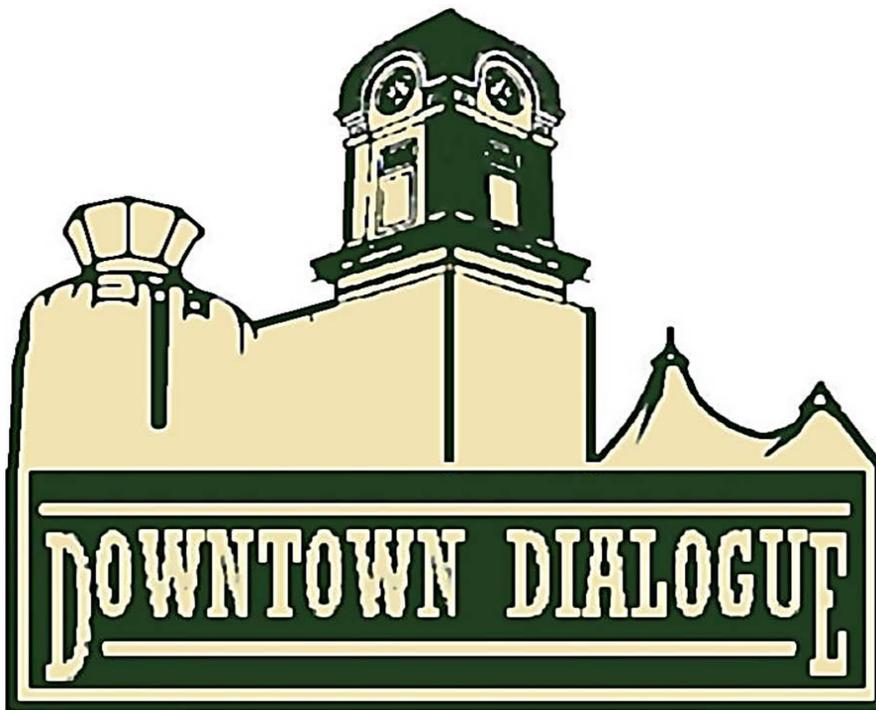


Downtown Dialogue in Action

Crime Prevention through Social Development

December 31st, 2014



Northern Ontario Research, Development, Ideas and Knowledge



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And by

Steffanie Petroni and Allyson Schmidt who provided research assistance and reached out to individuals whose voices would not otherwise have been heard;

NORDIK Institute is a community-based research institute affiliated with Algoma University. NORDIK promotes more vibrant, caring and sustainable communities through research, dialogue, analysis and reflection dedicated to the practice of holistic community development.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like other cities of its size in Northern Ontario, Sault Ste. Marie is facing a number of challenges, including an aging population and rapid changes to a resource-based economy. The downtown area of the city, like other urban centres across North America, has been experiencing a decline due in part to a changing global economy. This has led to a general **loss of vitality in the City's core**, exacerbated **by increasing social needs**. The well-documented social needs led to a high demand for police services in the downtown area requiring a comprehensive approach that went well beyond the capacity of any one service to address.

Building on the province's "Community Mobilization and Engagement Strategy" (Hamilton, 2010) adopted by Ontario's Chiefs of Police, Sault Ste. Marie Police Service's former Chief Bob Davies, approached NORDIK Institute and the John Howard Society in the spring of 2012 to invite their support in addressing the challenges in the downtown core of the City. A community dialogue and action research process was undertaken commencing in early 2013 which engaged social service agencies, local boards of education, businesses and residents for over a year in developing a plan to **reduce crime through social development**. This report outlines the context for the effort, methodologies used, findings of the project, and the outcomes and recommendations.

Over 1000 individuals participated in surveys, interviews, focus groups, media and social media commentary, and action research initiatives throughout this year-long process. Participants were passionate about the city's downtown core. While many expressed concerns over issues documented in this report, still nearly 90% of survey respondents felt that the downtown core held a **promising future** or strong potential, and were enthusiastic about numerous new developments and initiatives, some of which were stimulated by the action research itself.

Contrary to some public suggestions of a crime problem in the downtown, the research and Sault Ste. Marie Police Service (SSMPS) statistics demonstrate that the higher than average police service calls stem from issues of "social disorder" that are best addressed by increasing **opportunities for social interaction** and providing **supports to those most in need**. Numerous organizations responded to the call for change both during and subsequent to the period of data collection, resulting in initiatives such as the *restorative justice training* sponsored by the John Howard Society; the *Graffiti Reframed* project which fosters local dialogue between artists and the wider community and provides skills development for graffiti artists; and the *Neighbourhood Resource Centre* (NRC) a collaborative designed to bring services closer to

downtown residents led by the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service, established in the Gore-Albert Street neighbourhood.

The SSMPS has been providing the much-needed backbone support to the large-scale change envisioned by the participants in the Downtown Dialogue in Action project. In brief, SSMPS has:

- Adopted a crime prevention through social development philosophy, and implemented a community mobilization and engagement strategy to achieve this goal;
- Allocated resources – human, financial and infrastructure – to make this happen;
- Raised awareness in the community of the mobilization strategy, and formed partnerships to implement it; and
- Continued to co-generate knowledge and action to support the strategy.

The project has demonstrated both the power of and the need for the City of Sault Ste. Marie and local public services to **work collaboratively** with service providers, non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, and creative residents in a **multifaceted, holistic approach to revitalization**.

Rooted in the goals of crime prevention through social development, the recommendations coming out of the initiative focussed on employing a comprehensive, collaborative approach to resolving issues of public safety, security and well-being centred on four key theatres of action:

1. Strengthening social cohesion

- Including increased access to recreation opportunities, community spaces, and support for social enterprise, community events, and cross-cultural awareness;

2. Addressing the needs of ‘at-risk’ neighbourhoods and people

- Including expansion of the Neighbourhood Resource Centre, increased access to health and social services, organizing neighbourhood residents and businesses, and design solutions to crime and isolation;

3. Increasing access to the necessities of life

- Including greater access to food, housing, and childcare; and

4. Fostering a healthy downtown culture & economy

- Including greater support for the Downtown Association and local small businesses, increased walkability and accessibility, residential intensification, support for active transportation, and promotion of local heritage.

To fully support this approach, the report recommends striking a **coordinating committee composed of residents, business or property owners, service providers, and other diverse stakeholders** to advance the recommendations of the *Downtown Dialogue in Action* project.

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1.0 Introduction & Need for Change

Sault Ste. Marie, a small city (population approx.: 75,000) in Northeastern Ontario, is located on the St. Mary's River at the hub of three of the Upper Great Lakes: Superior, Michigan and Huron. Its strategic location at the heart of North America's transportation route supported habitation long before Europeans arrived, and today two First Nations, Batchewana and Garden River, still border the city, while a relatively high population of Aboriginal people (11%) reside within the City limits (Statistics Canada 2006). Like other cities of its size in Northern Ontario, however, Sault Ste. Marie is facing a number of challenges, including an aging population and rapid changes to a resource-based economy.

The downtown area of the city, like other urban centres across North America, has been experiencing a decline due in part to a changing global economy, where 'big box' retail outlets challenge the survival and growth of smaller locally-owned businesses, and high residential density urban cores have filtered out into suburban developments. This has led to a general **loss of vitality** with empty storefronts, less traffic, and a lack of a full-service grocery store. The loss of economic vitality has been exacerbated **by increasing social needs**: an older housing stock in the downtown core has tended to deteriorate as newer subdivisions were built on the city's outskirts, so less affluent families, dependent on public transit, have clustered in the more affordable housing downtown. Further, the construction of several senior citizens' apartment towers has increased the need for health and social services while the hospital, among other health and social services, have relocated from the downtown to the outskirts of the City.

Sault Ste. Marie Police Service's Division 2, which encompasses the downtown and the study area for this research, is the smallest of the Service's four divisions in both population and land area, yet the division experiences a disproportionate number of calls for service. Residents and business people in the downtown core have regularly contacted police for assistance, often relating to '**social disorder**'¹ rather than criminal activity.

Recognizing the limitations of conventional policing resources to effectively respond to such 'social disorder' calls, the *Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police* in association with the *Government of Ontario* developed a **Mobilization and Engagement Model of Community Policing** (Hamilton, 2010). The model proposes a cycle of assessment, planning and action to foster cross-sector collaboration addressing the underlying issues that reduce social cohesion and thus contribute to increases in criminal behaviour (OACP, 2010). The model, visible in

¹ 'Social Disorder' calls for service include such issues as noise complaints, 'suspicious person(s)', landlord/tenant disputes, and concerns regarding intoxication or drug use. The majority of social disorder calls are resolved without resulting in an arrest.

Figure 1, consists of four colour-coded stages. The **Red Zone** reflects a high need for police assistance, where the community's problem-solving capacity is significantly reduced, and police assistance is needed for **law enforcement and crime suppression**. While police are engaged in patrolling and intelligence gathering, the 'community mobilization' phase of the model calls for **social development measures** to be implemented that address root causes of crime, including poverty, substandard housing, and insufficient supports for children and parents. Furthermore, police lead safety initiatives in collaboration with community members, always with an eye for identifying potential leaders who can take leading roles in reinstating community ownership over their own security. Amber and Blue Zones represent a transition toward safer communities and **crime prevention strategies**. Police services in the **Amber Zone** continue to focus on community mobilization to as a means of recruiting neighbours and stakeholders to deal more effectively with the root causes of crime within a neighbourhood. The **Blue Zone** represents a reduction in service calls and the success of some community efforts. Police services also shift their focus to **community engagement** whereby they encourage local citizens to play a larger role in raising their own standards of safety and well-being. The **Green Zone** reflects a low need for police assistance, where the community leads its own problem solving and safety initiatives, largely **preventing criminal behaviour** altogether.

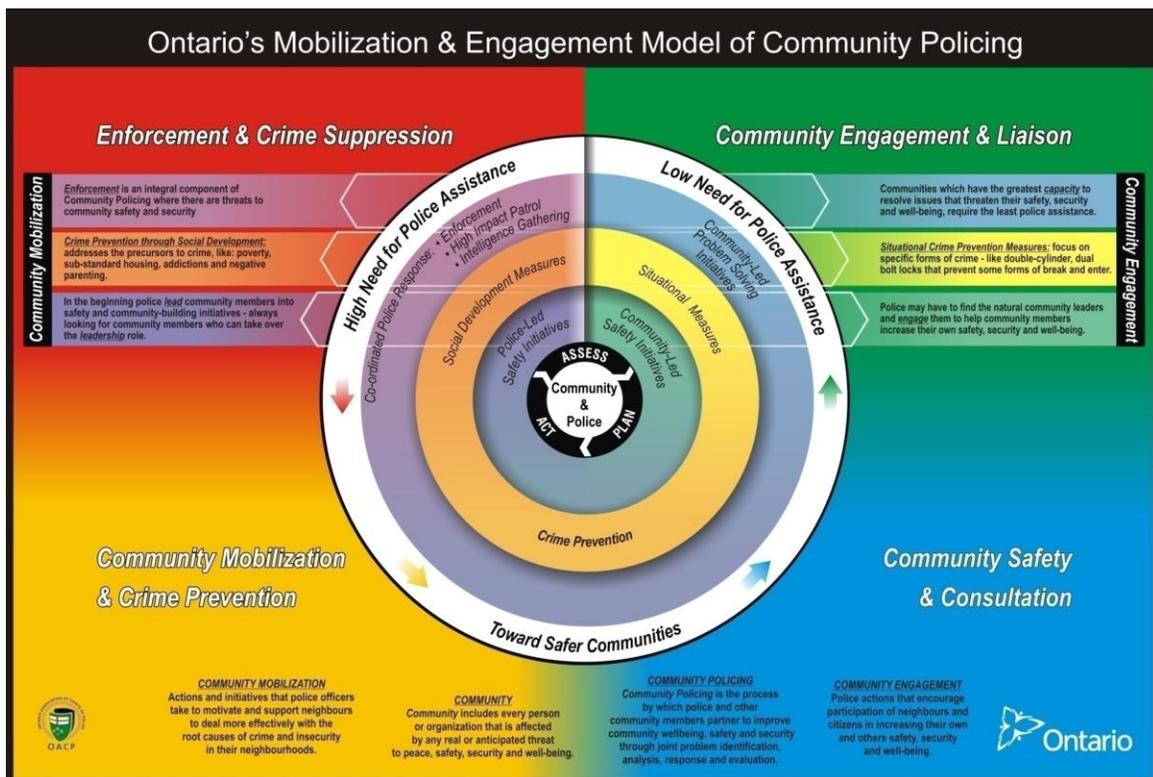


Figure 1: Ontario's Mobilization & Engagement Model of Community Policing (OACP, 2010)

The mobilization and engagement model of community policing requires a great deal of cross-sector collaboration and citizen-police cooperation. As the **Sault Ste. Marie Police Service** (SSMPS) examined the high rate and nature of calls for service in Division 2, it became increasingly apparent that community mobilization was needed to alleviate some of the pressures on the neighbourhood and police resources.

The SSMPS recognized that a permanent solution to the socio-economic issues prompting this demand for service required a more comprehensive approach and began searching for a longer lasting solution to the problem.

In May 2012 then-Chief of Police Bob Davies travelled to Montreal to attend a conference for police chiefs across the country. On the way there, two opportunities presented themselves to him to speak first with NORDIK Institute's Director of Research, Dr. Gayle Broad, and secondly with Suzanne Lajambe, Executive Director of the Sault's John Howard Society. Chief Davies discussed with both his concerns about the city's downtown area and the need to take a social development approach to resolving the problems the area was facing. Both Broad and Lajambe offered their organizations' support for taking an approach that would de-escalate criminalization and emphasize healthy social development.

Upon his return to Sault Ste. Marie, Chief Davies wasted no time. The following week, he contacted Dr. Broad and invited NORDIK to support the SSMPS in applying for a 'Proceeds of Crime Grant' that was due in just a few days. This first application was turned down in late August 2012, but this only seemed to strengthen Chief Davies' resolve. NORDIK assisted the SSMPS in coordinating subsequent meetings with the John Howard Society and then with a much larger group in March 2013, and a second application was submitted, this time successfully, which included both research as well as restorative justice training. Additional funding was obtained from the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund Corporation (NOHFC) as well as the United Way's Community Endowment Fund, to support the Downtown Dialogue in Action project.

By project start-up in May 2013, a group of approximately twenty individuals and organizations, including private businesspeople, residents, both school boards, and a number of service agencies, were committed to the project and the research, under the leadership of the SSMPS.

Shortly thereafter, a partnership was formed between the Police Services, NORDIK Institute and the John Howard Society to advance a community-based action research project called "Downtown Dialogue in Action". The partners met over the first year and brought other interested parties to the table, and in August, 2013, obtained funding to support this initiative. The partnership also developed a Steering Committee with other stakeholder groups. From May 2013 until May 2014 NORDIK employed a research coordinator, **Jessica Bolduc**, BA (Hons,

Econ) and two research interns, **Dana Chalifoux**, BSW, and **Tom Green**, MPL, to lead the action research and community engagement exercise. The Institute also provided research oversight and project coordination.

The vision for this project included four major components:

- Background research on the status of the city's downtown area and the engagement of residents, businesses, social service providers and consumers of services in a dialogue about the future of the downtown;
- Training of educators and police personnel in Restorative Justice practice;
- Exploration by all three partners of additional actions that could be taken to support social development;
- The development of a set of recommendations informing a comprehensive community plan for social development in the downtown area.

This report explores the outcomes of the research, dialogue and actions taken over the past year (March 2013 – April, 2014). **Section 2** reviews the methods used to engage the community in a dialogue and creating a vision for a comprehensive approach to change in the downtown area. **Section 3** outlines a review of literature pertaining to life in Sault Ste. Marie's downtown, as well as the role of social development in crime prevention. **Section 4** provides a summary of the research findings, including survey, focus group, and media review data. The section outlines participants' perceptions of the current challenges facing Sault Ste. Marie's downtown, together with an analysis of the strengths and opportunities to address these. Interspersed throughout this section are summaries of actions that were taken or are underway to advance the community's vision of a healthy and thriving downtown, including a community mobilization strategy adopted by the *SSMPS* and the emergence of a Restorative Justice community led by the John Howard Society, among many other projects. **Section 5** describes the public and official response to the research, dialogue, and action processes that have been carried out through the project. Finally, **Section 6** provides recommendations for further action to actualize social development within the downtown, while **Section 7** outlines the overall conclusions from the project.

1.1 Social Risk Factors

Significant risks for criminal involvement stem from limitations on the supports that children receive during early development.

In an effort to measure childhood wellbeing, the Best Start Network Report developed a metric based on a variety of indicators. According to the report, a child below the 10th percentile "has

poor overall social skills; has regular serious problems in more than one area of getting along with other children – accepting responsibility for his or her own actions, following rules and class routines, being respectful of adults, children and others’ property, having self-confidence and self-control, and adjusting to change; and is usually unable to work independently” (DSSMBSN, 2011, p.30). While several of these indicators are obviously culturally contingent, the Network’s report remains one of the few tools for measuring the impact of limited supports on children within Sault Ste. Marie.

Figure 2 outlines the level of social risk reported for children across Sault Ste. Marie. See section 4.8.1 for more information about the Social Risk Index.

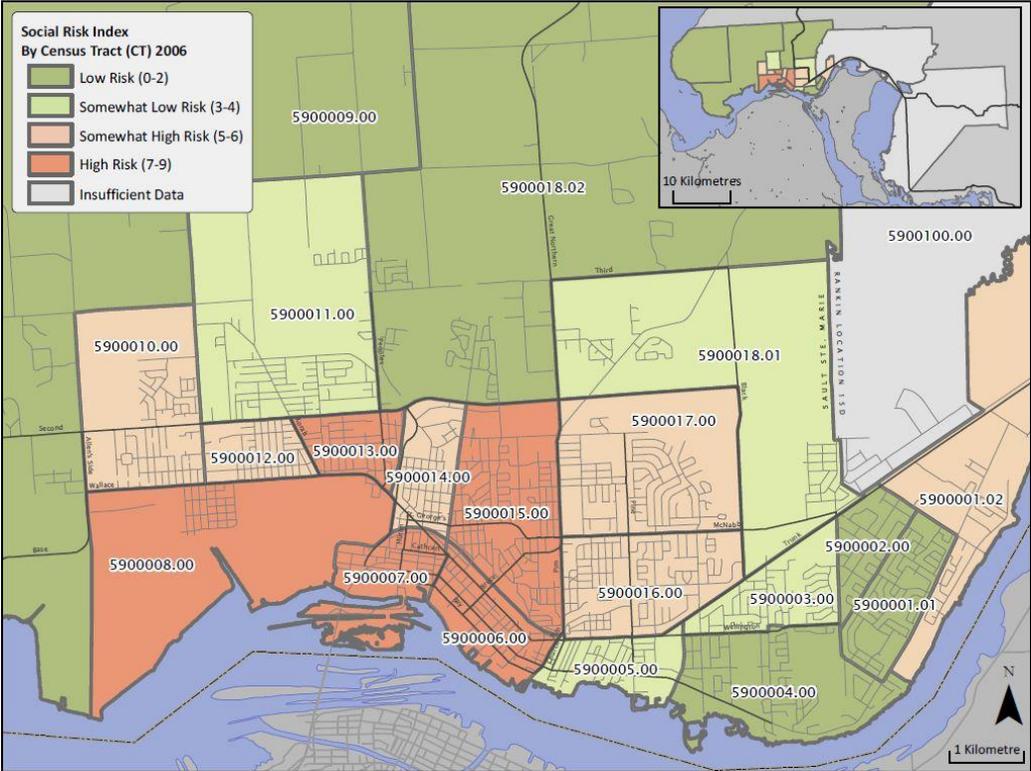


Figure 2: Children’s social risk in downtown area [tracts 5900007.00; 5900006.00; and 5900005.00]

The children growing up in the downtown area (tracts 5900007 and 5900006) are among the most at-risk children in Canada. Exacerbating this challenge is a lack of access to health services and recreational opportunities.

1.3 Health and Well-being Factors

Deficient health care and mental health services are also significant risk factors for criminal behaviour. Currently as a result of the Sault Area Hospitals and Algoma Public Health relocating

to Third Line and Willow Ave., respectively, the downtown is experiencing a depletion of these resources of care (Dutkiewicz, 2011; Lauzon & Kelly, 2013). The risk of isolation which can affect health is magnified by a lack of accessible transportation options (Dutkiewicz, 2011).

Insufficient access to recreation also has a negative impact on well-being by limiting opportunities for social contact and cohesion (DSSMBSN, 2011). Sault Ste. Marie has playgrounds and recreation opportunities in many parts of the city, however these are noticeably absent in the downtown core, as demonstrated by Figure 3 (DSSMBSN, 2011). *The Healthy Communities* partnership also noted a need for access to affordable physical activity opportunities, safe and proper recreation facilities and bike paths (Dutkiewicz, 2011).

Those who reside in the area between Dennis and Pilgrim Streets have no access to school or municipal playgrounds within reasonable walking distance, thus creating barriers and limiting opportunities for youth and families. Without such access residents are more likely to experience a lack of healthy activity and are at a higher risk of social isolation, which results in higher risks for social disorder and crime (DSSMBSN, 2011).

