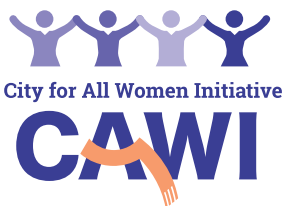


what
we heard

WALKING LISTENING

In Merivale, together: walking, listening,
and learning in place



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This document provides a summary of the Merivale Caring City's walk completed on July 3, 2025.

Thank You

This walk was made possible through the generous support of NROCRC and Gulay Karadere West, with funding from WAGE. We are deeply grateful to the community members who joined us on this walk. Your lived experience, expert knowledge, and strong ties to the community have been the heart of this work. We honor the trust you placed in us.

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the place now known as Merivale, exists within unceded, unsurrendered, and treaty lands whose history is shaped by the stewardship and resilience of Indigenous Peoples, including the Algonquin Anishinaabe. As a community organization, we recognize our role in listening to this land's stories, both those of enduring Indigenous presence and those of the vibrant, caring community here today. We commit to using our research not just to document, but to advocate for conditions that honor this legacy of strength and solidarity. Let this work be guided by reciprocity: learning the treaties that shaped this place, uplifting Indigenous voices in our efforts, and acting in ways that foster collective care for the land and its peoples; past, present, and future.

Community Accountability

This report is part of an ongoing conversation. Community accountability means staying in dialogue; not just reporting to you, but learning *with* you. We welcome your reflections, feedback, and questions. Your input helps us stay rooted in community priorities and ensures that what we share reflects your experiences, stories, and knowledge. Please reach out to info@cawi-ivtf.org if you have comments or concerns.

Research Statement

In nature, learning doesn't happen in a single sense. It happens through full-bodied attention. Trees respond to changes in light and soil. Rivers adapt to changes in terrain. Animals move through the world guided by sound, smell, touch, and instinct. Guided by this, our approach to research extends beyond what we hear in the recordings from this walk. Our learning was shaped by what we noticed and felt: the energy of the group, the generosity of collaboration, the interactions between participants, and the stories that emerged between stops. In this way, our research became not just an act of observation, but a shared practice of being and learning together in place. The following pages reflect what we heard, felt, and learned together.

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Here, we provide an outline for how we can carry this work forward. This includes potential areas for continued advocacy.

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The final pages include reflections from the research team who participated in the walk. These are included to offer transparency around our process, acknowledge how our identities and relationships shaped this work, and highlight the importance of learning with community.

Part 1: What we heard

These themes reflect the stories, concerns, and hopes shared during our walk through Merivale.

Key Themes:

1. Disconnection between services and daily life
2. Housing Affordability
3. Safety
4. Gap in services for children & youth



Theme 1: Disconnection Between Services and Daily Life

Across the neighbourhood, residents reported that they have access to essential services within a 15-minute radius. However, while access exists in theory, it is often undermined by design barriers, affordability challenges, and a lack of reliable public transportation.

- Most participants reported that places like Emerald Plaza, FreshCo, and Food Basics were within a 15-minute walk. However, affordability and grocery selection significantly limit their access. The neighborhoods nearby stores do not meet all needs, especially for bulk or low-cost items, forcing families to travel outside the community.
- All walk participants described the transit system as a major barrier that affects their ability to reach education, groceries, and services. Even though bus routes exist, participants experience late buses, reduced reliability, long walking distances due to route changes, and the need for a phone or data plan to navigate transit.
- Poor bus stop design (lack of seating, shade, or shelter) and car-heavy traffic patterns make walking difficult and unsafe. Participants described short walk crossing times, blocked sightlines, and congestion near schools.
- Pedestrian and cycling networks exist, however, they are often located behind large stores creating an 'out of sight' experience that can feel unsafe and adds distance and time to the route.
- Participants' stories highlight that while they can reach services on a map, system design, and economic barriers shape whether they can rely on them in daily life.

“for bulk purchases and cheaper prices you have to travel outside your neighborhood...there is also a lot of planning ahead due to food type preferences.”

“Walk times at crosswalks [are] very short, there's too much traffic and the bus stops are far apart.”

“The people coming from Merivale High School, they are like Grade 7 or 8s...Like they cannot cross the route because there is a big line of cars.”

“So one of the reasons made me buy a car, it’s for my daughter, many of those [bus shelters] are not heated. At least a little bit. So maybe we use solar power to heat them.”

“The bus is late, so I have to carry my shopping. Everything is great in the neighborhood, accessible & affordable, but the bus is late which means I have to carry my heavy bags.”

merivale

key themes

Theme 2: Housing Affordability & Stability

Across our discussions during the walk, participants emphasized that housing in the neighborhood is not only unaffordable, but also undermines their sense of stability, fairness, and dignity. Although some housing options exist, rising rents and limited availability prevent many from securing safe and stable homes.

- Many participants spoke about the unaffordability of housing, noting that rising rents create insecurity even for long-term tenants.
- Several comments from participants show that when families are stretched thin by housing costs, they experience stress that affects their daily lives. Limited housing stability makes it harder to engage socially, access supports, and feel a sense of community and connection.
- One walk participant described being caught between unaffordable housing and employment pathways that require English proficiency and “Canadian experience.”
- Walk participants also highlighted that the financial pressure of housing affects mobility. Participants spoke about the need to work extra hours to pay rent or maintain a car.
- Many of the responses from participants highlight that housing instability affects broader participation in community life. Rising housing costs create ongoing financial strain that leaves many with fewer resources: money, time, and energy, to participate in community activities.

“The rents are getting higher and higher day by day, so in those two buildings, it’s very difficult to get an apartment, because like the electricity is not included, and the rent is very high.”

