Restaurant
6 months	4 by 3 youth	Mall (3), Event Centre
1 day	4 by 4 youth	Malls (3), Library
5 years	3 by 3 youth	Library (2), Store

* Edmonton Public Library has indicated that lifetime bans does not reflect their policy

Banning is a topic that warrants further research, as little is known about the extent and impact of banning homeless youth.

Youth and Crime

Youth who are homeless are at greater risk of being victimized by crime than the general youth population (Gaetz, 2009). As described by Gaetz:

“As an outcome of their homelessness, street youth are typically pushed into places and circumstances that impair their ability to ensure their safety and security and, consequently, increase their risk of criminal victimization.” (Gaetz, 2009)

Youth participants were asked if they had been victimized by crime and/or encouraged to commit a crime in the areas they regularly traveled. Youth were reminded that they did not have to answer any question they did not feel comfortable answering.

29 of the 36 youth participants (81%) noted being victimized by crime, encouraged to commit a crime, or instances of both. Youth mapped where these events occurred, but many youth did not want to disclose further information. Some youth noted theft (including car theft), and a few youth noted assault and gangs (being recruited or threatened by). One youth noted sexual exploitation, and one noted drug trafficking.

Exploring Social Exclusion with Youth

To talk with youth about their perceptions of social exclusion, the interviewer explained that our committee of service providers was interested in how “feeling like you don’t fit in can affect decisions and actions”. Youth were asked if they ever felt like people judged them, and if yes, how they felt judged. Participants were also asked if they thought youth were on the streets because they felt like they didn’t fit in, or if youth felt like they didn’t fit in because they were on the street, a question that resonated with youth in Phase 1 of Safe Streets.

I feel like I don't fit in with the rest of everybody. I feel like people look down at me because I'm homeless. I feel dirty.

18 year old female youth

When I was homeless, I was trying to go to the south side but I was really dirty. People stared and made me want to fight them.... People judge me because I'm a 6ft native. It might just be because I'm a big dude, I will get in trouble. But everyone judges, it just happens. People just assume. You could just assume someone waiting at that the bus stop is a bum, but they might be getting off work, and just waiting for a ride. People judge you if you stay out of trouble or try to. They just think you're a bitch. You get judged.

17 year old male youth

When you're homeless you feel like an outsider, not part of civilization. As soon as you're homeless and fall asleep somewhere you'll get woken up within 15 minutes and told to get out.

20 year old male youth

Oh hell yeah! They look at you and they're like, "Oh shit, let's walk away."

18 year old female youth

Feeling Judged: "They think I'm a Criminal"

Most youth reported feeling judged. Youth gave several reasons for feeling judged, including: by their reputation, the way they acted, the way they were dressed, their ethnicity, for being homeless, or for "trying to stay out of trouble". Some youth specified that gangs, police, and security officers judged them. Youth felt that people thought they were up to trouble, or as one youth described: "they think I'm a criminal". Youth described people staring at them, or avoiding looking at them altogether. One youth felt judged because she was pregnant and she felt other people thought she couldn't take care of her baby. Six youth reported not feeling judged by others.

Streets and Fitting In

In the discussion of social exclusion, youth were also asked, "Do you think youth are on the streets because they feel like they don't fit in, or do they feel like they don't fit in because they are on the streets?". Youth live on the streets for a number of reasons, frequently to leave violence and abuse at home. Feeling unwelcome or like you don't fit in can lead youth to the streets, where they may then feel like they don't fit in with others who are not living the street lifestyle.

The most common response to the question was “both”. Youth explained that youth could end up on the streets because they feel like they do not fit in at home, at school, and/or in society. They may feel like they relate to or belong more with people who are living a street lifestyle. However, once they are living on the streets, youth feel even more like they do not fit in with mainstream society.

Several youth emphasized that many youth end up on the streets because of problems at home.

Society's got their own standards so a lot of times the youth don't really feel like they can accommodate to those standards, they become outcasts. And sometimes kids just grew up on the streets and it takes some time for them to accommodate to the standards that the other kids have, the kids with better opportunities. It goes on and on. When I was in juvenile schools it took me a lot to accommodate to public schools.

21 year old male youth

I think youth are on the streets because either shit went down at home and they don't want them there and they have nowhere else to go, or they're on the streets because their friends are.

18 year old male youth

Responses were nearly equally split between youth who identified that youth felt they didn't fit in so they were on the streets or that youth didn't fit in because they were on the streets. One youth mentioned youth creating a street family when they felt like they didn't fit in at home.

I think they're on the streets because they don't fit in and they use drugs and alcohol to cope with that and they find people like that.

20 year old female youth

I feel like a lot of people that are on the streets or are in group homes don't fit in because of that, they have to rely on services instead of themselves or families. They feel like they don't fit in because everyone else has themselves, their family, and their partners, while they have to rely on the government.

16 year old female youth

I think it's because they're on the streets. They think that "Oh, I'm on the streets, I'm useless, I'm nothing."

19 year old female youth

Q3. What factors contribute to a youth's perception that a space is safe or unsafe?

The Old Strathcona Community Mapping and Planning Committee members were interested in how youth who engage in high-risk behaviours navigate keeping safe when there are limited places the youth are welcome to spend time. Peer-to-peer safety strategies were explored by asking youth what safety advice they would give youth who were new to the streets. Interviewers noted that in earlier results different youth called the same areas safe or unsafe, and youth were asked their perceptions on how youth decide whether places are safe or unsafe.

Advice to Youth New to the Streets

Always stay in groups of people, stay away from drugs, and don't be out at night time.

18 year old female youth

Youth were asked what advice they would give a youth new to the streets. The results demonstrated the contradictory complexity of navigating life without a safe place to call home: youth warned youth new to the streets to stay away from others, but also not to go anywhere alone.

Most of the advice for youth new to the streets was centered on the following themes:

1. Avoid Entrenchment
2. Safety Advice
3. Avoid Drugs and Alcohol
4. Resources to Access

Avoid Entrenchment

Youth advised youth new to the streets to “do your own thing”, warning against spending too much time with youth who are entrenched in life on the streets. They suggested that youth who could do so, get off the streets as soon as possible. Youth felt that spending too much time with youth entrenched in life on the streets would lead to increased drug use and crime, and make it harder to improve your life or get off the streets.

Make a routine, make your own decisions, and do your own thing. If you follow a crowd you will be anchored down, your lifestyle will change because of their lifestyle.

24 year old male youth

Don't get to know everyone in the shelter, if you want to get off the streets you have to do your own thing... just use it for what it is, to sleep.

24 year old male youth

Safety Advice

Youth warned youth new to the streets not to trust others, to be cautious, keep to themselves and mind their own business. Some youth advised not to appear too intimidating (“don't walk around like you're tough shit”) as it could cause confrontation. Comments included “mind your own business”, keep your mouth shut”, “don't talk to anybody” and “careful who you piss off”.

