

THE SAFETY NETWORK DEVELOPMENT PILOT: WHAT WE LEARNED

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Authors

Saroja Ponnambalam, Social Planning Toronto
Ammar Adenwala, Social Planning Toronto

Editing & Design

Lisa Ferguson, Social Planning Toronto

The **Safety Network Development Pilot** was a partnership between the City of Toronto's Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) and Social Planning Toronto.

The Safety Network Development Pilot is part of the City of Toronto's Community Violence, Wellbeing, and Recovery Pilot (CVWRP), which supported the development, coordination, and implementation of a continuum of community wellbeing and recovery interventions for residents and community members impacted by violent incidents.

We would like to express our gratitude to the City of Toronto (CCRP), residents, stakeholders, agencies, facilitators, and evaluators for helping to make the pilot a success!

Project Team Acknowledgements

Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP), City of Toronto

Scerena Officer, Manager
Kecia Richardson, Supervisor
Kevin Bourne, Acting Supervisor
Saleha Nahdi, Community Development Officer (CDO)
Thipika Balakrishnan, CDO
Matthew Dewar, CDO
Temesgen Ghebremicael, CDO
Blair Hinsperger-Fox, CDO
Shane Jeremiah, CDO
Ashley Kakuk, CDO
Linda Li, CDO
Stephanie Mazerolle, CDO

Social Planning Toronto

Jin Huh, Executive Director
Saroja Ponnambalam, Community Planner
Shadya Yasin, Community Planner
Israt Ahmed, Senior Community Planner

Evaluation Team

Gillian Kranias
Denise Bishop-Earle

Highlights Video

Corex Creative

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In this summary, we share highlights and lessons learned from the **Safety Network Development Pilot (January 2021 to January 2022)**. We hope these learnings strengthen the capacity of local safety networks and support their goals of engagement, advocacy, and education.

WHAT WAS THE SAFETY NETWORK DEVELOPMENT PILOT?

Social Planning Toronto worked in partnership with the City of Toronto's Community Safety and Wellbeing Unit and its Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) on the **Safety Network Development Pilot**.

The pilot was open to residents and agencies participating in local safety networks, tables, and committees supported by the City of Toronto, and was focused on enhancing community capacity to support local leadership and mobilization to address community violence.

Our role was to strengthen CCRP-supported safety networks, tables, and committees across Toronto by:

- hosting a range of **city-wide virtual training series** during the summer and fall of 2021 on topics chosen by safety network members, and **providing resources** on these topics,
- helping to develop and supporting the delivery of safety networks' **local safety projects/initiatives**, which supported residents and community members impacted by violent incidents and contributed to strengthening networks, and
- **co-leading the Building Strong Safety Networks: A Day of Reflection**, a virtual event that brought safety networks from across the city together to collectively reflect on strengths, challenges, and opportunities to build stronger safety networks.



VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS

Residents and agencies across multiple safety networks identified their top priorities for training. Based on the results, we offered workshops on the following 10 topics between June and December 2021. Many of the workshops were offered twice.

1. Resident Leadership (2)
2. Needs Assessments and Resource Mapping (2)
3. Grant Writing Basics
4. Media Communications and Advocacy
5. Community Advocacy and Deputation Training
6. Anti Oppression Training (certificate offered) (2)
7. Conflict Resolution and Mediation (2)
8. Evaluating Impact (2)
9. Virtual Event Planning and Engagement
10. Network Sustainability (2)

A mix of residents and agency staff — 340 unique individuals — participated in the virtual workshops, many attending multiple workshops. The combined attendance for all workshops was 473. The most-attended workshops in order of popularity were Conflict Resolution and Mediation, Anti-Oppression Training, Resident Leadership, and Grant Writing Basics. Although trainings were targeted to safety network members, they were open to anyone, and we were excited to see many residents who had not previously been connected to a safety network in attendance.

Workshops were facilitated and presented by resident leaders with expertise in community safety, Social Planning Toronto staff, and experienced public educators.



