



CULTIVATING NEIGHBOURHOOD CONNECTIONS

Insights from the Lethbridge
Neighbourhood Engagement Project



Prepared By
League of YQL Neighbourhoods

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The League of YQL Neighbourhoods (YQLN) undertook a comprehensive engagement project combining data from a Neighbourhood Engagement Survey and insights from the YQL Neighbourhoods Discussion held in October 2024. This project aimed to assess community connections, identify gaps, and propose actionable solutions to cultivate neighbourhood engagement across Lethbridge.

Research shows that socially connected neighbourhoods are more resilient, safer, and more engaged, with better public health outcomes. Individually, strong social ties improve well-being, security, and youth development. These insights reinforce the importance of neighbourhood engagement and align with YQLN's findings:

Community Engagement

41.25% reported active online groups, mainly on Facebook, but only 17.5% noted formal associations. 23.75% were unaware of any groups, signaling a need for greater visibility.

Social Connections

64.38% know six or more neighbours, while 51.88% want to know more. Casual interactions, shared spaces, and kindness were key to fostering belonging.

Participation and Barriers

60.38% participate in activities, but 39.62% face barriers like time, awareness, and privacy. Inclusive, accessible events can bridge the gap.

Desired Activities

Strong interest in block parties, festivals, and projects. Parks, gardens, and libraries were highlighted as spaces for organic connections.

Role of Neighbourhood Associations (NAs)

NAs are vital for events, safety, and advocacy but need flexible support. They foster leadership and grassroots action.

YQLN's Role

YQLN enables neighbourhoods through tools, resources, and advocacy. Simplifying processes and inclusivity are top priorities.

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ABOUT YQLN

The League of YQL Neighbourhoods is dedicated to cultivating community in Lethbridge by connecting and supporting neighbours and neighbourhoods. Our vision is to create a vibrant community fostered by a network of welcoming and inclusive neighbourhoods.

Guided by our core values of sustainability, inclusivity, community, and connection, we strive to empower neighbourhoods with the tools, resources, and advocacy needed to nurture meaningful relationships and enhance local identity. Through supporting neighbourhood activities, promoting social inclusion, and developing strategic communication and outreach initiatives, we aim to create spaces for neighbours and neighbourhoods to collaborate, celebrate, and engage in building a better future together.

At the League of YQL Neighbourhoods, we believe that vibrant communities emerge when neighbours unite to create inviting spaces, share resources, and celebrate their unique cultures and histories. Whether through community events, workshops, or grassroots projects, we are committed to fostering opportunities for collaboration and mutual support. Together, we are cultivating a stronger, more connected Lethbridge, one neighbourhood at a time, creating a city where every voice is valued and every neighbourhood thrives.

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INTRODUCTION

The League of YQL Neighbourhoods (YQLN) is committed to fostering vibrant, inclusive, and connected communities throughout Lethbridge. By supporting neighbourhood associations, organizing events, and providing resources, YQLN aims to cultivate community ties and empower residents to take an active role in shaping their neighbourhoods. Neighbourhood engagement plays a critical role in building trust, improving quality of life, and creating spaces where people feel a sense of belonging.

Recognizing the importance of understanding community needs and priorities, YQLN launched the Neighbourhood Engagement Project to gather valuable insights and identify actionable steps for enhancing neighbourhood life. The initiative comprised two key components: the Neighbourhood Engagement Survey, which collected quantitative and qualitative data from residents, and the YQL Neighbourhoods Discussion, which provided qualitative insights through in-person dialogue with stakeholders.



Overview

The Neighbourhood Engagement Survey collected data on community participation, barriers, and opportunities for engagement across Lethbridge. Complementing this, the YQL Neighbourhoods Discussion provided qualitative insights from stakeholders, offering real-world perspectives on fostering connections. Together, these findings guide YQLN in cultivating inclusive and more connected neighbourhoods.

Survey Respondents: 160

Discussion Participants: 12

Data collected: October 2024

Key Focus Areas:

Strengthening Neighbourhood Connections

Cultivating a Sense of Belonging

Supporting Neighbourhood Groups

Literature Review

A growing body of research highlights the significant benefits of well-connected neighbourhoods, reinforcing the importance of fostering social ties at the community level. Social connectedness contributes to individual well-being, community resilience, safety, and civic engagement, all of which are crucial for fostering thriving neighbourhoods.

Community Level

- **Greater resilience in crises** – Strong neighbourhood ties enhance a community’s ability to respond to and recover from challenges such as natural disasters and public health emergencies (Aldrich & Meyer, 2019; Hall et al., 2023).
- **Increased safety and cohesion** – Higher levels of social cohesion are linked to lower crime rates, as residents look out for one another and take collective action when needed (Breedvelt et al., 2022).
- **Higher civic engagement and advocacy** – Neighbours who feel connected are more likely to participate in local decision-making, vote, and engage in volunteer activities (Putnam, 2000; Verba et al., 1995).
- **Economic and social stability** – Local businesses thrive in areas with strong neighbourhood connections, and investment in community infrastructure increases (Granovetter, 1973; Bailey et al., 2018).
- **Improved public health and well-being** – Residents of connected communities report lower stress levels, better mental health, and an increased likelihood of engaging in healthy lifestyles (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; OECD, 2013).



Individual Level

- **Social support and reduced isolation** – Knowing one’s neighbours fosters a sense of belonging and reduces loneliness, particularly for seniors, newcomers, and vulnerable populations (Smith et al., 2023; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2024).
- **Enhanced security and trust** – Individuals who feel connected to their neighbours report feeling safer in their community and are more likely to participate in neighbourhood safety initiatives (Breedvelt et al., 2022).
- **Higher life satisfaction and well-being** – People with strong social ties experience greater happiness, reduced stress, and an increased sense of belonging (OECD, 2013; Lewicka, 2011).
- **Opportunities for mutual aid** – Socially connected residents benefit from informal networks of support, whether through shared resources, childcare, or job opportunities (Putnam, 2000; Granovetter, 1973).
- **Positive impacts on youth development** – Young people growing up in socially cohesive neighbourhoods are more likely to develop leadership skills, engage in civic life, and experience lower rates of anxiety and depression (Harvard Kennedy School, 2006; Breedvelt et al., 2022).

