



Bonnyville:

Sharing Local Knowledge through Pictures and Stories



COMMUNITY HEALTH &
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

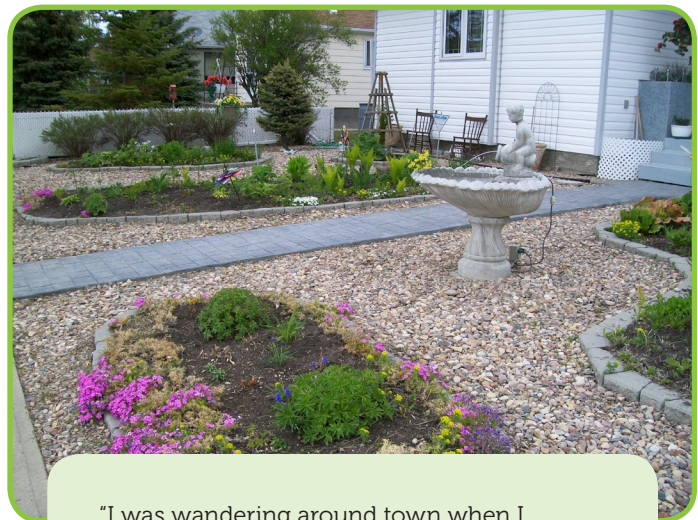
The Project

This project helped researchers understand how residents of Bonnyville saw their community's built environment. This project looked at features in Bonnyville that helped or prevented people from being physically active and eating healthy food. The **built environment** includes features in the community like:

- parks and green spaces,
- residential areas,
- public transit,
- indoor and outdoor activity options,
- restaurants and grocery stores options,
- how a community is maintained, and
- how the roads and sidewalks are designed.

These types of features may also affect the community's **social atmosphere**. The social atmosphere may include a community that feels friendly or having a good neighbour. Together, built and social features may influence the health of residents.

This project is part of a larger project at the University of Alberta called **Community Health and the Built Environment**. The goal of the larger project is to understand how people's decisions to make healthy choices are partly shaped by features in the community where they live. The project is taking place in four communities throughout Alberta: Bonnyville, North Central Edmonton, Medicine Hat/Redcliff and St. Paul.



"I was wandering around town when I happened on this yard and it impressed me, the amount of care this person put into making their yard aesthetically pleasing. It shows people can have a real sense of pride about their property and want to show off their gardening skills" (Bonnyville resident).

Pictures are Worth a Thousand Words!

How did the researchers do this project? They had residents take photos of their community. They then told researchers why those photos helped to describe physical activity and healthy eating in their community. This kind of project is called **photovoice**. Photovoice is a commonly used research method that helps researchers to gain a local perspective about an identified issue. Photos can engage people

better than words alone. Photovoice is a good way to begin conversations with local residents about their community.

The Photo-Takers

Seven people participated in the project from Bonnyville. These participants generally represented the community. Participants were recruited through posters, e-mail and word-of-mouth by other community members. There were six female and one male photo-takers ranging in age from 16 to 89. One of the photo-takers self identified as representing an ethnic group. Only one photo-taker had lived continuously in Bonnyville for all of his/her adult life. Photo-takers reported annual household income levels ranging from less than \$25,000 per year to over \$75,000 per year. We tried to make sure that all residents of Bonnyville had the chance to be a part of the project. Despite this, the group of photo-takers we interviewed represents only a small range of community residents.

The Photo-takers' Journey

1. Each of the photo-takers met with the researcher one-on-one to talk about their community.
2. The photo-takers were provided with digital cameras and were shown how to use them.
3. The photo-takers were given two weeks to take pictures. The pictures helped them talk about opportunities and barriers to physical activity and healthy eating in their community.
4. The pictures were printed.
5. Each of the photo-takers met one-on-one with the researcher. During this time, the photo-takers told their stories about each picture.



"This is my crappy school; well it's not crappy, the system of it is very good. It's just like the outside appearance, because there is an empty parking lot here and it is right beside a bar and hotel. It isn't a good place for a school" (Bonnyville resident).



"Too much traffic to bike to town. Where we live by the lake there is a 4 km winding road from North Shore Heights to Highway 28. There is continuous traffic, we tried riding our bikes before and it is just scary. It would be really nice to have a bike path, but I can't see that in the future. It is just too expensive, but they could do part of it actually, alongside the business areas, there is a great big ditch" (Bonnyville resident).

