

Neighbourhood Links: Barriers to Employment and Community Participation

Project Report Summary



**Cowichan Valley Safer Futures Program
Cowichan Women Against Violence Society**

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Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to the many, many people who joined in the Neighbourhood Links Project to help identify barriers to community participation and begin working towards strategies to address them. Special thanks to over 400 members of the Berkey's and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods for taking time to return surveys, participate in focus groups, interviews and safety audit walks.

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Introduction

Between September 2001 and May of 2002, the Neighbourhood Links Project studied Barriers to Employment and Community Participation in the Berkey's Corner and the Cairnsmore neighbourhoods. The study consulted residents in these two similar but diverse neighbourhoods through questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and Safety Audit walks, to identify factors that affect people's employment and community participation.

This project was sponsored by Cowichan Women Against Violence Society / Safer Futures Program and funded by Human Resources Development Canada through a job creation program which engaged three participants. A comprehensive project report was prepared, along with a report on the community consultation process and outcomes. The following is a synopsis of the report which has been prepared to provide a brief overview and summary of the data that was gathered and analyzed.

Research and Consultation Methods

A standardized questionnaire was distributed to approximately 2700 households throughout the Berkey's Corner and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods, as well as at various community locations. Two hundred and thirty six questionnaires were completed and returned.

Focus group discussions with various organizations including school Parent Advisory Committees, the Sikh Temple seniors group, new parent groups, Community Kitchens, the Open Door and the Food Bank provided additional insight about community safety and quality of life concerns.

A Safety Audit walk in each of these neighbourhoods brought together residents, school representatives, business owners and politicians to look at factors that affect safety and accessibility for area residents and others making use of the community resources and businesses.

Overall 421 people participated in the community consultation process.

Survey Respondents

Personal Data

- 86% of survey respondents were female.
- 72% were between 25 and 65 years old.
- Women ages 26-45 made up 48% of the women who responded, and 15% of women were over 66 years.

Household Composition of Respondents

- One in four households are single parent led.
- Just over half the respondents in the Neighbourhood Links Survey were living with a partner.
- On average, each household in the Berkey's Corner and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods has 3 people living it.

- Forty-nine percent of the survey households had children and teens under the age of 18 living at home.

Race/Ethnicity

- Eight percent of survey respondents indicate that they are First Nations.
- Fourteen percent of survey respondents identified themselves as belonging to an ethnic minority. This is considerably more than the Cowichan Valley as a whole where only 3% of the population is considered an ethnic minority. The high percentage of ethnic minorities responding could be due to the fact that in the Berkey's Corner neighbourhood there is a considerable sized Indo-Canadian community.

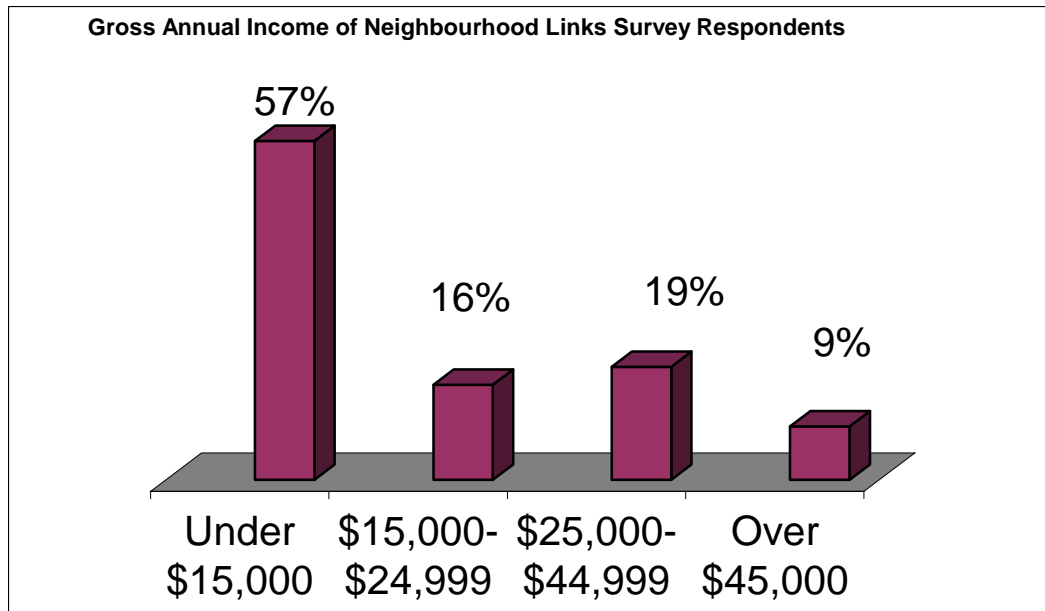
Education

- Neighbourhood Links Survey respondents indicate educational backgrounds that range from some high school to completion of a graduate degree. There is very little difference between female and male respondents in education levels.
- Thirty-six percent of respondents (41% of women) indicate that they have some college or university courses completed. Including those people who have trades and technical training and those with university degrees, 62% of the Neighbourhood Links survey respondents (65% of women) have had some education past high school completion.

