PUTTING THE PIECES IN PLACE: CHILDREN, COMMUNITIES AND SOCIAL CAPITAL IN AUSTRALIA

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beyond' to support the research and to ensure children were able to participate freely and actively. This research would not have been possible without such support and commitment. We would also like to thank the teachers in each of the schools, who provided support to the research and inspired us with their commitment to education.

Finally, our greatest debt of gratitude is to the children who participated in the research; to each we owe an enormous thank you. This research would not have been possible without the enthusiastic participation, commitment, and remarkable insights of the children. It was a great privilege to hear children's views and experiences of how some aspects of community are failing them and to learn what makes strong, supportive communities for children. The children who participated in the research were generous with their time and insights, and hopeful that their ideas, perspectives and experiences would be taken seriously. It now falls to adults to fulfil those hopes – and to act.

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II. Executive summary

What do children in Australia value about their communities? How are communities supporting children? How are communities failing them – and why? These questions underpin the 'Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia' research project, and shape this report.

Over the past fifteen years, governments at Commonwealth, state and local levels have been concerned with strengthening communities as part of a policy shift towards 'local solutions to local problems' and to place-based initiatives. This policy shift was heavily influenced by ideas of social capital. Children are often assumed to benefit from 'strong communities', yet we know very little about children's views on what makes a strong, supportive community. Indeed, we know very little about children's places and roles within Australian communities. If policies and initiatives are to be inclusive of children – as this report argues they should – it is crucial that we understand children's views and experiences of their communities.

Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia is one of the first research projects to explore in depth what children in middle childhood think about their communities, how children experience 'community' on a daily basis, and what vision they have for their communities. For the purposes of this research, 'middle childhood' is defined as the eight to twelve year age group. The project was funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage Grant, and carried out in collaboration with The Benevolent Society and NAPCAN (National Association for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect).

This report presents the findings of participatory, rights-based research with 108 children aged between eight and twelve years across six sites in eastern Australia. The findings provide important insights into communities from a child's standpoint.

This research also demonstrates children's capacity to engage in detailed discussion and deliberation about 'what works' – and 'what is broken' – within their community. Additionally, it demonstrates the important insights children can provide into how to fix that which is broken.

Based on the children's conceptualisation of community, we use the following definition of community in this report:

> Community is a social space within which people are personally connected and known to one another. Within this social space, people provide friendship and support to one another and work towards common goals. Respect and kindness are very important. In times of severe difficulty or crisis, communities need to be supported by helping professionals, such as police and ambulance services. The people who make up a community can be diverse.

The findings presented here are structured around the 'Community Jigsaw'. The Community Jigsaw is an analytical tool, based on children's priorities of what makes a strong and supportive community. The Community Jigsaw is shaped by four overarching categories:

(i) **Relationships** as forming the basis – the very heart – of community;

(ii) **Safety** as essential to children's perception and experience of community;

(iii) **Physical places** as important to children's experience of and connection with community;

(iv) **Resources** as important in contributing to, and often shaping, experience of community.

Within each of the four categories, several sub-categories emerged, resulting in a rich mosaic based on children's views and experiences. The sub-categories can be seen as forming pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. When all pieces are in place, communities are strong and supportive of children. The more pieces missing, the less supportive the community is of children. At some point so many pieces are missing that the jigsaw falls apart. At this point, communities have become dysfunctional places from children's perspectives.

The children who participated in this research identified as important, issues which are represented by the following pieces of the Community Jigsaw:

(i) **Relationships**: Family; Time with Parents; Friends; Good Neighbours; Caring People; Being Listened To; Community Get-togethers.

(ii) **Safety**: Positive Interactions; No Violence; No Bullying; No Drunkenness.

(iii) **Physical Places**: Home; A Good Environment; Inclusive Spaces.

(iv) **Resources**: Financial Security; Public Services.

In our representation of children's input in the Community Jigsaw (discussed in section 4 of this report), we have left the edges unfinished, indicating that this research is not exhaustive or comprehensive, and there is potential for the Community Jigsaw to be refined and extended, based on future research with children. Central to each piece of the jigsaw are the vitally

important concepts of respect and inclusion.

Key Findings

Too often communities are failing to include children or to make them feel safe, respected and listened to.

While there are many positive aspects of children's experience of community, the majority of children who participated in this research described being treated in a rude, dismissive or hostile manner by the adults in their communities. Many children spoke of being disconnected from the adults in their community, including their parents. Long working hours, time burdens, injury, illness and a preference for socialising with adults were all reasons provided by children for the limited time they were able to spend with their parents. This is highly relevant for children's experiences of community, as many children described their parents as actual or potential catalysts for their own involvement in their communities. It is important to emphasise here that children's insights indicate that lack of time with parents is not just a consequence of parental choice. Social factors, including financial pressures, (adult) peer expectations, and social and labour market policies, are often crucial determinants of how families structure their time. Children who described spending more time with their parents were also more likely to speak more positively about their communities.

While the most intimate relationships are central to children's sense of community, so too are broader, less familiar relationships. Children who knew their neighbours and had positive daily interactions with people around them (both adults and children) were more likely to feel safe, included and respected within their communities. Supportive and respectful relationships, including intergenerational relationships, are essential to children's positive sense of community.

Many children do not feel safe within their communities.

This striking finding is far more likely to be the case for children living in areas identified as 'disadvantaged'. This research provides important insights into why children feel unsafe, with three factors being particularly significant. First, children – particularly in the disadvantaged communities – are fearful and distrustful of people with whom they are not familiar. Many children spoke of 'stranger danger'. Second, children felt threatened by car-related aggression and violence – such as speeding in residential areas; drivers yelling at or abusing children; and drivers performing burn-outs, donuts and driving dangerously – which creates streetscapes that are exclusive of, and hostile to children. Third, and very importantly for children, excessive use of alcohol in public spaces – and the drunken and often violent behaviour that accompanies it – makes children feel highly vulnerable and damages the potential for children to feel safe and included in their communities.

The socio-economic status of a community and a child's family status matters.

Children living in the four disadvantaged sites were far more likely than those living in the more advantaged sites to describe being exposed to negative elements of their community. This research finds that when parents have more resources, they are better able to shield children from the more negative elements of community, such as anti-social or dangerous behaviour, the ways cars are driven, and public drunkenness. Children in a site that was relatively advantaged were far more likely than those in the disadvantaged sites to feel safe in their community, to know their neighbours, and to be on friendly terms with adults. They were also less likely, than children in the disadvantaged sites, to experience or witness public drunken behaviour. While children in the most advantaged of the sites described feeling safe in their community, they indicated that they were often quite disconnected from their local community. They described very busy schedules that allowed them little time to get to know the people living near them or to be involved in their community outside of school.

The children who participated in this research were somewhat ambivalent as to whether or not school was part of their community.

Children considered school to be a very important part of their lives, but some described it as an institution rather than part of the community. School friends, however, were generally considered to be central to children's communities. School was variously described as part of the community, as a community in and of itself, and as separate from community. This raises

important questions about policies that assume school is the most important – or only – aspect of a child's community.

A child standpoint on community is different from a dominant, adult-centric standpoint.

This research demonstrates powerfully that adults' perceptions of the strength or inclusiveness of a community should not be used as a proxy for children's perspectives and experiences. This research also indicates that a child standpoint challenges us to confront the ways in which communities are hostile towards children and create for them a sense of distrust or threat. At the same time, many of the issues raised by children are likely to also be important for adults, such as the need to prevent public violence, concerns about public drunkenness, and the importance of providing public services.

If policy makers and service providers are concerned that communities be safe and supportive places for children, it is crucial that children's perspectives, experiences and priorities are listened to and taken seriously. This means recognising that 'adult solutions' are not always solutions for children. An example here is the way that the provision of children's rooms by many clubs and other venues serving alcohol and providing gambling works differently for adults and for children. While children's rooms are presented as 'family friendly' and as a means of keeping children happily occupied while parents socialise, a significant proportion of children involved in this research who used such rooms had a different view. They described children's rooms as boring and exclusionary; something to be endured while adults have fun. The issue here is not the children's rooms per se, but the way in which children are excluded by adult forms of socialising.

Findings point to the need for indicators highlighting issues significant to child-inclusive communities.

Another important policy relevant finding of this research is that children should be explicitly included in measures or indicators designed to determine community strength, social capital or social inclusion. It is not sufficient that child relevant indicators focus only on 'developmental' issues, but that measures of social inclusion, social capital and community strength ask children directly about their sense of voice or empowerment, inclusion or safety. Here, we can learn from the omissions of the indicators developed by the federal Social Inclusion Board (in operation from 2007-2013). While this research suggests that many of the

indicators developed were considered very important by children, people under the age of fifteen were excluded from most.

Policy Implications

Arising from the findings of this research are a number of policy implications. These are listed below and are placed in context and discussed in the relevant sections of the report. We use the term 'policy implications' rather than 'policy recommendations' so as to refrain from being prescriptive. Our primary aim is to contribute to much needed debate about the ways communities can support and include children.