These findings underscore the importance of neighbourhood-level initiatives, such as those undertaken by YQLN, in fostering engagement and strengthening community ties. By investing in strategies that enhance neighbourhood connections, communities can become safer, healthier, and more vibrant.



DEMOGRAPHIC HIGHLIGHTS



ENGAGEMENT BY AREA

Survey responses highlighted regional variations in engagement levels across West, North, and South Lethbridge. Participation was the highest in neighbourhoods like Copperwood, Ridgewood, and Indian Battle Heights (all west side neighbourhoods) each with 12 responses. Conversely, areas like Southgate, Sunridge, Blackwolf, and Willowbrook recorded only 1 response each, indicating significant gaps in engagement.

The survey respondents provide important and valuable context for understanding diverse community perspectives. Key demographic indicators, included homeownership, household composition, and age distribution.

Homeownership: The vast majority (85.86%) of respondents own their homes.

Household Composition: Most respondents identified living in two-person households (38.38%), with three- and four-person households being the next most common.

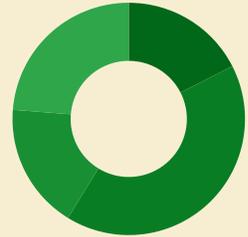
Age Demographics: The largest age group is 35-44 years of age (30%), with 78% of respondents falling between the ages of 25 and 54.

The findings show higher engagement in west-side neighbourhoods and highlight a homeowner majority, smaller households, and a focus on residents aged 25-54.

KEY FINDINGS

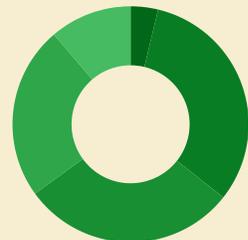
Presence and Activity of Neighbourhood Groups

Survey data revealed that **41.25%** of respondents were aware of active online neighbourhood groups, predominantly on Facebook, while **17.5%** cited formal associations. Another **17.5%** reported no active group in their area, and **23.75%** were unsure. During the discussion, participants emphasized the need for increased visibility and support for both formal and informal groups.



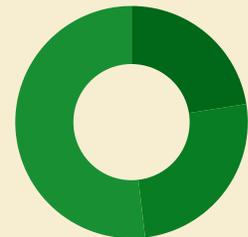
Levels of Social Connection

The survey found that **64.38%** of respondents knew six or more of their neighbours, with **51.88%** expressing a desire to deepen these connections. Insights from the discussion underscored the role of casual interactions—like greetings, small acts of kindness, and shared spaces—in fostering a sense of community. Proximity was identified as a key factor influencing the strength of social ties.



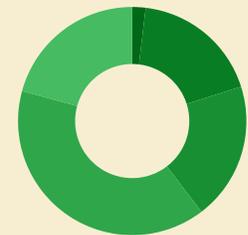
Participation in Activities

While **60.38%** of respondents reported participating in neighbourhood activities (e.g., cleanups, garage sales, seasonal events), **39.62%** indicated they did not engage due to barriers such as time constraints, lack of awareness, or personal preferences. Discussion participants highlighted the importance of offering diverse, accessible events to meet varying interests and schedules.



Desired Neighbourhood Activities

Both survey and discussion responses revealed strong interest in block parties, festivals, family-oriented events, and community improvement projects. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of creating inclusive and sustainable activities that bring people together organically, such as communal gardens and walking groups.



Role of Neighbourhood Associations (NAs)

Neighbourhood associations are widely recognized as crucial for fostering community building and organizing events. Survey respondents highlighted their importance in promoting safety, coordinating resources, and advocating for local improvements. NAs also serve as a conduit for sharing information, raising awareness of community happenings, and providing logistical support for neighbourhood initiatives.

However, concerns about over-regulation emerged, with some respondents wary of NAs adopting structures akin to homeowner associations (HOAs). Stakeholders in the discussion stressed the need for NAs to remain flexible, inclusive, and focused on empowering residents rather than enforcing rigid rules. Ensuring that NAs prioritize accessibility and act as facilitators, rather than gatekeepers, will be essential for maintaining community trust and participation.



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Role of YQLN

YQLN is seen as a pivotal and important resource for connecting neighbourhoods by supporting both formal and informal neighbourhood groups. Both survey respondents and discussion participants alike emphasized the following key roles for YQLN:

- Leadership Development: Providing training and mentorship for community leaders to build capacity and confidence in organizing neighbourhood initiatives.
- Logistical Assistance: Simplifying event planning processes by offering toolkits, guides, and resources to address common challenges such as permits, insurance, and funding.
- Resource Provision: Centralizing tools and information to make it easier for residents and associations to access support for their initiatives.
- Advocacy and Representation: Acting as a voice for neighbourhoods in municipal decision-making, ensuring that residents' needs and priorities are heard.

Inclusivity emerged as a core theme, with respondents urging YQLN to engage underrepresented groups and ensure equitable resource distribution across neighbourhoods. Reducing barriers like red tape and limited communication will further empower communities and foster connections.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Enhance Community Events and Activities

Expand informal gatherings like block parties and BBQs, and promote inclusive, family-friendly events year-round. Create a neighbourhood activity calendar and partner with local organizations to reflect the community's cultural diversity.

Strengthen Communication and Awareness

Develop a communication plan using newsletters, social media, and community boards. Welcome new residents with kits featuring event schedules and group information, and establish a centralized online hub for updates and resources.