Income and Employment

- The majority of respondents have an annual gross income of less than \$25,000 and expressed concern about their housing stability, access to nutritious food, lack of childcare, methods of transportation, personal safety and health.
- Over 50% of respondents indicate an annual gross income of less than \$15,000. British Columbia information in the 1996 Canadian Census indicates the average yearly income for those 15 years and over was \$26,295. Statistics Canada designates low income cut off (Canada's poverty line) for a single person as \$14,473.
- When asked about their current employment situation, 50% of respondents indicate some form of paid employment.

The following graph highlights the income levels for the respondents to the Neighbourhood Links survey.



Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity for women can contribute to families' risk of social, economic, mental and physical hardships. Many of those who participated in Neighbourhood Links community consultation were affected by economic insecurity.

Of all respondents, 37% indicated that they receive some form of income assistance such as Disability Payments, Employment Insurance or Social Assistance. 24% are receiving Social Assistance payments. Nineteen percent of all respondents indicate that they are entitled to receive child support payments. Of these, 52% indicate that support payments were not up to date.

Many people reported that struggling for basics like food and housing had an affect on their emotional stability and this had an impact on their ability to work or participate fully in the community. During the community consultation process, participants spoke of the difficulty of concentrating at work or school when they had nothing to eat, having to walk long distances to attend the food bank or access medical care and not having necessities like clothes and beds for their children.

*"It's hard to get on your feet
when you have nothing to get on your feet with"*

-Focus Group Participant

*lack of food = lack of motivation
lack of clothes = low self esteem
low self esteem & lack of motivation =
loss of opportunities and social health*

-Neighbourhood Links survey respondent's written comment

Housing

The Neighbourhood Links project explored the types of housing in the Berkey's and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods and how housing could impact the lives of the residents. The study questioned residents' moving patterns and reliance on alternative housing as well as home safety issues.

Housing is a basic requirement in life, but many of those who participated in this community consultation indicated that they cannot take it for granted. The survey results suggest that one third of the respondents pay more than 50% of their income on housing as well, people reported using 'alternative housing' like vehicles or campgrounds.

In focus groups, many women reported they had no choice but to move back in with family in order to obtain shelter for themselves and their children. Some women said they stayed in potentially unsafe circumstances, others without heat or hydro, in order to have shelter. Many reported sleeping in the living room so children of the opposite sex didn't have to share a bedroom.

Having housing stability is essential to being able to participate in the workforce. Monthly struggles to meet the rent or frequently moving, diminishes the energy needed to seek employment or perform well on the job. It is also difficult to have employers contact someone without a phone or address.

Income can also be a determinate of obtaining safe housing. Forty percent of respondents, primarily women, indicated they felt unsafe at home. Issues like having no telephone, the condition of the building they live in, drug and alcohol use by other tenants, noise and inadequate play areas for children were some of the safety concerns expressed.

CMHC reports that median family home sales in the Berkey's and Cairnsmore areas in 2000 were \$166,000. According to Vital Statistics – Census BC Directories, the single largest purchaser of homes in the area is seniors, with 30% of home sales to persons reporting to be in retirement.

Rowan Property Management reported that the average cost of rental of a single-family home (2 bed, 1 bath) in these areas is \$650 plus utilities. The rental cost of a single-family home (3 bed, 2 bath) averages \$850 per month plus utilities.

Neighbourhood Links survey results suggest that some of the residents of these neighbourhoods are experiencing housing instability. Survey results showed:

- one third of respondents have moved 1-3 times in the last 2 years
- 8% of respondents moved more than 4 times in the last 2 years
- 39% of respondents reported being evicted from their home

There is an obvious need for affordable housing units in both the Berkey's and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods. Needs for housing include:

- Stable housing for women leaving abusive relationships

- High-density housing could be offered to developers who include low income units in their developments.
- A hostel for those who are experiencing temporary homelessness
- New housing developments could undergo a safety audit to better plan for issues like lighting, pedestrian safety and accessibility.
- New developments should reflect a better mix of housing types than is currently allowed in the Berkey's corner area.

Access to Food

Access to affordable, high quality food is the cornerstone to health. For many people living with income restrictions, food can become one of the main focuses of energy; how to obtain nutritious food for themselves and their families. Neighbourhood Links Project looked at whether a lack of food affects study area residents. Given the fact that half the residents have incomes of under \$15,000 it is not surprising that many are struggling to put food on the table. In fact, one in three residents reported seeking assistance with their food needs on a regular basis.

