

# Where I belong: Public spaces and everyday acts of inclusion



## Project Update

Building on what we learned from the survey conducted in Phase 1 about the impacts of COVID-19 on the experiences of youth in public spaces, Phase 2 took advantage of public spaces reopening. During the second phase of the project, we completed 14 interviews, an additional 79 in person and online surveys on youth experience with public spaces, and 23 observations in eight Calgary Public Library locations and other public spaces frequented by youth. During this phase, we shifted our attention to exploring and learning about the experiences of belonging and inclusion of Racialized youth in public spaces. We also initiated a co-design team with five youth members. This group is meeting regularly at the Calgary Public Library throughout 2023 to discuss findings, design pilot projects, and make recommendations about how public spaces can be more welcoming for Racialized youth. Later this spring, our research team will present preliminary findings at Congress for Social Sciences and Humanities in Toronto, through the Association for Nonprofit and Social Economy Research (ANSER).

### Project Team

Nusrat Awan (Research Assistant)  
Dr. Katie Crossman (Lead Researcher)  
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### Co-Creation Team Members

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### Project Partner

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### Funder

CCSIF: College and Community Social Innovation Fund

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## Key Concept: Safety

“Safety is a state in which hazards and conditions leading to physical, psychological, or material harm are controlled to preserve the health and well-being of individuals and the community to realize their aspirations” (Maurice, 2001). In our research, we assess approaches to safety both objectively, by using environmental parameters, and subjectively, by exploring Racialized youth’s perceptions. When it comes to their perceptions of safety, some themes emerged from our interviews, surveys, and observations. For example, participants reported that safety is more than security measures; to them, safety is holistic. It is familiarity with a place, being surrounded by diverse people, and seeing themselves and their cultures represented in services, events, and working teams.

*“I think it’s safer because there’s more people that go there and it’s more modern. You see a lot of people that are around a similar age to you.”  
(Michelle\*, age 16)*





Additionally, youth we interviewed reported a preference for youth-friendly environments over areas specifically for youth. Feeling accepted and valued throughout a place — and not just within a specific zone — means safety to them. Perceptions of safety, rather than objective environmental safety, is one reason youth might avoid a public space. Rania\* (age 17) recognized the importance of safety: “Something that would turn me away from going to a specific place would be safety.” However, safety measures in the environment can be interpreted as a sign that a place is unsafe:

**“If there were security guards I would feel as though as there’s bound for something to happen, like they’re waiting for something to happen, so that would ... be distracting” (Amira\*, age 16).**

Although the purpose of security measures, such as guards, is to make a place objectively safer and reduce crime, an unintended consequence is that it may make a place feel less safe, draw attention to risks, and make Racialized youth feel less welcome.



## Research Assistant Profile: Eman Ibrahim

Eman has a medical background with a PhD in Public Health. She has experience in clinical, social, and academic research areas. Eman draws upon her background as a clinician with a diverse set of research methodological experiences and data analysis; she has been involved in research projects that focus on healthcare services and the epidemiology of chronic diseases. Eman has participated in research projects overseas and at Bow Valley College. Over her last four years at the

college, Eman has been involved in projects *Finding Your Voice*, *Knowing Your Rights*, *Vicarious Trauma in the Classroom*, *Workplace Wellness for Immigrant Women*, *Developing Recommendations for Anti-racist Actions*, and *Where I Belong*.

Eman values representation and sees it as a necessity not just to meet an equity, diversity, and inclusion quota, but to promote the quality of services. She believes that belonging is where you feel valued, respected, and included.

### Reference

Maurice, P., et al. (2001). Safety and safety promotion: definitions for operational developments. *Injury Control and Safety Promotion*, 8(4), 237-240.

\* Note: All participants' names are pseudonyms.