My Neighborhood

This is a picture of my neighborhood. The life that is happening in my neighborhood is built up by its people. We live in it so we must try to keep it. People think we can’t build up our neighborhood and we try to prove them wrong and show that we can build up and be strong. We must continue to build and try to keep our neighborhood safe.

- Brian

Safety and Security
Safety and Security

Safety and security was a recurring theme that came up in participants’ narratives, group discussions, interviews and photos. In general, the photos and narratives document their concerns about lack of safety in the community. Some photo-researchers took photos of basements and laundromats of public housing buildings in order to highlight the lack of safety in these otherwise public spaces; narratives mention witnessing instances of violence in these public premises. Photo-researchers, particularly those with children, were concerned about the garbage in and around schools and parks because of the risk to children’s safety and health.

The rise in gun violence within the Black Creek area was a major concern as well. Although there was some debate over the role of gangs in the community, the majority of participants identified violence resulting from gang activities as the greatest threat to their safety. All participants agreed that violence resulting from gang activities as the greatest threat to their safety. All participants agreed that the persistence of gang activity is linked to experiences of isolation, poverty and racism; some pointed out how youth join gangs as an act of resistance or response to these inequalities and oppressions they face.

While lack of safety and security was a major concern, many photo-researchers highlighted their dislike of being under constant surveillance by various ‘security’ measures enforced in the area. Some expressed strong concerns that residents of Black Creek, particularly youth, were in fact over-policed and profiled and suggested that the large police presence in their neighborhood often contributed to being unsafe instead of providing them with a sense of security. Photo-researchers documented how residents were beginning to tackle these issues by taking security into their own hands—neighbors and friends watch over each other, residents limit their mobility in order to avoid unsafe spaces and some residents invest in private security measures, like security systems and guard dogs. Photo-researchers were however united in their view that these were only band-aid solutions, and highlighted the need for government to take comprehensive measures to tackle the root causes (including unemployment, discrimination, and lack of services) that undermine safety and security in the neighborhood.

"... people don’t feel safe going to the basements a lot of people are attacked in Laundromat and that goes back to safety..."

Children walk home alone while their parents are at work. Even though there is a lot of crime and violence in the impoverished areas, children still feel very safe to walk home unaccompanied by anyone. Working parents can’t always be there for their kids. We as a community can help fill the gaps where parents can’t be. It takes a whole community to raise a child.

Yeah, I think all the building people have a problem with that, with this[safety]. And I have experience with the laundry, with the safety too. You know but, they have a camera. But you know what? They have a camera but the camera still didn’t protect the people...

The security doesn’t stay 24 hours in the building. We call their office, we say, ‘We need security in this building’... It is not good to be around this garbage, especially for kids. Garbage is like broken glass, food gone bad can harm kids.

“I see the greatness of poverty that allows us to be so destructive that the gangs represent the greatness of poverty”

“I have something to say. I think it is a way of crying out of the impoverished people that we have a want of a sense of belonging because when you belong to a gang you have that sense of belonging. So this is a cry out.”

“The word gang. The police is a gang, the word... so the children first of all are not being explained what the word gang means. How it is labeled different groups could be easily called a gang. The gang word has gone to a negative aspect...”

“The gangs started as a form of rebellion against the police, started as a protection program for the communities... back then you call the police or whatever they never come to the scene fast enough... for all these people in the area the gangsters or whatever are there like a form of protection.”

“Gangs are the most bad influence in our community. They are everywhere and more and more little kids are joining and spreading. People are getting hurt and killed and it is like the colours they wear, blue and red... It is a big influence in our community and is what is really happening here.

"We need safe places to live, even though there are always cameras watching us, we still don’t feel safe.”

-Photo-researcher
Violent Laundry

This is a picture of the laundry room in my building. I hate the laundry room because it has become a very dangerous place. I've not only experienced but I've also witnessed friends get assaulted in this room, reasons tend to be as silly as a dryer. I wish I had a car so that I could avoid this room altogether by taking my clothes to a local Laundromat.

- Safy

Barking Back

“I don’t know how they’re going to fix it, this area. Maybe I hope one day it’s going to be safe. I hope that it’s more safer. We’re scared.”

