

**Neighbourliness Builds Community Resilience:  
Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

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# Executive Summary

## Purpose, Research Questions, and Hypothesis

The purpose of this community-based research project was to explore how involvement in neighbourhood networks affected people in Edmonton, Alberta during the COVID-19 pandemic. Research questions sought to understand how involvement in neighbourhood networks during the pandemic took place, what processes and resources worked well or were challenging, and what changed or stayed the same. The objectives of this research project were to:

- conduct a literature review on the linkages between:
  - social capital and place-based approaches,
  - social capital and Asset Based Community Development, and
  - social capital and community resilience;
- contribute to existing research on the impact of neighbourliness during times of significant social challenge, using the COVID-19 pandemic as context; and
- provide recommendations to individuals or groups interested in starting, joining, or supporting a neighbourhood network, informed by the findings related to benefits and challenges.

The hypothesis explored is that involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased neighbourliness and social capital, which led to benefits that increased community resilience, disaster preparedness and quality of life.

## Literature Review

There is an assumption in the literature reviewed that the place-based nature of neighbourhood networks makes them viable places to build social capital and community resilience. Additionally, research shows that neighbourliness is key to people's resilience and readiness to cope with and adapt to difficult situations. The literature review also highlighted Asset Based Community Development as an enabler of neighbourhood networks and examined literature on linkages between involvement in neighbourhood networks with increased levels of social capital and neighbourliness. The insights on these research topics were organized into four main themes:

- Social Capital - A Foundational Concept in this Project,
- Place Based Approaches and Social Capital,
- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Social Capital, and
- Social Capital and Community Resilience.

The conceptual framework provided at the end of the literature review chapter, offers a visual representation of the project hypothesis and the main concepts of exploration, which informed the development of the research questions and the design of the literature review.

## **Methodology and Methods**

To answer the research questions in this community-based research project, a narrative analysis was used to implement a qualitative methodological approach. The narrative analysis focused on how 17 key informants formulated meaning from their experiences in neighbourhood networks. Semi-structured interviews enabled insights from each narrative to emerge and inform the main themes of the findings. Using a community-based approach leveraged the local expertise of people about their neighbourhood networks and the narratives that surfaced were enabled by the organic alignment between qualitative methodology and community-based research. Neighbourhood networks in three Edmonton neighbourhoods - Belgravia, McCauley and Westmount - were focused on in this research project, within the context of people's experience with neighbourliness where they live during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **Key Findings**

The findings informed and are organized into the following six themes that emerged throughout the narrative analysis of the interview data:

1. Involvement in Neighbourhood Networks
2. Belonging and Connection
3. Neighbourliness and Reciprocity
4. Responsibility and Purpose
5. Safety and Security
6. Supporting Processes and Resources

Synthesis of the literature review and key findings sought to demonstrate that involvement in neighbourhood networks contributes to increased neighbourliness and social capital. Further, the synthesis looked to identify if increased social capital resulted in increased community resilience and quality of life, which in existing research are linked to disaster preparedness and wellbeing. The synthesized findings are intended to inform recommendations for use by individuals or groups interested in starting, joining or supporting a neighbourhood network.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations put forward in this report are grounded in the learnings gained through the literature review and the narrative analysis of the interview data:

1. Start or join a neighbourhood network
2. Identify and support a leader
3. Leverage the ACE approach
4. Develop a neighbour contact list

The intention is that the findings and recommendations put forward from this project will be valuable to individuals and groups seeking to start, join or support place-based community development initiatives such as neighbourhood networks.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

This report summarizes the findings of a literature review and community-based research on the impact of involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic. Neighbourhood networks are place-based groups of two or more people who live in the same neighbourhood as each other and have established a group, formally or informally, related to a shared interest they can engage in together (Henning and Lieberg, 1996). The findings demonstrate the effects of involvement in neighbourhood networks on neighbourliness and social capital, especially during times of significant challenge such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The findings of this project are intended to contribute to existing research on the effects of involvement in place-based (Massey, Allen, Anderson, Cunningham, Hamnett and Sarre, 1984) groups such as neighbourhood networks, on neighbourliness and social capital, and highlight linkages to community resilience and quality of life during times of significant challenge. In addition, the findings are intended to inform recommendations for use by:

1. individuals and groups seeking to start or join a neighbourhood network;
2. individuals or groups currently involved in a neighbourhood network and looking for encouragement and support with maintaining and sustaining it; and
3. individuals, groups, or organizations (e.g., local social services organizations or local municipal government community development program providers and advisors) that support existing neighbourhood networks.

### **1.1 Project Objectives, Research Questions, and Hypothesis**

#### **Project Objectives**

The objectives of this project were to:

- develop a scholarly and grey literature review on the linkages between Social Capital and Place Based Approaches, Asset Based Community Development and Community Resilience;
- contribute to existing research on the impact of neighbourliness during times of significant social challenge, using the COVID-19 pandemic as context; and
- provide recommendations to individuals or groups interested in starting, joining, or supporting a neighbourhood network, informed by the findings related to benefits and challenges.

#### **Research Questions**

Primary question:

- How did involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton, Alberta affect people during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Subsequent questions:

- What effects (e.g., benefits and challenges, positive and negative) of involvement in a neighbourhood network were experienced?
- What did neighbourliness look and feel like during the pandemic, within the context of involvement in a neighbourhood network?
- What emotions did people experience in relation to being involved in a neighbourhood network during the pandemic?
- What processes and resources were in place prior to the pandemic that changed to adapt to the circumstances of the pandemic? What processes and resources stayed the same?
- What processes and resources used during the pandemic worked well?
- What challenges or issues arose in maintaining the existence and operation of neighbourhood networks during the pandemic?

### **Project Hypothesis**

The hypothesis is that involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton during COVID-19 contributed to increased neighbourliness and social capital, which led to benefits that increased community resilience, disaster preparedness and quality of life.

### **Key Terms**

The following key terms in the research questions are used throughout the report. While they are further explored in the remainder of the report, they are provided here to help better understand how they will be interpreted when asking and answering the research questions:

#### *Social Capital*

Neighbourhoods are the primary context within which concepts have been explored in this research project, and many researchers have suggested that neighbourhoods are an important source of social capital (Völker, Flap, and Lindenberg, 2007). Within this context, social capital can be regarded as “connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam, 1995, p. 19). This understanding of social capital, within the scope of a neighbourhood community, will be assumed throughout this project.

#### *Community Resilience*

For the purposes of this research project, community resilience is specified as a neighbourhood community’s resilience and defined as the ability of a neighbourhood community to cope with unexpected stressors and maintain the rhythms of daily life because of neighbourliness (Aldrich, 2012).

## **1.2 Importance and Contributions of the Research**

The research in this project shows that neighbourhood networks are beneficial during times of significant social challenge (e.g., during a pandemic like COVID-19) because of their effect on social capital through an increase in neighbourliness and connectedness. The research has shown that an increase in social capital gained through neighbourliness and connectedness enabled by involvement in neighbourhood networks, increases community resilience and this is of particular importance during times of widespread social challenge. The research findings informed the recommendations put forward in this report, which are grounded in the learnings about what worked well and what did not work well in neighbourhood networks in three neighbourhoods in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic between 2020 and 2022.

The research demonstrates the value of neighbourhood networks, including Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE) neighbourhood networks (see Chapter 2.3), and supports a place-based approach to enabling neighbourliness and building social capital in urban communities to prepare for times of future significant challenge. It is the report author's hope that these research findings will be valuable to individuals and groups seeking to start, join or support place-based community development initiatives such as neighbourhood networks. The research findings summarized in this report are intended to encourage and provide justification for an increase in the establishment, support and sustaining of neighbourhood networks in Edmonton, and more broadly. In instances where people are looking to obtain support to establish or maintain their neighbourhood network in terms of increasing people's interest and involvement or are looking to garner support from nonprofit organizations or municipalities (e.g., for consultation, volunteer time or funding), the intention is that this research would strengthen their case for soliciting endorsement, engagement in and support for their initiative.

The findings are additionally intended to contribute to overall academic knowledge about the importance of neighbourhood networks as an enabler of neighbourliness and increased social capital, which can subsequently increase community resilience during challenging times.

## **1.3 Positionality Statement**

The concept of positionality which “directly incorporates ideas of power and privilege and seeks to describe researcher identity in terms of an insider-outsider perspective” (Collins, 1999, as cited in Muhammad, Wallerstein, Sussman, Avila, Belone and Duran, 2014, p. 1048), has informed the research methodology. Biases include:

- past coordinator of Abundant Community Edmonton, a City of Edmonton program
- past City of Edmonton Employee
- well-connected in her neighbourhood and the broader community of Edmonton
- has a predisposition towards and preference for staying connected with neighbours
- believes that neighbourliness contributes to individual and collective wellness
- white, able-bodied, healthy woman in her forties who has experienced relative privilege throughout life such as having supportive family, friends and colleagues; access to secondary

education and other professional development training and certifications; access to secure employment including health benefits and insurance; access to a safe and comfortable home; access to recreational and sport activities; and opportunities to travel.

Biases were addressed during the research and writing of the report by first identifying the biases and reflecting on how they could influence the analysis of the findings and keeping this awareness alive throughout work on this project. Analysis and summarization in this project was approached with neutrality as much as possible.

## **1.4 Outline of Report**

The next chapter, Chapter 2, provides background information and context for this project including an overview of the Edmonton neighbourhood social landscape. Chapter 3 reviews existing literature on place-based community development, neighbourliness, social capital, and community resilience, especially during times of significant challenge or disaster. Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and methods used to explore the collected data. Chapter 5 identifies the findings from the literature review and the interviews with key informants and is organized into the themes that emerged throughout this project. Chapter 6 discusses linkages between the literature review and the findings to answer the research questions, setting the stage for Chapter 7 which offers recommendations for consideration by people interested in establishing, joining or supporting a neighbourhood network. The report concludes in Chapter 8 with an overall summary of the learnings and insights gained in this project.

## 2.0 Background

This chapter provides a description of the Edmonton neighbourhoods social landscape in which the impact of neighbourhood networks on neighbourliness and social capital has been explored in this research project, including:

- **A Neighbourly City** - an overview of the Edmonton Federation of Community leagues and the community leagues the federation supports;
- **Neighbourhood Networks** - a definition of neighbourhood networks within the Edmonton neighbourhoods social landscape context, and as defined for the purposes of this project;
- **The Abundant Community Initiative** - an overview of the Abundant Community Initiative, known in Edmonton as Abundant Community Edmonton, including definitions of Asset-Based Community Development and Place-Based approaches;
- **Past Observations of Neighbourliness and Social Capital** - past observations of neighbourliness and social capital building, identified by individuals and groups involved in Abundant Community Edmonton; and
- **Neighbourliness During Times of Significant Challenge** - initial commentary on the impact of involvement in neighbourhood networks on community resilience during times of significant challenge, and disaster preparedness for future challenges.

### 2.1 A Neighbourly City

Edmonton, Alberta is sometimes described as a uniquely neighbourly city because of a unique social landscape that exists in Edmonton that fosters place-based community building and neighbourliness (Kreitzer, Harvey and Orjasaeter, 2020). This social landscape is the existence of 161 volunteer-run, nonpartisan, secular, neighbourhood-based nonprofit organizations known as community leagues that are geographically oriented (EFCL About, 2023) and represent approximately 255 residential neighbourhoods in Edmonton.

Community leagues emerged in Edmonton in the early 1900s out of the public's desire to have "a united voice that could compete with those who had the ear of the City [The City of Edmonton] - the developers and trade boards" (EFCL History, n.d. 1900s, para.4). The early focus of community leagues was civic advocacy enabled by people connecting within their neighbourhood and organizing around what they collectively cared about. Over the decades, the focus shifted to include provision of recreation and social programming and the stewardship of neighbourhood amenities such as community halls, rinks, playgrounds, water features and gardens (EFCL History, n.d. History), but the act and significance of neighbours connecting with one another to improve quality of life where they live, has continued through the decades. Since their origins, it has remained a mandate of the community leagues to ensure they are "inclusive, regardless of class or ethnicity, open to both men and women" - which was well ahead of their time - and with no "affiliation with any political party or religious order" (EFCL History 1920s, n.d.).

Community leagues today are autonomous groups registered under the Alberta Societies Act and are members of the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues (EFCL About, n.d.), organized into 12 districts (EFCL About, n.d.). The EFCL is governed by one representative from each of the 12 districts and has been operating as a supporting umbrella group (not a governing group) to community leagues since 1921 (EFCL About, n.d.). The EFCL vision: “vibrant community leagues, vibrant city” and the mission: “engage, develop and connect Edmonton Community Leagues in building healthy neighbourhoods” (EFCL About, n.d.) are advanced through five guiding goals:

1. Championing Community Leagues
2. Advocacy and Engagement
3. Broadening Reach and Diversity
4. Building Effective Operations
5. Supporting League Leadership and Capacity

(EFCL About, n.d.)

The EFCL works in collaboration with community leagues, as well as with Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators from The City of Edmonton (City of Edmonton, Community Development in Neighbourhoods, 2023) to achieve these goals.

## **2.2 Neighbourhood Networks**

Edmonton, as a mosaic of community leagues, is a social environment in which place-based initiatives can flourish. Community leagues are examples of neighbourhood networks, which are groups of neighbours that engage in a shared interest together locally. Involvement in neighbourhood networks enables people to stay connected to the people who live near them, which can lead to a variety of benefits to them such as an increased sense of belonging, connection and safety in their neighbourhood. The 161 community leagues in Edmonton and additional examples of neighbourhood networks and their impact on neighbourliness and social capital, are discussed in Chapters 3, 5 and 6 of this report.

A key characteristic of neighbourhood networks is that they are place-based, an approach that posits that geographical context is important (Barca, McMann and Rodriguez-Pose, 2012). In the following section, an Edmonton community development initiative that operates with and in support of neighbourhood networks, is provided as an example of how place matters (Massey et al., 1984), demonstrated by its potential to enable neighbourliness and build social capital.

## **2.3 The Abundant Community Initiative**

Within the community league social landscape, a place-based community development effort called The Abundant Community Initiative (ACI) emerged in Edmonton in 2012. In addition to its place-based nature being important (Massey et al., 1984), the ACI is grounded in Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) theories and practices articulated in Kretzmann and McKnight's Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path towards Finding and Mobilizing a Community's

Assets (1993), and in McKnight and Block's *The Abundant Community: Awakening the Power of Families and Neighborhoods* (2012). ABCD is attributed to Kretzmann and McKnight, co-founders of the ABCD Institute at Northwestern University, and is now a well-documented community development approach that enables the identification and activation of people's skills, abilities and ways in which they want to contribute to their community (McKnight and Block, 2012). The original ACI processes and supporting resources in Edmonton were developed by Howard Lawrence (long time Edmontonian and at the time, an independent community development professional) and Anne Harvey (author of this project and at the time, an employee of The City of Edmonton). The process and resource development was informed by Block, McKnight and Kretzmann's work on ABCD practices, specifically focusing on identifying and activating people's skills, abilities and interests in relation to their neighbours. Process and resource development and implementation was conducted in collaborative partnership with community leagues, other neighbourhood networks, and City of Edmonton community development workers and leaders.

The ACI began in one neighbourhood, Highlands, and is now active in 161 Edmonton neighbourhoods, in connection with each neighbourhood's community league (City of Edmonton, *Abundant Community Edmonton, Participating Neighbourhoods*, n.d.). In Edmonton, ACI is now referred to as *Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE)*. Neighbourhood networks, including community leagues, implementing the ACE model continue to work in partnership with City of Edmonton community development workers who at the time of publication of this report were referred to as *Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators* (City of Edmonton, *Community Development in Neighbourhoods*, 2023).

The ACE framework was designed to augment the existing efforts of a community league or other neighbourhood network, to facilitate connections and neighbourliness starting at the block level (Kreitzer, et al., 2020). The term block is used to represent an actual street block, or cul-de-sac, or apartment/condominium building floor - essentially a small geographical area that people call home (Kreitzer, et al., 2020). People self-identify or are encouraged by their neighbours to step forward as leaders referred to as *Block Connectors*. These emergent leaders (Stelzner and Wielkiewicz, 2005) initiate and facilitate relationship building among neighbours. Once relationships have been established, *Block Connectors* facilitate intentional conversations that focus on three topics:

1. vision for the neighbourhood;
2. activities people would like to engage in with their neighbours; and
3. skills, abilities and experiences people would like to share with their neighbours (Kreitzer, et al., 2020).

This process is an example of asset mapping (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) in which the *Block Connectors* seek to discover what others are willing and wanting to contribute to their neighbourhood community, and then mobilize for collective action that improves community life.

In Figure 1 below, an example of one specific asset mapping resource previously used in the ACE initiative is shown. The resource is essentially a conversation guide used by *Block Connectors*

that offers suggested conversation starters or questions, which enable the Block Connector to discover what their neighbours would identify as their vision for their neighbourhood, the kinds of activities they would be interested in engaging in with other neighbours, and the skills, abilities and experiences that they would be willing to share with neighbours (Kreitzer et al., 2020). The resource shown in Figure 1 also identifies what the Block Connector is likely to discover through the conversation. For example, asking a neighbour what they hope for in the neighbourhood might lead to the Block Connector learning about the neighbour’s hopes, dreams and ideas related to the neighbourhood, which could inform local collaborative decision making about matters of importance to the neighbourhood community (Kreitzer et al., 2020).

