



Vibrant COMMUNITIES Saint John

Health-related results – Crescent Valley Neighbourhood Survey (06)

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Introduction

An extensive Community Survey was conducted early in 2006 in Crescent Valley and residents got involved in a big way by participating in focus groups and meetings related to its design and delivery, training to become survey facilitators, and participating in the survey as it was delivered door-to-door in every household. A whopping 54% of the community responded!

A little background on the neighbourhoods:

- The community consists of two main boulevards – MacLaren and Churchill – divided by Somerset Street and branching off into many courts and avenues. Altogether Crescent Valley covers more than 11 hectares or 27½ acres. There are 388 households for a total of over 1000 people.
- 65% of households have children under 18 – it is estimated that there are over 600 children and youth in Crescent Valley. Of all adult females in Crescent Valley, 42% are single parent mothers.

- Of those who responded to the survey, 83% were female and 17% were male...but we already knew that the ratio of females to males in CV is higher than elsewhere in the city.
- The majority of adults who responded to the survey (nearly 56%) are between the ages of 25 and 44... with another 30% between the ages of 45 and 64. There's an equal distribution (7% each) of those over 65 and those between 18 and 25.

Copies of the survey itself are available so you can get a sense of its scope.

Health Issues

- In response to a question on provision of care or support to health-challenged or disabled household members, 14% indicated they provided such care in their homes for people with needs that ranged from diabetes to asthma, epilepsy, and various forms of disability affecting mobility for adults, as well as ADHD, autism, and physical disabilities in children.
- While almost half of those surveyed said their health is good and another 10% excellent, this leaves a significant total of just over 40% with "fair" (30%) or "poor" (11%) health.

Community Services & Supports

- 75% of surveyed residents indicate they use health care services outside the neighbourhood – a rate that is second only to shopping. Of course the preponderance of all services and programs are only available outside the

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confines of Crescent Valley, so it isn't surprising that 72% and 77% respectively use buses and taxis to obtain these services – and that recurrently in the survey they indicate that scheduling and cost of transit are prohibitive, which means they go without essential services. This would be the main point to consider – the ghetto-like aspect of living in the Valley.

- A question on barriers to accessing services and programs outside the neighbourhood makes the connections even more succinctly:
 - Most common barrier (64%) was “not enough money”
 - 51% indicated that transportation was the major barrier while 47% said services weren't within walking distance
 - 39% said that health problems were a barrier in themselves to accessing services!

- In answer to the question of what services and programs residents want to be located in or near the neighbourhood, here are some highlights:
 - *A medical clinic closer – within walking distance (many times)*
 - *An after-hour clinic*
 - *Doctors' offices, medical facilities*
 - *Eye care, dentists*
 - *A methadone clinic*
 - *Healthier affordable restaurants*
 - *Fitness centre*

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Crime & Safety

Data that would impinge on markers of health:

- Many, if not most crimes, would have health impacts for the victim – to say nothing at the moment of the state of being of the youth perpetrators – and one question asked specifically about some of these effects:
 - 44% and 42% responded that fear and staying closer to home were effects of crime, with another 33% and 32% citing “less peace-of-mind” and “health” as impacts
 - The theme that runs through all the answers of how crime impacts the everyday lives of residents is fear. This kind of fear in turn influences the state of health and well-being of individuals and families in the neighbourhood. The threat of victimization is interlocked with a perception that retaliation is around the corner if you “rat” to police.
 - 32% of residents had experienced physical attack outside their homes within the past 2 years; 84% of those surveyed elaborated on these attacks, citing gangs; weapons such as knives, baseball bats and sticks, pipes, fists; and many said the attacks were “very severe” and “constant”.
 - 79% offered details on physical attacks on youth, citing aggression of every form from bullying younger children to “swarming”, attempted rape of children, knifing... surgery needed sometime. To and from school seems to be one of most dangerous trajectories for this form of violence.

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As one resident put it, “this is ongoing as younger kids learn from teens”, which suggests the need for education on alternatives to violence, as well as interventions and medical services.

