# New Measures of Public Safety

## A Youth-Led Vision in Saint Paul

Photo courtesy of the Saint Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety

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# Table of Contents

# A Letter from Saint Paul Mayor Melvin Carter

## How can we tell if our neighborhoods feel safe?

In Saint Paul, we are moving beyond relying solely on crime data and the absence of crime. We are also taking into account the *presence* of safety. Our Community-First Public Safety framework is grounded in community engagement, especially with our young people who are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of violence and trauma. When they share their experiences, they help shape our approach to public safety. They gain ownership of the outcomes.

Since 2020, we have worked with the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) to reshape our public safety system. With guidance and research support from the GPL, we created the Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS), led by Director Brooke Blakey. ONS also coordinates Saint Paul's violence prevention and alternative response initiatives, working to ensure our public safety strategy is responsive to residents. The Community-Based Indicator (CBI) pilot, the findings of which are detailed in this report, took an unfiltered deep dive into the reality of our young people, providing us with data and analysis that will help us reimagine our policies and procedures. The research compiled in the CBI report was conducted independently of my office. The GPL and World Youth Connect (WYC), a local, youth-led, and community-based organization, collaborated to interview 50 young people from Saint Paul who self-identified as being highly affected by violence and more than half of whom identified as Black.

Throughout this report, young Saint Paulites describe daily routines that are shaped by a persistent fear of violence — like moving from car to car on the light rail, staying indoors at night, and avoiding certain walking and driving routes. These behaviors demonstrate the enormous burden placed on young people when they don't feel safe, which traditional measures of public safety fail to capture. As one participant described, "If you're doing [research] about Saint Paul and you're trying to figure out what's safe and what's not safe, you need to know the hard, uncut version of what's going on."

The results of the CBI pilot have created a blueprint for Saint Paul and communities across the country to elevate the voices of those who are often excluded from the policymaking process and yet are most likely to feel its effects. This data helps us build on the efficacy of our public safety system and move closer to a model where measuring the presence and perception of safety is just as vital as the absence of crime.

To the young people who participated in this innovative project: thank you for your bravery in sharing your experiences. Your voices are indispensable in our ongoing work of reimagining our public safety system, holding officials accountable, and creating safer outcomes for everyone.



Melvin Carter

*Mayor of Saint Paul, Minnesota*

# Executive Summary

**In communities across the United States, mayors and other public leaders say public safety is a top priority.[1] But those leaders face a pressing challenge: they do not have the tools they need to measure public safety in a way that accounts for what residents experience in their daily lives. Without these insights, leaders report that they do not know if their decisions — the policies they set, the funding they allocate, and the institutions they oversee — meaningfully improve public safety for residents.**

Most jurisdictions maintain two separate systems to assess public safety. For performance management, public safety leaders regularly meet to evaluate crime and violence data. They use insights from these data to determine public safety priorities and plans. At the same time, many jurisdictions, often through offices of neighborhood safety or violence prevention, run deep community engagement processes. These processes capture resident perspectives and can elevate concerns on public safety that are not reflected in traditional law enforcement metrics.

The problem is that the rich qualitative data gathered from intensive resident engagement is rarely used in tandem with traditional law enforcement metrics to inform public safety management in real time. This disconnect means that the needs of the communities with the most at stake — those that are subject to high levels of violence and policing, especially Black and disinvested communities — are not sufficiently represented in the real-time public safety decision-making process, even if they participate in community engagement programs.

One way to bridge this gap is to develop and use community-based public safety indicators for public management. In this report, the Harvard Kennedy School Government Performance Lab (GPL) proposes a set of actionable indicators to measure observable changes in behavior among an often-overlooked group in public safety conversations: youth. The indicators were created for the city of Saint Paul as part of the GPL's ongoing collaboration with Saint Paul's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS). They are the result of a community-based participatory research model that the GPL co-designed with World Youth Connect (WYC), a local, youth-led, community-based organization.

To conduct this research, the GPL and WYC ran interviews and focus groups with 50 young people from Saint Paul who self-identified as highly impacted by violence.[2] The interviews were designed to learn what makes youth feel unsafe and how their behavior would change if they felt safe, which included asking a subset of participants to rank activities by priority of what they would do more often if their neighborhood was safer.[3] The GPL and ONS focused this research on youth because of an increase in violence involving youth in Saint Paul.

The GPL's research finds that youth feel unsafe in their daily lives and that they significantly alter their behavior as a result. The GPL identified four common themes that capture youth experiences with safety: the need to be consistently on guard, exposure to drug use on the METRO Green Line, interacting with the police, and social media use. These findings underscore the value of listening to community members; several of the most cited causes for feeling unsafe, particularly the train, were not previously a focal point of public safety efforts. Other areas, like social media, are perceived differently by youth than community leaders, and these differences may have significant policymaking implications when it comes to public safety. Existing measures of public safety simply do not capture what youth experience in Saint Paul.

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[1] Learn more in a 2023 GPL report, *Mayor to Mayor: Taking the Lead on Police Accountability.*

[2] We define "highly impacted by violence" as meeting at least one of four criteria: exposure to an incident of violence (90% of participants); having a relative or close friend pass away from violence (48%); youth or relative incarcerated due to violence (44%); residing in a neighborhood with two or more violent incidents per month (84%).

[3] To see the entire list of activities ranked by youth, see the Methodology section.

The GPL used these themes to develop and prioritize indicators of public safety, such as playing outside and riding the train, and corresponding metrics that Saint Paul can use to measure each indicator, such as the number of young people utilizing public spaces. These indicators, each of which is detailed in this report, reflect the types of actions youth would take if they felt safe, providing potentially observable metrics that Saint Paul could use to test measuring the presence of safety in a neighborhood. These indicators and corresponding metrics are explored more fully in Section 1 of this report.

# Research Themes: When Saint Paul Youth Feel Unsafe

> Being on guard is just being aware, ... and being aware is being alive.
>
> *— 23-year-old participant*

After discussing public safety at length with 50 young people from Saint Paul, the GPL analyzed the interviews and identified four recurring themes related to when youth feel unsafe.

### Theme 1: Being on guard
Nearly two-thirds of participants said they are constantly "on guard" in their neighborhood, monitoring their surroundings for signs of danger. Half of participants described violence as a routine occurrence, saying they are "used to it" or feel "desensitized" to it.

### Theme 2: The train
More than one-third of participants said the METRO Green Line train is a source of exposure to drug use. One-third of participants said they regularly avoid the train and instead take the bus, use rideshare apps, or walk.

### Theme 3: The police
Just under half of participants said they limit interactions with police, including changing routes and restricting 911 calls to extreme emergencies, due to fear of harm or mistaken identity. A smaller share of participants, just over one-fourth, said they feel safer in the presence of police.

### Theme 4: Social media
More than half of participants said that while they like to use social media for activities such as connecting with friends and family, they regularly encounter content that negatively affects their well-being, such as violent or disturbing videos.

# Youth Solutions and the Importance of Elevating Youth Voices

When asked how they would keep everyone safe if they were the mayor of their neighborhood, the participants offered many potential solutions, including:

- Additional investments in **community-based resources**, such as food banks, counseling services, affordable housing, and job programs, especially for individuals experiencing homelessness.

- Policy changes to **limit access to guns and drugs**, including restrictions on gun ownership and limiting access to pills and needles.

- **More community spaces and programming**, such as recreation centers, libraries, parks, and after-school programs.

- **Heightened non-police security** in their neighborhoods, such as additional security guards at schools.

Many of the participants said that through this interview process they felt heard about their safety concerns — often for the first time. One participant shared that this research "lifted a little bit off my chest to finally let other people know what's been going on, especially in my neighborhood." Participants also expressed a desire to see their insights translated into meaningful improvements to public safety in their communities.

This research benefited from the leadership and expertise of local youth. The GPL and World Youth Connect formed a Youth Research Council, a group of five young adults ages 19 to 24, to support the project through providing insights and spearheading responsibilities including participant recruitment. These researchers demonstrated how young people can lead initiatives to enhance public safety when given the opportunity.

# Recommendations: Building on and Replicating This Research

> It was nice actually having somebody to listen to something that most people really don't seem to care about, and actually know that there are people who are trying to make it better and make it a safer place.
>
> — *18-year-old participant*

The GPL offers recommendations rooted in this research to three key stakeholder groups:

## Mayors and Public Safety Officials

- Gather resident input to develop and test community-based indicators that provide real-time feedback on which public safety interventions make residents feel safer.

- Commit to involving residents as public safety solutions are designed and implemented to leverage local expertise.  Residents are often only engaged during initial listening sessions, but their perspectives are also valuable during design and implementation.

### Saint Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) and Collaborating Agencies

- Test measuring one or more of the indicators proposed in this report over the next year to improve the evaluation of current Saint Paul public safety programming and policies.

- Continue to engage Saint Paul residents in providing insight and feedback on indicators related to local experience, especially those residents personally impacted by violence and those living in neighborhoods with high levels of violence.

## Public Safety Researchers

- Use public safety priorities elevated by youth to engage in research assessing public safety investments that are more responsive to youth experience, including those that promote the presence of public safety beyond the absence of crime.

- Assess the accuracy of new public safety measures to detect public sentiment of safety. Researchers should evaluate the extent to which new public safety measures are responsive to aspects of resident safety that are not reflected in existing crime-based measures and determine whether the new safety measures are sensitive enough to pick up on improvements in perceived safety that may occur when public safety interventions occur.