Relationships

1.   Labour market policies, including workforce participation requirements placed upon parents (such as those implemented through Centrelink), should take serious account of the centrality of time spent with parents to children's sense of community.

   1.1.   In particular, Centrelink participation requirements should be eased to take account of parents' caring role and the importance of time spent with children not only in the early years but also in middle childhood.

2.   Planning and design processes should take greater account of creating entertainment and recreation spaces that are genuinely child-inclusive.

   2.1.   Clubs and similar venues should redesign their 'children's room' so that they are supportive and inclusive places, rather than exclusionary places, for children. Such redesign should be based on serious, meaningful and independent consultation with children.

   2.2.   Clubs and similar venues should promote and adhere to limits on the length of time parents are permitted to leave children in 'children's rooms'.

3.   Broad-based community events should be supported with particular attention to making them inclusive of children. Such events should be alcohol-free or severely restrict the amount of alcohol available.

4.   Local, place-based initiatives designed to create familiarity between neighbours, including children, should be promoted by both government and non-government agencies.

5.	Measures and indicators of social inclusion, social capital, community strength and support (such as those developed by federal, state/territory and local governments) should explicitly include data relating to children in middle childhood, including self-assessment where such an approach is used for other age cohorts in the community.

6.	Attention should be given by agencies such as the Human Rights Commissions and Children's Commissioners at federal and state levels to promoting social attitudes that respect, value and respect children.

Safety

7.	Policies at all levels of government must recognise and respond to the fact that excessive use of alcohol by adults, and associated drunken behaviour, has a direct and negative impact on children's sense of safety and inclusion in their communities.

8.	State and local governments should act to curb excessive public use of alcohol by adults, including by:

	8.1.	Providing resources for closer monitoring of alcohol serving venues by licensing bodies and law enforcement agencies;

	8.2.	Greater promotion, funding and enforcement of Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) requirements.

9.	Greater attention should be paid to the social impact of licensing new alcohol-serving venues and extending the trading hours of existing venues. There is a particular need to restrict licensed venues in residential areas.

	9.1.	Social impact analyses should be seriously undertaken and should not amount to 'tick-a-box' exercises.

	9.2.	Specifically, child-focused social impact analyses should be developed and implemented as part of the licensing process.

10.	State and local governments should develop and strengthen existing strategies to make public spaces such as parks safe and attractive for children, including children in middle childhood. More resources should be allocated to maintaining parks as alcohol-free, drug-free, clean spaces where communities, particularly families and children, can socialise.

Places

11. Children should be consulted in the planning and design of public spaces, in line with child-friendly city principles (such as those set out by UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/Australia-s-children/Child-Friendly-Cities.aspx).

12. Planning processes should take greater account of gender differences in boys' and girls' use of public spaces, with particular attention to fun and inclusive places for girls in middle childhood.

13. Public spaces for children should take account of the needs and preferences of children in middle childhood, and should cater to children's desire for places that are inclusive and safe, but also fun and exciting, with scope for engaging in high energy play and games.

14. New suburbs and housing estates should be designed and built with adequate footpaths to allow children to move safely around their neighbourhoods. Attention should be given to maintenance of paths in existing suburbs.

15. Place-based services should be assessed to ensure they are genuinely inclusive of, and accessible to children.

16. 'Communities for Children' and similar initiatives should ensure that children are identified as stakeholders and are consulted on the types of services that are appropriate in a given area.

Resources

17. National, state and local government initiatives providing services focusing primarily on early childhood should be extended to provide for children in middle childhood, as appropriate to their needs.

18. Proposed cuts or expansions to services, such as police, hospitals and family benefits, should be assessed for their impact on children.

School

19. Initiatives designed to build strong communities for children should recognise that school is only one aspect of children's communities – and sometimes not the most

important aspect. Initiatives to build strong communities for children should not rely exclusively on schools.

20.   If the role expected of schools is expanded to include community strengthening and building, individual schools much be resourced adequately to play such expanded roles.

21.   The development of school curricula at national and state levels should consider evidence on the negative, as well as positive, aspects of school homework, and on the impact of homework on other aspects of children's lives and development.

PART ONE: BACKGROUND AND APPROACH

Chapter 1.   Introduction

The Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia research project aims to contribute to community strengthening and social inclusion policies, initiatives and services which are child-responsive and child-inclusive. To achieve this aim, we have sought to understand what community means to children, what they value about community, and what they wish to change. This research was is premised on the belief that it is not possible to understand the ways in which communities support, or fail to support children, without asking children.

The research was shaped by the following questions:

- How do children define, describe and value their communities?
- In what ways do children participate in their communities?
- How do children engage with and contribute to networks within their communities?
- How do children contribute to and benefit from social capital within their communities?
- What do children wish to change about their communities?
- What would make community strengthening interventions successful from children's perspectives?

This report presents the findings of in-depth research undertaken between 2010 and 2013 with 108 children, aged between eight and twelve years, across six sites in eastern Australia.

This report is divided into two broad parts, each with several sections. Part One provides a discussion of our epistemological and methodological approaches. Here we set out the principles that underpin the research and shaped the choice of methods: an outline of the methods used, a review of the literature, and a brief overview of relevant policies in Australia.

Section 1 provides a detailed discussion of the research design, a review of the literature relating to social capital, and a critical overview of relevant policies. Section 2 provides a discussion of our epistemological and methodological approaches. Here we set out the principles that underpin the research and shaped the choice of methods. In particular, we

introduce and discuss concepts of generational ordering and a child standpoint, which are fundamental to the approach taken in this research. We also provide an overview of 'child-centred research workshops', which were used in this research. Sub-section 2.4 describes the methods used. Section 3 provides an overview of the participations and sites.

The framework for analysis used in this research is detailed in Section 4. Here we introduce the 'Community Jigsaw', which reflects the priority issues identified by children across all sites, provides a framework for our analysis, and structures this report.

Section 5 provides a review of the social capital literature, which has contributed to the intellectual foundation of this research. Section 6 provides a critical overview of relevant policies.

Part Two of this report presents the findings of the research with children and is structured around five key dimensions of community: relationships, safety, places, resources, and school. Four of these dimensions – relationships, safety, places, and resources – structure the Community Jigsaw. A fifth dimension – school – is also discussed. Each section begins with a brief overview of the relevant literature, with the aim of examining the extent to which children's views and experiences, as illuminated by this research, support or challenge existing understandings. Each section then details and analyses what children told us and, finally, provides the policy implications arising from this research. Policy implications are also provided at the beginning of this report.

Chapter 2. Research design

Epistemology, methodology and methods are crucial concepts in any research seeking to gain in-depth insight into the ideas, perspectives, priorities and lived experiences of individuals or social groups. Carter and Little (2007: 1316) describe these as providing the "framework for planning, implementing and evaluating the quality" of research. It is these crucial facets of research that ensure rigour and robustness and, importantly, shape the position of participants within research. Detailed explanation of frameworks used in research with children is particularly important, given that the inclusion of children as active participants, rather than as passive subjects of research, is relatively recent, frequently contested, and often presented with a lack of clarity about underlying values and assumptions of the researcher. When the values underpinning research are not made explicit, it is not possible to engage in dialogue about the epistemological and methodological approach.

2.1 Our epistemological approach

Our epistemological approach in this research is informed by more than three decades of scholarship in the tradition of the social studies of childhood, which situates children as producers and reproducers of social knowledge who actively engage with, interpret and influence their social contexts (see Mason and Falloon 2001; James, 2009; Corsaro, 2009; Bessell, 2010). Social studies of childhood have been central in reconceptualising ideas about children and childhood, and identifying children as social actors. The concept of children's agency has been used to recast children from objects of socialisation to members of their societies with their own life projects and standpoints. Children have been brought to the conceptual foreground (Alanen, 1994).

As children's lives, experiences and perspectives have been rendered conceptually visible, the nature of social relations and social hierarchies has been revealed. Pioneering work by Jens Qvortrup in the late 1980s emphasised the importance of studying childhood and adulthood, not as stages of life (whereby children eventually attain adulthood) but in a relational sense, whereby intergenerational relations occur within a structured and stratified social system. Childhood is not merely a (transitionary) stage of life, but a 'social status' (Qvortrup, 1987: 19). Alanen's groundbreaking work on generational ordering demonstrates the nature of children's location within social structures. Alanen (2009: 162) argues that

"...children's lives and experiences are, in addition to being gendered, classed, raced, and so on, also – and first of all – generationed." For Alanen, social analyses that take generational order seriously are able to recognise that not all that is known or observed about children's lives and experiences can or should be attributed to their 'childness'.

Following on from such theoretical interpretations of childhood and children's social status, our epistemology is shaped by a conceptualisation of children as (i) social actors who experience and influence their social worlds in unique ways and (ii) are socially positioned as a result of generational ordering. We recognise that children are not a homogenous group, but ordered by gender, class, race, age.