Bringing it All Together

After photo-takers shared their community stories, summaries were created for the top five pictures from every photo-taker. All of the photo-takers had the chance to review the summaries for their photos. These summaries were used to create a presentation and this report to share with community members and local decision-makers. The stories and photos in this report are shared with permission from the photo-takers. Residents and researchers hope that the pictures and stories will help others gain insight into the Bonnyville community. Remember, the stories were told by the residents themselves!

The Photo-takers' Stories

THE BONNYVILLE COMMUNITY

Bonnyville was generally perceived by the photo-takers as a natural resource service center for the surrounding region. The oil and gas boom over the past decade was said to have spurred on tremendous growth in residential and commercial development. This increase growth has been paralleled by an increase in the population of the town.

Most photo-takers acknowledged that the oil and gas industries were good for the economy and meant there was a lot of money in town. Yet, the increased incomes also caused some problems in the community related to drugs and gambling. Unlike many other small rural communities in Alberta, our photo-takers told us that the young people were staying in town, likely because of the oil and gas industry wages. However, the strongest message from the photo-takers was that there needed to be structure and organization for teenagers and adults to be physically active. The facilities are there, but it is the programming and marketing of events and activities that was seen as the biggest challenge to getting people to use the facilities.

Another important issue raised by the photo-takers was that there needs to be more services offered to make newcomers feel welcome in the community. A more welcoming atmosphere could help to make newcomers aware of the physical activities and healthy eating choices available to them in Bonnyville. Most of the photo-takers agreed that while Bonnyville's grocery stores provided fantastic healthy food options, people still need to make good choices. Most of the photo-takers also expressed that their involvement in this project helped them increase their own awareness of the community. In addition, photo-takers were more aware of what physical activity and healthy eating choices were available and how to access them.

The photo-takers' responses to the question "What does community mean to you?" were very different. Their responses included: members of a society, a physical area, a group of people that have a common purpose and share things, and a sense of belonging. In one case, the photo-taker described Bonnyville as a good place to live. Another photo-taker spoke of the potential they saw in Bonnyville and that they wanted to be part of helping the community improve. These two comments may reflect the fact that only one of the photo-takers was a long term resident of Bonnyville. In addition, three of the seven photo-takers had lived in the community for less than one year.

IMMIGRANT POPULATION

Many of the photo-takers noted the recent immigration of Mexican, Sri Lankan, and Filipino people into the community. It was understood by most of these photo-takers that the immigrants' arrival was to fill a labor shortage in the lower paying service industries. Photo-takers recognized that the immigrants were filling roles as grocery clerks, restaurant workers, and hotel/motel staff and that the resident population was shifting to higher-paying oil and gas industry jobs. Two photo-takers also noted the recent arrival of South African doctors to fill the demand in health services positions. Due to the arrival of many new people into the community, almost all photo-takers described Bonnyville as a community "in transition". Some photo-takers suggested that if you were not part of the established French, Ukrainian, or Polish groups it was difficult to fit in and feel comfortable in the community.



"The location is not significant, what this represents is our community's, and probably all rural towns', car mentality. We get into our cars to go everywhere, just because, and drive two blocks. It is just crazy. This is not good for the community's health"
(Bonnyville resident).

CAR CULTURE

Bonnyville was frequently described by the photo-takers as having a 'car culture' (see picture and caption on the left). Therefore, residents of Bonnyville were more likely to drive somewhere than walk, even if it was only two blocks. Photo-takers also suggested that a high number of high school students drive to school. As a result, youth often do not use other kinds of transportation (for example, biking, walking, or taking a school bus). A couple of photo-takers noted that there is no public bus service in Bonnyville, but taxis are available (for cost). In addition, they noted that a Handi-Bus service was available to seniors on a limited schedule for free or on a pay-per-use system.

GRAFFITI, VANDALISM, DRUGS AND GAMBLING

Small and occasional instances of graffiti and vandalism were mentioned by most of the photo-takers (see picture and caption on the right). Photo-takers suggested that the graffiti and vandalism did not pose any problems that affected access to physical activities or healthy eating. The same photo-takers reported that they felt safe in the community during the day. Some photo-takers suggested that drugs were readily available in the community. This may be because cost is not a barrier due to high paying oil and gas jobs. It was also suggested by one photo-taker that