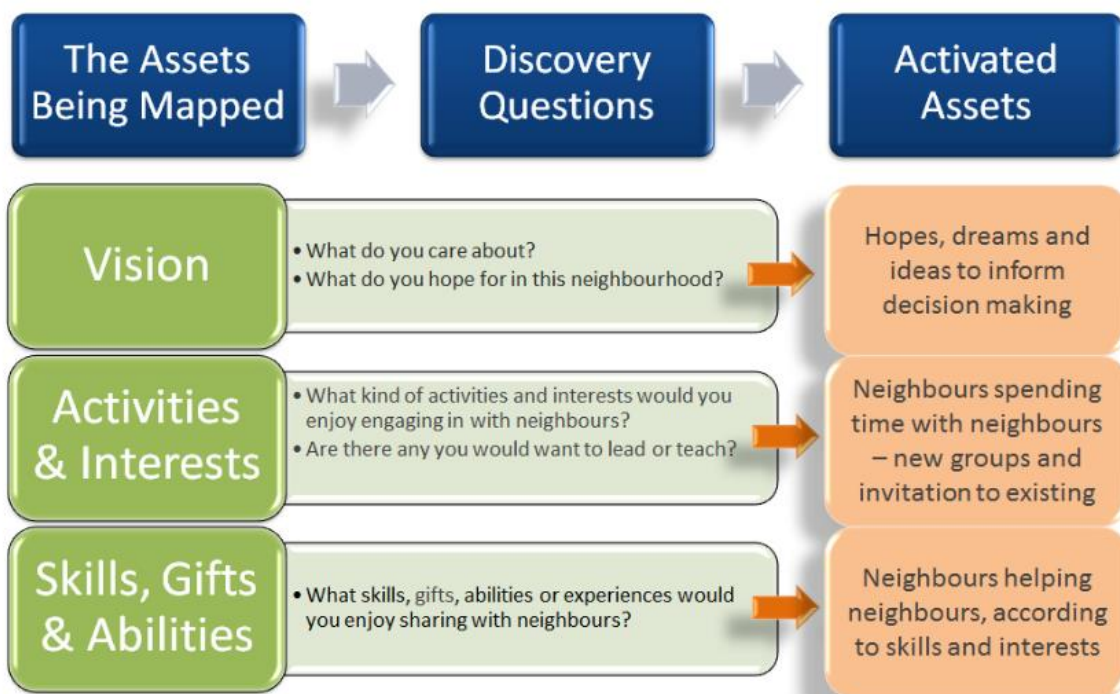


Figure 1. ACE Asset Mapping Tool (Harvey, 2017, as cited in Kreitzer et al., 2020).

As the number of Block Connectors increases in a neighbourhood, the next layer of organization and coordination, which is the Neighbourhood Connector, becomes helpful (Kreitzer et al., 2020). A Neighbourhood Connector is someone who lives in the neighbourhood who takes on the local leadership role of coordinating, mentoring, and supporting the Block Connectors (Kreitzer, et al., 2020). The Neighbourhood Connector, in many cases, collaborates directly with the community league or another local neighbourhood leadership body, as well as with others who come forward from within the neighbourhood to take on support roles according to their skills and interests, identified in the asset mapping intentional conversations mentioned above (Kreitzer, et al., 2020). The ACE Organizational Framework is illustrated in Figure 2 below, which includes a legend on the left side providing a list of the distinct roles/people/groups involved, and a corresponding visual on the right side showing how the distinct roles/people/groups interact with each other. The two-way



arrows are intentional, illustrating that the relationship, connections and information sharing, flows both ways (Kreitzer et al., 2020).



*Figure 2. ACE Organizational Framework of Connectors, ACE Resource Guide Edition 1 (City of Edmonton, 2019, as cited in Kreitzer, et al., 2020).*

As ACE grew in Edmonton, the Neighbourhood Connectors and Block Connectors began gathering monthly at a city-wide Block Connector meeting hosted by City of Edmonton staff, including the author of this report (prior to the pandemic). In addition to creating a sense of being a part of a team conducting collaborative community building across the city, one purpose of the monthly gathering was to share stories and learnings from each neighbourhood to inform iterative development of the processes and resources. The next section provides a summary of observations of the impact of involvement in ACE that were shared in those monthly gatherings.

## **2.4 Past Observations of Neighbourliness and Social Capital**

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, benefits of neighbourliness and increased social capital enabled by involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton had been observed. Experiences shared by people living in neighbourhoods implementing the ACE approach and shared by City of Edmonton staff working with these groups (i.e., personal experience as past City employee coordinating ACE), were reported in monthly city-wide Block Connector gatherings during the years of 2012 to 2019. The format for these Block Connector gatherings was facilitated, informal, conversational group discussions in which each participant had an opportunity to contribute their observations, stories about their experiences, ideas for future resources and process evolution, and their questions. The following experiences were noted during these informal facilitated gatherings:

- increased sense of belonging (inversely, a decrease in social isolation)
- increased sense of safety and security
- increased sense of pride and responsibility for the neighbourhood environment
- increased opportunity to engage in social and recreational activities with neighbours
- increased access to local childcare, senior care, and care in general, especially for those who identify as marginalized or vulnerable
- increased availability to home and property care resources (such as lawn mowers, shovels, ladders, etc., via sharing and borrowing among neighbours)
- increased sense of disaster preparedness (e.g., neighbour contact lists and connections perceived to be useful in the event of an emergency)

This research project sought to add to or affirm the above listed informal observations. In addition, this project sought to contribute to existing research outlined in the Literature Review, to posit that neighbourhood networks are an effective approach for enabling neighbourliness and building social capital, essential to community resilience during times of significant challenge.

## **2.5 Neighbourliness and Resilience During Times of Significant Challenge**

Researchers such as Cutter, Barnes, Berry, Burton, Evans, Tate and Webb (2008), Aldrich (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017), Tse, Wei and Wang (2013), and Aldrich and Meyer (2014), discuss the value of place-based approaches to building community resilience during times of significant challenge. The COVID-19 pandemic that took place between 2020 and 2022, presented a significant challenge. An intention of this project was to learn about the impacts of involvement in neighbourhood networks during the pandemic, to explore if place-based relationships and neighbourliness enabled by this involvement had an impact on community resilience during a challenging time.

### 3.0 Literature Review

The literature review focused on scholarly research relevant to place-based community development and its enablement of neighbourliness and social capital. Working from the research questions and project objectives, the review also examined research related to neighbourliness and social capital as contributors to community resilience, especially during times of significant challenge or disaster. In this chapter, the insights from the literature review have been organized into four main themes:

- Social Capital - A Foundational Concept in this Project,
- Place-based Approaches and Social Capital,
- Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Social Capital, and
- Social Capital and Community Resilience.

#### 3.1 Literature Research Topics and Retrieval Methods

The information listed in Table 1: Research Topics Linkage to Project Objectives and Research Questions lists the research topics (themes) that were reviewed in support of the project objectives and research questions:

*Table 1: Research Topics Linkage to Project Objectives and Research Questions*

Research topics	Linkage to project objectives and research questions
Social Capital – A Foundational Concept in this Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of research on social capital provides theory to supplement the analysis of:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◦ the discovered impacts - benefits and challenges - of involvement in neighbourhood networks, and</li> </ul> </li> <li>• the emotions people experienced in relation to their involvement in a neighbourhood network during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
Place-based Approaches and Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neighbourhood networks are inherently place-based. An exploration of place-based approaches’ contribution to resilience, provides evidence that neighbourhood networks can benefit people during challenging times, such as during a pandemic.</li> </ul>
Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Social Capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ABCD is a community development approach that is complementary to place-based approaches in building neighbourliness and social capital.</li> <li>• ABCD is applicable to a specific example of a neighbourhood network looked at in this project: Abundant Community Edmonton.</li> </ul>
Social Capital and Community Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploration of this topic was relevant to the research questions about what neighbourliness looked and felt like during the pandemic, within the context of involvement in a neighbourhood network, and how it contributed to an increase in social capital and an increase in community resilience</li> </ul>

In addition to the terms and phrases within the research topics listed above, the following terms and phrases were used in various combinations to extract literature from the University of Victoria library system, ProQuest EBook Central, Sage Research Methods, Wiley Online Library, Google Scholar and the JSTOR and EBSCO databases:

- “Building community through neighbourhood networks *or* community networks *or* place-based networks”
- “Community resilience and neighbourhood networks *or* community networks *or* place-based networks”
- “Neighbourliness and resilience *or* community resilience”
- “Social capital and neighbourhood networks *or* community networks *or* place-based networks”

Grey literature, found via Google and Google Scholar searches with the above listed search terms and phrases, was reviewed and incorporated into this literature review. Grey literature was of interest because of the existence of local news stories, private blogs and websites sharing individual and community examples of neighbourliness enabled by involvement in a neighbourhood network, in general, and specifically related to during the COVID-19 pandemic in Edmonton. While scholarly literature was the preference to use in this review, grey literature was used when it was the only type of information available to examine.

### **3.2 Theme 1: Social Capital - A Foundational Concept in this Project**

The concept of social capital is fundamental to this research project and has been studied by numerous scholars and researchers. Three common themes were noted across the literature reviewed for this project. First, Portes (1998) states that involvement in groups leads to positive impact for the individual and the community at large and this positive impact is a form of social capital. This broad understanding of social capital was common across the literature. A second common representation of social capital in existing research states that high levels of social capital are likely to correlate with high quality of life (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson, 2005), which suggests that involvement in a neighbourhood network could lead to an increase in social capital, and subsequently, increased quality of life. Finally, a third area of agreement found in the literature of relevance to this project’s exploration, is the concept of social capital increasing resilience, and specifically during times of significant challenge (Aldrich, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017).

Daniel Aldrich in particular, has done extensive research on the significance of social capital gained through neighbourliness in times of disaster (Aldrich, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017; Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). Aldrich says the number one predictor of survival and recovery is how well you know your neighbours (Aldrich, 2012). Knowing your neighbours and engaging in neighbourly relations and connections with them, builds social capital which in turn, builds a community’s resilience (Aldrich, 2012). This established community resilience is especially important when it comes to disaster preparedness, which is a large area of research that explores the impact of social capital on community resilience. Many studies on this topic recognize that people working together to cope or survive, are more likely to persevere (Quarantelli and Dynes, 1977;

Fischer, 1998; Aldrich, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017; Aldrich and Meyer, 2014) because of their collective social capital.

Social capital is a broad area of study and is often organized into three distinct forms in the existing research: bonding, bridging and linking. Putnam (2000) describes groups with strong ties (Kavanaugh, Reese and Rosson, 2005) among members as bonding social capital. An individual's friends and family, regardless of proximity in terms of where they live, would be considered examples of relationships or groups a person could count among their bonding social capital (Kavanaugh et al., 2005; Baron, Field and Schuller, 2000). Conversely, bridging social capital (Putnam, 2000) is associated with what Granovetter (1973) refers to as weak ties. Bridging social capital results from connections between individuals who are loosely connected to each other, and their connection crosses a variety of social groupings including socio-economic status and ethnic background (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). Because of the span across different social groupings, bridging social capital is likely to be characterized by diversity rather than the similarity among individuals seen with bonding social capital (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014), and is the type of social capital often associated with groups in a geographical community (Kavanaugh et al., 2005), such as a neighbourhood. However, other researchers have a different perspective (Beaudoin, 2009; Szreter, 2004), proposing that neighbourly relationships and acts of care among neighbours are forms of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and indicators of bonding social capital (Beaudoin, 2009).

Lastly, there is linking social capital which relates to connections between citizens of a community and the official power groups that exist in the community (Szreter, 2004). These connections cross between citizens and formal and institutionalized power groupings in a society (Szreter, 2004). This form of social capital is out of scope for the purposes of this project and was not explored.

### **3.3 Theme 2: Place-Based Approaches and Social Capital**

In Neighbourhood Resiliency, Margot Breton discusses what she refers to as local neighbour networks (2001). She suggests that resiliency in neighbourhood networks depends on a network of people who know each other, identify as neighbours, and engage in neighbourly relations and connections with each other (Breton, 2001). Importantly, the reciprocity between neighbours in their connection with and support of one another, contributes to a sense of community (Kavanaugh et al., 2007; Breton, 2001). People mobilizing and taking action to solve problems for and with one another, is an attribute of a resilient community (Breton, 2001) and an indicator of the presence of social capital.

Building neighbourly relationships and connections at the block level and the neighbourhood level, creates a culture of care and connection in which people look out for each other and feel an increased sense of safety and belonging (McKnight and Block, 2012). Within the context of this research project, this can also be described as the development of social capital in the neighbourhood, which is created when relationships between people who live in the neighbourhood result in actions that build community and connection (Coleman, 1990). This can take some level of intentional

community organizing, such as is demonstrated with the Block Connectors, Neighbourhood Connectors, Support Teams and Neighbourhood Leadership in the ACE Organizational Framework shown in Chapter 2.3. Research shows that communities that organize themselves have greater levels of social capital which enables increased readiness to mobilize and deal with significant challenges (Olson 1989). The proximity of neighbours enables them to be there for each other more immediately than even family members (if living in a different neighbourhood, area or city) or first responders or government could be, especially during a time when everyone and all services are at capacity due to unprecedented need, such as was experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. This concept of “neighbours as key generators of local social capital” (Cheshire, 2015) is well founded in existing research (Olson, 1989; Coleman, 1990; Breton, 2001; Dynes, 2005; Cox, 2008; Aldrich, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012, 2017; Aldrich and Meyer, 2014; Cheshire, 2015; Wickes, Zahnow, Taylor and Piquero, 2015).

### **3.4 Theme 3: Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) and Social Capital**

Researchers are increasingly identifying the need for a shift from social programs and services provided by service providers (agencies, organizations, institutions and businesses, i.e., professionals) as the predominant solution generator for challenges experienced in a neighbourhood, to local community building efforts that leverage the neighbourhood’s social capital (Anderson and Milligan, 2006). This shift is made possible by citizen-led grassroots community building initiatives, such as the ACE initiative described in Chapter 2.3 of this report, which strive to build social capital and neighbourliness. An increase in social capital and neighbourliness and the resulting benefits, which will be explored in more depth in Chapter 5, enable a neighbourhood community to better address complex social challenges that have become customary for service providers to alleviate. This is of particular importance during a disaster because the typical service providers may not be as readily accessible or available when there is an unanticipated and widespread strain on the service systems. With increased social isolation and decreased access to mainstream resources being challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to consider the benefits to be gained from strengthening the social fabric of a neighbourhood through increased neighbourliness, facilitated within the neighbourhood itself (McKnight and Block, 2012). Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) processes and resources can be leveraged to support this neighbourhood facilitated effort.

Existing research that focuses on the benefits of ABCD suggests that relationships with our neighbours positively impact our wellbeing. In their book *Abundant Community*, McKnight and Block propose an “it takes a village to raise a child” model of community living in the neighbourhoods we live in. As noted in Chapter 2, the ACE initiative was inspired by and built upon the ABCD practices and principles articulated in McKnight and Block’s book *Abundant Community* (2012), and on the work of Kretzmann and McKnight (1993). The ACE initiative includes ABCD processes and resources used in Edmonton neighbourhoods to intentionally build social capital.

Levels of trust are sometimes used to measure levels of social capital (Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). Examples of trust and social capital among neighbours in a neighbourhood include doors

unlocked, membership in neighbourhood networks who gather informally to engage in activities together (e.g., dog walking, gardening), sharing of resources (e.g., lawnmowers, ladders, snow shovels, etc.), helping with household and yard work or errands, childcare, senior care, the number of neighbours someone knows, and a general sense of belonging and safety in one's neighbourhood. These examples of the presence of trust and therefore, social capital in a neighbourhood community, can be achieved by implementing ABCD processes, as demonstrated in the ACE initiative in Edmonton, facilitated by Block Connectors and Neighbourhood Connectors.

An ABCD approach leverages people's relational assets and offers an alternative to needs-based or deficit-oriented approaches (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993). People are at the center of the approach and assume responsibility for their neighbourhood community's wellbeing by identifying and activating their existing individual and community assets (Mathie and Cunningham, 2003). As noted in existing research on ABCD practices, when people activate themselves as supports to one another on the block or throughout the neighbourhood, they experience intrinsic benefits and when they are on the receiving end, they experience a plethora of benefits including increased feelings of belonging and safety (Kretzmann and McKnight, 1993) which was of particular importance during the heightened stages of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **3.5 Theme 4: Social Capital and Community Resilience**

Researchers have looked at drawing connections between levels of social capital and a community's ability to be resilient and recover from disasters (Aldrich, 2012). As noted earlier in this chapter, Aldrich has conducted extensive research on the importance of social capital in building resilience during times of significant challenge. In addition to his own research, Aldrich notes several other researchers who have studied the connection between social capital and resilience within the context of disaster preparedness and recovery, such as Rovai (1994), Tatsuki and Hayashi (2002), Kamel and Loukaitou-Sideris (2004), Nakagawa and Shaw (2004), Dynes (2005), and Pais and Elliot (2008). These researchers used quantitative, qualitative and impressionistic studies to provide evidence of the role social capital plays in recovery from disasters (Aldrich, 2012).

Aldrich has examined multiple disasters in various parts of the world, using qualitative and quantitative data to propose that social assets are essential elements in building resilience and ability to recover during disaster (Aldrich, 2012; Kiruthu, 2013). In *The Externalities of Strong Social Capital: Post-Tsunami Recovery in Southeast India* (2011), Aldrich examined qualitative data collected from village communities in Tamil Nadu, India after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. His findings demonstrated a connection between social capital and community resilience during a disaster and post disaster. Essentially, people expressed increased feelings of safety, belonging and a perception that they would get through the challenges they were facing, in large part due to the connections with and support from their neighbours - the people physically closest to them and experiencing the disaster and post disaster period with them. This concept is supported by Cox and Perry (2011) who discuss community resilience as the capacity of a group of people to cope with a significant challenge and adapt to a new normal (Cox and Perry, 2011, as cited in Cheshire, 2015).