- Photo-researcher
A Mother's Worst Nightmare

This is a picture of head stones as far as the eye can see. This is where our youth are ending up on a daily basis. We are losing them to guns and violence everyday. A mother’s worst nightmare of a place where she may enter to spend time with her child. How sad. This is our community, our youth, our loved ones. Are the police doing the right thing profiling our youth, creating an angry society? Are parents loosing control or is it being taken away by government, the over policing and the profiling of our youth? Lets band together. Results come in numbers, signatures and letters. It time to hold people accountable for improper actions.

-Celena

“People don’t see the good they do, they only see the bad. I have seen some of the gangs help & protect the little kids in the neighborhood.”

“Just because you are part of a gang does not mean you are bad. Gangs are for protection. When someone gets robbed or something bad happens – the police don’t come. The gangs protect you.”

“It happens to me all the time – I walk out of the house & people think I am in a gang. But I am not. I am a caring person.”

“Jane and Finch does a good thing, media are the last to say it. When there is gun violence, media are the first to say it... [the media] says bad things like: it’s not a good community, it’s negative, it’s gang violence, it’s bad to live. I heard from somewhere that once you turn 19 it’s an automatic death to die, and I say that’s not true.”

- Photo-researchers
I was surprised when we were talking about the gangs. I’ve never sat in a discussion in my life where gangs were viewed as positive before or spoke about with such passion as such a good thing and I’m speechless again. I was very heartbroken like I felt very hurt that I couldn’t, I felt powerless because I felt like there’s nothing you can say right now or do to these youth to open their lives because they’re at an age where you have to see it for yourself! You can only relay the message and leave it there and hope that they do something with the message, you know. And I just felt like I was in the room everybody was hearing the message but it meant nothing from the older generation. And that was hard because being a parent I felt like what if the situation happens, where my son is in that position now and I have a message that I feel is life or death that I really need him to understand what the consequences are and he just doesn’t see it because these children were not even my family and I felt like “Oh my gosh just listen to me”. And I felt so powerless and I said “Can you imagine something, you know, this could be your son, or might be your son, what are you going to do, you know and just to know that that’s the part where the parents just have to hope for the best or turn to their religion or whatever else they use for strength, you know what I mean. Their faith or something but that was my reality of truly being a parent of what I have to look forward to and what I could possibly look forward to so it was really eye opening for me but it was also almost emotional too because I have to go and look at my son and daughter and say could this be you or will this be you?

-Photo-researcher

Normal Speed Traps

The police set up speed traps where cars are most likely to be speeding. This is regular for police while crime is being committed across the next street. Real crimes go unsolved and criminals get away with crime while police idle their time trapping normal hard working people into the system. What can we do about it? Nothing!

- Ann-Marie

One-word reactions to Photo:

"Resistance"
"Division"
"Puzzle"
"Black and White"
"Crying out"
"Poverty"
R: Oh, this is a photo when I went to a police barbeque. Yeah it was a police barbeque and then we went decided to went because I wanted to see how the barbeque was we just went, had food, had fun, played basketball, learned more about it. And then I decided to take this picture because we were at a barbeque and this picture was interesting because it was like a actually a talking police car.

Q: It was a talking police car? What did it say?
R: I don’t even remember but it was a talking police car. Two reasons I took it because of that, because it was talking and because it was showing how police is good in our community sometimes and people always want to hate them.

Q: People want to hate the police?
R: Yeah.
Q: Why?
R: For no reason, just put them in jail. Like yeah.

Q: But you don’t hate the police. Do you feel protected by the police in your neighbourhood?
R: Yeah. Yeah, I feel protected.

Difference Maker

Are the police doing the right thing profiling our youth, creating an angry society? Are parents losing control or is it being taken away by government, the over policing and the profiling of our youth?

-Photo-researcher
The physical neglect of public spaces in the Black Creek area was the most prominent theme in participants' narratives and photos. The project generated over 200 pictures of garbage accumulating throughout the neighborhood, pictures of dying trees, parks and schools in need of maintenance, under-utilized or abandoned green space and basketball hoops without nets. Overall, participants felt that the unreasonable build up of garbage made their neighborhood look ugly and made residents feel unimportant and undervalued. Photo-researchers documented concerns about lack of public parks as well as neglect of the few existing public parks. Parks were identified as an affordable means of entertaining children. Many participants felt that the lack of clean, safe and inviting outdoor space negatively affected their quality of life and health. Many of the young participants noted the value of having basketball courts near their homes and schools but wanted to see the courts better maintained. Although both government and residents were identified as being accountable for the "mess" in their neighborhood, the majority of participants felt that if government officials took more interest in making their neighborhood look beautiful, residents would be more motivated to keep it clean.