- A high volume of response to questions on domestic abuse suggests a significant problem in the neighbourhood. Here are the highlights:
 - An overwhelming majority said there are no resources for domestic abuse victims in the community apart from possible help from area churches, the hospital, or the community police station.
 - Many respondents commented that Hestia House was “way out”, which is also a comment on how locked in poverty and lack of transportation make them feel.
 - One resident said of programs and services for victims of domestic violence, **“this is a resource that the neighbourhood needs to have as well as to be educated on.”**
- In answer to the question of what Crescent Valley needs to help victims of domestic abuse, there were lots of good suggestions:
 - A safe house or transition house within walking distance is needed
 - Confidential counselling services housed in the neighbourhood.
 - A confidential 24-7 crisis line for domestic violence only
 - Prevention education for all ages on early signs of all forms of abuse and a prevention role for community police.
 - One resident was very specific:
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“A safety place...to go when something’s happening where they won’t be criticized or ridiculed, like a Block Parents idea... where confidentiality can’t be broken... a place “before” Hestia House.

Training and Education

- Just 33% of those surveyed have graduated from high school; another 15% have their Grade 10 or 11; 13% have some college or university, 12% graduated college or university, with the remainder Grade 9 or below. Relatively few residents – 11% -- are doing GED or upgrading. Barriers range widely but are chiefly financial, transportation, and childcare, as well as a lack of information about available programs *and* where they lead.

- One of the most compelling findings came out of a question that asks for reasons why people dropped out of public school. 68% of residents answered this one, citing:
 - Health-related reasons were cited very often, having mainly to do with the poor health of a family member, particularly a parent, requiring a child to stay home and look after them. One resident said, *“Health reasons – mine or someone else’s –but family related”*.
 - Economic reasons that necessitated a youth getting a job to help the family survive.
 - Low self-esteem and a sense of having no help for school-related problems – whether social or learning problems we don’t know.
 - Teen pregnancy. At times the comments suggest this was a deliberate response to problems at school and at home – the best of a poor set of options.

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- Of those who had been a student in some program in the past 5 years, a whopping 61% had **not completed** their program of study due to health and medical problems and learning difficulties.

- Among other **supports for work or education**, people cited the need for mentoring due to drug and alcohol problems and learning barriers, mental illness, and lack of family support. Several mentioned that better health care was needed because if you *do get work you lose your health card*.

- Only 24% of residents work outside the home for pay; around the same percentage do volunteer work in their own neighbourhood, which suggests that structural barriers are more relevant than a lack of industry. Many residents specified that their volunteer work is with health-challenged friends, neighbours, and family. It is certainly ironic that those least resourced are those who are volunteering. This is my experience working in both vulnerable neighbourhoods, that the poorest of the poor are coming out to meetings, making presentations, and participating.

- People who need help finding work cited as barriers “health”, disabled children or children with special needs (autism, ADHD, etc.); epilepsy, arthritis, diabetes, other forms of disability.

Housing

Pages and pages of problems in this section...

- Drafts come in along windows; it's difficult to regulate heat – either too hot or too cold.
- Wiring is perceived as obsolete and dangerous.
- There is much indoors and out that is old and needs to be renovated or replaced. Screens hang off windows, front yards are strewn with clutter, broken rain gutters that are hazardous in winter, causing falls and injuries, severely cracked toilet bowls, kitchen sink that leak under cupboard.
- Mold comes through all North-facing window sills and grows on the outside of the building so it seems to be right through the walls.
- Back hallways are a problem because of garbage pick-up being bi-weekly. Trash and cigarette butts are left in hallways (no locks) and there is nowhere to place accumulating garbage so rodents are a common issue.
- Exhaust for gas line is under bedroom window and causes breathing problems.
- Question of how to improve walking in the neighbourhood:
 - Much improved snow removal (77%)
 - More and better maintained sidewalks (76%)
 - More street lights (60%)
 - Well-marked crosswalks (59%)
 - Safe pedestrian trails and pathways
 - Build walking or bike trails; bike lanes on roads
 - Need crossing guards at Somerset intersection

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Working Together

- In response to the question of how well people knew their neighbours, most only knew the neighbour on either side of them. Residents are much less likely to know people on adjacent streets or courts, and many stay to themselves. Still, on average, 50% know some people living on the same street, the next street, or the whole community.

- The barriers to knowing neighbours better ran to 6 pages of response and while some mentioned isolation due to physical disabilities, agoraphobia, and other specific barriers, the vast majority of comments echo the theme of “Stick to yourself and you usually don’t have any problems” – a fear-based attitude that could function as both cause and result to perpetuate lack of confidence, perception of danger, and a powerful barrier (perhaps even more powerful than transportation) to getting out of the neighbourhood for work and training, among other things.