Acknowledging the way social relations order the lives of children, our epistemological approach is influenced by standpoint theory. Here, we draw on both the feminist origins of the concept and its more recent application to childhood studies. Hartsock (1981: 36) argues that the power of feminist methods of research is their ability to connect everyday life with the analysis of the social institutions that shape that life. This idea is central to the epistemological position of this research. We aimed to illuminate children's lived experiences and to gain deep insights into their everyday lives and their priorities, concerns and visions for their communities. Yet, we also aimed to understand those experiences, priorities, concerns and visions within the social institutions that shape children's lives and designate their social status and relations.

Swigonski (1994: 390) provides a useful summary of the ideas underpinning feminist standpoint theory:

> A standpoint is a position in society, involving a level of awareness about an individual's social location, from which certain features of reality come into prominence and from which others are obscured. Standpoint theory begins with the idea that the less powerful members of a society experience a different reality as a consequence of their oppression.

Fattore, Mason and Watson (2009: 59) observe that standpoint theory values the knower as the framer of knowledge. Thus, they argue that standpoint theory requires researchers to acknowledge children "as the sources of authoritative knowledge about their own world and as active agents in shaping and interpreting that world, constructing meaning and purpose much as adults do." In order to acknowledge, respect and value children's knowledge, it was

essential that we approached this research in a way that both illuminated and countered generational ordering and the power structures that are implicit in that ordering. In research, power manifests in child-adult relations and lay-professional relations. Taking this into account, both our methodology and methods were carefully designed to both recognise, and to the greatest extent possible, diffuse power relations and potentially negative aspects of generational ordering that place children in a subordinate position. We were also conscious of embracing the potentially positive dimensions of child-adult relations, whereby adults take responsibility for actively creating a space within which children feel safe, supported, and valued. This meant that within the research context, we validated children's views as important and meaningful.

Central to our epistemological position is the idea of research as a constructionist enterprise, whereby researchers and participants are co-constructors of meaning (Fattore *et al*., 2009: 59). As Fattore *et al*. (2009: 59) point out, this approach can be "contrasted with seeing meaning as something that researchers 'create', drawing on the data they have 'collected'." For us as researchers, this meant both working collaboratively with participants to understand their perspectives, priorities, and experiences, and returning to them to test our interpretations of what they had told us.

The value of this approach is illustrated by the following example. In one community, children spoke of alcohol as a problem, but it was not a dominant theme, as it had been in other communities. Other issues seemed more pressing for children. When we returned for a follow-up session, the researcher shared this 'finding' with children and asked if it was correct. One boy responded immediately "No way. No, you've got that wrong. Alcohol is a real problem here." Other children joined in the discussion, which became expansive. While two of the twenty children said they didn't really see alcohol as a problem – but as a means by which some adults have fun or relax – others strongly argued that the overuse of alcohol was a problem in their community, even though some children said that it did not impact on them directly. Had we relied on our analysis of the data we had initially collected, without checking back with the children, we would have created knowledge that did not accurately reflect children's experiences and standpoint(s). By co-creating knowledge with children, that knowledge is a more robust reflection of the social worlds in which children live.

2.2 Our methodological approach

In designing this research, we were cognisant of the distinction between methodology and methods, which is particularly important in undertaking research with children (Bessell, 2009). Research with children often focuses heavily on the use of methods considered to be appropriate, innovative or 'fun' for children, sometimes to the exclusion of serious consideration of methodology. Methodology can be defined as the principles and theoretical perspectives that underpin the research (Burnham *et al*., 2004: 4) and is guided by the epistemological approach adopted in the research. The methodological principles and theories come together as the research design (Crotty, 1998: 7), which in turn shapes the choice of methods and the ways in which methods are used. Method refers to the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyse data (Crotty, 1998: 3). Methods are essentially tools but they are at the 'sharp end' of research; they are what children experience and as such are important. It is, however, the methodology that determines the way in which researchers and participants engage and the position that children occupy within the research. As argued elsewhere (Bessell, 2009: 17) methods alone are incapable of ensuring that children are engaged in research in positive and meaningful ways.

In addition to being shaped by our epistemological position, our methodology is underpinned by two sets of principles: participatory research principles and rights-based approaches to research.

2.2.1 Participatory principles

Participatory research is foundational to our epistemological approach. Much of the literature on participatory research focuses on participatory techniques, which is valuable and relates directly to the design and choice of methods. Here, however, our concern is less with *techniques* and more with the ways in which *principles* of participation inform methodology. Cornwall and Jewkes (1995: 1668) suggest "the key difference between participatory and other research methodologies lies in the location of power in the various stages of the research process." Illuminating and dislodging power hierarchies was central to our epistemological approach and practically important, given that the research occurred in schools, where child-adult power relations are institutionalised.

Thomas and O'Kane (1998: 336-337) argue that participatory principles are one means of ensuring that research is ethical. They suggest giving children control over the research

process as a strategy for both participatory and ethical research. Participatory research is often closely associated with particular methods that are highly accessible and engaging, and over which participants have choice and control. Equally important as methods, is the framing of the research and the attitude of the researchers. The most participatory methods may not feel participatory if imposed on people or used in a manner that entails judgement or dismissal on the part of the researcher. In this research, we were concerned not only with the outcomes of the research (important as they are) but also with the experience of those who participated in it. Our aim was to ensure the experience of being involved in the research was a positive one for children, and one that created a genuine space for them to share their ideas.

Genuinely participatory research begins with wide consultation, including with participants, on the research topic, aims and questions. In this research, we determined the research aims and questions in close collaboration with the industry partners, but not with children. Thus, in its conceptualisation, this research was not fully participatory. Nevertheless, we sought to ensure that participatory principles were centrally incorporated into the research in the early stages of design. Most significantly, we did not determine any prior definition of 'community.' Rather, methods were designed to provide participating children with the opportunity to define community themselves. Children's own definitions then provided the basis for all subsequent discussions. On occasion, the researchers introduced different concepts of what is typically understood as community, not to replace children's definitions, but to investigate whether other definitions of community had resonance for children. For example, in most sites children did not mention 'virtual' communities (Facebook or other forms of social media). After extensive discussion, researchers asked children whether they considered virtual communities to be part of their community. The aim here was not to challenge children's definitions, but to genuinely seek children's views on the definitions often used by adults (and often assumed to be important to children).

2.2.2 Rights-based research

The second set of principles informing the research, are those of rights-based approaches. Beazley *et al*. (2009: 369) describe rights-based research as acknowledging children's agency, not as the outcome of academic theory, but rather as recognition that they are subjects of rights. Drawing on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, rights-based research requires that children be treated with dignity and respect, and that specific rights be upheld during the research process. Central is the right to information about

the nature and use of the research, as the basis on which children can decide whether or not to be involved in the research. Equally important is the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw from the research at any time. Boyden and Ennew (1997) have argued that the concept of informed dissent, whereby children are able to say 'no' is more important than the concept of informed consent, whereby children may feel obliged to say 'yes'. A rights-based approach requires researchers to ensure that children are able to choose not only if they wish to be involved, regardless of adult consent, but also when and how they wish to engage in the research. This is important in the context where a formalised ethics requirement is for adults to consent to children's participation in research before children are themselves consulted.

2.3 Child-centred research workshops

Our approach to undertaking the research with children was based on the concept of child-centred workshops. Developed by Sharon Bessell in 2008 and used previously in research aiming to understand what 'good quality' education means for children, child-centred research workshops involve group activities that provide space for children to share their individual perspectives and to engage interactively with other children and with researchers as ideas are shared and discussed (see Bessell, 2013).

Each of the child-centred research workshops for this project brought approximately twenty children together, to work both collectively and individually, to explore the meaning(s) of community, to consider what makes a strong supportive community, and identify what (if anything) needs to change or happen if communities are to be genuinely inclusive of both children and adults. The workshops involved between two and four researchers. Children divided into smaller groups, usually of around four to five people, and worked intensively with one researcher. Children were free to choose or swap their groups. They were also free to move between researchers to determine who they felt most comfortable talking with. Children also had the opportunity to have a 'private chat' with a researcher of their choice, if there were issues they preferred not to raise in the group situation. Workshops were audio recorded. Each researcher had a recorder, and children were able to (and did) request that the recorder be turned on or off at any time. Children were able to use the recorder if they wished, to ensure a particular message or thought was recorded.

The atmosphere within the research workshops was variously highly focused and serious, sombre, fun-filled and raucous. The research space was important and the workshops were most effective when there was sufficient space for children to move around freely and to

work in a space of their own choice – for example, at a desk or sitting or lying on the floor. In some cases, both indoor and outdoor spaces were available and children could choose where they preferred to work.

Child-centred research workshops can be highly effective when time is limited. A good deal of the literature indicates the importance of lengthy engagement with children, with ethnographic approaches often encouraged. While long-term and ongoing engagement with children is likely to be ideal, it is not always possible. Moreover, it should not be assumed that children always want researchers in their lives for long periods, or in more intimate and private situations.

Child-centred research workshops make it clear to children that the aim is to undertake research because their ideas are valuable and researchers want to know what they think. Workshops aim to establish a more engaging and interactive space than is possible through interviews, but to avoid sending children mixed messages about the nature of the relationship (i.e., avoiding the, arguably ill-conceived, approach of befriending children in order to gain their confidence).