Researchers who focus on resilience during times of disaster have produced a compelling body of evidence that outlines the vital role of social cohesion and localized social networks during and post disasters (Rovai, 1994; Tatsuki and Hayashi, 2002; Kamel and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2004; Nakagawa and Shaw, 2004; Dynes, 2005; Pais and Elliot, 2008; Hawkins and Maurer, 2009; Aldrich and Meyer, 2014). During the COVID-19 pandemic, due to the public health restrictions related to people's movement, travel and gathering with others, people were not able to connect with their close loved ones such as family and friends, if they did not physically live nearby (in other words, in the same neighbourhood). Because of the nature of the social restrictions during the pandemic, people suddenly found themselves more dependent on their neighbours and their local community. Their neighbours were, in many cases, the only people they could see in person - across the fence between yards or across the hallway in apartment and condominium buildings, or out for a walk in the neighbourhood, or at the local grocery store. The importance of local relationships, with neighbours, became more evident and appreciated.

### **3.6 Summary of Literature Review Findings**

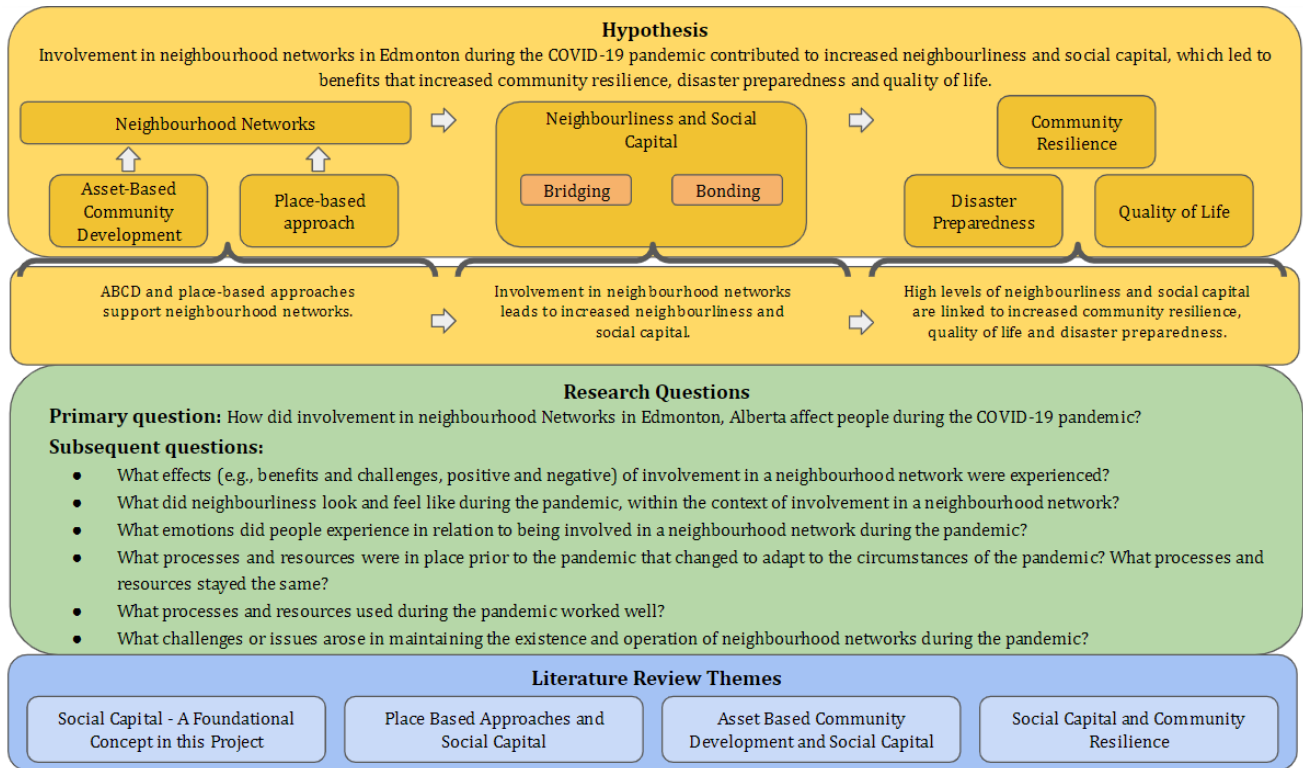
As evidenced in the research reviewed, there is a basic assumption that localized social networks, such as neighbourhood networks, are viable places to build resilience and preparedness for future emergencies (Dynes, 2005). It is recommended that organizations and local decision makers in communities take note of the importance of social capital to building resilience when planning policies and programs for future disasters or challenges (Aldrich, 2010). Given the strain on government and public services during the COVID-19 pandemic, which pointed out the need for more creative and collaborative solutions in the community, the findings of this literature review support the importance of enabling an increase in community resilience through the establishment of new, and support of existing, place-based neighbourhood networks, enabled by ABCD approaches. Aldrich (2017) encourages investment in social infrastructure to prepare for future significant challenges and notes that resilience will come from grassroots initiatives built on the social capital within local social networks.

By leveraging ABCD resources and a place-based approach, neighbourhood communities have the ability to harness the resulting social capital to build their resilience levels. This is beneficial at the best of times, with regards to quality of life and wellbeing that could result from higher levels of resilience and is particularly helpful in terms of disaster preparedness. Neighbourly relationships and practices established before disaster strikes, are key to a neighbourhood community's ability to effectively support one another during times of significant challenge (Cheshire, 2015).

### **3.7 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework was designed to contextualize the literature review and guide the design of the research (van der Waldt, 2020). The framework, shown in Figure 3 below, offers a visual representation of the report author's hypothesis and main concepts of exploration, which informed the development of the research questions and subsequent literature review themes.





*Figure 3. MACD Project Conceptual Framework 1. Harvey, 2023.*

## **4.0 Methodology and Methods**

A qualitative methodological approach was used to answer the research questions in this community-based research project. The information gathered in the key informant; semi-structured interviews contributed to the development of the recommendations put forward. The recommendations are intended for use by people interested in joining, developing or supporting a neighbourhood network.

This project received approval from the University of Victoria Human Research and Ethics Board on March 8, 2022. The ethics protocol approval number is 21-0174 and the following qualitative data collection process was approved: 15-24 semi-structured conversational interviews conducted via Zoom (using the University of Victoria Zoom profile) with people living in three Edmonton neighbourhoods: Belgravia, McCauley and Westmount.

### **4.1 Methodology**

#### **Community-based Research**

A community-based research approach was chosen because community-based inquiry is designed to identify and highlight local knowledge and experience (Jason and Glenwick, 2016), because of the potential benefits to interview participants (Barnes and Schmitz, 2016), and because of the possibility for effecting social change (Caine and Mill, 2016). Community inquiry, designed to amplify local knowledge, is relevant to and supports learning from people about their local context (i.e., their neighbourhood) and positions them as the experts about the place they live (Jason and Glenwick, 2016).

In addition to the potential for interviewees to experience benefits from participating in this project, there was a hope that they might be inspired to contribute to or engage more in their neighbourhood community. Community-based research is shown in existing scholarly research to inspire research participants to take action in their community and or feel good about their existing contributions to their community (Barnes and Schmitz, 2016). During the interviews, most of the interview participants expressed satisfaction with the exercise of talking about neighbourliness and shared that they felt motivated to continue or to enhance their actions of neighbourliness, which demonstrated potential for social impact in their neighbourhood. A community-based approach leveraged the local expertise of people about their neighbourhood networks, while at the same time, provided acknowledgement of and encouragement for neighbourliness which could lead to personal benefit to them and collective social change in their neighbourhood.

#### **Qualitative Methodology: Narrative Analysis**

A qualitative methodological approach was implemented in this research project because of its alignment with the goals of community-based research (Caine and Mill, 2016) and the project's objectives. A qualitative methodological approach seeks to reframe mainstream thinking and highlight individual and community strengths, and often, has a goal to advance a social justice agenda

in partnership with research participants (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The qualitative approach in this project included using the method of asking semi-structured questions that supported narrative descriptions and a thematic analysis (Kiger and Varpio, 2020; Josselson & Hammock, 2021). The narratives that emerged were enabled by the organic alignment between qualitative methodology and community-based research, an alignment which is demonstrated in scholarly research that explores the history of the two approaches being complementary (Caine and Mill, 2016). The emerging narratives provided an exploration of the interview participants' experiences in neighbourhood networks, and inspiration to motivate and enable continued community building action (Caine and Mill, 2016) through involvement in neighbourhood networks.

## **4.2 Methods**

This section provides an overview of the methods used to implement the narrative analysis approach, including how the neighbourhoods and interview participants were selected for this research project.

### **Interview methods**

The primary method was semi-structured interviews with key informants; people living in three Edmonton neighbourhoods with experience in neighbourhood networks. Key informants are people who can offer in-depth insights into specific situations and contexts because they are local to the place or topic of relevance (O'Neil and Godin, 2020). Semi-structured interviews are organized conversations that are guided by a set of questions and facilitated in an open-ended conversational way (Adams, 2015; Ahlin, 2019). Information shared by interview participants during semi-structured conversations guides how the interactive discussion unfolds, meaning the researcher must be attuned to the evolving dialogue to glean rich information and diverse perspectives (Ahlin, 2019). The full list of interview questions used in this project is provided in Appendix A: Interview Questions. An additional resource used to facilitate the interviews was Appendix B: Interview Introduction and Closing Remarks.

The interviews took place virtually via the University of Victoria's Zoom account, except for two interviews conducted over the phone because the interview participant's computer technology and/or network connection failed at the last minute. Appendix C: Interview Logistics Email and Zoom Invitation was used to prepare interview participants in advance.

### **Neighbourhood selection methods**

There were three Edmonton neighbourhoods focused on in this research project: Belgravia, McCauley and Westmount. These neighbourhoods were selected primarily because they have identifiable neighbourhood networks that were operational during the COVID-19 pandemic. Several other neighbourhoods could have been chosen from the total 161 residential neighbourhoods in Edmonton with active neighbourhood networks, but due to time and resource constraints of the report author, a decision to work with three neighbourhoods was determined to be achievable for this project. To select the three neighbourhoods, the report author met with City of Edmonton

Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators (City of Edmonton, Community Development in Neighbourhoods, 2023) who are geographically assigned and work directly with community leagues and other neighbourhood networks. Their consultation, based on their knowledge and experience as City of Edmonton staff who specialize in working directly with neighbourhood communities, informed the decision to work with Belgravia, McCauley and Westmount, based on the following criteria. Each selected neighbourhood:

- had identifiable neighbourhood networks that were operational during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- had people in the community who have publicly available contact information (for example on community league websites) and or could be introduced to the report author by City of Edmonton staff; and
- were notably different from one another in terms of socioeconomics and local culture (based on the knowledge, experience and perception of the City of Edmonton staff consulted with).

### **Interview participants recruitment and selection methods**

The interview participants were people who live in one of the three selected neighbourhoods and had had some level of involvement in a neighbourhood network during the COVID-19 pandemic. As noted above, a criterion for neighbourhood selection was the presence of people in the neighbourhood known publicly or by City of Edmonton staff. The City of Edmonton staff facilitated introductions between the report author and potential participants using Appendix D: Invitation to Participate Email. Once these people reached out to the report author, they became primary contacts. The primary contacts fanned out (snowball sampling) the invitation to neighbours who might also be interested in the research project. The exact number is not known, but it is estimated that the invitations sent by email would have been received by at least 100 people across the three neighbourhoods, and this does not include people who may have heard about the project by word of mouth. A short information and invitation communication piece (Appendix E) was sent to primary contacts in each of the three selected neighbourhoods, which they had the option of sharing via email or on their community league website, or other neighbourhood social media platforms, in an effort to reach more potential participants. It is unknown how many people would have seen this communication piece.

Interested individuals were invited to contact the report author by email or phone to inquire about involvement. If by phone, then the report author used Appendix F: Invitation to Participate Phone Scripts. To finalize involvement as a participant in this project, people were asked to complete a consent form (Appendix G) and confirm that they met the following criteria:

- must live in one of the three neighbourhoods being focused on in this project
- must be at least 18 years of age
- must have had some interaction with an identifiable neighbourhood network as defined by this research project, during the COVID-19 pandemic in Edmonton

### ***Interview participants***

A total of 17 people were interviewed: six from Belgravia, six from McCauley and five from Westmount. The average number of household members in the homes of the interview participants was two people. The interview participation criteria and the interview questions did not ask for or determine the exact age (participants signed a consent form for participation that indicated they were at least the required minimum age of 18), ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality or socioeconomic status of the person.

### ***Neighbourhoods represented***

Belgravia is a neighbourhood of an approximate population of 2,141 (City of Edmonton, 2019 Municipal Census Results, n.d.), located in the Edmonton ward of papastew. Belgravia overlooks the North Saskatchewan River and is located directly adjacent to the University of Alberta main campus. Belgravia is known as a community that is home to a large number of university academics, professionals, staff and students. It is generally thought of as one of the more affluent neighbourhoods in Edmonton with a relatively high average household income and level of education in comparison to other residential neighbourhoods in Edmonton. The majority of residences are single-family dwellings and three out of four are owner-occupied (Wikipedia, 2021). People who live in Belgravia, interviewed in this project, spoke of a prominent level of connection and neighbourliness between neighbours, experienced through for example, their involvement in dog walking groups and other informal neighbour groups.

McCauley, with an approximate population of 5,167 (Wikipedia, 2022) is described as a “vibrant and ethnically diverse inner-city neighbourhood” (Wikipedia, 2022), located in the Edmonton ward of O-day’min. It is known in Edmonton for having several historical buildings, dozens of religious buildings located on “Church Street”, and it is home to the Commonwealth Stadium which is one of Edmonton’s largest event venues. It is also home to Chinatown and Little Italy, both distinct retail and restaurant areas. It is generally thought of as one of the most economically challenged neighbourhoods in Edmonton with 15% of its residents making less than \$10,000 annually (Wikipedia, 2022). But it is also identified as one of the top five up-and-coming neighbourhoods in the city in part because it is rich in culture and highly walkable with great access to public transportation and a diverse array of activities and venues. McCauley is undergoing a Revitalization project coordinated by The City of Edmonton which began in 2008. This initiative has so far seen 26 houses built, 40 new businesses erected and over 30 facade improvement projects (Wikipedia, 2022). McCauley is a mix of single-family dwellings, walk-up and high-rise apartment and condominium buildings.

Westmount is a central-west Edmonton neighborhood in the ward of O’day-min, with an approximate population of 5,900 (Wikipedia, 2023). The neighbourhood primarily consists of single-dwelling homes and has a large number of historic homes. Westmount hosts a major shopping destination known as 124 Street which includes a diverse array of restaurants and retail, and it has the North Saskatchewan River along its south border and the Groat Road Ravine along its west and southwest borders affording its residents quick and easy access to nature walks and the river valley

trail system. Westmount has been identified as one of the city's top neighbourhoods to live in, in part due to its reputation as a community oriented, neighbourly place, and in part because it is an aesthetically pleasing area because of the historic homes and the town-within-a-city feel that the 124 Street offerings provide.

### ***Neighbourhood networks represented***

The following neighbourhood networks were represented and used as context by the participants for the interview questions they answered, organized by the three neighbourhoods focused on in this project.

#### *Belgravia*

- Abundant Community Belgravia (aka Abundant Belgravia) - linked to the City of Edmonton's Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE) program
- Belgravia Meets - a Facebook group that facilitates virtual connections, but also enables planning for in person gatherings
- Dog Walking Group - informal group of neighbours who gather regularly to walk together with their dogs

#### *McCauley*

- Abundant Community Edmonton (ACE) McCauley Block Connectors - linked to the City of Edmonton's ACE program
- Block Group in McCauley focused on identifying, reporting and preventing crime on the block - very organic, informal group which was initiated by neighbours with a common interest in dealing with criminal activity on their block
- Cultivate McCauley - a gardening group in the neighbourhood
- McCauley Community League Board - formal group that leads the neighbourhood's community league
- McCauley Children's Garden - informal group that was initiated by people with a shared interest in gardening with children and providing a space for children to enjoy the gardens and the outdoors in general
- McCauley Revitalization Committee - a formal group in collaboration with and supported and facilitated by The City of Edmonton (part of a formal Revitalization initiative led by The City of Edmonton in several areas across the city)
- Operation Fruit Rescue Edmonton (OFRE) - an informal group of people with a shared interest in preserving fruit from trees and bushes and ensuring it is used to make food products

#### *Westmount*

- IngleWest - a faith-based neighbour group in Westmount (and Inglewood, an adjacent neighbourhood)
- Westmount Block Connectors - linked to the City of Edmonton's ACE program

- Westmount Buy Nothing Group - an informal group of people who coordinate and facilitate the sharing and borrowing of miscellaneous items of use in day-to-day life
- Westmount Community League Board - formal group that leads the neighbourhood's community league
- Westmount Heritage Committee - an informal group of people who have an interest in learning about the history of the houses and their inhabitants, keeping records of these learnings, producing plaques for houses, and making the knowledge and learnings available in the neighbourhood for others who are interested
- Westmount Neighbours Facebook Group - a Facebook group that facilitates virtual connections, but also enables planning for in person gatherings
- Westmount Window Neighbourhood Magazine - a group of neighbours who came together to produce a neighbourhood magazine with stories about the people and goings-on in the neighbourhood

Of the 17 neighbourhood networks listed above, three of these (one per neighbourhood) are linked to the City of Edmonton's ACE program, in other words, the neighbourhood network started as a result of and continues to be connected to the broader ACE initiative and network.