- People appear to be making a very conscious decision to isolate themselves because the environment seems to be dangerous to them and being in relationship with other people is too risky. Here’s a sampling of how people expressed the dangers:
 - *Don’t like getting mixed up with them... Say Hi and that’s it.*
 - *I was told that was the best way to be* (This is another thing that emerges, the idea that this is a common strategy and one that is promoted by many people)
 - *Confrontation with one person and everyone else gets involved*

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- *Everyone wants to know your business*
- *I don't get out – there's nothing to involve people to get together. When I grew up here you know everybody – they were more involved.*
- *Just moved in and would like to keep to ourselves. Housing said that would be our best interest.*
- *Just wants to keep to herself. Too many people down here like to gossip.*
- *Some of the troublemakers are moved out and more are moved in therefore I keep to myself instead of unknowingly getting into trouble.*
- *Their attitude to people, for example who's better, who has the most material things; and race.*
- *Their lifestyle – I'm not into drugs, drinking clubs and gambling, hitting and swearing at my kids.*
- *It is fear, you don't know what they are going to do.*

Some of the themes that came up in the open-ended suggestions:

- Fostering inclusion and accessibility. Residents were adamant that activities and programs were designed to make sure people weren't left out because of lack of money. They wanted all ages to come together at safe inclusive events where there would not be drugs or alcohol. The word "respect" occurs frequently in suggestions.
- Safety. Suggestions about activities being safe for young children (good play area) as well as free of crime, drugs and alcohol.
- Structured recreational activities: More things for children and youth to do so they don't get into trouble!

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- Communication: Most responses suggested things like meetings, gatherings, events that combined social and chance to talk about issues and plan change. In other words, deliberately and safely and pleasantly breaking the patterns of fear and isolation, e.g.:

Have a block party by-weekly or once a month everyone meets, discuss starting with major problems & hopefully it'll catch on and together we make a new community.

Give them reasons to care, having social gatherings

- Fostering tolerance. Although some spoke with pessimism about the futility of changing things, many more saw the value in coming together to break down differences and increase tolerance of diversity.

Suggestions for Action

- Many residents feel a strong sense of social isolation living in the neighbourhood and the question of what opportunities would help overcome this isolation went on for several pages:
 - No services, nothing to do
 - Transportation big issue especially after 6 o'clock when bus service doesn't go through Valley
 - Some understand that the neighbourhood's reputation is a barrier; one resident said:

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“More activities, better understanding of those outside the area on what changes are being made so area would have better reputation”

- Seen next to the isolation question it makes sense that a vast majority of residents want a wide range of support groups offered in the neighbourhood:

75% groups for youth

72% group for single mothers

59% group for single parents

44% group for fathers

50% group for seniors

59% group for disabled or shut-in

67% group for substance abuse, gambling

60% group for domestic violence

- One resident commented that *“All of the above”* are needed, and several people added other suggestions, such as grief support groups, as well.
- Most residents indicated that confidentiality and trusted facilitation would be key to the success of support groups.

- Which issues need community education and involvement:

➤ Programs for teens (83%)

➤ Parenting skills (76%)

➤ Community centre (69%)

➤ Substance abuse and recovery (67%)

➤ Domestic violence (66%)

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- Gambling addiction (61%)
- Wellness clinics (54%)

A ranking question following this one suggests that residents want help with parenting, programs and services for teens, and domestic violence on a priority basis, with wellness and substance abuse problems high on the list.

- One thing that the survey shows over and over again is that as much as programs and services are needed in Crescent Valley, supports for using them are just as important. Transportation and childcare, for instance, are essential – and this has been confirmed in the almost 18 months I’ve been working in CV.
- Residents said that better communications in the neighbourhood would mean less gossip, more respect for other peoples’ privacy, good listening skills, no judgement of people who hold different views, and inclusion of everyone who has ideas to contribute.
- In order to communicate well, residents felt there should be a variety of opportunities to get together – for community action and change, and also just for fun.
- Very high percentages to questions of how partners should be involved in working together with CV residents, e.g. 77% said they wanted city government workers to get involved, 67% for provincial government, and

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42% each for community-based services or advocacy agencies and community development workers.

- Residents comments:

I think the more partners involved, the more options you have...

If they are willing to be involved that would be awesome!

- Overwhelmingly residents want to work together for change – 85% believe that this is the way change will happen, which firmly underlines the need to consult and collaborate. There were almost 6 single-spaced pages of suggestions and affirmation for working together. Last words and hats off to the courageous residents of Crescent Valley:
- *If everyone works together instead of against each other this place would be very good.*
- *If people work together, they communicate together, they stick together, they pitch in together*
- *If everyone got involved there would be more ideas for change*
- *The more people work together for change... will encourage people outside the community to want to help and maybe change the attitude of society.*

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