Youth Safer Communities Project

Chestermere & Area Community Coalition
Synergy Youth and Community Development Society
Hanna Mughal

Agenda

01 Background

02 Methods

03 Results

04 Recommendations

05 Conclusion & Questions

Background

01

Concern for youth safety and wellbeing in Chestermere, Langdon, and SE Rocky View increased after a youth died by suicide in September 2020.

02

The Chestermere and Area Community Coalition was formed, and the Community Youth Survey was conducted to determine what youth need to feel safe in their communities.

03

These focus groups are a recommendation from the Survey project. Focus groups were conducted with youth to provide clarity on survey results and gain a deeper understanding of youth safety and wellbeing.

Methods

Ethics approval was given by Rocky View Schools Division and Calgary Catholic Schools Division. Prior and informed consent was received.

2021-2022
Youth Survey

- 1,694 students (1077 students in Chestermere)
- Grades 5-12
- Administered in 8 schools (5 Chestermere schools participated)

Adult Survey

- 359 adults
- Youth-serving professionals and adults who care for youth

2022-2023
Youth Focus Groups

- 13 focus groups (10 focus groups in Chestermere)
- 87 students
- Grades 5-12, most gr. 5-10
- Administered in 8 schools

Adult Focus Groups

- 4 focus groups
- 23 adults
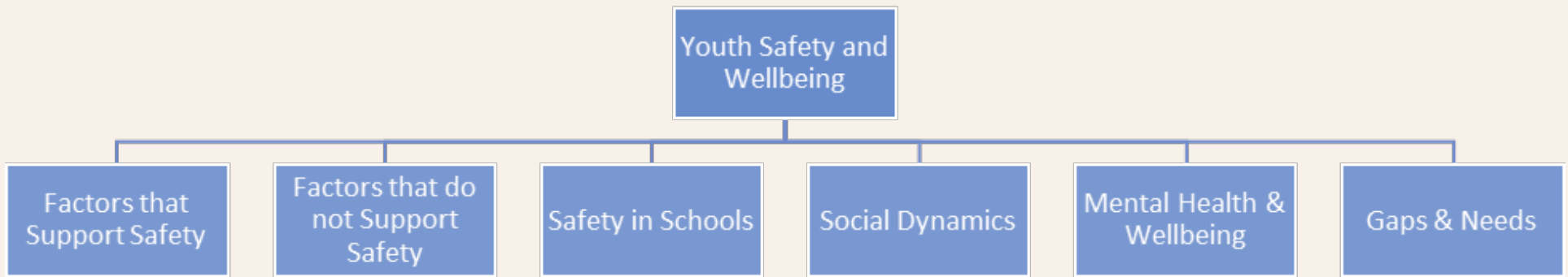- Adults across Chestermere & Langdon

Results

Safety means:

- Youth will not be physically harmed
- Youth have access to emergency services, basic necessities, and a place and/or person that they can go when they need
- Youth do not feel scared or anxious

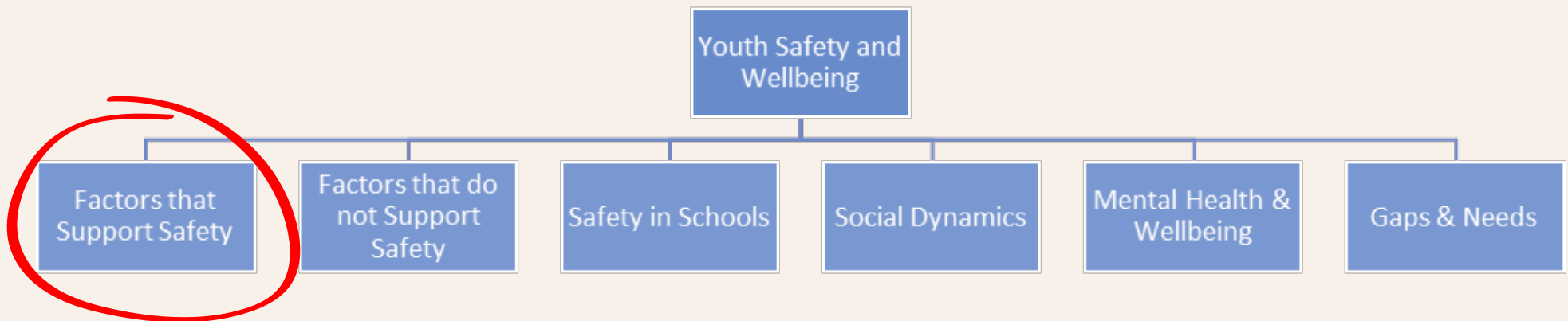**The characteristics of a safe space are:**