Hang out with people you know, try not to mix your friends because you don't know whose really trying to help you or hurt you.

22 year old female youth

Careful who you piss off down here, and don't “rep” anything that you don't actually rep.

16 year old female youth

As mentioned, while cautioning youth to be very careful about whom they spend time with, youth also repeatedly advised not to go anywhere alone.

A few youth warned youth new to the streets to be aware of their surroundings and trust their instincts.

If you aren't sure about a place, just get out. If you get that nervous feeling, you gotta go. Stick to your senses.

17 year old male youth

Youth particularly warned to take safety measures at nighttime. They recommended being in populated areas at night, to be off the streets somewhere safe at night (if possible), and if on the streets at night, not to be alone.

[Avoid Drugs and Alcohol](#)

Almost a third of the youth advised youth who are new to the streets to stay away from alcohol and drugs, particularly drugs. By extension, this also meant advising youth to stay away from people who might want them to do drugs.

Try to avoid staying with people that do drugs and meth and all that, focus on the things that you want to focus on, not what people try to force you to do.

19 year old female youth

[Access Resources](#)

Twelve youth recommended that youth who were new to the streets access available resources. Some youth specified resources they recommended (such as shelters and youth-serving agencies), and others gave general advice to seek assistance from organizations and connect with youth workers.

[Deciding if a Place is Safe or Unsafe](#)

Youth reported that the main determinant of whether a place is safe or unsafe is the other people who are there. Other factors included in the decision were: the experiences youth had there before, the violence and crime in the area, what their instincts were telling them, if their friends were there, and the area's reputation.

[Who Else Is There: "People are really the only things that make a place unsafe."](#)

Almost three-quarters of the youth said that deciding if a place is safe or unsafe depends on who else is there.

If people aren't safe, the place isn't. And if I don't know anyone, then I don't know if it's safe.

19 year old female youth

If they didn't know the people at a place, youth would assess the situation, watching how other people act. Youth said a place could be safe if people were friendly or laughing, whereas a situation with "bad vibes", yelling, drugs, or sirens might be one that they would try to leave.

Previous Experiences

Youth also used previous experiences in a place to determine if a place was safe or unsafe. Negative experiences such as robberies would lead to feeling an area was unsafe.

Crime and Violence in the Area

When describing safe places, some youth described places where there were no violence or weapons, no drugs, and less fighting. Higher crime rates could make youth more likely to decide a place was unsafe, as could frequent police presence.

Instincts

Youth spoke to "bad vibes", a sense of unease, trusting their gut, and level of comfort as part of their assessment of a place as safe or unsafe.

Friends

Places with friends were considered safer by the youth. One female youth noted that females were safer if they were accompanied by a male friend.

If you're in a place and you have no friends and people want to beat you they will because there's no one to stop them.

17 year old male youth

Reputation of the Area

Youth also indicated that the "stories" about an area factored into their perception of a place as safe or unsafe.

People hear stories and they hear rumors and things that happened and they hear lots of cops go there and they say, 'that place is unsafe.' Or people say 'carry a weapon around that street.'

19 year old female youth

Safe and Unsafe Area Mapping

Collated mapping images of the places youth mapped as safe or unsafe area are included in Appendix 1: Mapping Images.

Female youth participants placed more stickers on their maps indicating unsafe places than stickers indicating safe places. Female youth also indicated many more unsafe places than the male youth participants did, a finding consistent with Safe Streets Phase 1 results.

Female participants' "safe place" stickers were concentrated in central Edmonton, whereas the male youth's "safe place" stickers were more dispersed. Female youth were also more likely to indicate the same areas as safe compared to male youth, who each indicated unique places as safe.

Q4. What recommendations do youth have to help youth feel safer in the areas surrounding youth services?

One of the findings in *Safe Streets Phase 1* was that youth felt safe at youth-serving agencies, but identified the areas surrounding youth-serving agencies as unsafe. As noted previously, the safety of an area for youth is primarily determined by who else is there. While there is supervision within the youth-serving agencies, approaching or traveling to an area where many youth congregate is risky for youth as it increases the chances of altercation outside of the supervised spaces.

In this study, youth were asked how to make the spaces around youth-serving agencies safer, explaining the results from the earlier project. The most common recommendation from youth focused on transportation as a way to make traveling to youth-serving agencies safer. Five youth suggested transit access support, providing transit tickets or passes, and five youth suggested service providers have greater ability to give youth rides.

[Give youth] bus tickets. You get harassed or jumped if you're walking. Then you have to get on the train and you can't pay.

14 year old male youth

Youth also suggested ways to make public transit safer and more accessible, such as sitting at the front of the bus, having buses run later or more frequently, or reducing the price of bus fare.

Four youth suggested youth service staff support youth in feeling safer, for example by telling youth they don't have to be scared, and making youth feel more welcome. A few youth suggested building youth-serving agencies in safer areas and some youth recommended that youth who are afraid should walk with friends.

Other suggestions made by two or fewer youth included: carrying a cell phone, carrying protection, having more security, and staggering or extending youth service hours so the services are open longer.

Twelve of the youth reported they did not know how to make traveling to and approaching youth-serving agencies feel safer to youth.

They should open the places earlier and not open them at nine. It gets dark fast in the winter and they should have staff that have half shifts... so less bad things happen. Especially if you take a bus at night it's really scary. And sometimes you have to walk there and when it's cold it seems like a really long time.

19 year old female youth

Discussion

The results of this study with Edmonton youth who engage in high-risk behaviour suggests that local youth are impacted by social exclusion. Youth reported feelings of social exclusion, such as feeling judged and under suspicion of causing trouble. One youth described feeling that he was "not part of civilization" when homeless. Feeling unwelcome can magnify feelings of unworthiness, resulting in further isolation of youth who are already severely marginalized. Youth confirmed they often leave home for reasons such as abuse and violence. When youth are homeless, the resulting further isolation, exclusion and marginalization can make escaping street entrenchment more difficult. Aboriginal and LGBTQ+ homeless youth are over-represented within the homeless population (Government of Alberta, 2015; Abramovich, 2012) and prejudice can lead to amplified exclusion for these youth. Aboriginal residents in Edmonton perceive more negative perceptions of Aboriginal people compared to other Canadian cities (Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study, 2010).

The youth related multiple housing situations in the year prior to the project interviews. In some situations the "housing" was not housing, but sleeping rough (outside). It is important to note that as teenagers and young adults, these

youth are experiencing unstable housing and lack of a home during a critical development period. Development and attachment issues can make the transition to adulthood even more challenging (Government of Alberta, 2015). During a time when many young people are learning to be independent within the security of their family, these youth cannot depend on having even their basic needs met.

With most youth participants traveling via public transit and some recommending transit access to improve safety accessing youth services, the results from this phase of the Safe Streets Project continue to emphasize the importance of transportation, as found in *Routes to Homes*, Phase 2 of Safe Streets. Transportation can be a significant support to ending homelessness, as identified by individuals experiencing homelessness in Toronto (City of Toronto, 2013).