Empower Neighbourhood Associations

Support associations with toolkits, mentorship, and leadership training. Promote flexible, event-focused models to avoid over-regulation and build community trust.

Target Underrepresented Neighbourhoods

Identify low-engagement areas and recruit ambassadors to connect communities. Create tailored programs to address specific barriers and needs.

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Simplify Resource Access and Event Planning

Provide toolkits for event planning and advocate for streamlined city processes to reduce barriers. Offer micro-grants to support neighbourhood initiatives.

Promote Volunteerism and Leadership Development

Launch campaigns to highlight volunteer opportunities and benefits. Offer low-commitment roles to encourage participation and develop leadership programs for future community leaders.

Foster Inclusivity and Accessibility

Design culturally inclusive and accessible events, co-hosted with local organizations in underserved areas. Prioritize outreach to marginalized groups to ensure diverse participation.

Advocate for Neighbourhood Needs

Enhance YQLN's advocacy role by representing neighbourhood priorities to city officials. Host annual forums for community input and act as a liaison to address local needs like infrastructure and safety.

By implementing these recommendations, YQLN can strengthen connections and inclusivity across Lethbridge neighbourhoods and among neighbours. Expanding community events and promoting cultural diversity will bring neighbours together, while improved communication will keep residents informed and engaged. Empowering neighbourhood groups and addressing engagement gaps in underrepresented areas will ensure equitable participation. Simplifying resources, offering micro-grants, and fostering volunteerism will inspire local initiatives and leadership development, creating a stronger sense of belonging and trust citywide.





CONCLUSION

Neighbourhood engagement is essential for building resilient, safe, and connected communities. Research highlights the far-reaching benefits of strong social ties, from lower crime rates and higher civic participation to improved health and economic stability. YQLN's findings reinforce the need for visibility, accessibility, and inclusivity in fostering engagement across Lethbridge.

While many residents actively participate in community life, barriers such as time constraints, lack of awareness, and limited local support prevent broader involvement. Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between neighbourhood associations, community supports, and YQLN to create inclusive, sustainable opportunities for connection.

To move forward, YQLN will focus on:

- Expanding community-led initiatives to foster organic neighbourhood connections.
- Enhancing communication strategies to keep residents informed and engaged.
- Providing flexible support for neighbourhood associations to sustain participation.
- Targeting underrepresented areas to ensure equitable community engagement.
- Advocating for policies and resources that strengthen neighbourhood cohesion.

This report provides a foundation for action, but lasting change depends on ongoing collaboration. When neighbours connect, communities thrive. Together, we can build a Lethbridge where every voice is valued and every neighbourhood flourishes.

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*Thank
you!*

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Appendix A: Methodology

Explanation of the methods used for data collection, analysis, and integration of survey and discussion findings.

Neighbourhood Engagement Survey

Purpose: The survey was designed to gather quantitative data on community participation, social connections, barriers to engagement, and desired activities.

Distribution: The survey was distributed online through social media platforms, email newsletters, and community group networks to ensure broad accessibility.

Participation: A total of 160 residents across Lethbridge participated, representing diverse neighbourhoods and demographics.

Timeline: Data collection occurred during October 2024, ensuring sufficient time for community members to provide thoughtful responses.

Questionnaire Design: The survey included a mix of multiple-choice, Likert scale, and open-ended questions, focusing on:

- Presence and activity of neighbourhood groups.
- Levels of social connection and participation in neighbourhood activities.
- Barriers to engagement and suggestions for desired events and initiatives.
- Perceptions of neighbourhood associations and YQLN's role.

Neighbourhood Engagement Survey

Purpose: This in-person session provided qualitative insights by facilitating dialogue among stakeholders, including residents, community leaders, and neighbourhood association representatives.

Format: The discussion featured structured activities such as group discussions, to explore challenges, opportunities, and strategies for fostering community connections

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Participants: Twelve stakeholders participated in the session, representing diverse neighbourhoods and perspectives.

Timeline: The discussion was conducted on October 17, 2024, providing an opportunity to complement survey findings with real-world perspectives. A second schedule was scheduled on October 19, 2024, but canceled due to low attendance.

Data Analysis Methodologies

Quantitative Analysis

- **Descriptive Statistics:** Responses to the survey's multiple-choice and Likert scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends and patterns.
- **Thematic Categorization:** Open-ended survey responses were categorized into themes to identify common barriers, opportunities, and suggestions for improvement.

Qualitative Analysis

- **Thematic Coding:** Insights from the in-person discussion were transcribed and analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring ideas, challenges, and strategies for fostering neighbourhood connections.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Qualitative findings were compared against survey results to validate trends and enhance the depth of understanding.

Integration of Findings

Triangulation: Quantitative data from the survey and qualitative insights from the discussion were combined to provide a comprehensive understanding of neighbourhood engagement.

Validation: Common themes, such as barriers to participation and desired activities, were cross-referenced across both sources to ensure consistency and reliability.

Synthesis: Insights from both data sources were merged to inform actionable recommendations, aligning quantitative trends with real-world perspectives from stakeholders.

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Appendix B: Survey Questions

A complete list of questions used in the Neighbourhood Engagement Survey and Discussion.

Survey Questions

Does your neighbourhood have an active neighbourhood group?
How many people do you know in your neighbourhood?
How do you feel about your answer to question 2?
How do you engage with your next door neighbours?
How do you engage with the majority of people within your neighbourhood?
Based on your answers to questions 4 and 5, how do you feel about how you engage?
Which activities do you participate in within your neighbourhood?
If you do not participate in any, why not?
How do you commute within your neighbourhood?
What role do you see a Neighbourhood Association having in your neighbourhood?
How might you see YQLN providing support to neighbourhood groups?
How can YQLN support volunteerism/engagement within neighbourhoods with respective neighbourhood groups?
How would you rank YQLNs proposed projects?
[Region and demographic questions not listed]

Discussion Questions

How would you define a strong community?
What are the characteristics of a positive, thriving community?
What do you value / love about your community neighbourhood?
What are your neighbourhood's strengths / assets?
What would you like to see more of in your community neighbourhood?
What ideas / opportunities would help improve your neighbourhood?
How do we stay connected in our community neighbourhoods?
What are some of the ways people stay connected / get together?
What is the role of our local Neighbourhood Associations?