- Youth feel accepted, welcomed, loved, happy, respected, and comfortable in this space
- This space includes positive ideas, friends, and fun things
- It is non-judgemental, quiet, and private
- And it is a place where they can think freely and express themselves freely

Results

Results

Theme 1

Theme 1:
Factors in the community that support safety

1. Locations and/or circumstances where youth feel safe in Chestermere

- There were many locations in Chestermere that youth feel safe at for a variety of reasons
- Youth connect with people who feel safe at:
  - Home (80%)
  - School (65%)
  - By text (51%)
  - In person (47%)

Theme 1:
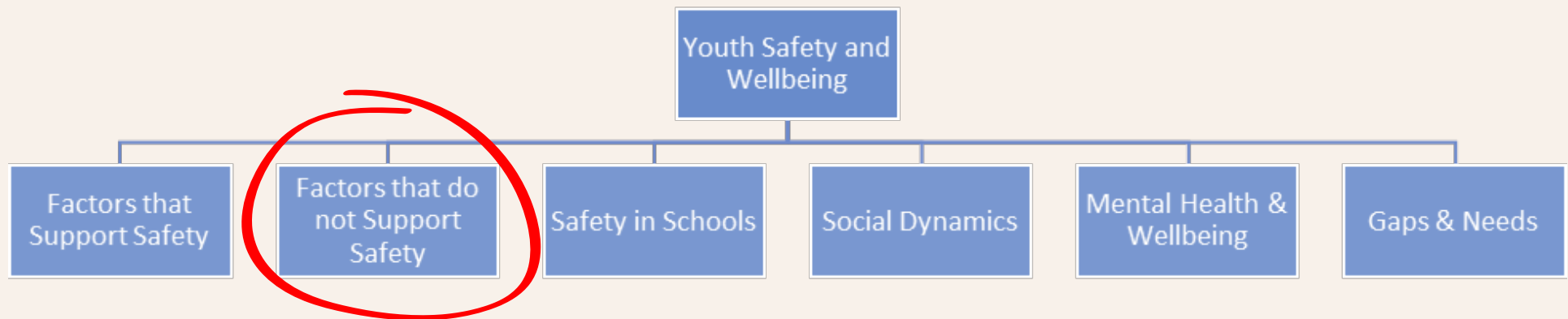# Factors in the community that support safety

2. People contribute to youth feeling safe

- 95% of youth stated they have one or more safe people in their lives.

- Some people increased feelings of safety for youth, without being linked to a particular location.

- A familiar face often led to feeling safe, and sometimes even seeing strangers increased feelings of safety. Hence, people often make youth feel safer.

Results

Theme 2

Theme 2:
Factors in the community that do <u>not</u> support safety

1. Locations and/or circumstances where youth do not feel safe in Chestermere

- 49% of youth stated that they have times when they do not feel safe. More than 50% of youth reported 1-3 days/week.

- Most indicated they feel unsafe in community spaces.

- Why?
  - Physically attacked
  - Being alone
  - Seeing strangers or "creepy people"
  - Bad drivers and busy intersections with crosswalks
  - Peer conflict and substances in specific locations
  - Water safety

Theme 2:
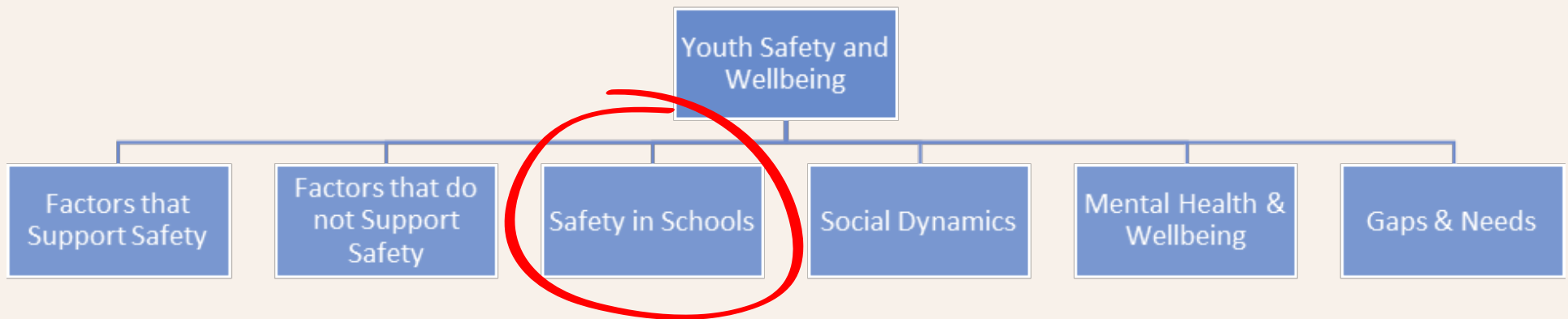# Factors in the community that do <u>not</u> support safety

