



Medicine Hat and Redcliff:

Sharing Local Knowledge through Pictures and Stories



COMMUNITY HEALTH &
THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

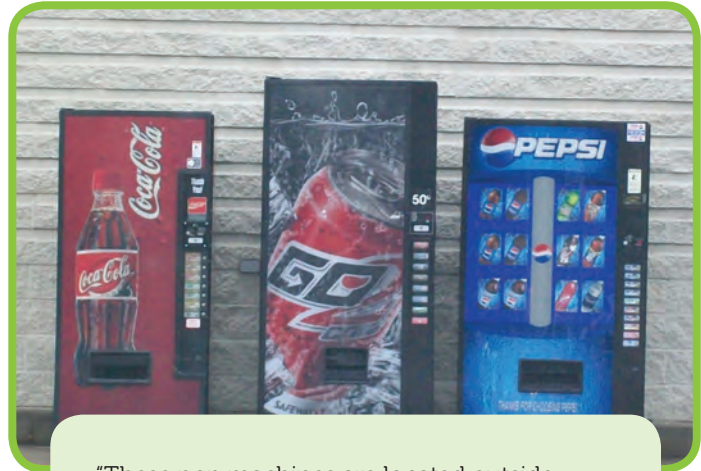
The Project

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

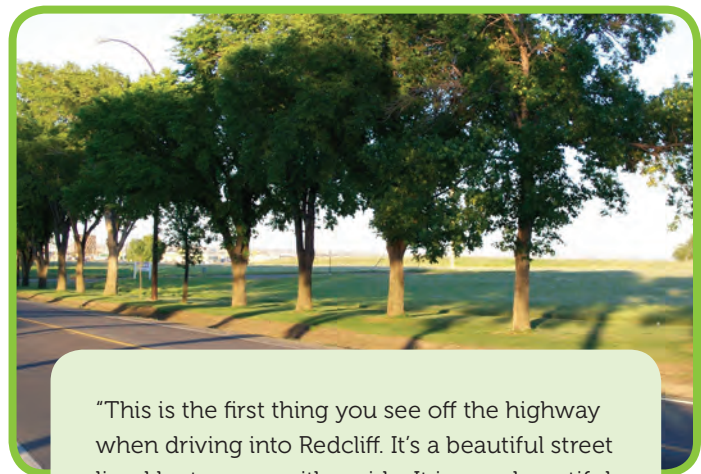
- parks and green spaces,
- residential areas,
- public transit,
- indoor and outdoor activity options,
- restaurants and grocery stores options,
- how a community is maintained, and
- how the roads and sidewalks are designed.

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

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



"These pop machines are located outside Safeway. Only one of them had water in it, the rest mostly had pop and juice" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This is the first thing you see off the highway when driving into Redcliff. It's a beautiful street lined by trees on either side. It is very beautiful and has a free flow of traffic in both directions" (Redcliff resident).

Pictures are Worth a Thousand Words!

How did the researchers do this project? They asked residents to take photos of their community. They then told researchers why those photos helped to describe physical activity and healthy eating in their community. This kind of project is called **photovoice**. Photovoice is a commonly used research method

that helps researchers to gain a local perspective about an identified issue. Photos can engage people better than words alone. Photovoice is a good way to begin conversations with local residents about their community.

The Photo-Takers

Eight people participated in the project from Medicine Hat and Redcliff (four from Medicine Hat and four from Redcliff). These participants generally represented the community population. Photo-takers were recruited through posters, e-mail and word-of-mouth by other community members. There were five female and three male photo-takers ranging in age from 15 to over 65. Photo-takers reported annual household income levels ranging from less than \$25,000 per year to over \$100,000 per year. None of the photo-takers identified themselves as belonging to a visible minority, but one individual had a developmental disability. The photo-takers had resided in Medicine Hat/Redcliff between 3 and 42 years, with most photo-takers having long-term ties to the community. We tried to make sure that all residents of Medicine Hat and Redcliff had the chance to be a part of the project. Despite this, the group of photo-takers we interviewed represented only a small range of community residents.

The Photo-takers' Journey

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

Bringing it All Together

After photo-takers shared their community stories, summaries were created for the top five pictures from every photo-taker. All of the photo-takers had the chance to review the summaries for their photos and provide input. These summaries were used (with permission from the photo-takers) to create a presentation and this report to share with community members and local decision-makers. Residents



"The tennis courts are free and 90% of the time empty so my husband and I go there now and play. There are some cracks on the courts so it is not in tiptop shape, but it works for us. We ride our bikes to the tennis courts. I enjoy the fact that it isn't used very often because it's more fun for me. I don't know why it isn't popular among the locals, probably because tennis is a forgotten sport" (Redcliff resident).

and researchers hope that the pictures and stories will help other community members gain insight into the Medicine Hat and Redcliff communities. The stories and photos in this report are shared with permission from the photo-takers.