All of the photo-researchers agreed that government officials were responsible for initiating the first steps towards making their neighborhood cleaner and healthier. They called for more government staff assigned to the maintenance of the neighborhood, more plant life, and better parks. Photo-researchers also highlighted the need for public education campaigns on the impacts of this kind of neglect on community health and the environment. Some photo-researchers suggested that this issue presented an opportunity for the government to create employment opportunities for youth.

People are always piling up garbage in almost the middle of the road for display, around my building. It's not a pleasant sight because anybody who would see this would probably get the idea that nobody around here cares to keep this area clean and free of garbage on roads. The garbage is almost sliding down towards the roads, the could pose a threat of an accident for any care driving by closely. People should clean up and get garbage piles off the roads.

"There are not many trees around because people don't care about how our environment looks. They don't plant trees, we should cut down all dying trees, plant more trees and take care of them."

"You can see the garbage everywhere on the road and school yard. It is not very good and they [children] go outside and play and breathe and smell. Another corner there is a lot of papers. Luckily, we have a person there that collect these things and hope to have more people to do his job to improve the health in the community".

The winter has ended and the mall neglects the garbage that accumulates along the walls, making our communities look filthy. We have young people that are willing to clean up messes but no one will hire them. Therefore they get the bad name of a dirty community. There is a lack of caring for the well-being or health of impoverished communities. There should be a program that can employ youth to clean and maintain the streets. After all, the youth get blamed for the mess anyway.

Most of the [basketball] courts don't have proper nets. Some are either broken or the net is torn which makes it hard for kids to have a good game. When things get broken, nothing is done about it.

I would like the government to provide the local schools with more funding to properly maintain the school’s property. Children should not have to go to school in such a disgusting environment. I feel that such surroundings are determined to their learning, because without pride in their schools, kids are not as eager to learn.

It's an irony seeing three neat trash bins next to a pile of garbage. This shows how the government is irresponsible to take care of the sanitation.

A girl poses in an area full of garbage to display how unsanitary our communities are. We see garbage all around our community and garbage is unsafe, can produce diseases, and it is not clean. More funding is needed in our community. Lack of funding is the cause of this problem. We can try to clean our community as well instead of depending on the government and other people to clean it.

-Dorigen
“You can see the garbage everywhere on the road and school yard. Is not very good and they go outside and play that breathe and smell. Another corner there is a lot of papers. Luckily we have a person there that collect these things and hope to have more people do his job to improve the health in the community.”

- Photo-researcher

“This is a picture of trash. I took this picture because it shows all of the mess and build-up happening in Black Creek, and if we as a community do not stop adding to it rather then shrinking it, we have no where to call home. To me, this picture means the outcome of what could happen if we don’t start taking care of our community.

- Stanley
Basketball is a very common sport. Many kids need basketball courts to do some physical activity after school. To do that you need a proper court to play in with all the proper facilities. Most of the courts don’t have proper nets. Some are either broken or the net is torn which makes it hard for kids to have a good game. When things get broken, nothing is done about it.

- Muzna
Looking for Hoopz

My Children

These kids are enjoying a good time – inexpensively. Because of my low income it’s important and vital to find inexpensive ways to entertain our children. We need to advocate governments and funders to invest in our communities. They should invest in more accessible activities.

-Safy
Mini Garden

People feel great about summer and they feel great about their environment. This is a mini garden where people are planting their seeds for new plants and flowers to grow and fill the environment with happiness. This is to show that there are still people who care about our community and want it to look great.

-Muzna
It’s getting so much worse. It’s where youth right now have to work in order to help their family out rather than working to get experience. It’s where you are giving your extra dollar to the daycares because you have to stay that extra hour at work. You know, in every which way people are suffering even the meals that you used to eat in the culture are minimizing now. You can’t eat the way you used to you can’t feed your kids the way they used to.

I know in my neighborhood they don’t have [time to do activism] when they are working 2 to 3 jobs and weird hours and because of their lifestyle of having to work all these times to pay the bills and city counselors aren’t accessible.

