

100 Cups of Coffee

The community's voice on Bemidji's
strengths, challenges, and future



A project of the Beltrami Area Resiliency Team
Facilitated by Beltrami Area Service Collaborative

February 2021

Introduction

The 100 Cups of Coffee project was launched to address a long-standing, all-too-common challenge facing Beltrami County: whole segments of the population are not involved in decisions and initiatives. Seeking out and lifting up the voices of those not typically at the table is the main objective of this project, to provide all citizens an opportunity to unite around a shared vision.

In June 2019, a Beltrami County Community Resiliency Conversation Event was held to discuss community well-being and resiliency. The 75 participants decided that the first step was to expand the network of community members who provide input and share leadership. To answer that call, a group of community members formed the Beltrami Area Resiliency Team, coordinated by Beltrami Area Service Collaborative (BASC). The Resiliency Team launched the 100 Cups of Coffee project.

100 Cups is a community-driven framework that listens to the voices of those who are not typically at the decision-making table. The format of 100 Cups is simple—volunteer interviewers have cups of coffee one-on-one with 100 community members. Questions center around community values, priorities, strengths, challenges, and hopes for the future.

The interviews started in March 2020, with the 100th interview held in late December 2020. Interviewees and other community members were encouraged to be a part of the Resiliency Team and the projects that emerge from the 100 Cups of Coffee findings.

This report provides a window into the responses of average citizens with exceptional ideas. It is intended to be an example of the power of asking, engaging, and building connection. Community capacity can be strengthened by intentionally connecting people, building a network that is deep and wide so that when adversity strikes, we are linked, invested, and can talk.

The Resiliency Team would like to thank all who participated in the 100 Cups of Coffee project, as an interviewer, interviewee, or other helper role. It is the Team's hope that this report influences what issues are prioritized, what strengths are celebrated, and who gets to help make decisions that build the future.

Facilitated by Beltrami Area Service Collaborative



Sponsored by United Way of Bemidji Venture Grant

With contributions from Culver's and Harmony Co-op

Key Findings



Family-oriented, community-driven

Interviewees described the Beltrami area as a family-focused place with lots of resources for individuals and families.



Racism exists

Division within the community, especially racism, was identified as a barrier to progress.



All about connection

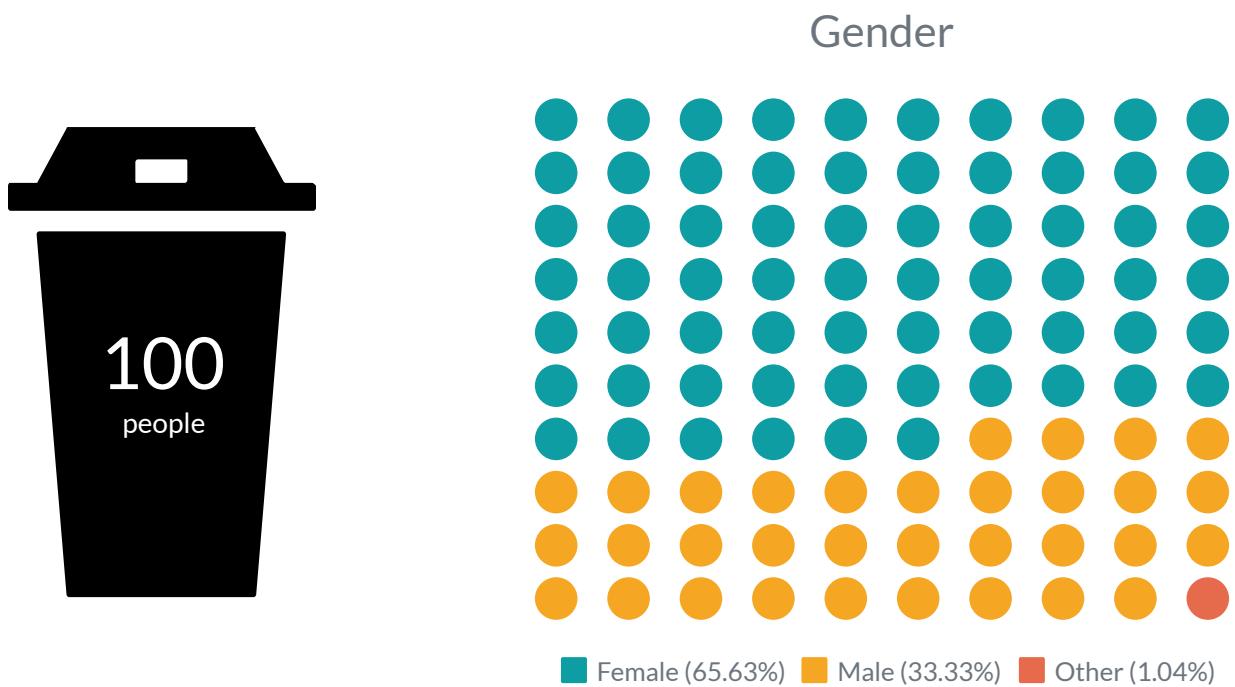
Interviewees yearned for a multi-purpose space where they could recreate, learn, celebrate, and gather together.