The Photo-takers' Stories

THE MEDICINE HAT/REDCLIFF COMMUNITY

Generally, all photo-takers reported that the communities were pleasant, safe places to live and a community where they enjoyed a good quality of life. None of the photo-takers mentioned crime, graffiti or violence as major problems in the communities.

More specifically, photo-takers from Redcliff expressed a strong sense of community. Residents felt that the small town provided them with a sense of safety and familiarity with other community members. However, three of the photo-takers in the study noted that older children (ages 12 to 17) in Redcliff were less connected to other neighbourhood youth when they attended school in Medicine Hat, as many Redcliff students did from Grade 7 and above.

Photo-takers expressed that Medicine Hat was an excellent place to live (as highlighted in the picture and caption above). Community ties in Medicine Hat seemed to be more family-based. Many photo-takers suggested that extended family members are a large part of their social network. One photo-taker noted this about Medicine Hat: *"I think new people who come here have a tough, at least I have heard, have a tough time breaking in to Medicine Hat because it can be so tight with family groups"* (Medicine Hat resident). However, this photo-taker also suggested, *"I think Medicine Hat as a community has quite a strong community spirit in terms of some of the things they offer as a city, I guess as the larger community"* (Medicine Hat resident). Other Medicine Hat residents expressed a strong family connection within the community and as well as a strong sense of community spirit as well.

Three of the photo-takers from Redcliff articulated concerns about immigrant workers brought to the community to work in the greenhouses. It was suggested that this group had limited access to services because they did not have vehicles.

Two of the photo-takers from Medicine Hat expressed frustration that previous attempts to affect change in their community had been disregarded by local politicians. One photo-taker wanting to advocate on behalf of the trees slated for removal in her area noted, *"we don't have a city councilor that is specific to this neighborhood, so then you just have to pick one out of the blue. . . I guess you could phone the MLA, but I*



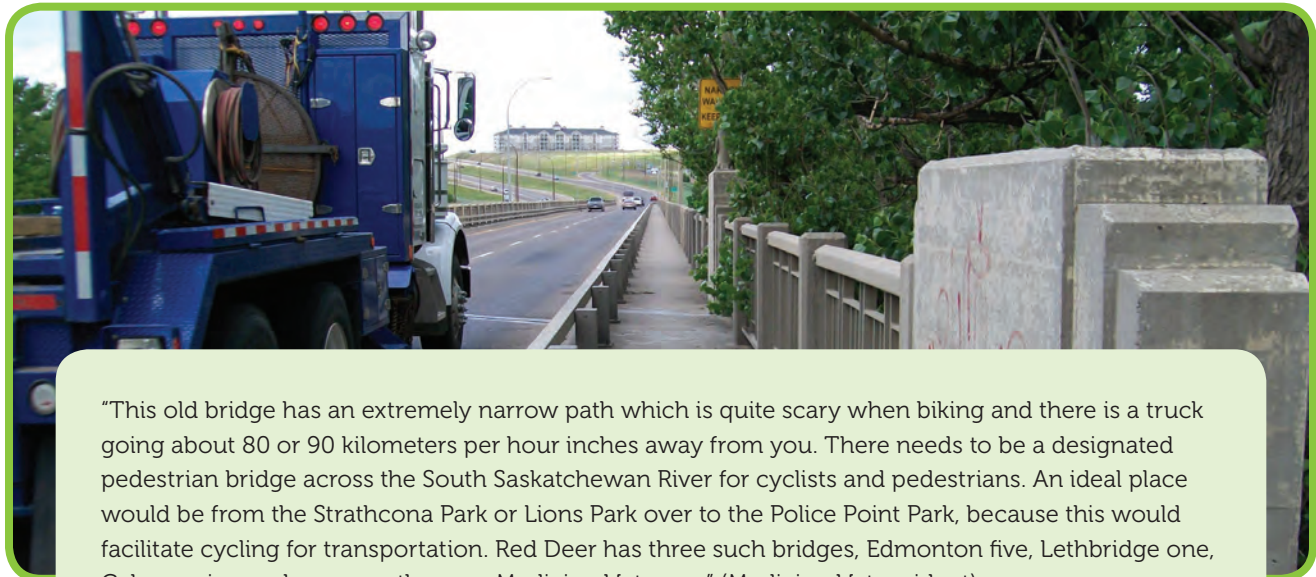
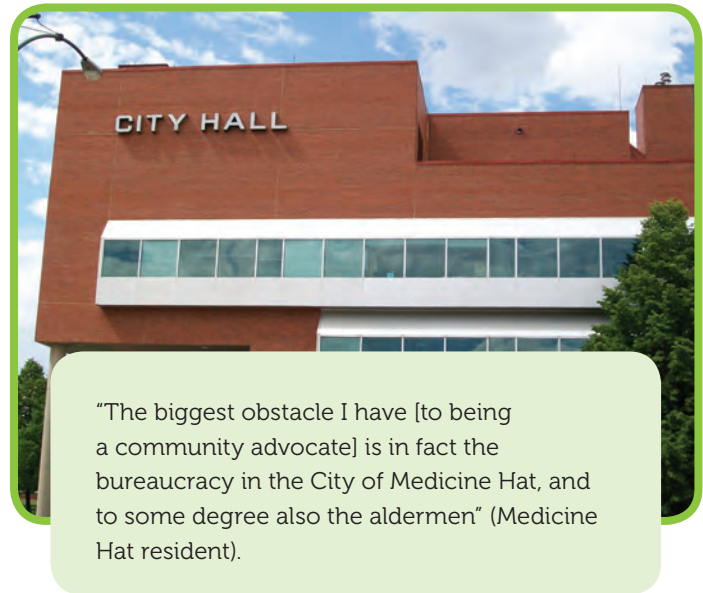
"Medicine Hat is an excellent place to live. You have no problem finding a place to exercise and do whatever you want. There is always something to do" (Medicine Hat resident).