Child-centred research workshops are particularly effective when the research aims not only to gain insight into children's self-identified experiences and priorities, but also into their proposed solutions to problems or challenging issues. Children have the opportunity not only to share their own ideas, but to bounce ideas off one another, and engage in discussion about creative solutions and responses to social issues.

While those who engage in participatory research with children are well-aware of children's ability to understand complex ideas and propose creative solutions, there remains among many adults, scepticism about the capacity of children in middle childhood (defined here as the eight to twelve age group). A not uncommon response from adults – including researchers and professionals working with children – to our description of our methodological approach has been 'but can children understand complex issues and propose creative solutions?' Here, we provide an example of a group discussion that took place between a group of six children aged between eight and eleven years to illustrate the level on which children can and do engage.

E raised the concern that the cost of housing is too high and leaves families without enough money for other necessities. The group discussed the problem of not having enough money

within a family for several minutes, when E brought the discussion back to the cost of housing. This time, she said that both rents and mortgages are too expensive and argued that both should be capped, so people only have to spend a certain amount of their income on housing. This suggestion triggered considerable debate. H said the idea would not work because builders' wages might go down if the prices of houses go down. M agreed with H's concern and said that if builders earned low wages they might look for other jobs, causing a shortage of builders. E continued to argue her case, and both D and F agreed with her that high housing costs are a problem that should be addressed. F observed that costs had been increasing in recent times. E shared with the group that in her family the high cost of rent was a serious problem and at times her mother was unable to afford food. The children agreed there was a problem and continued to debate what could be done for over ten minutes. As the discussion receded, the researcher asked how they knew so much about the issues. M replied, "We see the paper and we watch the news. We know what's going on. It's just that adults think we don't."

2.4 Methods

A core set of methods were offered to children at all sites. Children were able to choose not to engage in a method if it did not appeal to them. Generally, children engaged enthusiastically in every method, although in a small number of cases children opted to make slight adjustments to the methods. For example, a small minority of children preferred to draw a picture of their community rather than draw a map. Core methods used are discussed below.

2.4.1 Group discussions

The group discussion was the initial research activity at each site, and involved a child-led discussion of what the term community meant to them. Children and researcher(s) sat in a circle (usually on the floor, but on chairs in two cases at the request of children). In early sessions, a toy was thrown to whichever person wished to speak. Others did not speak when another person was holding the toy. In later sessions, at the suggestion of a child, a digital recorder replaced the toy and was passed to each person as they wanted to speak.

The group discussions were important in two ways. First, they set the scene for the overall workshop. Children were encouraged to share their ideas as they wanted to, and all ideas were taken seriously. Researchers, and in some cases other children, asked children to explain

their ideas further, not to justify them, but to ensure the researcher understood what was important. In some cases, children disagreed with one another and provided different perspectives. The researchers sought to ensure that different perspectives were both respected and appreciated and children indicated strongly that they valued the opportunity not only to share their ideas but to debate ideas. Second, the group discussions provided deep insights into the ways children define community, and also into the aspects of their communities that children either value or dislike. The group discussions did not aim to achieve a consensus definition of community, but to canvas and record children's varying ideas about how a community might be defined. They created an environment whereby conversations were lively and wide-ranging. In the original research protocol, it was anticipated that the group discussion would take approximately fifteen minutes. In some sites, children wanted to keep talking and group discussions continued for up to an hour.

2.4.2 Mapping

In the second core method, children were invited to draw a map of their community. Children worked individually on their maps and were given the opportunity to talk privately with researchers about them. Researchers did not seek to 'interpret' maps independently of children, but used the maps to engender conversations with children about their communities. Children were invited to highlight on their maps (using stickers or other symbols) the following:

- the places they like to go;
- the places they prefer to stay away from;
- the things they like to do;
- the people who are important;
- the people they prefer to stay away from (if any).

2.4.3 Poster-making

Children were invited to make a poster with a key message about what makes a good community, what needs to change or what adult decision makers need to think seriously about. Children were given the option of making their poster individually, in pairs or in small groups. The posters were then used as a catalyst for discussion with researchers about what is really important (in either a positive or negative sense) about communities. Children who wished to do so had the opportunity to share their posters with the rest of the group, but were

under no pressure to share.

2.4.4 Messages

Children were invited to write on pieces of paper the things they most liked about their communities and the things they most wanted to change. Children wrote these messages individually and privately and discussed them with the researchers but not with other children.

2.4.5 Drawing

In this activity, children were asked to draw pictures of what a happy and safe community would look like. The drawings were then used as the focus of a discussion about what makes a good community and how children see their role within it.

2.4.6 Opting-out and down-time

Drawing materials were available and children had the option to draw, write or scribble on unrelated topics if they wished to opt out of the research. Children were also able to have 'down-time' if they wanted, and to chat to friends or have a quiet rest if they wanted some time away from the research. In each research session, some children opted out or engaged in down-time, but always for brief periods. In all cases, children re-engaged after a short period of play, drawing, chatting or reflection. Here, methodology was important in creating an environment within which children felt sufficiently comfortable to decide when and how they wished to engage.

2.4.7 Final issues discussion

The final research session culminated with a group discussion, canvassing the issues raised in the research and highlighting the most important issues. As in the initial discussion, there was no intention to reach a consensus. Rather, the aim was for children to ensure their main messages were recorded by the researchers and to ensure that the researchers correctly understood those messages.

All methods were designed to foster conversation with children in ways that made children feel comfortable. In some cases, children did not complete a particular activity (eg: their map) because they instead engaged in discussion about the questions underpinning the activity. Our aim in asking children to draw pictures, create maps or design posters was not to interpret

them as data independent from the children who created them, but to use them as a catalyst for discussion.

2.5 Recruitment and consent

It was the original intention that the research partners would make initial contact with children and their families, explain the research and invite children to participate. In practice this proved difficult, and the researchers decided to work through schools.

Initial contact with four schools was made through the research partners, with follow-up from the researchers, and two schools were contacted directly by one of the lead researchers. The nature and aims of the research were explained to school principals and the schools were invited to participate. In all cases, schools were enthusiastic and extremely supportive of the research. After initial, informal discussions with schools, formal approval was sought from the relevant departments of education.

Schools identified potential research participants. Schools were asked explicitly to identify a range of children, rather than focusing on children considered to be particularly capable or well-behaved. The internal recruitment process varied within schools, with differing levels of 'randomness'. In one school, the principal explained that while she invited children based largely on the idea of randomness, she did exclude a small number of children who she believed would disrupt other children. Interestingly, in that school, several participants indicated their relief that certain children were not involved in the research, due to their 'disruptive' and 'scary' behaviour. Participating children felt that it would have been more difficult for them to express their views had the 'disruptive' children participated. We have no way of knowing whether or not the principal and the participating children had the same individuals in mind. This does, however, clearly dispel any idea that all children will feel comfortable simply because research is undertaken in an 'all-child' environment, as made clear in other research (Mason and Falloon, 2001).

Letters of invitation, explaining the research, were then given to children, who were able to decide whether or not to take a letter of invitation home to their parents. The aim here was to enable children to make their own choice, rather than feeling under pressure. If children indicated interest in participating, letters of invitation, information sheets and consent forms were then sent to parents. There were two cases of which we are aware where children wished to participate, but their parents did not provide consent. This raises one of the very

difficult challenges of making real our epistemological and methodological approach, in a social context where broader child-adult (in this case family) relations are ordered so that children are generally subordinated to adults.

Parents were provided with the lead researcher's contact details should they require additional information. Only one parent contacted the researcher directly, and that was at the conclusion of the research to thank the researchers for providing such a positive experience for her daughter.

Children were also given the opportunity to ask questions about the nature of the research. In one school, following a meeting with five children who were undecided but wanted more information, two girls and a boy decided to participate and two boys decided not to participate.

In line with our rights-based principles, informed consent was sought from children prior to the research and at the beginning of the first research session. Children were advised, and reminded, that they could choose not to participate in any activity and at any time.

No children withdrew from the research, although some children missed some sessions due to illness or other commitments. In some cases, children left the research for a period of time in order to fulfil other commitments (such as sporting commitments) and then returned. Thus, children had the opportunity to engage in the research on their own terms and were able to prioritise involvement in the research alongside their other activities.

2.6 Research ethics

A detailed research protocol was developed to guide the research, with a subsection on ethical principles. The protocol also set out possible ethical challenges and responses. The ethics section of the research protocol did not aim to provide a rigid set of rules and procedures but to assist the research team to think through possible ethical dilemmas and challenges and to consider the range of responses that might be appropriate. The research protocol also formed the basis for the ethics approval processes required by each of the universities involved and by the relevant departments of education.