Sample promotional materials for workshops

LOCAL SAFETY NETWORK PROJECTS/INITIATIVES

Twenty-five safety networks received \$1,000 each to deliver a local safety project or initiative, or to support resident leadership positions. We categorized project proposals by theme (some initiatives tackled more than one theme):

- youth engagement and youth training activities (10)
- safety network leadership and administration honoraria (9)
- community engagement activities (9)
- community education activities (7)
- community dialogue and healing supports (4)
- mapping/safety audit and planning (3)
- launch of new community/youth safety networks (2)
- safety network communication activities (2)

Some inspiring safety project ideas that were proposed:

- “Positive Ways to Help When Experiencing Trauma”: A project to help youths/teens (ages 10–16) have a better awareness and understanding of the types of trauma and trauma triggers
- creating a health and safety network focused on crisis prevention and looking at social determinants of health to improve neighbourhood safety — including voices of youths, seniors, and BIPOC individuals
- doing a METRAC safety audit training

Safety networks & committees that received pilot funds:

- 7 Creative Community
- Alexandra Park Safety Network
- Beyond 91 Table — Davenport Perth
- Chester Le Safety Network
- Church and Wellesley Safety Network
- Dorset Park Safety Network
- Flemingdon Thorncliffe Community Crisis Response Table (FTCCRT)
- Jane Finch Safety Network
- Kingsview Village Safety Committee
- LHION Safety Committee (Lawrence Heights)
- Malvern Safety Network
- Mending the Crack in the Sky (MCIS)
- Mornelle All-Stars Coalition
- North Etobicoke Residents Council (NERC) Safety Network
- North Etobicoke Youth Safety Committee
- Oakwood Vaughan Neighbourhood Action Partnership (OVNAP)
- Parkdale Safety Network
- Regent Park Safety Network
- Scarborough Village Safety Network
- Sister Power
- St. Jamestown Youth United
- Taylor Massey Oakridge (TMO) Safety Network
- Weston-Mount Dennis, Ward 5 Safety Network
- Willowridge Safety Network
- Woburn Planning Table



Project Contacts

Each safety network had a project contact who supported the delivery of the local project/initiative and acted as a liaison between the network and its trustee organization. Project contacts received an honorarium of \$250 to fulfill this role. We are grateful for their hard work and dedication!

Trustee Organizations

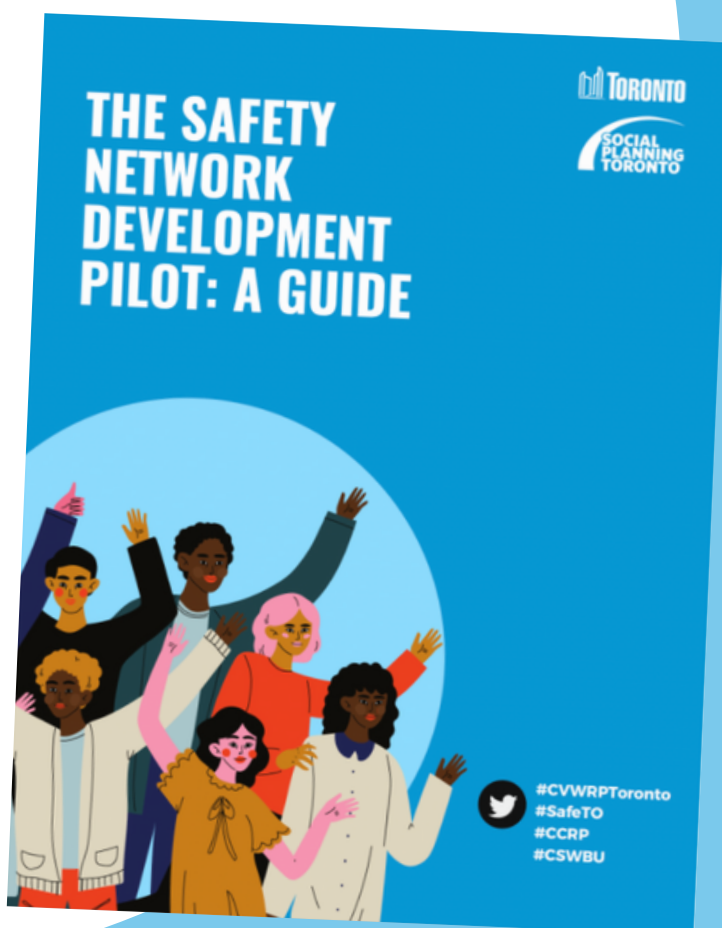
Each safety network had a dedicated “trustee organization,” responsible for holding and delivering the \$1,000 in funding. Thank you, trustees, for supporting networks’ sustainability!