# Indicators and Example Metrics

Based on the themes identified in this report, the GPL developed eight indicators of public safety, described in the table below. The table also includes example metrics that a jurisdiction could use to regularly measure the indicator.

## Eight Indicators of Public Safety in Saint Paul

If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would more frequently...

| Indicator | Example Metrics |
|---|---|
| **Neighborhood Indicators** | |
| **Play outside,** including biking, running, or taking walks | • Number of young people playing in an outdoor area without immediate adult supervision and number of young people utilizing public spaces (collected by having a city employee record the number of youth present at selected outdoor areas at regular intervals and adjusting for seasonality)<br>• Number of young people engaging in outdoor sports or recreational activities (collected from rosters or attendance data on participants) |
| **Move freely without worry,** including visiting nearby stores | • Number of young people outside demonstrating signs of moving freely such as walking or running in their neighborhood (potentially collected with anonymized, aggregate cellphone location data)<br>• Number of young people visiting local businesses (potentially collected with anonymized, aggregate cellphone location data) |
| **Socialize with others,** including hanging out with family and friends | • Number of young people engaging in in-person social interactions with peers or family members, in after-school programming, or other community events (collected from a youth survey or a more sophisticated cellphone data analysis)<br>• Number of young people attending group activities such as those organized by school, religious, or community-based organizations (collected from attendance rosters) |
| **Attend social gatherings,** such as fairs or cultural events | • Number of young people attending events in their own neighborhood (crowd counts at events)<br>• Number of young people visiting social spaces such as movie theaters and arcades (measured by ticket and admissions data, annually verified through a youth survey) |
| **Go outside at night,** including visits to a park or grocery store | • Number of young people/residents going to the grocery store or other local business after dark (measured with anonymized cellphone data or potentially with sales data by time of purchase)<br>• Number of young women demonstrating signs of moving freely outside at night (e.g., walking at a slower pace or running for exercise at night; potentially measured using traffic cams and security camera footage) |
| **Train Indicators** | |
| **Ride the train,** including to get to work and visit friends | • Number of young people/riders riding the train outside of school hours (measured from swipes of youth metro cards)<br>• Number of young people/riders riding the train at night (measured from swipes of youth metro cards) |
| **Sit in their preferred train car and seat** | • Frequency of young people/riders sitting in the middle train car (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders moving seats within the same train car throughout the duration of a ride (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders reporting being able to sit in their preferred seat (measured with subway user survey) |
| **Remain in the same train car** for the duration of the ride | • Frequency of young people/riders switching cars during a trip (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders boarding first available train (measured with subway security cameras) |

**Section 1**

# *Indicators*

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## How Youth Would Measure Safety

> " I would love to just be able to go outside without worrying that something will happen to me, when someone else will just do something violent, and yeah, having walks without worrying."
>
> — *17-year-old participant*

In 2023, the GPL and [World Youth Connect](#) co-designed and conducted community-based participatory research to develop public safety indicators rooted in the experiences of Saint Paul youth highly impacted by violence. In contrast to traditional crime metrics, these indicators are designed to measure how individuals experience safety rather than the presence of violence and were generated from interviews with community members. The indicators reflect what actions participants said they would take if they felt safe, such as riding the train or going outside at night more frequently, providing potential ways to measure the presence of safety in a neighborhood.

In this section, we identify eight potential indicators — five of which relate to neighborhoods and three of which relate to riding the train — drawn from synthesis of interviews and focus groups with Saint Paul youth. While these indicators are rooted in the experiences of youth in Saint Paul, the themes are aligned with those elevated by researchers in cities like Oakland ([Possibility Lab](#)) and New York City ([National Innovation Service](#)), which have surfaced related resident-generated priorities around violence and stressors, public services, and the built environment. For more on how other jurisdictions can use a similar process to develop their own community-based public safety indicators, see the "Recommendations" section.

# Indicator Development

We identified eight indicators through interviews that the GPL and WYC conducted with youth who self-identified as highly impacted by violence and primarily lived in four Saint Paul neighborhoods: East Side, Frogtown/Rondon, University/Midway, and Downtown. Interviews were carried out in two phases:

- **Phase 1** consisted of semi-structured interviews with 32 youth participants, seven of whom participated in a focus group and 25 of whom were interviewed individually. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences with safety, such as "Tell me about your neighborhood" or "Tell me about a recent time you felt unsafe." These interviews yielded four themes related to the participants' sense of safety — being on guard, the train, the police, and social media — and generated three indicators related to the train.

- **Phase 2** consisted of structured interviews focused on indicators that were conducted with 18 youth participants, five of whom participated in a second focus group and 13 of whom were interviewed individually. Participants in this phase were provided with a list of activities and asked to rank them based on the likelihood that they would engage in them if they lived in a safer neighborhood.[4] They were also asked questions including, "What activities would you do with your friends if you lived in a safer neighborhood?" These interviews generated five indicators related to neighborhoods.

Several of these indicators touch on topics that have been validated by researchers examining resident perceptions of public safety in other contexts, such as if residents feel safe leaving the house at night.[5] For those indicators that have not been studied as thoroughly, it will be important not only to develop the indicators but also to further assess whether they are reflecting the specific aspect of public safety that they are meant to, using either available administrative data or drawing on new collection strategies. Below we present each of the eight indicators, beginning with a description of how youth currently experience neighborhood safety followed by a description of what youth would do in a safer neighborhood. Each indicator also includes example metrics that jurisdictions could use to turn these indicators into measures that could be collected regularly and used to track progress on community safety goals.[6]

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[4]For the complete list of activities, see the Methodology section.
[5]Whitzman, Carolyn (2008). "Community Safety Indicators: Are We Measuring What Counts?" Urban Policy and Research, 26:2 (2008), 197-211, DOI: *10.1080/08111140701665849*; Kling Jeffrey R., Jeffrey B. Liebman, and Lawrence F. Katz (2005). "Bullets Don't Got No Name: Consequences of Fear in the Ghetto" in Weisner TS, Discovering Successful Pathways in Children's Development: New Methods in the Study of Childhood and Family Life. University of Chicago Press; pp. 243-282.
[6]Additional detail on indicators is available in Appendix I.

| Number | Context | Indicator: **If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would more frequently...** |
|:---:|:---:|:---:|
| 1 | Neighborhood | Play outside, including biking, running, or taking walks. |
| 2 | Neighborhood | Move freely without worry, including visiting nearby stores. |
| 3 | Neighborhood | Socialize with others, including hanging out with family and friends. |
| 4 | Neighborhood | Attend social gatherings, such as fairs or cultural events. |
| 5 | Neighborhood | Go outside at night, including visits to a park or grocery store. |
| 6 | Train | Ride the train, including to get to work and visit friends. |
| 7 | Train | Sit in the preferred train car and seat. |
| 8 | Train | Remain in the same train car for the duration of the ride. |

# Indicator 1: Play outside

> School is safe. But if I could do more workouts outside that would be so much better than inside. I feel like getting a breath of fresh air would be so much better than staying inside.
>
> *— 17-year-old participant*

For youth in Saint Paul, a safe neighborhood means spending more time outside, playing sports, exercising, and enjoying nature. But today, many feel the risks of violence are simply too high to take advantage of the outdoors regularly.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 25% of participants (8/32) said they often avoid going outside, including playing with friends, due to fear of violence or harassment. Four participants also raised concerns with the built environment of some parks, noting insufficient lighting and lack of cleanliness. A 17-year-old participant discussing a nearby recreation center said, "I would also really like to go to El Rio [recreation center], walk to it. But walking over there, you get catcalled — a lot."

A 20-year-old said she could not go on bike rides in her old neighborhood because she did not feel safe: "'Cause bike riding is like I couldn't do it when I was living on University. It was just too much stuff going on. I didn't feel safe going outside to go on a bike ride just to clear my mind or get some exercise." She recently moved to a safer neighborhood and went on eight bike rides in two or three weeks. When asked how she feels now that she has gone on additional bike rides, she said, "fun, good, relaxing." When asked how she feels when she finishes her bike ride, she said, "My whole body just feels better. Like, I can breathe better, like my head is more clear."

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would play outside or go to a park more frequently. Participants in Phase 2 referenced playing outside a total of 37 times (some participants mentioned this multiple times), specifically saying they would:

- **Spend more time outside:** Eleven participants said they would spend more time outside, including biking, running, or taking walks.

- **Go to an outdoor space:** Seven participants said they would go to a park to play sports such as soccer, and two participants said they would visit a lake or creek.

- **Go to a recreation center:** Four participants said they would go to a recreation center, where they would play basketball and participate in other activities.

## Example Metrics

- Number of young people playing in an outdoor area without immediate adult supervision and number of young people utilizing public spaces (collected by having a city employee record the number of youth present at selected outdoor areas at regular intervals and adjusting for seasonality)

- Number of young people engaging in outdoor sports or recreational activities (collected from rosters or attendance data on participants)

# Indicator 2: Move freely without worry

> I would love to just be able to go outside without worrying that something will happen to me, when someone else will just do something violent, and yeah, having walks without worrying.
>
> — 17-year-old participant

If they felt safe, youth in Saint Paul said they would explore their communities — walking around, going shopping, and visiting new areas. Yet today, many young people carry a heavy burden, anticipating violence in many spaces. Moving freely around the neighborhood becomes a high-risk activity.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 40% of participants (13/32) said that they scan the environment around them, often looking behind their backs and using their instincts to detect signs of danger, such as the sounds of speeding cars or the smell of drugs. A 16-year-old participant said about going to the store, "I say it's safe, but I wouldn't say stay at the store for a long time. Just go there and get what you want and then go back to where you want. I wouldn't recommend nobody just sitting at the stores in my neighborhood."