The Australian National University (ANU) and each of the three relevant departments of education required the completion of a different form of ethics protocol or application. The ethics protocol developed for the ANU ethics process was approved by the ANU Human

Research Ethics Committee on 28 May 2010 (protocol number 2010/161) and was subsequently approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (UWS protocol number H8290). Approval was provided by departments of education in each state where the research occurred, the first in late 2010, the second in early 2011 and the third in late 2012.

While the formal process of seeking ethics approval was an important aspect of the research, it was our epistemological position and methodological approach that provided the ethical framework for the research. We sought to ensure that ethical practice integrated throughout the research from design to our work with children and our analysis and writing up. Our ethical approach was grounded in children's position within the research and shaped by participatory and rights-based principles, rather than merely following a more rigid or formulaic approach to processes of ethics (see Abebe and Bessell, forthcoming 2014).

Chapter 3.   Research participants and sites

This research focuses on children in 'middle childhood', defined here as between the ages of eight and twelve years. Our focus on middle childhood aims to address what we identify as a lacuna in the literature and in public policy. There has been considerable focus on early childhood, when child development is widely acknowledged as critically important, and on adolescence, as young people transition into adulthood. Far less attention has been paid to children between early childhood and adolescence. When middle childhood is considered, it is often in terms of school policies and educational outcomes. This research aims to contribute to correcting the neglect of middle childhood, and to illuminate children's lives beyond the institution of school.

One hundred and eight children – forty-three boys and sixty-five girls – participated in the research. Twenty-three teachers and principals and twenty-one other key adult stakeholders (including policy makers and service providers) were interviewed. Throughout this report, children are referred to by a letter representing either their first name or chosen nick name and, in some cases, their age and the site. Adult participants are referred to by their professional status and sometimes the site.

The research was carried out in six urban sites in eastern Australia. Each site has been given a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the children who participated and to avoid stigmatisation of any particular community.

The research initially involved four sites: Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway. Each of these sites is classified as 'disadvantaged' on key socio-economic indicators (see Table 1) and each was identified for inclusion in the research by the partner organisations. One, and in some sites both, of the partner organisations provided services or support programs in each of these communities, and the research was originally conceived as providing important information about children's views on the strengths and problems in their communities. After conducting research in each of the initial sites, the decision was taken to extend the research to two additional communities not identified as disadvantaged. The reasons for this were two-fold. First, it seemed likely that many of the issues identified by children as undermining their experiences of community – such as excessive alcohol use, feeling unsafe, and having inadequate time with parents – were not restricted to 'disadvantaged' communities. Second,

focusing only on disadvantaged communities could potentially result in inaccurate assumptions about the relationship between disadvantage and children's experience of their community.

The research was extended to include two additional communities: Lakeview and Gardenville. Lakeview is 'average' on most socio-economic indicators, while Gardenville is at the upper-end on all indicators. The inclusion of Lakeview and Gardenville allowed us to provide more comprehensive analysis of children's experience and views of their communities. It is important to note, however, that there are very significant gaps in the selection of sites. This research includes only urban communities, which must be recognised as a shortcoming. It is hoped that future research, ideally using the same epistemological and methodological approach, will focus on rural and remote communities.

Four of the six sites included in this research were culturally and linguistically diverse, and the participating children were representative of this diversity. Children were not required to disclose their ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds, but a large number chose to. Only four children identified as indigenous during the research. It would be valuable for future research to focus on indigenous communities, where very little is known about children's views and experiences of community. Such research should be carried out in close collaboration with indigenous organisations and communities, and should involve indigenous researchers.

3.1 Overview of sites

3.1.1 Riverside

Riverside is located on the periphery of a major city and is identified as experiencing significant social and economic disadvantage. The area is culturally diverse and geographically distinct. The population of Riverside is highly mobile. There is a strong presence of both not-for-profit organisations and government agencies. Child abuse and neglect were identified by these agencies as significant issues in Riverside. In Riverside, children were particularly concerned about personal safety and excessive use of alcohol among adults.

3.1.2 Longridge

Longridge is an outer suburb of a large city, which sprawls along a major road. Key informants observed that there is no clear centre to the suburb and the boundaries are indistinct. Longridge is identified as experiencing socio-economic disadvantage. It is a culturally diverse community, with a significant Pacific Islander population. The population is highly mobile. Safety and excessive use of alcohol among adults were major issues for children in Longridge.

3.1.3 Surfside

Surfside is located two to three hours drive from a major city. Average income is below the national average and unemployment above the national average. Surfside is the least culturally diverse of all sites. The population of Surfside has grown over the past decade as financial pressure and housing costs have pushed families out of the nearest major city. Excessive use of alcohol by adults and violence associated with drunkenness were major issues for children in Surfside.

3.1.4 Parksway

Parksway is a suburb in a large city, with a highly culturally and linguistically diverse population. A large proportion of the population is from an Arabic-speaking background. Parksway has an average income below the national average and an unemployment rate significantly above. Violence, particularly drug-related violence, was a stronger issue in Parksway than in other sites. Some level of religious tension was evident. Differentiation of children's roles based on gender was somewhat stronger in Parksway than elsewhere.

3.1.5 Lakeview

Lakeview is an outer suburb of a city, with clear geographic boundaries. The area is less culturally diverse than other sites (except Surfside). Lakeview has an unemployment rate below the national average and average income slightly above the national average. Children in Lakeview described feeling very safe in their community and described strong social connections.

3.1.6 Gardenville

The children participating at the Gardenville site attended the same school but lived across several suburbs of a city. The profile of children's families is one of socio-economic advantage, with unemployment rates significantly below the national average and average income considerably higher than the national average. The majority of parents of children from Gardenville are tertiary educated and employed in professional occupations. The data provided in the summary table is based on communities from which the majority of children live and is indicative of the socio-economic status of the children who participated in the research at Gardenville. While the communities that are indicative of Gardenville are slightly less culturally diverse than the Australian average, the school population is more diverse than the average. Most children at Gardenville described having quite structured and busy lives, with a number of organised activities outside of school hours.

3.2 Statistical overview of sites

Table 1 provides statistical data on the six sites.

Table 1: Statistical overview of research sites

	Australia	Riverside	Longridge	Surfside	Parksway	Lakeview	Gardenville
ICSEA bottom quarter	25	68	52	41	33	22	1%
ICSEA lower middle quarter	25	16	23	24	22	32	4%
ICSEA upper middle quarter	25	16	23	21	35	26	18%
ICSEA top quarter	25	0	3	13	9	20	77%
Average wage/salary income (2009)	$46,599	$40,076	$38,093	$40,882	$40,051	$50,976	$63,371
Unemployment Rate (2009)	5.0	4.9	10.1	9.1	10.4	2.8	1.1
Unemployment Rate (2010)	5.5	6.1	13.3	8.6	12.7	3.6	1.6
% Population born overseas (2006 Census)	23.8 (Oceania 2.7; NW Europe 7.3; S and E Europe 3.9; MENA 1.4; SEAsia 3.0; NEAsia 2.1; S and Central Asia 1.0; Americas 1.0; Sub-Saharan Africa 1.0)	25.3 (9% Oceania, 9% NW Europe)	23.5 (Oceania 11.4, NW Europe 5.3)	12.8 (NW Europe 7.2)	50.2 (MENA 17.7, SE Asia 10.3, S & E Europe 7.8, NE Asia 5.5)	16.7 (North-West Europe 5.9)	23.1 (North-West Europe 9.5)
% Population speaking a language other than English at home (2006 Census)	16.8	7.3	12.7	3.4	75.9	11.6	11.5
% Population	19.8	15.7	12	15.3	8.8	20.7	31.5

	Australia	Riverside	Longridge	Surfside	Parksway	Lakeview	Gardenville
involved in voluntary work							
% of population caring for own children without pay (2006 Census)	21.3	24.4	28.6	23	22	28.9	17.7
% of population caring for other family members without pay (2006 Census)	11.2	10	11.4	12.6	11.7	9.8	12.3
% with access to internet at home (2006 Census)	63	66.2	62.2	54.8	56.5	79.7	71.9
% living at a different address 1 year ago (2006 Census)	15.5	18.8	21.2	15.9	10.8	12.2	15.5
% living at a different address 5 years ago	40.3	53.8	50.8	44.6	32.6	35.0	36.4
% of population with post school qualification (of population over 15 years)	52.5	48.7	39.5	47.1	44.2	55.3	70.4
Population Density (persons/km2)	2.9	435.8	1453.3	412.5	3802.4	1538.3	793.3
Indigenous Population (% of		1.6	4.0	3.1	0.4	1.3	0.7

	Australia	Riverside	Longridge	Surfside	Parksway	Lakeview	Gardenville
total)							
% population 0-14	18.9	19.6	29.0	20.8	23.3	22.8	17.8

Chapter 4.   The analysis process: co-constructing knowledge about communities

The epistemological approach that underpins this research requires us to consider children's experiences, priorities and perspectives at all stages of the research process in order to identify a child standpoint (see Alanen, 2002). Methodologies for undertaking participatory research with children are well developed and have been extensively debated, implemented and critiqued (see Christensen and James, 2008; Punch, 2002; Beazely *et al*., 2009; Mason and Hood, 2011), with particular attention paid to issues of ethics (see Morrow and Richards, 1996; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998; Christensen and Prout, 2002). Less attention has, however, been given to the analysis of data collected through participatory methods. This relative lack of attention is rather problematic. As Ennew and Plateau (2004) have pointed out, the way in which analysis is conducted determines the extent to which research respects (or fails to respect) the principles of human rights and participation on which our methodology is based.