Barriers to Employment and Community Participation

Although many different types of people have a variety of employment barriers, the research done by the Neighbourhood Links study shows that in the Berkey's Corner and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods the person most likely to indicate / experience barriers to employment is:

- Female between 26 and 45 years of age
- Has dependent children
- Has not completed high school

Through the consultation process, the Neighbourhood Links project was able to identify the main barriers to employment for the women who live in these two neighbourhoods.

The top six employment barriers identified by the women responding to the Neighbourhood Links survey are as follows:

Lack of Education and/ or training	43%
I have a disability	26%
Lack of Child Care	23%
Age (mainly for women aged 46-65 years)	22%
Available work doesn't fit with my family obligations	20%
Lack of Transportation.	19%

The Neighbourhood Links project looked at the ways residents in the Berkey's corner and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods are affected by health related barriers to employment and community participation.

Family Obligations and Childcare

Twenty percent of women and 13% of men indicate that family obligation is a barrier to being employed. Respondents indicate that they are home taking care of children, elders or an adult with disabilities (including those with physical and mental disabilities). For those women who

work part time, 33% indicate that most available work doesn't fit with family schedule/obligations.

With 81% of women indicating that they do the majority of arrangements around childcare, car-pooling, and extra-curricular activities for the children in the household, it is no wonder that they feel unable to fully participate in the community. As explained by several survey respondents when asked, why they are not involved in the community?

*"Exhaustion from being a working, single parent of a young child."
-Survey Respondent, April 2000*

One fifth of those respondents who had a barrier to employment listed lack of childcare as a concern. This number goes up to 50% when looking at those respondents who were currently home with their family.

Almost one third of respondents (who would need it) do not have any regular or temporary childcare arrangements in place should they find work for the next day.

Lack of Transportation

Transportation is a vital link for people to their community, yet one fifth of the women who responded to the Neighbourhood Links survey indicate that lack of transportation is an employment barrier. Lack of transportation was also cited by many women throughout the community consultation process as a reason for not being involved in the community. As one woman responded about what prevents her from full community participation:

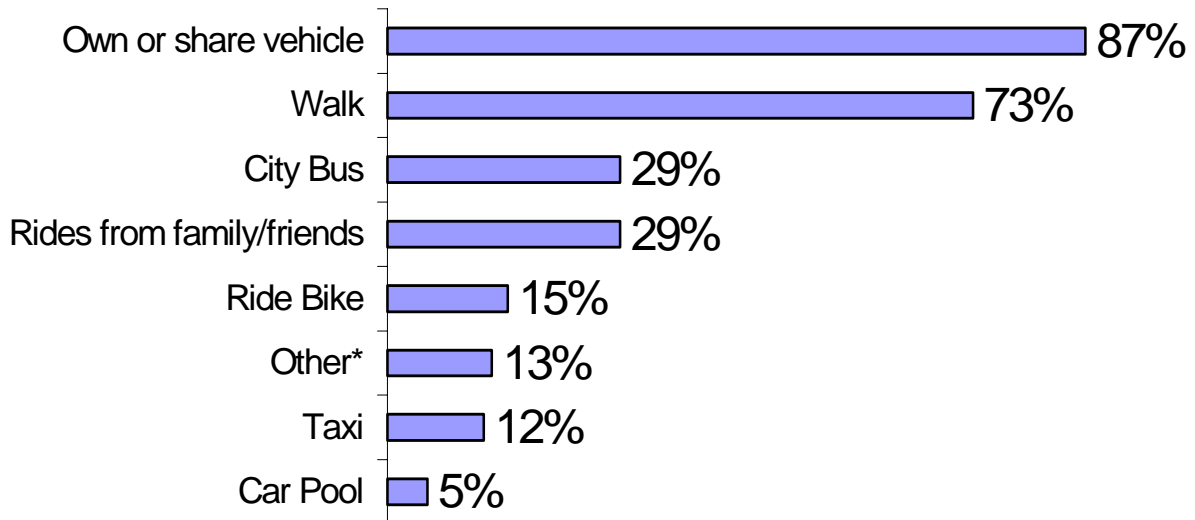
*"Transportation during evening hours...don't have extra money for taxi."
-Survey Respondent, April 2002*

Respondents to the survey ranked their methods of transportation such as owning a vehicle, walking, taking the bus, cycling, car pooling and taxi. The following chart illustrates the main types of transportation used by the survey respondents. (Totals more than 100% since respondents could check off three choices.)

After owning a vehicle, the majority of respondents indicate that walking was one of their main three methods of transportation. For some this is a healthy choice about how to get about, yet for others it is a real hardship that results from lack of money and inadequate public transit service. When people have health concerns, a long way to go, much to carry, or children to transport, walking can create problems.