A 13-year-old participant, who lost a close family member to gun violence, said of her previous neighborhood, "It was just a lot of crime." She moved to a new neighborhood a few years ago that she describes as a "really good neighborhood. Nothing really happens." When asked if she feels different being outside in her new neighborhood, she said, "It feels like I have freedom now, not being in a dangerous place where I always have to think about, 'Oh, is this going to happen?'" When asked about that freedom, she explained, "In my neighborhood, people in my neighborhood help each other. But, in my other neighborhood. it'd be like, 'Oh, you got to watch out for that person.'"

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would move freely without fear or worry more frequently. Participants in Phase 2 referenced moving freely a total of 27 times (some participants mentioned this multiple times), specifically saying they would:

- Walk around neighborhood: Ten participants said they would walk or run around their neighborhood freely and without fear or worry of unsafe incidents.

- Visit stores: Nine participants said they would walk to gas stations, restaurants, and other nearby stores.

- Drive around neighborhood: Two participants said they would drive around their neighborhood more often.

## Example Metrics

- Number of young people outside demonstrating signs of moving freely such as walking or running in their neighborhood (potentially collected with anonymized aggregate cellphone location data)

- Number of young people visiting local businesses (potentially collected with anonymized aggregate cellphone location data)

# Indicator 3: Socialize with others

> No matter if it's a man, a woman — I don't really trust anyone. If someone is passing by me on the sidewalk I would probably move further away from them just to kind of have that feeling of safety. And, I would do that with anyone.
>
> — *16-year-old participant*

In Saint Paul, participants said interacting with anyone – even friends or family – could mean danger. If they did not feel the need to protect themselves in a wide range of social situations, some participants suggested they would spend more time with those they care about – and cultivate new relationships, too.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 25% of participants (8/32) said they avoid interacting with others, aiming to avoid conflict, and 19% of participants (6/32) said they do not trust others and are skeptical of their friends. Relatedly, 34% of participants (11/32) said they analyze other people, including their walking patterns and body posture. A 23-year-old participant said, "It was almost like I was scared of my own community." When asked what he meant, he said, "I was scared of other people that were like me because I knew what it took to survive."

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would talk or hang out with people more frequently. Participants in Phase 2 referenced socializing a total of 16 times (some participants mentioned this multiple times), specifically saying they would:

- **Spend time with existing connections:** Nine participants said they would talk or hang out with people they know more frequently, such as friends and family.

- **Interact with new people:** Four participants said they would get to know their neighbors or other new people.

**Example Metrics**

- Number of young people engaging in in-person social interactions with peers or family members, in after-school programming, or other community events (collected from a youth survey or a more sophisticated cellphone data analysis)

- Number of young people attending group activities such as those organized by school, religious, or community-based organizations (collected from attendance rosters)

# Indicator 4: Attend social gatherings

> Especially for me and my identity, I would love to see [the] Pride [parade]. The Cinco de Mayo parade too. We would love to actually go again. I've never gone to a pride parade, but again, my family is afraid of violence, but I would love to see the the West Side. ... I've never seen it as much as I think I should.
>
> *— 17-year-old participant*

A safer Saint Paul would mean more youth joining cultural and civic events and enjoying public spaces, participants said. But because of the threat of violence, many youth instead choose to avoid hubs of activity, forced to choose caution over sharing in acts of community.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 25% of participants (8/32) said they go home or inside a safe place as soon as they can to protect themselves, often avoiding downtown or other hubs of activity. A 19-year-old participant said, "Even though there might be more security, nothing is safe. Nowhere is safe these days."

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would attend social gatherings more frequently. Participants in Phase 2 referenced attending events a total of 15 times (some participants mentioned this multiple times), specifically saying they would:

- **Go to a community event:** Six participants said they would go to fairs and other cultural community events.

- **Go to other social spaces:** Five participants said they would go to public spaces such as movie theaters, arcades, malls, parties, and other social activities.

**Example Metrics**

- Number of young people attending events in their own neighborhood (crowd counts at events)

- Number of young people visiting social spaces such as movie theaters and arcades (measured by ticket and admissions data, annually verified through a youth survey)

# Indicator 5: Go outside at night

> Go outside at night and be able to look at the stars and not have to worry about carrying mace in my pocket.
>
> *— 17-year-old participant*

Because they feel unsafe, many participants restrict their behaviors when it gets dark — avoiding even short stints outside whenever possible. Some participants said that if they felt safer, they would enjoy their communities at night, taking walks, visiting parks, and going to stores.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 38% of participants (12/32) said they do not feel safe going outside at night. A 16-year-old participant said he avoids taking out the trash or getting something from his nearby car at night due to the threat of gun violence.

> If it were safer, a 22-year-old participant said she and her friends would "go to a park or something, and we'd probably just also bask in the light of the moon." Another participant, a 14-year-old, said they would go on long walks to a local park at night five times a week.

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would go outside at night more frequently. Participants in Phase 2 referenced going outside at night a total of 13 times (some participants mentioned this multiple times), specifically saying they would:

- **Walk outside:** Five participants said they would take walks at night.

- **Go to a park:** Four participants said they would go to a park or lake at night.

- **Go to a store:** One participant said they would go to a corner store or grocery store at night.

## Example Metrics

- Number of young people/residents going to the grocery store or other local business after dark (measured with anonymized cellphone data or potentially with sales data by time of purchase)

- Number of young women demonstrating signs of moving freely outside at night (e.g., walking at a slower pace or running for exercise at night; potentially measured using traffic cams and security camera footage)

# Indicator 6: Ride the train

> "
> If it were safe, if it were fun to ride and there weren't people using drugs or people saying unwanted things, I would probably ride it every day.
> — *14-year-old participant*
> "

Participants recognized the potential value of riding the train in Saint Paul — as an affordable way to get to work or school, to see friends and family, and for some, to take shelter. Yet, because of the presence of drugs and threats of violence, they see the train as a source of potential harm to their well-being. Many said they try to avoid the train when they can, even incurring higher costs or foregoing certain experiences altogether.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** When asked to describe their neighborhood or a recent incident when they felt unsafe, 38% of participants (12/32) said they feel unsafe riding the METRO Green Line train due to the presence of drugs, and 16% of participants (5/32) said they feel unsafe riding the train due to the threat of physical violence. In response to feeling unsafe, 34% of participants (11/32) said they avoid the train by using other forms of transportation, such as saving to buy a car, using the bus, using rideshare apps, or walking. Participants especially avoided riding the train at night or when accompanied by children.

An 18-year-old participant said she limits riding the train and where she sits because of the presence of drugs and threats of violence. But, she said, "I actually enjoy riding the train. It's just calm and peaceful, I and I like watching everything go by … it's a little bit of a novelty to me." She especially likes looking at the churches and university buildings when the train crosses into Minneapolis. If it were safer, she would ride the train three or four times per week and sit in the middle car, where the seats are facing each other. Regarding not being able to sit where she wants, she said it is "sickening to me. … It makes me wanna scream, 'FU,' to the whole world for the way that we're living and the times that we have to live in."

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would ride the train more frequently. Participants shared multiple reasons for riding the train, including for transportation to work, school, or to see friends or family, and as a source of warmth and shelter.

## Example Metrics

- Number of young people/riders riding the train outside of school hours (measured from swipes of youth metro cards)

- Number of young people/riders riding the train at night (measured from swipes of youth metro cards)

# Indicator 7: Sit in the preferred train car and seat

> "I have always wanted to sit in the middle car … where the seats are facing each other. I don't … because I can't see people who are walking behind me. … I can't see out both windows at the same time, … and I need to be able to see my surroundings at all times..
>
> — *18-year-old participant*

For some participants that ride the train, picking a seat or car comes with high stakes — sitting in the wrong place can increase the risk of violence. If they felt safer, participants say the pressure of choosing the right spot on the train would decrease.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** To avoid confrontation or violence, 25% of participants (8/32) position themselves on the train in particular areas, such as at the back of the train where no other passengers are located behind them, or near the conductor. Participants described the middle car as particularly unsafe and therefore often avoid it.

A 20-year-old participant used to live near a train stop and considered it her "only" mode of transportation, riding it every other day. She did not feel safe on the train due to people fighting or smoking "Percs," an opioid. Before she boards the train, she looks to see if people are smoking drugs. If she sees people using drugs, she will go to the back of the car. Often, she will try to make sure she sits where her back is not to anyone, and if she sees people using drugs, she will move seats or look for people her age and go sit by them. She said she moves seats seven out of ten times due to drug use or being uncomfortable. She also pretends to be reading on her phone with only one earbud in so that people will not talk with her. This limits conversation to asking people if she can sit next to them. If the train were safe, she would say hello or talk to people, read books on the train, and ride it more during the day and night.

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would sit in their preferred train car and seat more frequently.

## Example Metrics

- Frequency of young people/riders sitting in the middle train car (measured with subway security cameras)

- Frequency of young people/riders moving seats within the same train car throughout the duration of a ride (measured with subway security cameras)

- Frequency of young people/riders reporting being able to sit in their preferred seat (measured with subway user survey)

# Indicator 8: Remain in same train car for entire ride

> *I'll either get off completely or I'll switch cars, but I have had to either switch cars or get off about every single time I've taken the train far distances.*
>
> *— 18-year-old participant*

When riding the train, some participants said the journey itself is an exercise in self-preservation. Because of the threat of exposure to drugs and potential violence, they said they move between car at various stops. If they felt safe, participants could ride the train in peace without feeling the need to re-evaluate the safety of their position with each stop.