When discussing safety strategies, not being alone was suggested as an important way to keep safe, but an area's safety is primarily determined by who else is there. The difficulty of trying to keep safe by not being alone, but also being very careful with who you spend your time with, emphasizes the complexity of constantly navigating what is safe and what is not safe when you do not have a stable home (a place of safety, comfort and belonging for many people).

There was strong overlap in the areas indicated as safe and unsafe (particularly by female youth participants), a finding consistent with the Phase 1 mapping. As well, there was significant overlap between the areas youth felt welcome in, and the areas they avoided. This may reflect several possibilities: that a safe area for one youth is an area another youth avoids, that these are central areas where services and transit access are focused and thus youth are spending more time in these areas in general, or perhaps that the safe and/or welcome areas are adjacent to the areas where youth feel unsafe. For example, many youth resources are located in central areas youth also report trying to avoid. The time of day might also influence how safe an area is, for example, one youth specified they felt safe in the Whyte avenue area during the day, but not at night. If the primary determinant of an area's safety is the other people there, a safe area could quickly become unsafe depending on whom else is present (also noted in Phase 1 of the Safe Streets project).

One unexpected observation during the project was that youth might interpret their bans as lengthier than the bans actually are. In earlier OSCMAP meeting discussions, it was observed that the number of youth who reported being banned from transit was much higher than the transit system's records of banned youth. This suggests some youth inaccurately believe (or were inaccurately told) they were banned. Similar indications of confusion around

banning were found in Phase 3. Some youth did not know how long their bans were for, and one service provider noted the youth's self-reports of bans did not reflect the policies of their organization. This may reflect the youth's feelings of exclusion and being unwanted, or that it's difficult for youth to understand the details when a ban is communicated to them. Further investigation into the bans of youth who engage in high-risk behaviour is recommended, particularly youth perceptions of bans, local banning policies, and how bans are communicated to youth. OSCMAP service providers have observed that it can be difficult for youth (particularly youth with a history of trauma) to determine what is a rejection of their *behaviour*, and what is a rejection of *themselves*. Being watched carefully, or being asked to not swear or to be quiet can be interpreted as "we don't want you here" and can make youth feel threatened. This sense of feeling threatened can cause a "fight or flight" reaction, resulting in an altercation or even aggressive behaviour. This can lead to youth being banned, further reinforcing feelings of exclusion.

The youth participants reported that they travel to youth-serving agencies on a typical day, and that youth-serving agencies are the places they feel most welcome. Basic needs like showering, eating and sleeping are sometimes met at the youth-serving agencies, but agencies also offer refuge for youth as one of the few safe and welcome places they can spend time. Youth-serving agencies provide youth a place to seek support and guidance from healthy adults and role models. Youth with histories of trauma may have few opportunities to allow themselves to be vulnerable, and the opportunities to safely process emotions with staff at youth-serving agencies may not exist elsewhere for the youth. Street-involved youth are often wary of trusting other people, and the trusting relationships built with service providers can have significant positive impacts by reducing isolation, and promoting positive behaviours. This trust also allows agencies to more fully understand and convey to others the challenges youth are living with to better meet the needs of the youth.

Conclusions

Social exclusion impacts youth who engage in high-risk behaviour as they navigate where and how to spend their time when there are limited places available to them that are safe, and where they feel welcome. Education and training are recommended to promote inclusivity and to better support youth.

Recommendations

Recommendation	Relevant Organizations
Education and Training to Reduce Social Exclusion	
1. Standardized training and education for staff working in areas frequented by youth who engage in high-risk behaviours (such as parks, shopping centres, and transit centres) to avoid or reduce altercations. Training opportunities in trauma-informed care and harm-reduction utilized where appropriate (e.g. the High Risk Youth Conference, or iHuman Youth Society's High Risk Youth Uncensored: An Educational Exchange training).	<i>Non-profit funders and investors, youth-serving agencies, Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, supports and services accessed by youth, business owners</i>
2. The creation of an awareness campaign and icon indicating a staff or resource has received training on working with youth engaged in high-risk behaviours. The icon would convey to youth that this person or place has received training and education on the experiences and perspectives of youth engaged in high-risk behaviours.	<i>Non-profit funders and investors, Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, supports and services accessed by youth, youth-serving agencies</i>
3. Edmonton Public Library continues to be a leader in inclusive resources and offering outreach services to people in need. We also recommend EPL continue community education about their outreach initiatives.	<i>Edmonton Public Library</i>
4. Culturally specific resources for Aboriginal youth, who are overrepresented amongst homeless youth or youth at risk of homelessness.	<i>Alberta Association of Services for Children and Youth, youth-serving agencies</i>
5. Supportive and trained supports and services for LGBTQ+ youth, who are also over-represented in the homeless youth population.	<i>Alberta Association of Services for Children and Youth, youth-serving agencies</i>
Housing & Transit Support	
6. Appropriate housing available for youth when needed.	<i>Homeward Trust Edmonton, non-profit funders and investors, Government of Alberta</i>
7. Transit access in combination with identification to help youth access resources and seek support, as recommended in <i>Routes to Homes: Transit and Social Skills Intervention for Homeless Youth</i> .	<i>City of Edmonton, non-profit funders and investors, Government of Alberta</i>

