“My Street 2020” Campaign

Campaign: Youth Speak
Theme: Public Space
Focus: Youth voice and participation
Outcome: Young people’s reflections on the impact of Covid-19 on their wellbeing

“Place is the most important correlate of a person’s welfare,” as noted by the World Bank (World Bank, 2009). Public space indeed is often associated with identity, memories and normalcy of everyday routine critical for healthy living. Yet in 2020, place itself became collateral damage as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic that affected cities globally. Public space such as streets, playgrounds and gardens were impacted as governments around the world succumbed to the pressure to lock down cities and towns to curtail the health scare and limit the spread of the pandemic.

“The character of a city is defined by its form: streets and public spaces, as well as buildings. From squares and boulevards to neighbourhood gardens, public space frames city image,” (United Nations, 2015). It is what we do in a space that transforms it into a place of meaning for our lives. One of the impacts of Covid-19 was on the built environment – changing the normal hustle and bustle of a street into vacant space bereft of human connectedness.

Shared use of space and provision is becoming more critical in urban environments. Millions of children, adolescents and youth from low and middle-income countries where space is often a luxury and home, a crowded, shared space of many, find public space to relax, form friendships and express themselves effectively. Streets are public spaces that promote health and well-being through walks, relationships, and build a sense of community, inclusivity, cultural expression, and equitable access for all ages. But the year 2020 brought a challenge to young people’s rights to independent play, as well as socio-cultural and recreational life – the very essence of healthy living.

In 2021, the HCA program is launching the “My Street” Campaign to capture young people’s observations, experiences and perspectives as they lived through lock downs, social distancing, online schooling, and no play during the pandemic in 2020. Our virtual microphone will visit different urban environments and capture young people’s voices, asking them how their street changed and city transformed during Covid-19, and in some cases how their city did not change and a street remained the same. A lack of change, due to an absence of city regulation or insufficient community adherence to safety protocols, impacted wellbeing in different but equally notable ways.

Participants will share what their streets were like and how they changed during the pandemic, and what became the new normal, including how it impacted the wellbeing of young people and their families, friends and communities. They will reflect on:

1. What kind of street they lived on? Explain different perspectives, cultures and usage of the street as a young person and reflect on the transformation due to Covid-19.
2. What was the impact of lock down and restrictions on young people and their communities?
3. What did they feel when there was a lack of measures in their city to address the spread of Covid-19?
4. How did young people adjust their use of streets while practicing social distancing? What alternate solutions did they source during these times to feel normal?
5. How did they support their friends and communities during this difficult time?
6. How did they use their streets before the pandemic and now during Covid restrictions?
7. What changes did they observe about community behaviours, what did they value about their street before, and what affected them the most about the change?
8. What is their advice to their city government and community leaders to better improve the response to Covid-19, how can they improve the environment?