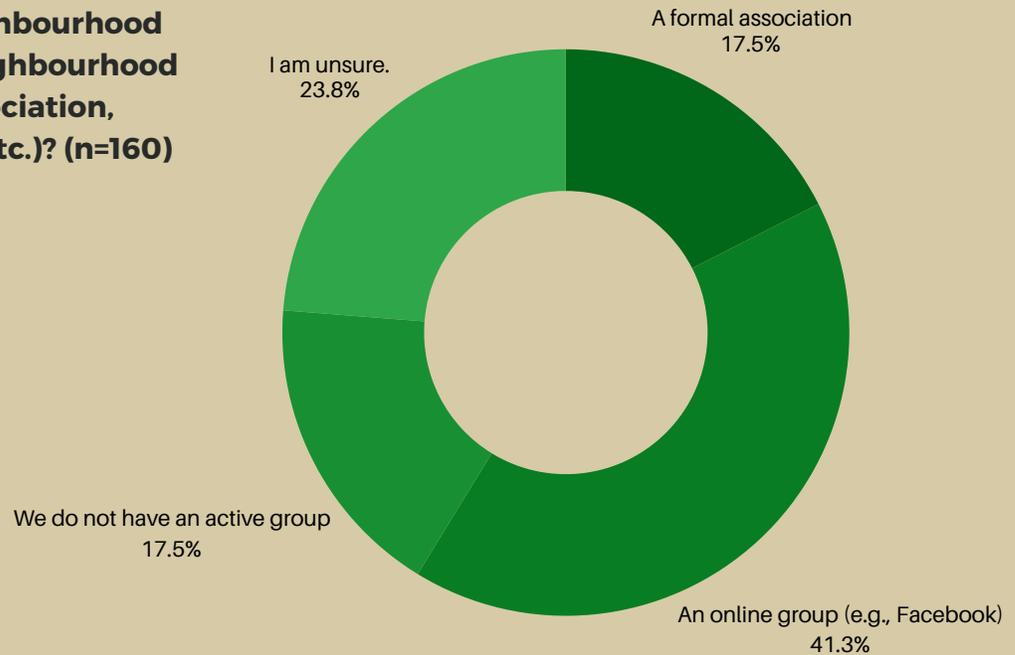
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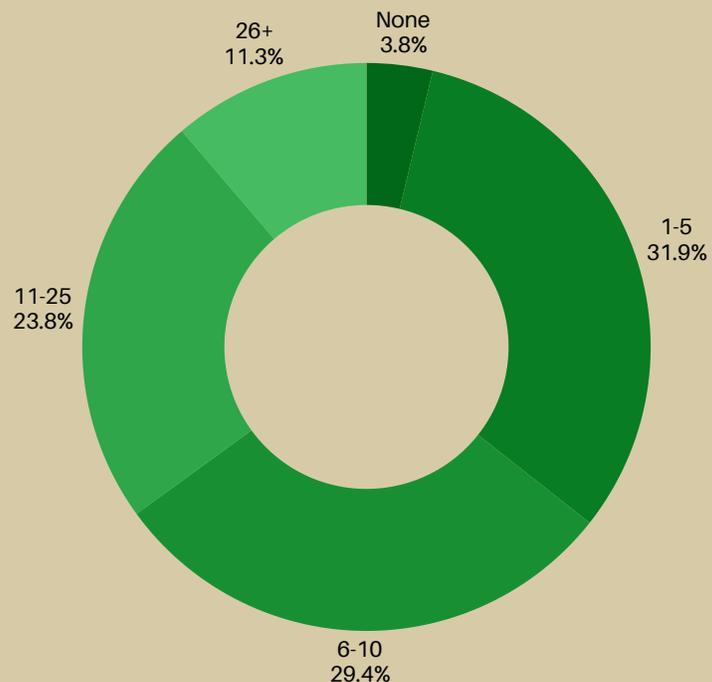
Appendix C: Survey Data Tables

Detailed tables showing response breakdowns by question.

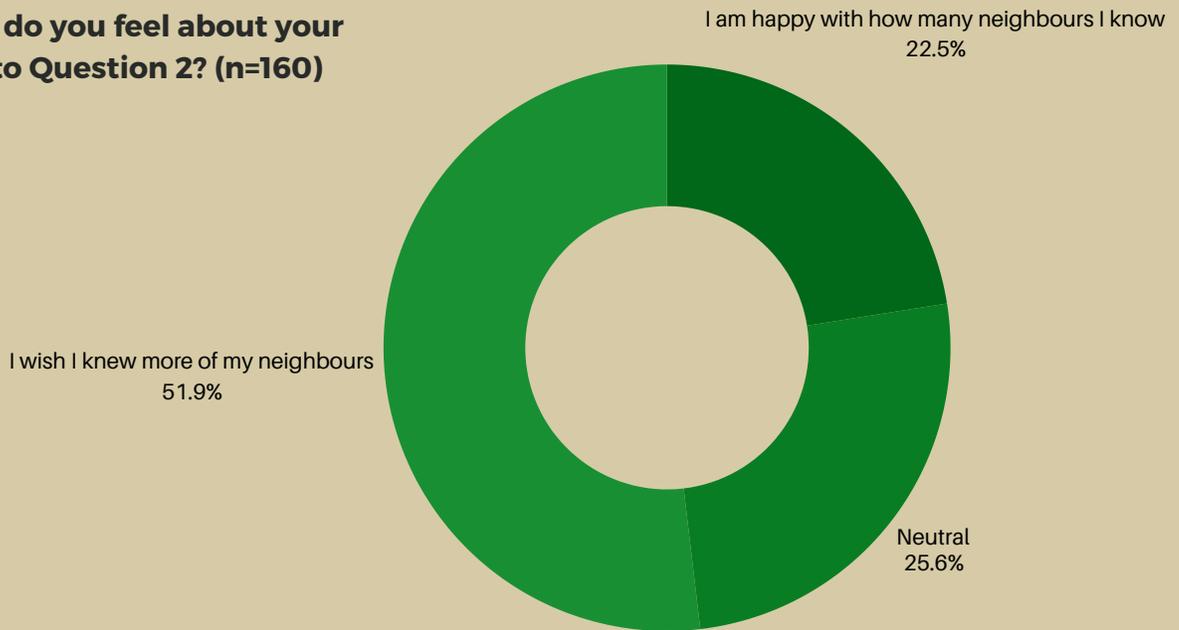
Q1: Does your neighbourhood have an active neighbourhood group (formal association, Facebook group, etc.)? (n=160)