### **4.3 Data Analysis**

#### **Narrative analysis**

A narrative analysis was used to implement an interpretative qualitative approach and included deductive and inductive elements to the coding, theming and analysis. Narrative analysis focuses on how people formulate meaning from their experiences in life through interpretation of the stories they share (Josselson and Hammack, 2021), for the purposes of this project, during interview conversations. With the exploration of themes in narrative analysis, there is flexibility and relative accessibility as a proven method for examining qualitative data in a community-based research context (Caine and Mill, 2016), and the method is shown in existing scholarly research to enable diverse, sometimes underrepresented viewpoints to come forward (Barker, Pistrang and Elliot, 2016). The narrative analysis in this project was deductive because past observations of neighbourhood networks' influence on neighbourliness (see Chapter 2.4) were drawn from to inform the themes of the interview questions. It was anticipated that certain themes would emerge based on the past observations and based on existing knowledge and experience working with neighbourhood networks. The analysis was also inductive, in that the final coding and theming of the qualitative data was determined by the data collected in the semi-structured interviews with key informants.

The data analysis methods enabled insights from each key informant's narrative to emerge and inform the main themes of the findings, outlined in Chapter 5. Data was collected in a protected Excel spreadsheet and 'Control Find' was a tool used to quickly refer to specific participant's responses and specific interview questions. Delvetool.com, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to code, categorize and organize insights from each key informant. The codes and categories created using Delvetool.com were further grouped into six main themes that reflected the similarity

and relation between the coded data. Delvetool.com functionality enabled the report author to quickly identify specific anecdotes to animate the key findings within each theme.

#### **4.4 Project Limitations**

The following project limitations are noted:

- Due to a limitation of time, interviews were limited to 17 one-hour interviews. With more time allocated to the interview phase, the number of interviews could have been increased which would have allowed for more people to share their perspectives and experiences, which could have added breadth and depth to the data collected.
- Diversity factors not controlled for include age (other than the minimum required age of 18), ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, religion/spirituality, nationality or socioeconomic status. As long as individuals met the criteria for participation as noted above in section 4.2, they were invited to engage in the research project interviews.



## 5.0 Findings

This chapter summarizes the findings and insights gathered in the 17 semi-structured interviews with key informants, identified in this report as Participant A to Q. The findings informed and are organized into the following six themes that emerged throughout the narrative analysis of the data:

1. Involvement in Neighbourhood Networks
2. Belonging and Connection
3. Neighbourliness and Reciprocity
4. Responsibility and Purpose
5. Safety and Security
6. Supporting Processes and Resources

Each of these six themes can be connected to an overarching theme that emerged throughout the interviews: participants shared that their relationships and interactions with their neighbours, in other words neighbourliness, helped them get through the unprecedented changes and challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. This predominant message was shared in response to two open-ended interview questions about what it feels like to be a part of a neighbourhood network:

- In general, what does being a part of a neighbourhood network feel like for you? What kind of emotions do you feel in connection to it? (Appendix A, Part B, Question 1)
- Overall, do you feel that you experienced neighbourliness and positive impacts of being a part of a neighbourhood network during the pandemic? Do you feel like being a part of a neighbourhood network during the pandemic made it easier/less stressful/less lonely/etc.? (Appendix A, Part B, Question 2)

Through a narrative analysis, the report author developed the six themes by grouping coded data (see Chapter 4 for methodology and methods) and then identifying a category name - a theme - for each of the six groupings. From a deductive perspective, certain themes were expected to emerge based on past observations (noted in Chapter 2.4) and from existing knowledge and experience working with neighbourhood networks. The inductive aspect of the narrative analysis meant that the final coding and theming was determined by the data collected in the semi-structured interviews with the key informants.

### 5.1 Theme 1: Involvement in Neighbourhood Networks

Of the 17 people interviewed, 14 were involved in their neighbourhood network(s) prior to the COVID-19 pandemic beginning and three became involved during the pandemic, specifically right at the beginning of the pandemic (early 2020).

The interview participants' identification of how and why they became involved in a neighbourhood network can be themed as follows:

How:

- the community league as a starting point
- the ACE initiative as a starting point
- other neighbourhood networks as a starting point

Why:

- desire to engage in a shared interest locally
- desire to help others in the neighbourhood
- general interest in neighbourliness and connection

In addition to the how and why, the roles participants are in within their neighbourhood network were identified and grouped into leadership and general membership. As well, although the participants mostly spoke of positive impacts, there were challenges identified. These are outlined at the end of this section of Chapter 5.

### **Sub-theme - How: The community league as a starting point**

As noted in Chapter 2.1, every residential neighbourhood in Edmonton has a community league, including the three neighbourhoods focused on in this project. Six of the 17 interview participants shared that involvement in their community league was their first point of entry into their engagement in neighbourhood networks, and three out of the six have been actively involved with their community league for more than 10 years (one participant shared that they have been with their community league for 35 years). Each of the six participants were intrigued by the community league structure. They joined out of a desire to be more connected where they live, and to contribute to their community.

Of the six participants whose involvement in neighbourhood networks began with their community league, four were members of their community league board. The reasons they chose to be on their community league board included: to meet people, to be more in touch with the happenings of importance to them in the neighbourhood (such as neighbourhood infrastructure and road renewal projects, social initiatives and neighbourhood politics), to contribute to local decision making, and to help advance neighbourhood-led initiatives (such as the Abundant Community initiative which will be looked at in more detail in the following section of this chapter). Participant A shared about previously being the Programs Director for their community league board. Within this board role, they started a walking club that has now been operating for four years. With the endorsement of the community league board and the involvement of interested neighbours, it successfully continued throughout the pandemic. With the provincial health restrictions in place at the time in response to the pandemic, the fact that it was an outdoor activity and easy to maintain physical distance, made it a permissible social activity. Two other participants specifically noted the advantage of a locally coordinated walking group:

“More walks, was a benefit; more outdoors time together with neighbours was a good thing.”  
(Participant M).

“Many other options were not allowed or were restricted, so this was something we could continue to do to stay connected.” (Participant J).

Community league involvement was noted by all six of the participants who identified their community league as their entry point into active community life in neighbourhood networks, as being an accessible and inclusive way for people to become more involved in their neighbourhood, with examples such as the local walking group to demonstrate their perception of the local advantage.

One participant, Participant M, shared about their experience moving from a city they perceived to feel lonely, to Edmonton where they said the community league environment made the city feel connected and welcoming. When they moved to Edmonton, they were interested in and drawn to the community league concept. They were spending a lot of time at home with their three young children and became involved in the community league as a way to get to know other people in the neighbourhood, especially other parents. As a newcomer to the city and the neighbourhood, they at first felt isolated and they generally did not know many people in the city. They were a part of a church community geographically far away in the city, but they shared in the interview conversation that they were “craving community and interactions with people closer to home” (Participant M); they wanted a sense of community right where they lived, and involvement in their community league made this a reality for them and their family. Their involvement in the neighbourhood community took away feelings of loneliness and replaced those with feelings of connectedness and belonging.

In some cases, after an individual’s first point of entry into active neighbourhood life was facilitated through their community league engagement, they were then connected to the ACE initiative through the community league (a trend observed during past work with community leagues and development of the ACE initiative). This was the case for Participant M, who said they responded to a local newspaper advertisement from the community league that was asking for people interested in starting a community garden to volunteer for an organizing committee. The participant was on that community garden committee for six months and while at the garden one evening, it happened to be the night of the community league’s Annual General Meeting (AGM). Someone from the community league encouraged them to come into the AGM to learn more about the community league board, and they ended up being nominated for and accepting a position on the board. Their experience on the board was what led them to hear about and then become actively involved in ACE as one of Edmonton’s first Neighbourhood Connectors, a coordinator of Block Connectors within the ACE Organizational Framework, Chapter 2.3.

### **Sub-theme - How: The ACE initiative as a starting point**

The ACE initiative was first established in Edmonton in 2012 within the community league social infrastructure, as discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.3. In the interview conversations, five participants identified that involvement in ACE was their starting point for engagement in neighbourhood networks where they live. A theme among the five people who were involved in ACE was that they described themselves as having an affinity for grassroots community development, and for three of the five participants, they shared that they have a particular interest in Asset-Based

Community Development. Participant D previously worked at a nonprofit organization focused on community development among seniors in Edmonton and described their past organization as providing structured services on a needs' basis and sometimes, in silos. They felt something was missing from the approach they were taking at their past organization, and when they learned about the ACE model, they found what they were looking for. This participant shared that they "have a philosophical belief that community is the missing link in human service" (Participant D) and they wanted to be engaged in and advance the ACE model in their neighbourhood because they felt the model provided that missing link.

The concept of Block Connectors within the ACE Organizational Framework was new for some people who became involved in ACE, but for others, the action of block connecting came naturally and was already being done; ACE just gave them terms and language to describe their existing actions and behaviours. Participant E shared that they have lived in their neighbourhood for about 20 years, and they shared that they "know everyone on their block now." Because of this, they were asked by a Neighbourhood Connector to be a Block Connector on their block. At first, they said no to formalizing what they were already doing because they did not feel they needed the title or to be a part of an organized network of Block Connectors. But the Neighbourhood Connector was persistent, and eventually Participant E decided to try it. As a Block Connector, they leveraged their natural propensity for neighbourliness, to reach out to even more people in their neighbourhood by connecting the existing social capital they had created on their own block, with other nearby blocks in the community.

When the ACE initiative was first getting started in Edmonton, part of how it took hold in neighbourhoods was through individuals becoming enthusiastic about its potential and presenting it to their community league board. Based on previous experience working with community leagues and the ACE initiative, it is known that often the individuals presenting the concept would be successful in their presentation and obtain support to initiate the model in their neighbourhood. Participant A talked about their personal experience bringing the ACE concept forward to their community league board. The existing organizational structure of the community league provided a supportive environment for the initiative to build momentum in, and the participant was able to build a support team (see the ACE Organizational Framework in Chapter 2.3) of interested neighbours to specifically advance the ACE initiative. They focused on recruiting other neighbours to be Block Connectors. Their Block Connector group grew in numbers and evolved to be a network of Block Connectors throughout the neighbourhood, and it all began with one person being excited about the potential of an idea and getting support from the community league board to pilot it. Participant C was successful with their presentation about ACE to their community league board and started a subcommittee of the board to establish the ACE initiative in their neighbourhood. They also garnered support for the creation of a new position directly on their community league board, to coordinate ACE for their neighbourhood on behalf of the community league. Active community members garnering support from their community leagues has been an important success factor for the ACE initiative in Edmonton, which has then sprouted off into or inspired the formation of other neighbourhood networks.

### **Sub-theme - How: Other neighbourhood networks as a starting point**

In addition to initial involvement in community leagues and ACE, every one of the 17 interview participants noted that there are many examples of neighbourhood networks in Edmonton that provide an opportunity for people to get involved and connected where they live (see Chapter 4.2 for a list of neighbourhood networks represented in the three neighbourhoods looked at in this project). Three of the 17 participants noted that their first point of contact into neighbourhood connections was through a neighbourhood network other than the community league or ACE: Participant J got connected through involvement in the community garden, Participant Q was a part of a neighbourhood heritage group and Participant K was a part of multiple place-based groups in their neighbourhood. Participant E shared that from their perspective, “as people get older their social circles and networks can shrink for a variety of reasons.” They were wary of this and wanted to prevent this from happening to them. Even though they identify as relatively introverted, they wanted to ensure they maintained social connections; they wanted to know their neighbours. Joining an informal neighbourhood network in their area enabled them to stay connected to people who live close by. It was shared by all 17 of the participants that it is important to them to stay connected in their local community, no matter what age they are. Participant H shared that they coordinated a neighbourhood network called Cultivate McCauley and their partner was a member of the Revitalization McCauley committee. It was important to them as a household, to stay connected to people who live around them, and to be actively involved in neighbourhood initiatives and groups that bring people together.

### **Sub-theme - Why: Desire to engage in a shared interest locally**

Four of the 17 participants specifically noted that their involvement in their neighbourhood network was driven by a desire to engage in a shared interest with people who live close to them, and all 17 participants gave examples of neighbourhood groups they have at some point been a part of that are focused on a shared interest engaged in together locally. Groups of interest included dog walking, gardening, fruit rescue, childcare, history, heritage preservation, faith, food security and skill sharing. A complete list of the neighbourhood networks the interview participants are involved in is provided in Chapter 4.2. Participant I shared that they were invited to a potluck dinner event that was also a traditional skill sharing event, bringing people together to specifically share their individual traditional skills (like foraging, hunting, gardening and organic food preparation) with other neighbours. The participant’s partner was making soaps at that time. They attended the potluck event together and had the opportunity to share their skills, learn different skills from others, eat food together with others and meet new people from their neighbourhood who shared their interest in skill sharing. A specific neighbourhood network - Operation Fruit Rescue Edmonton - was formed out of that event and focused on the idea of rescuing fallen fruit and bringing together neighbours with a shared interest in creative food security options. It was also noted by Participant J and Participant L that local groups that form around a shared interest, provide social opportunity in a “fun and playful space” with other neighbours, and the place-based aspect of the connection makes it a different relationship than what they experience with family and friends.

Participant P said they are a part of their area's business association because they have an interest in staying connected to local business development and having access to information provided by municipal government programs and services. Participant Q was interested in the history of the houses in their neighbourhood and wrote a booklet about the stories of several houses and families in the area. This exercise connected them to other neighbours who shared an interest in history and architecture, and who shared in the value of passing on the stories of the people who have lived in the neighbourhood over the decades. Another example brought up by two participants is IngleWest, a neighbourhood group that has members from Westmount and the next-door neighbourhood of Inglewood. This neighbourhood network started about six years ago and is a faith-based group, providing people who want to connect on this shared interest and stay local, a close proximity group to do so with (rather than travelling across the city to a specific church location). A key observation gained through discussion focused on a desire to engage in a shared interest locally, was that it is not just about the topic or activity they are gathering to engage in, but importantly and perhaps more significantly, the place-based aspect of the group.

The place-based aspect was of particular importance during the COVID-19 pandemic because people's movement around the city and gathering with others was restricted. Participant B said that "it felt like you could still get together with people as long as they were in your neighbourhood" and Participant A talked about the convenience of people being nearby with respect to engaging in shared interests, and to helping others in the neighbourhood which is explored further in the following section.

### **Sub-theme - Why: Desire to help others in the neighbourhood**

A predominant insight shared in the interview conversations was the desire to help others in the neighbourhood, and five participants mentioned that this was their key driver to getting involved in their neighbourhood network. Participant G shared that once they had lived in their neighbourhood for a few years and knew that it was a place they would likely stay in for a while, they wanted to contribute to their community and so they intentionally sought out opportunities to be engaged in neighbourhood networks. Participant G shared the story of how they once casually attended their community league's AGM and noticed that there was a need for more leadership. They could see that there was potential to introduce innovative programs that would be beneficial to the community league and the neighbourhood, and they saw where they might be able to support by filling the gaps. They could also see that the personalities present on the community league's board were genuine, and there was "a sense of positivity and love for the neighbourhood." They felt that it would not feel like a burden to take on a helping role on the board, but rather, was of personal interest for them; they had an interest in contributing to their neighbourhood community through involvement on the community league board. Four participants specifically expressed this: an interest in solving problems collectively with other neighbours, for the betterment of the neighbourhood community. More broadly, the participants who discussed their desire to help others in the neighbourhood included the following sentiments:

Helping people is mutually beneficial. There is convenience in people being nearby. (Participant A).

There is satisfaction in contribution, a sense of purpose. I enjoy giving back to the community. (Participant D).

It can be energizing to support others; it is a refreshing experience. Knowing how rough it is for people (during the pandemic), I experience benefits in seeing the benefits of the contributions I am able to make to others. (Participant G).

Helping each other through tough times is important. (Participant I).

There are a lot of people asking for assistance, so it is nice to see people being nice to each other and helping each other. (Participant P).

In the McCauley neighbourhood, there are several problem properties including some abandoned buildings, and this has become a topic some neighbours desire to contribute to solutions for in this neighbourhood, as explained by Participant H. This participant wanted to contribute to their neighbourhood by working with others, locally, on collaborative solutions for addressing the challenges arising from the problem properties. As a central Edmonton neighbourhood, they shared that there is a high degree of intersectionality around poverty, racism and economic strife in McCauley, and so they perceived there to be a keen sense of social justice that brings neighbours together to find solutions and to help (Participant H). Neighbourhood community development, which could also be described as place-based community development, is about starting from where people are at in terms of level of connection and engagement with each other and being realistic about how to move forward (Barca, McMann and Rodriguez-Pose, 2012).

### **Sub-theme - Why: General interest in neighbourliness and connection**

Perhaps not surprisingly, a clear trend across all 17 interviews was an expressed interest in neighbourliness and connection. Two participants explicitly noted that they made an effort to get involved in their neighbourhood because of an interest in neighbourliness and connection. One of these individuals, Participant A, said their father was always the type of person who would talk to anyone and everyone. They grew up during a time when not everyone knew all the people on their block, but they and their father certainly gave it their best effort. This same participant commented: “we are not very tribal” (in Canadian culture) and “we have become isolated from each other; we might know the people right next-door to us, but that tends to be as far as it goes most of the time.” The remedy for this, as inferred by 15 of the 17 participants, is neighbourliness and connection, and their neighbourhood networks enable this for them and their household:

We need connection; we need this to live and prosper all the time, let alone in a disaster. (Participant B).

Neighbourliness is key to surviving challenges and is also rewarding and meaningful; to have relationships and chats with neighbours. (Participant D).

I know people as a result of being involved in a neighbourhood group. I like the feeling of connection and belonging where I live. (Participant F).

I enjoy talking to people and I like the feeling of being involved in a neighbourhood group; it makes me feel connected, it gives me a sense of belonging. (Participant M)

My neighbourhood group provides a way to participate and engage with people. (Neighbourhood networks) are a nice way to get to know people and have more people in your circle. (Participant P).