**Youth safety in Saint Paul:** To avoid exposure to drugs and other behavior that makes them feel unsafe on the train, 19% of participants (6/32) said they move between train cars at train stops during a single trip. An 18-year-old participant who is a frequent train rider said, "I try to scan and smell the car before I get on it." If the car "smells bad" or there is a "crowd of people that don't look like they have good things in their mind, … I run to the next car. If that doesn't look like a good car, I'll just wait for the next one."

**Indicator of a safe neighborhood:** If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would more consistently remain in the same train car for the duration of the ride.

## Example Metrics

- Frequency of young people/riders switching cars during a trip (measured with subway security cameras)

- Frequency of young people/riders boarding first available train (measured with subway security cameras)

# *Research Themes*

## When Saint Paul Youth Feel Unsafe

"

On the train, it's like a cage. ... Once the door shuts and you're starting to get smacked up, you're not getting out of that. It's life or death."

*— 23-year-old participant*

# Theme 1: On guard in daily life

> "When I was younger, the Eastside was full of kids playing, ... but as you grow older, you just start to realize how dangerous it is, but you are just so used to it, you do not mind it.
>
> — *22-year-old participant*

> "It used to be so normalized for me that I literally knew and still know exactly what days I expect violence to take place on, which is Tuesdays and Thursdays. It's become such a heavy thing that ... if it doesn't happen, that's weird.
>
> — *22-year-old participant*

For many of the youth interviewed in Saint Paul, being "on guard" is a necessary state of mind that is responsive to their exposure to drug use and gun violence. Because of frequent threats to their safety, participants said they must regularly scan their surroundings for signs of danger in an effort to protect themselves and, in some cases, their children or younger siblings. Anticipating violence has become a part of daily routines.

Participants described navigating and adapting to an environment where threats to their safety are common. Participants discussed specific safety concerns, including:

### Gun violence
Twenty participants referred to gun violence as a major safety concern. A 22-year-old participant said, "It [gun violence] became so common that when Fourth of July weekend starts to roll around, you can tell the difference between a gunshot and a firework. ... It's just become such a common thing now that I'm just used to it. Like, I literally will be walking around, and if I hear it, I'll stop, but I don't even really duck anymore."

### Drug use
More than half of participants said that observing drug use, such as individuals smoking opioids, in their community, school, or on the METRO Green Line significantly harmed their sense of safety.

### Fear of violence at recreation centers and schools
Thirteen participants said they feared safety threats, such as intruder alerts and shootings, at recreation centers and schools.

Findings in this section are based on Phase 1 semi-structured interviews with 32 participants. However, Phase 2 interviews, which included more women and nonbinary participants, surfaced a notable topic that was not captured during Phase 1:

### Harassment, especially from men
Half of Phase 2 participants (9/18) expressed concern with being harassed on the METRO or in their community. These participants — all of whom were women or nonbinary, except one — were especially concerned with sexual harassment from men. A 22-year-old participant said, "I go now [to the grocery or corner store] ... once a week if not once every other week. I literally, I try to avoid it as much as possible. I do get catcalled often. ... There will always be specifically a random man like trying to talk to me or trying to get my attention even if I have in headphones, even if I'm wearing fully covered clothing, like always. ... It usually is difficult for me to go to the store because then I have to do everything in one trip, and I don't have a car. ... But if I do it at any other time, it just makes it feel more creepy, and I get in my head about it, so I just try to go that one time."

# How Saint Paul youth adjust their behavior in response to frequently feeling unsafe

Most participants described changing their daily behavior in anticipation of threats to their and their family members' safety.

- **Being on guard:** Twenty participants said they are constantly alert when navigating their neighborhood. They scan their surroundings in anticipation of threats like robbery and stray bullets. They are on the lookout for signs of danger including speeding or circling cars, large groups, and specific individuals known for criminal activity. One 23-year-old participant described how he plans his day to avoid crowds, going outside early in the morning or when it is hot out since others are less likely to be out then. He avoids being out on the street between 2-5 p.m. each day.

- **Varied coping mechanisms:** Twenty participants described how they process violent incidents and their feelings of safety. Their behaviors vary widely and include talking with friends (5), using alcohol or cannabis (3), and working out or playing sports (3). Three participants said that they avoid talking to adults about their emotions. An 18-year-old participant described how she could not run or meditate as often as she would like because she did not feel safe. She said, "Because of the stuff that's happened in the complex, I don't even feel comfortable like sitting down and being able to take the time to be peaceful and calm and just clear my mind."

- **Avoiding the outdoors at night:** Seven participants said that they avoid leaving their home after dark. A 20-year-old participant said, "During the day, the neighborhood is mostly quiet, but at night, you can hear gunshots every night. It's a usual thing for everyone now, like they're just so used to it, and you just think about it like a normal gunshot even if someone is getting killed. And then the next morning you find out that, 'Oh, someone is getting killed in your neighborhood.'" A 16-year-old said that he avoids taking out the trash at night because he does not feel safe.

- **Not changing their behavior after a violent incident:** Five participants said that following a violent event, they resume their typical routines. For example, one participant entering the ninth grade said, "Sometimes I look out the window, and I see the cops, and I just have no reaction because this happens every week or so."

> "
>
> After like 8, 9 o'clock, ... I'm in the house, and I try to stay there until or unless I have to go out the next day. If I absolutely don't have to, I won't, but if I absolutely do, I would sit here, and like I completely cover myself. I get completely dressed up. I make sure that like no skin is showing. ... I specifically have to have a route mapped out on my phone or in my head, get there specifically. I don't talk to anybody. I have my headphones in; I have my head down; my hoodie's on. And I get to point A and then literally back to the house as fast as possible. And that's me outside whenever I go outside at night.
>
> — *22-year-old participant*

"

I hate it. I really do hate it. I hate it a lot ... the drug use. I like Saint Paul, but the drug use and how people just don't even care. My son could be sitting right on the train with me, and they'll try to smoke on the train. It's just bad trying to travel around.

*— 21-year-old participant*

"

"

That's when the most violence happens ... people just get on the train and start doing shit ... just random violence. I avoid the train at night time. I've never been on the train past 8 o'clock, especially with my kids.

*— 22-year-old participant*

"

The METRO Green Line, a light rail in Saint Paul, could be a vital method of affordable transportation for many youth. But because they perceive it as a source of threats to their safety, including exposure to drug use and physical violence, many say they avoid it, instead taking the bus, using rideshare apps, or walking.



Photo courtesy of Metro Transit.

The METRO Green Line is an 11-mile light rail that connects downtown Saint Paul and downtown Minneapolis. "I won't switch cars at Central, I won't switch cars at Capitol and Rice, I won't switch at Snelling ... because I don't feel safe getting off." — 18-year-old participant.

Participants frequently referenced the METRO Green Line when describing recent incidents where they felt unsafe. They said they felt unsafe for multiple reasons, including:

### Drug use

Twelve participants said that drug use among other riders, such as smoking opioids, made them feel unsafe because it signaled a threat, or they worried the smoke could cause medical issues, such as exacerbating asthma or causing headaches. One participant said that he has witnessed people overdosing on the train and has administered Narcan multiple times.

### Physical violence

Five participants said that they have witnessed or felt the threat of physical violence while riding the train or waiting at a train stop, such as seeing people initiate unprovoked attacks or carrying guns. Reflecting on previous confrontations on the train, one 23-year-old participant said, "On the train, it's like a cage. … Once the door shuts and you're starting to get smacked up, you're not getting out of that. It's life or death."

### Unhoused individuals

Four participants expressed fears about being near unhoused people and people with apparent mental health challenges, including the fear of unwanted confrontation or touching.

### Police presence

Three participants said they feared that the Metro Transit police would mistakenly identify them as the perpetrator of violence or violently detain other riders. Some unhoused participants expressed fear at being indiscriminately punished by Metro Transit police when they try to rest or sleep. A 19-year-old said, "Sometimes they'll get on people's ass for nothing. … Like, where do you want me to sleep? On the sidewalk?"

Findings in this section are based on Phase 1 semi-structured interviews with 32 participants. However, Phase 2 interviews surfaced a notable topic that was not captured during Phase 1:

### Sources of shelter

Two participants (2/18) experiencing homelessness use the train as a source of warmth and shelter because it is a safer alternative to other shelter options. One 20-year-old participant experiencing homelessness said, "I think the Green Line is necessary for the Twin Cities because it's transportation for people that are working and for people that don't have a place to go. … It is a resource that I use so that I'm not freezing my ass off outside."

# How Saint Paul youth adjust their behavior in response to fears on the train

- **Using other forms of transportation:** Just over one-third of participants avoid the train by saving money to buy a car, using the bus, using rideshare apps, or walking, particularly at night or when accompanied by children. A 16-year-old participant said, "If I don't feel really safe riding the train, I just call up an Uber."

- **Choosing seats strategically:** One-fourth of participants position themselves on the train in particular areas to avoid confrontation or violence, such as at the back of the train where no other passengers are located behind them, or near the conductor. Participants described the middle car as particularly unsafe and therefore often avoid it.