Q2: How many people do you know within your neighbourhood? (n=160)



Q3: How do you feel about your answer to Question 2? (n=160)

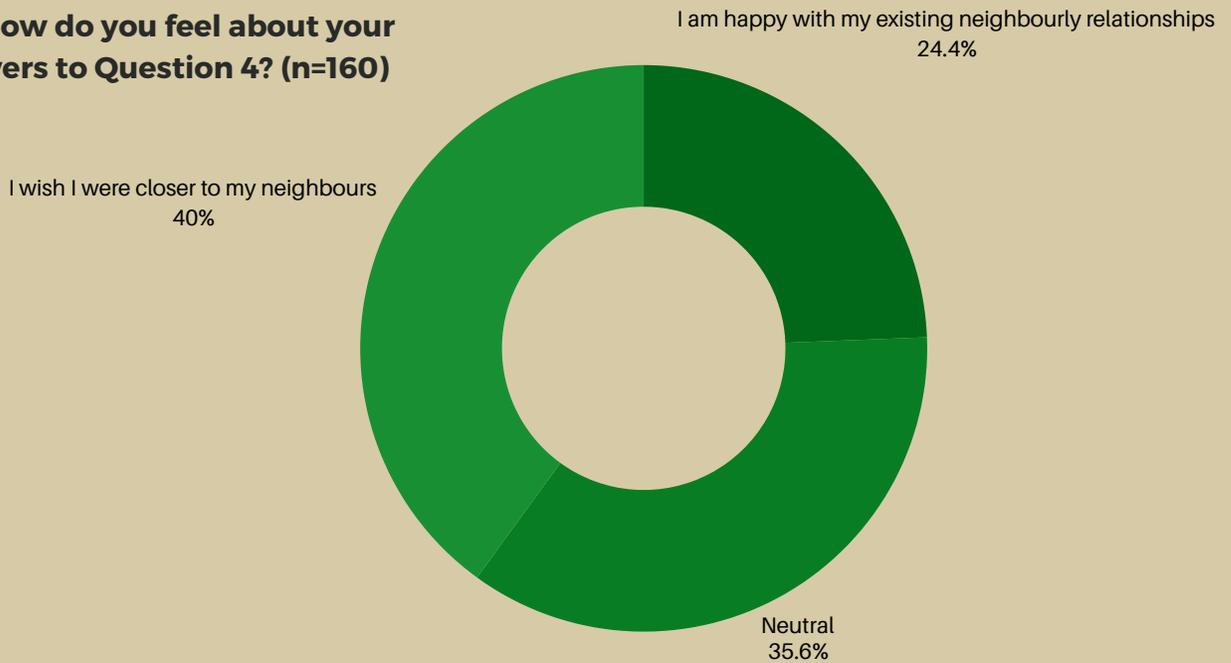


Q4: How do you engage with... (n=160)

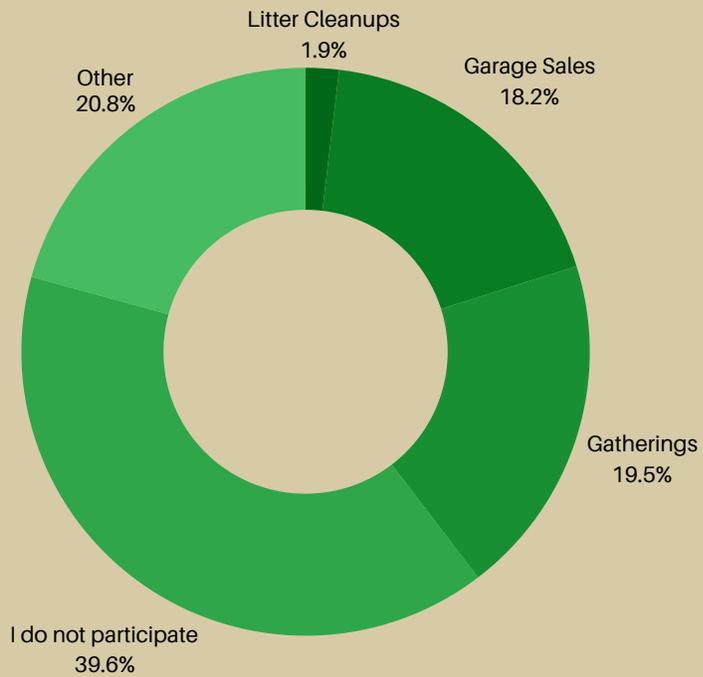
- I never see them
- I rarely see them
- I say "hi" if I happen to see them
- Acquaintances - we have exchanged contact info
- Friends - we get together occasionally
- Close friends - we get together often