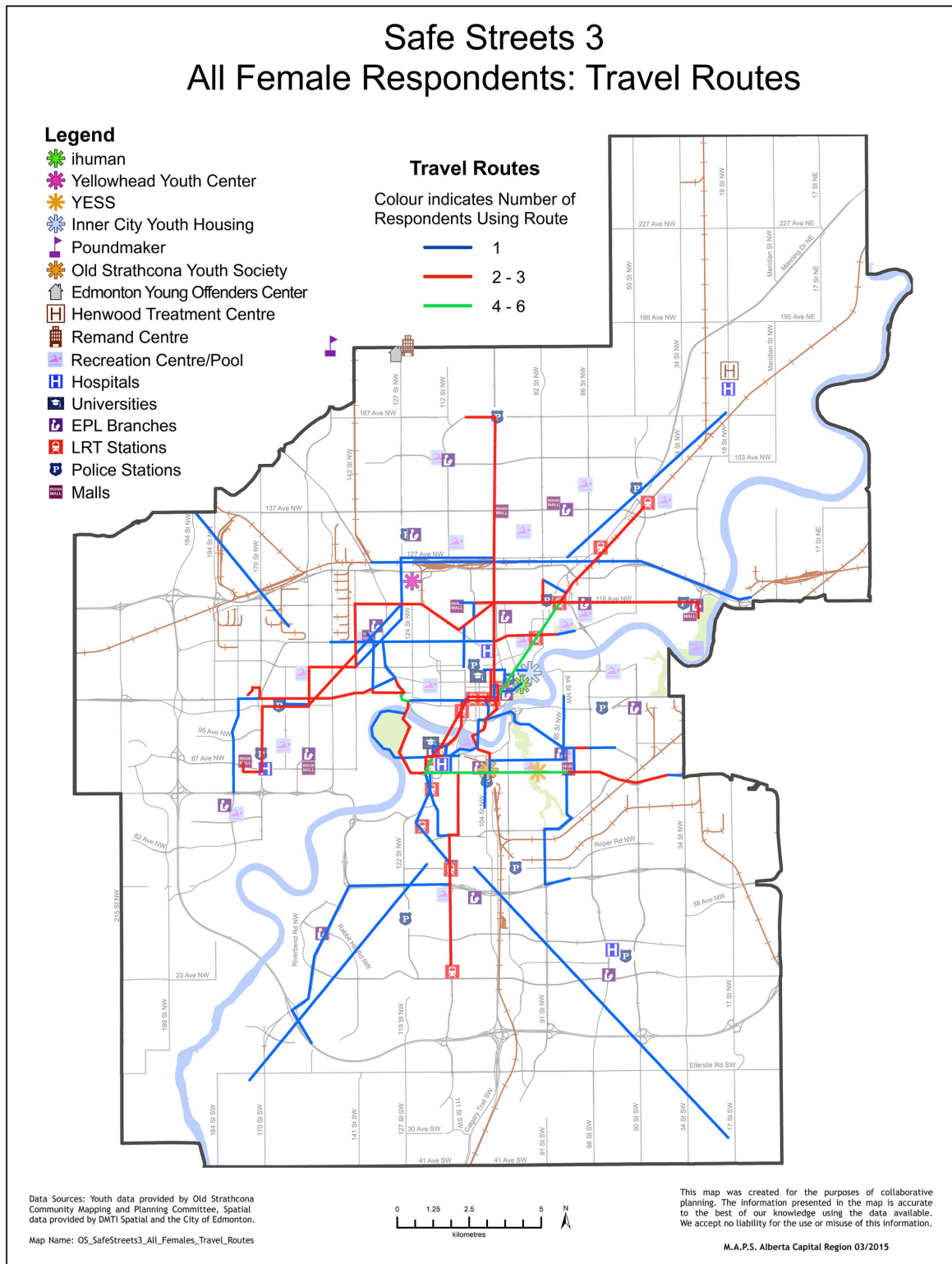
Banning Policy and Practices	
8. Further investigation and research into banning practices and policies and youth who engage in high-risk behaviours (e.g. how and why bans are implemented, how they are communicated and understood by youth, ban resolution, and opportunities for restorative justice).	<i>Youth-serving agencies, City of Edmonton, academic institutions</i>
9. Clear communication and, where appropriate, more flexibility, alternative measures, and consideration of special circumstances in banning practices.	<i>City of Edmonton, youth-serving agencies, other services and supports accessed by youth</i>
10. Appropriate referrals provided when youth are banned. For example, a youth banned for intoxication would also receive a referral to an addictions resource.	<i>Youth-serving agencies, other services and supports accessed by youth</i>
Support for Youth-Serving Agencies	
11. Suitable, sustainable funding for youth-serving agencies to be available when youth need them.	<i>Government of Alberta, FCSS, non-profit funders and investors</i>
12. Continued recognition of the substantial role youth-serving agencies provide in building relationships with hard-to-reach youth, reducing isolation and promoting positive behaviours.	<i>Government of Alberta, City of Edmonton, non-profit funders and investors</i>
13. Youth-serving agencies continue to be at the forefront of making services inclusive for youth.	<i>Youth-serving agencies</i>
14. Extended hours for youth-serving agencies in the winter months to provide a safe and warm place for youth.	<i>Youth-serving agencies, non-profit funders and investors</i>