have emailed him about other physical activity things, and he has never done anything about it" (Medicine Hat resident). These concerns are illustrated in the picture and caption on the right.

GEOGRAPHY AND CLIMATE

The study area included the City of Medicine Hat and the Town of Redcliff, which is located approximately 15 minutes east of Medicine Hat. The South Saskatchewan River serves as a major focal point in Medicine Hat as the community surrounds the river on both sides. Some photo-takers noted the lack of bridges that cross the river (particularly for pedestrian and bicycle use) therefore, various parts of the community were more challenging or time consuming to access (described in the picture and caption below).

Several photo-takers also noted how the southern location of Medicine Hat/Redcliff meant that their communities enjoyed a warmer climate than the rest of Alberta. They mentioned how Medicine Hat is known as "the sunniest city in Canada". The warm sun in Medicine Hat was identified as conducive to more outdoor activities, such as swimming and cycling. However, the heat of the summer and coldest days of winter were also identified as barriers to outdoor activity.



COMMUNITY ECONOMY

Although Medicine Hat and Redcliff are separate municipalities, photo-takers expressed that there is a close relationship between the two. The population of Redcliff is dependent on Medicine Hat for many services, including shopping, professional services, recreation and schools, and this relationship in turn contributes significantly to the economy in Medicine Hat. All of our photo-takers from Redcliff worked or went to school in Medicine Hat.

Medicine Hat is known as “the gas city” with much of its economy linked to the natural gas industry. As one photo-taker noted, the recent downturn in the Alberta economy has had significant effects on the residents of Medicine Hat. *“Almost every person I know who is married, their spouse has either lost a day of work or has been cutback in hours if they have been in the oil and gas field, or they have lost their job”* (Medicine Hat resident).

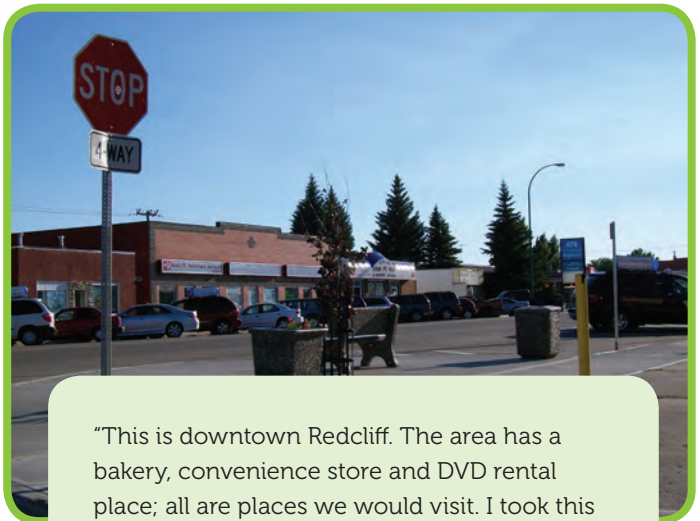
Redcliff has a large concentration of commercial greenhouses and is known as “the greenhouse capital of the prairies”. All the photo-takers noted how this makes locally grown produce readily available.

CAR CULTURE

Most photo-takers were quick to point out that recent developments in the community were designed with the automobile in mind. Photo-takers from Medicine Hat spoke to the difficulty of using walking or cycling to reach destinations in the City (as highlighted by the picture and caption above). Even those who didn't perceive automobile dependency as a problem spoke of their car as the key to mobility in Medicine Hat: *“Oh yes you just follow [the road] here, and drive, it will take you wherever you want to go”* (Medicine Hat resident). Long distances between residential and commercial/recreational services were cited as a barrier to active transportation, as was lack of safe places to cycle.