Project Support

Criteria and guidelines for local safety network projects and initiatives were outlined in the user-friendly [Safety Network Development Guide](#), which was available on the [Safety Network Development Pilot webpage](#). Social Planning Toronto staff also supported safety network members who were developing proposals with check-in meetings and email correspondence.

Partnership with CCRP

Throughout the pilot, Social Planning Toronto collaborated closely with Community Development Officers (CDOs) in the City’s Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP) to connect with local safety networks and to ensure that CDOs addressed networks’ concerns about the pilot.



BUILDING STRONG NETWORKS: A DAY OF REFLECTION

On December 8, 2021, Social Planning Toronto and the Community Crisis Response Program hosted a city-wide event, **Building Strong Safety Networks: A Day of Reflection**, on Zoom.

The event brought together 135 people (109 residents and staff from 26 agencies) from all CCRP safety networks across the city to:

- celebrate safety network accomplishments;
- engage in a visioning exercise to identify networks' strengths, challenges, and opportunities; and
- create space for collaborative, solutions-based dialogue.

We opened the event with a group Jamboard exercise, asking network members to share their thoughts on their accomplishments and inspiring models. Here are their responses:

Q1. What are some of your major accomplishments as a safety network?



conducted
safety audits



established a
safety network table



created neighbourhood
resource guides



increased youth &
senior engagement



delivered workshop series
in the community



built trust
in the community



increased inclusivity —
religious & school communities



built safer places



What are some of your major accomplishments as a safety network?



Jamboard exercise responses: networks' major accomplishments

Q2. Are there any models of networks that have inspired you or that you have found work well?

- resident-led networks
- investment in youth
- Harlem communities (New York)
- peer-based collective models
- clinical models of wellness
- Safety Development Pilot Project
- community-wide workshops, conferences, and online forums
- resilient mothers group
- mental health and well-being
- community policing



Building Strong Networks: A Collective Reflection

After the Jamboard exercise, attendees split into breakout groups based on network location (north, south, east, and west Toronto) to discuss collective **strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and results across safety networks** (a "SOAR analysis"). Six key themes resonated across all group discussions:



1. The importance of taking time for self-care. Safety networks are important, but limited resources and the disruption that crises can have on members' lives make burning out a real risk. To build a strong network, members need to take care of themselves first and have adequate mental health supports.



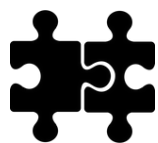
2. Training and support for members. For safety networks to work well, members need clarity about their roles. For example, when a safety network establishes protocols (such as a crisis response protocol or a communications protocol), it helps members understand their roles more clearly. Safety networks also need the right tools — for example, adequate training to engage in crisis intervention and to mobilize supports for the community after critical incidents.



3. A (digital) space for cross-collaboration. To benefit from all the amazing initiatives happening across the city, residents and partners expressed their wish for a shared digital space, such as an app or website, where district-based networks could come together to learn and share resources.



4. Sustained funding for resident advocacy. Safety networks would benefit from dedicated positions for resident advocates — who are the experts of their communities — and funds are necessary to sustain these positions.



5. Support for issues connected to safety. Safety networks play a crucial role in making communities safer and healthier. But "safety" must be considered holistically. Networks need resources and support to target issues connected to safety such as mental health, food insecurity, isolation, and gun violence.



6. Consistent relationship building among stakeholders. Safety networks emphasized the need to continually build relationships with stakeholders in the community such as the Toronto Police Service, healthcare practitioners, educational services, and local businesses. However, to improve the services these stakeholders deliver it is important to recognize the power imbalances inherent within these relationships.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE PILOT

Social Planning Toronto worked with independent, third-party evaluators throughout the pilot to conduct workshop polls, a mid-pilot survey, and two reflection sessions. Safety network members and Community Development Officers shared their thoughts on successes and challenges. Key highlights from the evaluation are detailed below.