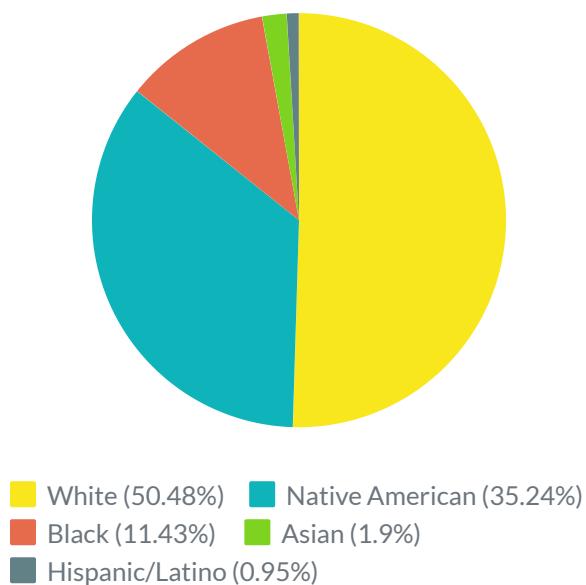
Raising our voice

Less than 1/3 said that they had a voice in community decisions. Numbers were even lower among Native American interviewees.

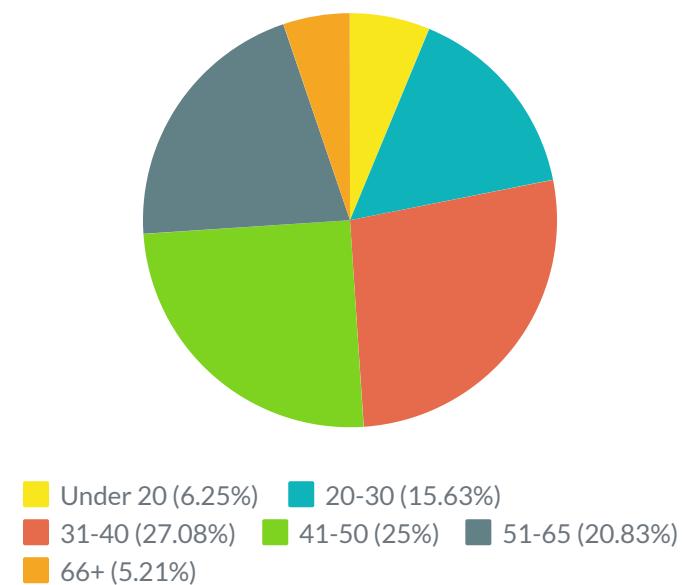
Who was interviewed?