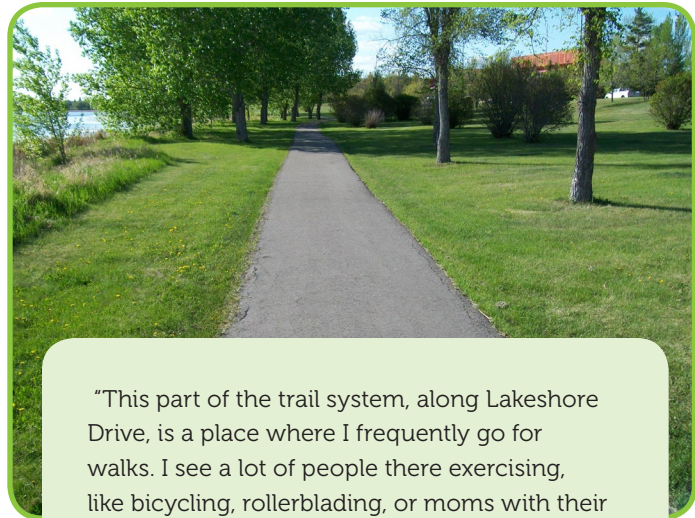


"There [are] a lot of empty lots that I found walking around... it [causes] vandalism too and there was like garbage around it, which you can't really see, but there was. I don't know just felt abandoned"
(Bonnyville resident).

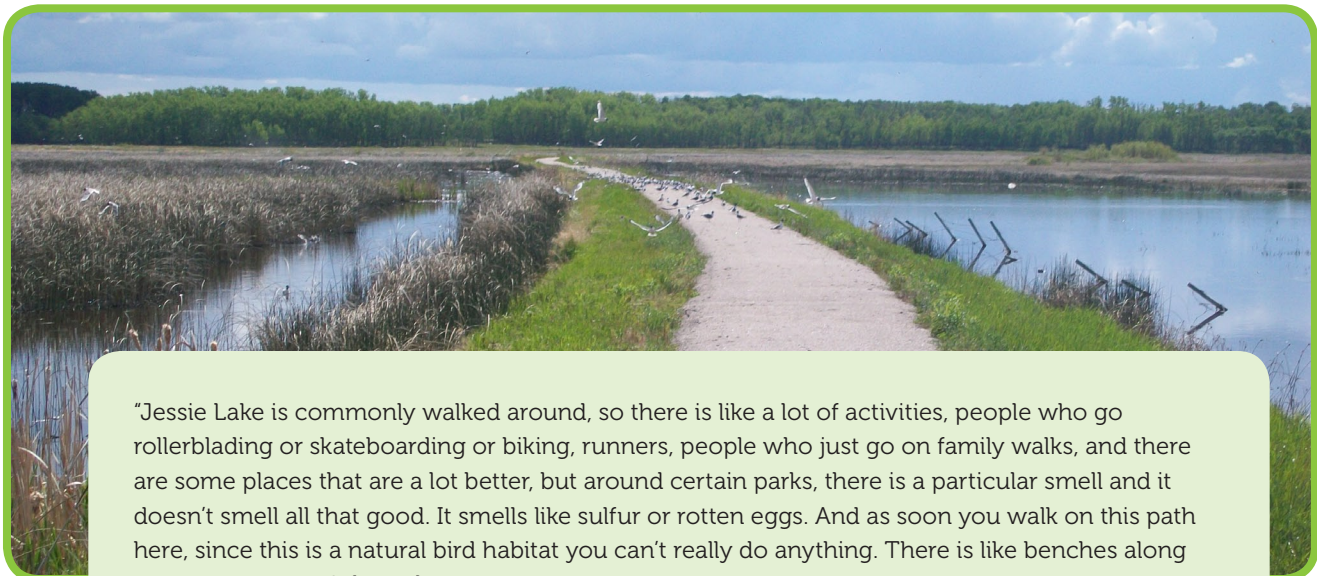
the prosperous economy and the unemployment/under-employment of young people made it easier for them to get into trouble with drugs. The easy access to casinos and gambling was also mentioned as a problem in the community.

COMMUNITY TRAIL SYSTEM

The Lakeshore Drive and Jessie Lake areas were prominent physical features of the community. These areas were mentioned and photographed by all photo-takers. The photo-takers reported that there is a paved trail, approximately 11 kilometers long. This trail goes all the way around the lake and it was described as a multi-use trail used for walking, running, or bicycling. Most of the photo-takers spoke of the smooth surface and how well maintained the trail was (see picture and caption on the right). Although a pleasant place to walk, one photo-taker felt the bird droppings should be cleaned off the trail on a regular basis (see picture and caption below). The playgrounds and park area along Lakeshore Drive were described as well used and well maintained.