Challenges

As in any pilot, a few challenges had to be worked through:

- **Establishing relationships and community outreach took time.** Reaching members of 25 networks during a global pandemic was sometimes tricky. Each community member and agency had their own capacity to engage, and all were impacted, both personally and professionally, by pandemic stresses and changes. Recognizing that safety network members were facing barriers to participation during this difficult period, Social Planning Toronto staff attended network meetings as often as possible to share as much about the pilot as possible in order to strengthen relationships.
- **The initial application process required a lot of effort for a small amount of funding.** Initially, safety networks needed to pitch new projects to access the \$1,000 grants, discouraging some resident leaders, particularly youth, from applying. After listening to resident concerns, Social Planning Toronto and the Community Crisis Response Program simplified the application process for funding and expanded possible uses of funding to include support of existing initiatives and community needs, and honoraria for resident leaders. While these changes increased residents' interest in the funding, the delay in receiving expressions of interest due to the initial, more restrictive, criteria meant that grants were only allocated towards the end of the pilot.
- **"Pilots" can be triggering for communities.** Institutions and funders with power must consider what it means to call a project "a pilot" and how this might negatively impact communities. Residents emphasized that instead of continuing to deliver short-term, one-off pilots, the City needs to provide sustainable and ongoing support for safety networks.

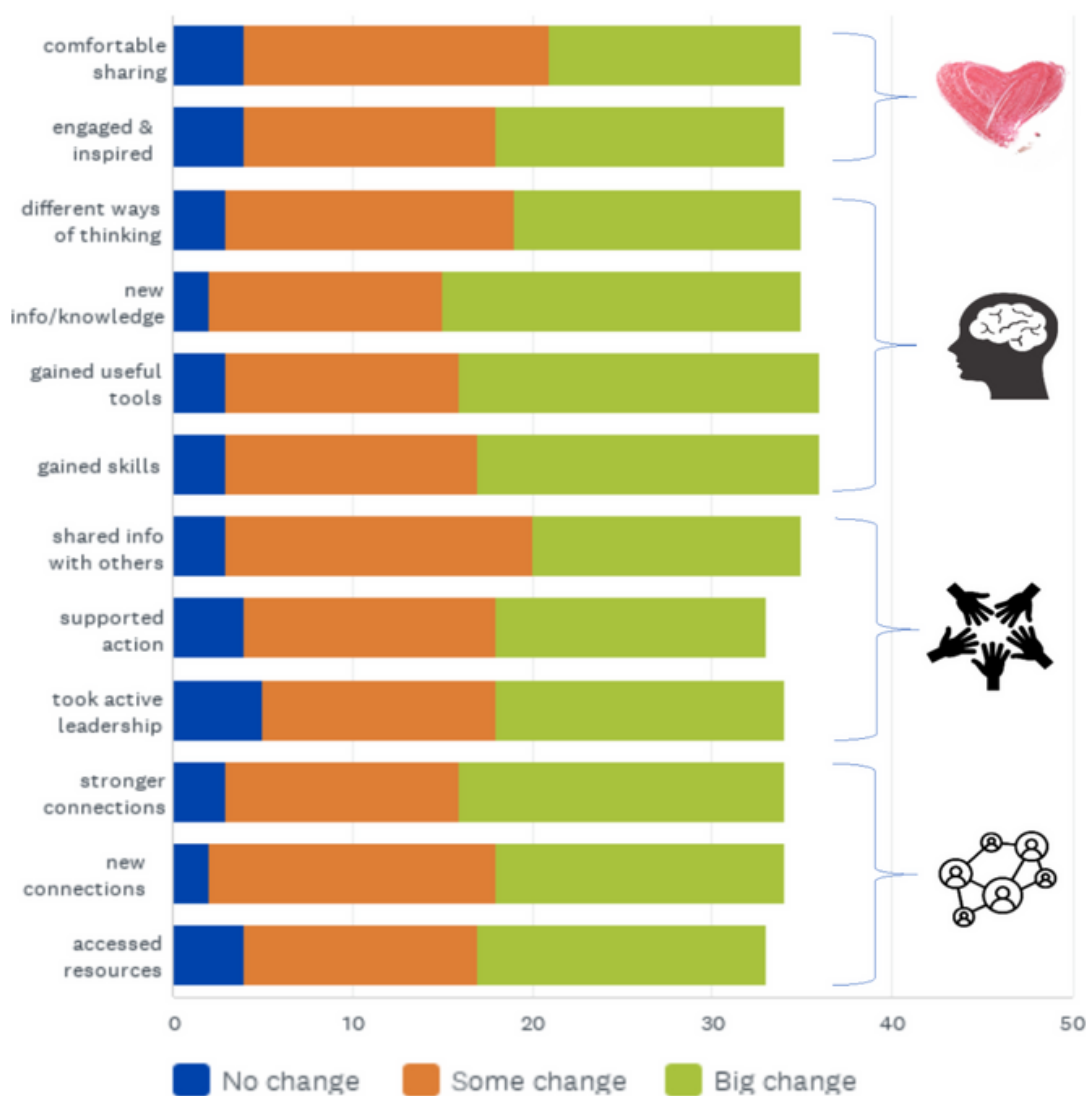


One of the challenges we [discussed] was the term 'pilot'... coming into communities where they're prone to having initiatives or activities coming in and not being...sustainably supported...was kind of like a red flag from time to time."