“Medicine Hat offers little for the cyclist that wants to use cycling as transportation. Not to go for a little joyride. People want to commute and ride their bike. And here it is, we are in Medicine Hat stuck in the mind frame of the 1950s. On-road bike lanes actually do serve a purpose to make it safe for cyclists, but also safer for the motorists, because I don't think there is any motorist out there that really wants to run over a cyclist” (Medicine Hat resident).



“This is downtown Redcliff. The area has a bakery, convenience store and DVD rental place; all are places we would visit. I took this picture because that area serves as a source of inspiration for us to walk to. We can walk there as a family and go for a treat. It is a nice place to walk to, and it is safe” (Redcliff resident).

ACCESSING LOCAL DESTINATIONS IN REDCLIFF

Photo-takers from Redcliff saw their town as very well set-up for walking to the services that were present in the community (as indicated in the picture and caption on previous page). Many spoke of walking to the library, pool and downtown area on a regular basis.

However, all photo-takers from Redcliff also indicated that they traveled regularly to Medicine Hat in order to access many services. Photo-takers pointed out that there was no safe way to travel between the municipalities without a car, as there is no bus service (as indicated in the picture and caption on the right). Transportation between the two cities was identified as particularly problematic for lower income individuals and immigrant workers without a car, and youth, seniors or disabled persons who did not drive.

TAKING A WALK THROUGH THE COMMUNITY

Sidewalks in Medicine Hat and Redcliff were noted as barriers to walking for leisure or active transportation. In Medicine Hat, one photo-taker with young children noted how the narrow sidewalks in her neighbourhood made it less pleasant to walk with her family. The very hot weather was also noted to be intensified by the lack of trees which would provide shade along the sidewalk, making walking unbearable as there was no protection from the midday sun. This photo-taker noted that building codes in her area did not require that trees be planted in new developments, so those who were building new homes, often overwhelmed by the cost of building, were not planting trees voluntarily (as highlighted in the picture and caption above).



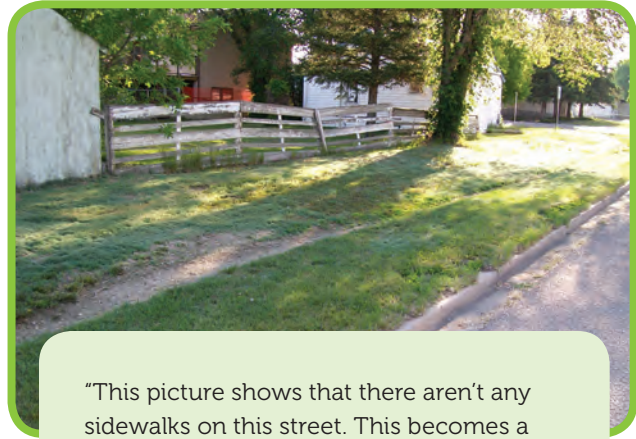
"I took this picture just to show that we don't have an actual bus system in Redcliff. If you don't have a vehicle, you don't qualify for special transit, can't afford a taxi, you are stuck in Redcliff. A bus would help me because I would be able to come into [Medicine Hat], go to the gym if I needed to, go to a bigger grocery store if I needed to. You know, do those things that I maybe can't do within my own community" (Redcliff resident).



"This is the sidewalk on our street; it is very narrow as you can see, and my husband and I can't even walk beside each other when pushing the stroller. Since there are a lot of cars parked on the street, you can't even walk on the street. People in new areas are not required to plant trees or anything, so aesthetically speaking this area isn't pleasing to look at and there is no shade" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This area is not paved, just gravel road. It is an area that is not really developed but I prefer to walk down this area because it feels peaceful, has less traffic and it doesn't raise any safety issues for me" (Redcliff resident).



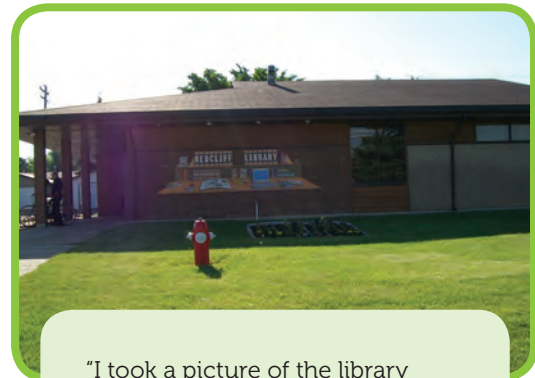
"This picture shows that there aren't any sidewalks on this street. This becomes a concern if you want to walk. There are actually a lot of streets that don't have sidewalks. So you either walk on the grass or gravel or walk on the street which isn't that safe" (Redcliff resident).

In Redcliff, photo-takers spoke about the absence of sidewalks in many areas as a barrier to safe walking in the community (as indicated in the picture and caption above). One teenage photo-taker noted that she was unable to rollerblade or use a scooter in her neighbourhood due to the absence of sidewalks.