"This part of the trail system, along Lakeshore Drive, is a place where I frequently go for walks. I see a lot of people there exercising, like bicycling, rollerblading, or moms with their children in strollers. I think it is an important place for people in Bonnyville. The smooth surface, the nice view, the grass and the lake encourage people to go out and exercise" (Bonnyville resident).



"Jessie Lake is commonly walked around, so there is like a lot of activities, people who go rollerblading or skateboarding or biking, runners, people who just go on family walks, and there are some places that are a lot better, but around certain parks, there is a particular smell and it doesn't smell all that good. It smells like sulfur or rotten eggs. And as soon you walk on this path here, since this is a natural bird habitat you can't really do anything. There is like benches along and benches aren't [good] for seating, because there is a whole bunch of bird poop all over it, as well as the trails. And then when you are walking along this part here, there is like a whole bunch of birds on the trail and they start flying all over you" (Bonnyville resident).

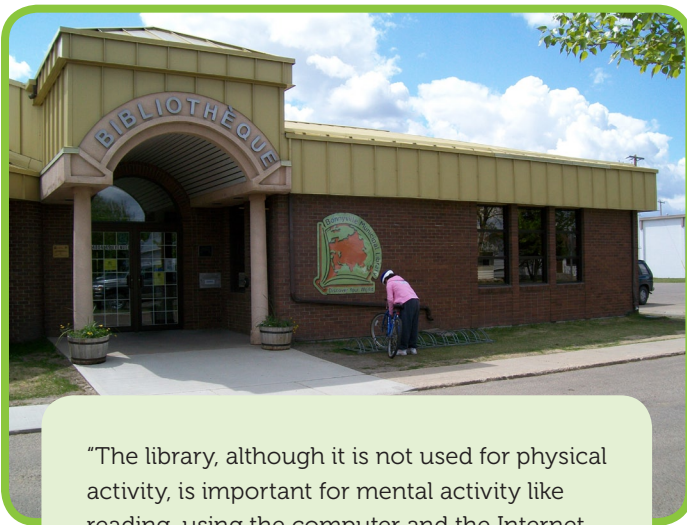


"There are a lot of people who use Moose Lake, and I think the lake provides a sense of community. There was a fishing derby with a hundred boats last weekend. There are people tubing, wakeboarding, kids playing along the shore, and snowmobiling in the winter. Kayaking is on one of my passions and I can launch right from my backyard" (Bonnyville resident).

MOOSE LAKE

Moose Lake was mentioned by some photo-takers as a great place for many different activities: boating, fishing, water skiing, tubing, kayaking, wakeboarding and playing on the beach (see picture and caption above). These photo-takers reported how living by the lake was good because the area feels peaceful and calm. These photo-takers also described class and social status issues around the different levels of wealth of some of the lake residents. It was suggested that these issues cause some tension that may affect access to certain activities on and around the lake (for example, walking on the frozen lake in the winter or participating in social activities put on by the community league). Photo-takers expressed

that class differences also affect the unity of the different subdivisions around Moose Lake. One photo-taker expressed that they had a sore spot for "lake people" who use Bonnyville's facilities but did not help to pay for them.



"The library, although it is not used for physical activity, is important for mental activity like reading, using the computer and the Internet. I think it is a very important place for the community. They have a lounge area with newspapers and magazines for people to sit and read. I find the book selection and the hours of operation a bit limited for me" (Bonnyville resident).

THE LOCAL LIBRARY

The Public Library was viewed by many of the photo-takers as being very important to the well-being of the community (see picture and caption on the left). The caption on the left reports that the hours of operation were limited for library use. Despite this, other photo-takers spoke of the hours as good and adequate to serve the needs of the community. Mention was also made of the recent renovations and the addition of an automatic door opener. The automatic door

made it easier for seniors and people with physical challenges to access the library. The bike rack in front of the library was also noted as a positive feature that encouraged active transportation to this popular destination.