Fattore *et al*., (2007: 14) highlight the importance of involving children in research as co-constructors of knowledge in both the collection of data and at the analysis stage. To achieve this in their research on well-being, Fattore and colleagues adopted a staged approach, whereby the researchers returned to seek children's clarification on the validity of their interpretations. In this project, we adopted a similar approach, returning to children for what we termed 'follow-up sessions', discussed earlier. After the initial research sessions with children, audio recordings were transcribed and categorised to identify overarching themes. Children's posters, maps and written messages were also examined, in conjunction with the accompanying discussions with the children who had created the visual data, for overarching themes. Categories were then established. The only pre-set category identified at the outset of the research was 'children's definitions of community', all other categories emerged from the data. Categories were cross-referenced to identify the existence and nature of connection between categories. After completing this phase of analysis, we returned to the children for follow-up sessions. During these sessions, we presented to children how we had interpreted their views, priorities and experiences, as well as presenting those of children from other sites. The follow-up sessions resulted in lively discussions around the findings, and were central to our process of analysis. Follow-up sessions were audio recorded and provided an

important source of clarification, validation, and additional data. We then returned to our categories to ensure their validity and to include additional data provided by children during the follow-up sessions.

Interviews with adult participants were also audio-recorded, transcribed and analysed. Given our commitment to developing a standpoint grounded in children's experience of the social world, data gathered from adults was used to provide background and context and to deepen insight, but children's perspectives were used as the basis for the analytic categories. Our aim in the analysis process was not to construct our own interpretation of reality but to understand deeply children's interpretation of 'community', their experiences of their communities, and their views on what is positive about communities and on what needs to change. In this, our focus is best described as emic, rather than etic[1], in that we sought to co-construct knowledge of communities with children not from the perspective of (adult) expert observers.

4.1 Defining community

As discussed, we decided consciously at the outset of this research project not to define community ourselves, but to seek from children their definitions of community. While there were differences between children and across sites, there were many more similarities in children's definitions of community.

Based on child-led group discussions and one-on-one conversations with children, a common – although not universally shared – definition of community emerged. Not surprisingly, some children disagreed with the common definition, while others placed emphasis or priority on different issues. These differences will be discussed in greater detail in later sections. Based on the views of the majority of children across the six sites, community can be defined as follows:

> Community is a social space within which people are personally connected and known to one another. Within this social space, people provide friendship and support to one another and work towards common goals. Respect and kindness are very important. In times of severe difficulty or crisis, communities need to be supported by helping professionals, such as police and ambulance services. The people who make up a community can be diverse.

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[1] We use the terms emic and etic in the anthropological sense. Simply put, 'emic' refers to explanations of behaviours, beliefs or values provided by a person within his or her own culture (or context). 'Etic' refers to explanations of behaviours, beliefs or values provided by an observer who is outside the culture (or context) that is being observed.

The following sections provide discussion of children's views on the various elements of this definition.

4.1.1 The heart of community: familiar people, personal connectedness and support

People were at the heart of children's definitions of community. J (girl aged 11) summarised the views of many when she said "I think people, because without any people we wouldn't actually have any friends, we would be all alone, so we would have nothing to do."

Children who participated in this research overwhelmingly defined community as being about people who are personally connected, people who know each other and share. Familiarity was important. Family was very important in all sites, and emphasised as central to community in some. Family provided the basis from which children engaged in their communities and in many cases actively facilitated that engagement.

In two of the sites children were identified as being central to community. C (boy aged 11, Riverside) said "It would be great if every house had at least one kid." C's thought was shared by many children across all sites, who felt that children enhance connectedness and interaction between community members, and through their own friendship networks.

In five of the six sites (Riverside, Longridge, Surfside, Parksway and Lakeview) familiar people were central not only to children's definition of community but to their experiences of it. A (girl, aged 10, Longridge) summed up the general view as follows:

> I reckon the community should be a place where people can bond together instead of being separated. Like I think a community should have things that bring all of the people that live around together.

S (boy, aged 9, Longridge) said "a community is a family of people." The idea of personal connection underpinned definitions provided by the majority of children in all sites except Gardenville, where the theme of familiarity was not as strong. Living in the same broad area and doing things together was considered to be the basis of community. S (boy aged 10, Longridge) added that ideally, communities should be made up of "nice people." This is an important issue, raised by children in different ways across all sites. While children recognised that the concept of community includes people who are not friendly and not nice, friendly, nice and supportive people were considered extremely important. In Lakeview,

where children's description of their own connections to their community was most positive, familiar people who were friendly and kind were very important.

4.1.2 Community as a site of co-operation and support

Children commonly defined communities as places where people worked together for common outcomes. G (girl, aged 8) said "I think community is people helping out each other." M (boy, aged 9) said "To me it means the people in your local area and the community work together and try to make it better."

In defining community as a site of co-operation, most children used examples of informal support, such as neighbours supporting one another, helping out and sharing food. Only a very small minority of children explicitly included community service and welfare agencies within their definition of community. B (girl, aged 11, Gardenville) said "I think community means a group of people that help each other in - I don't know how to put these in words, but people help people's lives – like the homeless people, give them stuff. Like the Salvation Army's a community." In four of the six sites (Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway), there was a significant presence of community service and welfare agencies providing support and services. In three of these four, few children described having direct contact with or knowledge of them. The exception was Riverside, where a local community worker was identified by several children as an example of someone who "does things for" and "looks after" others. This particular worker was very active in the community, organising and delivering school breakfasts one day each week and a community breakfast in a local low-cost housing area on Sundays.

V (boy, aged10) defined community as "A place where people live and come together and have fun." The idea of people coming together was central to the definitions of many children, and community gatherings were considered an important part of community. Other children suggested, however, that a community is not only about fun but also about providing support in difficult times. N (boy, aged 11) observed, "Community is more important when things are not fun – when things go wrong community is really important." Children spoke of community providing support to those who live locally and are part of that geographic and social community. Familiarity, personal connectedness and support in difficult times were strong and recurrent themes across all sites, and together indicate the centrality of belonging to children's definition of community.

4.1.3 Community as providing support in times of crisis

Children defined community as people helping one another in times of difficulty or crisis. Here, children expanded the definition of community beyond familiar people to include people with whom they did not necessarily have a direct personal link, but who provide assistance in times of need. Police and emergency workers, particularly paramedics or ambulance officers, were regularly identified as being very important to a community. While this was a strong theme in all sites, it was less so in Riverside.

In one conversation in Surfside, B (boy aged 11) said "When people need help the police come and when there is someone that's hurt or sick or needs help the ambulance come." D (boy aged 9) agreed that police and ambulance officers are important, but went further, "Like the SES and like the police and the ambulance and stuff like that. They are all community trying to help people out. Like builders try to help like build houses." The theme here, as in other sites, was of people helping out in times of difficulty, "People help each other like in ... when they ... like in fires. The fire brigade come and puts the fire out" (O, girl aged 10, Surfside). J (girl, aged 10, Gardenville) defined community in similar terms: "I think it's when people get together and help each other in times of need like in the floods in Queensland, maybe, because everyone helped each other and they made that community shelter." In all sites, children considered community to be especially important in times of natural disasters, or other crises.

In Gardenville, children had a somewhat more expansive definition of community than in other sites, focusing beyond their local community. This was particularly evident when children spoke of the ways in which communities provide support in times of crisis. For example, Gardenville is not located in Queensland, but the example of floods in Queensland was used by J as an example of a community (in this case a national community) providing support. In Gardenville, several children defined community as extending beyond national boundaries, for example N (girl, aged 10) said that Australia and Afghanistan have a connection, because Afghanistan has a war and Australia is trying to help out, as a community member should.

In Parksway, children spoke a great deal during the initial discussions of the importance of 'helping professionals', identifying fire-fighters, ambulance drivers, police, nurses, doctors and teachers. Part way through the first workshop session, it emerged that the children had, had some preparation from teachers prior to their involvement in the research and had

discussed what community means. It seemed that this discussion shaped children's initial responses to the question 'what is a community?' As the workshops unfolded, however, children moved to what seemed to be their own definitions and descriptions of community. Hospitals remained very important for several children in Parksway, as did a police presence on the streets. There was little discussion of the other 'helping professions' after the initial group discussion.

4.1.4 Community and diversity

While children defined community as people having connection and common purpose, they did not see communities as needing to be homogenous. There was a clear view that communities can, do and should, include people who are different from one another. E (girl aged 12, Riverside) exemplified this view when she said, "Different families need to be a bit different so that you can learn about people that are from different culture."

