



## Social Connections, Safety, and Local Environment in Three Manchester, New Hampshire, Neighborhoods

### Survey of Residents' Perceptions

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As part of its Neighborhood Health Improvement Strategy, the Manchester Health Department is implementing the Manchester Community Schools Project (MCSP) in the Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods. The community-school model recognizes that schools are vital neighborhood institutions for all residents. This collaborative effort will strengthen links between local government, schools, nonprofit service agencies, and residents. The holistic approach intends to improve a variety of outcomes using numerous strategies. In particular, the Health Department and its partners seek to improve outcomes related to: educational achievement, economic wellbeing, access to health services, health-related behaviors, supportive living environments, and social connectedness/safety. Elementary schools in Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park will play a key role by providing after-school programming and serving as sites where residents can find information about programs and services through care coordinators. Schools might also host events like block parties and neighborhood watch groups, thereby better connecting residents to one another. This fact sheet uses data from a survey of Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park residents to draw attention to the current state of connectedness, trust, and perceptions of the local environment in these three neighborhoods. This survey is a mechanism for residents to provide input; data also set benchmarks to measure the MCSP's success when residents are surveyed after the project's implementation.

Findings are presented in Table 1.<sup>1</sup> Responses suggest that residents in all three neighborhoods generally feel safe during the day and are comfortable calling the police

#### KEY FINDINGS

Residents of Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods report that they generally feel safe during the day, that they are comfortable reporting crimes to the police, and that they are hopeful that if a child was hurt or scared, there would be a trustworthy adult nearby to help.

There is some variation between neighborhoods. Only about half of respondents in these neighborhoods felt there was anything they could do to prevent crime. A majority in all neighborhoods feel that residents help each other out, especially in the Bakersville neighborhood.

In general, perceptions of the local environment were most positive in Bakersville, and lowest in Beech Street.

to report a crime. Also, most residents said they are confident that an adult would intervene if a child needed help, and a majority said that community members help one another and that people in their neighborhood are treated with respect. Responses to this survey also help inform where the MCSP's efforts should be focused. For example, while most had a positive outlook on the local environment, there was some variation between neighborhoods. Increasing access to local recreational opportunities (such as improving the quality of local parks) will be especially critical in Beech Street. Access to such facilities could foster increased connectedness while also helping to improve outcomes related to physical health.

In all three neighborhoods, respondents reported feeling less safe at night. Moreover, only about half of residents in these neighborhoods said they were confident that they could help to reduce local crime.

**TABLE 1. PERCEPTIONS OF SAFETY AND SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS IN MANCHESTER'S BAKERSVILLE, BEECH STREET, AND GOSSLER PARK NEIGHBORHOODS (FIGURES SHOWN ARE PERCENTAGES)**

	BAKERSVILLE	BEECH STREET	GOSSLER PARK	TOTAL
<b>NEIGHBORHOOD SAFETY</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
I FEEL SAFE WALKING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD DURING THE DAY	89	89	94	90
<b>I FEEL SAFE WALKING IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD AT NIGHT</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>I FEEL COMFORTABLE CALLING THE POLICE TO REPORT SUSPICIOUS OR CRIMINAL BEHAVIOR</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>83</b>
THERE IS LITTLE I CAN DO TO PREVENT OR REDUCE CRIME IN MY NEIGHBORHOOD	46	51	39	47
<b>VIOLENCE IS NOT A PROBLEM IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD</b>	69	41	36	53
<b>CRIME IS NOT A PROBLEM IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD</b>	58	38	19	45
<b>TRUST &amp; SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
IF A CHILD GOT HURT OR SCARED WHILE PLAYING OUTSIDE, THERE ARE ADULTS NEARBY I TRUST WOULD HELP	91	69	84	77
<b>PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD HELP EACH OTHER OUT</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD CAN BE TRUSTED</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>53</b>
PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD ARE TREATED RESPECTFULLY	77	60	57	68
<b>PEOPLE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD ARE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>LOCAL ENVIRONMENT</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>AGREE</b>
<b>THERE IS A LOT OF TRASH AND/OR LITTER ON THE STREETS</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>GRAFFITI IS AN ISSUE IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>HOMES AND OTHER BUILDINGS ARE WELL-MAINTAINED</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS ARE WELL-MAINTAINED AND SAFE</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>IT IS PLEASANT TO WALK OR RUN IN THIS NEIGHBORHOOD</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>72</b>

Note: Bolded figures indicate statistical significance between neighborhoods.

Neighborhood watch groups and violence prevention programs might help in this regard, particularly in the Beech Street and Gossler Park neighborhoods, where residents were more likely to report that crime and violence are problematic. Programs and groups such as these might also help to improve trust and connectedness, as these were lower in Beech Street and Gossler Park. Improving access to recreation areas might have a similar effect. When residents trust and are better connected to one another, they also have a greater chance of combating local crime and improving safety.<sup>2</sup> The findings presented here will be compared to a second round of surveys that will be conducted in the coming years after the community schools project is fully implemented.

### Data

In the summer and fall of 2013, the Manchester Health Department went door-to-door in the Bakersville, Beech Street, and Gossler Park neighborhoods, conducting a survey about trust, social connectedness, and perceptions of the local environment. Within the sample of 253 respondents, 121 (48 percent) were from Bakersville, 95 (38 percent) from Beech Street, and 37 (15 percent) from Gossler Park. In addition, 63 percent of respondents were non-Hispanic White, 14 percent were Black, 5 percent were Asian, 14 percent were Hispanic (of any race) and 3 percent reported their race/ethnicity as Other or Multiracial.

To conserve space, the percent who “disagree” or responded “neither/neutral” are not shown.<sup>3</sup>

### Endnotes

1. “Agree” refers to respondents who either “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with each statement.
2. See “Neighborhoods and Violent Crime: A Multilevel Study of Collective Efficacy,” by Robert J. Sampson, Stephen W. Raudenbush, and Felton Earls, in *Science* (Volume 277, No. 5328, pages 918–924).
3. Neither/neutral comprised a small portion of respondents, ranging from as low as zero to as high as 13 percent. The most common questions to garner “Neither/Neutral” responses were those regarding children, as well as “whether people in this neighborhood could be trusted” and whether “There is little in my neighborhood I can do to prevent crime.”

### About the Author

Justin R. Young is a doctoral candidate in sociology at the University of New Hampshire and a research assistant at the Carsey School of Public Policy.

### Acknowledgments

The author thanks Jaime Hoebeke and Anna Thomas at the Manchester Health Department and Curt Grimm, Eleanor Jaffee, Michele Dillon, Michael Ettlenger, Amy Sterndale, and Laurel Lloyd at the Carsey School of Public Policy at the University of New Hampshire for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.