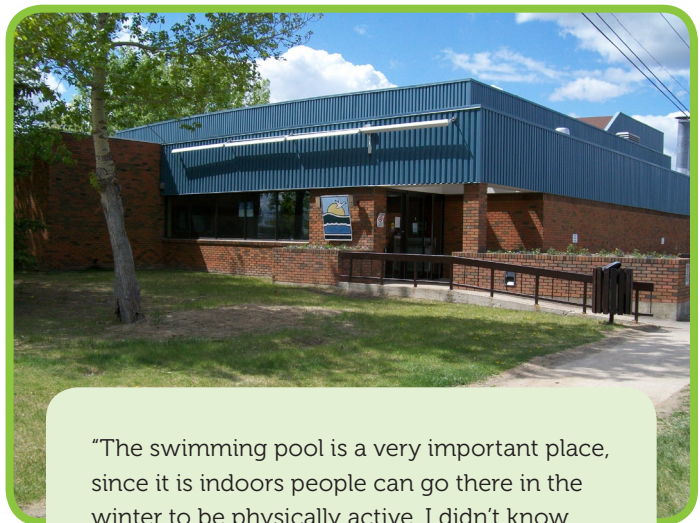
COMMUNITY RECREATION FACILITIES

Awareness of the facilities for physical activity and recreation in the community was very different among photo-takers. This may be because three of the photo-takers had lived in the community for less than one year at the time of the interviews. All of the photo-takers commented that more information about the community's facilities and programs would be helpful. Some of their suggestions included:

- posting information about community facilities, programs, and upcoming events on the community's public service websites (important to make sure the information is always up to date);
- distribute a free community program guide to all residents through home mail delivery;
- include information brochures and pamphlets in the monthly utility bills sent to all residences; and,
- use local media to share community information.

The same three photo-takers said that their participation in this project allowed them to "discover" many of the community's facilities and recreational opportunities of which they were previously not aware. This suggests that one of the first priorities to promote access to facilities, physical activity programs, and recreational opportunities is public awareness.

On the other hand, three other photo-takers who had resided in the community longer were familiar with and spoke positively about community facilities. The long-term residents believed Bonnyville was fortunate to have the facilities that were currently available to them (see picture and caption above). One photo-taker thought some of the facilities were being underutilized. In addition, other thought that there appeared to be a lack of adequate management for others.



"The swimming pool is a very important place, since it is indoors people can go there in the winter to be physically active. I didn't know about the pool until I saw some information about it at the library this spring" (Bonnyville resident).

BONNYVILLE CENTENNIAL CENTRE

The Bonnyville and District Centennial Centre, referred to as the C2, was discussed and photographed by all the participants. It was described as a multi-use facility that is a focal point in the community. The C2 provides residents with many physical activities and recreational opportunities:

- two ice arenas,
- a field house for indoor soccer,
- badminton,
- volleyball,
- tennis,
- a gym, and
- a track for walking and running.

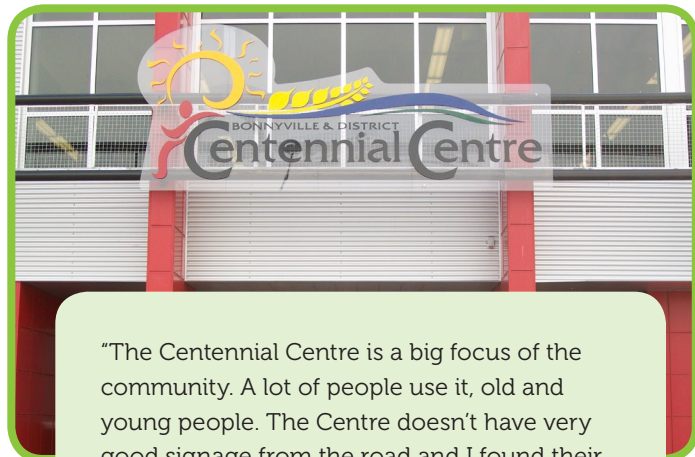
Some photo-takers noted that the C2 hosted trade shows, dances, musical events, and a weekly indoor farmers' market. One photo-taker mentioned that NAIT and Portage College have offices there and offer courses to students. Most of the photo-takers spoke of the C2 positively. The photo-takers suggested that the facility was very busy because the parking lot was always full. Other photo-takers suggested that the elevator to the second floor was good for seniors. In addition, C2 allowed seniors to use the indoor walking track for free (as photo-takers described in the captions on the right). The C2 was described as having good operating hours.

However, there were also concerns expressed by the photo-takers about C2. Membership fees were said to be expensive and an obstacle for some community members. Costs for individual programs were also thought to be expensive by some photo-takers. Also, some thought the parking lot was not big enough to accommodate all vehicles, especially when multiple events were on at the Centennial Centre. Some photo-takers noted that the outside signage was not very good at informing the public about activities in the community, particularly along the main road (highway; see picture and caption above). They suggested that the



"The indoor walking track at the Centennial Centre is free for seniors. In the winter there are quite a few seniors taking advantage of the walking track. It even has hills on it and they have rules posted for the different speeds of people using it" (Bonnyville resident).