Race/Ethnicity*



Age



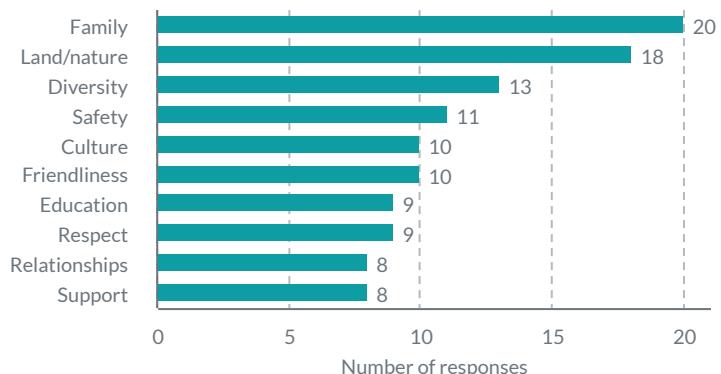
*Interviewees who selected more than one race/ethnicity were counted in all categories identified.

Values and Strengths

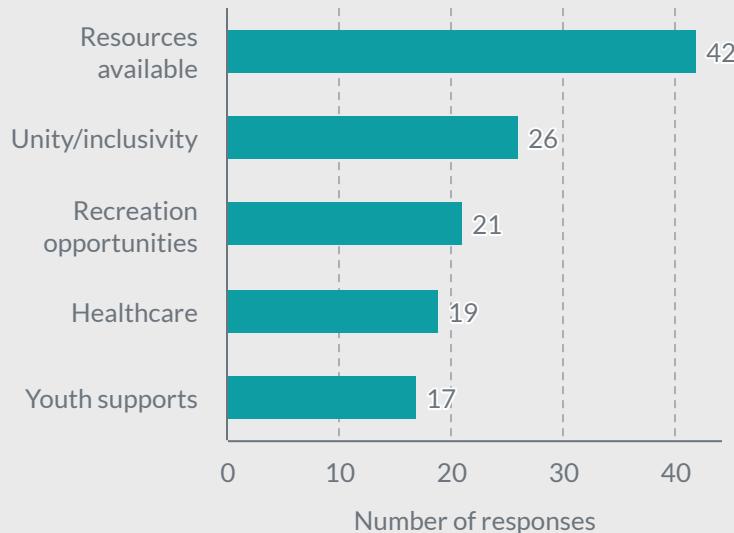
What values do you think are most important to your community?

Interviewees offered their views on the core values of their communities. Family and connection to land/nature were the most frequently reported responses.

Many responses centered on core components of interviewees' lives, such as family, safety, culture, and education. Others focused on community interactions, with values such as friendliness, respect, and support.



What does the community do well to support the health, safety, and wellbeing of people who live here?



This question asked about community strengths. Most frequently mentioned was the range of resources and services available in Bemidji.

In terms of recreation opportunities, interviewees commented in particular on the abundance of public parks and outdoor communal spaces.

Regarding healthcare, many interviewees noted the wide range of healthcare choices and the availability of specialists and public health resources.

Many interviewees expressed a belief that the community is youth-focused, with plenty of activities and resources to support children.



"There's a strong collective identity within the music community. There are great opportunities for all of the arts, really."

"There are so many parks in the city. They're very family-friendly."

"There are good resources here, but they're not well-known."

"We have socially minded political leaders."

"With Sanford, we have access to specialists. That's unusual for a town of our size."



What's something you know that you wish other people in your community knew and paid attention to?



In the above question, interviewees offered their own knowledge and insights that may not be known by the wider community. The most frequently mentioned topics were as follows:

- The existence of racism
- Mental health needs in the community
- Homelessness in the community
- The need for understanding to establish empathy and common ground

"Drugs make people do stupid, messed-up things. It's not really us."
 "More attention needs to be brought to the disappearance of Native American women and children."

"How difficult it is to be growing up today with technology. Young people are missing opportunities to have relationships across generations. They're unfairly 'dissed' by adults.
 But we created this barrier."

"I wish people paid attention to welcoming our aging citizens and recognized their value."

"Having worked for a nonprofit, I learned there are programs and resources here that I didn't know about."