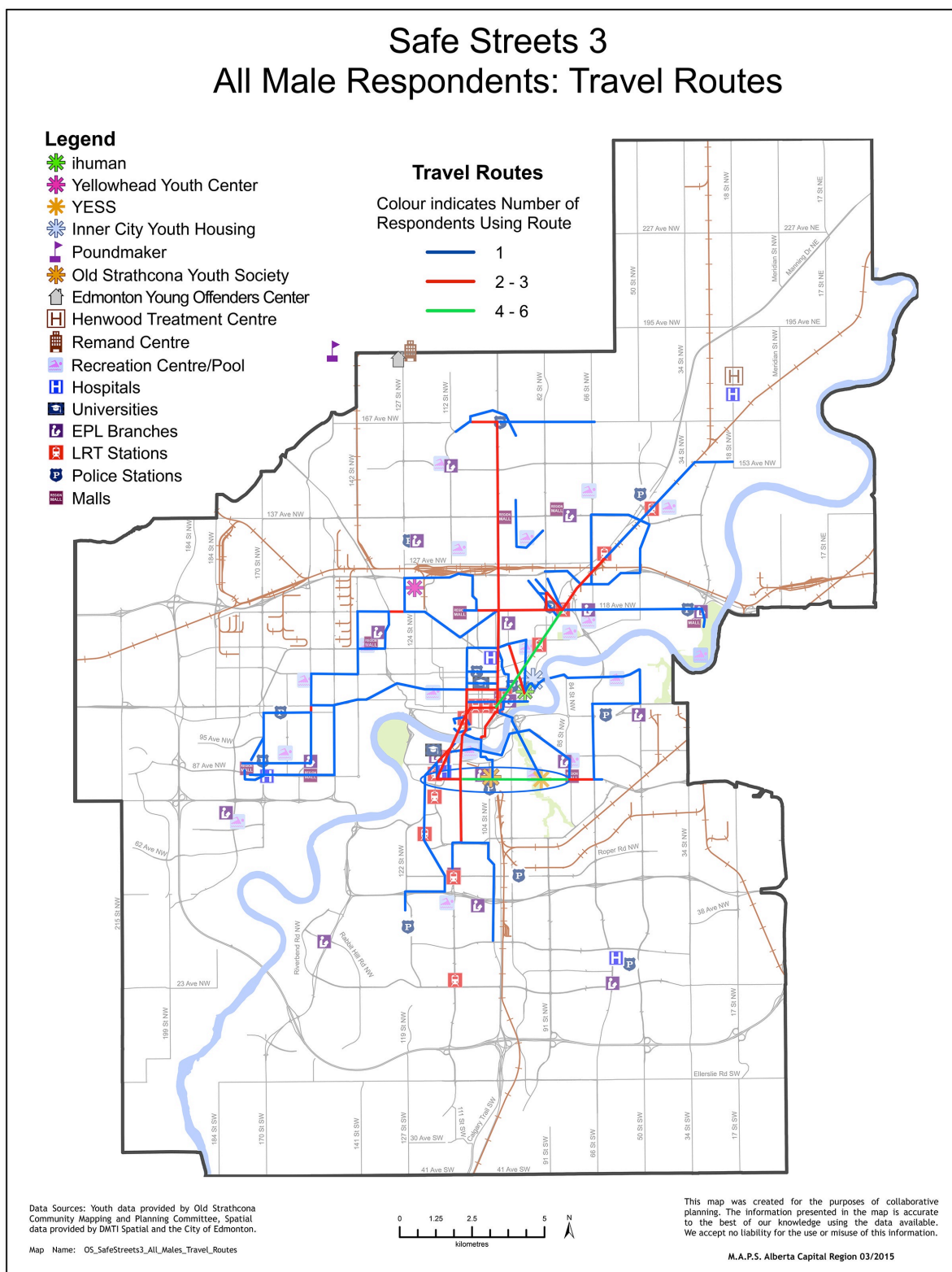
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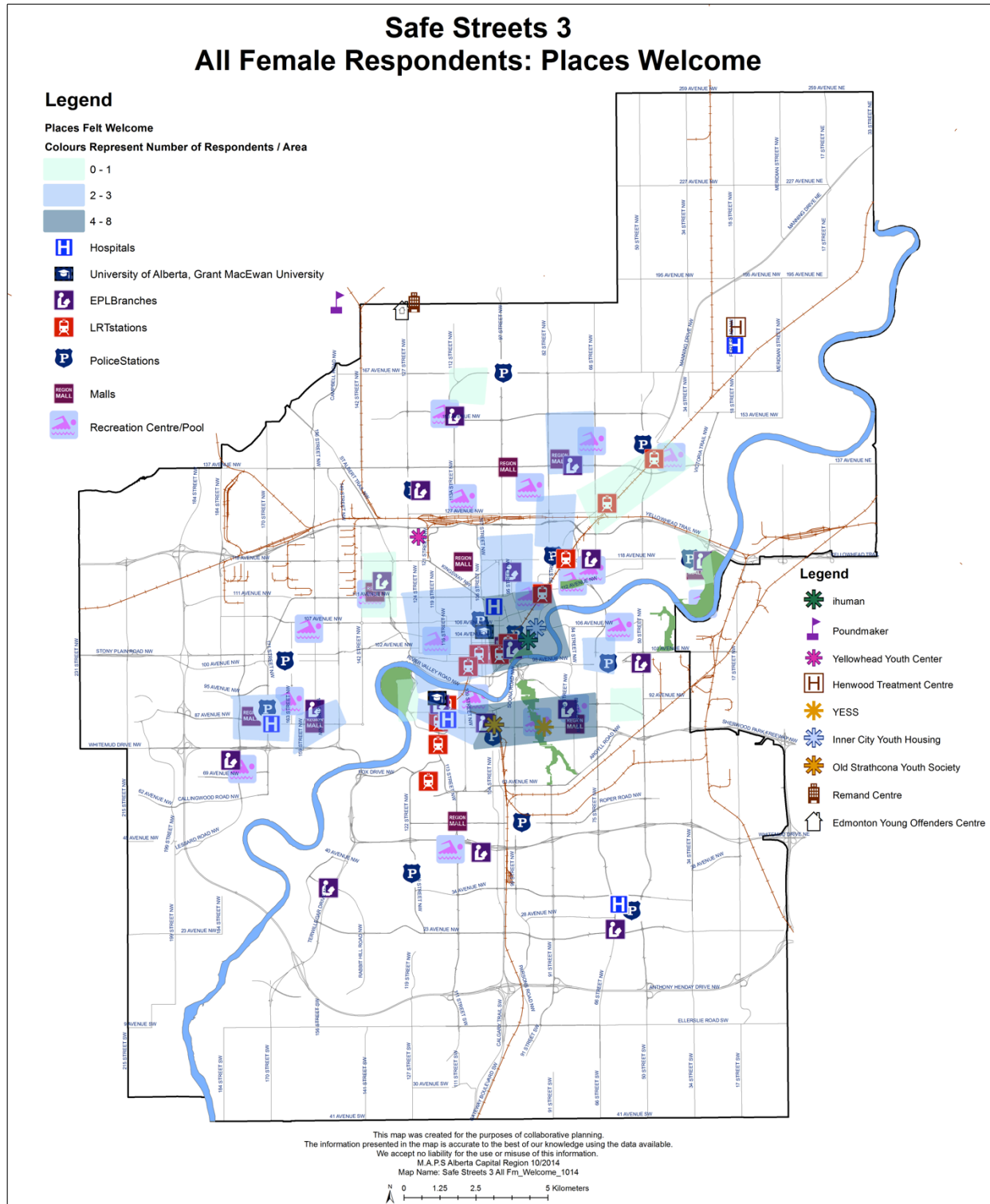
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