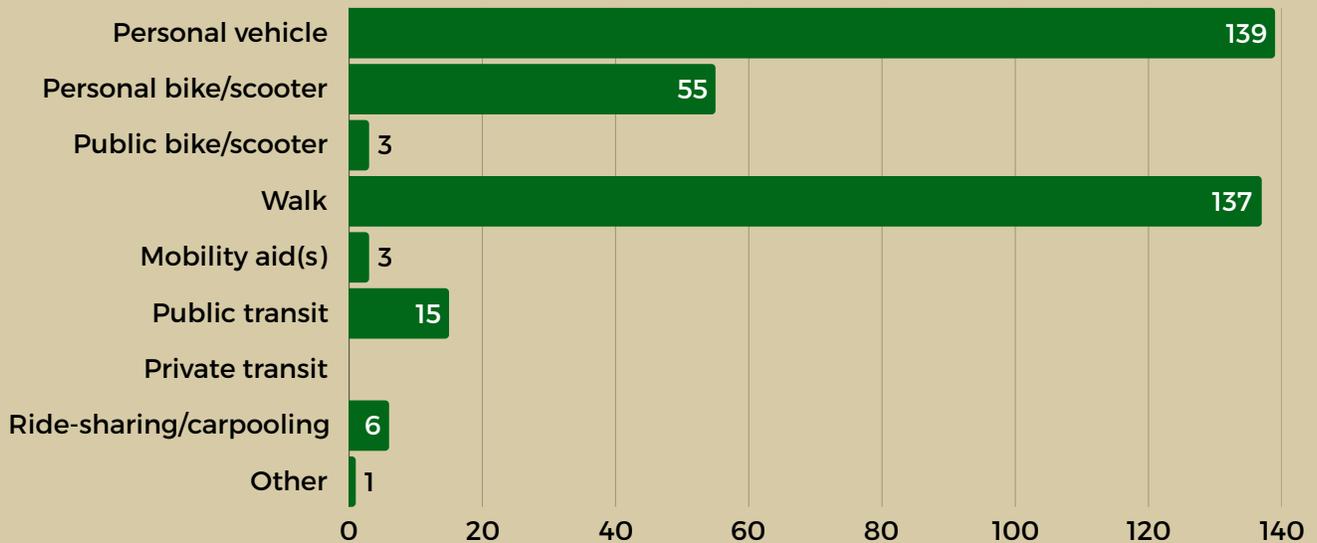
Q5: How do you feel about your answers to Question 4? (n=160)



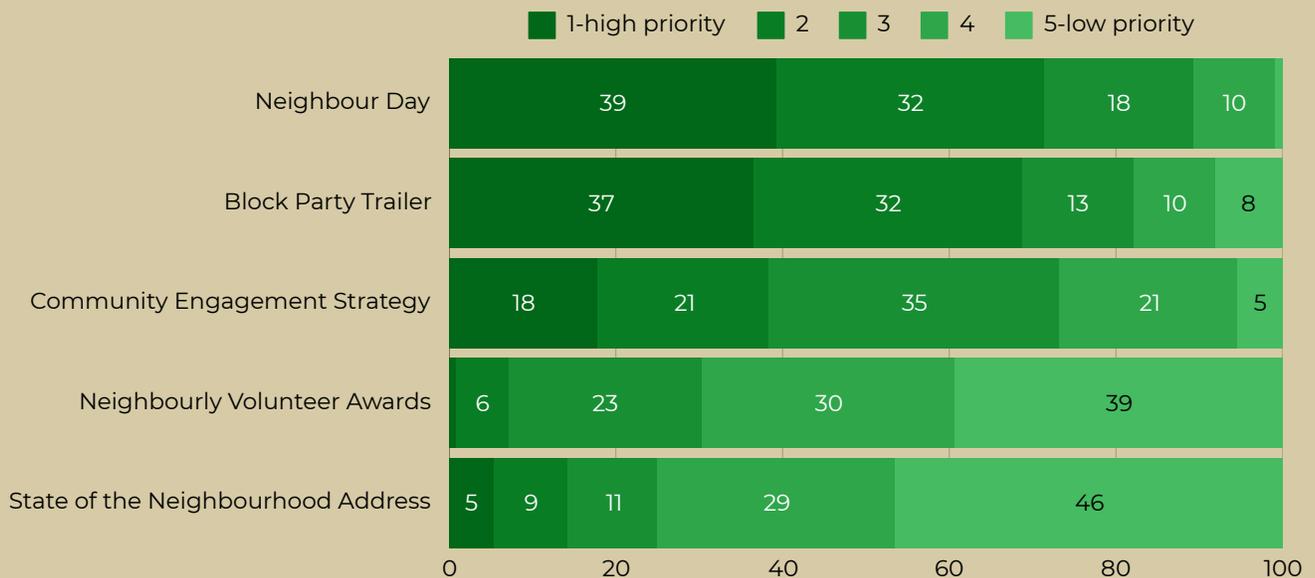
Q6: What activities do you participate in within your neighbourhood? (n=159)



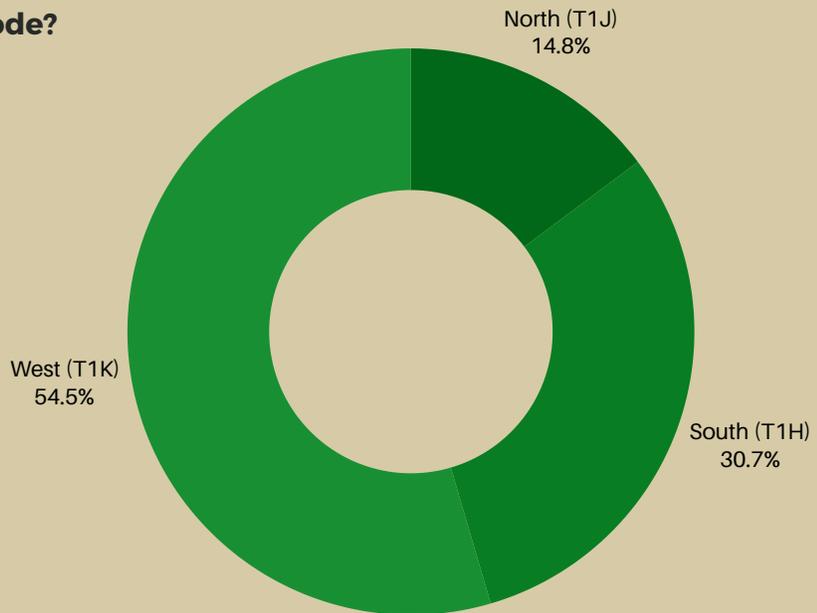
Q9: How do you commute in your neighbourhood? (n=160)