2. People contribute to youth not feeling safe

- Peer groups

- Predatory adults on video games and social media

- Boys/men can make girls feel uncomfortable when walking in community spaces

- Younger youth tended to report a fear of being kidnapped

"You can probably tell if somebody's not gonna keep an area safe judging by how they're behaving. So I guess what makes it unsafe is just general behaviour of people."

Results

Theme 3

Theme 3:
Safety in Schools

1. Perceptions and experiences of safety in schools

- 19% of youth said they would go for help at school if they were feeling unsafe

- Some youth in the focus groups said school is a safe space for them

- Physical safety concerns

- Issues with teacher-student relationships

- Concerns related to feeling supported and welcome: self-expression & academic pressure

- From adults: Concerns regarding class sizes, more difficulties with self-regulation

Theme 3:
Safety in Schools

2. Changes to learning

- Improve delivery of curriculum

- More variety in options/electives

- Adults identified additional educational topics

"But it's the whole class literally saying that that they have a problem learning in [teacher B's] class, that they're not learning anything, that it's like hard to actually engage in [teacher's] class."

Theme 3:
Safety in Schools
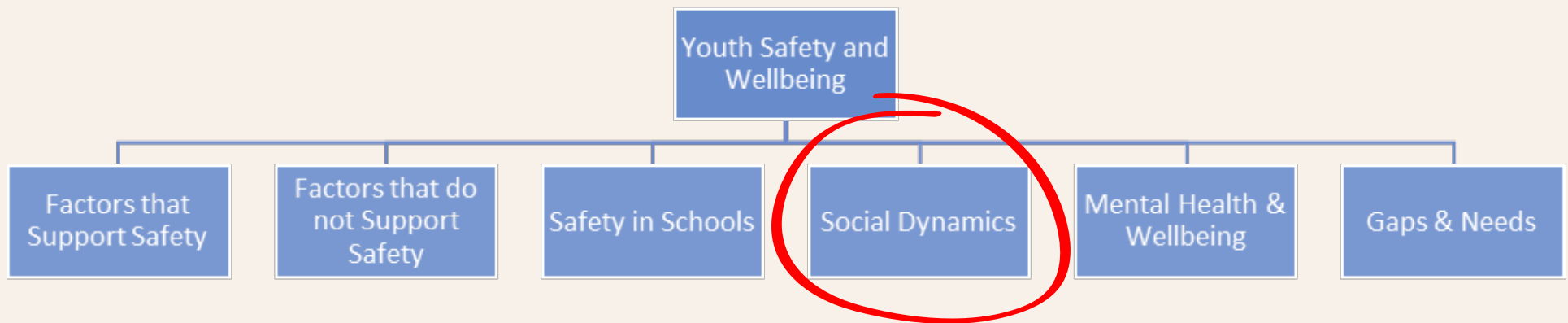
3. Changes to school structure

- Desire for school to meet more than just educational needs

- Both youth and adults identified a need to change how consequences for poor behaviour are handled

- More extracurricular and/or clubs that aren't sports-related

"..make connections with people because at this age, like during your adolescence, it's very important to make connections with people. And make... as many friends as you can because it helps with the development of the brain, you know, emotionally like helps you."

Results

Theme 4

Theme 4:
Social Dynamics

1. Relationships between youth

- Bullying:
    - How often it occurs
    - Who bullies
    - What bullying looks like

- Queer youth are bullied
    - 15% of youth feel unsafe due to gender identity and/or sexual orientation

- Peer group conflict

"...And he's also like, pretty inappropriate towards me like he always like, touch me, like rather inappropriately, but no one will do anything about it. Because it's just boys being boys."

Theme 4:
Social Dynamics

2. Bullying online

- Bullying online looks similar to bullying face-to-face

- On all social media, texting platforms, video games

- Adult concerns with youth witnessing mistreatment of others online consistently

- Despite this, youth relayed that online can be a place of connection and they have many strategies they use to stay safe online. Adults noted they need more education on how to support youth to stay safe online.