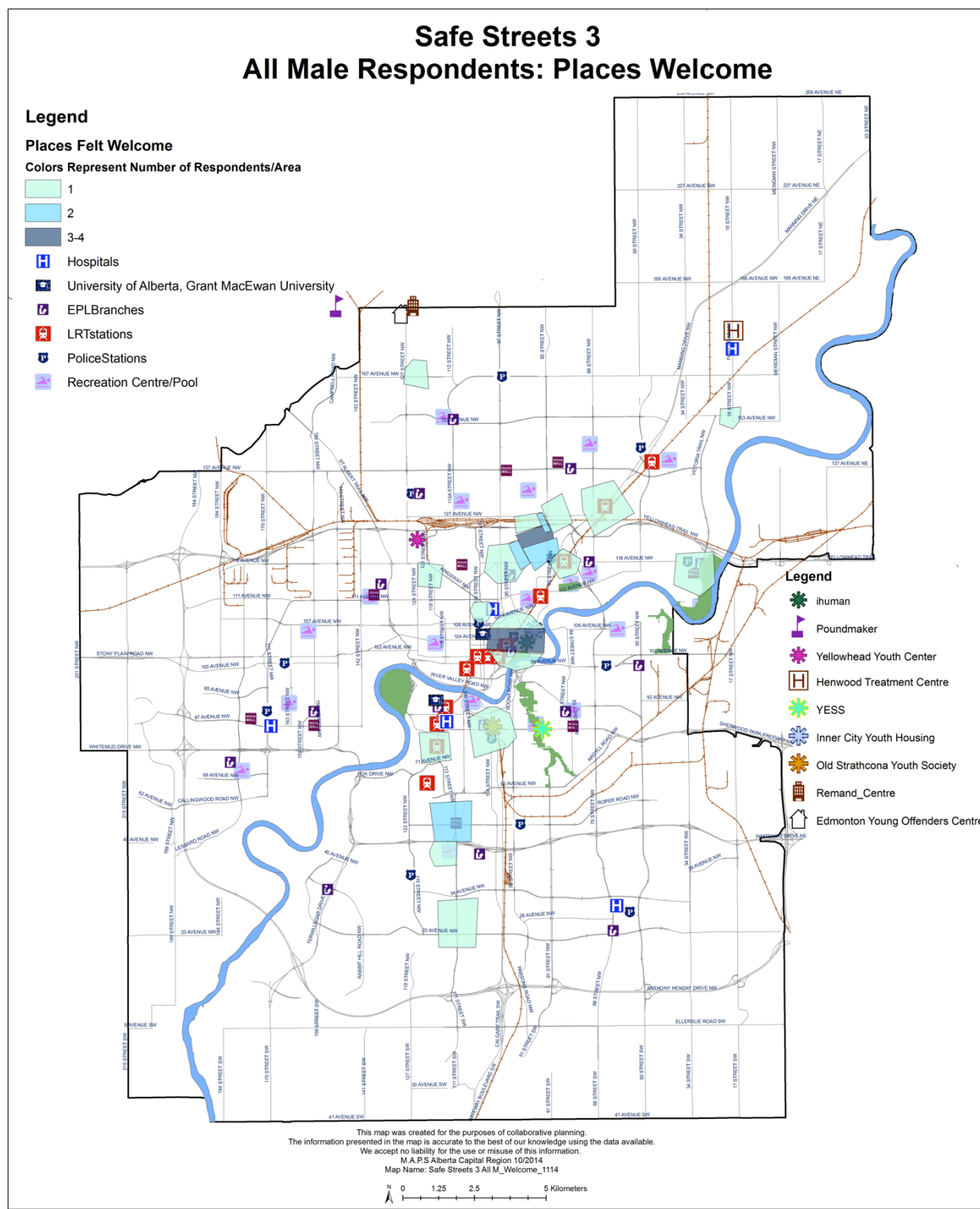
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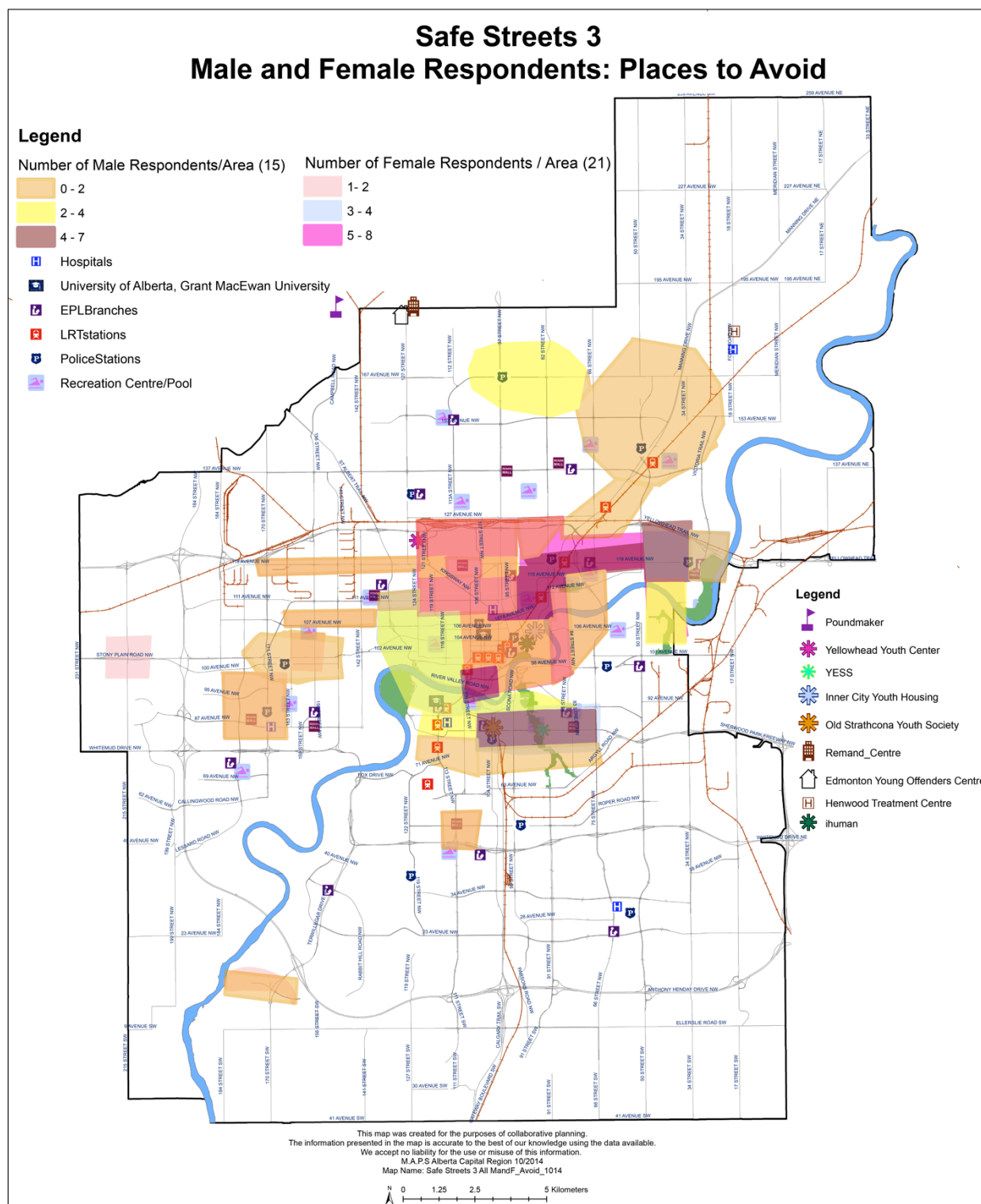
Appendix 1: Mapping Activity Images