Other Redcliff residents did not feel that lack of sidewalks were a barrier (as highlighted in the picture and caption above). One photo-taker chose to walk in an area without sidewalks at all, choosing the quieter area over the smoother walking surface.

REDCLIFF LIBRARY

One facility mentioned by several photo-takers in Redcliff was the local library (see picture and caption on the right). The library was mentioned as a hub of the community which not only offers information, but acts as a link between the community and local health promotion initiatives.



"I took a picture of the library for three reasons: you can get information on being physically active and eating healthy, the Good Food Boxes are distributed there, and the Community Garden is there" (Redcliff resident).

POPULAR FORMS OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Most photo-takers described walking for pleasure as a regular source of physical activity, whether walking the dog, walking to the park with their children or walking to take photographs. Similarly cycling as a form of leisure activity was commonly identified. However, walking and/or cycling as a form of active transportation was not very common, particularly among Medicine Hat photo-takers. One photo-taker however was a strong advocate for bike lanes in the city. He and several others reported it was very unsafe cycling on the street in Medicine Hat. Another Medicine Hat

resident noted, “you very rarely see people on the sidewalks. . . [it is] like a community bias against physical activity here”.

Swimming was also frequently mentioned as a common form of physical activity and also as a way to cool down in the hot summers. Most of the photo-takers reported that their activity declined in the winter as they did not like the cold, but for two photo-takers, their activity increased in the winter as a result of using indoor facilities.

Both of the photo-takers with young children prioritized their children’s activity above their own: “my physical activity right now is about my kids” (Redcliff resident). Many of them identified the importance of teaching their children about an active lifestyle as a motivator to physical activity.

MULTI-USE TRAILS

Several participants spoke about the trail system present in both Medicine Hat and Redcliff. Photo-takers in Medicine Hat indicated that the city had an extensive trail system which was cleared in the winter. Generally, the trail system was reported to be in good shape and enjoyable to cycle/run/walk on, but some photo-takers expressed concern about the upkeep of the trails (see picture and caption on the right). Despite efforts by the City of Medicine Hat, icy conditions were still reported to be a problem at times in the winter as well.

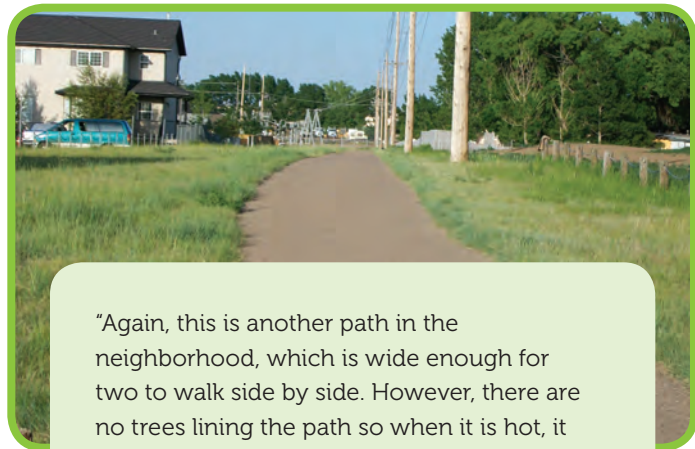
One photo-taker liked that she could walk side-by-side with her husband while pushing a stroller while on the trails (see picture and caption on the right). She also valued the green space beside the path that allowed her to let her toddler walk safely beside the stroller as well. However, the lack of trees along the path



“This is the interpretive centre in Police Point Park. You can rent cross country skis there at an affordable price. It is not too far from our house so it is very easy for us to get to” (Redcliff resident).



“Medicine Hat has many good trails. This trail to Echo Dale was part of the original system built in the Don Getty years, but there is no scheduled maintenance program in place. In places, the weeds are growing up through the trails. I believe this is very dangerous for cyclists, people walking, running, and for parents pulling the kids in the little buggy behind their bikes” (Medicine Hat resident).



“Again, this is another path in the neighborhood, which is wide enough for two to walk side by side. However, there are no trees lining the path so when it is hot, it becomes unbearable to walk there” (Medicine Hat resident).



"This natural space off South Boundary Road has some of the only trees in the area. These will probably be ripped down for the new development. Right now, we enjoy walking on this road as it is not open to traffic yet" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This is a picture of the walking trails by the river. It has benches for people to sit when they get tired" (Medicine Hat resident).