Respect for other cultures was a theme underpinning the idea of a 'good community' for many children. In particular, children spoke of cultural respect – something considered important by the majority of children across all sites, but strongest in Riverside, Longridge and Parksway, each of which has a high level of cultural diversity. For example, V (boy aged 10, Longridge) said that there should be a parade at Christmas, so people can have fun and celebrate. He thought this was important, even though he and his friend are not Christians and do not celebrate Christmas. V described having a Christmas parade as a good thing because it makes other people happy. W (boy aged 8, Gardenville) emphasised the importance of respecting difference, and went on to explain that respect includes not making fun of people because their religious or cultural beliefs are different. Across all sites children spoke of the importance of accepting and respecting diversity within communities.

4.1.5 Community as physical place

The importance of place as community was evident in site discussions generally, as discussed in Section Nine, but was highlighted in definitions of community in only two communities. In one of these sites – Lakeview, which could be described as one of the more advantaged – the physical neighbourhood, including shops, park and oval, were identified as places where one could feel comfortable. In each of the sites where place was identified by the majority of children in their definitions of community, people, connectedness and relationships were still accorded greater priority. N (boy aged 10, Parksway) said "You don't have to live close. It's

good to meet new people in the community." J (boy aged 11, Lakeview) said that his house is very close to the things he needs or likes to do in his community. When asked if close proximity to places and people was important to a community, J replied "I don't think it really matters but it's convenient." J's observation provides insight into the way in which many children thought about physical place: while it is important within communities, its value is largely one of utility. Human connectedness also has an instrumental or utility value, but is of great intrinsic value.

4.2 A framework for analysis: the 'Community Jigsaw'

From our analysis, four overarching categories emerged as important to children's interpretation of community across all sites. This is not to suggest that all children identified these categories as the most important aspects of community, and for some children they held little importance. Rather, these categories represent the issues that were most dominant across all sites. The four overarching categories are:

(i) **Relationships** as forming the basis, the very heart, of community;

(ii) **Safety** as essential to children's perception and experience of community;

(iii) **Physical places** as important to children's experience of and connection with community;

(iv) **Resources** as important in contributing to, and often shaping, experience of community.

Underpinning these four categories, two key themes emerged as values that children consider essential to good communities: inclusion and respect.

Within each of the four categories, several sub-categories emerged, resulting in a rich mosaic based on children's views and experiences. Presenting the richness of children's insights and the multi-faceted and complex construction of community that emerged from the research proved challenging – as is so often the case in qualitative research.

During a research session in Lakeview, M (girl, aged 9) said "A community is like a puzzle, you need to have all the bits to make it work." From M's comment, and the discussion around it, the Community Jigsaw was developed as a framework for analysis. The Community Jigsaw, illustrated in Figure 1, graphically represents the elements identified by the children who participated in this research as central to a positive community. When all the pieces are in place, a community is strong and supportive of children. The more pieces that are

removed, the less supportive the community is for children. At some point so many pieces are missing that the jigsaw falls apart. At this point, communities have become dysfunctional places from children's perspective.

We use the Community Jigsaw here, to structure our findings. The Community Jigsaw is also a potentially important tool for policy makers and practitioners. The key policy and practice question is 'how do we ensure as many pieces as possible are in place?' From a policy development and policy evaluation perspective, we need to ask how policies, services and interventions can reinforce pieces of the Community Jigsaw that are already in place and add those that are missing. In reinforcing and adding pieces of the Community Jigsaw, it is crucial that those pieces that children consider to be in place and working well are not undermined. In some communities, the decision may be taken to focus on strengthening one piece of the Community Jigsaw because that piece is weak or missing. In doing so, it is important that decisions are based on knowledge of the local area, including – crucially – children's knowledge.

In our representation of the Community Jigsaw, the edges are left unfinished. Our aim here is to highlight that this research is not exhaustive or comprehensive, and the Community Jigsaw can be refined and extended based on future research with children. While this research could usefully be extended to more urban sites, we are particularly conscious of the fact that no rural sites were included in our research, and of the need for research using a similar methodology, to be carried out in rural and remote areas of Australia including indigenous communities.

Figure 1: The Community Jigsaw

Legend:
- Relationships
- Safety
- Physical Places
- Resources

Puzzle pieces: FAMILY, GOOD NEIGHBOURS, GET TOGETHERS, HOME, TIME WITH PARENTS, CARING PEOPLE, GOOD ENVIRONMENT, INCLUSIVE SPACES, FRIENDS, NO BULLYING, POSITIVE INTERACTIONS, NO VIOLENCE, BEING LISTENED TO, NO DRUNKENNESS, FINANCIAL SECURITY, PUBLIC SERVICES
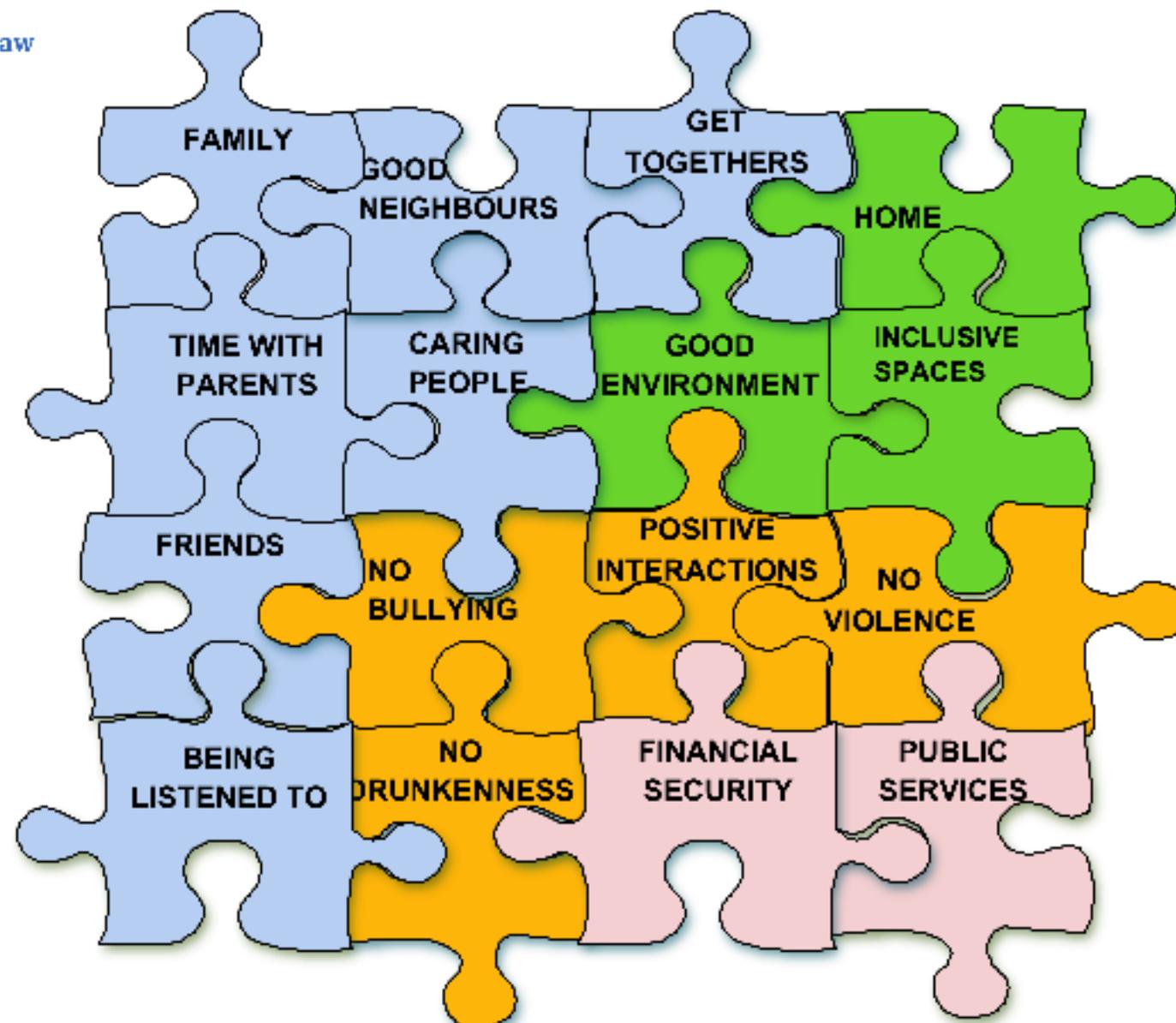
4.3 Systematic reflection within the analysis process

Alvesson and Skoldberg (2009: 9) have argued that "systematic reflection on several different levels can endow the interpretation [of qualitative data] with a quality that makes empirical research valuable." Within this research we sought to self-critically reflect on the research process, and on our interpretations, at each stage and on different levels. At the completion of each research session with children, the research team completed standard observation sheets, which recorded information such as the details of the children involved, the research setting and the methods involved. The standard observation sheets also provided space for the researchers to document their immediate reflections on what had transpired during the research, including children's views and our reactions to those views. The team then discussed each of our reflections and examined our understanding of children's interpretations of 'community'. Importantly, these discussions assisted the research team to illuminate and challenge our own "taken-for-granted assumptions and blind spots"' (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009: 9), thus ensuring – to the extent possible – that we did not miss or dismiss aspects of children's interpretations. This was essential in understanding a standpoint grounded in children's experiences. Post-research sessions also provided researchers with an opportunity to debrief after particularly intense sessions when children had shared their negative – sometimes heartbreaking – experiences within their communities.