— Anonymous

Successes

Residents responded positively to Social Planning Toronto's project support and virtual workshops. As the graphic below illustrates, a virtual "Head, Heart and Hands" poll found that most pilot participants felt welcome and comfortable sharing thoughts and engaged and inspired. Most residents gained new, useful information that they could then share with others. What's more, workshops left residents feeling they could support action, take leadership, and build connections within and beyond their communities.



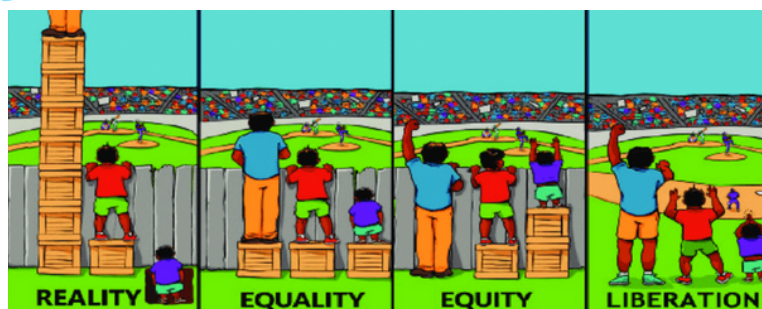
"Head, Heart and Hands" mid project survey results

Training workshops directly equipped residents with tools, knowledge, and skills they could use to support their networks and communities. One resident reported:

“ I felt as though I left each workshop with tangible solutions. The workshop facilitators were great at sharing practices that worked for them and offered many great resources. A 2-hour workshop is limited in the support/knowledge that can be shared — but after each workshop, I felt as though I was walking away with ideas/strategies that I could add to my personal ‘toolkit.’”
— Resident, survey

Workshops also helped residents move from intuitive knowledge to conscious, deeper understanding of concepts. As one participant stated in a reflection session:

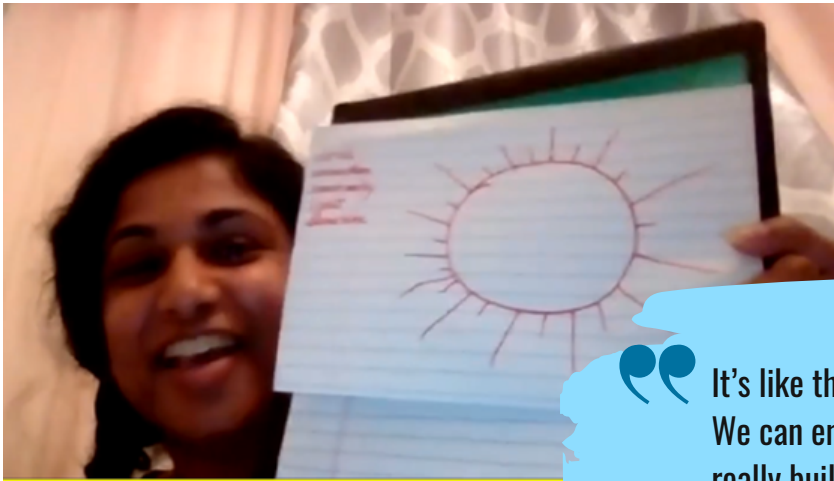
“ I did take in the anti-oppression workshop, and this ['balancing power' graphic from the workshop] really resonated with me...especially the last picture, of 'liberation'...this is what [our networks have] been always aiming for, and it really completed the picture.”
— Resident, reflection session



