



Bystander Awareness Campaign

Edmonton

Research Executive Summary - 2023

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Background	3
2. Secondary research	3-4
3. Primary research	4
a. Objectives	4
b. Methodology	4-5
c. Overall findings	5-7
i. Motivations and barriers	5
ii. Potential intervention actions	6
iii. Preliminary campaign messages	6
iv. Campaign development suggestions	7
v. Baseline pre-campaign measures	7
4. Campaign development	7-8
5. How the campaign guides the public on the six intervention actions	8
a. Direct actions (if you feel safe intervening)	8
b. Indirect actions (if you feel unsafe intervening)	8

BACKGROUND

In 2016, Edmonton became the second city in Canada to join the United Nations Women Safe Cities and Safe Public Spaces Global program. In response to the Edmonton: Safe City [scoping study](#), community groups, Indigenous organisations, academia, corporate partners and government came together as the Edmonton: Safe City Community Collaboration Committee to [recommend strategies](#) to make public spaces, including transportation, safer for women and girls and individuals who identify as women in Edmonton.

These recommendations formed the development of a campaign to raise awareness and motivate bystanders to intervene in situations of gender-based harassment and violence on transit. It also recognizes the intersection of race, class and gender in reducing and preventing violence towards all marginalized identities in transit spaces. The Bystander Awareness campaign is one important part of the overall efforts to improve safety and security on transit.

In keeping with the Safe City recommendations, the approach to the campaign needed to be evidence-based and incorporate an Indigenous perspective. The project team applied [Gender Based Analysis Plus](#) (GBA+) to help understand and address the needs of diverse people in transit spaces.

As a first step, research was needed to learn about what current information existed about bystander awareness, and, secondly, to better understand the level of knowledge on the topic; the motivations and barriers to intervening, and to test established models of bystander awareness training.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

The project team conducted a cross-jurisdictional scan that identified existing research on bystander behaviour (motivations and barriers), actions and campaigns. The analysis indicated support for bystander intervention models that provide potential actions bystanders can take.

This analysis further showed gaps in existing research from a GBA+ process and Indigenous perspectives. For this reason, the project team conducted primary research to incorporate this important process in testing different perspectives on suggested bystander actions. The process allowed the project team to better understand the experiences and comfort of transit riders to act as bystanders when observing gender-based harassment and violence on transit.

PRIMARY RESEARCH

Objectives

The objectives of primary research were to:

- Understand barriers and motivations of bystanders to intervene in a gender-based harassment or violence situation
- Test the applicability of bystander intervention actions identified in secondary research
- Test preliminary campaign messages
- Determine key language considerations to build a campaign of this nature
- Establish pre-campaign baseline measures of bystander awareness and intervention
- Apply a GBA+ process to the research and campaign development to ensure inclusion of diverse perspectives, e.g, Indigenous people, women, LGBTQ2S+, racialized minorities, etc.

Methodology

The City worked with a local research firm, Y Station Ltd., to conduct primary research. Data collection was conducted in two phases.

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Participants	Representatives from organisations advocating for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous people • Racialized minorities • Youth • LGBTQ2S+ • Persons with disabilities 	Diverse intersectionalities of transit riders, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous people • Racialized minorities • New Canadians (less than 3 years) • Youth • Seniors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Women <p>Edmonton Transit Service staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGBTQ2S+ Women Men Different income ranges Transit riders who ride at different frequency, days, times, or modes <p>Edmonton Transit Service operators and peace officers</p>
Methods	In-depth interviews (n=18)	In-depth interviews (n=31) Focus group (n=8) Online survey with the Edmonton Insight Community (n=822)
Dates	September 7 - October 5, 2022	October 7 - November 1, 2022

Preliminary campaign messages were developed based on the findings from Phase 1 and tested in Phase 2.

Overall findings

Motivations and barriers

Motivations for bystanders on transit to intervene include:

- Empathy or concern about the well-being of the individual being harassed
- Chivalry / sense of duty / hero status
- A moral sense of doing what is right
- Getting involved if the situation is safe
- The presence of other bystanders (increasing the feeling of safely intervening)

Middle-aged transit riders (compared to youth and seniors) and women indicated more willingness to intervene.

Barriers for bystanders on transit to intervene include:

- Concerns about personal safety / becoming a target of harassment
- Not knowing how to intervene
- Not knowing if intervention is needed (lack of confidence, fear of embarrassment)
- Hesitancy to deal with authority; overall distrust about interacting with the legal system

Transit riders who have a visibly different appearance or accent and youth expressed a lower likelihood to intervene because of the fear of becoming the target of harassment themselves.