- **Changing train cars**: Four participants move between train cars during a single trip to avoid exposure to drug use and other behavior that makes them feel unsafe. For example, one participant who frequently uses the train gets off at train stops and moves to a different train car due to drug use about five out of every 10 train rides.

# Theme 3: Police

> [The police officer with a gun drawn] was like, 'Who are you?' I said my name and I was like, 'Can I just finish my work and go about my day?' ... And he pulled off real quick, and I couldn't get his badge number or anything, and it was just unlawful, and it made me scared because I also had my [family members] with me. ... I don't know how it made them feel, but I was scared for them.
>
> *— 20-year-old participant*

> [I feel comfortable being in the presence of police] when they are just in the neighborhood, playing with the kids, talking with the teens, talking with the parents, just being one with the community.
>
> *— 18-year-old participant*

When it comes to public safety, police officers are at the forefront of young people's minds — more often as a threat to safety than as a source of it, especially for Black youth. Participants elevated a range of specific fears, including direct physical harm, being mistakenly or wrongly accused of a crime, and being the victim of racist policing. As a result, just under half of participants said they limit their interactions with police, including changing their routes and restricting 911 calls to only life-threatening emergencies, due to fear of direct physical harm or mistaken identity. By contrast, more than one-fourth of participants said they feel safer and more secure in the presence of police.

Among participants who expressed that police influenced their sense of safety, participants who expressed fear of the police were 71% Black, while those who felt safer with the police were only 33% Black. Additionally, 50% of the participants who expressed fear of the police live in the Frogtown/Rondo neighborhood, while only 28% of the research sample lives in that neighborhood. Participants often described firsthand experiences of harmful interactions, such as an officer pulling a gun on them due to mistaken identity and an instance where an officer directly harmed a participant's family member. Participants cited multiple reasons why they felt unsafe when interacting with police, including:

### Physical harm or exposure to violence toward others
More than half of participants said they feared that police would cause them direct physical harm, such as shooting them, or that they would be exposed to police violence toward others, such as watching an officer violently detain someone. A 23-year-old participant who was detained on a police bus during the protests following George Floyd's murder said, "It's the way that they did it. ... That was the first time I was actually scared ... like the police really, really scared me."

### Wrongful identification
Seven participants said they feared that the police would mistakenly identify them or wrongly accuse them of a crime. A 19-year-old participant said, "The police always mistaking me for somebody. That happened to me so many times."

### Racist policing
Seven participants said they felt unsafe due to the threat of being profiled or mistreated by the police based on their race. Discussing his reaction to hearing police sirens, a 23-year-old participant said, "It's just like automatic, like, 'Are they coming for me?' even if I didn't do anything."

One-fourth of participants said that the presence of police on patrols in the neighborhood or being able to contact the police through 911 makes them feel safer. When describing an experience at a neighborhood block party, one 16-year-old participant said, "I feel safe because there's police officers with horses." A 19-year-old participant said, "They're like the good guys … trying to keep the community safe. Without the police, it would be really unsafe."

## How Saint Paul youth adjust their behavior in response to the police

- **Avoiding encounters:** Fourteen participants said they intentionally avoided encounters with police by taking alternative routes when walking or driving, not making eye contact or conversation when police speak to them, or alerting family and friends when they see police officers. One 22-year-old participant said, "I try to avoid them as much as possible. … When I see them, I just keep walking. I don't even look up, I just go about my day. If I see them walking the same way I'm walking, I just kinda go the opposite way."

- **Restricting use of 911:** Ten participants said they would call 911 only in the case of a life-threatening emergency or other limited circumstances to reduce interactions with police officers. One 18-year-old participant said they would call the police only "if I'm on the verge of death maybe … [if] I got shot and I'm bleeding out." A 13-year-old participant, recalling when someone asked them to call 911, said, "I was debating. I was just scared."

- **Using 911 when feeling unsafe:** Three participants said calling the police is something they do if they feel unsafe. A 20-year-old who said she would call the police if she felt unsafe said her view of them "just depends on the police officer, I guess. If they're kind enough or if they're actually looking out for the community, it just depends on who they are."

- **Protecting against proximity to danger:** Five participants said that the presence of police, such as a squad car or sirens, signals that there is danger nearby. For example, two participants said that when they hear sirens and see police, they lock their homes and stay away from windows to protect themselves from stray bullets.

# Theme 4: Social media

> " Every time I opened Instagram, somebody else passed away. ... I just wanted to look at a funny video and laugh.
>
> *— 20-year-old participant*

> " I remember when all the George Floyd protests were happening. There was a livestream that was showing it like every day. I remember the comments section was just terrible. People saying racial slurs, people saying racist stuff, people even saying anti-Muslim stuff. ... It made me feel like I have to watch out ... it definitely made me feel more like racism is a big thing.
>
> *— 16-year-old participant*

Similar to the METRO Green Line, participants said they see the potential of social media as a valuable resource — for connecting with friends and family, entertainment, and learning about their community. While some academic research[7] and local[8] and national media coverage[9] suggests that social media contributes to physical violence and fuels interpersonal conflict among youth, participants suggested that for them, the danger was often psychological rather than just physical, stemming from disturbing content online or cyberbullying. In response, youth carefully curate their social media networks and limit or pause their use.
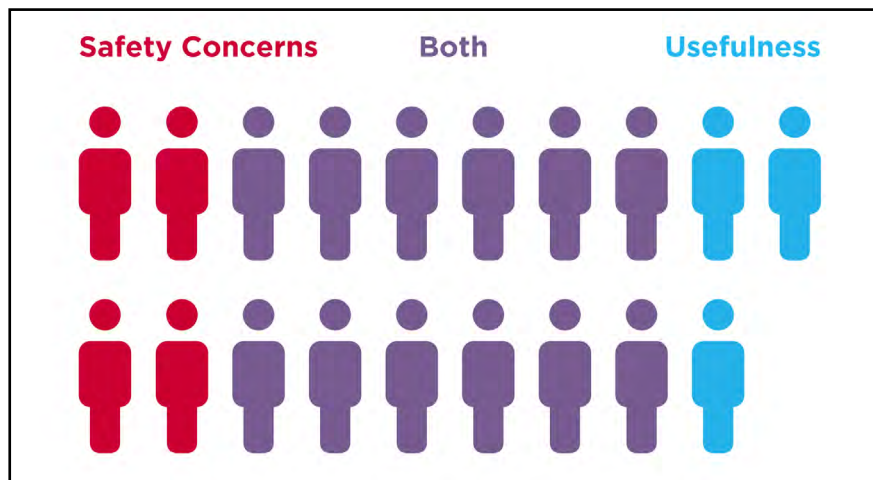


Of the 19 participants who discussed social media's hazards or its utility, four raised only a safety concern, three raised only its usefulness, and 12 discussed both.

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[7] Patton, Desmond Upton, Jun Sung Hong, Megan Ranney, Sadiq Patel, Caitlin Kelley, Rob Eschmann, and Tyreasa Washington. "Social Media as a Vector for Youth Violence: A Review of the Literature." Computers in Human Behavior 35 (June 2014): 548–53. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2014.02.043.

[8] Jany, Libor. "Minneapolis Gang Factions Split and Evolve, Fueled by Social Media and Old Beefs." Star Tribune, September 21, 2019. https://www.startribune.com/minneapolis-gang-factions-split-and-evolve-fueled-by-social-media-and-old-beefs/560996522/.

[9] MacGillis, Alec. "How Social Media Apps Could Be Fueling Homicides Among Young Americans." ProPublica, August 8, 2023. https://www.propublica.org/article/social-media-violence-young-americans; "Does Social Media Encourage Violent Teen Behavior?" NPR, January 15, 2013. https://www.npr.org/2013/01/15/169421562/what-causes-violent-teen-behavior.

Half of the participants said that social media poses risks to their well-being — including by creating a digital space to glorify fighting, exposing them to graphic content, and facilitating bullying. Many of these same participants, though, described having positive experiences on social media too. Participants' perspectives on social media include:

### Fighting
Eight participants raised multiple ways social media contributes to conflicts, including individuals filming physical fights to post on social media, individuals arguing on social media, and online conflicts becoming physical. For example, three interviewees — each who attend a different school — said that a social media disagreement started a physical fight at their school.

### Disturbing content
Seven participants reported that they regularly see "toxic" or distressing content, including photos and videos of murders, online; some expressly stated that this material harms their mental health. A youth who saw someone's death posted on social media said, "Why would y'all even post this? You know what I'm saying? Like she got family. ... I don't even want social media no more because it's just people like, they do anything for view, they do anything for likes, they don't even think about the damage they're doing. Everybody lives in their own world. They don't got no morals, they don't got no sense."

### Bullying and rude behavior
Five participants said they encounter bullying and other unkind behavior from others while online. An 18-year-old said, "You feel down about yourself [when you're on social media] because there's either people talking down about you or they're just making up rumors about you."

### Usefulness
Fifteen participants described using social media for activities that brought value to their lives, including keeping in touch with family members and friends, finding entertainment like funny videos, and staying informed about events in their neighborhood.

# How Saint Paul youth adjust their behavior in response to hazards on social media

- **Limit friends and followers:** Six participants described being cautious about who they add on social media, only connecting with people they already know or with whom they share mutual friends.

- **Change or pause use:** Five participants have restricted their use of social media, such as no longer using the chat feature, or stopped their use entirely because they find it upsetting. All participants who paused their activity, however, eventually returned to the platforms.