There are usually people around who seem to know everyone, Participant J commented, and these people are often inclined to naturally seek out groups to be a part of because they are genuinely interested in neighbourliness and connection. Participant J said these traits describe them personally, and they actively seek out opportunities to be neighbourly. Throughout all the interview conversations, there were several participants who said that they like connecting with others, and that they actively seek out opportunities to become engaged in neighbourhood networks because neighbourliness is important to them; they value it. Participant I noted that there is a “positive ripple effect” to these acts of neighbourliness. “When we take care of our neighbourhood and neighbours, other people will recognize the effort and care for it (the neighbourhood) as well.” (Participant I).

### **Sub-theme - Role: Leadership roles**

Participants were asked what roles they hold within their neighbourhood network and through this interview question, it was observed that there was a trend of natural leadership among all of the 17 interviewees. Five of the 17 participants directly identified as a natural leader and all of the other participants indicated a tendency towards leadership through less direct comments about them initiating neighbourliness and connections among neighbours, or about leading particular events and activities in their neighbourhood for others. As was noted in Chapter 2.3, the ACE Organizational Framework consists of a support team. Three participants shared that they are or were members of their neighbourhood’s ACE support team, and two others said that although they did not hold a formal support team role, they enjoyed contributing their ideas to the establishment and growth of ACE, in other words, their contribution was through collaborative ideation. Three participants said they contributed by promoting the ACE initiative among their neighbours, or through their past or current role as community league board members. As community league board members, they contributed to their neighbourhood’s ACE efforts through decision making and policy development that would support local community development. An example of this advocacy and leadership support was ensuring that ideas were put forward to the community league board in a strategic and timely way for support; they advocated for buy-in and advanced development by leveraging their existing leadership reputation on the board or in the neighbourhood, to influence others.

With both the ACE initiative and community league board involvement being prominent shared experiences across the participants, several participants said they have been or are still in the leadership roles of Block Connector or Neighbourhood Connector or were/are community league



board members. With ACE, six participants identified as being a Block Connector, one as a Neighbourhood Connector and three as members of an ACE support team. With regards to community league board membership, among the interview participants there was a community league past president, programs director, facilities committee chair, finance committee chair and treasurer, as well as individuals who have led large community league facility renovation projects and grant writing initiatives. Throughout these responses, there was an expressed interest in neighbourhood network specific leadership roles, whether the person was/is in formal leadership roles within their professional life or not.

### **Sub-theme - Role: General membership**

There were 12 participants who shared that their role in their neighbourhood network is general membership (as opposed to specifically identifying as a leader of the network). If the neighbourhood network they were using as their example was fairly informal, it was noted that membership was similarly informal, in other words, everyone had an equal membership and no identifiable leadership was needed (for example with dog walking groups or gardening groups, or connections established around care of others, or sharing of things such as yard tools). The less formal and in some cases, smaller sized neighbourhood networks, did not appear to have the need for identifiable roles, rather, equal and general membership according to individuals' availability and interests defined what their involvement looked like.

There were other reasons for general membership shared, in addition to leadership not being needed. For two participants who identified as being a general member of their neighbourhood network, rather than a positional leader, they shared that they took on administrative support type roles which were needed. Participant D noted that they generally enjoy supporting in the background. Participant H said that they became the default administrator, creating tracking documents and organizing information so that it would be easy to access and helpful to the rest of the group. They helped their group to use social media tools for communications across the group and helped with collecting and organizing contact information. A theme among these responses about general or in the background roles, was that these participants enjoy lifting others up and enabling leaders and initiators to be successful, from behind the scenes. Another theme was that some people like to contribute in ways other than leadership because of specific skills and abilities they want to contribute (for example, playing the guitar for a group, to provide the gift of music). For others, choosing a non-leader role ensures that they can maintain boundaries about how much time they spend with and for their neighbourhood network (i.e., leadership roles might take up more time than non-leader roles). In general, the participants spoke of diversity among their groups in terms of a mix of leaders, administrative supports, contributors of other gifts, and generalists.

## **5.2 Theme 2: Belonging and Connection**

Participants were asked what it feels like to be a part of a neighbourhood network, or asked in another way, what kind of emotions they felt in connection to their involvement. The response for 10 of the 17 participants was that being a part of a neighbourhood network increased their sense of belonging and connection where they live. Eight of those 10 said that through their involvement, they

knew more people than they otherwise would have, and Participant H said that they “know everyone on their block by name, or at least their family structure, or know them by what they do.” The participants shared that being a part of a neighbourhood network gave them a feeling of community and togetherness, which was especially important to them during the COVID-19 pandemic. Local health restrictions required that people stayed home, so their only interactions were with the people in their household at first, and thankfully after not too much time had passed, also with neighbours close by. People began interacting over the fence, or at the end of the sidewalk or driveway to their home, or out walking the dogs in the neighbourhood. The importance of relationships with neighbours was amplified because, in theory, people could no longer connect in person with family and friends that lived in a different neighbourhood, so people relied more heavily on neighbours. Participants indicated,

It absolutely was a benefit to be a part of the (neighbourhood) group during the pandemic - it forced me to stay connected, gave me a reason and a way to stay connected. It made a difference to me personally. (Participant P).

(Being a part of the neighbourhood) made it feel less lonely. We met virtually but there was a sense of belonging focused on the place where we live. And it was even stronger with physical neighbours surrounding my house. It was a way to stay connected because you could see each other in each other's yards. (Participant G).

The pandemic for many, was a time of unprecedented isolation and loneliness. When asked about their observations of social isolation and loneliness in their neighbourhood during the pandemic, and how involvement in neighbourhood networks impacted their emotions, participants responded with:

Isolation was more noticeable or amplified. Maybe we were too busy to notice it before (the pandemic). (Participant D).

Yes, especially for people living alone. Especially older people and single people; especially older single people. It was a relief to have ways of reaching out to people, with the Block Connectors. (Participant B).

(During the pandemic) I felt very isolated because I could not do all the things I had done before like block parties and having people over. (Participant M).

Neighbourhood involvement limits social isolation (Participant O).

A retired participant shared that involvement in a neighbourhood network gave them something to focus on, increased their social connections and minimized their potential to feel alone. Twelve of the 17 participants shared similar sentiments, noting that their neighbourhood network involvement, even if gatherings were conducted virtually via Zoom or other virtual platforms, kept them connected to their neighbours. These neighbourly connections gave them a feeling of calm during a time of great

uncertainty and Participant J put it this way: connections with their neighbourhood network was “like an oasis during a time of difficulty; it enabled us to stay connected to people who live in the neighbourhood.”

### **5.3 Theme 3: Neighbourliness and Reciprocity**

Throughout the interview conversations, heartfelt stories of neighbourliness and care were shared from the participants’ experiences living through the pandemic. The participants talked about people in their neighbourhood coming from all walks of life, being of all ages, abilities, and backgrounds, and that the pandemic in some ways brought them all together; together as neighbours who needed to help each other get through a challenging time. During disasters and times of significant widespread challenge in a society, sometimes the usual service providers of things like childcare, temporary shelter, gasoline and even food, can be halted or drastically changed for several days and maybe weeks (Aldrich, 2017). During the interviews, many examples of neighbours filling the gaps for each other were shared. Examples included grocery shopping for neighbours, providing childcare, and keeping each other’s spirits up through social connection across the fence or out walking in the neighbourhood. Importantly, the reciprocity between neighbours in their connection with and support of one another, was said to have contributed to a sense of community (Breton, 2001) which seemed to have increased the neighbourhood community’s resilience and increased people’s overall sense of wellbeing.

Interview participants spoke of pre-pandemic neighbourliness and reciprocity as well, recalling stories about their neighbours helping them, or vice versa. Participant M talked about a time when their children would get home from school early and as parents who were not yet home from work, they could call one of several neighbours on the block and ask them to look out for their children until they got home, or let their children know to head over to so and so’s house for a bit. This created a feeling of a village; people you could count on if you ever needed help. This kind of neighbourliness and mutual support motivated the participant and their household to become even more connected in their neighbourhood and various neighbourhood networks. Participant K, when describing their experience and perception of neighbourliness where they live, said it is like the Sesame Street romanticized idea of what a neighbourhood can be; a place where people get together and spend time with each other, and take care of each other. They talked about how the ACE processes and resources gave them the tools they needed to get connected and to feel like they were a neighbourhood community. Involvement in a neighbourhood network enabled the participants to stay connected to people and Participant Q shared that through these connections, they received appreciation from neighbours for their helpfulness and neighbourliness, which was intrinsically satisfying for them and at the same time, gave them a sense of belonging and connection.

Care for seniors was also mentioned in addition to care for children. Participant O talked about their desire to age in place and expressed how grateful they are that this is now possible for them because of multi-generational relationships and care at the neighbourhood level. Participant B shared about how in their neighbourhood, they used their existing contact lists and knowledge of who people on the block are, to identify where there might be individuals or households, and

especially seniors or elders, who might need help during the pandemic. Help took the form of getting people to the doctor if needed, picking up groceries, or helping with household and lawn tasks that would usually be done by someone from outside of the neighbourhood (often a professional service provider) who was no longer able to come due to movement and physical distancing restrictions. The report author observed through the interview conversations, as well as reflecting on past work with neighbourhood networks, that involvement in neighbourhood networks enables a multi-generational ecosystem, inclusive of a wide range of ages, abilities and experiences among neighbours. Also notable, the contact lists that people had because of being a part of a neighbourhood group prior to the pandemic, allowed them to quickly connect with people they thought might need help.

#### **5.4 Theme 4: Responsibility and Purpose**

It was noted in 10 of the 17 interviews that involvement in a neighbourhood network creates a sense of loyalty or responsibility to neighbours and to the neighbourhood: a recognition of the importance of pulling together as a community. It was said that involvement can take up a lot of your time, but it brings joy and a sense of purpose, so it is worth it (Participant I and O). Through relationships with neighbours, participants said they learn about their neighbours' needs and they share about their own. Participant K said that the pandemic reminded people that we need to help each other. It forced our hand to an extent because the need became so high that it was necessary to help each other locally in our neighbourhoods. It was noted by Participant K that as a society we would do well to remember the lessons of the importance of helpfulness learned during the pandemic, and work to continue to build and enhance our neighbourly relationships where we live.

There were five participants who shared examples of an increased sense of purpose gained through involvement in a neighbourhood network during the pandemic. They explained that there is a satisfaction from contributing to their community that gives them a sense of purpose. It was said that doing things like picking up groceries for a neighbour or checking in on someone who lived alone or was not mobile to make sure they were safe or doing what they could to support local small businesses, all contributed to an overall sense of purpose, which in turn led to people feeling more connected, well and safe. Participant O gave an example of their contributions to the production of a neighbourhood magazine in which they would ask people how it was going for them during the pandemic including asking about mental health, asking about how local businesses were doing, and sharing stories of people right there in the neighbourhood. Having this neighbourhood project to focus on and work with other neighbours on, made a world of difference to them in how they experienced the pandemic. It gave them a sense of purpose, and it also produced a mechanism for connection and solidarity among neighbours in the community.

#### **5.5 Theme 5: Safety and Security**

In the interview conversations, four participants, when asked about how it feels to be a part of a neighbourhood network, mentioned that it increases their sense of safety and security. In pre-pandemic days, Participant H said that sometimes neighbours who knew each other through a

neighbourhood network would team up to deal with issues in the neighbourhood together, for example, working with other neighbours and local bylaw officers and City of Edmonton staff to address specific neighbourhood concerns related to crime and safety. Participant K talked about “street intelligence” gained by knowing your neighbours and being engaged in neighbourhood networks:

There are three things that happen (with regards to safety and security). First, you feel comfortable in your neighbourhood, you feel you are ok because you know who the homeless people are, and you can identify who is dangerous and who is not. You can categorize what is dangerous versus what is uncomfortable. Being involved is the only way to know and categorize - to gain street intelligence. The second thing is a sense of wellbeing when you can walk into a store (in your neighbourhood) and people know you. And the third thing is you start to feel useful in your community – you look out for your neighbour who is away, you notice if something is off, and you help them take care of their property.” (Participant K).

There was a safety in proximity factor that was mentioned by the participants, which was especially relevant during the pandemic. As has been mentioned in previous sections of this chapter, not being able to meet with friends and family in other neighbourhoods, meant that the people who lived close by were more likely to be the people to turn to in case of need or emergency. There were also examples shared of pre-pandemic incidents in which the help of close-by neighbourhoods was important, and general comments on the ability of neighbours to be quickly available to help:

My basement flooded four years ago, and I called my neighbour to borrow their shop vacuum. My neighbour then offered to help with the cleanup. It is not always an emergency (that we need our neighbours for), it could be that our dog is sick or dying, or we are having an emotional emergency and need to talk.” (Participant N).

Let us say there was a water main break. There will be people who will be sharing containers and water and filling their bathtubs. They will know how to connect with each other (if they are connected through a neighbourhood network). People will look out for each other. (Participant P).

When you know people in your neighbourhood and you are involved in neighbourhood networks, you are more likely to notice when something is off. For example, you can watch out for each other’s property and things, and you might notice if an unknown vehicle or person is present that may need attention brought to it, or an activity or happening that seems outside of the normal and potentially of risk to neighbours. (Participant K).

Examples of increased safety and security were mentioned within the context of children too. Participant M said that blocks with people who know each other and connect with each other in a neighbourly way, enable children to feel safe playing outside on the block and around the neighbourhood. Participant M knows multiple people in various houses, and it gives them a sense of safety because they know they can go to those people for help if they need to, and they know their

children are also cognizant of people on the block who they can feel comfortable reaching out to if ever the need arose.

### **Sub-theme - Contact lists increase disaster preparedness**

An important theme within safety and security, was the element of disaster preparedness in terms of readiness to deal with the pandemic because of already existing neighbourhood networks and neighbourliness, and in terms of learnings to be considered for future challenges. Of the 17 participants, 10 commented on how their community's ability to mobilize for care was enabled by existing structures such as neighbour contact lists, social media groups such as through Facebook, and the fact that people knew others on their block or in their neighbour networks. Identifying and reaching out to neighbours who were suspected to need more help than others, was aided by existing knowledge of them through established neighbourly relationships, and through established methods of communication such as contact lists. Some of the examples shared in the interviews were specifically related to the role of the Block Connector in ACE as a coordinator and holder of neighbour contact lists, such as in these examples:

Having someone on the street that people know is the person who is the lead for the block, which facilitates the connections, it gives people a roadmap. The only way for that to be maintained is for that person, the Block Connector, to reach out to people who are new and help fold them into the group. A lot of what they (Block Connectors) do is make others known to others. It is a key role, to introduce new people to everyone; such a service, such an important role, and a commitment to make it happen. If you have a street that does not have this person (the Block Connector) it would be a much more difficult time. (Participant N).

We created block maps with contact info so that everyone could stay in touch, and we used the pandemic as a reason to do so. This is really good to have in these times when we need to rely on our neighbours. Our format was a block map. (Participant B).

Participants talked about already established respect and familiarity that set them up for success when the pandemic hit. Participants among the 10 out of 17 mentioned above, said being a part of a neighbourhood network, especially now having experienced the support they felt from it through the pandemic, gives them a feeling of readiness for whatever could happen next in life. Their contact lists, block maps and knowledge of each other through use of virtual social platforms, enabled them to stay connected during the pandemic and reach out to each other easily:

Our community league had a list of people who might need some help. Knowing we were looking out for people caused me to feel safer. (Participant B).

The more people who know each other, the more able we are to knock on their doors to see if they need help. Not in an organized way necessarily but yes, we are more prepared. (Participant D).

(Neighbourhood) groups make me feel more ready and feel like even if things go off the rails, there are people who have my back. (Participant M).

People need to make the choice to connect while they can, because relationships like this take time to create. (Participant O).

We made a google form for people who were prepared to sign up to help a neighbour, and for people who need help. We put it up on the community (league) website and Facebook pages and we quickly had 75 people say they could help. (Participant P).

The theme of preparedness and quick mobilization that resulted from pre-pandemic established neighbourhood networks and an existing culture of neighbourliness, is an important learning from the interview conversations and is in alignment with the findings of the literature review discussed in Chapter 3. Communities who have existing groups of neighbours who know each other, have established communication methods, and have respect and care for each other, are more likely to have higher levels of social capital, which is associated with higher levels of community resilience during times of significant challenge (Aldrich, 2012). Ten of the 17 interview participants in this project said that they feel it is essential to build connections and neighbourliness to live a more full and happy life, and importantly, to be better prepared for whatever unknown challenges may lie ahead.

## **5.6 Theme 6: Findings Related to Supporting Processes and Resources**

Participants were asked about the supporting processes and resources associated with their neighbourhood network, and they were asked to comment on how these elements changed or stayed the same during the pandemic. There were several changes made as a result of public health restrictions, and as the restrictions ebbed and flowed, people in neighbourhood networks adjusted and evolved. There were also elements that stayed consistent throughout the pandemic, which participants noted as foundational characteristics of their neighbourhood networks that helped them get through the pandemic together. With both the changes and things that stayed the same, a recurring theme that emerged was that people came to appreciate their neighbourhood networks in a new way as they experienced the benefits of reciprocal neighbourliness during a challenging time.

### **Sub-theme - Changes to supporting processes and resources**

With local health restrictions limiting people's movement, the obvious change in process was that at first, people could not meet in person and so they moved their gatherings to the virtual environment. Platforms such as Zoom, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, NextDoor and emerging virtual platforms developed specifically to meet the new demands for virtual connection during a pandemic, became the go to for people as they tried to keep their existing groups active, or to find new ways to stay connected and take care of each other. Seven out of the 17 participants talked about how their neighbourhood's Facebook page was a key tool for connection and care. They used their virtual tools to chat, check in on each other from a safety perspective, make arrangements to get groceries for

those that needed help, share stories and jokes to keep people's spirits up, and more. One participant added that:

The online groups (in their neighbourhood) that had just started up before the pandemic, really then blossomed as a result of the pandemic. (Participant M).