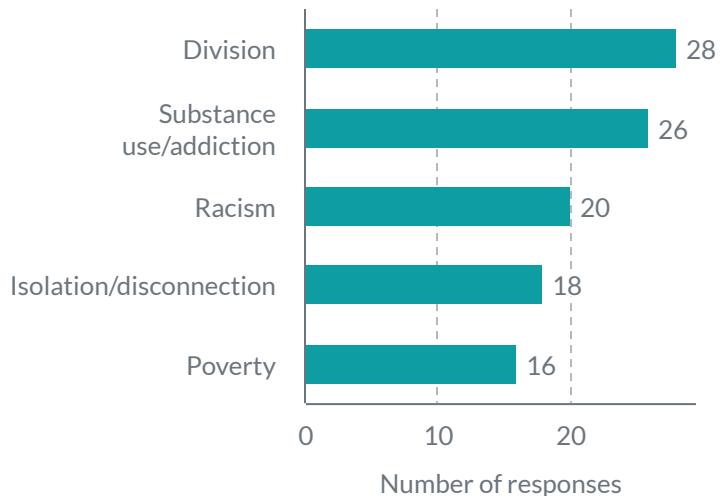
"The people who go to prison and come back—our young people look up to them like those that go to war. That's why it is so important to help reintegrate them and recover."

Challenges

What are the most significant challenges that your community faces?

Division was the most noted challenge that the community faces. This included all kinds of division, primarily that along racial, political, cultural, or economic lines.

Many interviewees expressed extreme isolation/disconnection as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some described this as a more permanent problem, expressing that socialization opportunities were lacking or that it was difficult to fit in as a new person to the community.



"Not a lot for elders or single people."

"Going into the store, I wonder how I'll be treated. Will I be treated differently because of the color of my skin?"

"Childcare and transportation are big problems. Childcare is unaffordable. If you have the money, spots aren't available. Transportation by the bus doesn't work. You'll be late."

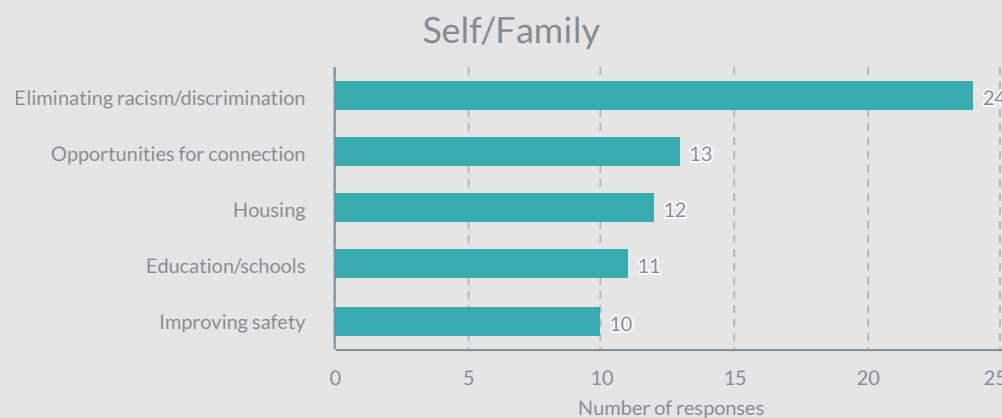
"We're the First City on the Mississippi. We need more opportunities for people to interact with it and appreciate it."

"One challenge is domestic violence."

"I don't feel connected to the community."

"Non-Natives see Natives as drug addicts and alcoholics. Natives see non-Natives as jerks."

What's one thing that could be done right now by the community that would make a difference for you and your family?