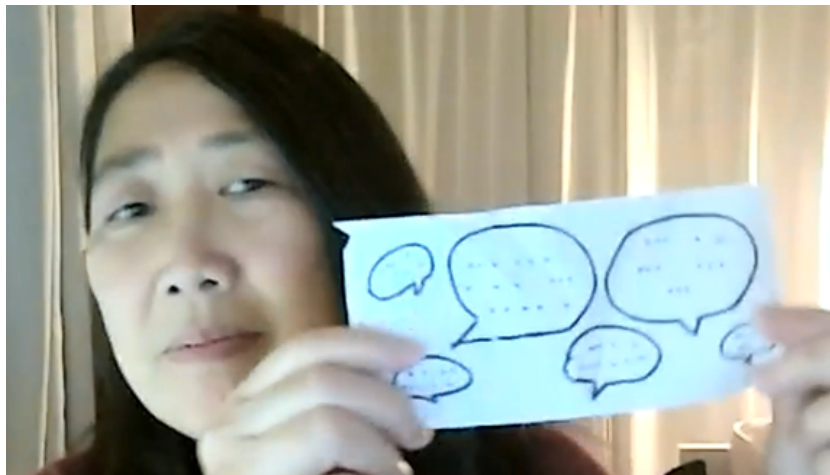
"The difference between the terms equality, equity, and liberation," illustrated;
© Interaction Institute for Social Change. Artist: Angus Maguire

In the reflection session, residents were asked to draw or think of an image that showed what impact the pilot had on them. Here are some of the drawings and comments shared:

“ I [drew] three things...a wrench, which symbolized equipment, like ‘I’ve been equipped’...an arm to symbolize strength, that I’ve gained a lot of strength through these workshops...and then links, like a chain link, to symbolize connection.”
— Resident, reflection session



“ It’s like the sunshine...there’s a lot, when we work together! We can emanate that light from one another and share and really build a network.”
— Resident, reflection session



Resident drawing, reflection session

RECOMMENDATIONS

From the great feedback provided by the safety networks we developed **four key recommendations** for future capacity-building initiatives and plans to support communities develop safety networks:



1. Provide supports and resources that contribute to building stronger safety networks.

- Focus on opportunities to strengthen networks, not just individuals. For example, fund resident participation, reduce community-identified barriers within networks, and regularly connect resident leaders with their City of Toronto peers and decision-makers.
- Provide adequate funding and time to deliver local projects/initiatives.
- Support long-term sustainability and growth of networks.



2. Co-design — meaningfully — with community.

- Include and resource resident voices at the project design table, and provide opportunities for resident input from the beginning of the project.
- Continue to listen to formal and informal feedback from residents and other key stakeholders. Stay responsive by adapting plans and revising strategies.
- Steer away from top-down decision-making.
- Follow up on feedback/recommendations from network members and residents.



3. Build capacity with an anti-oppression lens.

- Use an anti-oppressive and trauma-informed approach in training, because systemic challenges can hold people back no matter what kind of training they receive.
- Take a holistic approach to building network capacity — ensure collaboration, safety, well-being, empowerment, and choice; respect confidentiality; and recognize cultural, historical, gender, and other challenges that communities might face.
- Equip networks with tools and strategies beyond training opportunities; equip them to advocate to decision-makers and make meaningful change in their communities.



4. Build knowledge, confidence, and interdependence with peer spaces.

- Provide peer spaces to allow network members to exchange knowledge and build a set of shared tools and insights — for the community, by the community. Learning isn't a one-way street!

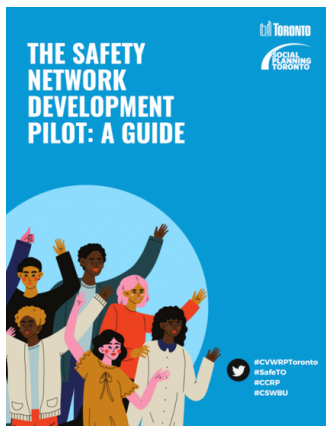
Overall, the Safety Network Development Pilot was successful in building resident knowledge, capacity, and agency. No doubt this will support residents' continuing struggles to make their communities safer and healthier places to live.

APPENDIX: RESOURCES FOR SAFETY NETWORKS

Stay tuned for workshop recordings and a video that shares more key highlights of the **Safety Network Development Pilot** from residents who were involved!

In the meantime, Social Planning Toronto offers the following resources for safety networks:

- the **Safety Network Development Guide**



- slides and other resources from the workshops (access them [here](#))

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A partnership between the City of Toronto's Community Crisis Response Program (CCRP)
and Social Planning Toronto, January 2021 to January 2022

Funded by the City of Toronto