# *"If I Were Mayor"*

## Youth Visions for a Safer Saint Paul

> **Definitely building more parks, like a basketball court down there would probably bring more positive energy down there. ... There's really no basketball courts downtown."**
>
> *— 24-year-old participant*

# "If you were mayor, what would you do to keep everyone safe?"

"I would, first of all, put more shelters in place. It took me like two months to get into a family shelter." — *21-year-old participant*

"Investing in communities. We start actually allocating resources to communities that really need it. I mean, you go down Payne or Arcade, what the f*** is there? ... There's that one community center that's being built up on Rice, but what about the kids over off Mount Airy? There's nothing over there." — *23-year-old participant*

"Definitely building more parks, like a basketball court down there would probably bring more positive energy down there. ... There's really no basketball courts downtown." — *24-year-old participant*

"Investing in safer public transportation, investing in more transportation for people to get access to well-paying positions. ... You have to go all the way over to Midway to get a decent paying position for kids, you know? And then, you know, we're having kids work at the Burger King off Snelling, where there's literally robberies every other month. ... It's like damn, parents are having to choose between giving their kid a job and maybe them not coming home." — *23-year-old participant*

"I would probably start by making it cleaner, ... like just putting trash cans on the train so that people have a place to throw their trash away instead of just on the floor. ... I feel like if it's a cleaner environment, people feel less entitled to take advantage of the space." — *18-year-old participant*

"I would stop suspending kids. ... They go home and they just go outside. ... So they might get suspended, now they got a whole day at home just time on their hands ... I would find them things to do inside the school." — *20-year-old participant*

"Banning guns, like hunting guns are fine, but guns to kill people should be banned. ... A lot more areas for just kids with adults being in a separate area." — *13-year-old participant*

Participants poured out ideas on how to improve public safety: investing in community resources, like food banks and shelters; changing policy, especially to curb gun and drug use; and creating more community spaces, like recreation centers and afterschool programs. Participants elevated another recurring theme during the interview process: that it felt good to be heard about their safety concerns. Participants want their insights to spur action that will make their neighborhoods safer.

Local youth also served in leadership roles throughout the research process. Researchers from the Government Performance Lab collaborated with a Youth Research Council, made up of five World Youth Connect members ages 19 to 24. The Youth Research Council contributed to developing questions, recruiting participants, note-taking, and facilitating interviews and focus groups. They demonstrated how young people can successfully take on significant responsibility to shape public safety in their community.

# Youth Ideas to Improve Public Safety

While this research was not designed to comprehensively source solutions from youth, we asked participants, "If you were mayor of your neighborhood and had no resource constraints, what would you do to keep everyone safe?" Participants offered many potential solutions to increase public safety, sometimes without being prompted. Participants' recommendations include:

### Additional investments in community resources
Twenty-two participants called for investment in their neighborhoods to develop community resources, such as educational and community programs for youth, food or clothing banks, therapy and counseling, drug treatment centers, educational and job programs, shelters, and affordable housing. Participants specifically pointed to the need for additional resources for individuals experiencing homelessness, like food, clothing, and shelter. During an interview at SafeZone, a drop-in center for youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, a 23-year-old participant said, "I'd create two to three more buildings just like this, not only for youth, but maybe even for adults, too. Because once you turn 25, you're gonna age out of this."

### Policy changes on guns and drugs
Sixteen participants suggested policy changes, especially to limit access to guns and drugs. A 19-year-old participant said, "I want security to get tighter with gun violence and drugs. I know kids getting drugs off the street for $5 a pill is not secure at all." Some participants called for restricting gun ownership and banning high-powered guns. Others said they would try to get drugs off the street, saying that it is currently too easy to access pills and needles. An 18-year-old reported, "A lot of people I know take marijuana, Percs, cocaine, heroin."

### More community spaces and programming
Twelve participants said that they want additional safe public places and activities, such as community centers, recreation centers, libraries, parks, or after-school programs. Participants desire better access to spaces to play sports, get help with their homework, and meet with counselors and mentors. An 18-year-old said, "I would definitely have more safe places for people that need to go talk about some situation that's happening, people that need to talk through the beef … like counselors that you have at school." When asked why having someone to go talk to is important, he said, "So they just have like a place where they can empty out. They can open up a little bit, let down their shield. They just talk through all their pains or anger that they might have."

### Heightened security in their neighborhoods
Ten participants said they would increase non-police security in their neighborhoods. A 19-year-old suggested, "I feel like in school there should be more security guards because there's way too many fights, and there's too many people just like roaming around the school, skipping classes." Some participants preferred security guards to police officers. Four participants called for more police presence specifically, yet three participants called for measures to increase community trust in police, such as increasing oversight of police. A 20-year-old suggested, "Finding a way where you could

implement laws and enforce laws without making people feel unsafe. … It's to the point where people fear police more than they fear danger sometimes, and sometimes people won't call 911 because they don't want to deal with that interaction with police." While some participants would like to see more police and security guards in their neighborhood, more than half of participants describe feeling less safe around law enforcement, as described in "The Police" section.

## Youth Want Their Safety Concerns to Be Heard

> "
> I've been taking the train and bus for a while, and because of that, I've definitely been saving up for a car because of my safety. But I definitely feel like I expressed a lot for sure because I do care about other people's safety and my safety, and they should do something because it's getting out of hand.
> — *24-year-old participant*
> "

All 41 participants who gave an opinion about the research process said they appreciated the opportunity to participate. They said they think research on safety in the city is important, said they were grateful to be asked for their perspectives, or said they enjoyed the process. Twenty participants said they hoped that the project would improve public safety and spark changes in Saint Paul. Fourteen participants said they appreciated feeling heard, often for the first time, about their safety concerns. A 19-year-old said, "I feel better from saying it 'cause I don't really talk about these things with a lot of people." When asked why, she said, "If they asked, then I would say it, but they don't ask, so I don't say it." A 21-year-old participant said, "I've actually been wanting to talk to someone about this. … It feels good to have someone hear or ask about what's going on here and how to fix it."

# *Youth Leadership in This Research*

As part of a community-based participatory research design, the Government Performance Lab worked with World Youth Connect to form a Youth Research Council to collaborate on this project. The Youth Research Council is made up of five members of World Youth Connect: Cortez, DJ, Dun, Mae, and Markos. They supported the project throughout the research process, including by recruiting participants, facilitating interviews and focus groups, and recording notes. Engaging youth researchers in this project was essential — not only to incorporate their lived expertise as local youth but also to build World Youth Connect's capacity to conduct similar research in the future. Members of the Youth Research Council said they learned facilitation and probing techniques and how to conduct post-interview debriefs. These researchers demonstrated how young people can lead initiatives to enhance public safety when given the opportunity. The final interviews of this project were with these young researchers, and some of their reflections are included here.

## Reflections from the Youth Research Council

*What impact do you think this project will have on the future of World Youth Connect?*

"I wanted to utilize the organization as a platform for more opportunities regardless of who you were or where you were at in your life. ... I think through this project it was really emphasized, elevating youth voice, ... which is part of our mission, just getting into those spaces where young people don't usually get to speak their minds as much, or when they do, it isn't taken as seriously."
— DJ, age 24

*What did you want to learn from this project?*

"I was very curious on how much people experience violence in the city. 'Cause normally, I don't experience any violence, but I hear about it. ... I was just curious on a day-to-day basis who experiences this violence and what particular areas does this take place."
— Cortez, age 19

*Why do you think this project is important?*

"You don't really get a perspective that much sometimes of youth and what their viewpoint of safety in their own community is, which I think is important. Not only because I believe everybody's voice kinda has a say, especially if you're living in the community. But also I think new perspectives can come out and new solutions might be able to come out if you're able to hear these different things. … It kinda gets you excited sometimes when you're in those interviews, and you can tell someone hasn't been asked that question — or seriously at least — because it allows you to hear something new."
— Markos, age 21

*How did it feel to hear youth talk about their personal experiences with safety?*

"For some of the interviews, they were like they don't tell this to anybody, even their close friends or their brothers or siblings. … For them to tell us, I just felt like we gave them the respect. We showed them we cared, so they were able to tell us."
— Dun, age 20

*What do you hope will change as a result of this research?*

"I hope that it's safer, and I hope that people that are higher up than us can see the report or the data that we collected. I hope that they see this, and they make a change, … just make a new law or something that will keep us safe, especially the youth."
— Mae, age 19

# Recommendations

Over a six-month period, the GPL and World Youth Connect spoke with 50 young people to create indicators of public safety for Saint Paul. Participants elevated multiple concerns about their own and their communities' safety: needing to be constantly on guard in anticipation of safety threats, feeling unsafe on the METRO Green Line, more often distrusting law enforcement than seeking further police presence, and encountering violent content on social media. These themes were used to develop indicators of safety, which reflect what actions participants would take if their neighborhood were safer. Each indicator also includes example metrics that a jurisdiction could use to regularly measure the indicator.