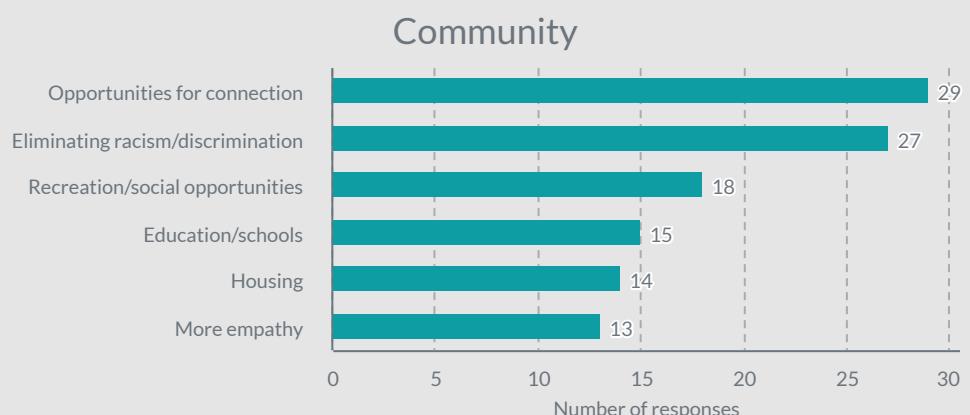
Responses for this question align with the identified challenges in the question above (page 6).

Most responses regarding education/schools described a culturally divided atmosphere or a lack of completeness and truthfulness in teaching about local, national, and Indigenous history.

What's one thing that could be done right now that would make a difference for your community?

Once again, interviewees expressed a strong desire to connect with their fellow community members.

Although recreation opportunities were also cited as a strength (page 4) of the community, interviewees particularly mentioned a lack of options in winter months, as well as a lack of non-athletic options, such as classes, dance clubs, and new places to eat or congregate.



"My grandson is 15 years old and very independent. I feel afraid whenever he leaves. I tell him to be aware of his surroundings, to be on alert for people who are racist, to get out of there."

"I wish kids my age could go do something besides hard drugs, bowling alley, or Perkins. We need something, and year-round."

"Support for kids with unique educational needs is lacking."
"Show respect for one another!"

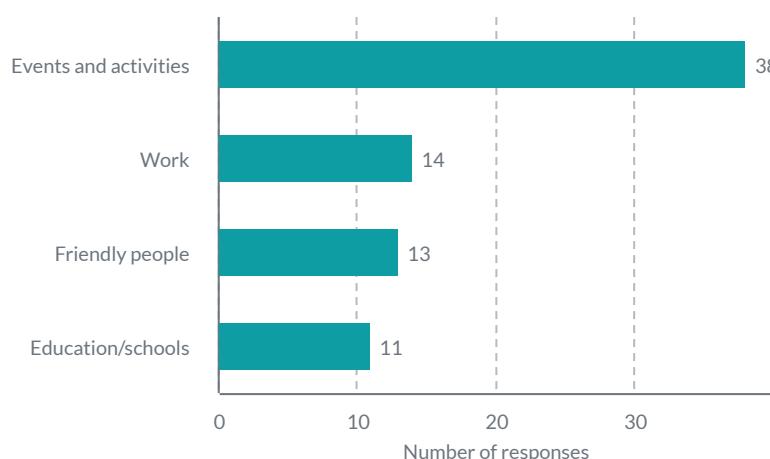
"Housing—there just isn't enough."

"Kids say racist things to minority classmates. Administration and parents say it was not meant to be malicious and move on."

"People are warm and welcoming here, but it is hard to go deeper than being acquaintances."

Community Connection and Support

What helps you feel connected to your community?