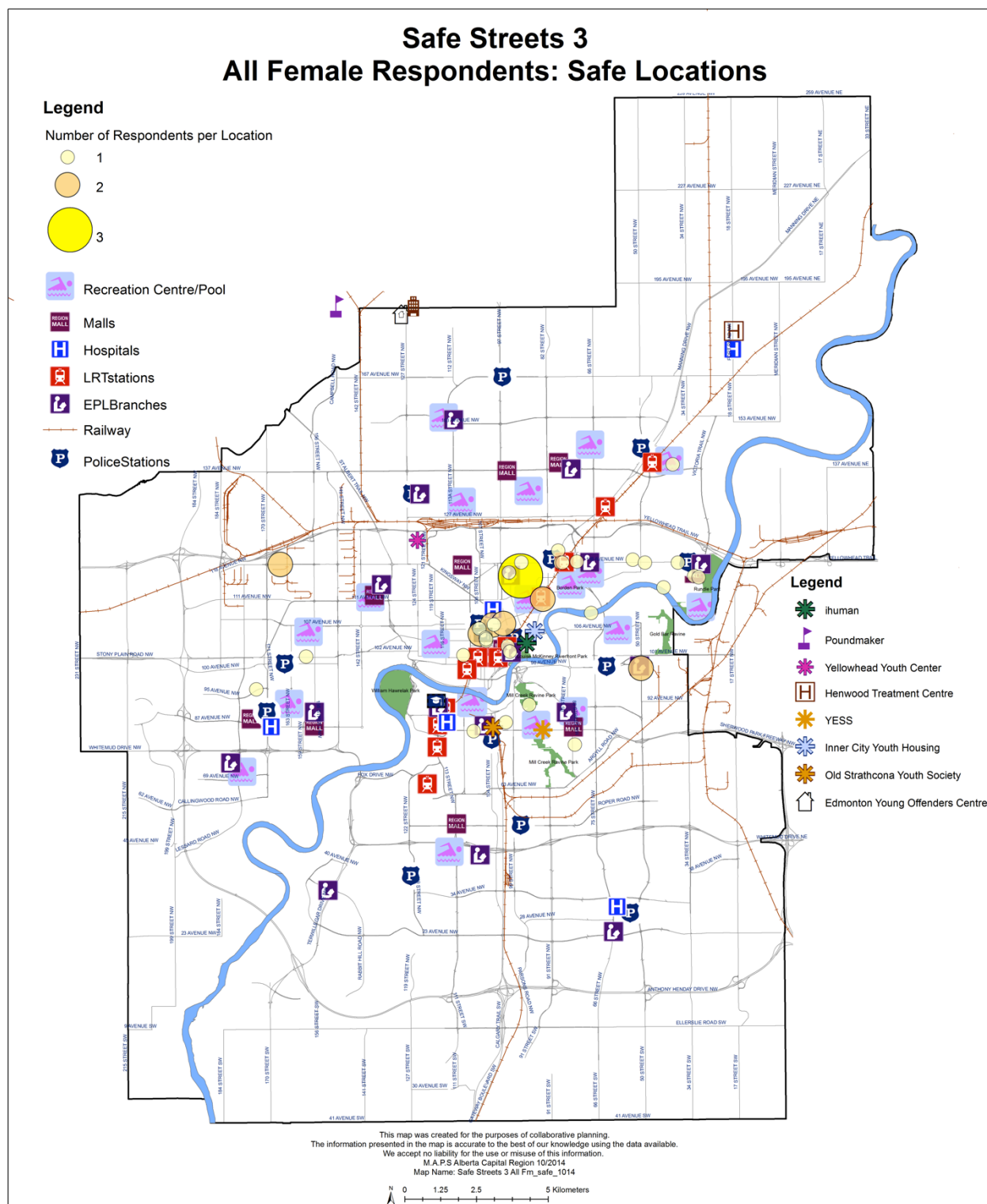


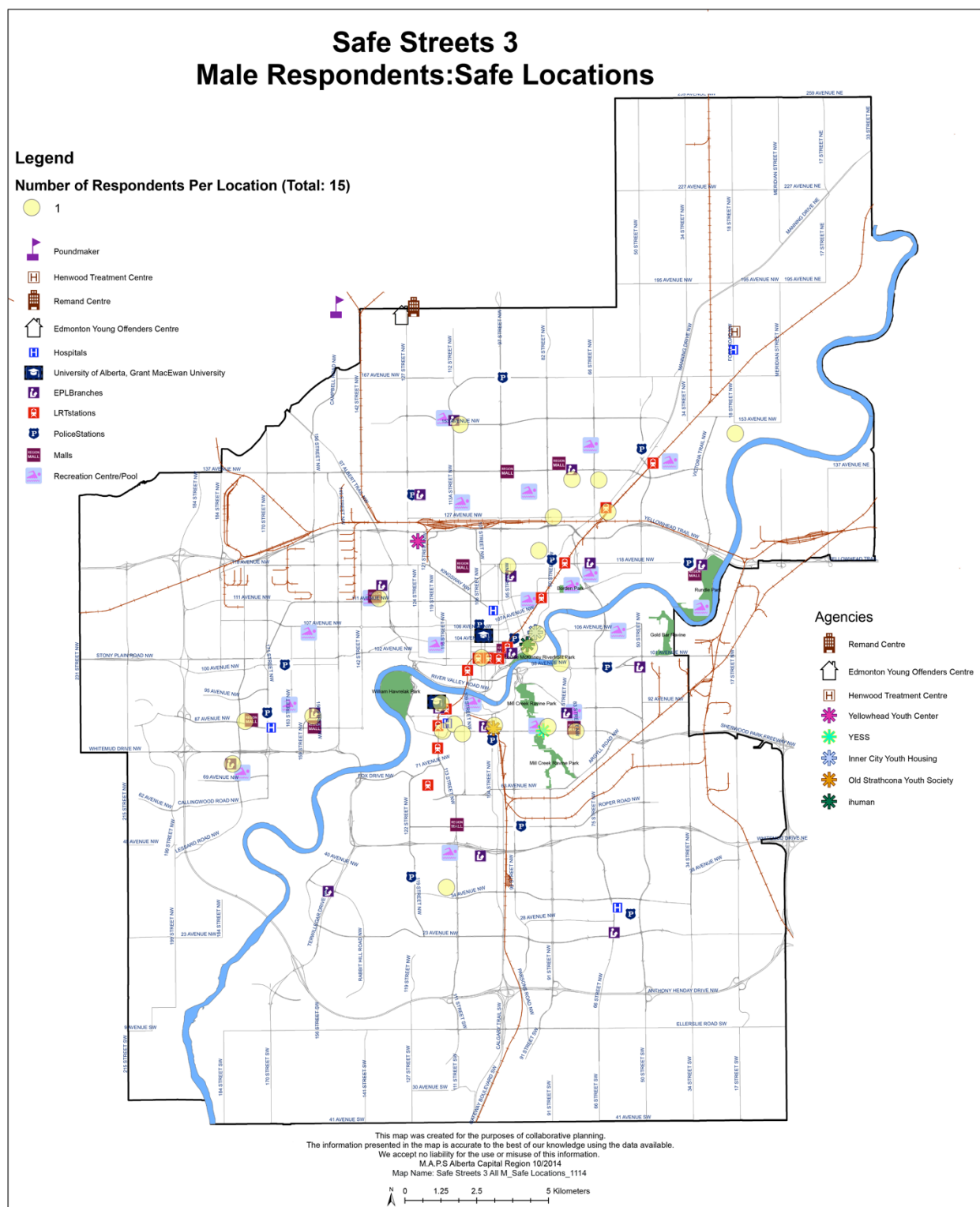


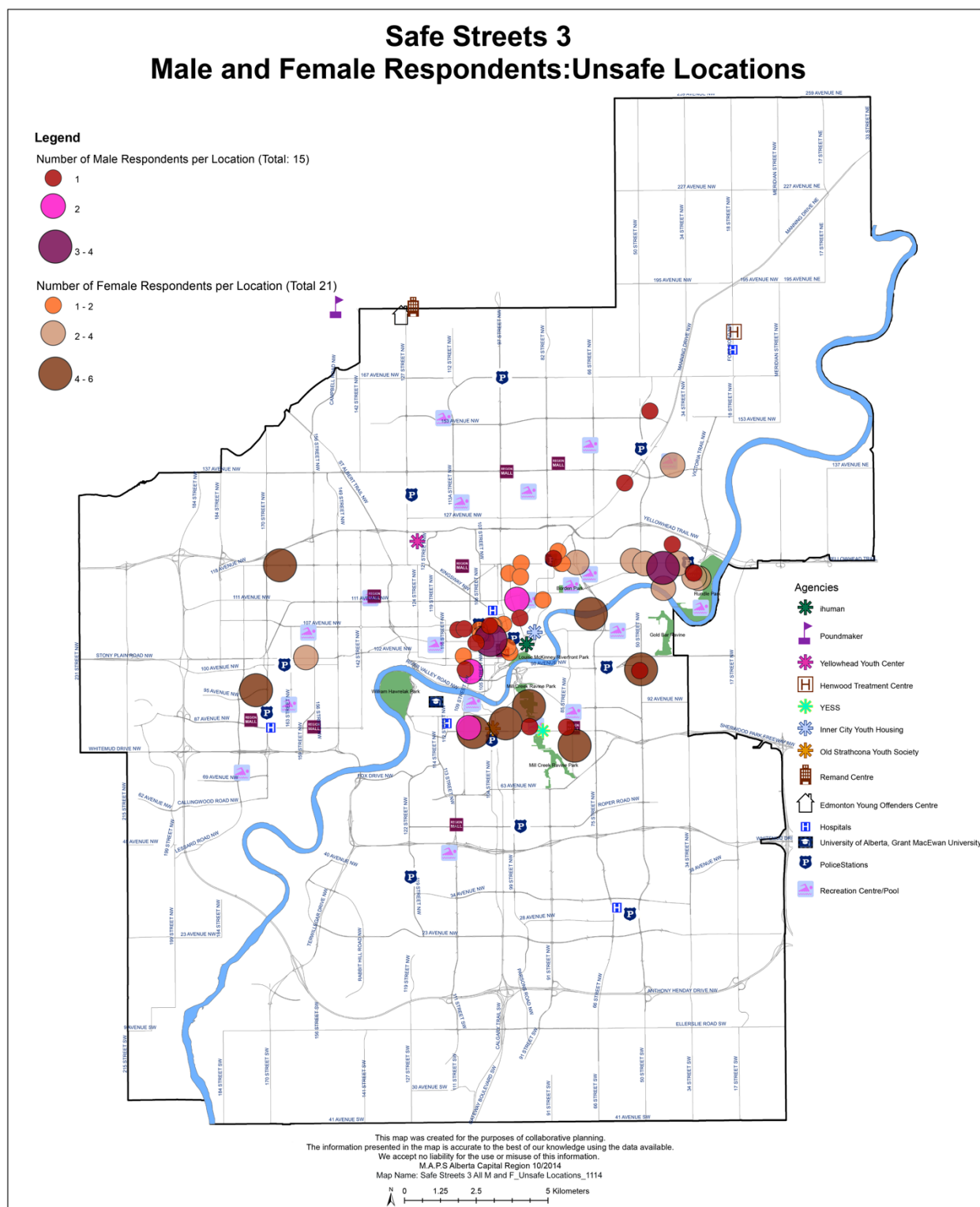












Appendix 2: Mapping Activity and Discussion Questions

Mapping Activity Instructions:

Please use the map and flipchart paper. One map for each interview; couples may want to complete a map together. Different color markers will each represent one youth route. Draw the numbers from start to end of the route with Number 1 as a starting point. Youth will draw the arrows (for directions) of start/from to to/end of youth route(s). Youth will indicate red (not safe) or green (safe) point(s) along the route. Please use flipcharts for adding the point names from the map (e.g. library as a safe point) and answering the questions. If there is a space the point names from the map can be added to the map as well.

1. Mapping Activity Questions

- 1.1. On a typical day, where do you go and how do you get there? (Please draw on the map your daily route(s) and destination(s))
- 1.2. Why are you going there? What will you do there?
- 1.3. Where do you feel welcome? (Colour places on the map) Do you feel like you fit in there?
- 1.4. Are there places you avoid? (Colour places on the map) Why do you avoid them? Could something be done to make these places safer/more comfortable for you?
- 1.5. Have you ever been banned? (Mark places on the map with stickers) (Probes: From where? For what? For how long? Did you get a ticket?)
- 1.6. Have you been victimized by crime and/or encouraged to commit a crime in the areas that you regularly travel? (Mark places on the map with stickers)
- 1.7. Please create a legend on the map. What the colours were used to indicate, and what the stickers indicate.

2. Discussion Questions

- 2.1. If a youth were new to the streets, what advice would you give them to keep safe?
- 2.2. The last time we did this mapping activity, different youth would sometimes call the same place safe or unsafe. How do you think youth decide or feel that a place is safe or unsafe? Is that how you decide a place is safe or unsafe?
- 2.3. When we did these maps before, youth told us about youth services they liked, but that they felt unsafe in the areas right around the youth services. What could be done to make you and other youth feel more comfortable approaching, or traveling to youth services?

We're interested in how feeling like you don't fit in can affect actions and decisions.

- 2.4. Do you ever feel like people judge you? How do they judge you?
- 2.5. Do you think youth are on the streets because they feel like they don't fit in, or do they feel like they don't fit in because they are on the streets?

