

# “Parks connect us”



## BENEFIT #6

### **Parks in Lethbridge encourage us to socialize and be active in the community**

Public park spaces provide residents with important and valued spaces to meet neighbours and participate in a plethora of community activities. The 2008 Lethbridge sub-segment of the Alberta Recreation Survey found that the majority (74%) of residents preferred to participate in their favourite recreational activity in a social setting.

A 2004 study published in the Environment and Behaviour Journal found that the presence of green spaces in a neighbourhood were related to the amount of social activity that takes place and stronger social ties between neighbours.<sup>14</sup> Parks also foster social inclusion in a community. Social inclusion is broadly defined as ensuring that all children and adults are able to participate as valued, respected and contributing members of society. It involves the basic notions of belonging, acceptance and recognition. Parks contribute to social inclusion by providing spaces that all segments of the population can enjoy for activities, events or casual use.

A 2006 research initiative in Brooklyn, New York investigated women's activities in urban park spaces. The social benefits and experiences that resulted from usage of urban parks were significantly reflected in the findings of the study. Participants noted that parks were a socially intimate place and that their activities were enriched by the presence of others (e.g. friends, families and strangers). The presence of these social conditions was further identified as a key factor that increased motivation and usage of parks.<sup>15</sup>

A growing understanding of the social benefits that result from the existence of urban parks spaces has led many urban planners and municipal administrators to put an increased focus on ensuring that adequate parks and open spaces are available. A 2012 study found that the provision of high quality public spaces, including parks, is a key factor in enhancing the sense of community in newer urban areas.