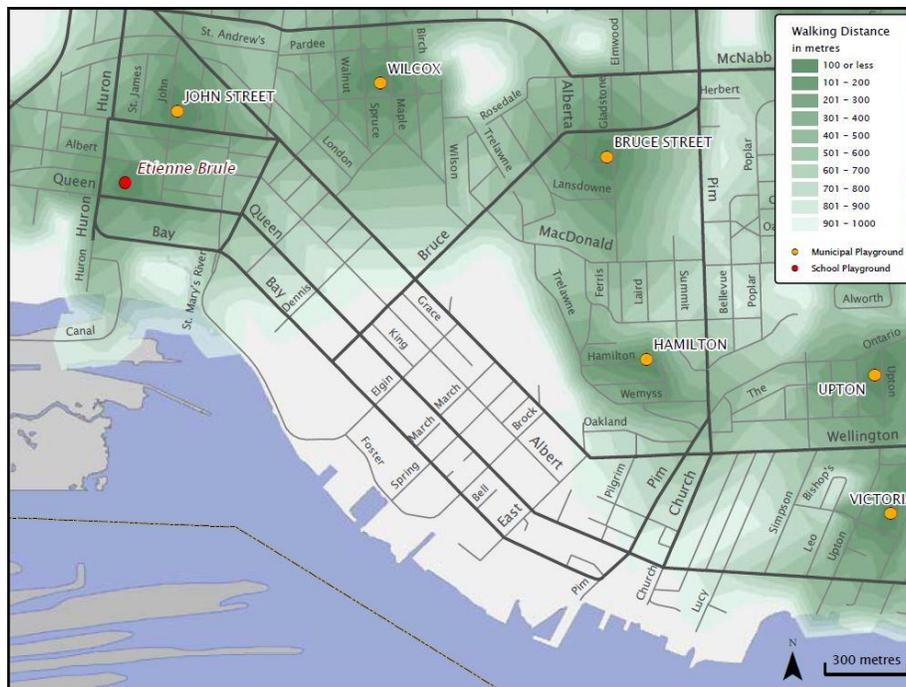
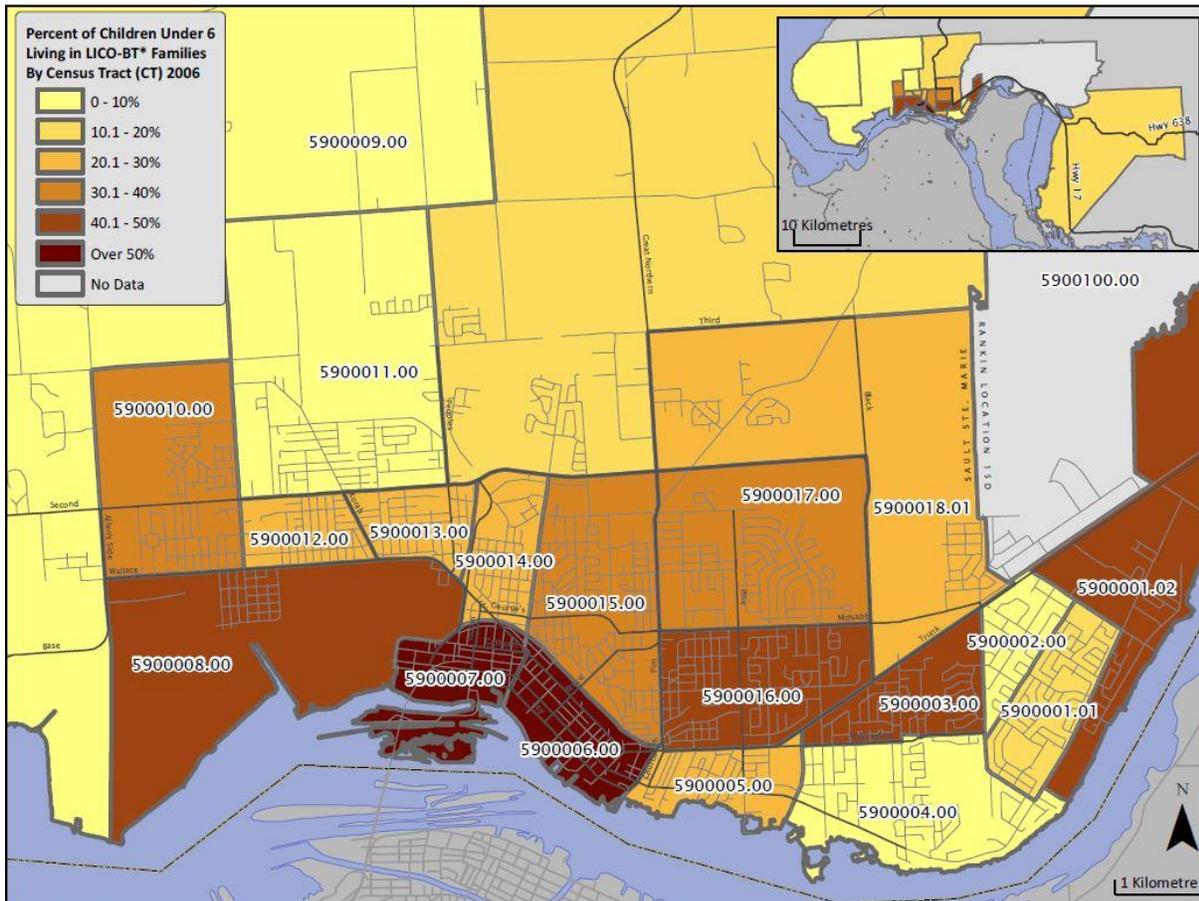


Figure 3: Location of Municipal and School Playgrounds

1.4 Economic and Demographic Factors

Poverty and related factors have been consistently demonstrated to have a momentous impact on the prevalence of crime (Russell, 2014). The city's downtown residents experience a lower

socio-economic status than the city’s general average and lower income levels within households. Average per capita income in the study area is less than \$30 000 per year, and average family income is less than \$50 000 per year (Statistics Canada, 2012). A shocking 50% of the children living in the downtown live below the low-income cut-off (LICO) poverty measure. Figure 4 demonstrates the distribution of child poverty across Sault Ste. Marie.



*LICO-Before Tax: Income levels at which families spend 20% more than average of their before tax income on food, shelter and clothing (Statistics Canada).

Figure 4: Children living in low income families (Best Start Network 2011)

Residents also have lower levels of education than the city’s average, and a higher percentage live in rental units (DSSMBSN, 2011; Statistics Canada, 2012). A 2007 Economic Feasibility Study of the downtown found that the factors contributing to its decline were the dilapidation and vacancy of infrastructure, including housing and storefronts; limited ownership opportunities; and inaccessibility or lack of retail choices in the area.

1.5 Crime and Safety Factors

The downtown core suffers from the perception of reduced safety, due at least in part to the higher than average calls for service received by police (IBI Group, 2007). This perception is intensified by the presence of vacant and unmaintained store fronts, property crime such as graffiti, and an absence of life and vibrancy in the area (m.i.&fg.²).

A lack of pedestrian presence in the downtown can increase criminal activity, or the perceptions of criminal activity. Creating a thriving downtown with people utilizing the space puts ‘more eyes on the streets’ and can therefore decrease crime or change the negative perceptions of safety in a given area (Jacobs, 1961). The limited public presence in the neighbourhood consequentially limits the perception of safety.

1.6 Need for Change Summary

As the local studies from the health, economic, and social service sectors indicate, many people residing in the downtown core are marginalized with limited incomes, supports, and resources (DSSMBSN, 2011; Dutkiewicz, 2011; Lauzon & Kelly, 2013; IBI Group, 2007). Substandard housing, lack of access to recreational facilities, and a general lack of business vitality in the area further exacerbate the social exclusion of residents in this area. High numbers of ‘social disorder’ calls to the police (see S.3.1) demonstrate a need for change, and indicate that the downtown area needs a longer-term, comprehensive approach to crime prevention through social development.

2.0 Action Research Methodology – Community Dialogue and Mobilization

The Sault Ste. Marie Police Service, the **John Howard Society** and the **Steering Committee** members provided valuable leadership and oversight to the project, encouraging participation and mobilizing community members. Over 1 000 people participated in the *Downtown Dialogue in Action* through the use of diverse and inclusionary research methods. Some of the methods were more traditional, such as interviews, focus groups and surveys, while others engaged and targeted specific groups through public, inclusive actions within the population such as *the Jamestown Flowerbombing*, and *Graffiti Reframed*, a collaboration with youth, local

² This short form signifies that data or statements have been gleaned from **multiple interviews and focus groups**.

artists, residents and businesses to support the development of youth street art. Efforts to engage particularly marginalized groups such as sex trade workers, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender/transsexual and queer (LGBTQ) community and people living in poverty used trusted intermediaries to reach these populations. Other research currently underway or recently completed in the downtown served to augment and verify the results of this project. The following is a detailed description of the methodologies and approaches used by the research team to collect data in support of the *Downtown Dialogues in Action* project.

2.1 Study Area and Demographics

The study area for the *Downtown Dialogue* project was determined by the community partners as well as by examining mapping used by the City of Sault Ste. Marie and the *SSMPS* as well as through criteria used by the Canadian Urban Institute to define downtowns in its national downtowns study (Canadian Urban Institute, 2012). The study area is comprised of *SSMPS*'s Division 2 and the City's Downtown Community Improvement Policy Area. The area includes main streets, a cohesive mix of commercial and mixed use buildings complemented by civic, religious and residential buildings and public spaces, has high levels of pedestrian activity, and is well served by public transportation. It is defined by hard boundaries such as the St. Mary's River to the South, railway tracks and Cathcart St. to the North, West St. to the west and Simpson St. to the East.

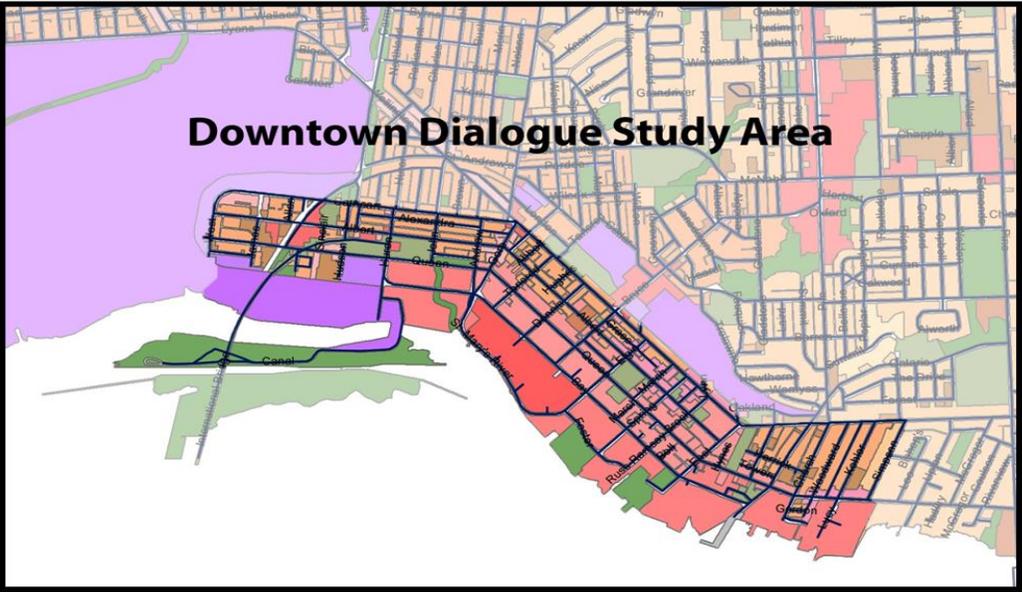


Figure 5: Downtown Dialogue Study Area

The downtown dialogue study area coincides fairly well with two of the city's census tracts. By examining the data available for these two census tracts (5900007.00 and 5900006.00) from

Statistics Canada we can get a general demographic profile for the area's resident population. **The population of the area in 2011 was 4 692 people.** This is **down 4.2% from 4 901 in 2006.** The area has a high proportion of both youth (0-14) and older adults (65+). It also has a high proportion of renters and a relatively large population who walks or takes transit to work (Statistics Canada, 2012). Many of the people who work or spend most of their day downtown, however, reside in other neighbourhoods, resulting in two different populations with distinct priorities and issues. Consequentially, the methods used in this research attempt to reach both populations in various ways.

2.2 Engaging in a Community Dialogue

NORDIK recognized that several different research methods would be necessary to engage the diversity of research participants, i.e., residents, business owners/staff, service providers, and visitors to the downtown.

The partnering organizations formed a **Community Advisory Committee** to guide the research project consisting of members from 28 organizations, private businesses and non-profits that operate out of or service Sault Ste. Marie's downtown. Members included the Boards of Education, City staff and officials and a number of service providers and businesses. The advisory committee met three times during the course of the project, in March, June, and October of 2013, to **periodically receive updates on the status of the project and provide guidance for areas of further study and action.**

Prior to receiving ethics review approval, the researchers attended public meetings and events such as City Council meetings, public open-houses for the City's **Downtown Improvement Program** and **Housing and Homelessness Strategy, Rotaryfest, Buskerfest** and others (See Appendix G). The researchers also set-up an information table and displays at the **Station Mall** for two days in July.

To ensure the rights and wellbeing of participants were thoroughly protected and in keeping with NORDIK's standard research ethics procedures, a full ethics review was completed in the summer of 2013 by Algoma University's Research Ethics Board.

Both traditional and social media outlets were used to reach out to the community. Press releases announced the project, its partners, and the receipt of funding, and were reported by four local media outlets including the Sault Star, Sootoday.com, Local2.ca, and CTV. The project obtained nine separate occasions of coverage during the project.

The *Downtown Dialogue* Project created its own Facebook page and Twitter account. These sites were used to update the public on the progress of the project, and to receive feedback

and share information about services and initiatives that were taking place in the downtown. A *Downtown Dialogue* page was also established on the NORDIK website. The researchers' contact information was posted on these sites and the public was encouraged to contact them regarding any questions, comments or suggestions.

Three public presentations of the research findings were made in late March, 2014 to community leaders, front-line workers, and residents and business owners in the downtown area. Feedback from these presentations was incorporated into this final report.

2.3 Interviews and Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups were conducted to glean more in-depth, qualitative responses from a diverse cross-section of those who live, work, provide or access services in the downtown.

Interview and focus group participants were recruited by distributing recruitment posters to local service agencies and businesses and by posting the announcements on the project's social media pages, through snowball sampling, and through the Steering Committee. Research Participants were limited to those who live, work, and provide service or access services in downtown Sault Ste. Marie.

Participants represented a wide cross-section of ages, genders, institutional affiliations, ethnicity, and abilities among other demographics, and included residents, businesses, social service providers, and equity seeking groups. Some groups, including urban Aboriginal residents and service providers, sex trade workers, those in conflict with the law, youth, seniors, the LGBTQ community, and individuals who experienced mental illness and addiction, were specifically recruited to ensure that their voices were elevated in this research. Focus groups and interviews with sex trade workers, people accessing food services, and the LGBTQ community were conducted by research consultants with previous experience working with these groups who had developed a rapport and trusting relationship. These consultations took place in safe spaces to reduce participants' concerns regarding confidentiality. Potential participants were notified via posters, word of mouth and email that food, refreshments and bus passes would be offered at the sessions, and service providers made available space for the focus groups, improving accessibility.

The interviews and focus groups were designed to elicit participants' connections to the downtown core, how they used that space, how they felt about the area and what they thought could/should be improved. Interviews and focus groups were either hand or audio-recorded

and transcribed. Focus group participants were able to record a substantial amount of their input themselves through the use of post-it note brainstorming exercises.



Figure 6: Timeline of the Downtown Produced by Focus Group Participants

A total of **43 semi structured interviews** (see Appendix A), and **16 focus groups** (see Appendix B), ranging in size from 3 to 18 participants, for a total of **131 participants**, were conducted. Once the interviews and focus groups were transcribed, the data was coded and a content analysis was performed by the researchers using grounded theory.

2.4 Survey

To provide an opportunity for broader participation, an **electronic survey** was created and distributed using *FluidSurveys*. The survey link was posted on the project's Facebook and Twitter sites and also distributed by email through NORDIK³ and Algoma University listservs. Participants were also encouraged to forward the survey to interested parties that they may have known. The survey had **150 respondents** (See Appendix C for survey questions).

2.5 Media Review

A media review was conducted on the comments posted by citizens related to articles on the downtown area on local news website **Local2.ca**. This review provided a better understanding

³ With over 100 community-based research projects completed, many within the City of Sault Ste. Marie, its listservs are quite extensive.

of what issues, activities, and events were deemed to be of particular significance to people in Sault Ste. Marie. A **key word search**, based on issues discussed at the project's Steering Committee meetings, was used to find articles that may be relevant to the *Downtown Dialogue* Project. Key words included **downtown, Jamestown, Queen, Bay, Gore, Gateway, Waterfront, Boardwalk, Prostitution, Housing, Crime and Police**.

A total of **55 articles** written within the period of August 14, 2013 – August 14, 2011, with a total of **463 comments** from the public, were reviewed. The articles were summarized in an excel spreadsheet and comments transcribed. A content analysis was performed and identified the major themes and issues about which commenters were most concerned or most opinionated regarding the downtown area (See Appendix D).

2.6 Community Action

Action research is a methodology often used to achieve social change and involves the full and active participation of the community in the research process, usually resulting in a more accurate and authentic analysis of social reality (Greenwood & Levin, 1998; van de Sande & Shwartz, 2011). Action research involves examining issues and problems but also initiating opportunities for change during the research process, and assists in creating improved conditions and environments while providing important information for the outcome of the final research (ASCD, n.d.). Given the goals of this research project, i.e., to engage the downtown community in a comprehensive planning process, action research was identified as an ideal method.

While many of the research activities could be termed 'action research', there were also several discrete community actions which were prompted by the research itself. These included a **flowerbombing in the Jamestown area; restorative justice training** for 41 participants, conducted by the John Howard Society of Sault Ste. Marie in collaboration with the John Howard Society of Hamilton; a crowd-funding event called '**Soup Ste. Marie**'; a collection of activities to address **graffiti in the downtown** area; and the sponsoring of activities designed to promote social enterprises as a response to high unemployment of youth and others in the study area. The **Sault Ste. Marie Police Service** was also taking a number of actions to re-direct its support for change and to mobilize the community. These actions are not yet complete and are outlined more fully throughout **Section 4 in subsections designated as "Community Actions."** Together, these actions engaged almost 300 people.

Table 1 Community Engagement & Research Activities

Name of Activity	Type of Engagement	Number of participants
Community Engagement		
Native Nation Youth Council	Introduction and Dialogue	19
Soup Kitchen: I dream. I see. I remember.	Introduction and Dialogue	15
Social Development Council	Introduction and Dialogue	19
Community Advisory Committee Meetings	Presentation on project goals and timeline	40
Station Mall Display	Introduction to Project	25
Email and Private Message Suggestions	Correspondence	8
Art Gallery Expansion Meeting	Consultation	9
Crime Prevention Seminar	Presentation and Dialogue	100
NORDIK AGM	Presentation and Dialogue	30
Downtown Association Board Meeting	Introduction and Dialogue	13
Social Enterprise Stakeholder Meeting	Facilitation & Dialogue	21
World Aids Day	Information & Dialogue	50
Subtotal		349
Research		
Individual Interviews	Research	43
Focus Groups	Research	131
Media Scan	Research	40
Survey	Research	150
Subtotal		363
Actions		
Jamestown Flowerbomb	Action Research, Community Gardening	50
Restorative Justice Training	Training	41
Soup Ste. Marie	Community Event	100
Graffiti Reframed	Facilitation & Dialogue	8
Community Committee on Graffiti	Presented project, proposed actions, developed funding proposal	20
Graffiti Reframed	Presented to City Council & Staff, obtained Motion to support Funding Application	80
Subtotal		299
Total		1012

2.7 Collaborative Research

The Downtown Dialogue researchers collaborated with two other studies that were being undertaken at the same time as the Downtown Dialogue project, and which were either partially or wholly including the same study area, the Canadian Urban Institute's 'The Value of Investing in Northern Ontario's Downtowns' and the 'Urban-Aboriginal Communities Thrive' (U-ACT) study by the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres. The sharing of data and information further informed the dialogue and actions of this research.

The Urban Aboriginal Task Force (Phase II): Urban-Aboriginal Communities Thrive (U-ACT), research project driven by urban Aboriginal communities and Friendship Centres in North Bay, Sault Ste. Marie and Timmins, is a two year community-driven research project. This action oriented research project continues to address the community determined needs and priorities through an asset-based approach, focusing on the strength and resiliency of these communities and their individual members to overcome challenges in a manner that can inspire positive change and social transformation (Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres, 2013).

The Canadian Urban Institute's study is also a two year research project. It examines and promotes revitalization efforts in Northern Ontario's five largest downtowns - North Bay, Sudbury, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and Thunder Bay. This project will deliver detailed research and analysis on the evolution of Northern Ontario's downtowns, a comprehensive community engagement program to help develop innovative and targeted approaches to revitalization and a web portal to create a platform for knowledge ex-change across the five cities (Canadian Urban Institute, 2013).

2.8 Literature Review Design

An ongoing literature review was conducted over the course of the research project. Literature was reviewed regarding social development and crime prevention, and downtown revitalization in Canada and small urban and northern communities.

The literature review consisted of Academic peer-reviewed articles, governmental reports and reports from local organizations in Sault Ste. Marie. Academic articles were searched using the Algoma University Wishart Library Catalogue and Academic Databases such as Scholars Portal and EBSCO. A key word search narrowed the results to the most relevant articles. Key words used in the search were: **crime prevention, social development, downtown, and revitalization.**

A number of studies have also been conducted within Sault Ste. Marie and the Algoma District on such topics as **crime, vibrancy, and health and social services**. Findings from these reports are summarized following the literature review.

2.9 Research Limitations

While the research design endeavoured to reach and report from as broad a swath of the community as possible, a number of technical and logistical limitations curtailed either the reach of the researchers or the documentation of data.

Several focus groups were not audio recorded due to technical difficulties, and some participants being unwilling to have the session audio recorded. These issues were mitigated through hand written recording and the focus groups were facilitated in a way which allowed for participants to record a substantial amount of input themselves through the use of adhesive notes.

The online survey respondents were limited to 150 because this was the maximum allowed by the service provider, FluidSurveys, who had not activated the proper account. There was further interest in participating in the survey and a larger number of respondents could have been sampled, but unfortunately, by the time this was recognized, the survey period was closed.

The media review examined the comments posted by the public on news articles related to the downtown by one small locally owned and operated media company, Local2. The Local2 website is configured in such a way that it is possible to see which news articles have been commented on and it is also possible to search for articles based on keywords. Comments can be made anonymously and could be made multiple times by the same person. It is also apparent that there is a small community of 30-40 people who are regularly commenting on articles on the website.

We were unable to speak with anyone under the age of 18 or anyone who was currently incarcerated as per the conditions of the Algoma University Research Ethics Board.

3.0 Literature Review

3.1 Crime Prevention through Social Development and the Need for Urban Vitality

Crime, defined as charges brought under the Criminal Code of Canada, is showing a downward trend while police services are experiencing increasing demands for assistance, and increasing costs. Over 75% of calls for police service involve 'social disorder', something other than a chargeable offense. Social disorder is a signal of the presence of conditions that can evolve into self-destructive and criminal activity (Russell & Taylor, 2014).

Dr. Irwin Waller has demonstrated that prevention measures and improved pro-social settings for youth yield greater return on investment than enforcement and incarceration options (Waller, 2006). In Ontario, cuts by former governments to healthcare, welfare, and employment insurance have contributed to social disorder. More people are being harmed by lack of social service supports from the government than are being protected by a shift in policy towards more aggressive policing and strict incarceration policies (DeKeseredy, 2009).

Russell and Taylor posit that Canada's human services should take an approach of focusing on the root causes of crime in order to make communities safer (2014). They contend that the roots of crime, anti-social behaviour, disease and illness are the same: economic and social exclusion, substandard housing, addictions, inequitable distribution of social power, and what they deem as 'ignorance and illiteracy' and 'negative parenting,' however problematic these terms may be, as they are based on cultural assumptions. Yet each of these 'roots' have their own determining causes. Focusing on positive ways to influence social conditions can produce far more opportunities to reduce harm and victimization and reduce costs of emergency response than only targeting offenders. **Social development is a long term strategy for increasing the safety and well-being** of people living in marginalized conditions; and thereby, reducing the demand for police assistance. Russell (2012) states that crime is a symptom of social exclusion and that safety and well-being can only be achieved when community cohesion is achieved. If there are some people in a municipality who feel unsafe because of the actions and behaviours of others, they argue, then there is no community (Russell & Taylor, 2014).

A fundamental attribute of a successful city district is that a person must feel personally safe and secure on the street among all of the strangers there. If people fear the streets, they will use them less, which make the street even less safe. A sense of personal belonging and social cohesiveness comes from well-defined neighbourhoods and crowded multi-use streets (Jacobs, 1961).