Other participants said they made the virtual situation work, but one of the negative impacts was that some people became weary of meeting virtually. Connecting virtually during the pandemic had its ups and downs, but overall, it was an option that some participants expressed being grateful for, because it was better than nothing.

Another challenge highlighted was that many community initiatives and project groups or committees came to a halt, which meant some people who were previously active in their neighbourhood network became "comfortable with just staying at home and not actually doing anything for the group" (Participant L). An adaptation to mitigate lethargy and complacency in one neighbourhood network was to establish personal and group goals. They asked each other – "how do each of us want to contribute?" If a process was not working well for people, they would ask each other: "do we need to try something different?" (Participant L). In this way, they kept each other accountable to continued engagement in their neighbourhood network, which they knew ultimately, would be a benefit to them during the pandemic.

Other changes directed by health restrictions were group sizes and meeting outdoors, once people were allowed to have some gatherings. These changes required more intentionality and sometimes more planning, to enable inclusivity and to maintain connection with people who might still need to physically isolate in their home due to health, mobility or personal preference. Participant M identified one advantage of this change was that smaller group sizes meant a more organic and less structured environment which they said some people preferred. Although some participants said more intentionality and planning was required during the pandemic, other participants said less was needed. Participant F said neighbourly connections became more natural and casual, with an example being small groups of neighbours going for regular walks with each other or chatting across their fences or at the end of their sidewalks and driveways. Being outdoors more often was a change that most people expressed being happy about. Walking outside became one of the only activities people could engage in with others, and there were health and wellness benefits attributed to this change talked about by several of the participants, as noted previously in Chapter 5.1.

### **Sub-theme - Supporting processes and resources that stayed the same**

Throughout the pandemic, there were elements of the neighbourhood networks discussed in the interviews that stayed the same. A clear theme that became apparent throughout the interview conversations was that the things that stayed the same were the foundational principles of the neighbourhood networks, such as connection, care, fun, sharing things and information and service, safety, and an overall sense of belonging. Participant L said being a part of a neighbourhood network through the pandemic, gave them something familiar and consistent. As Participant K stated, calamity



often brings people together; everything boils down to survival and making sure people are ok. It was noted by 10 participants that they were ready to adapt to the pandemic because they were already mobilized; their existing networks on their block and in their neighbourhood provided the stability, care, and connection that they needed. Participant A said, “we were ready to mobilize because we were already established (as a group).”

### **Sub-theme - Challenges related to involvement in neighbourhood networks and adapting to the pandemic**

In this chapter, a plethora of benefits have been identified through anecdotal examples of the positive impact of involvement in neighbourhood networks, but there were also negative impacts mentioned during the interviews. Most notably within the context of supporting processes and resources that needed to adapt during the pandemic, but also with respect to group dynamics, diverse expectations, and varying perspectives on appropriate boundaries among neighbours. As one participant put it,

Not everyone has the same social skills, some people may have a different awareness of appropriate boundaries. And for people who may need a lot of support, it could be more than we can give. (Participant N).

Determining boundaries among a group of diverse people in the virtual realm adds an additional layer of challenge. Issues of privacy and giving people their personal space become especially relevant. Participant N said: “the use of social media as a prime communicator, leaves something to be desired.” Communication can “be misinterpreted or blown out of proportion; it’s more likely to erupt over social media (than in person interactions)” (Participant N).

With the constantly evolving health restrictions during the pandemic, it was “challenging to try to find ways to adhere to guidelines, and the pandemic itself was a polarizing topic.” (Participant N). The pandemic became a sometimes-delicate subject of conversation, and many experienced changes to or losses of relationships in their lives, including with neighbours. There was also a lot of change fatigue during the pandemic and at times, people would grow tired of the additional effort that was sometimes necessary to keep the momentum of group initiatives going. People persevered though, as Participant B affirmed:

There is only so much you can do alone. To feel hope, it is important to have people on board to create care, to help each other with ensuring necessities are in place. We need connection; we need it to live and prosper all the time, let alone in a disaster. (Participant B).

Despite the challenges participants shared, they were quick to say things like “challenges aside, it is important to be connected, to help people to know that they are not alone. This might be some sort of massive event that forces us to connect but it is for the best.” (Participant N).

## 5.7 Conclusion

The findings outlined in this chapter demonstrated that involvement in a neighbourhood network affected people during the COVID-19 pandemic in multiple ways. Although there were a few comments made about the challenges of adapting processes and resources to meet local public health restrictions, and about the complexities of group dynamics, the resounding response from the key informants was that the impact they experienced was positive. With limited opportunity to leave their neighbourhood due to local public health restrictions, neighbourliness and engagement in groups close to home became more valuable than in pre-pandemic days, and based on the stories shared by participants, appeared to increase people's resilience and quality of life. There were several indications in the interviews that pre-existing (i.e., prior to the pandemic) neighbourhood networks increased individuals' resilience during the pandemic. One way this was made evident was by the fact that involvement in a neighbourhood network meant that people had contact lists to enable reaching out to each other, and their existing neighbourly relationships could be quickly activated and leveraged for social connection and for help when needed.

Involvement in neighbourhood networks, as described by the 17 key informants:

- increased their sense of belonging and connection,
- increased their sense of safety and security,
- increased appreciation of the impact of neighbourliness and reciprocity, and
- increased their sense of purpose and their sense of responsibility towards their neighbours.

Supporting processes and resources that stayed the same were mainly principle-based consistencies, which became further reinforced and appreciated during the pandemic. Processes and resources that were adapted were changed based on the specific needs of the people in the neighbourhood network as well as the always evolving circumstances of the pandemic. Threaded throughout the participants' collective narrative, was the account that interactions with their neighbours, in other words neighbourliness, helped the participants get through the unprecedented challenges of the pandemic, improving their quality of life and increasing their wellbeing.

## 6.0 Discussion and Analysis

The primary research objective of this project was to answer the question: How did involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton, Alberta affect people during the COVID-19 pandemic? This chapter discusses linkages between the literature review and the findings to answer the primary research question and the subsequent research questions listed in Chapter 1. This discussion will include further exploration of the main themes identified in Chapter 5 and their integration with the hypothesis.

In the Conceptual Framework shown in Figure 3 at the end of Chapter 3, the hypothesis was visualized as a progression of elements that enable and contribute to subsequent elements, suggesting linkages and effects that were expected to emerge in the interviews with key informants. Figure 4, below, illustrates an integration between the initial hypothesis elements articulated in Chapter 1 and the findings themes in Chapter 5. This visual will be referred to throughout this chapter.

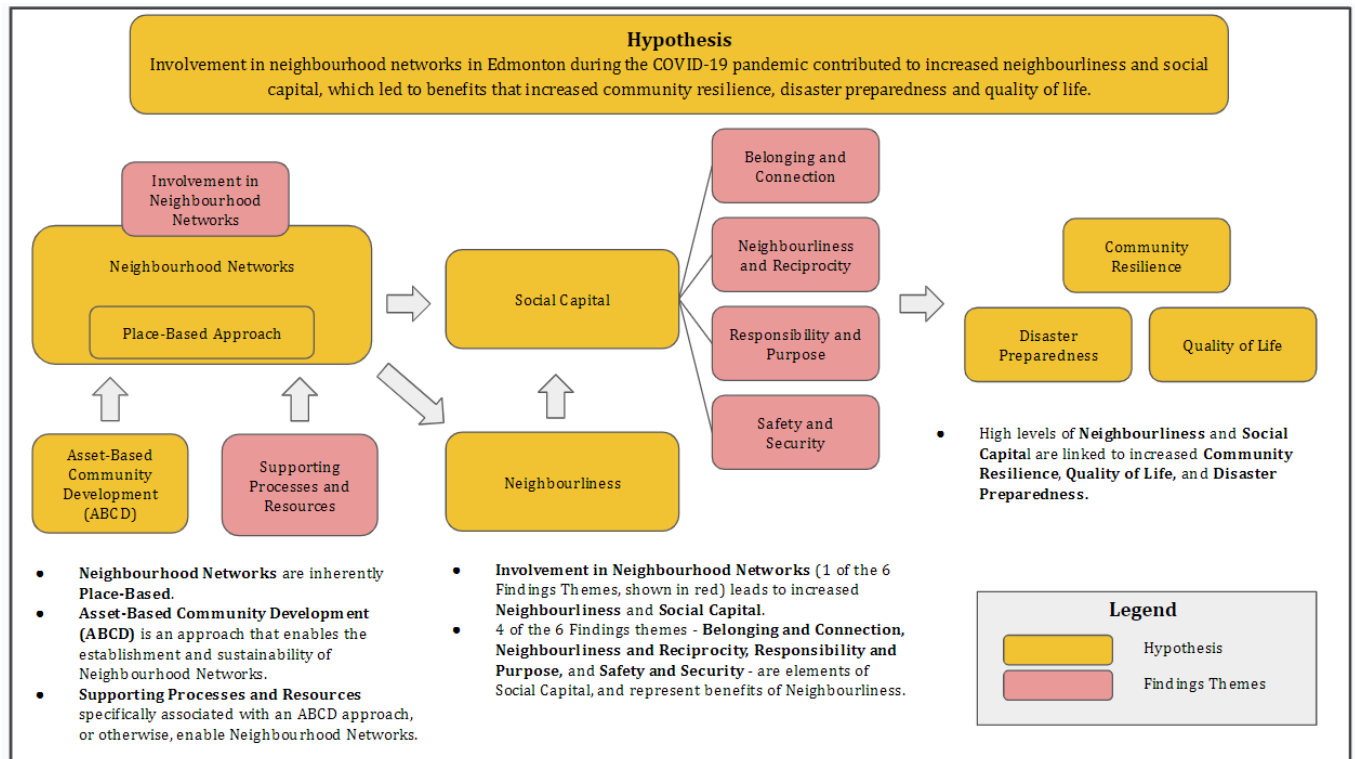


Figure 4. MACD Project Conceptual Framework 2. Harvey, 2023.

## **6.1 Exploration of the Main Themes**

### **Theme 1: Involvement in Neighbourhood Networks**

Involvement in neighbourhood networks, as shared by the key informants, is a decision to be actively engaged with neighbours because of the benefits expected to be experienced as a result of that involvement. In Chapter 5, the mechanisms (how) and motivations (why) related to the interview participants' experiences being involved in a neighbourhood network, were identified. Mechanisms included becoming involved through the community league, through an ACE initiative (e.g., as a Block Connector, Neighbourhood Connector, or member of an ACE support team) or through another neighbourhood network. Motivations included a desire to engage in a shared interest locally, a desire to help others in the neighbourhood, and a general interest in neighbourliness and increased connection. The participants also identified the distinct roles they were in within their neighbourhood network, broadly grouped as leadership roles and general membership. Regardless of how or why they became involved, or what their role was, all of the interview participants expressed that their experiences in neighbourhood networks had a positive impact on them, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Neighbourhood networks are inherently place-based and there is an assumption in the literature reviewed that localized social networks, such as neighbourhood networks, increase social capital and enable increased resilience (Dynes, 2005). The local advantage is multi-faceted. As shared by the interview participants in this project, having people close by that you know and who know you, results in a number of benefits, to be identified and further explored in this chapter as elements of social capital. In the literature review of the concept of social capital, three common themes emerged across the scholarly research:

1. involvement in groups leads to positive impact for individuals and their communities and this is a form of social capital (Portes, 1998);
2. high levels of social capital are likely to correlate with high quality of life (Kavanaugh, Reese, Carroll and Rosson, 2005); and
3. there is agreement among researchers that social capital increases resilience, and specifically during difficult times (Aldrich, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017).

The linkages between these literature review themes, and this project's findings support the project hypothesis that involvement in a neighbourhood network in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased social capital, which led to benefits that increased community resilience, disaster preparedness and quality of life. These linkages are shown visually in Figure 4 above and explored further in the following sections of this chapter.

### **Theme 2: Belonging and Connection**

Belonging and connection are elements of social capital and can also be identified as benefits resulting from having social capital. Aldrich (2012) affirms this with his theory that engaging in neighbourly relationships and connections with neighbours increases social capital, which subsequently increases a community's resilience. Coleman (1990) too, states that social capital in a

neighbourhood is created through neighbourly relationships resulting in actions that develop community and connection. The data collected in the interviews contributed to this existing research by providing evidence of the importance of local relationships with people at any time, and especially during a particularly challenging time such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was explicitly stated in the narratives shared, that incidents of loneliness were avoided or minimized by the availability of nearby neighbours to engage with socially or in collaborative effort towards a shared-purpose project or initiative (such as running a community league as a board member, taking care of a community garden, or supporting a group of Block Connectors). People's movement was restricted during the pandemic, but they had pre-existing relationships with their neighbours, gained through involvement in neighbourhood networks, which allowed them to maintain connection with other people and households nearby. According to the interview participants, this was incredibly important to them in terms of their quality of life and ability to be resilient during the pandemic. The sense of belonging and connection expressed by participants is evidence of social capital in their community and was articulated as a benefit of their involvement in a neighbourhood network.

### **Theme 3: Neighbourliness and Reciprocity**

As demonstrated in the literature review and the interview findings, the act of people coming together and taking collective action to solve problems and take care of each other, is an attribute of community resilience (Breton, 2001). Taking care of neighbours is a neighbourly thing to do, and according to the interview participants, the act of being neighbourly and the reciprocity of receiving neighbourliness from others, contributed to their quality of life and their sense of resilience during the pandemic. The reciprocal neighbourliness spoken of in the interviews, suggested that trust existed between the participants and their neighbours. Some researchers of social capital, such as Aldrich and Meyer (2014), have stated that levels of trust can be used to measure levels of social capital. Examples of trust that emerged in the stories shared included feeling comfortable leaving their doors unlocked, sharing resources such as lawn mowers and snow shovels, taking care of each other's children, knowing that there were people around them who cared about them and would help them if they needed help, and a perception that people would chip in to solve common problems together. These examples of reciprocal neighbourliness would likely not exist without the trusting relationships that they had developed, and this culture of care (McKnight and Block, 2012) gave them a sense of belonging in their neighbourhood, all of this being evidence of high levels of social capital.

The concept of reciprocal neighbourliness being an indicator of social capital is threaded throughout existing scholarly research on the topic. McKnight and Block (2012) explore the concept of a culture of neighbourliness in their research and as proposed in their philosophy known by the name of *Abundant Community*. They say the customs of a neighbourhood can be referred to as the social fabric of the community, and our neighbourhoods as a whole are arguably the primary source of our wellbeing (McKnight and Block, 2012). The anecdotal evidence analyzed in this project highlighted multiple examples of reciprocal neighbourliness and its contribution to the development of trust among neighbours. It was clear through the responses shared by the interview participants, that they were experiencing the benefits of having social capital where they live, highlighted through their stories of reciprocal neighbourliness between neighbours.

#### **Theme 4: Responsibility and Purpose**

In the narratives that unfolded during the interviews for this project, participants opened up about their sense of responsibility and purpose in their neighbourhood, specifically within the context of the pandemic as experienced in Edmonton. One interviewee said “there is satisfaction in contribution, a sense of purpose. I enjoy giving back to the community” (Participant D). Several participants shared examples of their contributions to their community and the intrinsic benefits they experienced as a result of their active engagement in supporting others and making a difference in their neighbourhood. People who identified as Block Connectors or Neighbourhood Connectors, spoke of their motivation to contribute through facilitating connections and networking, among others. Their stories shed light on their sense of responsibility to their community, which McKnight and Block refer to as a key element in creating and sustaining an abundant community where you live (McKnight and Block, 2012). They build on this theory further by positing that the most effective communities of today, are ones that have assumed primary responsibility for their community’s wellbeing, such as prioritizing taking responsibility for care of neighbours and the neighbourhood as a whole (McKnight and Block, 2012). The findings explored in this project, provided narrative examples of people in Edmonton neighbourhoods feeling a sense of purpose associated with a sense of responsibility to contribute to their neighbourhood and care for others who live close to them.

#### **Theme 5: Safety and Security**

Having a sense of safety and security was articulated by the interview participants as an important contributor to their quality of life, and an essential characteristic of a neighbourhood they would choose to live in. Participants said that the connections they have with their neighbours contribute significantly to their perception of their own safety and security in their neighbourhood, and that during the pandemic especially, they relied on and in turn, helped their neighbours more than anyone else in their life at that time, because of how locally everyone was forced to live. There was a sense of experiencing challenge and hardship together as a global community because of the global nature of a pandemic, but it was the people living closest to them that they would go to for day-to-day support and companionship, and to commiserate together in the shared experience of living through a pandemic. This concept is explored by Cox and Perry (2011) in their discussion about community resilience, and also in disaster preparedness research most notably by Aldrich in his multiple publications on the topic (2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2012 and 2017). The importance of safety and security to overall quality of life was evident in the stories shared by the interview participants.

Existing scholarly research on disaster preparedness in relation to neighbourliness and neighbourhood networks was a particular area of focus in the literature review for this project. Dynes (2005) stated that localized social networks (such as neighbourhood networks) are good places to cultivate resilience and prepare for future emergencies. The interview participants shared that they felt they were better prepared to cope with and adapt to the constantly evolving circumstances of the pandemic, in part because of their involvement in neighbourhood networks which enabled access to their neighbours through pre-established relationships and contact lists. They produced creative and collaborative solutions to stay connected to each other and to help neighbours in need. Some participants talked about how their community of neighbours leveraged ABCD practices through

their use of the ACE organizational structure of Block Connectors, Neighbourhood Connectors and ACE support team members. The organic and collaborative nature of the ACE approach enabled them to identify and activate the human assets - skills, abilities and interests - of the people in the neighbourhood (Kreitzer, et al., 2020). Aldrich (2017) recommends that communities invest in social infrastructure to prepare for future challenges and notes the importance of grassroots initiatives (such as the ACE approach) that can enable the building of social capital within local social networks. Interview participants' stories supported the idea that neighbourly relationships are key to success in terms of a community's ability to support one another during disaster (Cheshire, 2015).