## Eight Indicators of Public Safety in Saint Paul

If their neighborhood were safer, participants said that they would more frequently…

| Indicator | Example Metrics |
|---|---|
| **Neighborhood Indicators** | |
| **Play outside,** including biking, running, or taking walks | • Number of young people playing in an outdoor area without immediate adult supervision and number of young people utilizing public spaces (collected by having a city employee record the number of youth present at selected outdoor areas at regular intervals and adjusting for seasonality)<br>• Number of young people engaging in outdoor sports or recreational activities (collected from rosters or attendance data on participants) |
| **Move freely without worry,** including visiting nearby stores | • Number of young people outside demonstrating signs of moving freely such as walking or running in their neighborhood (potentially collected with anonymized, aggregate cellphone location data)<br>• Number of young people visiting local businesses (potentially collected with anonymized, aggregate cellphone location data) |
| **Socialize with others,** including hanging out with family and friends | • Number of young people engaging in in-person social interactions with peers or family members, in after-school programming, or other community events (collected from a youth survey or a more sophisticated cellphone data analysis)<br>• Number of young people attending group activities such as those organized by school, religious, or community-based organizations (collected from attendance rosters) |
| **Attend social gatherings,** such as fairs or cultural events | • Number of young people attending events in their own neighborhood (crowd counts at events)<br>• Number of young people visiting social spaces such as movie theaters and arcades (measured by ticket and admissions data, annually verified through a youth survey) |
| **Go outside at night,** including visits to a park or grocery store | • Number of young people/residents going to the grocery store or other local business after dark (measured with anonymized cell phone data or potentially with sales data by time of purchase)<br>• Number of young women demonstrating signs of moving freely outside at night (e.g., walking at a slower pace or running for exercise at night; potentially measured using traffic cams and security camera footage) |

| Indicator | Example Metrics |
|---|---|
| **Train Indicators** | |
| **Ride the train,** including to get to work and visit friends | • Number of young people/riders riding the train outside of school hours (measured from swipes of youth metro cards)<br>• Number of young people/riders riding the train at night (measured from swipes of youth metro cards) |
| **Sit in their preferred train car and seat** | • Frequency of young people/riders sitting in the middle train car (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders moving seats within the same train car throughout the duration of a ride (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders reporting being able to sit in their preferred seat (measured with subway user survey) |
| **Remain in the same train car** for the duration of the ride | • Frequency of young people/riders switching cars during a trip (measured with subway security cameras)<br>• Frequency of young people/riders boarding first available train (measured with subway security cameras) |

These indicators hold relevance not only for Saint Paul but also for mayors, public safety officials, and researchers seeking to develop more responsive public safety strategies in other communities. Below, we outline recommendations for these priority stakeholder groups.

# Recommendations for Mayors and Public Safety Officials

*This includes mayors, deputy mayors overseeing public safety, and heads of offices of violence prevention or neighborhood safety*

## Gather resident input to develop and test community-based indicators that provide real-time feedback on which public safety interventions make residents feel safer.

Mayors and public safety officials should draw on the indicators identified in this report to expand the way in which they define, measure, and create strategies to improve public safety so that their public safety strategies are more aligned with resident priorities and experiences.

To do this, public safety agencies should first gather community input to understand what factors contribute to residents feeling safe or unsafe and how resident behavior differs depending on how safe residents feel. These insights can then be used to determine how to capture those observable changes in resident behavior and measure them over time and in response to specific policy interventions.

Public safety agencies should then create a set of metrics to track community safety and test them over an initial six-to-twelve-month period. Ideal metrics are those that can be gathered from existing administrative or otherwise accessible data, which can help to avoid creating research fatigue from asking residents to constantly respond to surveys or interview questions. For example, residents may have specific safety concerns related to utilizing public parks, taking public transportation, or being outside in their neighborhood after dark. These activities could be measured before and after implementing interventions, such as increased cameras or call boxes on train cars, or improved street lighting, to capture whether these interventions result in residents engaging in more of the activities that indicate an increased sense of safety. Once metrics are validated through this initial testing, they should be measured regularly and used alongside traditional public safety metrics (e.g., crime rates) to better hold public safety agencies accountable to investing in programming and policy responses that are most closely aligned with resident priorities.

**Commit to involving residents as public safety solutions are designed and implemented to leverage local expertise.**

Gathering community input effectively in a process like this requires moving beyond simply asking community members once about lived experience, and should also prioritize resident involvement in solution development and testing.

Mayors and public safety officials should regularly engage residents in designing, testing, and providing feedback on which public safety solutions are and are not working. Examples of this engagement could include:

- **Community-based participatory research:** In this type of research, residents are involved in all aspects of the research project to develop more nuanced perspectives on residents' public safety concerns, including design, facilitation, insight validation, and read-out sessions.

- **Community participation in implementation:** Involving residents and community organizations in the design, testing, and validation of new indicators of public safety. This could include refining policy interventions to test, identifying new sources of data to collect to measure the impact of the intervention, collecting qualitative resident feedback on the impact of the intervention, and involving residents in the interpretation of data collected after the intervention.

# Saint Paul Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) and Collaborating Agencies

**Test measuring one or more of the indicators proposed in this report over the next year to improve the evaluation of current Saint Paul public safety programming and policies.**

ONS should draw on the themes and indicators identified in this report to work with partner agencies in expanding the focus of its safety programming beyond violence prevention, as many of these topics align with existing research on a range of wellbeing outcomes for residents. This could include:

- **Facilitate increased use of outdoor spaces:** Indicators 1 (Play outside) and 2 (Move freely without worry) reflect that youth would spend more time outside if their neighborhoods were safer. The benefits of better access to outdoor spaces could extend beyond public safety, as there is extensive research on the correlation between time spent outdoors and health.[10]

- **Support increased connections between peers:** Indicator 3 (Socialize with others) reflects that youth would talk or hang out with their peers more frequently if their neighborhood were safer. Existing research has found that social connectedness is positively associated with improved public health[11] and reduced crime.[12]

- **Improve safety on public transit:** Indicator 6 (Ride the train) reflects that residents would ride the METRO Green Line more frequently if it were safer. Addressing safety on the train can both increase Metro Transit ridership[13] and facilitate improved mobility for residents seeking access to jobs, education, health care, and social activities.

[10] Jimenez, M. P., DeVille, N. V., Elliott, E. G., Schiff, J. E., Wilt, G. E., Hart, J. E., James, P. (2021). "Associations Between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence." International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 18(9), 4790. DOI: 10.3390/ijerph18094790.

To measure the potential indicators identified in this report, ONS should look for opportunities to leverage existing data, such as administrative data sets or publicly available data, related to residents' activities and utilization of public spaces and services. For example, ONS could begin by identifying data already collected by Metro Transit on youth train ridership and rider experience. As another example, the city could use existing data on youth participation in recreational activities to assess progress on safety initiatives.

**Continue to engage Saint Paul residents in providing insight and feedback on indicators related to local experience, especially those residents personally impacted by violence and those living in neighborhoods with high levels of violence.**

ONS can use the indicators and example metrics identified in this report as tools to verify that initiatives targeted at improving public safety are making a measurable difference. Specifically, given that a subset of the indicators elevates local experiences that may not be fully explained by national public safety literature, ONS should solicit additional resident input on potential interventions that require additional context, such as the topics outlined above: outdoor space, connections between peers, and public transit.

ONS provided funding to compensate the youth researchers and youth interview and focus group participants included in this report. Building on this support, ONS should identify additional opportunities to further build the capacity of residents and organizations to take part in the policymaking process. This could include compensating individuals for their contributions as sources of local expertise or their contributions as co-researchers in future projects. ONS should also consider ways to elevate residents and organizations as credible messengers during public briefings and other reputation-building forums.

[11]Holt-Lunstad, Julianne, Theodore F Robles, and David A Sbarra. 2017. "Advancing Social Connection as a Public Health Priority in the United States." The American Psychologist 72 (6): 517–30. *https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000103*.

[12]Stuart, Bryan A, and Evan J Taylor. 2021. "The Effect of Social Connectedness on Crime: Evidence from the Great Migration." The Review of Economics and Statistics 103 (1): 18–33. *https://doi.org/10.1162/rest_a_00860*.

[13]Metro Transit. "Performance - Metro Transit." *https://www.metrotransit.org/performance*. Accessed March 27, 2024.

# Recommendations for Public Safety Researchers

**Use public safety priorities elevated by youth to engage in research assessing public safety investments that are more responsive to youth experience, including those that promote the presence of public safety beyond the absence of crime.**

By focusing on the self-reported experiences of youth ages 13-24, this research contributes to a growing body of literature on adolescents and public safety. Researchers have explored a number of related youth safety topics in cities across the United States, including the relationship between perceptions of neighborhood safety and youth outdoor activity,[14] youth feeling unsafe outside after dark,[15] and youth[16] and adult[17] hypervigilance in response to threats of violence. However, there are a subset of themes identified in this report that warrant additional discussion and exploration, including:

- **Social media:** Further research is needed to better understand how social media impacts young people's sense of physical and psychological safety. While historically public safety research has focused on the physical environment, Saint Paul youth described multiple ways in which social media harms their safety: by sparking fights, serving as a platform for violent and graphic content, and facilitating cyberbullying. Youth also reported that social media improved social connections and provided other positive benefits. Therefore, researchers and policymakers should move beyond efforts to just document the harms of social media. Instead, researchers and policymakers should investigate how to better support young people as they navigate social media in their daily lives and potentially seek to counteract the negative experiences they may have with it.

- **Recreation and social activities:** Further research is needed on the availability and impact of recreational opportunities and social activities available to young people, as well as on how to create environments in which young people feel safe playing outside. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, media outlets have highlighted incidents of group violence and youth involvement in crime in cities across the country.[18] Common policy responses, such as implementing curfews,[19] increasing police presence in certain areas, and banning youth from certain locations such as malls,[20] can restrict opportunities for youth to engage in positive social experiences. Further research on the efficacy of interventions that seek to expand recreational and social activities for young people could inform policy alternatives that are responsive to youth safety and wellbeing concerns.