"Like a lot of online things that like normalize bullying like to the point where like, you can like just like try to be playing game with your friends and then just like having people just like…yelling at you, like swearing at you…they get mad and so like try to leak your IP address so then a bunch of people shut off your wifi.."
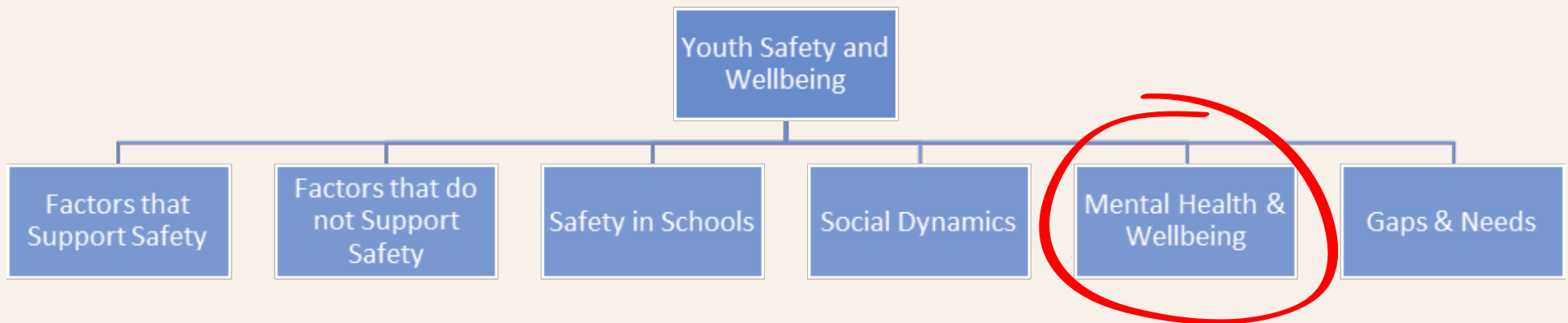
Theme 4:
Social Dynamics

3. Racism

- 17% of youth said that having a different first language makes them feel like they do not belong

- Youth called racial slurs

- White peers not being respectful or understanding

- The adult perspective

Results

Theme 5

Theme 5:
Mental Health and Wellbeing

1. Attitudes towards mental health and wellbeing

- Most youth shared that it is good to talk about how you feel with others

- There is a range of attitudes and reactions to mental health and wellbeing, but most felt that there was still a stigma towards this.

- Differences in how peers and adults react to asking for help or sharing.

> "..if you ever try opening up to anyone, it's like they don't even listen anymore. Like you're like, "oh yeah like I had this panic attack." And then they're like, "well, I've had panic attacks like this many times. And now look at me.""

Theme 5:
Mental Health and Wellbeing

2. Youth support characteristics

- The people youth go to for help: friends, parents, teachers, sibling, cousins

- Characteristics of these people: trust, give good advice, privacy/confidentiality, truly listen, care for you and are kind

"...especially my parents because like they've been there and they've done that. So I know that whatever they tell me, it's something that they've experienced and they've learned from."

"...my best friend [Name], like, we both struggled with the same problem. So... we both feel like we can talk to each other."
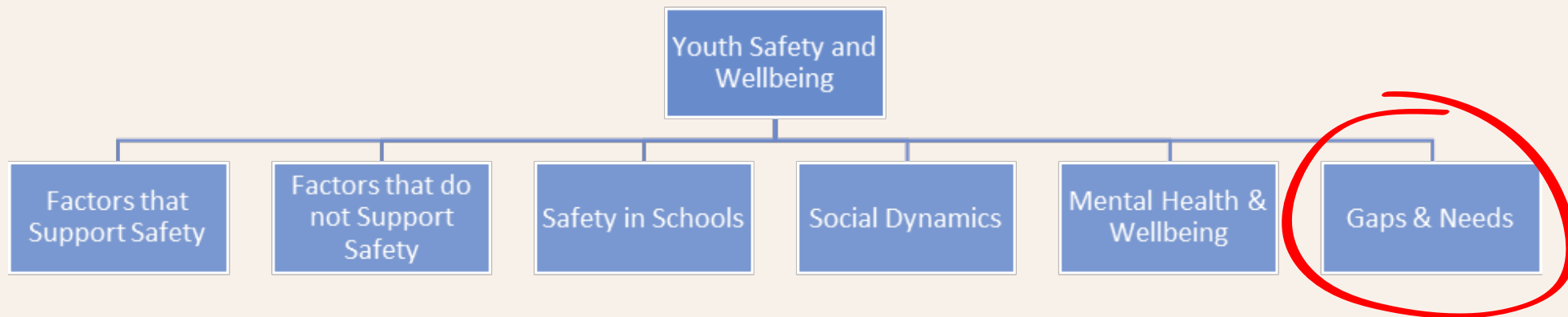
Theme 5:
Mental Health and Wellbeing

3. Suicide and self-harm

- 19% of youth have considered harming themselves.
  - Of these 19%, 60% considered harming themselves during the last year.