"I walk about 7 kilometers per trip. First I take my daughter to school in her old neighbourhood, then I walk to Cairnsmore to drop my other child at daycare and then downtown so that I can go to school. It takes just over an hour to do the whole trip. At the end of the day we do it all again!" -Woman at Focus Group

Transportation Methods of Neighbourhood Links Survey Respondents



The third most commonly used method of transportation was equally divided between taking the bus and getting rides from family and friends. These methods of transportation had challenges for survey respondents and focus group participants. Respondents did not like relying on others for transportation and had several concerns about taking the bus.

- Not enough buses on the routes
- Buses don't run in the evenings
- No buses on Sundays and Statutory holidays
- Buses don't go often enough

"I'm having to miss appointments because of the times the buses run."

-Woman at Focus Group

Problems associated with public transit included:

- Costly: \$1.25/trip adds up over the day and at times respondents didn't have any bus money.
- Difficult for school age children and teenagers to participate in extra-curricular activities because public transit schedule doesn't coordinate very well with these activities.
- No bus down Sherman Road (no stop near the Sikh Senior's Center)
- Difficult to take strollers on the bus, especially if you have more than one child.
- Applying for jobs (i.e. couldn't get to Job interviews)

Impacts of lack of transportation

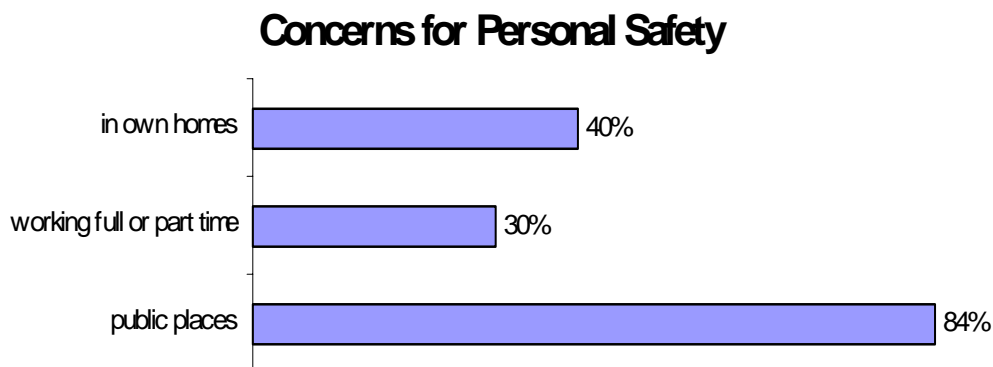
When asked for specifics on what activities were particularly difficult to do with the respondents' method of transportation, women in the survey had the following concerns; getting food, getting to work, household errands, and getting children to and from school and activities.

Concerns for Personal and Public Safety

Many people, especially women and children, restrict their activities because of their concerns for personal safety. They don't go out at night, use public transportation, attend courses, community meetings or use parks. Statistics Canada reported that over half of women say they restrict their lives in order to be safe on a daily basis. (Statistics Canada, 1993)

This restriction of activity, because of concern for personal safety, affects the vibrancy and viability of communities. Crime or fear of crime impacts the economic activity, and contributes to neighbourhood decline. In order to determine the extent of these destabilizing conditions, Neighbourhood Links community consultation questioned the prevalence and nature of safety concerns in the Berkey's and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods.

*"I fear any male approaching – experience says that you can't be sure of safety."
Neighbourhood Links survey participant*



- In addition to concerns for safety, 62% of respondents in the Berkey's area said they restrict their activity or take special precautions to ensure their safety.
- Females, seniors and renters all weighted safety more heavily than other groups.
- Forty percent of female respondents indicate concerns for their safety while at home.

Top five factors related to safety concerns :

- Violence
- Living alone
- Being female
- Breaking and entering of homes

- Partner or ex-partner abuse

Impacts of Safety Concerns on Employment

- 30% of those employed indicate that they have safety concerns at work.
- 12% indicate that safety factors were a barrier to them getting or keeping employment.
- 14% list sexual harassment or sexism as being an issue while looking for or being employed.

Conclusion

The Berkeys and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods are diverse and vibrant communities with distinct identities formed by history and evolution of development. And although these neighbourhoods have many, many positive qualities including diversity and character, they face a number of challenges posed by a combination of obstacles to access to opportunities for a good quality of life, which are linked to a number of community factors including housing, transportation, recreation, etc.

This brief synopsis of the research data gathered during the project illustrates a myriad of issues and barriers experienced by people living in the Berkey's and Cairnsmore neighbourhoods, and provides a foundation for forming recommendations and developing strategies to address needs for an adequate quality of life for residents in these areas. Such strategies will need to include community and social development, physical safety and security, and community planning and design to ensure that the areas develop in a way that does not exacerbate issues, and in fact, assists residents to build healthier, safer, more accessible communities and address existing disparities.