“She says that she’s paying \$1,950. For two bedroom. without parking and without paying the electric and two children. And she said she’s a newcomer, so I think the government is paying for her, but it’s not too much. And after six months, they will stop paying for her. And she said, it’s hard for her and her husband to find work. They are not able, like, to speak good English. And every time they apply for a job, they need like a high school. Canadian experience.”

“Facilities are available but 5 days a week work system & weekend work to pay for a car loan leave no time to access.”

Theme 3: Safety

Throughout the walk, participants described safety as a major concern that shapes how they move through the neighborhood, especially after dark. These concerns affect their ability to walk to parks, use community spaces, or simply move around the neighborhood with confidence.

- Many participants reported feeling unsafe walking alone in the evening, noting that darkness, isolated pathways, and low community visibility heighten their sense of vulnerability.
- Participants also described specific locations, such as Inverness Park, as particularly unsafe due to poor lighting, winter conditions, and lack of natural surveillance.
- Stories of car theft, assaults, or “dangerous people” in certain areas add an additional layer of fear, particularly for women, youth, and newcomers .
- Overall, participants expressed a desire for more lighting, more monitoring, and visible safety support to create a sense of security in shared spaces.

“Too much people here are hurting... sometimes something dangerous happens here and no one is watching them.”

“When we walk here alone... it’s dangerous because we see people and the teenagers here... it’s hard to walk alone because they may do something bad.”

“I used to go to Movati and then, yeah, I had like something. So I got scared to walk here at home. Yeah, at night, I think they should put more time and maybe more light light.”

Theme 4: Gap in Services for Children & Youth

Walk participants consistently highlighted a shortage of programs and resources for children and youth in the neighborhood.

- Some participants shared about long waitlists for affordable childcare and limited spaces for infants and young children.
- Participants also noted that existing spaces and programs are not well aligned with the needs of children and youth. They noted that while a few spaces for children and youth exist they are insufficient, require cost, and transportation, which many families cannot reliably meet.
- Comments about unsupervised youth in the neighborhood also signals a lack of safe, engaging spaces for young people to gather, learn, and connect.
- Many participants described not knowing what services exist or how to access them, leading them to rely on personal networks

“I don’t know where to go... how to apply for things.
So we are using our own resources.”

“There are some places for children and youth, but
tennis courts are not enough... we need more spaces
that cost nothing.”

Key Take-aways

Across housing, services, safety, and youth programming, participants' dignity is central to their experience of the neighborhood. Access alone is insufficient if systems are unreliable, unsafe, or financially inaccessible. Participants' stories reveal that the way services, spaces, and infrastructure are experienced matters as much as their mere presence.

- Unaffordable or unstable housing undermines residents sense of security and autonomy
- Even when services exist nearby, barriers like cost, transportation, and stigma limit meaningful use
- Poor lighting, unsafe streets, and unreliable transit reduce independence and freedom of movement
- Waitlists, cost, and time constraints limit meaningful access to healthcare, essential services, and social supports.
- Opportunities to socialize, enjoy green spaces, and participate in cultural or spiritual activities are essential for dignity, yet remain limited.

This report reflects only a small part of a much bigger story, one that is still unfolding and one that belongs to the people who live it. We hope this report helps make visible the voices, questions, and wisdom that shape Merivale. The next steps belong to all of us.

Appendix: Reflections from the Field

These personal reflections were written by members of the Merivale walk planning team. They represent individual perspectives, moments that lingered, and the emotional truths that don't always fit neatly into themes. We include them here to honor the full-bodied nature of community-based research, where knowledge is shaped not just by what's said, but by how we show up, listen, and feel in place.

Reflection by Meg Herod (she/her)

Policy Director, Co-executive Director

Walking with residents in Merivale has taught me how experiencing a neighbourhood is the only way to understand it. As we walked we saw so many services: grocery stores, a library, cafes, and even bike lanes and walking paths to connect them - the important components of a neighbourhood. From the experience of a pedestrian, a resident, or a caregiver, these pieces may exist, however, are not fitting together. A pedestrian path may take you out of the way or feel unsafe. A bus stop may lack accessibility. It's stories of experience that must guide how we plan a neighbourhood.

Reflection by Kassidy Ransom (they/them)

Civic Engagement Coordinator

I wasn't able to attend the walk in Merivale, but my understanding of the neighborhood grew through the traces the walk left behind: the voices, the stories, and the emotion carried within them. I began with the evaluation criteria, and at first glance, they painted a reassuring picture. On paper, Merivale appeared to meet the needs of its residents. But when I turned to the voice recordings and transcripts, a different narrative emerged. What looked neat and sufficient in the data became far more complicated when viewed through lived experience. I heard stories of inaccessibility, financial barriers, and safety concerns. But what stood out most was the sense of disconnection woven through each of these challenges: disconnection from neighbors, from services, and from the very systems meant to support both people and place.

In the end, the contrast between the evaluation criteria and the lived narratives taught me something important: a neighborhood cannot be fully understood through metrics alone. It must also be felt. And through the voices of the participants, I was able to sense the complexity, resilience, and challenges that define Merivale, revealing a community far more layered than the data initially suggested.

Reflection by Cata Jurado (she/her)

Communications and Civic Engagement Coordinator

On the day we walked with Merivale residents, we were surrounded by their smiles and the playfulness of the children who joined us, as well as the residents' meaningful insights and the generosity they showed in sharing their stories. Their Living experience makes it clear how disconnected services can be from people's homes. Yes, there's access, but not for everyone, and often not in ways that feel dignified. Transportation, housing, and safety challenges intersect, making daily life harder instead of easier.

The residents know exactly what they need to live fully. This walk served as a reminder of how crucial it is to have spaces and places of care that support people and are close to home. It also reminded all of us that designing a city for dignity starts with truly listening to the people who navigate it every day.

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