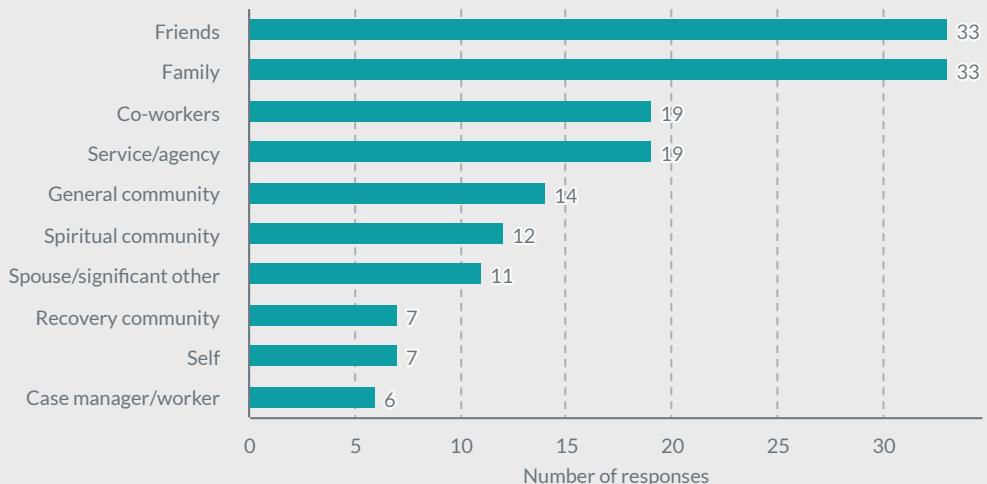
Events and activities were identified as crucial to interviewees' sense of belonging and connection in the community. These included events such as music concerts, festivals, and parades, in addition to communal activities such as group exercise, sports, parenting classes, or theatre.

The school system was identified as a key community for many people, as interviewees felt involved in the community through their own or their (grand)children's educational and school sports activities.

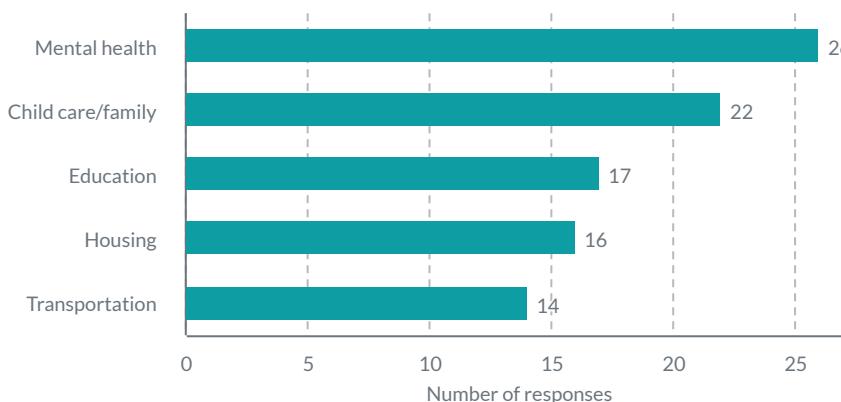
When you need help, who do you turn to?

Friends and family form the primary support systems for interviewees.

Service/agencies mentioned included both government social services and a wide range of non-profits in the areas of housing, food, and youth support.



What types of supports for individuals and families are missing in your community?

