

Where I belong: Public spaces and everyday acts of inclusion



Project Team

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Project Background

Where I belong: Public spaces and everyday acts of inclusion is a three-year project funded by the Government of Canada (CCSIF: College and Community Social Innovation Fund). In partnership with the Calgary Public Library, the project is exploring, piloting, and evaluating innovative ways in which public spaces can foster inclusion and belonging among Racialized youth.

These newsletters will report on our progress and share projects updates. In future issues, we will profile research development, key terms and concepts, and reflections on how this work contributes to inclusion and belonging in public spaces used by youth, especially Racialized and immigrant youth.

Project Update

The project now has 4 phases. Phase 1 was added in response to the closures of public spaces due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This phase is now complete.

Phase 1: Preliminary Research

Preliminary data collection (online survey of youth library users), Data analysis

Phase 2: Research and Pilot Co-Development

Targeted data collection (online and in-person survey, interviews, and observations), Data analysis, Co-creation

Phase 3: Piloting and Evaluation

Implementation of pilot(s) at library, Evaluation of pilots

Phase 4: Knowledge Mobilization and Impact Measurement

Workshops, presentations, publications



Phase 1

The **Calgary Public Library** assisted us in recruiting survey participants by sharing the survey with youth users and volunteers. Phase 1 data collection included an online survey of youth between the ages of 16-19 who had accessed the Calgary Public Library in the previous three years, and we collected 244 completed surveys, most of which were completed by participants between 16-17 years old and in grades 11 and 12. Over 2/3 of respondents reported being female, and the reported ethnocultural backgrounds were varied, with South Asians in the majority, followed by White, Chinese, and Mixed Heritage youth. These survey results helped us recalibrate our methods for further targeted data collection and the research progress. Phase 1 also helped us better understand how youth view the library and other public spaces, as well as how COVID impacted their experiences with public spaces. Phase 1 was largely the work of Martha Fanjoy and Laurent Wall.



What We've Learned: Youth Experience at Public Libraries During the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Nusrat Awan & Helena Shoraj, Research Assistants

The data collected in Phase 1 suggested that the COVID-19 library closures greatly affected youth who responded to our survey, impacting their emotional, mental, and physical health, sense of community, and access to resources (e.g., printing, Wi-Fi, books, quiet space, etc.).

It was encouraging to learn that 92.8% of the youth who responded to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safe in the library. However, only 59.2% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they feel safe in other public spaces in Calgary. One of the participants' comments illustrated this:

"My neighborhood is a desolate wasteland, but the library makes it feel less so."

Collaborating for Inclusion: Project Partner, Calgary Public Library

By Izuchukwu Igwe, Research Assistant

The School of Global Access' Applied Research team at Bow Valley College seeks opportunities to work with organizations that share our commitment to bettering our community. In the *Where I belong: Everyday acts of inclusion and public spaces*, we have partnered with the Calgary Public Library (CPL) to better understand how to foster belonging and inclusion across public spaces.

CPL is the second biggest library in Canada (after the Toronto Public Library), and it is the sixth most used library system in North America, with 21 branches scattered across different communities in Calgary.

CPL is committed to equity, diversity, and inclusion, and is one of the signatories of the Urban Libraries Council's Statement on Race and Social Equity, which serves as a baseline upon which libraries can build policies and actions that make their communities more inclusive and just. The library has diverse visitors of different age and economic strata. CPL is committed to removing barriers, and all Calgary residents can get a free Calgary Public Library card either by

Furthermore, nearly one third of the respondents reported that COVID-19 related library closures had a negative effect on their reading, and about a fifth of respondents said that the closures had negatively impacted their social activities. One teen stated,

"My happiness has been negatively impacted by library closures, as I used to love going to the library and taking out my favorite manga's and reading them at home. The library was always a fun and relaxing space for me to be."

The research so far suggests that many youths depend on the library for a variety of different supports, and the closures of the libraries and other public spaces had a variety of negative impacts on them. Now that libraries and other public spaces have reopened, we are exploring their role in the lives of Racialized youth.

registering online or by visiting the library. Among other things, cardholders get access to library computers, printers, photocopiers, programming, international newspapers, books, movies, and music. With branches well suited in different communities and very accessible, the libraries serve as meeting points for the public.

The library is also committed to reconciliation with First Nations peoples. CPL organizes Indigenous writers' workshops, has added Indigenous languages books to their permanent collections, and installed traditional and contemporary artwork by Indigenous artists at seven locations.

This commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion is why the School of Global Access started collaborating with Calgary Public Library and why CPL's partnership is so valuable on this project.