## Assess the accuracy of new public safety measures to detect public sentiment of safety.

Further research is needed to determine how much additional value there is to using new indicators in addition to existing crime measures. Research should also investigate the extent to which the new measures are responsive to aspects of resident safety that are not reflected in current measures. Researchers also need to determine whether the new safety measures are sensitive enough to identify improvements in perceived safety that may occur when public safety interventions occur.

[14] Galaviz, Karla I, Deena Zytnick, Michelle C Kegler, and Solveig A Cunningham. 2016. "Parental Perception of Neighborhood Safety and Children's Physical Activity." Journal of Physical Activity & Health 13 (10): 1110–16. *https://doi.org/10.1123/jpah.2015-0557*.

[15] DaViera, A.L., Roy, A.L., Uriostegui, M. and Fiesta, D. (2020), "Safe Spaces Embedded in Dangerous Contexts: How Chicago Youth Navigate Daily Life and Demonstrate Resilience in High-Crime Neighborhoods." Am J Community Psychol, 66: 65-80. *https://doi-org.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/10.1002/ajcp.12434*

[16] Teitelman, Anne, Catherine C McDonald, Douglas J Wiebe, Nicole Thomas, Terry Guerra, Nancy Kassam-Adams, and Therese S Richmond. 2010. "Youth's Strategies for Staying Safe and Coping with the Stress of Living in Violent Communities." Journal of Community Psychology 38 (7): 874–85. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.20402

[17] Smith, Nichole A, Dexter R Voisin, Joyce P Yang, and Elizabeth L Tung. 2019. "Keeping Your Guard Up: Hypervigilance Among Urban Residents Affected By Community And Police Violence." Health Affairs 38 (10): 1662–69. *https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.00560*.

[18] Dil, Cuneyt. "D.C. Area Reckons with Uptick in Youth Violence." Axios D.C. (Washington, D.C.), September 13, 2023. *https://www.axios.com/local/washington-dc/2023/09/13/crime-youth-violence-dc*.

[19] Wilson, David B., Ajima Olaghere, and Charlotte Gill. 2016. "Juvenile Curfew Effects on Criminal Behavior and Victimization: a Campbell Collaboration Systematic Review." Journal of Experimental Criminology 12 (2): 167–86. *https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-016-9258-y*.

[20] Moss, Linda. "Here's How Malls Across the Country Are Restricting Teen Visitors." CoStar News, April 17, 2023. *https://www.costar.com/article/1884101418/heres-how-malls-across-the-country-are-restricting-teen-visitors*; Lange, Alexandra. "Teens Need Malls. Malls Need Crowds. Why Are They Pushing Kids Away?" Guardian, December 5, 2023. *https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2023/dec/05/teens-need-malls-malls-need-crowds-why-are-they-pushing-kids-away*.

# Methodology

This report reflects findings from interviews and focus groups on safety conducted with 50 youth participants, ages 13-24, who live in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

## Research Coordination

Saint Paul's Office of Neighborhood Safety (ONS) assisted in the development of the research's target demographic and screening criteria. Given an increase in violence involving youth in Saint Paul, youth were selected as the target population.

ONS also selected and funded World Youth Connect (WYC), a youth-led Saint Paul nonprofit working to increase youth voice in public discourse, to assist with research activities. ONS was not involved in conducting or analyzing any interviews or focus groups. All research functions were conducted by the Government Performance Lab (GPL) and WYC, independent of any city agency.

To ensure youth voice was elevated throughout the research process, the GPL and WYC established a Youth Research Council, made up of five World Youth Connect members ages 19 to 24. The Youth Research Council received training from GPL staff and contributed to developing questions, recruiting participants, note-taking, and facilitating interviews and focus groups.

The research protocol was approved by the Harvard University human subjects Institutional Review Board.

## Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited via flyers with a QR code that linked to an interest form. After completing the interest form, participants were screened on four criteria. If a youth answered yes to at least one of the four criteria, they were eligible to participate in the research. The following table displays criteria answers for the 50 participants. Participants who completed most to all of a 60-minute interview received $100; participants who completed most to all of a 30-minute interview received $50.

| Criteria | Participants Answering "Yes" |
|---|---|
| Youth exposed to incident of violence | 90% |
| Relative or close friend passed away from violence | 48% |
| Youth or relative incarcerated due to violence | 44% |
| Youth resides in neighborhood with two or more violent incidents per month | 84% |

The table below includes demographics of the 50 participants. "Other" reflects additional categories that each constituted less than 10% of the total sample. Other race and ethnicity categories in the sample included: two or more races, American Indian, Hispanic or Latino, and white. Among Asian participants, the most common ethnicity was Karen.[21]

| Age | Gender | Race and Ethnicity | Neighborhood |
|---|---|---|---|
| 42% ages 13-17<br>58% ages 18-24 | 56% Male<br>40% Female<br>4% Non-binary | 58% Black or African American<br>22% Asian<br>20% Other | 34% East Side<br>18% Frogtown/Rondo<br>14% Downtown<br>10% West Side<br>24% Other |

## Data Collection

Thirty-eight interviews and two focus groups were conducted in two phases from August to October 2023. Most interviews and focus groups were co-facilitated by at least one GPL staff member and at least one member of the Youth Research Council. The Youth Research Council also supported notetaking.

- **Phase 1** consisted of semi-structured, 60-minute discussions with 32 youth participants, seven of whom participated in a focus group and 25 of whom were interviewed individually. Participants were asked open-ended questions about their experiences with safety, such as "Tell me about your neighborhood" or "Tell me about a time you felt unsafe, uneasy, or concerned about being in your community." Participants also completed a written exercise where they selected and ranked actions they take to stay safe. GPL staff analyzed these discussions and ranking exercises and identified four themes (Section 2: Themes), based on frequency and depth of insights, related to participants' sense of safety — being on guard, the train, the police, and social media — and generated three safety indicators related to the train (Section 1).

- **Phase 2** consisted of structured, 30- or 60-minute discussions focused on indicators with 18 youth participants, five of whom participated in a focus group and 13 of whom were interviewed individually. Participants in this phase were provided with a list of activities, generated from findings during Phase 1, and asked to rank them based on the likelihood that they would engage in them if they lived in a safer neighborhood. The activities participants ranked were organized into four categories:

  - **Getting around:** Walking around without worry of cars or dangerous people; just drive around; bike more often; going to store or gas station more often; going rollerblading.

  - **Going to the park:** Go to a rec center; play basketball at the park; play volleyball at the park; play football at the park; play soccer at the park.

  - **Being active or self-care:** Gardening; running or exercising; go outside more at night; go to a lake or creek; meditation; journaling.

  - **Spending time with people:** Talk with or hang out with people; hangout on the porch; play outside without supervision; go to a carnival or community event.

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[21] The Karen are an ethnic group from the country of Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, many of which fled due to religious and ethnic persecution. There are an estimated 17,000 Karen people living in Minnesota.

- They were also asked questions including, "Imagine you live in a neighborhood that is safe. What would you want to do with your friends?" The GPL generated five safety indicators related to neighborhoods (Section 1) based on analysis of these discussions and ranking exercises based on frequency and depth of insights. Finally, participants were asked what solutions they would implement if they were mayor of their neighborhood with unlimited resources and how they felt about the interview process. These findings generated the insights in Section 3: Elevating Youth Voices.

We would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their research support:

- *World Youth Connect*
- *Face to Face* (SafeZone)
- *Ujamaa Place*
- *Twin Cities Academy*
- *The JK Movement*
- *El Rio Vista Recreation Center*
- *Jimmy Lee Recreation Center*
- *Rose Street Community Center*
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- *Dr. Ceema Samimi, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota School of Social Work*
- *Dr. Aviv Landau, Research Assistant Professor and Co-Director of SAFElab, University of Pennsylvania School of Social Policy & Practice*
- *Dr. Katie Goodstar-Johnston, Associate Professor, University of Minnesota School of Social Work*
- *Dr. Suzanne Le Menestrel, Director of Science Affairs, Society for Research in Child Development*

# Appendix: Number of Youth Mentioning Each Indicator

| Number | Context | Indicator and Example Metrics | Unique Participants | Total References |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Neighborhood | **Play outside** | 12* | 39 |
| 2 | Neighborhood | **Move freely without worry** | 15* | 27 |
| 3 | Neighborhood | **Socialize with others** | 11* | 16 |
| 4 | Neighborhood | **Attend social gatherings** | 9* | 15 |
| 5 | Neighborhood | **Go outside at night** | 9* | 13 |
| 6 | Train | **Ride the train** | 11^ | N/A |
| 7 | Train | **Sit in preferred train car and seat** | 8^ | N/A |
| 8 | Train | **Remain in same train car for entire ride** | 4^ | N/A |

*Neighborhood indicators were identified from Phase 2 participants (18). Counts of unique participants are conservative estimates given that focus group participants in Phase 2 (5) were counted here only if they verbally discussed a particular behavior, but not if they only wrote it down on their ranking sheet.*

*^Train indicators were identified from Phase 1 participants (32).*

# The Government Performance Lab

The Government Performance Lab, housed at the Taubman Center for State and Local Government at the Harvard Kennedy School, conducts research on how governments can improve the results they achieve for their citizens. An important part of this research model involves providing hands-on technical assistance to state and local governments. Through this involvement, we gain insights into the barriers that governments face and the solutions that can overcome these barriers. By engaging current students and recent graduates in this effort, we are also able to provide experiential learning.