- Only two comments were made in the focus groups about suicide.

.

Results

Theme 6

Theme 6:
Gaps and Needs

1. **Facility and amenity enhancements**

- In Chestermere:
  - Swimming pool
  - More pathways/sidewalks
  - More places to hang out with friends
  - More businesses or places that are geared towards difficult cultures, religions, and spiritualities
  - A bigger, updated recreation centre
  - A gym for youth

- 56% of youth stated the community needs more safe spaces.
  - Wanted a space to hang out and talk

  These places were important for connection and a sense of belonging

Theme 6:
Gaps and Needs

2. Social, Recreation, and Special Interest Programming

- In Chestermere:
  - More recreation activities (e.g. hockey, teams for girls, swimming clubs, bowling)
  - More youth recreation programming out of community spaces like the library and parks
  - More creative programming (cooking lessons, pottery)
  - More green spaces
  - More youth groups

  These programs are important for wellbeing and mental health

Theme 6:
Gaps and Needs

3. Support services

- Youth identified support services that are missing in our communities
  - Medical care
  - RCMP
  - Animal shelter
  - Houselessness supports
  - Therapists/counsellors
  - Places you can call for help

Next Steps

Four overarching recommendations:

1. Community effort
   a. Sustained collaboration on all levels of the community, open lines of communication.
2. Youth engagement
   a. Youth are experts in their experience, so consult them in responses to safety concerns.
3. Address the lack of empathy
   a. This will need to be holistic, but is important to facilitate change in multiple domains (i.e., mental health, bullying, asking for help).
4. Continuous evaluation
   a. Assess and improve interventions based on feedback from youth, and involve youth in the evaluation process.

Next Steps

Specific recommendations directed towards systems in the community: governments, community/recreation services, parents/caregivers, protective services, schools, and the business community.

See Appendix E.

Examples:

#7: Build more and/or deeper relationships with youth. This applies to both Council and Administration. The strategies you use for this should be applied consistently – a practice that centres building relationships with youth should become the norm for all public service staff.
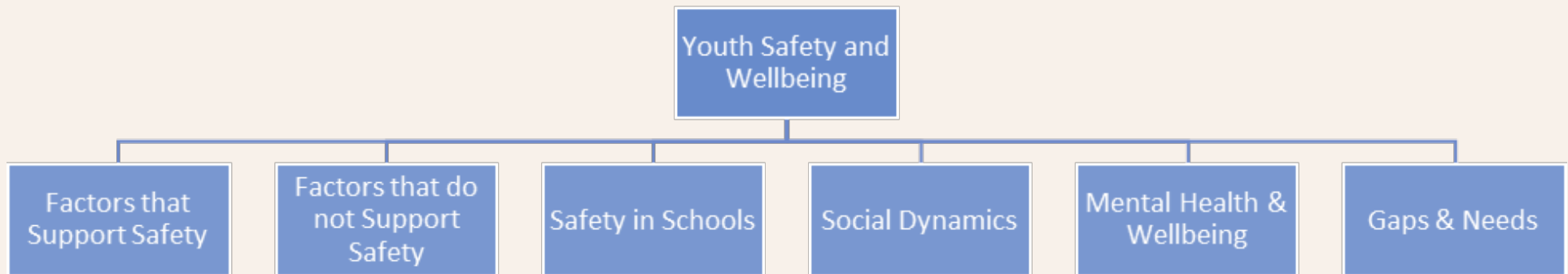**Applies to:** *City/County Government*

#43: Based on the experiences shared throughout Theme 5 and the gap in mental health services identified in Theme 6, establish accessible and stigma-free mental health support services in schools and the community. This includes counselling, stress management, and resources for students facing emotional challenges, among others.
Applies to: *Provincial Government, City/County Government, Public Health Care, Community Agencies, School Divisions*

Conclusion

The stories and details youth shared with us gave incredible insight into the way youth experience safety and wellbeing in Langdon, and SE Rocky View.

Thank you!

Questions?

Questions later? Contact us:

Synergy Youth and Community Development Society
In partnership with the Chestermere and Area Community Coalition

involved@yoursynergy.ca
403-212-0242

101-340 Merganser Dr. W, Chestermere, AB, T1X 0Z6
(Centre for Community Leadership)