According to renowned urban theorist Jane Jacobs, safety comes from having ‘eyes on the street’ or having well-used streets and neighbours engaged in watching the street. This is most effective when done casually and voluntarily. Jacobs argues that you can’t make people use streets they have no reason to use and that you can’t make people watch streets they don’t want to watch. Having diverse uses, including stores, restaurants, bars, and other public places interspersed along the sidewalk, works in several complex ways to make the area safer:

1. *They give people a concrete reason to use the street.*
2. *They draw people along the sidewalk past places that have no attraction to the public. The influence doesn’t carry very far so it is important for enterprises to be frequent.*
3. *Storekeepers and business people become guardians. They watch the street and care for customers.*
4. *The activity generated by people on errands or getting food or drink is itself an attraction to other people.* (Jacobs, 1961)

A recent study by the Canadian Urban Institute (2012) has taken a comprehensive look at downtowns across Canada. The study shows that while downtowns had been in decline for some time, they are now making a resurgence. **Strategic partnerships and multi-sector collaboration** are critical for implementing visions for downtowns, **residential development** is bringing vitality back to downtowns, and revitalization is happening on many scales. Downtowns do have to overcome perceptions and concerns over lack of safety. The busier and more vibrant a downtown is, the safer people tend to feel (Canadian Urban Institute, 2012).

Business Improvement Areas (BIAs) in Canada have been taking a ‘clean and safe’ approach to security in their districts. ‘Clean and safe’ refers to ensuring an environment is free of litter and risk for consumers to pass through unscathed (Lippert, 2012). The approach uses security, signage, beautification as well as environmental design to increase perceptions of safety (Sleiman & Lippert, 2010; Lippert, 2012; Bookman & Woolford, 2013). Cleaning up litter and removing graffiti is important for the perception of safety and the image and reputation of an area. Way-finding signage also plays a role in the feeling of safety and attracting people to an area (Bookman & Woolford, 2013). Design interventions such as installing appealing light standards and benches to attract pedestrian traffic are found to help save insurance costs from fixing broken windows etc. (Lippert, 2008). Ambassadors programs are another security measure that has appeared across North America in recent years. The Ambassadors patrol BIAs with a blend of cleaning, interactive customer service, and surveillance aims (Lippert, 2012). They also contribute to adding ‘eyes on the street.’

Based on the review of the literature best practices for improving safety in downtowns and reducing crime are to focus on **improving social conditions, building communities and social networks, and changing negative perceptions** of the areas and its residents.

3.2 Local Studies and Reports

There have been a number of studies and reports conducted on the Algoma District, Sault Ste. Marie, and the downtown area which help inform this research. These reports come from the health, social services, business, and municipal service sector but their recommendations remain relevant to crime prevention and social development.

3.2.1 Reports on Crime

In 2009, Sault Ste. Marie's City Council commissioned a study on youth crime in the municipality. The Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre (SSMIC) used GIS to determine which neighbourhoods experienced crime and to pinpoint where young offenders resided (SSMIC, 2009). The report suggests that while there were multiple crimes being reported that were committed by young offenders, the rate of youth crime in Sault Ste. Marie was not extreme and was committed by only a few individuals. Crime was spread relatively evenly throughout the city, with a slight concentration around schools and low income neighbourhoods (Hoffman, 2010). These findings are consistent with other studies of mid-sized Canadian cities (LaGrange, 1999). The SSMIC report had several recommendations, one of which was to set up **recreational activities in low income neighbourhoods**. They have a low rate of participation in sports and recreation which may be due to an inaccessibility of transportation to recreation centres. This finding is consistent with the Community Picture Report published by Healthy Communities Partnership Algoma in 2011 (Dutkiewicz, 2011). SSMIC held community meetings where a number of local service providers made recommendations in response to the report. Many of these recommendations have since been addressed or are being addressed (See Table 2).

Table 2 Recommendations of SSMIC Study of Youth Crime (Adapted from SSMIC, 2009)

Recommendation	Action
Identify where high risk youth live	Our Children their Future Report (DSSMBSN, 2011)
Include youth in the development of any strategies	Sault Youth Association and Downtown Dialogue
Identify gaps in services and develop a central database for social services	211 Service (211 North, 2012)
Emphasize prevention and remediation	Downtown Dialogue, Restorative Justice Training, <i>SSMPS</i> embracing provincial Community Mobilization and Engagement policing model
Provide community busses from low income areas to recreation centres	None to date. Similar suggestions to subsidize transit service for youth involved in recreation were found in Downtown Dialogue Research

3.2.2 Reports on Vibrancy

The *Downtown Association* commissioned a ‘planning and visioning’ workshop for the development of the downtown in 2004. The workshop was facilitated by *Possibilities Group* and was attended by a broad cross section of stakeholders and interest groups from the downtown area. The conclusions were that:

- Downtown needs to become a neighbourhood where people can live, work, and play;
- Downtown needs to be more active in the evenings and weekends; and that
- Safety should be increased in the downtown, especially at night and pedestrian and transit connections should be improved (Jaehrling, 2004).

A 2007 Economic Feasibility And Downtown Improvement Study commissioned by the City of Sault Ste. Marie found that the factors contributing to the decline of the downtown were **out-migration** of people and business to newer urban and suburban areas, **dilapidation and vacancy** of existing infrastructure, perception of **property crime and reduced safety**, **inaccessible retail and lack of retail choice** compared to suburban retail centres, **limited**

ownership opportunities, small lots and accessibility issues for multiple car families (IBI Group, 2007).

From (2007-2009) The City operated a **Downtown Development Initiative** to address concerns regarding dilapidated infrastructure and decreasing property values. It built on the vision that was established by the *Possibilities Group* report (Jaehrling, 2004). The Initiative provided \$1.355 million in the form of grants and rebates to the downtown area. The city has reviewed the programs and determined that they were extremely successful, achieving a private/public sector investment ratio of 7:1. The initiative **leveraged \$10 million in private investment** in the downtown and resulted in **physical improvements to buildings, improved pedestrian laneways, and new residential development** in the downtown (Downtown Development Initiative, 2012). The City is now working on a second phase for this initiative. The second phase will include Gore Street and initiate streetscape and street **furniture improvements**. This second phase will also include the development of **parkettes** and **public art installations** along with grants to improve infrastructure in the area (Downtown Community Improvement Plan, 2014). These Downtown Development Initiatives should help to address some of the crime and safety issues in the downtown through design and social development.

A number of reports and studies conducted by *Destiny Sault Ste. Marie* were also reviewed (Destiny Sault Ste. Marie, 2003; Krmpotich, 2007; Gravelines, 2009). Destiny is a think tank that identifies priorities for economic direction in Sault Ste. Marie. Many of the priorities for the downtown have been accomplished in the last ten years such as constructing the **Essar Centre** and developing **Clergue Park**. Others were identified but have not yet been realized, such as the proposal to create a downtown trolley, which could address some of the transportation and accessibility issues that will be discussed in subsequent pages.

A report on Sault Ste. Marie's Age Friendly Initiative detailed the City's age-friendly assessment and status from the *World Health Organization* (Pagnucco, 2011). The report states that all master plans and city projects will now have Age-Friendly considerations built into them. This is important because there are several projects in the downtown as well as the Canal District Master plan which will have to **take accessibility into consideration** of their design.

3.2.3 Reports on Health and Social Services

The Community Picture Report, 2011 by *Healthy Communities Partnership Algoma* highlights some similar findings to our own study. The report notes that the risk of isolation, which can affect health, is magnified by the **lack of public transportation** within and between communities in the Algoma District and that there are challenges in bringing stakeholders together (both public and private partners) (Dutkiewicz, 2011).

The study examined the demographic profiles of the communities in the Algoma District and also distributed a survey regarding health issues. The study found that in Sault Ste. Marie there is a need for access to **affordable physical activity** opportunities, safe and proper **recreation facilities** and **bike paths**. Decreasing alcohol and substance misuse and increasing resiliency skill in youth is a priority. There is a lack of **mental health supports** and health services for people with mental illness in the community (See Appendix F for priorities and recommendations).

A 2011 Report by the Best Start Network, the *Sault Ste. Marie District Social Services Administration Board* and the *Sault Ste. Marie Innovation Centre* examined children under 6 in Sault Ste. Marie and their risks and vulnerabilities. The study used a GIS approach and examined demographic information to get a better understanding of the city's population and where children are located. It also examined social risk and health indicators. It is apparent from the report that children in the downtown have **higher social and health risks**, tend to live in **low income households**, and generally have **limited access to playgrounds** (DSSMBSN, 2011).

The *Soup Kitchen Community Centre*, whose mandate is to address the needs of those who live in poverty, has identified health care service gaps in the downtown in recent years as a result of the *Sault Area Hospitals* and *Algoma Public Health* relocating to the city's north end. In response, the organization's Board of Directors has decided to expand its operations and to examine the feasibility of owning and operating a **community child and health care facility** located in the downtown (Lauzon & Kelly, 2013; Schmidt, 2013). The Soup Kitchen report shows that there is a **lack of service support the vulnerable population** that lives in the downtown core. The creation of a child and health care centre in the downtown would also help to address some of the priorities and recommendations outlined in the Community Picture Report (Dutkiewicz, 2011).

A research project undertaken in Sault Ste. Marie by the *Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres* has examined urban service agencies and First Nations communities, and coordinated Aboriginal and mainstream services. The study found that there was a relatively high degree of social inclusion of urban Aboriginals in the community. The **Alternative School** in the downtown was highlighted for regularly hosting and promoting cultural events. While the after-effects of the Indian Residential Schools are still very present in the city, a large number of non-Aboriginal institutions have also demonstrated understanding of this need and make efforts to improve cultural competence. Sault Ste. Marie boasts a vibrant **Indigenous Art community** exemplified by such groups as The Sault Indigenous Writers' Collective and a recently-opened Anishinaabe art vendor on Gore Street. A second report by the research team examined mental health services available in Sault Ste. Marie. The team found that there is a variety of mental health services available in Sault Ste. Marie, with **limited psychiatric services**. The *Sault Ste. Marie Indian Friendship Centre* (IFC) is the only organization in Sault Ste. Marie that delivers

Aboriginal specific services. The study recommends providing more resources to the Sault Ste. Marie Indian Friendship Centre, as it is the only organization that provides culturally appropriate services for both adults and youth specifically geared to the urban Aboriginal population (U-ACT, 2013).

211 North releases an annual report that outlines the top reasons that people access 211 services in Northern Ontario, including Sault Ste. Marie. The service connects people to non-emergency services and programs and often prevents problems from spiraling into crises. It promotes early intervention, prevention and self-sufficiency which make for a healthier community. The top reasons for contact are: **Health Programs/Services, Government Services/Programs, Individual /Family Services, Consumer/ Commercial Services, Income & Financial Assistance, and Mental Health and Addictions.** The report also indicates any gaps in service (211 North, 2012). 211 has only been available in Sault Ste. Marie since 2009, most of the service users currently are in Thunder Bay.

3.2.4 Reports on Childhood and Early Development

According to the Best Start Network's 2011 report, socioeconomic risk factors for child development in the downtown core are very high. The **Social Risk Index** measures nine indicators, including the percentage of lone-parent families, families with low income, knowledge of an official language, immigration status, rental vs. ownership rates, residential mobility, unemployment rates, level of formal education, and percentage of families receiving government income transfers (Best Start Network, 2011). **Both downtown census tracts were ranked as high risk**, in contrast to the city's average ranking of "somewhat low risk" (2011).

These socioeconomic factors contribute to how the neighbourhood fairs on the Early Development Index that evaluates five domains as a means to measure "readiness to learn among kindergarteners" (2011). On this measure, the downtown, encompassed by the "West Central" region of the study, is consistently at higher vulnerability than the city's average on all but one measure. The breakdown listing the selected domains is provided in Table 5.

Table 3: Education Development Index - West Central Division Compared to City Average (Best Start Network 2011)

Domains	West Central Score	City Average
Physical Health & Well Being	18	16.8
Social Competence	17	13.3
Emotional Maturity	16	13.45
Language & Cognitive Development	8	4.6
Communication Skills & General Knowledge	8	8.2

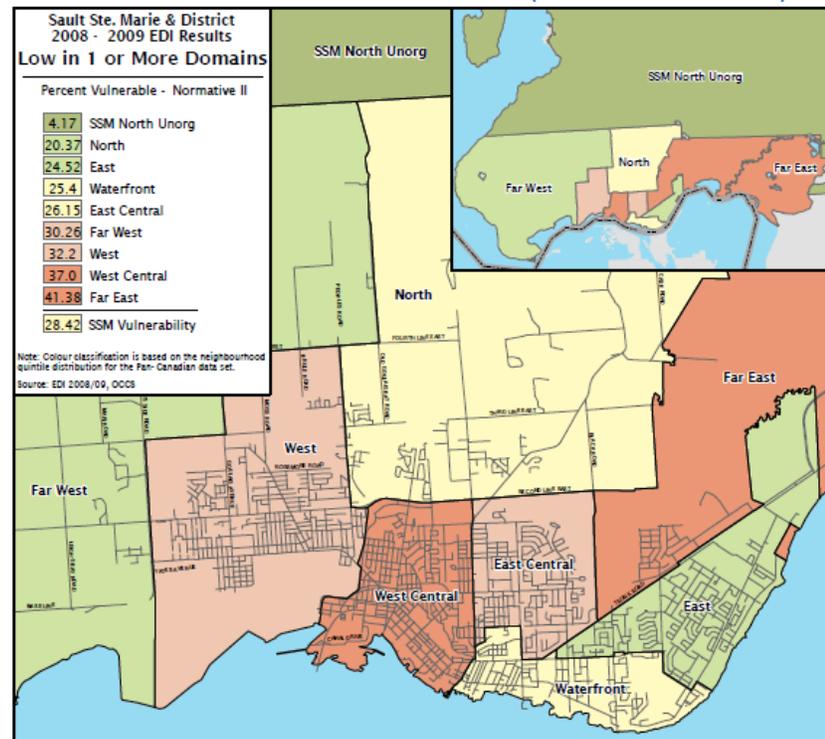
Legend: Vulnerability of Selected Domains Measured Against Provincial Average.



Sault Ste. Marie’s downtown fell within the worst 20th percentile of all neighbourhoods across Canada for high risk vulnerability on the Early Development Index (Best Start Network, 2011). Figure 9 demonstrates the percent of children in each Division who are deemed vulnerable in one or more domain.

While a number of the indicators used to measure the score in various domains tend to be culturally relative (e.g. ‘following rules and class routines’ and ‘able to work independently’ as indicators of social competence) and do not necessarily represent a holistic image of “childhood development,” it is important to remember they are selected based on a child’s readiness for the provincial school system that has a number of cultural barriers of its own.

Figure 7: Percent of Children Vulnerable in 1 or More Domain (Best Start Network 2011)

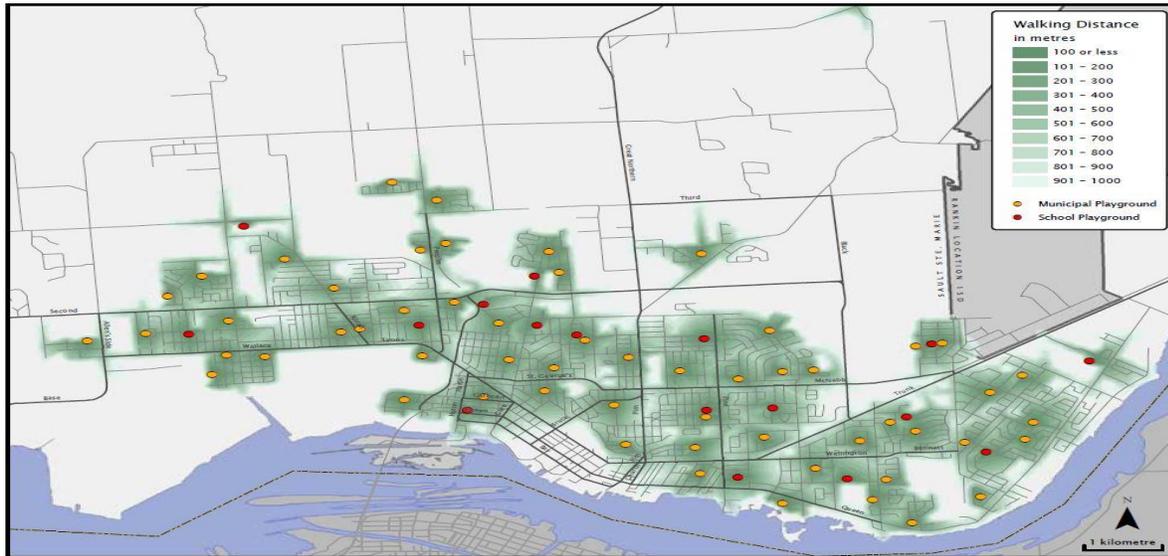


This research demonstrates that the children growing up in the downtown area of Sault Ste. Marie are among the **most vulnerable to risks impeding development** in Canada. Exacerbating this challenge is a lack of access to recreational opportunities.

Sault Ste. Marie has playgrounds and recreation opportunities in many parts of the city however these are noticeably absent in the downtown core (DSSMBSN, 2011; see also Section

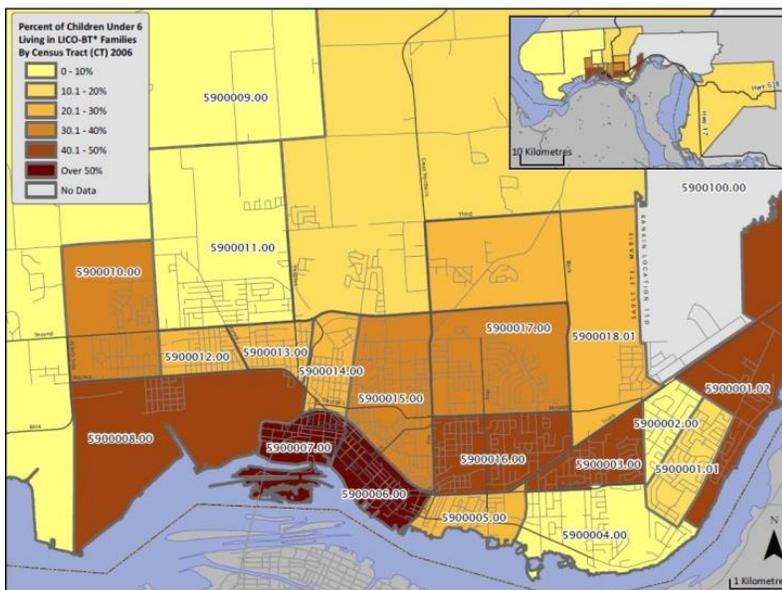
4.5 Parks and Recreation). Those who reside in the area between Dennis and Pilgrim Streets have **no access to school or municipal playgrounds** within reasonable walking distance, thus creating barriers and limiting opportunities for youth and families accessing spaces for outdoor play. Without such access residents are more likely to experience a lack of healthy activity and are at a higher risk of social exclusion (DSSMBSN, 2011).

Figure 8: Location of Municipal and School Playgrounds (Best Start Network 2011)



The lack of playground in the downtown core is particularly shocking when compared to the geographic distribution of low-income families across the city, as demonstrated in Figure 11 (Repetition of Figures 4 of Section 1.4). Clearly there is a **lack of public play infrastructure** in the very neighbourhoods **that need such free opportunities the most**.

Figure 9: Children Living in Low-Income Families (Best Start Network 2011)



*LICO-Before Tax: Income levels at which families spend 20% more than average of their before tax income on food, shelter and clothing (Statistics Canada).

Figure 11 demonstrates that downtown residents experience a lower socio-economic status and report lower income levels than the city's overall averages. Average per capita income in the study area is less than \$30 000 per year, and average family income is less than \$50 000 per year. A shocking **50% of the children living in the downtown live below the low-income cut-off (LICO) poverty measure**. Residents also have lower levels

of formal education than the city's average, and a higher percentage live in rental units, suggesting home ownership remains unattainable for many (DSSMBSN, 2011).

Substandard housing, lack of access to recreational facilities, and a general lack of business vitality in the area further exacerbate the social exclusion of residents in this area. That these features overlap with the geographic distribution of higher numbers of 'social disorder' calls to the police indicates a need for **longer-term, holistic approaches** to crime prevention through social development.

4.0 Findings

4.1 Summary of Engagement

Among the first tasks of data collection were to identify the populations that go to or live in the downtown, as well as why they do so. A survey was distributed among city residents online and garnered 150 responses. Interviews and focus groups targeted both general and specific populations to ensure the widest possible diversity of voices were being captured within the limitations of the research, as well as to glean more qualitative data pertaining to people's experiences of the downtown. A media review was also conducted early in the research process to identify issues or themes of significant public concern related to the downtown.

4.1.1 Survey Results

A significant majority of people responding to the survey (84%) reported that they access services in the downtown while roughly a third indicated that they work downtown or provide services in the downtown (38% and 32% respectively), and a small share (14%) indicated that they live downtown.

An overwhelming number of respondents (87%) indicated they had lived in the city for more than 10 years but some newcomers (4%) did participate. The number of female respondents was almost double that of males. Respondents were also largely middle aged, however, youth (12%) and seniors (5%) did participate. A full breakdown of respondent demographics is available in Appendix C.

When participants were asked to indicate how often they found themselves downtown the most popular response was 'everyday' (29%). In total, more than 82% of the respondents were downtown at least once a week if not more frequently, compared to 14% that indicated 2 to 3 times per month, and 4% that indicated less than once a month.

The majority of respondents (77%) also indicated that they felt 'moderately' to 'very' safe downtown, as indicated in figure 5.

Respondents also had a generally positive outlook on the future of the downtown area. Figure 7 indicates that nearly three quarters of respondents felt the future was 'extremely,' 'very,' or 'moderately' promising for the neighbourhood.

When respondents were asked to rank a number of optional factors with respect to which would be most important for creating a safe, secure, and thriving downtown, there was clear consensus **that local stores and businesses** played a dominant role. There was also significant support for a **greater police presence**, with the highest number of respondents (26%) indicating it was the most significant, yet it also proved to be a polarizing option, as 32% indicated it was the least or second-to-least significant. **Events and activities** to bring people downtown, **recreational opportunities**, and **galleries, theatres, and cultural activities** followed on the priority scale. **Accessible transit** was a lower priority, with 34% indicating it in 5th or 6th position. **Community/social services** and **schools** had somewhat varied support, though the bulk of respondents positioned both options toward the bottom of the priority scale, with 34% indicating social services in 6th or 7th position, while nearly half placed schools in the final 7th and 8th positions. Full results appear in Table 3.

When solicited to provide their own suggestion of what changes would most improve the downtown, 133 unique responses were generated, with factors relating to increasing the presence of people in the neighbourhood ranking highest (18.2%). Improving cleanliness

Figure 10: How safe do you feel downtown?