- The presence of other bystanders (thinking someone else will intervene)

Potential intervention actions

Six bystander intervention actions were tested. Some intervention actions resonated more than others **based on the bystander's personal assessment of their safety.**

Based on participant findings, the project team proceeded with using 'De-escalate' instead of the word 'Diffuse.' 'De-escalate' was easier for people to recognize and relate to in describing the actions originally attributed to the word 'Diffuse'.

- **Direct actions** tested were Direct, Diffuse, Distract
 - Direct actions were less endorsed by transit riders
 - Some participants suggested training so people feel equipped to use these actions
 - Some participants did not relate to the word 'Diffuse'

Intervention action 'Document' was not preferred by transit riders identifying with minority populations, as they feared video or other records being used against them or to make fun of them.

- **Indirect actions** tested were Delegate, Document, Delay
 - Indirect actions received mixed endorsement
 - 'Delay' was endorsed by many participants. There were some concerns this action could 'victim-label' the person being harassed
 - Reluctance to involve authority to 'Delegate'

Preliminary campaign messages

Preliminary campaign messages focused on recognizing harassment or empowering bystanders were tested in Phase 2.

- Recognition message, 'if it's unwanted, it's harassment' was preferred over 'no such thing as minor'
- Empowerment messages, 'we are all responsible' received the most favourable feedback followed by 'you can make a difference.' The message 'it feels good to help' garnered mixed feedback as participants mentioned that 'helping' may not feel good in all instances, instead leading to feelings of fear, concern and/or anxiety

Campaign development suggestions

- Ensure accessibility: use plain language, translations, videos, high contrast images
- Use a mix of verbal and non-verbal intervention actions suggestions
- Use tagline or hashtags

Baseline pre-campaign measures

Women and Indigenous survey respondents are more likely to indicate having witnessed gender-based violence or harassment on transit in the past three months.

- 12% of survey respondents (n=822) indicated having *witnessed* gender-based violence or harassment on public transit in the past three months (from the survey data collection dates), of which (n=103), 58% indicate there was intervention either by them or someone else

Women respondents are more likely to indicate having experienced gender-based violence or harassment on transit in the past three months.

- 5% of survey respondents (n=822) indicated having *experienced* gender-based violence or harassment on public transit in the past three months, of which (n=45) 4% indicate someone intervened to help them
- 47% of survey respondents (n=822) agreed that if they witnessed gender-based violence or harassment on public transit, they would intervene
- 26% of survey respondents (n=822) agreed that they know how to safely intervene when someone experiences gender-based violence or harassment on public transit

CAMPAIGN DEVELOPMENT

The findings from the research informed campaign development in terms of language, relatability and comfort with the recommended actions among diverse bystanders.

Based on the research findings, the campaign is designed to:

- Motivate and empower bystanders to act in a manner that is safe for the bystander and for the person who was harassed
- Provide an array of potential intervention actions based on an individual's assessment of their own safety and comfort

The campaign design was tested for readability for people with different visual abilities and uses:

Research findings gave shape to the campaign concept "Give Voice to your Inner Voice." This concept was best supported by research.

- Plain language for the potential intervention actions
- Print, digital, audio ads, video and web to deliver messages
- A thoughtful and intentional approach to convey the concept using a series of 'graffiti-style' words to depict the inner voice that tells us when something isn't right

HOW THE CAMPAIGN GUIDES THE PUBLIC ON THE SIX INTERVENTION ACTIONS

Direct actions (if you feel safe intervening)

Be Direct - be vocal, call out what's happening. Ask if the person being harassed is okay.

De-escalate - speak calmly and slowly to everyone involved. Avoid telling the initiator to calm down.

Distract - draw the initiator's attention away from the situation. Talk loudly. Ask for directions. Pretend to use your phone.

Indirect actions (if you don't feel safe intervening)

Delay - wait until the situation is over. Then follow up with the victim to see how they are feeling.

Document - scan the situation. Record the time, place and other relevant information. Offer info to the person who was harassed when you feel it's safe to do so.

Delegate - ask for assistance from others. Talk to a fellow bystander, ETS security, peace officer or, in an emergency, call 911.

To request the full Bystander Awareness Campaign research report, contact wsdadmin@edmonton.ca.