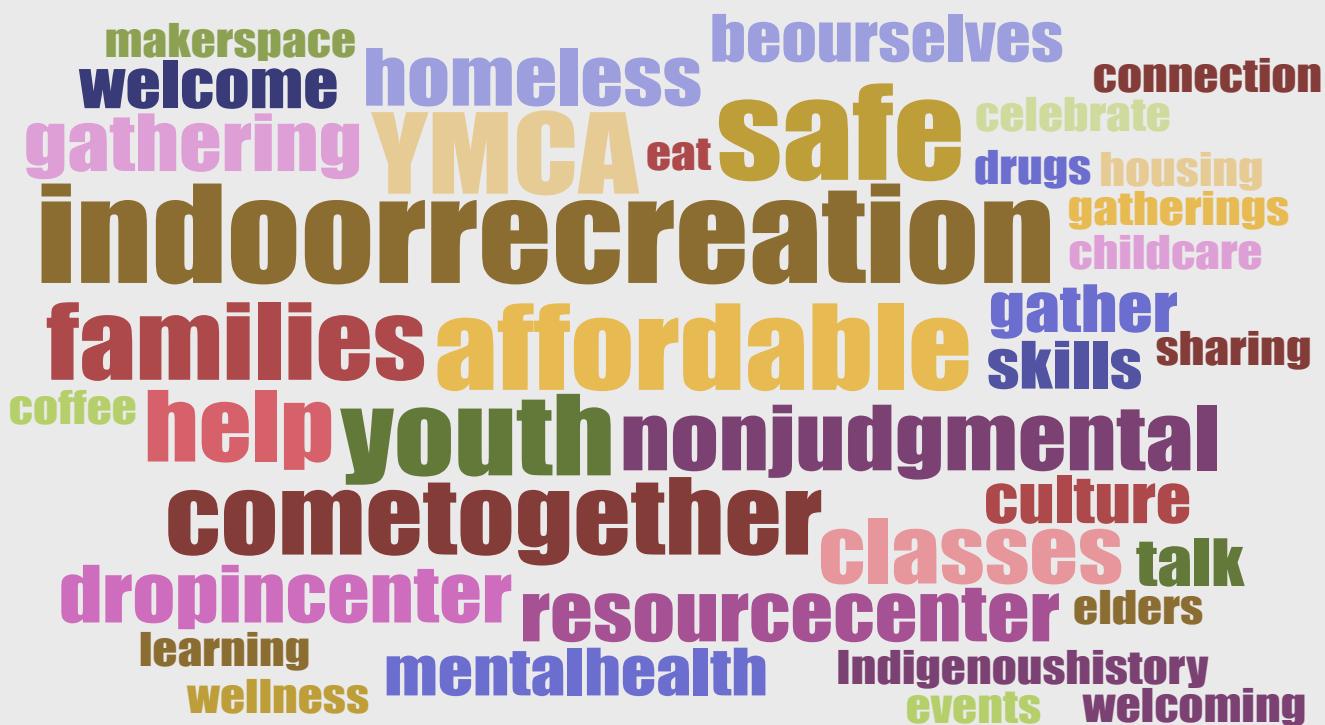


Mental health services were identified as most lacking in the community. Many interviewees wished for a drop-in mental health service that could provide same-day appointments and rapid crisis intervention.

Interviewees also described the dire state of child care, especially for those who lack transportation or work outside of traditional "9-to-5" hours.

Education responses often focused on continuing adult education, such as life skills classes or hobby tutorials, as opposed to the school system.

"I wish there was a place in our community where..."



Interviewees overwhelmingly desired a place for indoor recreation. Some proposed a place where one could simply exercise indoors, while others wished for a more multi-purpose space, where community members could recreate, take classes, hold events, and simply gather together. Many also wanted a resource hub where they could access the services they need in one place.

Many interviewees described what this space would be like, using words like "safe," "welcoming," and "nonjudgmental."

"Bring something to the community where everyone can go, not super expensive, not exclusive to any subset of people, open year-round. An indoor park of sorts, or a YMCA."

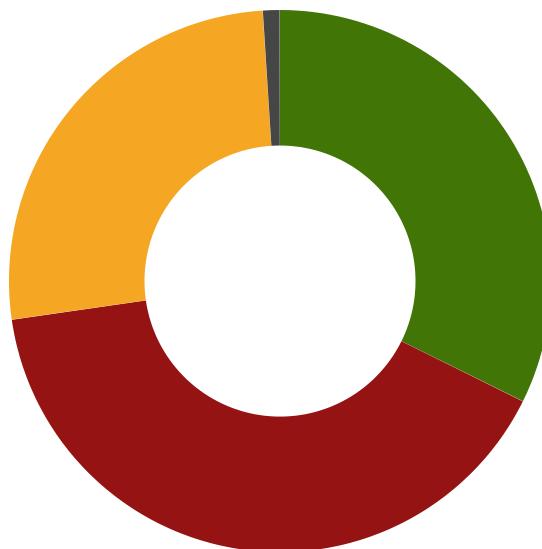
"A resource hub! Where can I get help all in one place?"

"I'd love a place where people of different walks of life and perspectives can share in a safe space."

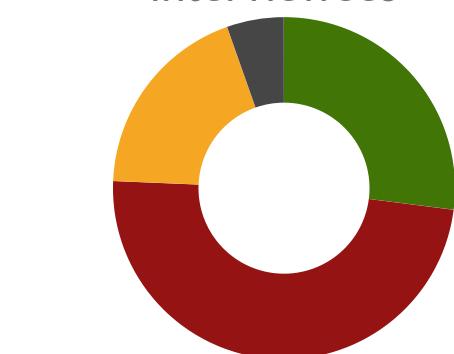
"A makers' space would get people talking, sharing skills."