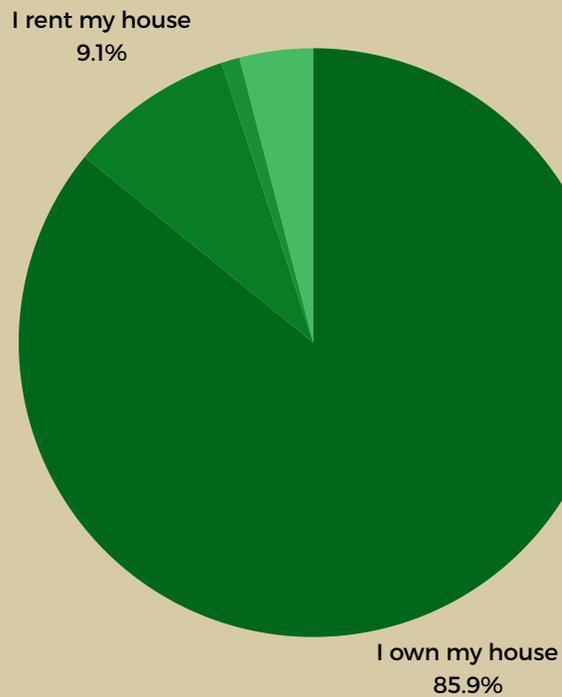
Q13: How would you rank the priority of the following proposed YQLN projects? 1 = highest priority, 5 = lowest priority (n=112)



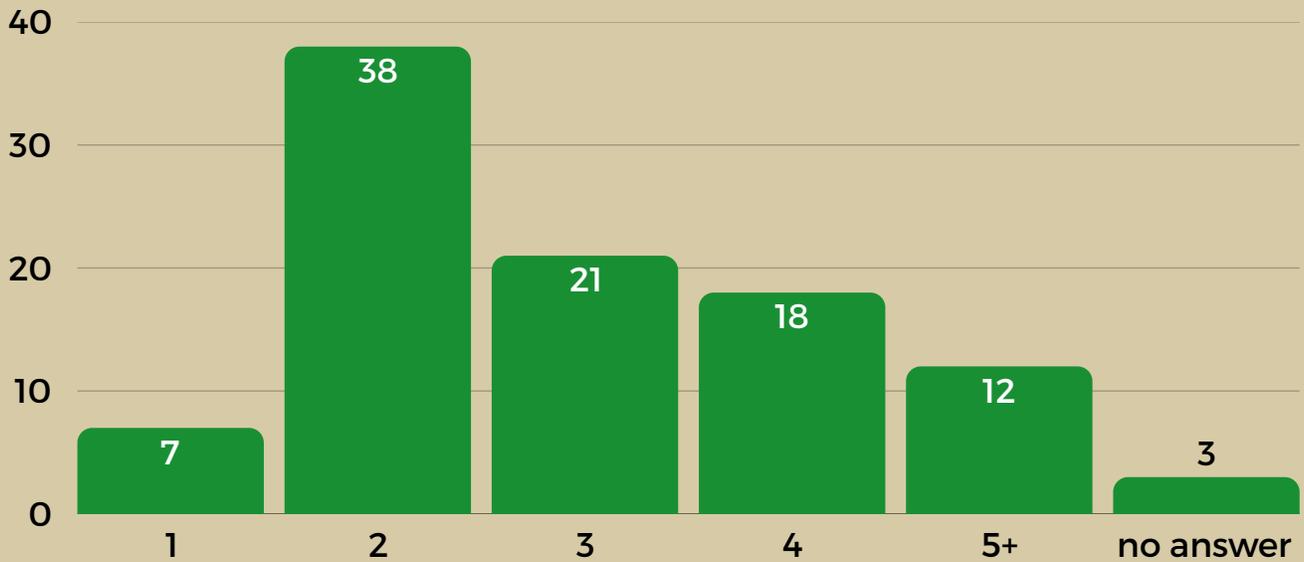
**Q14: What is your postal code?
(n=90)**