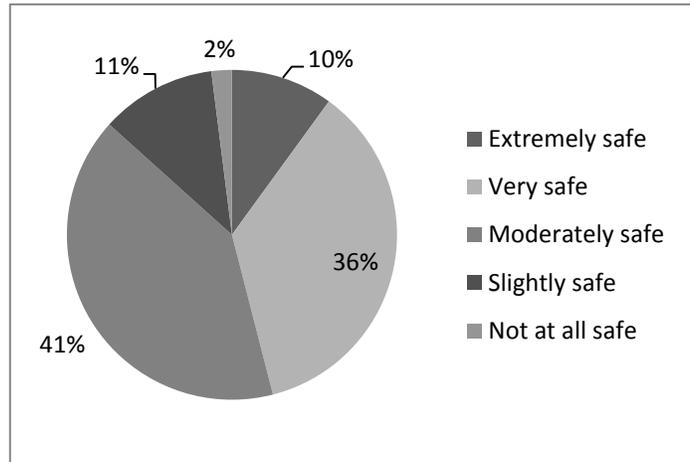
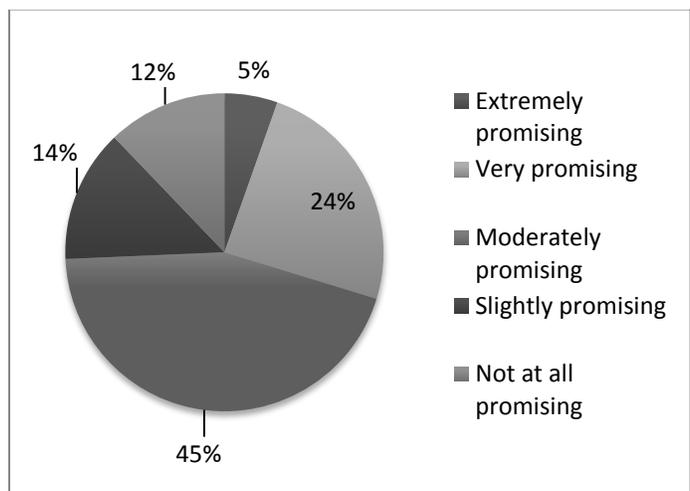


Figure 11: How promising is the future of downtown?

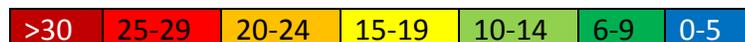


(17.5%), having longer store hours (15.2%), and increasing the police presence (14.4%) were also frequently cited, with housing (11.4%) being another strong contender that was not anticipated by the survey. For a comprehensive list, see appendix C.

Table 4: Please rank the following based on your opinion of what is most important for creating a safe, secure, and thriving downtown. 1 = Greatest importance, 8 = Least importance.

VARIABLE / WEIGHT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Schools	17 12.3%	9 6.5%	11 8%	5 3.6%	17 12.3%	11 8%	22 15.9%	46 33.3%
Social services	14 10.2%	16 11.8%	17 12.5%	18 13.7%	15 11%	23 16.9%	25 18.4%	8 5.9%
Accessible Transit	10 7.8%	18 14%	13 10.1%	13 10.1%	22 17.1%	22 17.1%	13 10.1%	18 14%
Cultural activities	7 5.3%	19 14.5%	18 13.7%	23 17.6%	17 13%	18 13.7%	13 9.9%	16 12.2%
Recreational opportunities	6 4.7%	19 14.8%	20 15.6%	25 19.5%	17 13.3%	18 14.1%	14 10.9%	9 7%
Events & activities	12 9.4%	16 12.5%	24 18.8%	22 17.2%	21 16.4%	14 10.8%	13 10.2%	6 4.7%
Local stores & businesses	28 21.2%	26 19.7%	14 10.6%	13 9.8%	11 8.3%	16 12.1%	12 9.1%	12 9.1%
Police presence	35 26.1%	3 2.2%	11 8.2%	10 7.5%	18 13.4%	14 10.4%	19 14.2%	24 17.9%

Legend: Colour Gradient Values - Number & Percent of Survey Respondents



4.1.2 Interviews & Focus Groups

Interviews and focus groups provided significant insight into the profile of those who live, work, seek services or provide services downtown.

A number of people who live and work downtown find that they rarely need to leave the area. These people report trying to lead a more sustainable lifestyle and are very conscious of supporting the local economy, preferring to patronize smaller local businesses and buying locally produced wares and food (m.i.&fg.). They enjoy walking and biking and drive less than other respondents (m.i.&fg.). When they do leave the downtown, they report that it is for items that are more difficult to locate in the neighbourhood, such as construction materials and larger grocery purchases (m.i.&fg.).

Among those that travel to the neighbourhood, most say they go downtown to shop, attend events, go to restaurants and use the Boardwalk and Hub Trail, as well as to access facilities such as the Art Gallery, the Essar Centre, and the Centennial Library (m.i.&fg.).

Downtown social services played a significant role in the lives of many vulnerable or marginalized populations. Services that were mentioned included the Soup Kitchen Community Centre, St. Vincent de Paul Society, the John Howard Society, the needle exchange, Ontario Addictions Treatment Clinic, the Sault Community Career Centre, Women in Crisis, Pauline's Place, the Canadian Mental Health Association, the Children's Aid Society, the Group Health Association's HIV/AIDS Resource Program, Ontario Works and ODSP offices, and detox programs (m.i.&fg.).

Overall, many perceived that the downtown was in a period of growth and redevelopment, however several expressed that the neighbourhood appeared deserted and unkempt (m.i.&fg.). Some of the participants talked about the stigma of the downtown, that there is "nothing to do," that it is unsafe and "run down" (fg. 4 & 5). Others pointed to recent events or change in the downtown that have brought them to the area and changed their perceptions. One participant expressed:

[I]t seem like a lot of the younger generation want to be downtown and a lot of the older generation tends to have a negative view of [the] downtown area, there's like a stigma left in their mind with it (i.11a).

Many participants exhibited or discussed a lack of awareness about the projects and programs that are happening in the city, reporting that they did not feel engaged enough by decision makers, including businesses, politicians, and community organizations. This trend suggests a greater need for dialogue and information sharing. Several participants stated that they learned something new about the community simply by participating in this research project.

Downtown revitalization has been identified as a priority by the City of Sault Ste. Marie and a number of other organizations within the area (Sault Ste. Marie, 1996; Sault Ste. Marie, 2012, 2014). Currently, the City's Downtown Development Initiative, Canal District Neighbourhood Plan, Economic Diversification Strategy and Cycling Master plan, as well as the Algoma Farmer's Market Business Plan, developments at the former site of St. Mary's Paper, and the Animation of the John Rowswell Hub Trail, to name just a few initiatives, will significantly impact the downtown over time. Participants expressed the importance of the City, as well as local agencies and organizations informing the public and including them in dialogue to ensure that projects and initiatives address the needs and concerns of the widest possible representation of the community (m.i.&fg.).

4.1.3 Media Review Results

The media review (see Section 2.5 for methodology) identified twelve major Issues or themes of concern to those responding to local news reports (See Table 4).

Table 5: Media Review Themes

Crime/ Policing	Pedestrian and Bike Friendly	Vacant and Older Buildings	Parking
Development	Community	City Council	Multiculturalism
Activity	Age Friendly	Recreation and Green Space	Social Development

The themes are explained in greater detail below:

Crime/ Policing – The downtown is perceived to have a high crime rate, with Gore and Albert Streets assumed to be the most dangerous. Some commentators requested a greater police presence, especially foot patrols. There are some traffic safety concerns as well.

Development – The public responded with both positivity and skepticism to reports of development projects in the downtown. People are supportive of most developments but often express uncertainty if such projects will be successful.

Activity – This theme encompasses events, attractions, and promotions in the downtown. Commentators also voiced their desires for cafés, sidewalk patios, open air markets (craft and farmers) and having longer store hours downtown.

Social Development – There is an expressed need for funding and programs to address unemployment, low incomes, a lack of affordable housing and mental health issues.

Pedestrian and Bike Friendly – There are pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns in the downtown. Commentators also expressed that increasing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure can improve quality of life and provide a positive impact on downtown businesses.

City Council – Several commentators felt that they did not receive enough information about what the City is doing downtown.

Recreation and Green Space – Many expressed the need for more parks, trees, playgrounds, and recreation opportunities in the downtown.

Multiculturalism – Exposure to different cultures through new downtown restaurants was highlighted. Some suggested celebrating multiculturalism through events, festivals, and themed blocks as a means for attracting and retaining businesses and investment.

Age dynamic – Several commentators expressed a need for suitable housing and activities for both youth and seniors.

Parking – Many expressed a desire for increased free parking downtown and there is interest in removing the paid parking on Queen Street.

4.2 Downtown Design and the Physical Environment

4.2.1 Downtown Geography

The geography of the downtown was found to be a factor that affects the safety and vibrancy of the area. The downtown core is long and stretches many blocks. Some landmarks, social spaces, and commercial activities in the downtown are located quite far from each other and there are many vacant spaces in between. One participant noted:

It's a big distance. We have a very long stretched out commercial area. Whereas you look at most municipalities there is the main street and then off the side streets, and in the streets behind the main street, you have a collection of blocks. It may go from the main street and back a block or two in each direction but we just have Queen St., that's it, and I think that's to the detriment of our downtown commercial core (i.1).

This leads many people to drive to multiple destinations in the downtown rather than walk. This contributes to the downtown being deserted and people's feelings of being less safe in the area.

4.2.1.1 Growth of the City in the North

In the last few years, much of the growth in the City has taken place north of its urban core. This type of growth has typically been in the form of **low density** residential subdivisions and **'Big Box' retailers** who concentrate in suburban peripheries (Morgan 2005, 11). With its reliance on automotive transportation, this type of growth discourages pedestrian traffic, and its isolation from dense and diverse commercial zones and reliance on low-wage labour and low-priced, high-volume sales undercuts locally owned competitors while limiting the

recirculation of profits within the local economy (Morgan 2005, 10; Evans-Cowley 2008, 330). One participant expressed:

I hate to see that everything is moving up on the hill and I think the downtown is losing by that. It would be nice to keep things downtown that are already there (i.6).

Many service providers have also migrated away from the centre of the city to areas that are less accessible to the public that they serve. The relocation of the *Sault Area Hospital*, the *Public Utilities Commission (PUC)*, *Algoma Public Health (APH)*, and the *Greyhound Bus Terminal*, for instance, provoked strongly negative reactions from several participants (m.i.&fg.). While each of these services either employed large numbers of people and brought them to work in the downtown, or otherwise functioned as a drawing force for residents, those effects are now being exerted on the city's periphery.

Schools are also being closed throughout the city and being amalgamated into larger, consolidated '**superschools**' located outside of the city's centre, with the new *St. Mary's College* straddling the boundary between residential and rural neighbourhoods. The consequence of these choices is an increased reliance on bussing and the loss of the neighbourhood function of schools (Irwin & Seasons, 2012).

Housing developments in the city's northern periphery tend to be higher end, fully detached homes on larger lots in subdivisions carved out of existing woodland. This type of growth is less sustainable and it takes away from the downtown by providing a residential base for commercial expansion in the city's north end, encouraging vehicular traffic while discouraging active and public transportation, diminishing the city's residential density, and taxing city resources by increasing the number of roads and services that need to be maintained in the periphery (Sault Ste. Marie, 2014). One participant commented on this style of development, noting:

There are a lot of spaces in that downtown area that are not being utilized to their fullest, yet we see subdivisions popping up everywhere, well I think we can better use space in this community. In speaking with people I'm sure they wouldn't say 'well Jamestown is my ideal place to live' but it could be (i. 8).

While the City is invested in the downtown and has provided incentives to promote growth in the area, **little has been done to discourage expansion** further from the city's centre.

4.2.1.2 Commercial Neighbourhoods and Space

Some participants also felt that the Station Mall had a generally negative impact on the other businesses downtown, drawing shoppers away from Queen Street, though there was a sense of appreciation for the independent businesses that make their home in the Mall. One participant noted:

I would like to see less mall and more downtown, even though I also spend a lot of time at the mall. I mean I'd like to see businesses like the bookstore at the mall, the kitchen gadget store, and Hilltribe, (...) come, move into downtown storefronts (i. 26)

On a similar theme, while there was a *strong* general preference for more small, entirely locally controlled businesses, there were a handful of notable exceptions with respect to franchises that some respondents wished to see branch into Sault Ste. Marie (e.g. Old Navy, H&M, etc.)

4.2.2 Redevelopment and Heritage Preservation

There have been a number of positive developments in the built environment of downtown in the last several years and there are a number of major projects in the works that have the potential to dramatically change the downtown. Participants stated that a number of infrastructure projects had significantly improved the downtown's image, functionality, and attractiveness. These included the redevelopment of the former scrap yard located on the current *OLG Casino* site and the construction of the *Hub Trail*. Focus group participants expressed their support and excitement for future projects such as the redevelopment of the *St. Mary's Paper Mill*, the expansion of the *Hub Trail*, the construction of the International Bridge Plaza and the creation of the *Canal District* (m.i.&fg.). Study participants felt that these infrastructure projects would create a more attractive downtown and create more opportunities for them to use the downtown.

Many participants did express concern for the preservation of **heritage buildings** with the prospect of so much redevelopment in the near future. Many participants were disappointed that buildings like the Royal Hotel and Cornwall building had been demolished instead of being preserved and repurposed (fg. 4 & 9). Others also wished to see a greater role and support for the **Sault Ste. Marie Museum** in promoting local heritage and a common sense of place and belonging (fg. 4).

There were also concerns that the redevelopment projects in the downtown could displace marginalized groups. The downtown area is one of the primary locations of **affordable housing** within the city. *The Royal Hotel* was again brought up as an example where affordable housing

was lost due to redevelopment (fg.9). The building, which was demolished, contained eight apartments and an office building was constructed in its place. The construction of Carmen's Way and the *International Bridge Plaza* have also resulted in the loss of further affordable housing units in the downtown area, as well as physically dislocating Jamestown, a lower-income neighbourhood between Carmen's Way and West St., from the geographic continuity of the rest of the downtown study area.

4.2.3 Vacant and Deteriorating Buildings

Many participants pointed out that there are a number of **vacant and derelict buildings** in the downtown (fg. 5). Several expressed that the state of such buildings did not make the area feel safe and was detrimental to creating a vibrant downtown. Derelict buildings can also be a safety hazard to the public as they increase the risk of accidents and fires. They also make the downtown a less walkable and inviting place by interrupting the streetscape and creating voids in downtown blocks where there is little to attract people. Sault Ste. Marie's downtown is physically very long and narrow which makes it **less walkable** but consecutive vacant buildings add to this problem. Several people expressed that they do not feel safe walking by empty and deteriorating buildings:

I would emphasize that there needs to be some things in place to prevent the decay of infrastructure down there. Because it's our first impression when people are visiting from out of town. We have Tourism Sault Ste. Marie, we have the charity casino, we have a lot of things to offer. We have beautiful scenery, we have all this stuff. I think first impressions are first impressions and you come into the city and this is what you are met with. It's a sad thing really. Someone's first impression of Canada is worn out building and back alleys and sort of a ghost town area. I think that can be changed (i.8).

Many of the small business and service agencies that are lease holders of downtown storefronts do not have the funds to renovate these buildings. Many of the city's oldest buildings remain in the downtown and they are difficult and **expensive to renovate** because of their age (Sault Ste. Marie, 2014). They are also difficult to heat and are often not well insulated, making affordability an issue for prospective tenants (Sault Ste. Marie, 2014). A number of participants suggested that buildings in the downtown be 'fixed-up' or get a 'facelift,' however others pointed out the difficulty associated with taking on a high-cost renovation while attempting to maintain the affordability of the property:

But how do you renovate these places? If you have been in a lot of them they need a lot of work, how do you do that and keep the price affordable (i.2)?

4.2.3.1 Community Action: Jamestown Flowerbomb – Beyond Neighbourhood Beautiful

Downtown Dialogue in Action researchers worked to mobilize community members to create positive environmental changes in the Jamestown area of downtown Sault Ste. Marie by holding a **'Flower Bombing.'** A Flower Bombing is a guerrilla community initiative and form of tactical urbanism that involves mobilizing community members while beautifying a less utilized public space. It follows the principle that citizens can undertake direct, low-cost, high-reward actions that immediately improve some aspect of a community's public life and demonstrate to city leaders that there are opportunities for easy, successful changes.

Through generous donations from *Green Grass Yard Care, Downing's Greenhouse, New North Greenhouse, Habitat for Humanity, Spadoni's Furniture, the Social Work Club at Algoma University,* and private donations it is estimated that over \$5,000 in material and labour was donated.

The event was able to provide community members with flowers and tools to complete the Flower Bomb, with live music, children's activities, food and beverages. The Flower Bomb was a huge success with approximately 50 people that participated. Since being completed, the area has received maintenance support from the *City of Sault Ste. Marie Public Works Department* which has added the Jamestown flower beds to its watering schedule. The Jamestown Flower Bomb also received several nominations for the *City's Beautification Awards.*

Ultimately, however, the action was less about beautification than it was about fostering social connections, changing negative perceptions, and people mobilizing to take ownership of their neighbourhood. The action's greatest success stemmed from the community-building process that brought dozens of local residents together to affect social and political change in their own back yards.

4.3 Downtown Vibrancy

For many participants the downtown was seen as a **destination** rather than a neighbourhood or community. In order for the downtown to truly be a community it must have places for people to live, work, play, and access their basic needs. Participants did identify a number of community building actions that have taken place in the downtown in recent years. These include events hosted by the ***Downtown Association***, the opening of **new businesses and restaurants**, and **improvements of the alleyways and public spaces** (m.i.&fg.). The opening of the ***Algoma University Residence*** in the former Windsor Park Hotel was noted by many participants as something that brought vibrancy to the downtown because of the students that it brings to the area.

Actually that has been good because you see the kids walking along the street that live at the residence. So it's kind of nice, it gives us more people downtown and using the services (i. 6).

Options identified by participants for increasing the 'neighbourhood' character of the downtown included restoring two-way traffic on downtown streets, making the area more 'pet friendly,' having more open-air markets, and restricting some portions of the downtown to pedestrian-only traffic (fg. 3 & 4).

Participants also noted several barriers to creating a downtown community including lack of housing options, lack of a grocery store, and the closing of schools in the area (fg.5 & 11). The need for neighbourhood schools and grocery stores also limits localized social contact due to fewer occasions to meet one's neighbours.

Many participants noted the lack of housing options in the downtown and stated that if there are more people living downtown, those people will support the businesses in the area.

I think businesses that would stay opened later gets people walking and spending more time downtown at night. Then you have some of the people living there that aren't just driving in and out, there's more promotion of walking or cycling and there's more visible bodies there (i. 11-1).

A number of participants expressed concern over **school closures** in the area, believing that it will be harder to attract residents – particularly young families – to the downtown core if the neighbourhood does not have sufficient local schools.

Yes when you have a school downtown, like right now St. Mary's is downtown and you see all the school kids there and it's a nice community feeling because they are there, and they're walking around in the area. So you get that community look and feel. Whereas if there's no schools then who is there? And then who's going to move there? There are no schools; their kids will have to take the bus. People move away from the downtown if there are no schools for their kids to go to (i. 6).

Currently *St. Mary's College* (Secondary Catholic School) and *Etienne Brule Public School* (Elementary) are slated to be repurposed or moved, leaving the *Urban Aboriginal Alternative High School* on Kohler Street, and the *Holy Angels Learning Centre* on Wellington St. East as the only schools within the study area, both focussing on alternative secondary education.

4.3.1 Festivals and Events

Festivals and events in the downtown area are very successful and well attended. This was evident to the researchers when they witnessed the crowded streets at **Rotaryfest**, **Buskerfest**, the **Downtown Street Party**, and **Moonlight Magic**. At these events the streets were temporarily closed to vehicular traffic to make way for food stands, music, vendors and other displays to attract people. Research participants stated that they enjoyed and attended these events and that they would attend more of them, should more occur⁴. They also felt that these events enhanced the downtown and should happen more regularly.

Buskerfest, I think that brings a lot of families downtown and it's an awesome thing but if it was more regular, instead of once a year, every couple months or monthly. It seems to be a real popular thing. I don't know how expensive it is to do but if there were local people to do a smaller type instead of a huge Buskerfest (i.5).

4.3.2 Hours of Operation

Many participants cited the **limited hours of operation** of downtown businesses as a barrier to the neighbourhood's vibrancy, noting it was a disincentive to being downtown in the evenings.

[T]o me the big thing with the shops are, I like to shop in the shops, we like to go there but they are not good hours. Even on weekends, if it's a long weekend a lot of them are closed because it is a long weekend (fg. 13-1).

They also expressed disappointment that many downtown businesses do not open during large events such as Buskerfest or the Rotary Day Parade.

4.4 Social Spaces

For groups at risk of isolation, the research found that there are important social spaces in the downtown that they access. For seniors and people living with mental health issues, places like the Essar Centre, where they can walk for free and interact with others, are very important for their social lives and mental health. For instance, the restaurant in Zellers (now closed) had been an important social space for many seniors because, as they explained, the food was good, affordable, and the environment was friendly (fg.7).

⁴ Post data collection for this research, in June 2014, this potential for increased vibrancy was realized at the 'Eat Algoma' local food event. All 500 tickets to the 'Pulled Pork Contest' were sold, and it was estimated that well over 1000 people attended the street party celebrating local foods, crafts and music.

A common theme in every focus group was that the downtown area needed **more social spaces to attract people**. Participants indicated that socializing and meeting new people were factors that drew them to events and businesses in the downtown, and stated they would go downtown more often if there were more places that offered spaces for social interaction and for community groups to meet. Some felt that a **multi-purpose community centre** was needed in the downtown to fill this void (fg.4, i. 26).

Outdoor patios and markets were the types of places that participants stated would attract them to the area. One participant stated:

I certainly feel like we need more of a, I'm not going to say nightlife but, we have some great restaurants but we need more of a presence downtown. You just don't really see it that busy or that exciting when it's supposed to be like the highlight of the city. I hear stories about how the downtown used to be twenty or thirty years ago from people I work with and people who are a bit older and obviously they say in 1990 they used to drive downtown and meet all of their friends and their used to be like 18 places you could walk down and there was just people everywhere. If you look now it's non-existent at all and that would be nice to see (i.29).

4.5 Parks and Recreation

The parks and recreation opportunities that do exist in the downtown are well used and many participants expressed that they enjoy using the **Hub Trail, Boardwalk, Sault Ste. Marie Canal and National Historic Site**, and **Whitefish Island trails**. However the opportunities for recreation are limited in the downtown and of those that exist, many felt they were not well advertised, as the following excerpts from focus groups demonstrate:

More advertising about nature and museums and stuff like that (fg.12-3)

There's nothing about Whitefish like the new stuff they put up to walk (fg.12-2).

No one knows about it (fg.12-2).

The Greco public pool and the Esposito rink are also well used and participants opined that the high usage was related to the fact that these activities are free (m.i.&fg.). Apart from these services, participants felt that there was a **lack of affordable recreation** opportunities for kids in the downtown, echoing the findings of the Innovation Centre (2009) and the Healthy Communities Partnership (Dutkiewicz 2011). *The Rotary Club* and the City are currently examining the feasibility of constructing and maintaining a 'splash pad,' which numerous

participants felt could be a fun, safe and low cost attraction that would benefit the community (fg.9).

The **cost of sports equipment** was identified as a barrier for youth in the downtown, in addition to **limited access to recreation centres and sports fields** (m.i.&fg.). Most of the recreation centres in the city are located outside of the downtown and are difficult for youth to access by transit. Several participants expressed concern that the East End location of the City's skateboard park is too far away for youth from the downtown to access easily (m.i.&fg.). Boxing was cited as one of the few accessible and affordable recreation opportunities found in the downtown.

There was concern about the safety of the few parks that are located downtown. Several participants had concerns about drug paraphernalia being found in the parks and felt that they should have better lighting, be **patrolled**, and **cleaned** more frequently (fg.3, 5, & 11).