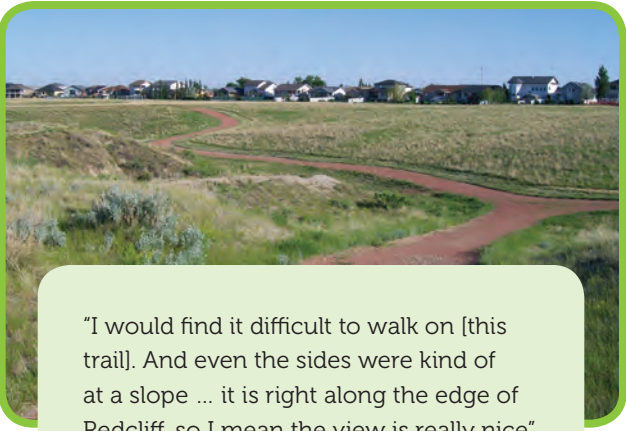
still presented a barrier to using the trails on hot days. This photo-taker preferred to walk along South Boundary Road to take advantage of the trees before the area was redeveloped (see picture and caption above).

In other, more central areas of town, there are trees and benches along the trail, which provided a favorite place for one photo-taker to walk who needed to rest frequently (see picture and caption above). This photo-taker also valued walking downtown where the aesthetics are pleasing; this gives him something to look at as he walks (see picture and caption below).

In Redcliff, feedback about the trail system was not as positive. Photo-takers noted that there are two trails in Redcliff, but only one is paved, which makes it difficult to walk on, particularly for seniors. Both paths however did run along the cliffs in Redcliff, and thus they offer pleasant scenery (see picture and caption below). Yet, photo-takers also noted that the trails lack connectivity and lead to nowhere. No photo-takers reported making regular use of the trails. One photo-taker described one way to improve her community: *"I would put more paths in that actually lead somewhere, because they don't lead anywhere. They like stop"*. Photo-takers did note that the trails were a start and were something to build from.



"This was taken downtown. It's nice to walk around there and look at the flags, I like to go down there and do that. There is also a train there" (Medicine Hat resident).



"I would find it difficult to walk on [this trail]. And even the sides were kind of at a slope ... it is right along the edge of Redcliff, so I mean the view is really nice" (Redcliff resident).



"This road leads to a park and across from the park is a place where you can go fishing. Kids go there and have a good time. There are no community issues to bring up about the park" (Medicine Hat resident).



"These are the swings in the playground at Kin Coulee Park. It is a busy place as it is well used" (Medicine Hat resident).

PARKS AND GREEN SPACES

Photo-takers from both Medicine Hat and Redcliff expressed appreciation for the large number of parks in the area. Kin Coulee Park and Police Point Park in particular were mentioned as being focal points of the community, offering outdoor activities in both summer and winter, for residents of Medicine Hat as well as Redcliff (see pictures and captions above).

Photo-takers suggested that both municipalities had several parks, but one photo-taker in Medicine Hat noted parks were not utilized evenly (see picture and caption below).

Two photo-takers mentioned Echo Dale as a park they frequently enjoyed. One thing the photo-takers found challenging about using the park was accessibility (see picture and caption below). The park is located just behind Redcliff, but there is no path to take you there and photo-takers suggested that



"This is Southridge Park, a busy park where we often go. Empty parks have certain characteristics; they are the types of parks where you can't have little kids. [The parks have] lots of monkey bars, there are not really places for the kids to run or climb up and they are not at all shaded" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This is a man made swimming lake at Echo Dale. The sign on it shows the lifeguard hours. In June and August it is closed early so that might serve as a deterrent to people actually using the place. I can't go out there after work because the swimming is over by the time I get there. It gets busy in July when it is open a little bit later. It kind of bugs me that we build a beautiful resource and then have such limited access to it" (Redcliff resident).

building a bridge from Redcliff would allow youth to access the park without having to drive there. Photo-takers also noted that the limited hours at the facility are a barrier to accessing Echo Dale park.

COMMUNITY RECREATION FACILITIES

Both Medicine Hat and Redcliff have a variety of recreational facilities. In Redcliff, photo-takers spoke of the municipalities many outdoor facilities, including the pool, tennis courts, BMX track and golf course (see picture and caption on the right). These amenities were all located centrally, near one another, which photo-takers found convenient, allowing their children to easily access the facilities.

Redcliff is also home to an arena (the Rec-tangle) and a curling rink. A frequent concern raised by the photo-takers in Redcliff is that there is little to do in the winter for indoor activities. Photo-takers noted that there is no gym in town or place to walk or swim indoors, necessitating a trip to Medicine Hat to do these type of activities. For those unable to drive, particularly seniors and youth, this presented an even bigger problem.

Medicine Hat has many recreational facilities, both indoor and outdoor. The Leisure Centre and the YMCA were frequently noted by photo-takers as valuable resources in their community as place to go for physical activity (see picture and caption on the right).

However, two main areas of concern were raised for amenities in Medicine Hat: time accessibility and cost. One photo-taker with young children noted that there is a lack of places to take her daughter to play on weekend mornings if the weather is bad (see picture and caption on the right).