"I think the Centennial Centre is a great asset to the community and the senior citizens in particular. This is a beautiful walking space in the winter and it is free for seniors. The only drawback in the winter is when snow and the weather make it difficult for some seniors to get to the Centre" (Bonnyville resident).



"The Centennial Centre is a big focus of the community. A lot of people use it, old and young people. The Centre doesn't have very good signage from the road and I found their website information a bit limited" (Bonnyville resident).

sign could provide more information about the facility, what services were available, and where the entrance was. Photo-takers cited the poor signage as something that might limit accessibility for newer residents and visitors in the community.

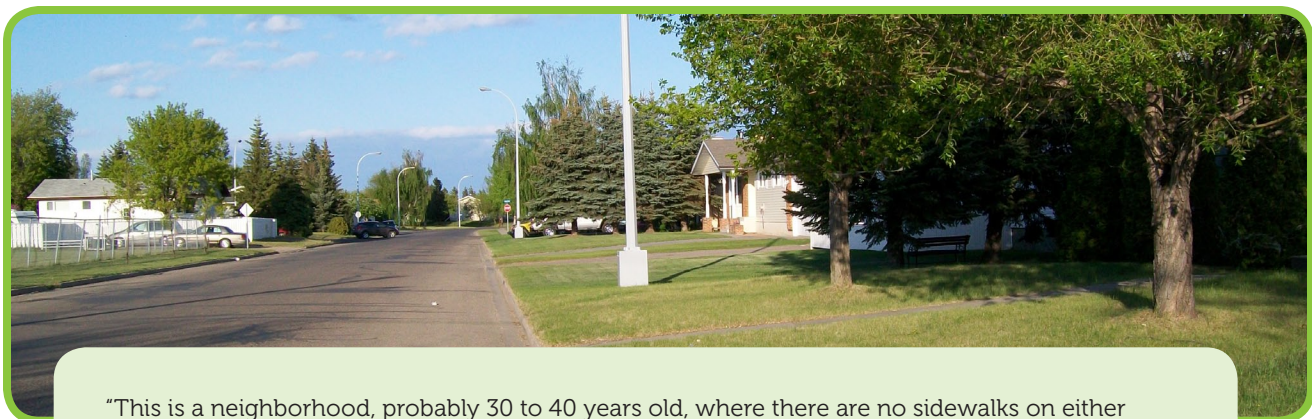
Many photo-takers reported that it is not convenient to walk to the Centennial Center from many parts of town. Others suggested that while the female fitness class was on, the childcare program was not available. This scheduling would restrict the ability of mothers with young children to participate. Other photo-takers highlighted that the opening of the C2 had hurt small, independent fitness businesses in the community (see picture and caption above). All of these concerns could be barriers that may affect some people's access to and participation at C2.



"This is the privately owned gym that was here before the Centennial Centre, but it only offers fitness classes now. It has a larger room that can accommodate more people and it is cheaper than the Centennial Centre. That is why I go there" (Bonnyville resident).

TAKING A WALK THROUGH THE COMMUNITY

Most of the photo-takers talked about walking as their primary source of regular physical activity. Photo-takers walked to take the dog out, reduce stress, and for exercise. Two of the photo-takers described their walking as an active form of transportation to get from place to place, as neither of them had their own vehicles. Some barriers to walking, reported by photo-takers, were the lack of sidewalks in some areas, and the quality of sidewalks around town (see picture and caption below). Other comments from these photo-takers were that many of the sidewalks in the older areas of town were too rough, forcing




"This is a neighborhood, probably 30 to 40 years old, where there are no sidewalks on either side of the street. Everyone has to walk on the road including, school children, delivery people and seniors. This can be very dangerous in the winter with the traffic and the build-up of snow along the sides making the road narrower. I don't know why they didn't build a sidewalk there" (Bonnyville resident).