4.6 Transportation and Parking

Transportation is an issue especially for older adults and people facing barriers to accessibility. Participants felt that the bus service in the city is **inconsistent** and that the hours of service are **limited**. Some expressed that the routes make it difficult to access certain areas of the city, particularly the hospital (m.i.&fg.). For some participants the cost of transit services was prohibitive but it was often their only option. Participants also found it difficult to get a taxi when bus service was unavailable and that the cost of taking a taxi did not allow this to be an option for many people.

Yes the way the buses run... they run fairly often down Queen but the bus doesn't seem that convenient to people, people will say that the bus routes are not that convenient. A lot of people that go downtown and use the downtown services are getting there by bus (i.6).

Parking was identified by many participants as an issue in the downtown. People feel that there is enough parking in the downtown for shoppers and tourists but there is a lack of parking for those who live outside the area and commute to work (m.i.&fg.). A major dilemma centres on citizens not wanting to pay for parking, yet parking spaces take up much of the valuable real estate in the downtown. One service provider had this to say about the on-street parking on Queen Street:

I think it's useless really because they semi-malled Queen St. so they got rid of a bunch of it, for the better, but the few parking spaces that are left on Queen St. only create an illusion that if someone comes downtown they can park in front of this commercial use.

Chances are, that space, because there's so few is going to be filled... The other thing is if parking is harder to find in the downtown area then you encourage the use of public transit. People use public transit to come downtown (i.1).

Several focus group and interview participants mentioned concerns about traffic accidents in the downtown area, which were echoed in the Media Review. Many participants also expressed that they felt unsafe walking or biking in the downtown (m.i.&fg.). They also mentioned cases of interaction between cyclists and motorist and cyclist and pedestrians. One participant expressed:

I find when I'm biking, it's completely fine biking on Wellington but biking on Queen St, is when you have the most people trying to run you over and stuff like that. Or run you off the road (i.11-1)

Participants felt that the downtown would be safer and that there would be fewer accidents if there were more **bike paths** and greater **pedestrian infrastructure** (m.i.&fg.).

4.7 Graffiti

The City of Sault Ste. Marie recently established a *Committee on Graffiti* to look at the causes and develop comprehensive solutions to graffiti tagging in the downtown core. Despite this call to action, research participants did not highlight graffiti as being a major theme for improvement in the study area and the incidence of respondents highlighting this is a concern was statistically insignificant. City officials and staff are passionate about the topic, however, with one participant noting that "Graffiti is an issue in the downtown that many people feel strongly about, and something needs to be done about it" (fg.11).

Graffiti was brought up sporadically throughout the research. A participant from one focus group noted "Every time something is new it just gets ruined with Graffiti".

Some survey respondents suggested that a greater police presence would discourage graffiti, while others impressed upon the need to 'clean up Gore Street' when they were solicited for changes that would improve the downtown.

4.7.1 Community Actions: Graffiti Reframed – Skills Development through Community Arts

In response to calls for action on graffiti, further research led to the creation of a working partnership with many stakeholders from Sault Ste. Marie's arts and culture sector and as noted above a municipal committee was formed. NORDIK initiated a partnership with the *Arts*

Council of Sault Ste. Marie, applying to the *Ontario Trillium Foundation* with a letter of support from the City of Sault Ste. Marie, for a project entitled *Graffiti Reframed*⁵. The goal of the project is to support the development of a multi-technique/medium youth street art project in collaboration with youth, local arts institutes, individuals and businesses in the downtown core. The project will allow youth to express their feelings and provide them with a positive and productive outlet to deal with community issues that are important to them. The action research project is also designed to create more positive perceptions of graffiti within the broader community as well as amongst taggers themselves. It is hoped that the project will be a positive and restorative action that will make the downtown a more livable and inclusive space for everyone.

4.8 Voices from the Margins: Poverty and Social Exclusion

During the process of creating a presence in the downtown, conducting focus groups and interviews, and events such as the *Jamestown Flower Bomb*, *Graffiti Reframed*, and *Soup Ste. Marie* (see S. 4.2.3.1, 4.7.1, and 4.8.7), it became apparent that **empowering** and **engaging** community members of marginalized groups and taking time to understand their strengths and barriers is imperative to creating a safe, secure, and thriving downtown. Marginalized groups often face challenges in trying to voice their concerns, navigate oppressive systems, or create positive changes within their communities.

People that grow up in an unhealthy environment where mental health issues, addictions, violence is involved end up in a cycle where they continue these patterns. These issues need to be addressed, people need to be educated and assisted and supported for issues they are experiencing. There needs to be more positive and healthy outlets for youth such as a youth centre, or a safe place (i.14).

During the process of gathering data and information from participants, researchers were able to gain a better understanding of issues faced by marginalized groups, such as transportation, housing, affordability of events and recreation, and outreach. Many participants shared their experiences of stigma and feelings of isolation from the community (m.i.&fg.). Without proper resources and supports, resorting to crime can feel like the only option for people living in poverty (fg.11). Community mobilization, partnerships, and engagement can assist in addressing the root causes of crime. Creating **a shift from intervention to prevention** can assist in reducing poverty and issues of poverty, and in turn reducing crime and decreasing calls for service.

⁵ Funding for this project was obtained from the Ontario Trillium Foundation in July 2014 and it is now underway.

4.8.1 Poverty

During the research process many participants shared their experiences of poverty and feelings of marginalization. Issues raised included a limited income through employment or social assistance, lack of employment opportunities available in the community, and not being able to meet their basic needs (m.i.&fg.). People living in poverty can be at a higher risk of being involved with crime due to **financial pressures**, along with other conditions contributing to poverty such as **mental health and addictions, intergenerational trauma, abuse, and inequality** (Nurius, Uehara & Zatzick, 2013).

One research participant, a former escort, shared her experiences of poverty and how a lack of supports created many barriers and challenges. She moved to the Sault when she was 17 years old, completed high school and became pregnant. However, without any family to support her and a very small network in Sault Ste. Marie, she felt very isolated. When she had only peanut butter left to feed her 16 month old baby she made the decision to call a local escort agency for employment. Another former sex trade worker shared that she became involved in the sex trade to provide food for herself and her two children (i. 17).

4.8.1.1 Actions: Social Enterprise – Poverty Reduction through Employment Opportunities

The Downtown Dialogue project and Social Entrepreneurship Evolution (SEE) facilitated a meeting with organizations involved in **social enterprise** to discuss how these types of enterprises could be encouraged and supported and also the possibility of creating a Social Enterprise Incubator in the downtown core. Another project led by NORDIK, SEE is an innovative collaborative of diverse partners from across Northern Ontario that engages and works alongside young social entrepreneurs aged 13-35 to develop and connect the sustainable infrastructure they need to both make a living and address social, economic and environmental issues in their communities.

The first social enterprise meeting took place on November 25th and the group met again on January 2nd. Participants at the meeting included the Economic Development Corporation (EDC), SSMIC, John Howard Society, the Soup Kitchen, Community Living Algoma, and Gangplank. Community Living Algoma currently runs several social enterprises and the Soup Kitchen and John Howard Society are interested in starting up social enterprises as well. The EDC and SSMIC are currently renovating a building on Queen St. in the downtown core for the purpose of expanding SSMIC's existing business incubator and it is hoped that at least some small area may be designated for social enterprise start-up.

While the group has not continued meeting, several social enterprise initiatives are underway, and SEE's efforts to both raise awareness and obtain funding sources for these initiatives are ongoing. Additionally, River's Edge Developments, a private-sector developer of a brownfield site within the catchment area, has collaborated with Ontario Works to sponsor two social enterprises that have contributed to the creation of the 'Mill Market', a farmer's market located at the corner of Huron and Bay Streets. SEE's collaboration with partners across Northern Ontario resulted in an application being submitted to the Social Enterprise Demonstration Fund through the Office of Social Enterprise at the Ministry of Economic Development, Employment and Infrastructure that would provide much-needed start-up funding for social enterprises in the region.

4.8.2 Housing

Housing has been a predominant theme throughout the research process, especially among marginalized and low-income groups. Recurring issues include **housing costs, lack of safe, affordable housing, maintenance, and landlord and tenant issues**. Existing stocks of subsidized or rent-geared-to-income housing are insufficient to address local need, leaving many people on long wait lists, and in turn living in unaffordable housing. The cost of housing in Sault Ste. Marie can be expensive and unattainable, especially for marginalized and low-income groups. Data from the National Household Survey (2011) indicates that while 26% of tenant households in Sault Ste. Marie are in subsidized housing, 37.8% of tenants are putting more than a third of their income towards shelter costs. And while median monthly shelter costs for rented dwellings in Sault Ste. Marie were \$590 in 2006, they have risen 12% to \$658/month in 2011 (Statistics Canada 2006; National Household Survey 2011). For people relying on social assistance, it can be impossible to find safe, affordable accommodation, leaving many people living in less than adequate housing with many health and safety concerns.

Several tenant participants expressed that they have had issues with landlords not maintaining rented properties, a concern which was echoed by service providers who called attention to a great number of poorly maintained buildings in the core (fig.11). SSMPS also listed landlord/tenant disputes among the many social disorder calls that they receive and over which they have little jurisdiction. Landlord and tenant issues often become complex because of laws and regulations, issues navigating the system, and people being unaware of their rights. An interview with a service provider shared that many people who seek assistance do not understand their rights (i.9). Making a complaint can also be costly, and many tenants cannot afford to do so. The service provider also shared that there need to be more supports for low-income people and marginalized groups, such as people coping with mental health issues.

4.8.3 Transportation Concerns

Transportation issues were a common theme throughout the focus group process, especially with marginalized and low income groups. They shared their experiences of **rude** bus drivers, the **rising cost of transportation, inadequate hours of operation, and infrequency of service**. Many people shared how difficult it is to access needed services and run every day errands because of the inadequate transit system (see also S. 4.6). With the outmigration of many health and social services from the downtown, especially the hospital, it leaves people without proper access to services and supports. Focus group participants shared that transportation is a huge issue that creates daily struggles, and that transit should be more affordable and accessible (m.i.&fg.). Recommendations from participants included increased parabus service, free public transit on special occasions, eliminating public transit service reductions or interruptions on weekends and public holidays, and eliminating ads that cover bus windows and cause difficulties for visually impaired riders (fg. 4).

4.8.4 Food Security

Food security, defined as everyone having adequate access to food (Allen 1999), was identified by many participants as a major issue for marginalized and low income groups within the community. There are very few services that provide food, and most have restrictions on their access, be it their hours of operation or transportation issues. Many people shared that they access food programs but could not always do so when needed because of these restrictions. Services that do provide food, such as the *Soup Kitchen Community Centre*, are also often **stretched to their limits**.

Some also shared that *Walmart's* arrival at the Station Mall has provided an **accessible and affordable grocery** option in the downtown core, where before all large-scale grocers were outside of the study area. Still, even Walmart was not always an option for those on strictly limited budgets.

One focus group participant shared that **food insecurity** led her into the sex trade so that she could provide food for herself and her two children. Women working in the sex trade shared that a mobile food delivery service or a place to access healthy, perishable food outside regular business hours would fill some of the needs they experience (m.i.).

Several respondents expressed an interest in **community gardens** that can provide fresh fruit and produce at low or no cost in the downtown core (m.i.&fg.).

4.8.5 Service Access

There are many programs and services in Sault Ste. Marie that assist marginalized groups, however many felt that outreach gaps were causing some to fall through the cracks. In most cases if a person is connected to a service, they have better chances of navigating systems, identifying, and utilizing the services they need. Those who are not connected to any services are left vulnerable and at risk.

During a focus group, one man shared his experience of finding a very young pregnant female eating out of a garbage can downtown (fg. 10). He shared that he talked to her, informed her about various services, and expressed his hope that she reach out for support. Consequently he felt that there needs to be more community **outreach programs** that engage potential clients in the community and on the streets, outside of stationary service settings. Improved case management was also raised as an issue of concern. Many people shared their experiences of being pushed from one service to the next, of gaps and overlapping services, as well as with some service providers not being up to date on the services and programs offered through the city (fg. 10 & 12). All of these concerns and experiences create major challenges and barriers for people who are accessing services.

The accessibility of **health and social services** in the downtown core was a great concern for the majority of people who participated in focus groups and interviews. Many services have migrated out of the downtown (most notably the *Sault Area Hospital* and *Algoma Public Health*), creating transportation barriers for people in need of support, and leaving many without access to the services they require. A social service provider in the downtown core stated:

It would be easier to have more centralized services, and central not being on top of the hill because most of the client groups that we work with are downtown. So a lot of people won't follow up with referrals because they don't have access to the stuff that is on top of the hill like the Hospital, and [Algoma] Public Health (i.3).

Another focus group participant echoed concerns with the location of services, particularly with the new Sault Area Hospital site on Third Line, stating:

It is hard for people that are on low incomes especially to get up there like I dread the thought of it, if I got sick and had to take the cab up to the hospital and back, it would cost me fifty dollars (fg 13).

4.8.5.1 Community Actions: Community Health Care Centre – Access to Services and Social Inclusion

The Soup Kitchen Community Centre, whose mandate is to address the needs of those who live in poverty, has identified **health care service gaps** in the downtown in recent years as a result of the relocation of Sault Area Hospitals, Algoma Public Health, and other health services. In response, the organization's Board of Directors began exploring the feasibility of expanding its operations to include owning and operating a **community child and health care facility** located in the downtown (Lauzon & Kelly, 2013).

Allyson Schmidt was contracted through the NORDIK Institute to coordinate project development for the Community Health Centre project, under the direction of an Advisory Committee. A subsequent community engagement project shows that there is a lack of service support for the vulnerable population that lives in the downtown core. Ultimately, however, the Soup Kitchen Community Centre board of directors decided in 2014 that creating and operating the community child and health care facility was beyond the Centre's mission. Nonetheless, a group of local citizens continue to carry the vision forward.

While the Neighbourhood Resource Centre on Gore Street may help to address some of these service gaps, the creation of a child and health care centre in the downtown would also help to address some of the priorities and recommendations outlined in the Community Picture Report (Dutkiewicz, 2011).

4.8.6 Marginalized Identities

Marginalization, discrimination, and prejudice based on race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation were identified both by participants and researchers as ongoing challenges facing the entire community. Incidents such as a violent attack on an Algoma University student of African descent and Islamophobic public reaction to a woman-only designated swim time at the YMCA stood out as the most recent examples of this ongoing problem (Purvis, 2012; Ougler, 2013). Yet events such as **Passport to Unity** and growing annual festivities for **National Aboriginal Day** stood out as positive forces, among others, to increase and improve public dialogue on issues of diversity, inclusion, and respect (fg. 4).

In consultations with the LGBTQ community, increased visibility at major community events stood out, particularly Sault Pride's participation in the Rotary Day Parade, seen as the city's largest public celebration. Commenting on that participation, one participant noted:

That made me feel a lot better about the downtown core, like there was some acceptance city wide about it. There was a lot of controversy, but I think that that's good. That gets people talking, it creates dialogue (i.25)

Since the interview, **Sault Pride** has since hosted the first Pride Festival in local history (see 4.8.8 for further details).

Summing up her perception of prejudice in the community generally, one participant expressed:

Prejudice exists here, right? Homophobia exists here. Of course my feeling of it has been that it's not really based on hatred or fear so much as ignorance, and really innocent ignorance. Not nasty ignorance, just like "Oh, I never thought about that, and I didn't know, and why would I? Because I've never had any reason to think about that, but now that you've brought it to my attention, you're totally right, and you've changed my mind." (i.26)

Participants especially underscored the need for greater collaboration, connections, and cultural awareness between indigenous & non-indigenous people.

4.8.7 Community Actions: Soup Ste. Marie – Crowd Funding for Social Innovation

The social issues confronting Sault Ste. Marie are multifaceted and complex, and require creative solutions when public resources are tight. This context stimulated the development of Soup Ste. Marie, a public dinner designed to use community-driven financial support to **democratically fund projects** led by individuals, businesses or groups of community members. It is a micro-grant model based on the international *Sunday Soup* program that uses crowd sourcing to finance creative projects through community meals.



Figure 12: Participants listen to presenters at the inaugural Soup Ste. Marie

The inaugural **Soup Ste. Marie** took place on November 14th, 2013 at 180 Projects, on Gore Street. The event's theme was 'How will you Change the Downtown?' Attendees paid a \$10 entrance fee for which they received a bowl of soup and a vote on which community project they thought should receive the proceeds of the event. A call for submissions went out several weeks prior. Interested parties were encouraged to submit an idea for a project that would benefit the downtown. There were no entry fees for submissions. Seven parties were chosen to present their ideas, showcasing their proposals through a 5-minute presentation and a 5-minute Q&A period. Attendees listened, asked questions, and then cast their vote to grant the proceeds to the most inspiring project. The winning presenter, Teddy Syrette on behalf of the **Sault Pride Committee**, received over \$1000 for projects to increase LGBTQ visibility and create a more welcoming atmosphere for LGBTQ population in Sault Ste. Marie.

Since the award was given, the Sault Pride Committee has hosted regular all-ages drop-in coffee nights and the city's first ever Pride Festival that took place from September 5th to 7th, 2014.

4.9 Perceptions of Safety, Crime and Social Disorder

4.9.1 Perceptions of Crime, Safety, and Security

Participants had somewhat **divergent perceptions** of safety and security in the downtown, as survey findings in section 4.1 have indicated earlier. Some expressed no concern over crime, as the following interview excerpt indicates:

In the city of Sault Ste. Marie I feel as safe in the downtown area as I would walking in a rural setting. I don't believe we have a high incidence of crime. We do have an incidence of crime but that can happen anywhere (i.1).

Some participants felt that the perception of the downtown is very different from the reality. One resident and business owner who stated that he felt very safe and had never had any issues in the area had this to say:

I also think that a lot of times people think that just because something has happened on a street that it's unsafe there, but a lot times those occurrences are just from certain groups of people that are involved with maybe criminal activities and it's just that particular group that ends up with problems between each other. They're not really worried about anybody else. You might possibly have harassment or something but that's usually as far as it goes (i.11-2).

Other participants also identified the issues that people experiencing **poverty**, **addictions**, and **mental health issues** are being associated with crime whether that is the case or not. This was consistent with our survey and media review findings where several people said that they felt unsafe when someone had asked them for spare change in the downtown, while others attributed crimes in the downtown to youth and methadone clinic users.

Most participants in the study, however, stated that they felt safe downtown but less so at night and in certain areas. **Albert Street**, **Gore Street**, alleyways and the bus terminal were places that people commonly identified as feeling less safe. One focus group participant shared:

I live on Albert Street and the last couple of years, the last five years, it was pretty safe to go out at night. But right now it is very scary to go out after six o'clock because of the prostitution and the drugs. And there has been four murders close to that street. So we don't go out anymore (fg.13-2).

A number of participants commonly stated that they felt the downtown was deserted after 5 o'clock and that consequently they didn't feel safe. A lack of adequate **lighting** in alleys, parking lots and parks also contributed to feeling less safe in the downtown.

During business hours I feel quite safe. In the evening I feel a little unsafe around the Gore area, the James Street area. A little unsafe I'd say (i.5).

I feel safe during the day. And in the evening not so safe (i.6).

I would say that evening time is a little bit more intimidating. Going to get milk at Mac's Mart [on the corner of Gore & Wellington] is a little bit more questionable (i. 8).

Many respondents felt that if businesses stayed open later, they would feel safer and would be more inclined to be downtown later in the evening. Having **businesses open later** in the evening improves safety and can prevent crime in two ways: first, it gives people an accessible place to go if they need assistance and creates more 'eyes on the street' through the presence of business owners and employees. Second, the open businesses attract people to the area, creating even more 'eyes on the street,' or would-be witness deterrents. Some participants drew these same connections, as one person shared:

More 24/7 coffee or open shops. So at least you know you have places to go if you need [help] (i. 12-3).

One downtown resident told a story about how she had her purse stolen while walking downtown. One of the most upsetting things about the situation, she expressed, was that there was **no one around to help** her or witness the attack.

I thought okay... and then all I heard was the bike behind me and him trying to grab my purse. No one around and I yelled 'Rape, Help, Terrorist, Bomb, Fire.' No one came up (fg.12-2).

Most participants wanted to see a **greater police presence** in the downtown area; however they were very specific about the type of police presence that they wanted. Participants felt it should be a **visible, interactive presence** that takes a proactive approach to crime prevention (fg. 3, 5, & 11). Participants wanted to see police officers on foot and they would like to be able to communicate with them. Several participants stated that the only time they see a police officer is when someone has called and there is a problem. They stated it would be nice to see the police patrolling and engaging in the community to prevent problems. Having a police storefront in the downtown was mentioned by several participants, as they felt it would decrease crime in the area and increase safety.

Again, I think that if the police services had office space downtown, it might decrease the crime rate, but I'm not 100% sure of that. Police cannot be everywhere at all times, so crime may continue downtown or move to another location. Everyone needs to take responsibility and do their due diligence to make sure their vehicles, etc. are not targeted. Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) could be taught to businesses to assist them (i. 15).

Many participants stated that the *Crime Stoppers* patrollers make them feel safer and that they notice a difference having them in the community. The **Crime Stoppers Patrol** is a partnership between *Sault College Justice Studies*, *Crime Stoppers*, *SSMPS*, and the *Downtown Association*. Patrollers are 1st and 2nd year students from Justice Studies/ Police Foundations at *Sault College*, and cover an area including the Boardwalk, Bay St., Queen St., Albert St., from Gore to

Bruce Street. They are highly supervised and go through a screening process based on their skills as well as personality. Rather than law enforcement, the patrol is designed to be proactive, deterring crime by their mere presence in the neighbourhood.

The program has been reported on favorably in the media and several participants in interviews and focus groups stated that property crimes have decreased in the patrolled areas (m.i.&fg.).

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design, mentioned by the above participant, helps to discourage crime through physical modifications that make certain kinds of crime more difficult and increase the number of eyes on the street through measures such as low-intensity but frequent lighting fixtures, design measures to increase pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and increasing the number of trees or other foliage to render the neighbourhood more attractive to visitors.

4.9.1.1 Community Actions: SSMPS – Mobilizing the Community for Change

The SSMPS has adopted Ontario's *Mobilization and Engagement Model of Community Policing*, which in this instance, is risk-focused, police initiated, police mobilized and agencies partnered (OACP, 2010). In brief, this model suggests that the police, through mobilizing and partnering with other agencies to develop interventions in high-risk neighbourhoods, can reduce crime through social development (see the introduction, Section 1.0, and the literature review for crime prevention through social development, Section 3.1, this report for a more detailed outline).

The SSMPS began the mobilization process through partnering with NORDIK Institute in undertaking an extensive, community-wide dialogue and research process, to identify a vision for the downtown area. As the research evolved, the SSMPS continued the mobilization process, by meeting with various agencies and encouraging them to form a plan to address the social needs in the downtown core; by obtaining the support of City Council for a budget and strategy to allocate resources directly to this high-risk neighbourhood; and by mobilizing residents and businesses in the neighbourhood to work with them to address numerous issues.

One of the outcomes of this strategy has been the **Neighbourhood Resource Centre (NRC)** that opened up in storefront space on Gore St. in May 2014. The NRC is a collaboration with various service providers, including the *Algoma Community Legal Clinic, Canadian Mental Health Association, Algoma Public Health, Ontario Works, Victim Services Algoma, Women in Crisis*, and the children's *Best Start Program*. It is staffed by a police officer between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., but also provides space for community services and public events to foster dialogue between residents and service providers.