“You know what I think that the government should have more of a backbone to cap things. I think they sit back and just let things happen, happen, happen...And just watch and watch because they know that their cupboards and pantries are full so they don’t have to worry. And again it becomes a “Who feels it knows it”. If the head, and the decision makers are all not knowing where their next meal is coming from I would definitely be the first to be signing some things to make sure we can all eat that next meal. But because we don’t feel it, we don’t know, you know, so I truly believe the government is just they’re just sitting back because they can. This is a part of the world that we live in and it’s sad, but you know, this is how easy it is to just get away with doing things the wrong way and continually continue to do things the wrong way.”

Income Security

In general, capturing intangible social issues like employment and income security through photographs is a challenging task. Nonetheless, photo-researchers from this project, particularly older participants, managed to use photovoice in innovative ways to highlight employment and income security issues that they face. A photo of bags of rice accompanied by a powerful narrative speaks volumes about the impact of rising food prices in the midst of growing unemployment. Another photo-researcher provided an insightful narrative about the cycle of unemployment to accompany her photo of two young mothers with their babies in strollers in front of a mobile job recruitment van. Another photo-researcher simply took a photo of a clothes donation box located in the neighborhood, noting the photo said a lot on its own. One photo-researcher pointed out that having to work two or three jobs leaves little time to advocate on issues important to them. These stories are captured in this section.

“I got a phone call of “Oh my gosh, do you know rice is going up and there’s no rice anywhere.” That scared me so much because, my culture, we eat a lot of rice and we use a lot of flour. I immediately freaked out and I went out and drove all night. By the time, when I got this message it was 9 o’clock in the evening and I’m like “Where is really open? Where can I, you know, get rice and flour?” And I did find a store, like a 24 hour store that didn’t raise their price yet, right. I was not aware, I’m a person that doesn’t really like to watch the news. So I wasn’t aware of what was going on in the week. So when I found this 24 hour store, I felt like I had to get everything there that was left, you know, just in case you never know and I started to get all this anxiety and just feel like “Oh my gosh” and “My kids!” and just seeing the worst out of it. You know so that’s why I had so much. Being in that store and looking at the shelf and the shelves were all empty I also was sad because then I said what if there is not enough? And what about the families that didn’t get to go and do it and stuff and then I felt like my responsibility, can you truly have this amount and you know your friend didn’t get any as well? So I just felt like what is my role as well. So when I was leaving I saw that and my place and I said I have to take a picture because to me that’s my mother I’m sure would say when you look at that, that’s a blessing, right. To look at that and see that abundance in the household. That’s a blessing, right. So I took that picture. It was for myself more of my faith that I made it and got the last of what’s there. So that picture reflected was what the last thing at the shelf at the store and I happened to be the one and just got it. It was kind of emotional. It had me thinking about my mom and she’s always giving food away, you know and stuff and always making sure people are fed and stuff in the community so it really reflected, you know.

-Celena

In general, capturing intangible social issues like employment and income security through photographs is a challenging task. Nonetheless, photo-researchers from this project, particularly older participants, managed to use photovoice in innovative ways to highlight employment and income security issues that they face. A photo of bags of rice accompanied by a powerful narrative speaks volumes about the impact of rising food prices in the midst of growing unemployment. Another photo-researcher provided an insightful narrative about the cycle of unemployment to accompany her photo of two young mothers with their babies in strollers in front of a mobile job recruitment van. Another photo-researcher simply took a photo of a clothes donation box located in the neighborhood, noting the photo said a lot on its own. One photo-researcher pointed out that having to work two or three jobs leaves little time to advocate on issues important to them. These stories are captured in this section.
This is part of the daily life of a newcomer like me. They've come here for different purposes like to get higher education, to get a job, or to get government assistance. I came here because of the lack of freedom back home. I feel like I could have freedom here but the language barrier limits my freedom here.

- Sha
“It takes a village to raise a child”, and seeing two mothers supporting each other and just being out on a stroll it was just like a nice day. You know, but also having the truck there brought to my attention the reality falls back on providing for our children and stuff. If they’re walking to the van for employment it goes back to our revolving circle as well. There’s no jobs are not being given there’s no jobs, you know, lack of education and stuff as well so I wonder if they went to the van, if they are successful. Are these mothers working right now? Are they employed? Are these kids ok?

-Celena