Appendix 3: Demographic Questionnaire

Agency _____

Map Code _____

Date _____

1. Sex:

- ☐ Male
☐ Female

☐ _____

2. Age (in years): _____

3. Which choice(s) below do you think best describe you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> First Nations | <input type="checkbox"/> Hispanic or Latino |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Metis Nation | <input type="checkbox"/> Middle Eastern |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Urban Aboriginal | <input type="checkbox"/> Caucasian/ White |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African American | <input type="checkbox"/> Multi-racial |
| <input type="checkbox"/> African /Caribbean Islanders | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

4. Do you have Child Welfare status? (Do you have a social worker?)

- ☐ Yes
☐ No

5. Where do you get money? Check all that apply.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> AISH | <input type="checkbox"/> Panhandling |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social Worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Family |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Job | <input type="checkbox"/> Student Funding/Learners Benefits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Illegally | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____ |

6. Current Housing: Where are you living right now?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rent | <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster home | <input type="checkbox"/> River Valley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shared housing with
relatives/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Somebody's couch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group home | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter | <input type="checkbox"/> Treatment Centre |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Motel or Hotel |

7. Previous Housing: In the last year where have you lived? Check all that apply

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rent | <input type="checkbox"/> River Valley |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Foster home | <input type="checkbox"/> Somebody's couch |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shared housing with
relatives/friends | <input type="checkbox"/> Outside |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Group home | <input type="checkbox"/> Treatment Centre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shelter | <input type="checkbox"/> Motel or Hotel |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Homeless | <input type="checkbox"/> Remand/Other Corrections |