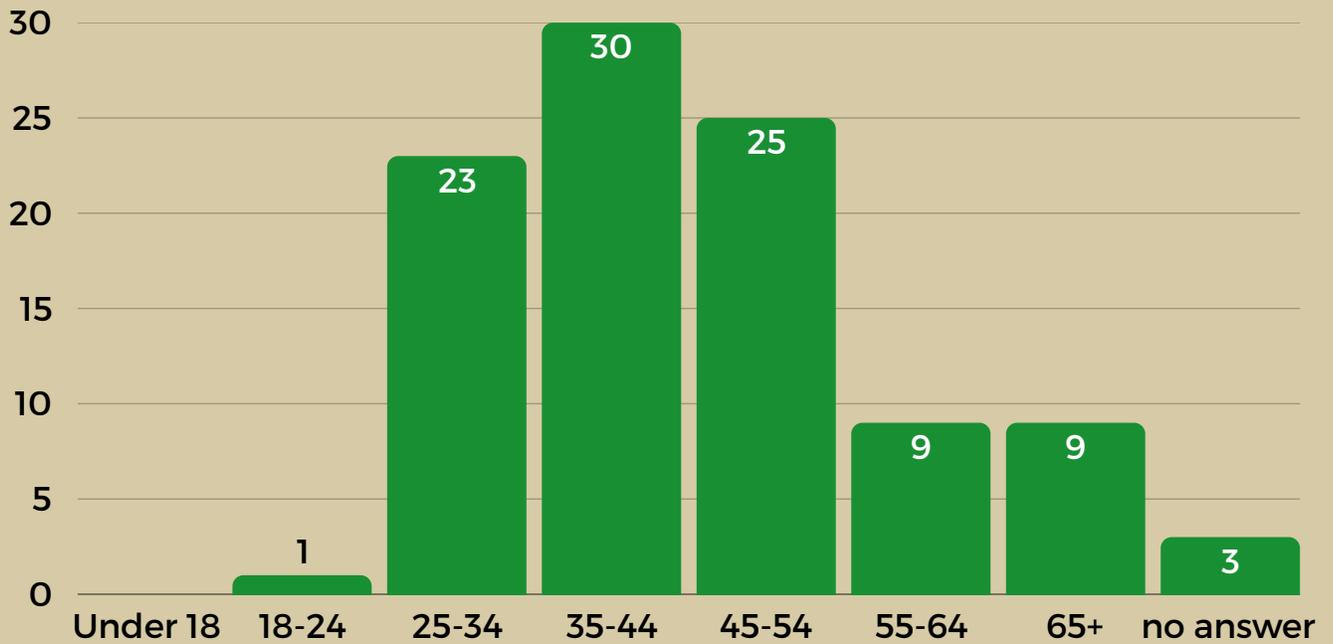
Q16: Current housing situation (n=99)



Q17: How many people live in your household? (n=99)



Q18: Please select your age group. (n=100)



Appendix D: Discussion Summary

Key themes and insights from the YQL Neighbourhoods Discussion.

Defining Community

A thriving community is built on belonging, genuine relationships, shared spaces, diversity, and intentional design. It fosters solidarity, participation, and connection through shared values and inclusive infrastructure.

Valued Neighbourhood Elements

- **Natural Environment:** Parks, trees, and green spaces are essential assets.
- **Community Engagement:** Action-oriented neighbours and shared values strengthen connections.
- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Varied demographics and housing enrich community life.
- **Accessibility and Infrastructure:** Well-maintained, easily accessible neighbourhoods enhance appeal.

Neighbourhood Needs

- **Infrastructure:** More community spaces, and pedestrian-friendly design.
- **Cultural Enrichment:** Greater focus on arts, events, and public gatherings.
- **Safety and Cleanliness:** Address safety concerns and promote clean public spaces.
- **City Engagement:** Strengthen partnerships with the City of Lethbridge.
- **Community Healing:** Foster post-COVID connection and belonging.

Ways to Connect

Engagement:

- **Casual Interactions:** Everyday greetings and gestures foster familiarity and connection.
- **Acts of Kindness:** Mutual aid and shared resources build trust among neighbours.
- **Shared Experiences:** Bonding over common challenges strengthens solidarity.
- **Volunteering:** Local initiatives enhance community spirit and create deeper connections.

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Events:

- Local Gatherings: BBQs, parades, and festivals encourage resident interaction.
- Neighbour Day: Structured events to foster community ties.

Community Spaces (Bumping Spaces):

Accessible places like parks, gardens, libraries, and courts naturally bring residents together.

Communication and Updates:

- Information Sharing: Newsletters, social media, and websites keep residents informed.
- Institutional Networks: Schools, faith organizations, and clubs act as hubs for collaboration.

Role of Neighbourhood Associations

Support and Resources:

- Tools for Building: Associations provide templates and resources for local projects.
- Initial Guidance: Early-stage support helps kickstart community-driven ideas.

Information and Communication:

- Information Hub: Associations link residents to city updates and resources.
- Resource Access: They guide neighbourhoods to grants and opportunities.

Leadership and Advocacy:

- Core Leadership: Associations organize events, advocate for needs, and mobilize communities.
- Representation: They amplify concerns to local governments and ensure neighbourhood interests are heard.

Fostering Connection:

- Shared Spaces: Associations encourage the use of community spaces for informal gatherings.
- Event Focus: Activities in shared spaces strengthen bonds and encourage organic interactions.

Neighbourhood Associations go beyond administration—they spark engagement, connect people, and drive grassroots action. Even without formal structures, local leaders and groups are essential for fostering cohesive, thriving communities.

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Appendix E: Additional Resources

References to YQLN resources, including toolkits, guides, and event planning support.

YQLN Website (yqlneighbourhoods.ca)

The YQLN website offers a collection of valuable resources and tools designed to support the development and sustainability of neighbourhood associations.

Tools page includes:

- 10 Benefits of Neighbourhood Association: Highlights the key advantages of forming a neighbourhood association.
- Lethbridge Neighbourhood Assoc – General Info: Provides foundational information about incorporating a neighbourhood association.
- Drafting and Revising Bylaws: A guide to creating and maintaining effective bylaws.
- Membership Development: Strategies to grow and engage membership.
- Strategic Planning and Governance: Tools for effective organizational planning and governance.
- Writing a Grant Proposal: Guidance on crafting compelling grant applications.

Resource page includes:

- Neighbourhood Block Party Planning Guide: A comprehensive guide to organizing and hosting successful block parties, including tips on planning, logistics, and creating an inclusive, enjoyable event for all.
- More to come

Neighbourhood Groups page includes:

A comprehensive list of Lethbridge neighbourhoods with existing groups that residents can engage with. For those whose neighbourhood is not yet represented, resources and support are available to help establish a new group or association.

Email: weareyqlneighbourhoods@gmail.com | Facebook: [@yqlneighbourhoods](https://www.facebook.com/yqlneighbourhoods)

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