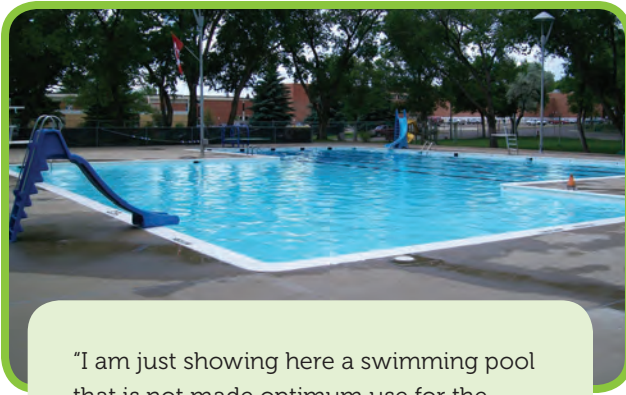
"This is the Redcliff aquatic center. I usually take my son there. They have swim lessons available. It is accessible and it is located opposite to the BMX track" (Redcliff resident).



"This is the Family Leisure Centre. It has water slides, weight rooms, a rink and an arts and crafts facility in it. They all also have a hot tub and steam room. It is a useful spot for the community, and it is affordable. Lots of kids in the community make use of the facility" (Medicine Hat resident).



"If it is raining and it is like a Saturday, there is nowhere to take your kid except McDonalds Play Land. So you can't go to the Leisure Centre because it doesn't open until noon, the Y doesn't open till noon. And where else can you go if you want your kid to get some active time. She can't go to the park because it is pouring" (Medicine Hat resident).



"I am just showing here a swimming pool that is not made optimum use for the people of the community to swim. I like to swim there at 6 in the morning like I used to, or at 7, whatever time it was, I can't do that anymore" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This is a picture of a greenhouse, and I took it because there are a lot of them in Redcliff. You can go there and purchase vegetables very cheap. I had never accessed them directly before because I wasn't sure if I could. So I think that this sign helped because then I knew that I could just go in. It might be a concern that people don't know the process and don't know what to do, or maybe even that they sell to the public, and so don't access them" (Redcliff resident).

Similarly, another photo-taker noted that his local pool is not open to swim laps in the morning anymore, which presents a barrier to activity for this individual (see picture and caption on the left).

Cost of indoor activities was also identified as a barrier to physical activity for residents. Particularly given the recent economic turndown, one photo-taker noted that several of her friends with young children could only do activities which were free in the community. Generally, cost led to more problems in the winter: *"[when it is really cold or icy] we would go to the Y, they have an indoor track, but a few of the people wouldn't come because it was too expensive. The drop-in fee is almost \$10 and you can't get just a one-month or a punch card pass that is discounted or anything, so it is a \$10 drop-in fee at the Southridge Y, where the running track is. So if you want to run 3 times a week that is \$30 a week, and these are all moms with young families and they can't afford it"* (Medicine Hat resident). This photo-taker noted that there is a fee reduction program available, *"but it is more, I think for people who are on social assistance, where there is not a lot for working poor, there is nothing, there are no services for working poor"*. Other photo-takers, from both Redcliff and Medicine Hat, mentioned free swimming and skating times, offered in both communities and sponsored by the Kinsmen, were often utilized and appreciated by community members.

COMMUNITY GREENHOUSES

Many of the photo-takers told researchers that the greenhouses of Medicine Hat/Redcliff provided their communities with an excellent source of well-priced local produce (see picture and caption above). Some photo-takers reported that they purchased produce directly from the greenhouses, which was convenient and less expensive than getting produce at the grocery store. However, some photo-takers, particularly those newer members to the community, were unsure if the greenhouses sold produce directly to individuals. Those without local knowledge of etiquette for shopping at the greenhouses could potentially be missing the valuable opportunity of purchasing vegetables at reduced cost.

COMMUNITY GROCERY STORES

Photo-takers from Medicine Hat were all positive about the healthy food options available in the city. Costco and Superstore were the most commonly utilized grocery stores. Other smaller stores such as Regis Meats and Nutters (see picture and caption on the right) were valued for their healthy natural food choices and the local ownership.

All photo-takers from Redcliff told us that they did not regularly buy groceries in town. Cost and lack of selection were cited as reasons that the grocery store was not regularly utilized, and photo-takers only went there to pick up convenience items. Photo-takers noted that some individuals in Redcliff have difficulties shopping without access to a vehicle to go to Medicine Hat. Temporary workers from Mexico were specifically mentioned as vulnerable in this situation (see picture and caption below). Some photo-takers feared for the safety of Mexican workers riding their bikes to the Superstore in Medicine Hat and returning with bags on their handlebars, a distance of approximately 15 kilometers each way. Recently a Mexican grocery store had opened in town, but none of the photo-takers were sure if the store was meeting the needs of the workers.



"Nutters is a bulk and natural food franchise that originated in Medicine Hat" (Medicine Hat Resident).