### **Theme 6: Supporting Processes and Resources**

Interview participants were asked what changed and what stayed the same throughout the pandemic in terms of their neighbourhood network's supporting processes and resources. Analysis of the interview data highlighted that things that stayed the same were principle-based consistencies which were then further reinforced and appreciated during the pandemic, and things that changed were collaborative adaptations to meet specific needs of neighbours and to sustain group functionality in response to evolving circumstances throughout the pandemic. Change fatigue was a widely experienced emotion and was mentioned by some of the participants, and sometimes resulted in lethargy and complacency. It was said that some people grew tired of the constant adaptation and customization of processes and practices, and it was at times challenging to keep the momentum going within group initiatives in the neighbourhood. According to the interview participants, they had to balance structure with flexibility, thoughtfully balancing the need for consistency while at the same time being ready to pivot and come up with new strategies for sustaining their neighbourhood network (Ramey and Randall, 2021).

The move from in person to virtual was a shared experience around the globe and was noted by the interview participants as one of the prominent changes within their existing neighbourhood network processes. Although not the preferred way to gather for some of the people who shared their sentiments on this change during the interview conversations, virtual platforms at least enabled people to stay connected in a different way which was noted as better than not at all. From the perspective of seeking a silver lining in the situation, there were elements of the virtual method of social connection that people could appreciate. It was mentioned, for example, that decision making activities within their neighbourhood network initiatives (such as community league board meetings) could be conducted more quickly because people did not want to spend as much time conducting neighbourhood business virtually as they would be willing to do in person. This freed up time for other activities in their daily life, including more time with members of their own household. Virtual engagement had its pros and cons and was one of the most significant changes interview participants had to adapt to.

One of the notable changes animated through stories shared by the interview participants was the move to outdoor activities and connections with neighbours. With movement generally restricted to the local area people lived in, solace was found in connecting with neighbours across the fence, out on the sidewalk or driveway in front of homes, or out walking in the neighbourhood. Walking became one of the only social activities people could engage in with others, and interview

participants noted that there were advantages to this. More walking meant more physical activity and time outdoors, both of which have known health and wellness benefits (Marselle, Irvine and Warber, 2013). In addition, group walking has additional mental health benefits (Marselle, Irvine and Warber, 2013), which was affirmed in comments from the interview participants about their increase in walking with neighbours during the pandemic. From the silver lining perspective again, connecting by engaging in neighbourhood walking groups, or less formally with a next-door neighbour, was an example of an adaptation that had notable benefits.

Some people shared in their interview that they are relatively extroverted and enjoy large group settings, but others expressed a preference for small group engagement which for them was a change during the pandemic that they appreciated. At first, only virtual engagement was possible during the pandemic. Then as the impacts of the COVID-19 virus became more known and health restrictions loosened, gathering in person was permissible but only outdoors and in small numbers. This turned out to be a welcome change for some people; they found that the group size limits meant small organic gatherings became the norm and they experienced these to be more relaxing than pre-pandemic larger, more formal gatherings.

## **6.2 Limitations of Analysis and Areas for Further Research**

Throughout the discussion and analysis of the findings, limitations and possibilities for future research emerged. One limitation in the analysis is minimal exploration of the impact of virtual-only neighbourhood networks, which were mentioned by a few interview participants, and their contribution to minimizing social isolation and increasing social capital in a neighbourhood. Further research could explore how people perceive and are impacted by virtual-only neighbourhood networks and look at their potential to contribute to an increase in social capital and resilience in a local community, in general or during a time of significant challenge such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

A second limitation was deeper analysis of the contributions of ABCD practices and the ACE approach in particular, on increasing social capital and neighbourliness, and subsequent increases in resilience, quality of life, disaster preparedness and wellbeing. Research could take a deeper dive into the ACE Organizational Framework as a social structure that enables people to become more connected where they live, and experience increased social capital and neighbourliness.

Finally, a third limitation was a lack of a more extensive look at the linkage between increased community resilience and disaster preparedness within the context of neighbourhood networks. Further research could seek to identify clear correlation between levels of resilience in a community that are directly resulting from involvement in a neighbourhood community and resulting in greater levels of disaster preparedness.



## 7.0 Recommendations

This project explored the hypothesis that involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to increased neighbourliness and social capital, which led to benefits that increased community resilience, disaster preparedness, and quality of life. The synthesized findings from the literature review and the key informant interviews support this hypothesis, demonstrating that involvement in neighbourhood networks in three Edmonton neighbourhoods during the COVID-19 pandemic had a positive effect on people. During the interviews, the key informants organically put forward specific actions that they suggested could enable neighbourhood networks, based on their personal experience. In this chapter, their suggestions have been formulated into four recommendations that meet the following criteria:

1. action-oriented,
2. reinforced by the insights gained from the literature review and the key informants, and
3. identified as achievable because of established community development resources and support available in Edmonton (and if people are not physically in Edmonton, these resources can be accessed remotely through virtual, phone and email communication, and are available online).

The recommendations are:

1. Start or join a neighbourhood network
2. Identify and support a leader (of a neighbourhood network)
3. Leverage an ABCD approach (to start or sustain a neighbourhood network)
4. Develop a neighbour contact list

The recommendations are intended for consideration and use by:

1. individuals and groups seeking to start or join a neighbourhood network;
2. individuals or groups currently involved in a neighbourhood network and looking for encouragement and support with maintaining and sustaining it; and
3. individuals, groups, or organizations (e.g., local social services organizations or local municipal government community development program providers and advisors) that support existing neighbourhood networks.

### 7.1 Recommendations and Implementation Strategies

#### **Recommendation 1: Start or join a neighbourhood network**

There are several benefits to enjoy as a result of involvement in a neighbourhood network. As evidenced in the discussion and analysis of the literature review and findings, involvement in a neighbourhood network contributes to increased neighbourliness and social capital, resulting in benefits such as belonging and connection, reciprocal neighbourliness, the intrinsic value of a sense of responsibility and purpose, and increased safety and security.

### ***Recommendation 1 - Implementation Strategy***

Anyone can start a neighbourhood network; it is a group of two or more people who live near each other and would like to engage together in a shared interest or pursue a common purpose like leading a particular group, activity, initiative or project. From the stories shared by interview participants and the insights gleaned during the literature review, the more people you know in your neighbourhood the better. So, although involvement in a group of a few neighbours will have benefits, the research suggests that broader reaching (i.e., more neighbours involved) neighbourhood networks will likely lead to people experiencing more richness and depth in the identified benefits.

In its simplest form, a neighbourhood network is a gathering of at least two neighbours, and examples of more fulsome groups include community leagues, groups of Block Connectors, and other examples like those listed in Chapter 4. Ways to get started include reaching out to neighbours who live next door, on the block or close by, and connecting with existing groups to inquire about involvement. If there is not a neighbourhood network that fits what a person is hoping and looking for, there is the opportunity to establish a new neighbourhood network; that is the advantage of the citizen-led, organic nature of neighbourhood networks. Establishing a new neighbourhood network can be as simple as reaching out to a neighbour or two about engaging together in a specific activity of common interest.

In Edmonton there is a broad reaching network of support through well-established community development processes and resources. These are available to people through the Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues, individual community leagues, the City of Edmonton's Neighbourhood Resource Coordinators, multiple neighbourhood networks connected to community leagues and the ACE initiative, and established ABCD approaches currently being implemented such as the ACE approach. It is recommended that people interested in joining, supporting or starting a neighbourhood network connect with one of these established groups and networks to gain access to a wide range of resources and support.

### **Recommendation 2: Identify and support a leader (of a neighbourhood network)**

For larger neighbourhood networks and depending on the context and purpose of the group, identifying a leader and establishing a support structure for them, will likely increase sustainability of the neighbourhood network. One of the reflections shared by Participant C, when asked if they had any recommendations for people organizing and sustaining neighbourhood networks, was that you need someone championing and pushing from behind, putting in the hours to make it happen. Participant C talked about one of their neighbours who played this role; they were the driving force, the leader and supporter, moving things forward with a momentum they had created. Participant C said, "this is crucial for success." They said "every neighbourhood has people who know everything about the (neighbourhood), and you must first find these people. You might not ask them to be a Block Connector necessarily, but you are going to (minimally) ask them who to ask to be a Block Connector." (Participant C).

Through the analysis of the literature review and findings, it was evident that a level of organization and coordination is important to the success of neighbourhood networks. Establishing

leadership and support roles is key, so it is recommended that when starting a neighbourhood network, people take time to determine an organizational structure that will enable them to maintain and sustain their group, balancing the organic nature of it with the desire to build momentum and flourish over time.

### ***Recommendation 2 - Implementation Strategy***

A suggested approach to identifying and supporting a leader (of a neighbourhood network) is an ABCD approach, which seeks to discover and leverage people's skills, abilities and interests in their community. The ACE approach is an example of an ABCD approach, and is discussed further in recommendation 3, below. This approach seeks to discover and activate the skills and interests of others, including people who are good at and have a desire to be a leader. In addition, as was mentioned in the implementation strategy for recommendation 1, connecting with one of the established groups and networks in Edmonton - such as a community league or an ACE group of Block Connectors - will open the door to accessible, well-established resources and support. These resources and support systems will enable the action of identifying and supporting a leader of a neighbourhood network.

### **Recommendation 3: Leverage an ABCD approach (to start or sustain a neighbourhood network)**

For establishment and for ongoing sustainability of a neighbourhood network, it is recommended that an ABCD approach, such as the ACE approach (primarily discussed in Chapter 2.3), be implemented. The ACE approach, or any ABCD approach, can be leveraged to establish, strengthen and sustain neighbourhood networks because it is an approach that specifically seeks to discover and activate people in a neighbourhood, to take collective action and to engage with each other in local activities, initiatives and groups.

### ***Recommendation 3 - Implementation Strategy***

People looking to start or sustain a neighbourhood network are recommended to connect with their local community league or ACE group, if they live in Edmonton. This will link them to resources such as the ACE Organizational Framework, which provides a leadership and support structure that empowers people to take on the leadership roles of Block Connector and Neighbourhood Connector, or to take on support roles such as members of an ACE Support Team. This structure enables increased levels of organization, coordination and facilitation within the domain of a neighbourhood network. For people not living in Edmonton, there is a broad reaching ABCD and ACE community to be linked with via information available online, including the opportunity to connect with EFCL and The City of Edmonton's ACE initiative.

Once leaders have been identified (as per recommendation 2), an ABCD approach enables their skills, abilities and interests to be activated for collective and collaborative action in the neighbourhood, and they are supported to succeed through the existence of an organizational structure that is supplemented by ACE processes and resources, which are inherently an ABCD approach to building community, in other words, they build upon people's strengths and interests.

#### **Recommendation 4: Develop a neighbour contact list**

In the literature review and interview data, it was evident that a contact list of neighbours increases people's opportunities for social connection where they live, which leads to multiple benefits as discussed in Chapter 5 and 6. In addition, the existence of a neighbour contact list increases safety and security in daily life, and therefore preparedness and ability to quickly mobilize to work together and help those in need in case of emergencies. It is recommended that even if a person's involvement in neighbourhood networks where they live is limited or not of particular interest to them, that minimally it is important for quality of life and safety to implement mechanisms for staying connected with people nearby. In short, staying connected to neighbours can increase quality of life and resilience today, and security and wellbeing in the future.

#### ***Recommendation 4 - Implementation Strategy***

A contact list can be in the form of an actual list of names and contact information, or a block map with names for each household, or it could be in the form of a social media group such as a Facebook neighbourhood group or a WhatsApp group chat. Some interview participants mentioned using Word or Excel spreadsheets as organizing tools to manage their neighbour contact lists. It does not need to be a sophisticated method; it can be as simple as a handwritten or typed document, shared with neighbours on the block. And although the action itself is simple, the benefits are highly valuable, as posited by the key informants in this project. A neighbour contact list has been shown in the research to minimize social isolation through enabling opportunities to connect with neighbours, and to increase safety and security by ensuring people have the ability to quickly reach out to neighbours if they need help.

## **8.0 Conclusion**

The benefits of neighbourliness and social capital gained through involvement in neighbourhood networks, were researched and analyzed with the intention to inspire and enable people to consider the value of neighbourliness in their own lives and in their local community. There is a local advantage which we all can discover and gain from when we empower each other to collaboratively foster a culture of care and connection where we live. The health benefits of having a sense of belonging and connection are explored and demonstrated in multiple fields of work and research streams, including in the scholarly literature reviewed for this project, and affirmed through the narrative analysis of the interview conversations.

In this community-based research project, the impact of involvement in neighbourhood networks in Edmonton has been demonstrated to result in benefits that positively affect quality of life and increase resilience and disaster preparedness. The place-based nature of neighbourhood networks contributes to existing research on the significance of place-based community development efforts and highlights the value of anchoring in an ABCD approach, such as the ACE approach. The ensuing benefits eclipse any challenges experienced and enable a neighbourhood community to enhance their daily quality of life while at the same time, equipping them for a more resilient future.

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## **Appendices**

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Appendix B: Interview Introduction and Closing Remarks

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Appendix E: Neighbourhood Website and Social Media Recruitment Content

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Appendix G: The Participant Consent Form

## Appendix A: Interview Questions



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### Interview Questions

*Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher will use the content in the Interview Introduction and Closing Remarks, to kick off the Zoom meeting.*

#### **Background**

Before we get started into the interview questions, I will provide a brief background and context. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic impacting Edmonton, benefits of neighbourhood groups and neighbourliness enabled by the place-based nature of Abundant Community (or equivalent) neighbourhood networks, had been observed and reported on by people involved or impacted. Then, Covid-19 happened, which shook our day to day lives. Daniel Aldrich, Director of the Security and Resilience Studies Program at Northeastern University and author of several books related to resilience, says the number one predictor of survival and recovery is how well we know our neighbours. In this research study, I am interested in learning about the benefits of place-based neighbourhood networks in Edmonton during the pandemic in terms of what went well and what might be done differently in the future, and what kind of impact people felt by being a part of a place-based neighbourhood network of some kind.

Learnings from the interviews in this research study will be formulated into recommendations for use by people coordinating or involved in place-based neighbourhood networks or thinking about starting a similar initiative where they live.

#### **Terminology being used in this interview**

The term Place-Based Neighbourhood Network will be referred to as PBNN for the remainder of this interview and what the term refers to is a neighbourhood group of 3 or more people, who live in the same neighbourhood - i.e., neighbours - who have formed a group or some level of connection and networking with each other because they live near each other, i.e., because they are neighbours.

#### **PART A - General questions**

1. Can you confirm what neighbourhood in Edmonton you live in?
2. How many people live in your household?
3. Are you currently involved in a Place-Based Neighbourhood Network? (PBNN)
4. Is it part of the Abundant Community Edmonton program (or Abundant Community initiative) in some way, or separate, or you are not sure?
5. When did you first become involved in your PBNN (before or during the pandemic)?

6. How did you become involved?
7. Why did you become involved? If you became involved during the pandemic, please indicate if you became involved because of the pandemic.
8. Do you have a specific role in the PBNN? For example, are you the leader, or one of several co-leaders, or the founder, or play a certain support role?

**PART B - Questions related to impacts of being involved in a PBNN during a pandemic**

For the following questions, think about the impacts of being involved in your PBNN during the Covid-19 pandemic.

If you were involved in your PBNN prior to the pandemic, for each question I will prompt you to think about and talk about impacts you have experienced in a PBNN during the pandemic, in comparison to what you may recall feeling prior to the pandemic.

1. In general, what does being a part of a PBNN feel like for you? What kind of emotions do you feel in connection to it?
2. How does it impact you to be in a PBNN?
  - a. Do you feel an increased sense of safety and security?
  - b. Do you feel an increased sense of belonging?
  - c. Do you feel a sense of purpose (e.g., does it provide you with the opportunity to help others in some way)?
  - d. Do you feel a sense of duty or obligation to others?
    - i. Tell me more about this. Is it a positive or a negative impact for you?
  - e. Do you feel an increased sense of pride and responsibility for the neighbourhood?
  - f. Do you feel like you know more people in your neighbourhood as a result of being in a PBNN?
  - g. Do you feel like more people know you as a result of being in a PBNN?
  - h. Do you experience any benefits such as:
    - i. access to local childcare (e.g., neighbours who take care of your children)?
    - ii. care of seniors (you or other members of your household)?
    - iii. care in general, towards you and/or members of your household?
  - i. Do you experience any benefits such as increased availability to home and property care resources (such as lawn mowers, shovels, ladders, etc., shared among neighbours)?
  - j. Do you feel any sense of greater preparedness in case of a disaster or significant unexpected negative event that impacts everyone in your community?
3. Overall, do you feel that you experienced neighbourliness and positive impacts of being a part of a PBNN during a pandemic? Do you feel like being a part of a PBNN during the pandemic made it easier / less stressful / less lonely / etc.?

**PART C - Questions related to process and resources**

For participants who were involved in their PBNN prior to the pandemic and during:

1. Can you tell me about processes and resources that stayed the same during the pandemic?
2. Can you tell me about processes and resources that changed during the pandemic, as a direct result of needing to adapt previous processes and resources to the pandemic environment/situation?
  - a. Can you provide examples of processes that changed? How did they change? How did your PBNN adapt?
  - b. Can you provide examples of resources that changed? How did they change? How did your PBNN adapt?
3. In general, what was more challenging within your PBNN as a result of the pandemic?
4. In general, what was easier within your PBNN as a result of the pandemic?
5. Overall, thinking back on how your PBNN adapted to the pandemic situation, what worked well?
6. Overall, thinking back on how your PBNN adapted to the pandemic situation, what did not work well? How would you modify and do things differently in the future?