"I wish there was someplace where I could walk in and talk about mental health that same day."

Do you feel like you have a voice when decisions are made in the community?



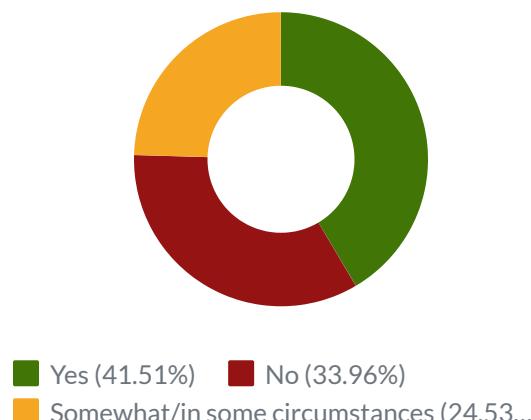
Native American interviewees*



Black interviewees*



White interviewees*



*Interviewees who selected more than one race/ethnicity were counted in all categories identified.

Next Steps

The Beltrami Area Resiliency Team will be reaching out to interviewees and the broader community to set in motion ideas that were shared through 100 Cups of Coffee. We will be sharing the wisdom of the 100 Cups of Coffee interviewees with decisionmakers and asking them to consider how these insights might be incorporated into community development. We will continue to call out to a broader sector of our community for their involvement in creating a healthier and more resilient population.

Interested in joining in on the work of the Resiliency Team? Contact BASC at 218-333-8194 or email resiliencyteam@gmail.com

Beltrami Area Resiliency Team (BART) Facilitated by Beltrami Area Service Collaborative

The Beltrami Area Resiliency Team is made up of dedicated individuals who have diverse roles in the Bemidji area. This group is continually growing, as any community member who supports the mission is welcome to participate.

Mission and Vision of the Resiliency Team

We aim to create a self-healing community by...

- Sharing widely the science of trauma, historical trauma, and resiliency and lead community conversations about these topics
- Expanding the network of community members who will provide input on what is needed for a healthier, more resilient community
- Uniting this expanded network of community members to identify and implement strategies that will result in a healthier, more resilient community

The Principles of a “Self-Healing Community”

- Building self-healing communities is about investing in the people who have the most at stake—especially people affected by trauma—so they can be expert leaders in their own community’s change.
- People do best when they are nested in flourishing families and communities.
- Understanding needs of others leads to better solutions.
- Coming together to share leadership, take collective action, build relationships is critical.
- Community capacity can be strengthened by intentionally connecting people, building a network that is deep and wide so that when adversity strikes, we are linked, invested and can talk.
- We are all working together—those most affected by adversity, those committed to improving lives, and those ready to offer resources.
- This work requires hope, optimism and efficacy.
- We are the ones who are creating a better future for our children. We’re in this together.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Resiliency Trainings

The Resiliency Team can connect you with workshop trainers who present on the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and the hope of resiliency.

For more information on the groundbreaking research on these two topics, go to
<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/acestudy/index.html>

"Bemidji has a good recovery community."

"We could do a lot of good job creation by encouraging renewable energy."

"Bemidji is growing. It's hard to provide services for everyone."

"We spend 90% of our money in Bemidji. How can we bring business back to Red Lake?"

"The school has done a phenomenal job with COVID."

"Working with kids makes me hopeful. They are like sponges. They learn so fast."

"People don't know our reliance on a healthy environment. We are susceptible to being our own worst enemies."

"Bemidji is a 'desert' when it comes to resources for the homeless."

"Compared to other towns, Bemidji invests more money in arts, road infrastructure, keeping things clean, bike paths, and we try for clean water."

"Lots of outdoor activities in the summertime."

"We can remove the stigma of getting help."

"We can't go back to sleep. We must forge ahead through transformation."