Quoted in an August 12, 2014 *Sault This Week* article, then-Police Inspector Art Pluss explained:

This is non-traditional policing. Traditionally we react; we get a call and we arrest someone [...] but we can't just keep arresting people [...] We need to work hard at immersing ourselves in the community. We need to become part of the community and to listen, to bring about change (Pearson 2014).

The SSMPS is also changing the way that it responds to calls related to sex work related offences (Mills 2013). Then-police Chief Bob Davies has indicated that the force was looking to Sudbury for models with a greater focus on building trust and targeting those that harm sex workers.

In March 2014, the SSMPS brought Dr. Hugh Russell to Sault Ste. Marie to participate in the release of the Downtown Dialogue findings, and to provide an introduction to the community of the concept of community mobilization. The three separate presentations to everyone from the Mayor to downtown residents, businesses and service agencies, resulted in a resolution by City Council to support the mobilization strategy and endorse the efforts of the SSMPS in creating the Neighbourhood Resource Centre.

4.9.1.2 Community Actions: Restorative Justice – Crime Reduction through Conflict Resolution

One of the significant challenges facing both business and residents in the downtown core is the need to increase local conflict-resolution capacity in order to better address criminalization arising from socio-economic marginalization, mental health issues, and other social factors.

Figure 13: The Restorative Justice Model



To that end, the *John Howard Society* hosted “train-the-trainer” workshops to 41 service providers in the use of **restorative justice practices**. The SSMPS, the *Algoma District School Board*, and the *Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board*, and other community stakeholders were among the participants in the workshops led by the *John Howard Society’s* Hamilton branch that has already successfully implemented Restorative Justice Practices in their own community. Those who successfully completed the training

have the ability to train others within their organizations and the community as a whole. Figure 13 provides an overview of the distinguishing features of Restorative and Non-Restorative approaches to Justice.

The *John Howard Society* has created an Operational Committee with the *SSMPS*, the *Algoma District School Board*, and the *Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board* to apply for further funding to continue the implementation of these practices in Sault Ste. Marie⁶.

4.9.2 Sex Trade Work

Among the ‘social disorder’ calls discussed in Section 3.1, disputes between residents and sex trade workers have often resulted in police intervening in situations beyond their skill set and scope of practice. The result has been numerous arrests and charges against sex trade workers where other interventions rooted in **social development** would be more productive. While not universally so, a number of underlying issues play a contributing factor in driving individuals to the sex trade as a means of income. These issues can include poverty, mental health and addiction issues, inequality, intergenerational trauma, and abuse to name a few. Reframing sex work in a way that focuses on **safety** and **addressing workers’ underlying needs** in a **non-judgemental setting** instead of focussing on intervention and punishment is important to creating positive, lasting, and holistic changes.

Focus groups and interviews were conducted with women who engage in the sex trade who shared their experiences of addictions, poverty, gaps in services, stigma, and many other barriers. Several participants indicated that they found it difficult to access health services when they needed to do so (m.i.&fg.). Interviewees used words like ‘**stigmatized**’ ‘**disrespected**’ and ‘**humiliated**’ when talking about using local healthcare services in Sault Ste. Marie.

One participant briefly described an incident on a small side street that runs west of Gore Street. After a confrontation with an individual known to her, she was badly injured. She called out for help but nobody came to her aid or called the police. She doesn’t remember how long she was lying on the side of the road before she was able to get up and stumble to a friend’s house. Another participant shared their experience in terms of health services:

If there was a safe place where I could have gone for health services- check-ups or to get condoms or whatever, that was just for sex trade workers and run by sex workers I would have gone to them for help. I’m friends with women that used to do it and are still

⁶ Funding from the Ontario Trillium Foundation was obtained to support this initiative in the summer of 2014, and the project will train many more ‘trainers’ over the next 2 years.

doing it. It's just easier to trust someone that understands what you're going through and doesn't judge where you are in life (i. 21)

During the research process, several women admitted to struggling with **addictions**. Three women attend the methadone clinic on Queen St. and also access the needle exchange program. These three women disclosed that the pressure to turn tricks in addition to a need to feed a drug habit can turn sex workers against one another. One woman shared that when she was going through a hard withdrawal that she physically attacked another street worker for her small stash of drugs.

It's not something I'm proud of. I tried quitting so many times that I've lost count. I still see that girl and we still hang out. It's just the way it is. She'll jump me next time and the next day we'll be good. It's like it never happened (i.22)

There are **major gaps in services** in terms of sex trade work in Sault Ste. Marie which creates barriers for people trying to find support or work in a safe environment. Many people who engage in the sex trade experience abuse. The risks associated with sex work are magnified for these women who are working on the streets and risk violence at the hands of their clients. Two participants also described violence that they experienced at the hands of their boyfriends when they didn't make enough money or used drugs that were paid in lieu of cash. Each woman expressed the need to extend hours for services, pointing out that the nature of their work keeps them up most of the evening. Not only do they suggest hours of operation in the evening, but also that these services be available seven days a week. One participant shared her idea on how to make sex trade work safer:

I want to start a safe stroll project and outreach for the girls. If somebody goes missing who will know? I'd like to put together a list of the girls and emergency contacts or something. And I'd like to make a more formal, more recognized way of reporting people who are unsafe in the area. Like if there is a guy in the area that's creeping the girls out they could report what he looks like, what colour his car is. Stuff like that (i.17).

4.9.2.1 Community Actions: CWIN, NWC, and Stop the Arrests – Sex Work is Work and Needs to be Safe

Currently in Sault Ste. Marie there are no prevention, education, rehabilitation or recovery programs for women who have been involved in the sex trade, nor are there any sex worker organized and driven safety and support programs, such as the one described above. To address these gaps, a number of groups have emerged in the last three years:

The Northern Women’s Connection (NWC) works with women who have experienced sex work and are trying to exit the trade. NWC aims to fill the gap of missing services directly aimed at the intersecting issues that are faced by women involved in the sex trade, while encouraging the development of the skills necessary to build their lives outside the trade.

The Coalition of Women in Numbers (CWIN) is a collective of local women focused on the needs of women involved in or at risk of involvement in the sex trade. The coalition envisions providing harm reduction, non-judgmental support and exit strategies for those involved in the sex trade. CWIN maintains that “it is the lack of choice in society that drives a woman into the sex trade industry and not the often believed stance that women enter and remain in the sex trade by their own freewill” and aims to “engage community members to be a part of developing strategies that will improve the quality of life for all women” (CWIN 2013). Since its inception, members have partnered with the Neighbourhood Resource Centre to conduct outreach and distribution of harm reduction supplies, and have issued commentary on developments pertaining to the debate over Canada’s prostitution laws (CWIN 2013).

Stop The Arrests!!! Sault Ste. Marie (STA) is a collective composed of current and former sex workers and their allies that formed in September 2012 in response to a police sting that charged 9 women with prostitution-related offences. The coalition advocates harm reduction practices, sex worker mutual support and advocacy, and the decriminalization of sex work. STA sees criminalization as a barrier to safe working conditions and social inclusion of sex workers. Since its inception, STA has organized educational presentations, Sault Ste. Marie's first ever International Day Against Violence Against Sex Workers (December 17th), and launched the local ‘Red Umbrella Campaign’ to draw attention to the rights of sex workers. The collective has also participated in sex worker conferences, and issues commentary on both police response to sex work within Sault Ste. Marie and to the larger debate over Canada’s prostitution laws, vocally opposing the government’s Bill C-36.

4.9.3 Mental Health and Addictions

Many research participants shared that they perceived a lack of mental health and addictions services in the community, especially in terms of rehabilitation for people coping with addiction issues (m.i.&fg.). There is no full rehabilitation facility in Sault Ste. Marie, with the closest option located in Elliot Lake. The lack of rehabilitation support in the community can create challenges for those trying to access treatment. Research participants shared that they would like mental health and addictions services to be accessible and remain in the downtown to better address the needs of those accessing these supports (m.i.&fg.).

By contrast, some participants shared that they felt the **methadone clinic** located on Queen Street was undesirable, expressing that the number of people standing outside the clinic creates an uneasy atmosphere for others in the downtown (fg. 4). Nonetheless, given the shortage of mental health and social services, a majority shared that they still feel the clinic needs to be accessible and located in the downtown core.

Not surprising given some of the commentary about the methadone clinic, some participants who access mental health and addiction supports shared experiences of stigma and discrimination (fg. 6 & 13). Those accessing services can be less inclined to do so when they experience discrimination and shame for doing so. Working to reduce stigma and discrimination through education and advocacy can help create a safer environment for those coping with mental health and addictions issues, thus increasing chances for success and fostering positive, supportive relationships.

4.10 Changing Perceptions and Approaches to Downtown Revitalization: Other Community Initiatives

Numerous other businesses, agencies, organizations, and individuals have been active in fostering community and trying to revitalize the city's downtown. Even small actions, such as choosing to walk down a less commonly traveled street, contribute to the vitality of a neighbourhood. Consequently, capturing all the initiatives to improve the city's downtown core would be impossible. What follows is a brief profile of some of the more public, visible, and larger-scale initiatives that continue to foster downtown revitalization.

The Downtown Association is a Business Improvement Area devoted to “improving and promoting downtown Sault Ste. Marie through investment, advocacy and events” (Downtown Association n.d.). Covering an area along the Queen Street corridor from Pim to Dennis Streets the *Downtown Association* not only represents the interests of downtown business owners and stakeholders, but spearheads a number of initiatives to bring people to the neighbourhood to live, work, play, and shop. Some of the Association's recurring projects include the *Sault Ste. Marie Walk of Fame* that profiles Saultites who have made outstanding contributions to the community, Moonlight Magic that kicks off the holiday shopping season with a tree lighting, late-night shopping, and a hot-chocolate competition, and a summer-time Downtown Street Party featuring late-night shopping, bands on every block, and ‘pop-up’ patios. The *Downtown Association* also works collaboratively with other businesses and groups to facilitate special events and festivals.

In 2012, developers purchased the former St. Mary's Paper Mill site near the International Bridge and founded **Riversedge Developments**. Since then, Riversedge has spearheaded the

restoration and revitalization of the **Mill Square**, as it is now known and encouraged the City in its recent designation of the Canal District. **The Machine Shop** at the site has hosted numerous concerts, banquets, and other special events, particularly in concert with the Algoma Fall Festival. In 2014, the **Mill Market** opened in the adjacent former Fish Hatchery site at 35 Canal Drive, offering “fresh food, culinary and craft for the everyday to the extraordinary” (Mill Market 2014). The market building also functions as an incubator for **Entomica**, Northern Ontario’s only insectarium. Also in April of 2014, *Algoma University* and the Algoma Conservatory of Music signed agreements with Riversedge to move the Conservatory and the university’s music program to the Mill Square (Purvis 2014). In October, the university signed another agreement moving its Fine Arts program to the site as well (Northern Ontario Business 2014).

Animating the John Rowswell Hub Trail is a joint project of NORDIK and the City of Sault Ste. Marie’s Planning Department in collaboration with over 15 other community groups. The project will provide “information regarding the rich historical, cultural and environmental ecosystems adjacent to the Hub Trail” (NORDIK 2014). Information will be accessible through a printed guide, a web portal, and mobile devices and will be accessible in English, French, and Anishinaabemowin. The project will also provide information on healthy, active living, and hopes to be a platform for future cultural and tourism development.

Following public consultations in February 2014, the City of Sault Ste. Marie released its **Canal District Neighbourhood Plan** in July. Focussing on the western end of the Downtown between Dennis Street and Carmen’s Way and inclusive of its namesake, the Sault Ste. Marie Canal, the newly envisioned district plan outlined a number of key projects necessary for achieving its vision of leveraging existing community assets, linking disconnected parts of the city fabric, guiding appropriate built form, and animating and programming the public realm (City of Sault Ste. Marie & Greenberg Consultants Inc. 2014). Projects range from streetscape improvements, to trail and park development, to road reconstruction, and facilitating a greater presence for post-secondary education institutions, building on Algoma University’s collaboration with Riversedge Developments.

Eat Algoma is a local food festival organized by the *Rural Agri-Innovation Network (RAIN)* (a joint collaboration of NORDIK and the Innovation Centre). Located on Block 1 of Queen St., the event features “farm-fresh food vendors, children’s activities, live music, a pop-up patio, and the Restaurant Food Challenge Competition” (Downtown Association n.d.) In addition to bringing hundreds of people downtown, the festival raised awareness about local agricultural producers and fostered stronger connections between farmers, restaurants, and consumers.

The City’s much awaited **Heritage Discovery Centre** opened its doors in 2014, offering displays and interpretation services for the *Ermatinger Clergue National Historic Site* and increasing the

city's heritage tourism infrastructure. Also adding to the city's cultural scene, the Algoma Fall Festival spearheaded Sault Ste. Marie's first participation in the international **Nuit Blanche** arts festival that sees art installations from local and international artists accessible throughout the late night.

Some **residential intensification** has also been underway in the last year, with the construction of the River Park Manor apartment building by Sar-Gin Developments, on the corner of Bay and East Streets, near the Centennial Library. Further, the TVM Group purchased the former Plummer Hospital site on Queen Street, and received City Council backing to build a condominium complex, named Riverwalk Condos, with units ranging from 830 to 1800 square feet (Della-Mattea 2014).

Several new businesses have also opened their doors in the downtown or are in the process of development. **Shabby Motley Handcraft** specializes in yarn and craft supplies while offering a café and baked goods; **Outspoken Brewery** and **Union Jack Brewery** have recently filled a gap in the local market by offering locally brewed craft beer; **Q Bakery & Café** has recently opened in the downtown, and also offers light lunches, while next door **Atrebla** and has joined local clothing retailers and producers, specializing in handmade garments; **Low and Slow** and the **Gore Street Café** have also helped re-establish the City Centre as a destination for diners. **Homespun Treasures** also opened in the Heritage Block, offering handmade crafts and gifts.

Likewise, due to support from the Downtown Association, local entrepreneurs, activists, and organizations like the Canadian Bushplane Heritage Centre, numerous festivals and special events have proliferated, including the **Java Jamboree**, **Diversity Downtown**, the **Pumpkin Weigh-Off**, and the earlier-mentioned **Downtown Street Party**. There has been such strong public appreciation for such events that faced with the end of RotaryFest's Second Stage and Buskerfest's one-year hiatus in 2014, local entrepreneurs from Loplops and Case's Music organized **The Emergency Festival**, featuring four stages with live bands along with craft and farmer's markets.

5.0 Response to Research

Presentations of the initial findings of this research in late March 2014, were enthusiastically attended by over 150 community leaders, front-line workers, residents and business owners, and on April 7, 2014, City Council passed a resolution recognizing the role of social development in crime prevention, and committing to:

capitalizing and building on municipal expertise, embracing innovations in policing and social services with the goal of socially inclusive community development, and supports partnerships that promote the improvement of community safety and crime prevention (City of Sault Ste. Marie 2014).

The research team made three presentations to stakeholders – one each to community leaders, front-line staff and property owners and residents - in March 2014, outlining the research design and responses from the community. Themes generated by the research included reframing approaches to crime, restorative justice, the importance of downtown and its resident community, social space and activity, parks and recreation, redevelopment, safe streets, appearance and cleanliness, accessibility, poverty, safe and affordable housing, food security, outreach in health and social services, sex trade work, and mental health and addictions. These recurring themes highlight the most urgent dimensions of social development needing to be addressed by future action.

6.0 Recommendations

The recommendations stemming from the research are rooted in strategies of crime prevention through social development. While some recommendations obviously address the roots of crime (e.g. increasing access to appropriate housing, providing supports for people living with addictions, etc.) others stem from the need to build community and to empower residents by promoting their vision of what they wanted their downtown to be.

Each recommendation includes the identification of proposed leaders to move the measures forward. The leader identified is based on an evaluation of who is currently well placed to mobilize around identified issues, and does not necessarily reflect the will of the identified agency, government body, or stakeholder.

Some measures that support the recommendations are already commencing or underway, yet they are reiterated here to underscore their importance. This is indicated in parentheses where applicable.

6.1 Downtown Action Coordinating Committee

To maintain the momentum of the *Downtown Dialogue in Action* project and to foster further actions, the community must:

- Strike a **coordinating committee composed of residents, business or property owners, service providers, and other diverse stakeholders** .
(action: *Mayor & Council of Sault Ste. Marie* [particularly Ward 4 councillors], *United Way of Sault Ste. Marie*)

Without a body to coordinate ongoing efforts and direct the existing momentum toward the ongoing goal of crime prevention through social development, we risk losing that momentum while the constructive dialogue that the project generated fades into memory. Such a committee could also foster greater communication and collaboration between service providers and other downtown agencies and encourage the sharing of resources and information across sectors.

6.2 Comprehensive Collaborative Approach to Improving the Downtown

Based on public input, actions, and the investigations carried out through this research, the following recommendations should be initiated, monitored, and maintained:

Employ a comprehensive collaborative approach to resolving issues of public safety, security, and well-being through various measures of community development. The *SSMPS* has initiated such a process, as exemplified by its collaboration with the John Howard Society, NORDIK, the Arts Council, Algoma Public Health, and numerous other agencies and community members with its Neighbourhood Resource Centre on Gore St. Such collaborations must continue, while other stakeholders in the community, including Municipal government, must draw on similar approaches to tackle complex issues including a scarcity of affordable housing, economic diversification, youth retention, counteracting forces of marginalization, and meeting the increased needs of senior citizens to name just a few. The approach, informed by the principles of crime prevention through social development, can be defined by four distinct, but interconnected strategic directions:

5. Strengthening social cohesion;
6. Addressing 'at-risk' neighbourhoods;
7. Increasing access to the necessities of life; and
8. Fostering a healthy downtown economy

6.2.1 Strengthening Social Cohesion

Keys to crime prevention through social development include measures that **strengthen social cohesion** throughout the city by engaging citizens from all walks of life in the activities, social life, development, and planning within the community. Measures include:

- Expanded ‘train-the-trainer’ Restorative Justice project led by John Howard Society to include wider array of participants, including business people, landlords & tenants, other service providers, and any interested citizens (CURRENTLY UNDERWAY)
(action: *John Howard Society*);
- Development and support for social enterprise and social innovation (CURRENTLY UNDERWAY)
(action: *NORDIK Institute, Social Entrepreneurship Evolution, District of SSM Social Services Administration Board, SSM Innovation Centre, SSM Economic Development Corporation, SSM Community Development Corporation*);
- Encouraging collaboration with Service Clubs to support aesthetic improvements and recreation infrastructure development
(action: *SSM Planning Division, SSM Parks Division, SSM Recreation & Culture Division, various service clubs⁷, Downtown Association*);
- Increased support for cultural events and festivals, including:
 - Creating a single office at the City of Sault Ste. Marie for event organizers to coordinate street closures, necessary permits and licenses, and to inform event organizers about various funding & collaboration options.
(action: *Chief Administrative Officer of the City of Sault Ste. Marie in collaboration with the SSM Traffic Division, SSM Economic Development Corporation, SSM Recreation and Culture Division, SSM Community Development Corporation, and Algoma Public Health*);
 - Increasing funding available to artistic and cultural events through the cultural financial assistance program, and creating a new pot of funding for festivals that are not necessarily arts-related
(action: *Mayor & Council of Sault Ste. Marie, SSM Recreation & Culture Division*)

⁷ Including Business and Professional Women’s Club, Elks Lodge, Fraternal Order of Eagles, Girl Guides, Kiwanis Club, Knights of Columbus, Lion’s Club, G. Marconi Society, Moose Lodge, Rotary Club, Royal Canadian Legion, Royal Canadian Legion Ladies’ Auxiliary, Royal Purple Lodge, Sault Shrine Club, SSM Chamber of Commerce, Scouts, and Zonta Club.

- Creating more social/community spaces downtown, especially safe spaces for youth (action: *SSM Community Centres Division, various local businesses, social service providers, and social entrepreneurs*);
- Addressing current and historical examples of racism, prejudice, and intolerance and promoting greater connections and cultural awareness, especially between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples (action: *SSM Police Service, Indian Friendship Centre, New to the Sault Settlement Services, local education sector⁸, various social entrepreneurs*);

6.2.2 Addressing the Needs of ‘At-Risk’ Neighbourhoods & People

‘At-risk’ neighbourhoods, notably during the time of this study Gore Street and Jamestown, require specific targeted efforts to mitigate the marginalization experienced in these neighbourhoods and to correct the neglect that they have faced over the preceding recent decades. Measures include:

- Expanding the Neighbourhood Resource Centre on Gore St. to serve as a community or social services ‘hub’ (CURRENTLY UNDERWAY).
(action: *SSM Police Service, Canadian Mental Health Association, Algoma Public Health, District of SSM Social Services Administration Board, Group Health Association, Sault Area Hospital, Community Care Access Centre, other various social services*);
 - Provide patrol officers specialized training in dealing with individuals with mental health issues ;
 - Providing space for health & social services outside of the neighbourhood to have a point-of-contact in the Downtown.
- Drawing on artistic practice or a ‘festival’ model to promote community enthusiasm, engagement, dialogue and exchange (CURRENTLY UNDERWAY).
(action: *Arts Council of SSM & District, Soup Kitchen Community Centre, 180 Projects space for artists and curators, local community arts practitioners & social entrepreneurs*)
- Creating Neighbourhood Associations or Business Improvement Areas.
(action: *area businesses, residents, service providers and property owners*)

⁸ Including Algoma University, Sault College, Algoma District School Board, Huron Superior Catholic District School Board, Conseil Scolaire Catholique du Nouvel Ontario, Conseil Scolaire du District du Grand Nord de l’Ontario.