"Redcliff Foods is the only grocery store and certainly helps the town eat healthy, because if we didn't have one at all, that would be really hard, especially for the people that can't get into Medicine Hat. Unfortunately, it is quite expensive compared to Medicine Hat, so I only use it to pick things up last minute. For people who live on a fixed income, I think that it would be a challenge to choose healthier foods if they only shopped there. Since we live a block away from Redcliff foods, we bike or walk there whenever we go to pick up things. It might not be as accessible to those who live in the newer developments because it is located in the outskirts of Redcliff. It's open throughout the week and weekends and is relatively busy" (Redcliff resident).

GOOD FOOD BOX PROGRAM AND COMMUNITY GARDENS

Two of the photo-takers in Redcliff mentioned the Good Food Box program and the community garden available in both Medicine Hat and Redcliff. Photo-takers told researchers that the Good Food Box can be purchased at the Redcliff Library each month and offers a selection of local produce at prices less than the stores. The Good Food boxes in combination with the community garden helps to increase access to healthy foods in both communities.

FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS

While shortage of healthy food was not identified as a problem, *“too many fast food restaurants here”* (Medicine Hat resident) was a common message made by photo-takers. One photo-taker from Medicine Hat noted that fast food restaurants in Medicine Hat were very busy: *“I think it is cost, not health that makes a difference in terms of how busy places are”*. She cited the example of two Mexican food restaurants in her area: *“and you will even see the difference, if you go to Mucho Burrito at lunch and you go to Taco Time at lunch, the lineup at Taco Time is way longer, and it is way busier, than Mucho Burrito, because Mucho Burrito is expensive in Medicine Hat”*. The photo-taker acknowledged that she was able to support healthier eating choices and local business owners largely because she had the resources to do so, but many other residents did not have the same resources to make healthy choices (see picture and caption above).

Photo-takers also told the story of how fast food restaurants were part of the social fabric of Medicine Hat (see picture and caption above).

Fast food also gave many photo-takers a local destination for a walk or bike ride. *“I took [the picture] because I always walk on that trail, all the time, because there is like Tim Horton’s down there”* (Redcliff resident), this quote represented a common theme to the stories told by the photo-takers.



“I like Mucho Burrito because the food is fresh and healthy. I go there at least once a week with my daughter. It is more expensive than other fast food, but I support the place because the food there is healthier and I get portions that follow Canada’s Food Guide. I also want to support the local owner”
(Medicine Hat resident).



“We meet [at Dairy Queen] often as a family. If any of the kids have dance recitals, or soccer games, we would typically go to that Dairy Queen and meet up as a family and all go there and have like an ice cream together. . . It is a real social thing to go to the Dairy Queen here and it has always been like that ever since I was a little kid”
(Medicine Hat resident).

Summary

Photo-takers from Medicine Hat and Redcliff generally felt their communities' built environment helped them to make healthy choices. Outdoor physical activity amenities were plentiful in both communities, but Redcliff residents told us they needed more opportunities for indoor activity in the winter in their town. Medicine Hat has many indoor facilities, but for some, cost could be a barrier.

Photo-takers interviewed in Medicine Hat and Redcliff tended to participate in physical activity more as a leisure time activity than as a form of active transportation. Photo-takers who spoke about active transportation told researchers that walking was often impractical because of long distances to cover and busy roads to cross. Cycling on Medicine Hat streets was noted as dangerous by several photo-takers, and trails lacked connectivity to be efficient for transportation. Trails were valued however for recreational opportunities only and not for transportation. Since the weather in southern Alberta tends to be extremes of hot and sunny in summer and cold and windy in winter, walking in the community is more attractive where there are trees to offer protection from the elements. Ensuring trees are planted in newer areas may encourage activity in the newly developed areas now and in years to come.

Generally, healthy eating in Medicine Hat and Redcliff was easily available to those who had a vehicle. Photo-takers, particularly those from Redcliff, expressed concern for members of their community who lacked a vehicle and the access to reasonably priced healthy food. The cheaper cost and social opportunities afforded by fast food restaurants were key to the success of the many fast food restaurants in the area.



"These stairs are also in Kin Coulee park. On either side of the stairs is a hill used for tobogganing. In the winter you can use the stairs to get to the top of the hill and there is a path atop the stairs as well" (Medicine Hat resident).



"This is one of the first signs you see coming into Redcliff. It usually shows community events going on in Redcliff. This time it is advertising Lion's Park. It usually announces any sort of recreational activities or events coming up" (Redcliff resident).

Who We Are

The researchers from the University of Alberta have partnered with the Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation for this project. The Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation works with the community to ensure that various project pertaining to both active (bikes, trails) and alternate (improved transit, improved sidewalks, walkways/wheelchair access) transportation are improved.

What's Next?

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

Thank You!

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

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Our Community Partner:

The Coalition for Active and Alternate Transportation

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