**For participants who became involved in the PBNN during the pandemic**

1. Can you tell me about processes and resources that were created as a result of the pandemic, to keep the PBNN going or to grow it or to start it (if it started during the pandemic)?
  - a. Can you provide examples of processes that changed? How did they change? How did your PBNN adapt?
  - b. Can you provide examples of resources that changed? How did they change? How did your PBNN adapt?
2. In general, what was challenging within your PBNN as a result of the pandemic?
3. In general, what was easy within your PBNN as a result of the pandemic?
4. Overall, thinking back on how your PBNN adapted to the pandemic situation, what worked well?
5. Overall, thinking back on how your PBNN adapted to the pandemic situation, what did not work well? How would you modify and do things differently in the future?

**PART D - Neighbourhood communications**

1. Does your PBNN have a contact list or some other easy way for everyone to contact each other? (e.g., Facebook or other social media groups, group chat on WhatsApp or another platform).
2. Was your PBNN's contact list, or other method of easily contacting each other, established before the pandemic or during?
3. If before, how did having a contact list or way of easily contacting each other, impact you and others in your PBNN during the pandemic?
4. If during, was the contact list or way of easily contacting each other established directly because of the pandemic? If so, what was the impact on you and your PBNN to have this communication channel set up?

5. Did having a contact list between people in your PBNN reduce Covid-19 pandemic related anxiety for you?
6. Did you observe, and/or, are you aware of if having a contact list between people in your PBNN reduced Covid-19 pandemic related anxiety for others in your PBNN?
7. Thinking about the future - there is always the possibility of a sudden unexpected event that could impact society broadly. How do you think having a contact list or way of easily contacting each other in place before an event struck, would impact people living near each other, i.e., neighbours?



## Appendix B: Interview Introduction and Closing Remarks



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### Interview Introduction and Closing Remarks

#### Introduction (pre interview questions)

Hello (Name), great to see you / meet you virtually. Thanks again for participating in this study and taking the time to chat with me today. As mentioned in our previous communication, this interview will be 60 minutes and there will be \_\_questions.

This research project will:

- identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- report on what worked well and what did not (strengths and weaknesses).

These learnings will inform recommendations which will be made available for future use by individuals or groups interested in establishing a new or sustaining an existing PBNN, especially within a city neighbourhood environment and with the added considerations involved during a time of challenge within the community (e.g., a pandemic).

For additional context and to provide a connection to what you may be more familiar with, Abundant Community related neighbour networks are an example of a PBNN.

Participation in this research study must be completely voluntary - thank you for completing and sending me your signed Participant Consent Form. Do you have any questions about the consent process or how the information you share today will be used?

Do you have any other questions for me before we get started?

#### Closing (post interview questions)

Thanks again for taking an hour out of your day to talk with me, I really appreciate the time and energy you put into this. Your input is a valuable contribution to this research study! I will share the final report with you and all participants when it is complete, and you are welcome to share it with others at that point, as you wish. And as mentioned in the previously shared information and consent form, this recording and the transcripts and my notes, will all be destroyed once this project is complete.

Any final questions before we sign off today? Thanks!

## Appendix C: Interview Logistics Email and Zoom Invitation



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### Interview Logistics Email and Zoom Invitation

#### Interview Logistics Email

Subject: Follow up Logistics for your upcoming research study interview - *Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic*

Thanks again for your interest in participating in the *Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic* research study and for sending me your Participant Consent Form and providing dates and times that will work well for you.

Your interview will take place on (Day) (Month) (Date) 2022 at (time). The interview will be 60 minutes long and take place on Zoom. A Zoom invitation will follow this email. To join the Zoom meeting, you will click on the link in your calendar invite. If you have any difficulties signing in on the day, give me a call at 780-915-6544.

Let me know if you have any further questions prior to the interview. Otherwise, I will see you virtually on (Date).

Thanks!

Anne Harvey  
Graduate Student, Masters of Community Development  
University of Victoria  
Ph. 780-915-6544  
[anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com)

#### Zoom Invitation

Subject: Neighbourliness Builds Resilience Research Study Participant Interview

Thanks again for your interest in participating in the *Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic* research study!

If you have any difficulties signing in on the day, give me a call at 780-915-6544.

Let me know if you have any further questions prior to the interview. Otherwise, I will see you virtually on (Date).

Thanks!

Anne Harvey  
Graduate Student, Masters of Community Development  
University of Victoria  
Ph. 780-915-6544  
[anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com)

## Appendix D: Invitation to Participate Email



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### Invitation to Participate Email

**Option 1 - Email to be sent to primary contacts (through the researcher's professional network and/or publicly available contact information) and secondary contacts (contacts received through primary contacts) and to people who the researcher spoke to over the phone who said they would like to participate**

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study - Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear (Name),

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study as part of the capstone project for my Masters of Community Development program at the University of Victoria.

This research project will identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic, and report on what worked well and what did not (strengths and weaknesses). These learnings will inform recommendations which will be made available for future use by individuals or groups interested in establishing a new or sustaining an existing PBNN, especially within a city neighbourhood environment and with the added considerations involved during a time of challenge within the community (e.g., a pandemic). For additional context and to provide a connection to what you may be familiar with, Abundant Community related neighbour networks are an example of a PBNN.

Participation in this research study involves a virtual interview on Zoom with the researcher Anne Harvey, and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, to be scheduled at your convenience in **April 2022**.

Participation is completely voluntary. Should you have any questions regarding the interview or this research study, I would be happy to answer them prior to or at the time of the interview.

**If you consent to participate**, please sign and return the attached consent form by email to [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com) by **March 30, 2022**. Please include an indication of three dates and times that would be convenient for you in April, and I will send a Zoom calendar invitation for one of your provided date/time options.

This project is being completed with the support and supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers (250-721-8057). You are welcome to contact Dr. Speers should you have questions.

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

If you are aware of someone else in your neighbourhood who you think would be interested in participating in this research study, please feel free to provide them with my contact information (below).

Thank you,

Anne Harvey  
Graduate Student, Masters of Community Development  
University of Victoria  
Ph. 780-915-6544  
[anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com)

Attachment: Participant Consent Form

**Option 2 - Email to be sent to people who email the researcher as a result of seeing the research study invitation on their community league website or social media pages**

Subject: Invitation to Participate in a Research Study - Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear (Name),

Thank you for reaching out about the opportunity to participate in this research study, I appreciate your interest.

As noted in the (community league website or social media page), this research project will identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic, and report on what worked well and what did not (strengths and weaknesses). These learnings will inform recommendations which will be made available for future use by individuals or groups interested in establishing a new or sustaining an existing PBNN, especially within a city neighbourhood environment and with the added considerations involved during a time of challenge within the community (e.g., a pandemic). For additional context and to provide a connection to what you may be more familiar with, Abundant Community related neighbour networks are an example of a PBNN.

Participation in this research study involves a virtual interview on Zoom with the researcher Anne Harvey, and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, to be scheduled at your convenience in **April 2022**.

Participation is completely voluntary. Should you have any questions regarding the interview or this research study, I would be happy to answer them prior to or at the time of the interview. **If you consent to participate**, please sign and return the attached consent form by email to [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com) by **March 30, 2022**. Please include an indication of three dates and times that would be convenient for you in April, and I will send a Zoom calendar invitation for one of your provided date/time options.

This project is being completed with the support and supervision of Dr. Kimberly Speers (250-721-8057). You are welcome to contact Dr. Speers should you have questions.

You may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria (250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca)).

If you are aware of someone else in your neighbourhood who you think would be interested in participating in this research study, please feel free to provide them with my contact information (below).

Thank you,

Anne Harvey  
Graduate Student, Masters of Community Development  
University of Victoria  
Ph. 780-915-6544  
[anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com)

Attachment: Participant Consent Form (Appendix E)

## Appendix E: Neighbourhood Website and Social Media Recruitment Content



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### Neighbourhood Website and Social Media Recruitment Content

**Title:** Are you interested in participating in a research study about place-based neighbourhood networks in Edmonton?

**Content:**

Anne Harvey is conducting a research project as part of the requirements for a master's degree in Community Development. The research will identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic. To provide context and a connection to something that may be more familiar and identifiable to you, Abundant Community networks and groups are examples of PBNNs.

This study will look at three neighbourhoods in Edmonton, including yours!

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and will involve a 60-minute interview with Anne via a Zoom call, during the month of June 2022.

For more information about participation in this research study, please call 780-915-6544 or email Anne at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com) by June 15.

If you know of someone in your neighbourhood who may be interested in participating, please pass on this information.

Thanks!

## Appendix F: Invitation to Participate Phone Scripts



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### Invitation to Participate Phone Scripts

#### Initial Phone Call

*Using contact information provided by primary contacts (through the researcher's professional network and/or publicly available contact information) to connect with individuals who have said to the primary contact that they would prefer to be contacted by phone*

Hello, this is Anne Harvey. I received your phone number from \_\_\_\_\_, who let me know you were ok with receiving a call from me about potential involvement in a research study.

The research project will identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic, and report on what worked well and what did not (strengths and weaknesses). These learnings will inform recommendations which will be made available for future use by individuals or groups interested in establishing a new or sustaining an existing PBNN, especially within a city neighbourhood environment and with the added considerations involved during a time of challenge within the community (e.g., a pandemic). For additional context and to provide a connection to what you may be more familiar with, Abundant Community related neighbour networks are an example of a PBNN.

Participation in this research study is completely voluntary, and involves a virtual interview on Zoom with me, and will take approximately 60 minutes to complete, to be scheduled at your convenience in **April 2022**.

If you would like to participate, I will send you an email with a bit more information including contact information for the supervising professor and the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria, as well as a consent form which I will need you to sign and return to me by email if you decide you would like to participate.

Thanks for considering participating in this research study! Let me know if you have any questions. Also, if you are aware of someone else in your neighbourhood who you think would be interested in participating in this research study, please feel free to provide them with my contact information. I can be reached at 780-915-6544 or by email at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com).

Thanks again!

**Voice Message**



Hello, this is Anne Harvey. I received your phone number from \_\_\_\_\_, who let me know you were ok with receiving a call from me about potential involvement in a research study about place-based neighbourhood networks in Edmonton.

If you are interested in hearing more about participating, please give me a call at 780-915-6544, or I can be reached by email at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com).

Also, if you are aware of someone else in your neighbourhood who you think would be interested in participating in this research study, please feel free to provide them with my contact information as well.

Thanks!

### **Follow Up Phone Call**

*To be sent to people who do not respond to the initial phone call within 6-7 business days*

Hello, this is Anne Harvey, and I am following up regarding a voice message I left for you on (date), inviting you to participate in a research study about place-based neighbourhood networks in Edmonton.

If you are interested in participating, please give me a call at 780-915-6544 or email me at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com), by (date).

Thanks!

## Appendix G: The Participant Consent Form

# PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

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## RESEARCH STUDY: Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic

### Introduction

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Neighbourliness Builds Resilience: Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks in Edmonton During the COVID-19 Pandemic* that is being conducted by Anne Harvey. As a graduate student at the University of Victoria, Anne is required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a master's degree in Community Development.

This research study is being conducted under the supervision of Kimberley Speers, a faculty member in the department of School of Public Administration at the University of Victoria. If you have further questions about this research study, you may contact Kimberley (Kim) by email at [kspeers@uvic.ca](mailto:kspeers@uvic.ca) or by phone at 250-721-8057.

### Purpose and Objectives

This research project will:

- identify the benefits of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks (PBNNs) in Edmonton during the COVID-19 pandemic, and
- report on what worked well and what did not (strengths and weaknesses).

These learnings will inform recommendations which will be made available for future use by individuals or groups interested in establishing a new or sustaining an existing PBNN, especially within a city neighbourhood environment and with the added considerations involved during a time of challenge within the community (e.g., a pandemic).

For additional context and to provide a connection to what you may be more familiar with, Abundant Community related neighbour networks are an example of a PBNN.

### Importance of this Research

This research will demonstrate that PBNNs are beneficial during times of significant social challenge (such as during a pandemic like COVID-19) because of their potential to increase neighbourliness and connectedness among neighbours. The hope is that his research will encourage an increase in the establishment of PBNNs in Edmonton and perhaps more broadly, and or provide encouragement to maintain and grow existing PBNNs in Edmonton or more broadly.

### Participant Selection

You are being asked to participate in this research study because you are involved in or have been impacted by a PBNN, for example, you are involved in or have been impacted by Abundant Community neighbour groups and networks. The researcher is interested in hearing about your experience being a part of a neighbour group during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **What is involved**

If you consent to voluntarily participate in this research study, your participation will include being interviewed for 60 minutes on a virtual call (using the University of Victoria's Zoom account, a cloud-based software that enables video conference calls) by the researcher, Anne Harvey.

A video recording and typed (on a laptop) notes will be taken. As well, a transcription of the video recording will be made for the purposes of the audio to be transcribed to text. The recordings will be destroyed/deleted and completely removed from the researcher's laptop once the audio has been transcribed and the transcripts will be stored securely and confidentially within the researcher's password protected (and Two Factor Authentication protected) e-files and folders within the University of Victoria's Microsoft Office 365 and OneDrive account, which no one but the researcher has access to.

The insights gathered through interviews will be themed and analyzed, and inform recommendations, all of which will be included in the researcher's final capstone paper which will be presented to the University of Victoria.

### **Inconvenience**

Participation in this research study may cause some inconvenience to you, including spending 60 minutes during your day to speak to the researcher.

### **Risks**

There are no known or anticipated risks to you by participating in this research study.

### **Benefits**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research study include:

- Satisfaction gained from talking about a topic that you may be interested in and passionate about.
- Satisfaction in contributing to a cause that you may care about - community building and increasing social capital (the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society or place) through a Place-Based Neighbourhood Network (e.g., a neighbourhood community group, such as neighbour network within the Abundant Community initiative).
- The opportunity to increase your personal knowledge about the topic of Place-Based Neighbourhood Networks and how they contribute to community building and increasing social capital. The process of thinking about and answering questions in the 60 minute interview may cause you to reflect on community building strategies you have used or observed or have been impacted by, and this process of thinking and reflecting about such activities may lead to you making your own information connections or inspire you to come up with new thoughts and ideas that could be applied in your life in your neighbourhood.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this research study must be completely voluntary. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time without any consequences or any explanation. If you withdraw from the research study your data will only be used if you give permission. At any point, if you decide you would like to withdraw your participation, please contact the researcher, Anne Harvey, at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com) or by phone at 780-915-6544. If you decide to withdraw, the researcher will ask you if you would like to also withdraw your data from inclusion in the research study.

### **Researcher's Relationship with Participants**

The researcher may have a relationship with potential participants from past work with Abundant Community Edmonton (a City of Edmonton community development program). To help prevent this relationship from influencing your decision to participate, the following steps to prevent coercion have been taken: the researcher will not influence or put pressure on any past colleagues or relations to participate in this research study.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Your confidentiality and the confidentiality of the data will be protected and will be saved and stored in the researcher's password protected (and Two Factor Authentication protected) e-files and folders within the University of Victoria's Microsoft Office 365 and OneDrive account and the University of Victoria's network storage, which is hosted solely in Canada.

The intention of the researcher is to keep all participants anonymous and not attribute their responses to them by name in the results. This will be the case unless a participant chooses to be identified by name and have their responses attributed to them by name in the results.

If you choose, you could:

- be identified by name / credited in the results of the research study, and/or
- have your responses attributed to you by name in the results.

Both of the above points are optional.

**Option 1:** Your responses will be kept anonymous/confidential in the research results.

I choose to not be identified by name in the results of the research study and to not have my responses attributed to me by name in the research results: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Participant to provide initials)*

**Option 2:** With your permission, your responses will *not* be kept anonymous/confidential in the research results.

I consent to be identified by name and have my responses attributed to me by name in the research results: \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Participant to provide initials)*

### **Dissemination of Results**

It is anticipated that the results of this study will be shared with others in the following ways:

- Thesis defense presentation for University of Victoria faculty
- Posted on the University of Victoria UVic Space website, a publicly accessible site with former University of Victoria students' thesis final reports
- Directly shared with participants in this research study and members of their place-based neighbourhood networks who are interested in reading the results of this study
- It is possible that all or part of the final report could be published in an article, chapter or book

### **Disposal of Data**

Zoom servers are located outside of Canada and Zoom stores users' names and usage data outside of Canada. No other information is stored outside of Canada, and recordings of Zoom meetings are not stored on Zoom servers.

With the exception of the final thesis paper, all data from this study will be destroyed upon completion of the research project and thesis defense. The electronic data will be erased, and all paper copies will be shredded.

### **Contacts**

Individuals that may be contacted regarding this study include Anne Harvey, Researcher, by email at [anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:anneharveyedmonton@gmail.com) or by phone at 780-915-6544 and Kim Speers, Supervisor, by email at [kspeers@uvic.ca](mailto:kspeers@uvic.ca) or by phone at 250-721-8057.

In addition, you may verify the ethical approval of this study, or raise any concerns you might have, by contacting the Human Research Ethics Office at the University of Victoria by email at [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca) or by phone at 250-472-4545 or [ethics@uvic.ca](mailto:ethics@uvic.ca).

### **Consent**

Your signature below indicates that you understand the above conditions of participation in this study, that you have had the opportunity to have your questions answered by the researcher, and that you consent to participate in this research project.

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*Name of Participant*

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*Signature*

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*Date*