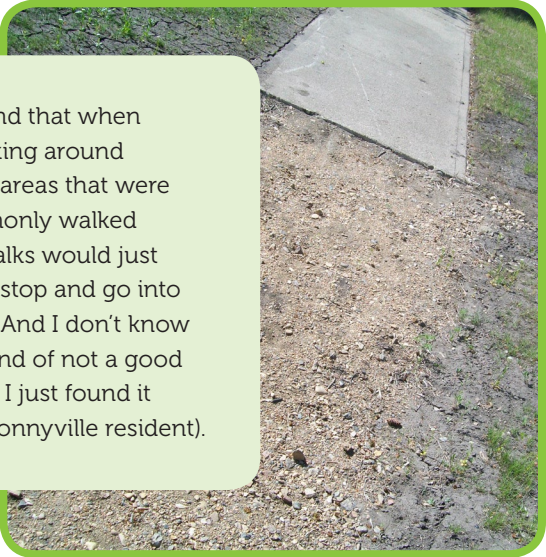
them onto the street (see picture and caption on the right). A lack of well-maintained sidewalks may be a barrier for people using wheelchairs, walkers, strollers, skateboards, and rollerblades. Curb cuts (i.e., the lowering of a sidewalk to make it smooth with the pavement) were noted as being inconsistent throughout the community. One photo-taker also reported that many sidewalks just “ended” and turned into dirt or grass areas (see picture and caption on the right). This made it more of a challenge to access certain parts of town. One photo-taker stated that road maintenance most likely took precedent over sidewalk maintenance for local politicians and community decision-makers. This may be because of the “car culture” of the community. Photo-takers highlighted that improper maintenance of sidewalks does not promote walking as an active form of transportation or physical activity.

UNSTRUCTURED FREE PLAY

The relatively new skateboard park was reported by many photo-takers as a good place for kids to hang out and use their time creatively (see picture and caption below). The skateboard park is located in the Recreation Centre’s parking lot, near the baseball diamonds on the east side of the complex. It was mentioned by some photo-takers that there were no signs present to indicate who can use the skateboard park. In addition, it would be good for residents to know who is responsible for maintaining it and if there were any community sponsors involved in its development. The skateboard park was described as clean and free



“Many of our sidewalks around town are broken and uneven with cracks and rough spots. There is a lot of traffic between the Lodge and the Extended Care and the sidewalks should be looked at. This makes it difficult for people with walkers and canes and may cause them to fall” (Bonnyville resident).



“I just found that when I was walking around particular areas that were not commonly walked on, sidewalks would just randomly stop and go into dirt road. And I don’t know it is just kind of not a good thing, and I just found it harder” (Bonnyville resident).



“The skateboard park surprised me because I didn’t know we had one in town. It is a really good facility and good exercise for the boys. I didn’t see any signage directing people to the park but word-of-mouth is one of the best advertisements for something like this” (Bonnyville resident).

of graffiti and vandalism. One trash can was reported to be available but there were no visible benches or tables for participants or spectators to use. Skateboarding was mentioned by some photo-takers as an active mode of transportation for some teenagers to get to school. Skateboarding around the trails at Jessie Lake was also described as a popular activity for many teenagers.

Despite the overall positive responses about the skateboard park, most photo-takers reported that there were not many “free play” (or informal activity) options available to teenagers. Organized sport was described as expensive. Some suggested that there was a need for more free activities for the youth to do. Some of the comments from photo-takers were:

- free play or unstructured activities does not seem as common among kids anymore;
- you do not see kids playing street hockey;
- some parents are afraid to let kids play outside;
- teenagers are too busy with TV, videos, and computer games;
- kids these days are lazy; and,
- although there are lots of playgrounds and green spaces you just do not see the spontaneous free play these days.

COMMUNITY GROCERY STORES

All photo-takers believed they had access to quality food and healthy food choices at the grocery stores in their community, as described in the captions below. Most photo-takers did comment about the price and selection of food, highlighting that a lack of grocery store competition meant they were paying higher prices. Most photo-takers also mentioned that Bonnyville had a long term family owned and operated grocery store. The family owned store was well supported by “old time” residents. Suggestions were made that this store actively contributed to community events and offered free delivery service to its customers.



“I do most of my shopping there at Sobeys. It’s pretty new and they have staffing issues. People from outside of town would more frequently go to Wal-Mart in Cold Lake. But it is a pretty nice store and they seem to keep up” (Bonnyville resident).



“The vegetable displays and the selection we have available are excellent. I don’t understand why so many people buy the junk food. I think the community is well served by the local grocery stores for healthy food options” (Bonnyville resident).

LOCALLY GROWN FOOD

Many photo-takers placed a high value on food grown locally in their community. They appreciated the better taste and flavor of food locally grown, as described in the caption on the right. Access to farmers markets, U-Pick farms and a community garden were discussed and photographed often. Some of the concerns expressed by photo-takers about the market at the Centennial Centre were:

- the Centennial Centre was hard to walk to for some people, such as seniors, families with small children, and people with disabilities;
- the parking lot would be full with vehicles from people attending other events at the Centennial Centre; and,
- vendors sell out fast if you do not get there early in the morning.