- Increasing the accessibility of physical activity, sport, and recreation programs, especially playgrounds for young children;
(action: *SSM Parks Division, SSM Recreation and Culture Division, Algoma Public Health, various service clubs*)
- Cross-sector collaboration to implement design and landscaping changes in line with *Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design* principles
(action: *SSM Planning Division and area businesses, residents, and property owners*)
- Exploring planning and design solutions to mitigate the physical isolation that has afflicted Jamestown since the construction of Carmen's Way;
(action: *SSM Planning Division*)
- Pursuing affordable housing policies that support the creation and maintenance of mixed-income neighbourhoods;
(action: *SSM Planning Division, District of SSM Social Services Administration Board*)

While Gore Street and Jamestown currently require specific attention, we must be cautious not to assume that the problems experienced in these neighbourhoods begin and end within their boundaries. Neighbourhoods are constituted by the people that live and spend time in them. Consequentially, lasting solutions require responding to the needs of at-risk individuals and groups of people. These measures include:

- Creating more services for people living with mental illness or dual diagnoses;
(action: *Ministry of Health & Long Term Care, Sault Area Hospital, Group Health Association, Algoma Public Health*)
- Promoting greater understanding of the lives and working conditions of sex workers; Provide non-judgemental outreach and support services that focus on empowerment, self-determination, and safety (both for those who wish to exit the sex trade and those who do not);
(action: *HIV & AIDS Resource Program, Stop the Arrests, Coalition of Women in Numbers, Northern Women's Connection*);
- Increasing access for and creating more services for people living with addictions, including:
 - Creating an Addictions Treatment Centre or Program;
(action: *Ministry of Health & Long Term Care, Sault Area Hospital, Group Health Association, Algoma Public Health*)
 - Increasing resources for harm-reduction outreach and education programs;
(action: *HIV & AIDS Resource Program, Group Health Association, Algoma Public Health*)

- Promoting greater understanding of addictions across the community;
(action: *HIV & AIDS Resource Program, Group Health Association, Algoma Public Health*)

6.2.3 Increasing Access to the Necessities of Life

A holistic approach to resolving the issues faced in our community also requires acknowledging their roots in the prevalence of poverty and by corrective measures to create equitable access to the necessities of life. **Addressing poverty** entails understanding that economic marginalization is not a product of geography (though the built environment can both aggravate and mitigate the effects of poverty), but of complex, interconnecting social and economic relationships. While many of the forces that aggravate poverty stem from provincial, national, and international policy and actions, there are some measures that can be taken by local stakeholders to relieve some of the pressures faced by people living in poverty and meliorate the related effects that contribute to ‘social disorder.’ Measures include:

- Increasing the stock of affordable housing through alternative partnerships;
(action: *District of SSM Social Services Administration Board, Habitat for Humanity, local property owners, local housing developers*)
- Increasing options for affordable childcare;
(action: *District of SSM Social Services Administration Board, SSM Day Care Division*)
- Augmenting the number and programming of community gardens to facilitate access to healthy foods and cultivation skills;
(action: *District of SSM Social Services Administration Board, various social service agencies, social entrepreneurs*)

6.2.4 Fostering a Healthy Downtown Economy

Fostering a healthy downtown economy involves a series of measures ranging from modifications to the built environment that encourage public use of certain spaces to various supports for business development. Measures include:

- Providing more comprehensive support for the work and efforts of the Downtown Association, including promoting the diversity of small businesses in the neighbourhood;
(action: *local businesses, SSM Economic Development Corporation, SSM Community Development Corporation, SSM Traffic Division*)
- Promoting walkability and an intensification within the downtown through measures such as infill, expansion and improvements to cycling and active transportation

infrastructure, returning one-way streets to two-way traffic, promoting sidewalk patios, encouraging mixed-use buildings and zoning, and encouraging street festivals.

(action: SSM Planning Division, SSM Recreation & Culture Division, local property and housing developers, SSM Traffic Division)

- Expanded use of heritage designation and greater effort to preserve historic buildings; Greater visibility and collaborative involvement from the Sault Ste. Marie Museum and other heritage organizations;

(action: SSM Municipal Heritage Committee, SSM Recreation & Culture Division, SSM Museum, Ermatinger-Clergue National Historic Site, Parks Canada, Historic Sites Board, various property owners and social entrepreneurs)

- Greater role for education institutions in contributing to the local arts & culture community;

(action: Algoma University, Sault College, Art Gallery of Algoma, Arts Council of Sault Ste. Marie & District)

- Improve accessibility to the downtown by providing free and/or more frequent public transportation on special occasions, eliminating service reductions or interruptions on weekends and public holidays (particularly for the para-bus), and eliminate advertisements that cover bus windows (which cause difficulty for visually impaired riders);

(action: SSM Transit Division)

- Encourage a more pet-friendly atmosphere with dog-parks, public fountains, and increasing the number of garbage cans located beyond Queen Street.

(action: SSM Public Works Division, SSM Parks Division)

7.0 CONCLUSION

Downtown Dialogue in Action sought to bring divergent populations in the community together in dialogue about the future of the city's downtown, and thanks to the project's creative methodology and collaboration between various agencies, stakeholders, and individuals throughout the community, the project has been largely successful in achieving this end.

The use of Action Research as a methodology both fostered local leadership development while necessitating the collaboration that made inter-community dialogue possible. Actions such as the *Jamestown Flowerbomb*, *Soup Ste. Marie*, and *Graffiti Reframed* inspired individuals across the community (a large proportion of whom are youth) to become actively **engaged with their community** on a variety of fronts. The interaction that was generated through these activities

created space for dialogue about a variety of topics of local concern, including poverty, conflict resolution, marginalization, and the inequitable distribution of resources and attention across the city to name just a few, and broadened participants' understanding of their surrounding community. Significant media coverage also expanded the reach of these community actions to reach hundreds more people than could have feasibly participated. A number of activities also helped **develop skills among their participants**, most obviously evidenced by the *Restorative Justice Training* provided by the John Howard Society. *Graffiti Reframed* likewise helped develop artistic skills among youth, while actions originating outside of the project but connected to its themes, including those mobilized around Sex Workers, encouraged some of the city's more marginalized (and often vilified) citizens to advocate and organize on their own behalf and in their own interest. Community engagement efforts also helped many individuals and agencies articulate visions for positive change within the community, such as the pursuit of a community health & child care centre spearheaded by the board of the *Soup Kitchen Community Centre*.

For the momentum and dialogue generated by the project to continue, a **Coordinating Group must be struck** to carry forward the vision and collaboration embodied throughout the first phase of this project. This *Coordinating Group* will facilitate ongoing collaboration between individuals and various stakeholders throughout both the downtown and the city at large. To avoid losing the momentum generated thus far by the *Downtown Dialogue in Action* initiative, we need individuals to continue to come forward to take up leadership roles, both with existing projects and processes engaged in the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service's Community Mobilization and Engagement Strategy, and with new initiatives that complement those aims of social development. In order for individuals to come forward, however, they **need a place to come forward to**, and without a Coordinating Group for the next phase of this initiative, the opportunities to strengthen both those individuals as well as our own collaborations will be squandered. The *Coordinating Group* should also build on the **collaborative structure** that made Downtown Dialogue in Action so successful, ensuring that the vibrancy of the neighbourhood's residents is embraced and that the downtown's potential is fully realized.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Downtown Dialogue Interview Questions

1. Do you live downtown?
2. Do you own property downtown?
3. How often are you in the downtown core?
4. What activities do you do in the downtown?
5. What services do you access downtown?
6. How safe do you feel downtown?
7. What changes would you like to see more of downtown?
8. What changes would most improve the downtown?
9. How promising is the future of downtown?

Others

- What barriers and challenges have you experienced in the downtown area?
- Are there services you may need, but don't have access to?

Appendix B: Focus Group Questions

Focus Group Questions

1. Please write down anything that you think is significant about the downtown, positive or negative, that has happened in the last ten years.
2. What does your ideal vision of Sault Ste. Marie's downtown look like?

Appendix C: Survey Questions, Responses and Results

Downtown Dialogue

Top of Form

Project Overview and Consent

The Downtown Dialogue in Action study is a community based project being led by NORDIK, a research institute affiliated with Algoma University. The purpose of the study is to develop an Action Plan for creating a safe, secure, and thriving downtown Sault Ste. Marie. Through dialogue with people who live, work, or access services downtown we can gain a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the area and identify opportunities for positive change.

Your participation is strictly voluntary. Confidentiality and anonymity by NORDIK staff is guaranteed, and only the researchers will have access to the surveys responses (which will be securely stored in the NORDIK Institute office). Written reports of the study will not identify you personally as a project participant.

If you have any questions or concerns about the study or about being a subject, you can call us at (705) 949-2301, ext.4357 or 4229 or Dr. Gayle Broad, Director of Research, NORDIK Institute, Algoma University at (705)949-2301, ext. 4351.

I understand the purpose of the research and what my participation will entail. I am willing to participate and I give my permission to the NORDIK Institute to use the information in the project report for distribution and possible publication in scholarly journals.

Yes

No

Downtown Dialogue Study Area

For the purposes of this study the downtown is bounded by Simpson Street in the east and West Street in the west (near the Essar Steel gate). The area extends from Wellington Street in the north all the way to the waterfront.

Question 1

Check all that Apply. Do You?

- Live downtown
- Work downtown
- Access services in the downtown
- Provide services in the downtown

Question 2

How often are you in the downtown core?

- Everyday
- Monday to Friday
- Once a week
- 2 to 3 times a month
- Less than once a month

Question 3

How safe do you feel downtown?

- Extremely safe
- Very safe
- Moderately safe
- Slightly safe
- Not at all safe

Question 4

Please rank the following based on your opinion of what is most important for creating a safe, secure, and thriving downtown

Accessible transit

Greater police presence	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Recreational opportunities	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Local stores and businesses	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Galleries, theatres, cultural activities	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Community/social services	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Schools	<input type="text" value="---"/>
Events and activities	<input type="text" value="---"/>

Question 5
What changes do you think would most improve the downtown?

Question 6
How promising is the future of downtown?

- Extremely promising
- Very promising
- Moderately promising
- Slightly promising
- Not at all promising

Question 7
Select your gender

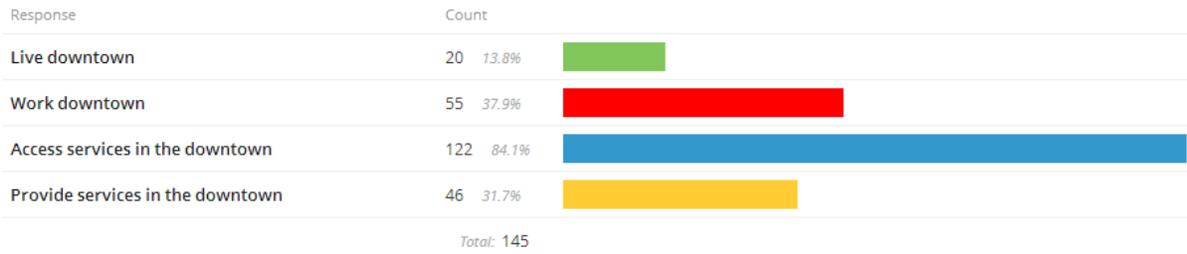
- Male
- Female

Question 8
Select your age range

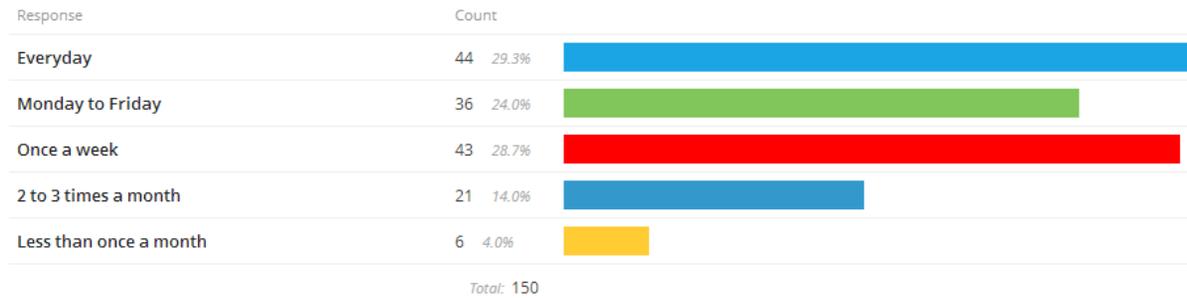
Question 9
Length of residence in Sault Ste. Marie

Survey Responses

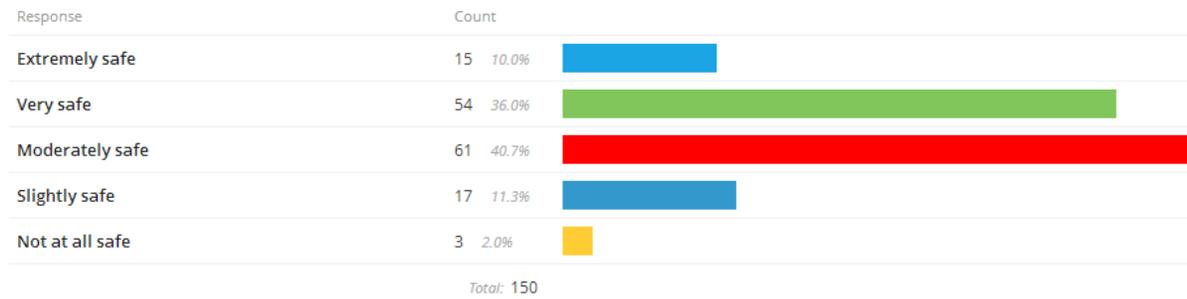
Question 1



Question 2



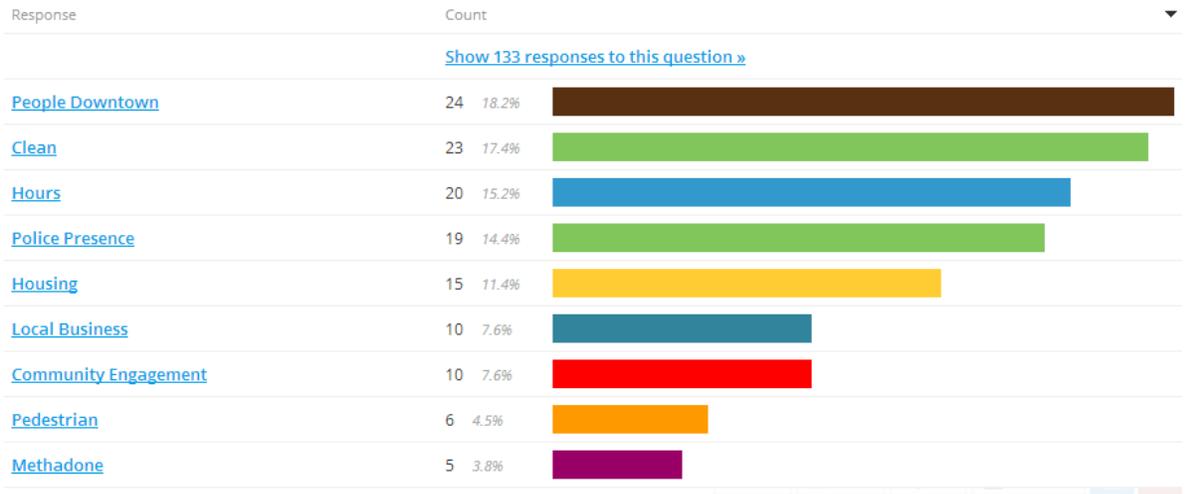
Question 3



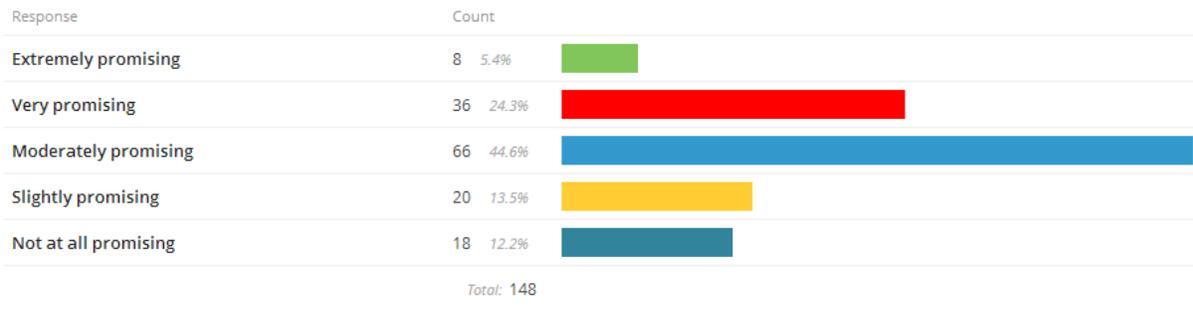
Question 4

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	Total:
Greater police presence	35 26.1%	3 2.2%	11 8.2%	10 7.5%	18 13.4%	14 10.4%	19 14.2%	24 17.9%	134
Schools	17 12.3%	9 6.5%	11 8.0%	5 3.6%	17 12.3%	11 8.0%	22 15.9%	46 33.3%	138
Community/social services	14 10.3%	16 11.8%	17 12.5%	18 13.2%	15 11.0%	23 16.9%	25 18.4%	8 5.9%	136
Events and activities	12 9.4%	16 12.5%	24 18.8%	22 17.2%	21 16.4%	14 10.9%	13 10.2%	6 4.7%	128
Accessible transit	10 7.8%	18 14.0%	13 10.1%	13 10.1%	22 17.1%	22 17.1%	13 10.1%	18 14.0%	129
Recreational opportunities	6 4.7%	19 14.8%	20 15.6%	25 19.5%	17 13.3%	18 14.1%	14 10.9%	9 7.0%	128
Local stores and businesses	28 21.2%	26 19.7%	14 10.6%	13 9.8%	11 8.3%	16 12.1%	12 9.1%	12 9.1%	132
Galleries, theatres, cultural activities	7 5.3%	19 14.5%	18 13.7%	23 17.6%	17 13.0%	18 13.7%	13 9.9%	16 12.2%	131

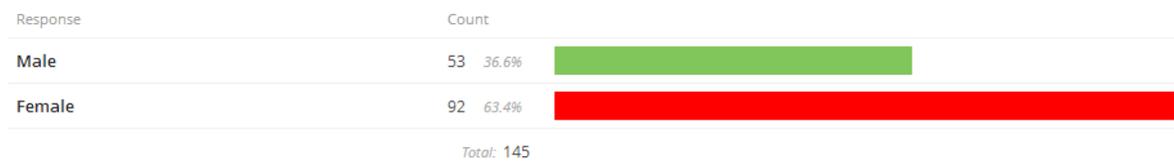
Question 5



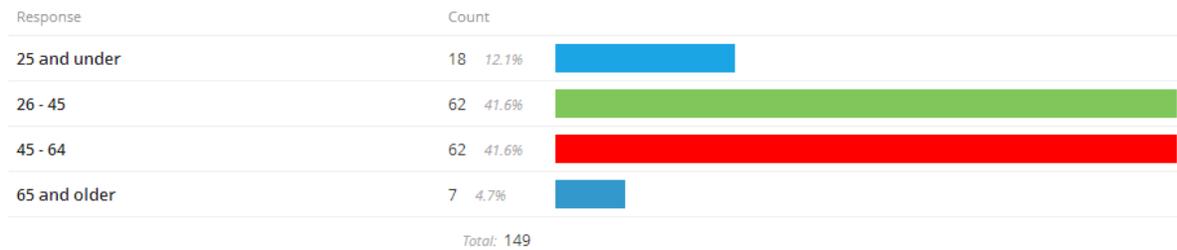
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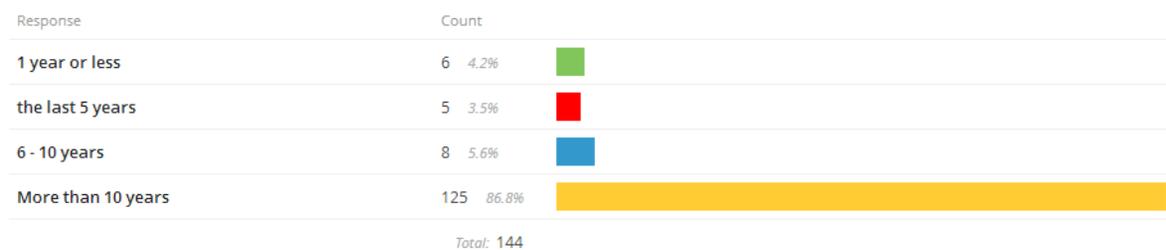
Question 7



Question 8



Question 9



*Question 5 was open ended. There were 133 responses to the question that were coded. The results typically fell under 9 categories.

People Downtown - Respondents indicated that having more people downtown or attracting people to the downtown would most improve the area.

Clean – Improving the cleanliness and general appearance of the downtown. Cleaning up litter, removing graffiti, fixing deteriorating buildings.

Hours – There is little open in the evening and on weekends. Leads to less foot traffic, less activity and feeling less safe.

Police Presence – Having an increased police presence and more foot patrols in the downtown.

Housing – More housing options, affordable housing. Renovating older buildings for safety and energy efficiency. By-law enforcement and landlord responsibilities.

Local Business – Provide support to small local businesses

Community Engagement – Encourage community engagement, involvement and events. Also support information sharing between agencies, organizations and the public.

Pedestrian – Increase walkability, build and improve pedestrian walkways, close streets more often for events.

Methadone – Move or shut down the methadone clinic

Summary of Survey Results

The majority of people responding to the survey were those who access services in the downtown. Responses from those who live downtown, work downtown, and provide services in the downtown were captured as well. Most respondents indicated they had lived in the city for more than 10 years but some new comers did participate. The number of female respondents was almost double that of males. Respondents were largely middle aged, however, youth and seniors did participate.

When participants were asked to indicate how often they were downtown the most popular response was 'everyday'. 80% of the respondents were downtown at least once a week if not more. The majority of respondents also indicated that they felt moderately to very safe downtown.

Having a greater police presence and encouraging people to come downtown by having events and activities, cleaning up the area, supporting local businesses, and having longer store hours were viewed as the most important aspects for improving the downtown. Overall the future of the downtown appeared promising to respondents

Appendix D: Media Review Results and Summary

The media review resulted in identifying 12 Major Issues or themes that people responding to local news reports are concerned about.

Crime/ Policing	Pedestrian and Bike Friendly	Vacant and Older Buildings	Parking
Development	Community	City Council	Multiculturalism
Activity	Age Friendly	Recreation and Greenspace	Social Development

Crime/ Policing – The downtown is perceived to be a high crime area, Gore and Albert Streets being the worst. More police presence is wanted in the area especially foot patrols. There are some traffic safety issues as well.

Development – The public responded with both positivity and skepticism to reports of development project in the downtown. People are supportive of most developments but are unsure if they will be successful.

Activity – This theme encompasses events, attractions, and promotions in the downtown. Commenters also voiced their desires for cafes, sidewalk patios, open air markets (craft and farmers) and having longer store hours downtown.

Social Development – There is an expressed need for funding and programs to address employment, low income, affordable housing and mental health issues.

Pedestrian and Bike Friendly – There are pedestrian and bicycle safety concerns in the downtown. Commenters also feel that increasing pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure can improve quality of life and impact downtown businesses.

City Council – The public felt that they did not receive enough information about what the City is doing downtown.

Recreation and Greenspace – There needs to be more parks, trees, playgrounds, and recreation opportunities in the downtown.

Multiculturalism – Exposure to different cultures through new downtown restaurants was highlighted. Suggestions came from commenters to embrace business was multiculturalism and celebrate it through events, festivals, and themed blocks

Age friendly – There should be suitable housing and activities for youth and seniors

Parking – The public want increased free parking downtown and there is interest in removing the paid parking on Queen Street.

Appendix E: Focus Group and Interview Participants

During the research process interviews and focus groups were conducted from August 2013 to December 2013. 16 focus groups were conducted with 131 participants and 28 interviews were conducted including 42 participants. Focus groups were held with youth residing downtown, people in conflict with the law, downtown employees and residents, the LGBTQ community, health service providers, people who access mental health services, seniors, women on fixed incomes, business owners, urban indigenous people, various service providers, and city officials among other groups.