All of these could be considered possible barriers to some individuals wanting to access healthy local food choices (see pictures and captions below).

U-Picks were described by some photo-takers as very busy. They suggested that now you have to schedule a time to go out to the farm to pick. Previously you could just show up anytime and get out into the garden to pick what you want. These photo-takers believed that these changes were a result of growing awareness of organic options and an increased interest in locally grown and tastier foods in the community.



"I think one of the most important things is being able to shop and get good food. All three of our grocery stores have a good selection of quality fruits and vegetables. But the root vegetables, like the carrots, don't have the same flavor as locally grown ones"
(Bonnyville resident).



"This is some asparagus from a local U-Pick garden in the area. They attend the local farmers' market as well as having signs out on the highway to promote their garden. There is a total difference in the taste of anything we can grow here compared to anything brought in"
(Bonnyville resident).



"There are two farmers markets in town, one on Saturday and the other on Tuesday, and a lot of people go to both. I think organic foods are becoming more popular with the younger people. The location and the parking are not as convenient for the vendors and customers at the Centennial Centre farmers market"
(Bonnyville resident).

RESTAURANTS AND FAST FOOD

Many of the photo-takers thought that restaurants in Bonnyville currently do not offer very many healthy food options. Most of the foods were described as deep fried, and “all the same”, such as burgers, fries, pizzas and Chinese food.

7-11 was mentioned as selling mostly packaged, microwavable products that are not very healthy (see picture and caption on the right). One photo-taker suggested that 7-11 was busy all the time and that junk food is “evil”. The higher prices on the little bit of fresh fruit they did sell was not encouraging people to buy it as a healthy alternative.

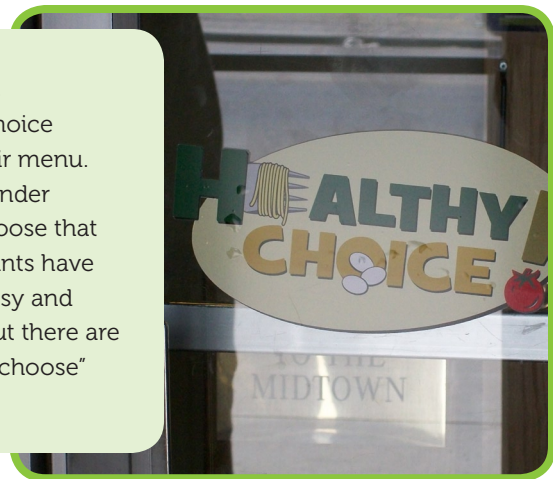
There were some healthy eating options at restaurants reported by a few photo-takers, who believed that these options were becoming more accessible. The ‘Healthy Choice’ logo did appear on some

local restaurant doors and menus (see picture and caption above). The ‘Heart Smart Menu’ was also mentioned as being available at a few restaurants in the community. Some photo-takers suggested that to increase access to healthy food choices, they would like to see more grilled foods as opposed to fried, more ethnic eating options, and more places with outdoor patios.

“People go to buy mainly microwavable food to eat all the time. It is not really healthy but there is always a big line there. I think it mainly sells junk food, nothing healthy. Apples and oranges are really expensive. I don’t know why this is but it discourages people from buying fruit” (Bonnyville resident).



“The Noodle House is promoting Healthy Choice eating options on their menu. The only thing is I wonder how many people choose that choice. Most Restaurants have fried things, very greasy and fatty, or junk foods. But there are options for people to choose” (Bonnyville resident).



Who We Are

The researchers from the University of Alberta have partnered with a group of stakeholders from the Bonnyville community. This group helps to represent the diverse nature of the community and includes members from Alberta Health Services, Bonnyville and District Chamber of Commerce, the church community, community members, Community Futures Lakeland, EmployAbilities, Family and Community Support Services, Healthy Alberta Communities, Town of Bonnyville (Economic Development Office, and Development and Planning).

What's Next?

The researchers will work with community stakeholders to develop community projects. The goal of the projects is to help community members be more physically active and choose to eat healthy food.

Thank You!

The researchers and community stakeholders would like to thank all of the photo-takers for sharing their stories. All of the pictures in this summary document were from the project.

For more information about this project, please contact:

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Our Community Partners:

Alberta Health Services
Bonnyville and District Chamber of Commerce
the church community
community members
Community Futures Lakeland
EmployAbilities
Family and Community Support Services
Town of Bonnyville
(Economic Development Office,
and Development and Planning)

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