Focus Group	Date	Number of Participants
#1	August 20 th , 2013	8
#2	August 22 nd , 2013	11
#3	August 28 th , 2013	5
#4	August 30 th , 2013	3
#5	September 12 th , 2013	18
#6	September 25 th , 2013	7
#7	September 30 th , 2013	9
#8	October 1 st , 2013	8
#9	October 2 nd , 2013	6
#10	October 9 th , 2013	20
#11	October 9 th , 2013	9
#12	October 21 st , 2013	4
#13	October 22 nd , 2013	7
#14	October 23 rd , 2013	6
#15	November 4 th , 2013	6
#16	November 7 th , 2013	4
16 Focus Groups		Total 131

Interviews Conducted	Date	Number of Participants
#1 Downtown Service Provider	August 8 th , 2013	1
#2 Service Provider Downtown	August 26 th , 2013	1
#3 Social Service Provider	August 27 th , 2013	1
#4 Service Provider	August 28 th , 2013	10
#5 Service Provider	August 29 th , 2013	1
#6 Downtown Service Provider	September 1, 2013	1
#7 Community Advocate	September 5, 2013	1
#8 Social Service Provider	September 10, 2013	1
#9 Downtown Service Provider	September 17, 2013	1
#10 Advocacy Group	September 18, 2013	3
#11 Business Owners/Residents	September 23, 2013	2
#12 Service Provider	October 22, 2013	1
#13 Downtown Resident	November 5, 2013	1

#14 Downtown Service Providers	November 14, 2013	2
#15 Downtown Service Provider	November 18 th , 2013	1
#16 Downtown Service Providers	November 18 th , 2013	2
#17 Sex Trade Worker 1		1
#18 Sex Trade Worker 2		1
#19 Sex Trade Worker 3		1
#20 Sex Trade Worker 4		1
#21 Sex Trade Worker 5		1
#22 Sex Trade Worker 6		1
#23 Sex Trade Worker 7		1
#24 Sex Trade Worker 8		1
#25 LGBTQ 1	October 1 st -November 30 th	1
#26 LGBTQ 2	October 1 st -November 30 th	1
#27 LGBTQ 3	October 1 st -November 30 th	1
#28 LGBTQ 4	October 1 st -November 30 th	1
#29 Business Owner/Resident	November 22 nd , 2013	1
29 Interviews		43 Participants

Appendix F: Community Picture Report, 2011 Priorities and Recommendations

Priorities	Recommendations
<p>Physical Health</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to affordable physical activity opportunities 2. Access to bike paths or bike routes on roadways 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to physical activity, sport and recreation programs and services by improving the availability of opportunities in the community especially in high risk populations • Increase and improve existing access to bike paths and routes on city roadways by supporting active transportation & improve the built environment initiatives.
<p>Substance & Alcohol Misuse Top Priorities</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increasing resiliency skills in youth (coping skills, social engagement) 2. Decrease in risky drinking behaviours such as driving, crime, violence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase resiliency skills in youth through prevention programming strategies, services and professional access • Reduction in risky drinking behaviours through communication, education, programming strategies to improve personal skills to prevent and reduce binge drinking
<p>Mental Health Promotion</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Destigmatize mental illnesses in youth and adults 2. Drop-in centres in communities for people in need 3. Open “community hubs” where multiple organizations provide health, social services, and recreational programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce the stigma of mental illness in youth and adults through increasing knowledge and awareness of mental health issues, education and programs • Increase access to local community health services and support for people with mental illness. • Increase central access to services that provide health, social services, recreational programs and other healthy lifestyle information to those with mental illness
<p>Healthy Eating</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Access to healthy, affordable foods 2. Sale of healthy food choices at concession stands and vending machines at recreational facilities and parks 3. Local community Farmer’s Market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase access to healthy affordable foods in multiple settings such as schools, workplaces and the community especially for high risk populations • Increase choices for healthy eating at recreational facilities and parks • Increase support for local community Farmer’s Market to purchase locally grown food
<p>Injury Prevention</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Maintain community parks and fields in good condition (e.g. remove uneven surfaces, poor lighting, proper and safe play equipment) 2. Maintenance of sidewalks for pedestrians (e.g. marking hazardous sidewalks, snowplowing) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decrease injuries by maintaining local community areas (i.e. parks, fields, sidewalks) in good condition through Municipal Parks and Recreation and Official plans policies or overall maintenance strategies.

Appendix G: Record of Community Meetings, Events and Presentations

April 23, 2013 – Native Nation Youth Council

Three NORDIK staff attended a meeting held by the Native Nation Youth Council at the Indian Friendship Centre on East Street. The event was attended by 19 people including NORDIK staff. The Council is a non-profit organization that engages youth through traditional methods such as sharing circles and sweat lodges. They are dedicated to protecting the environment and Aboriginal culture. During a sharing circle the council expressed their concerns regarding youth living in the downtown. They focused on getting youth away from alcohol and drugs and promoting traditional teachings and practices to engage the youth in having a healthier life.

April 29, 2013 – Teleconference Canadian Urban Institute

NORDIK staff had a conference call with the Canadian Urban Institute (CUI). CUI is conducting a research project on Investment and Revitalization in Northern Ontario's downtowns. Both groups agreed to collaborate where possible throughout the projects. NORDIK staff would be attending the Canadian Urban Forum in Ottawa on June 18 hosted by CUI and would receive an update on the project then.

April 30, 2013 – Soup Kitchen: I dream. I see. I remember.

NORDIK staff attended this event at St. John's Church Hall. The Soup Kitchen and Thinking Rock Community Arts collaborated on a participatory art project. People were invited to share their thoughts, memories or ideas about the West End on a fabric square that would become part of a community quilt celebrating the stories of the West End. NORDIK staff shared their ideas by creating their own squares for the quilt.

April 30, 2013 – Bushplane Museum Executive Director

NORDIK staff met with the Executive Director of the Bushplane Heritage Museum at the Bushplane Museum. The Director expressed interest in partnering with other local culture groups and attractions creating a cultural corridor or district on the east side of the downtown. The group included the Bushplane Museum, Ermatinger Clergue National Historic Site, Sault Ste. Marie Museum, Sault Ste. Marie Library, and the Art Gallery of Algoma.

June 04, 2013 – Social Development Council

NORDIK Staff attended the final meeting of the Social Development Council before their summer break. The YMCA gave a presentation on a Youth Engagement Program that they provide. The United Way gave an update on the Action for Community Change Project. They held a number of 'community conversations' and were in the process of analyzing the data.

NORDIK staff introduced the council to the Downtown Dialogue project and invited the members to share their thoughts on the project.

June 11, 2013 – John Howard Orientation

The John Howard Society provided an introduction to their staff and the programs and services that the agency offers. We attended an orientation at the John Howard Society. They offer employment services, social skills courses, conflict resolution, anger management, and other training. They aid people with discharge plans from jail, community service, and bail supervision. They have a very close relationship with the court services in Sault Ste. Marie and Algoma Public Health runs a needle exchange out of the office. The John Howard Society is a partner in the Downtown Dialogue Project and provided space and support for the project.

Some staff mentioned concerns with biker gangs entering the city and also mentioned that the city has a large drug problem.

June 11, 2013 - Soup Kitchen AGM

A Soup Kitchen employee gave a presentation regarding the Board's decision to pursue the creation of a Community Health and Child Care Centre in addition to their current facility. The next phase for the project will be a Feasibility Study and Business Plan.

June 12, 2013 - Meeting with Gangplank

Gangplank is a collaborative working group that is being hosted in Main Branch of the Public Library. Gangplank encourages entrepreneurs and innovators to work together. They trade skills rather than money. People with expertise in web development may help someone make a website for a business and in return get help making their own business plan. Gangplank was originally a member of the Downtown Dialogue Steering Committee. They are currently looking for a new space to hold their meetings.

June 13, 2013 - Meeting with Tony Martin (Soup Kitchen Board Member)

As part of the feasibility study for the Health and Child Care Centre the Soup Kitchen is doing a public consultation process and indicated they would like to collaborate with Downtown Dialogue where possible. Tony Martin talked about the importance of child care to allow people to work. He also talked about the difficulty that people have when taking the bus to health care appointments.

June 13, 2013 - Downtown Association

The Downtown Association stated that they were excited about the project and some of their members are as well. The Association was willing to collaborate with the project wherever

possible. They indicated that the downtown is portrayed as having problems with crime and drugs in the news. In their opinion the downtown is actually doing well. The population is up and there are more new businesses. Some businesses have closed but it is not always for a negative reason. One business owner retired and another outgrew their location, which are both success stories.

June 18 – 19, 2013 - Canadian Urban Forum

NORDIK Staff attended the Canadian Urban Forum in Ottawa. The Forum was presented by the Canadian Urban Institute, a stakeholder in the Downtown Dialogue Project. The goal of the conference was to start a conversation among decision makers and other urban stakeholders to reignite interest in Canada's urban agenda. The conference focused on addressing Canada's infrastructure deficit and highlighted new models for funding infrastructure, new models for strategic partnerships, and new models that leverage underutilized assets, and the value of investing in Canadian Downtowns.

June 20, 2013 – Meeting with United Way

The United Way has been working on a project called Community Conversations. The project is funded by the Ontario Trillium Foundation. The Community conversations use protocols of the Harwood institute for conducting its research. The conversations have no more than 15 people per group. It is an open format 'kitchen table' style conversation. The facilitator asks what are your hopes, dreams, aspirations and challenges. The conversations take place at non-traditional sites such as the YMCA and the library. There are equal numbers of men and women and people from all walks of life. First Nations and seniors were represented as they are a high proportion of the population in the city.

Some initial findings were that the community wants safe, affordable housing; good employment opportunities; an inclusive community offering respect and equality; and a safe community free of crime and drugs. Based on the research the Sault Ste. Marie is categorized as "the waiting place" according to Harwood protocols, which means that people want to make changes but don't know how.

June 21, 2013 – Meeting with Coalition of Women in Numbers (CWIN)

CWIN is an advocacy group that works with women engaged in the sex trade. They discussed having a larger public meeting in the future and the possibility up setting up a hotline or support network to aid people in the sex trade. It was also discussed that they may be applying for funding to do these projects.

June 21, 2013 – Meeting with School Board

NORDIK staff met with staff of the Algoma District School Board. Organization of Restorative Justice training for school board employees was discussed.

June 21, 2013 – Meeting at Riversedge Developments

Riversedge Developments purchased the former St. Mary's Paper site and is planning to redevelop the area. They are interested in partnering with the arts community, local businesses, Sault College, Algoma University, the Innovation Centre, and the Soup Kitchen among others. They recognize that they need to engage the local community and make the site attractive to locals in order for it to be successful. Riversedge was a part of the Downtown Dialogue stakeholder committee.

June 25, 2013 – Steering Committee Meeting

Over 40 people from the community were in attendance and there more than 20 different groups, organizations, agencies and associations represented.

Issues discussed: Police presence in the downtown, safe and affordable housing, affordable office space, youth engagement, the need for addictions treatment facilities, negative perception of downtown, definition of downtown boundaries.

June 26, 2013 – John Howard AGM

NORDIK Staff presented an overview of the Downtown Dialogue project and partnership to the John Howard Society Board.

July 09 – 10, 2013 – Station Mall Display

For two days NODIK set-up a project display in the Station Mall. The display provided an overview of the project and its goals. Staff engaged the public to answer any questions regarding the project.

July 11, 2013 – Meeting with City Planning Department

The City Planning Department staff stated that city council is exploring a second phase of the downtown revitalization strategy and grant programs. The city is also planning three priority cycling routes that will be part of the Hub Trail.

July 16, 2013 – Jamestown FlowerBomb

NORDIK staff organized a community event to plant flowers outside the Soup Kitchen. All of the soil, mulch, flowers, and materials were donated by local businesses and citizens. Neighbours and Soup Kitchen patrons planted flowers, weeded beds and repainted dilapidated benches.

NORDIK staff also provided a barbecue and activities for children during the event. Several local news provided covered the event.

July 18, 2013 – Teleconference with John Howard Society Hamilton

A coordinator from John Howard Society Hamilton explained how they had implemented Restorative Justice Training in their city and provided guidance as to how it could be implemented in Sault Ste. Marie. It was recommended that an Operational Committee be formed to oversee the Restorative Justice Program to ensure that it is maintained and sustainable.

July 22, 2013 – Meeting with researcher from Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive

The Urban Aboriginal Communities Thrive project that is taking place in Northern Ontario. The researcher gave us an overview of his project and was introduced to the Downtown Dialogue Project.

July 23, 2013 – Downtown Dialogue Partners Meeting

The partners discussed a press release announcing the Proceeds of Crime funding and ways of engaging other stakeholders in the project. An Operational Committee consisting of the Police Services, ADSB, and John Howard would be formed to oversee the Restorative Justice Training Program.

July 23, 2013 – Teleconference with CUI

Canadian Urban Institute will be releasing a new project newsletter soon. They received good responses from the survey in the Sault and North Bay.

July 24, 2013 – Meeting with Bushplane Museum Executive Director

The Director discussed the creation of a Cultural Corridor group which consists of the Bushplane Museum, the Ermatinger Clergue National Historic Site, the Museum, the Art Gallery, the Library, and the Norgoma. The goal of this group is to create an Arts/Culture and Entertainment Strategy for the City and to create an identifiable Cultural District in the Downtown.

The Bushplane Museum has partnerships and agreements that go beyond the scope of a museum. They provide space for weddings, community groups, festivals, and high school and college Media Arts Programs.

July 25, 2013 – Meeting with Bichler Developments

Bichler Developments manages a number of properties in Sault Ste. Marie. They have converted several former churches into boarding houses. They also provide food programs for their tenants and are hoping to expand their operations. Many of the tenants are on Ontario Works or Disability Pensions. The owner mentioned that they have a close relationship with the police and John Howard Society. They sometimes have difficulty with people having addictions. They mentioned that the food program has seemed to alleviate some of the incidents that happen because access to food and hunger is no longer an issue for the tenants.

July 29, 2013 –Thinking Rock Arts: Community Conversation

Thinking Rock Arts held a Community Conversation at the Riversedge site. There was representation from many community groups and local social service organizations. There were also many members of the Arts Community. The session introduced the community to grants and community building projects that use art as a catalyst. The session helped to connect local organizations and increase communication. People responded well to the session and indicated that they would be receptive to more workshops like that.

August 1, 2013 – Meeting with United Way Community Liaison

The community liaison works with tenants and housing providers to preserve tenancy and solve tenancy issues. The worker stated that quality of housing in the downtown is substandard and many of the clients live in atrocious conditions but cannot afford better. Some areas of the downtown are becoming gentrified and there is not enough affordable housing. Many low income people are being displaced to areas located farther from the services they need. The idea of creating a Tenants Association and a Landlords Association could be helpful to provide people with information, supports and advocacy.

August 13, 2013 – Downtown Association Board Meeting

The Downtown BIA Coordinator asked NORDIK Staff to present the project to the Downtown Association Board members.

August 14, 2013 – Cultural Corridor Group

The Cultural Corridor Group met to discuss putting forward a grant to develop a strategy for their organizations to collaborate more effectively. It was decided that the group would wait until next year to put forward the application.

August 14, 2013 – City Council Meeting – Riversedge/Blue Forest Proposal

The City is paying for a feasibility study for Riversedge to develop as a tourist destination. They are working with them to transfer the \$5 million in NOHFC funding, which had been earmarked

to develop the Gateway site, to Riversedge. The City is also contracting Ken Greenberg and the Planning Partnership to create a Public Realm Master Plan for the 'Canal District' which would include the Gateway site, Riversedge, the proposed Bridge Plaza and parts of Gore Street. The Plan will dictate what develops in the area and how it will look.

August 20, 2013 – Crime Stoppers Patrollers Supervisors

The Crime Stopper Patrollers in the downtown are a partnership between Sault College, Crime Stoppers, SSMPS, and the Downtown Association. The Program coordinator stated that the patrollers are student volunteers from Justice Studies/ Police Foundations. They patrollers are highly supervised, highly visible (fluorescent jackets) and non-confrontational. They are a proactive patrol meant to prevent crime. They are a deterrent to crime and do not intervene in any crimes.

The program focuses on preventing/addressing property crime, mischief, break-ins and theft from vehicles. The program has been a success. It gives the volunteers a great opportunity. It makes people feel safer and has been reported on favourably in the media.

August 21, 2013 – Meeting with Downtown Association and Sault Ste. Marie Police Service

Through a literature review NORDIK found case studies regarding the relationship between Business Improvement Associations, Police, and safety. These findings were presented to the Police Service and Downtown and discussion took place around implementing some of the ideas and programs that exist elsewhere in Canada. The Police are able to provide training to downtown merchants if interested (safety tips, reporting to police, etc.). The idea of creating Ambassador Patrols for the downtown was also discussed.

August 26, 2013 – Meeting with United Way

Through their Community Conversation project the United Way identified 4 major themes areas that the community is concerned with. The United Way will try to address one of the themes – they have chosen to work on improving access to good employment opportunities and addressing the mismatch between the skills people possess and those currently sought in the job market.

August 30, 2013 – Conference Call CUI

The Canadian Urban Institute will be doing some consultations in Sault Ste. Marie and they are recruiting interns for the project.

September 3, 2013 – Meeting with Community Geomatics Centre

NORDIK Staff met with staff at the Community Geomatics to discuss the Youth Crime Report they had completed in 2009. The report was commissioned because the City appeared to have a huge spike in youth crime. Once the report came out and it was apparent that the issue had been misrepresented the Youth Crime Committee disbanded. One of the recommendations of the report was to create a database of the community and social services in the area. The 211 service now addresses this need and also releases an annual report that identifies service gaps. It was also discussed that the Rotary Club had recently been discussing actions that they might be able to implement in the downtown.

September 4, 2013 – Meeting with 211 Coordinator

In meeting with the local 211 coordinator we discussed improving the search methods on the 211 website. We were also given promotional materials to distribute to raise awareness of the service.

September 5, 2013 – Meeting with Tony Martin (Soup Kitchen Board Member)

Discussion focused on the Soup Kitchen's interest in social enterprise. At the moment they are focused on creating a Community Health and Child Care Centre. Within that project they would like to have an incubation space for social enterprise but there is no one spearheading that initiative at the moment.

September 10, 2013 – YMCA Services and Facilities

NORDIK staff met with staff from the YMCA and toured the facility. The facility has expanded its services and has become more of a community centre than just a fitness centre. It could be a good model for creating a community centre in the downtown. They offer opportunities for socializing and recreation and also provide child care and financial assistance.

September 11, 2013 – Meeting with Sault Ste. Marie Police Service

Met with Police Service staff and were asked to speak about Downtown Dialogue at upcoming Crime Prevention Conference.

October 15 -17, 2013 – Restorative Justice Training

The John Howard Society has created partnerships and an Operational Committee with the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service, the Algoma District School Board, and the Huron-Superior Catholic District School Board to provide 'train-the-trainer' workshops in the use of Restorative Justice Practices as a tool for conflict resolution.

October 24, 2013 – Meeting with Art Gallery Consultant

The Art Gallery is looking to expand and update its current building. NORDIK staff were invited to a consultation session to discuss how the Gallery could be better integrated with the downtown. It was discussed how the building could be better integrated with the downtown physically. It was also discussed how the Gallery could engage youth in the downtown. This could help decrease youth crime in the area by giving them other outlets. It could be especially helpful for dealing with the graffiti issue downtown.

October 29, 2013 – Crime Prevention Seminar

The Downtown Dialogue Project presented at the Sault Ste. Marie Police Service's Annual Crime Prevention Seminar on the project, its goals, and some of the actions and findings to date. The conference was attended by over 100 people including representatives from social services, the City, and the Canadian Urban Institute. A representative from the John Howard Society also presented on Restorative Justice Training.

November 6, 2013 – Public Open House: City Downtown Revitalization Plan

The City held an Open House at the Downtown Association office to receive feedback on their draft Revitalization Program. The public were interested in accessing the proposed grant to improve properties in the area. They also gave feedback about improving the transit services downtown to better travel from stores and restaurants and also making it safer and easier to travel from bars and restaurants at night.

Some business owners stated that they needed more support from the city. City council members stated that the council has clearly stated that the downtown is a priority. The city can only do so much to help the businesses there are things like store hours that are the responsibility of the business owner and the city has no influence over.

November 7, 2013 – NORDIK AGM

Downtown Dialogue presented their research and findings to date to the public and the NORDIK Board. The director of the City's Planning Department was interested in having a presentation for city staff once the findings are finalized to help inform their Community Improvement Plan for Downtown.

November 14, 2013 – Soup Ste. Marie

This event was organized as part of the Downtown Dialogue project. This was a crowd funding event to support a community project that could help revitalize the downtown. It was held at 180 Projects, and art gallery in the downtown and the event was attended by over 100 people. The winning project idea received over \$1000 to support their cause.

November 15, 2013 – Treatment and Remand Centre

NORDIK Staff toured the Algoma Treatment and Remand Centre to learn more about those in conflict with the law. The treatment section of the facility holds inmates from all over Ontario and has access to many resource including psychologists, social workers, and recreational facilities. Many of the reasons for people being in the center are drug related. There is a lot of recidivism for those in remand and they often end up in the facility regularly.

When someone is released from the facility they often don't have a home or job. Often times they must stay at a shelter and for those with addictions it is not a good option because they are often in close proximity to people who are using.

November 25, 2013 - Social Enterprise Meeting

NORDIK facilitated a meeting with stakeholders involved in Social Enterprise development. This included the EDC, SSMIC, CLA, the Soup Kitchen, JHS, and Soogoma. Community Living Algoma and Soogoma currently have Social Enterprises. John Howard and the Soup Kitchen are interested in developing a Social Enterprise. The Innovation Centre is interested in housing Social Enterprises and the EDC is interested in funding Social Enterprises. The EDC suggested that the groups write a proposal to access funding for Social Enterprise and that SSMIC might be able to distribute the money to Social Enterprise start-ups.

November 27, 2013 – World Aids Days

Downtown Dialogues was invited to host an information booth at the World Aids Day Presentations and Conference held by The Algoma Public Health Unit, Group Health Centre, and HARP. The event was attended by about 50 people. Some issues that were brought up were the lack of education and awareness that kids and even service providers have regarding transmittable diseases such as HIV and HEP C. It was also brought up that it is difficult to bring this education into the schools.

December 11, 2013 – Meeting with Indian Friendship Centre (IFC)

The Aboriginal Criminal Court Worker at the IFC indicated that the IFC is interested in Alternative Justice Models. They would like to participate in Restorative Justice Training.

December 20, 2013 – Graffiti Project Meeting

We participated in a meeting at 180 Project s with stakeholders that were interested in creating a graffiti project. Participants included 180 Projects, the Art Gallery, the Art Council, CTD Designs, and Blackbird. The group decided they would apply for an Ontario Trillium Fund Grant to do a mural project in the downtown.

January 15, 2013 – City Council Community Committee on Graffiti at City Hall

The committee was formed to bring together a number of stakeholders and experts in the community to discuss how to deal with the graffiti issue in the city. There was a consensus that a "Made in Sault Ste. Marie" approach is to be positive and to engage the graffiti community to work toward positive expression, leading to community enhancement outcome. Most attendees identified most graffiti is created by youth so youth related strategies need to be developed. The next step is to bring an inventory of specific initiatives that can readily be initiated. For example the Skatepark as a site for a mural and the City's Green Committee Community 20 minute makeover may focus on graffiti removal.

February 11, 2014 – Youth Forum

Downtown Dialogue attended the Sault Ste. Marie Youth Forum. The set out to engage youth and youth workers to gain information about the barriers, gaps and opportunities that exist related to education, employment and entrepreneurship, and to mobilize the community to act on the opportunities and challenges identified.

March 21, 2014 – Executive Stakeholder Presentation

Final presentation of Downtown Dialogue findings and recommendations to community leaders and executives of agencies.

March 26, 2014 – Public Forum

Final presentation of Downtown Dialogue findings and recommendations to the public.