The feedback sessions with children also provided an important opportunity for systematic reflection, as we invited children to respond to our interpretations of their interpretations. During in the feedback sessions, it was crucial that our philosophical commitment to creating spaces within which children could share their ideas frankly and with confidence was put into practice. Feedback sessions were sometimes quiet and reflective, as children thought about and commented on sometimes difficult issues, such as the real-life personally-experienced consequences of long waiting times in hospital emergency rooms, the sadness of inattentive parents, or the challenges of drunken violence on the part of adults. The sessions were often noisy and boisterous, as children challenged the researcher and sometimes one another. While the feedback sessions were loosely structured to ensure key issues were covered, they were not an orderly process – indeed, they were often highly disorderly and the researcher was not in control of the nature, direction or volume of the discussion. The nature of the feedback sessions meant that some children were more comfortable engaging than others. The researcher invited children who felt they had not had their say to have a 'private chat' – either

one-on-one or in small groups – after the feedback sessions. Several children accepted this invitation to present their views and to agree with, challenge, or add to our interpretations.

Importantly, the feedback sessions gave children an opportunity to reflect on, and sometimes supplement, their contributions to the research. For example, after the feedback session in Riverside, J (girl, aged 11) approached the researcher and said that she would like to talk more about the issue of children's contributions to their community. J explained that she had not given much thought to the ways in which children contribute to their communities, but after participating in both the research and feedback sessions she wanted to say more about her own role in her family and community. J said "The things that some children said they do, I do all of that and more, much more. I do cooking and look after my brother and sister. I help out with my mum's boyfriend around his workshop because he owns his own business." J described helping out in the workshop as fun and described her sense of responsibility to her brother and sister. She also observed that she had little opportunity to engage in other activities within her community because of the extent of her responsibilities. This resulted in a deeper discussion between J, two other children and the researcher about the nature and diversity of children's roles, an issue that had emerged only tangentially during the initial research session.

As part of the analytic and reflexive process, we held a series of workshops with adult stakeholders to present, discuss and receive critical comment on our findings. In all, five workshops were held. Participants in the first workshop, held in February 2013, were scholars working in the area of childhood studies and in the second, held in April 2013, staff from our partner organisations. The methodology and methods used, the findings and our analysis of the findings were presented and subjected to scrutiny. These workshops provided an opportunity to test our interpretations of the data, to reflect on the research process, and to consider how the findings might be most effectively presented. Our aim was to expose our interpretations – and assumptions – to critical discussion as part of our systematic reflection.

Between April and July 2013, three workshops were held with bureaucrats working in relevant departments in two states and at the Commonwealth level. The 'policy makers' workshops' invited participants to consider the findings of the research and engage in a discussion of how they could be presented and framed to be of most use to policy processes. Our aim here was by no means to tailor our findings to fit a particular policy agenda, but to ensure to the greatest extent possible that the findings are presented in a manner that is policy

relevant. All workshops were held in a 'closed door' environment to foster frank, open and critical discussion. Workshop participants' comments have been used to shape the presentation of our findings and, in particular, to inform policy recommendations, however, participants are not quoted in this report without their explicit consent. The workshops were highly valuable in illuminating the policy areas for which this research has not only relevance, but important implications.

Chapter 5. Social capital theory, communities and children

From the 1990s, governments in several OECD countries focused their attention on the role communities can play in overcoming disadvantage and social exclusion (Barnes *et al*., 2006). According to Johnson *et al*. (2005: 5) concern about 'community' intensifies during times of profound social change, such as the current 'period of globalisation'. They argue "at such times, it is claimed that the main institutions supposed to promote human welfare cannot cope, or are not doing a good job. Presently, there are claims that families, markets and states are letting many people down." (Johnson et al, 2005: 5). Concern about past and present failures and, more markedly, uncertainty about the future underpins our contemporary 'risk society' (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1999). For Beck (1992), modernity itself and the creation of wealth have resulted in risk, particularly future risk created by human behaviour in the past and present. Edwards (2004: 4) argues that in times of change marked by a concept of risk, there is a strong impulse to produce certainty; "Intellectually, politically and popularly, social capital offers a particular sort of explanation of, and remedy for dealing with, perceived changes in the way we live, work and relate to each other." From this perspective, social capital, and the particular forms of social and familial relations associated with it, provides an anchor in a time of turbulence. Within this increased focus on strengthening communities as a response to disadvantage and social exclusion in times of uncertainty, children are often presented as either catalysts for adult participation (for example, play groups that create social networks between parents) or beneficiaries of strong communities of adults. There has, however, been silence around children's definitions of community, what children value, how they contribute and what they would like to change.

This silence exists despite two important developments in thinking about children and childhood over the past two decades. First, social studies of childhood have contributed to new ways of theorising childhood (James *et al*., 1998; Qvortrup, 1999) and a number of empirical studies exploring the ways in which children exercise agency and engage with their communities and social worlds (Mayall, 1994; Morrow, 2001; Fattore *at el*., 2007). A growing body of research highlights children's competency to influence research and policy agendas (Darbyshire *et al*., 2004; MacDonald, 2008). Second, the almost universal ratification of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* focused policy,

research and scholarly literature on the human rights of children and children's participatory rights (Bessell and Gal, 2009; Bessell, 2010).

In this research, as already discussed, we have drawn on scholarship within social studies of childhood to explore children's perspectives, experiences and priorities about 'community' in order to understand a child standpoint. In doing so, we aim to inform both the policy and scholarly literature, which has paid insufficient attention to children as active members of their communities. Much of the scholarly and policy discourse on the role communities can play is informed by the literature on social capital. While there have been several important studies focusing on children and social capital, much of the 'mainstream' (adult-focused) theorising of social capital has been largely impervious to children.

In a 2001 publication entitled *The Well-being of Nations: The role of human and social capital,* the OECD presented the concept of social capital as "allowing individuals, groups and communities to resolve collective problems more easily," and as being a useful concept for policy (p. 42). In Australia, as discussed in Section Six of this report, the instrumental potential of social capital has been identified by both state and Commonwealth governments. Social capital has been considered as "having benefits for the economy, particularly in terms of its potential to decrease transaction costs, encourage cooperative behaviour and trust" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2002: 1). Consequently, increasing attention was paid to the ways in which social capital could be both facilitated and measured. The popularity of the concept of social capital coincided with, and was partially driven by, the publication of Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The collapse and revival of American community* in 2000. Putnam identified ways in which Americans had become increasingly disconnected from social and democratic structures. Putnam's work heightened the concerns that in the United States and in other wealthy countries, community was in decline.

5.1 Theoretical foundations of social capital: Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu

Conceptualisations of social capital have been informed by the work of three scholars in particular: Robert Putnam, James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu. As such, it is valuable to consider the theories of each. As noted, Putnam's work has been highly influential in policy since the late 1990s and has also promoted a great deal of criticism. In particular, Putnam's work has been critiqued as insensitive to gender in some areas (such as the nature of

organisational membership), and as promoting a highly conservative, even regressive, attitude to the role of women by drawing an association between the movement of women into the labour force and the decline of social capital. Putnam has also been criticised for failing to pay sufficient attention to the twin axes of gender and generation, particularly within the family (Edwards, 2004). Coleman's work was highly influential in education policy in the United States in the 1960s. His later theorising of social capital as an explanation for educational achievement pays particular attention to children, but as future citizens rather than as social actors in the present. Bourdieu pays little direct attention to children, but does explore the intergenerational dimensions of social capital. Bourdieu's theory of social capital focuses not on the potential of social capital to connect individuals and strengthen communities, but as a framework for analysing social exclusion and class division.

5.1.1 Robert Putnam's concept of social capital

Robert Putnam, who defines social capital as 'social connections and attendant norms and trust', has been most influential in revitalising policy interest in social capital. For Putnam, social capital is closely related to political participation and civic engagement, with civic engagement defined as 'people's connections with the life of their communities, not merely politics' (Putnam, 1995: 665). Putnam's earlier study of local government in Italy found that 'the performance of government and other social institutions is powerfully influenced by citizen engagement in community affairs' (or social capital) (Putnam, 1995: 664). From his work in Italy and in the United States, Putnam concluded that education (specifically higher education) is the strongest correlate of civic engagement. Putnam (1995: 676) argues 'highly educated people are much more likely to be joiners and trusters, partly because they are better off economically, but mostly because of the skills, resources, and inclinations that were imparted to them at home and at school.' Thus, for Putnam, there is a close relationship between human capital and social capital. Importantly, Putnam does not make prior claims about who benefits from the social connections that define social capital; this, he argues, can only be determined empirically. Putnam describes generalised reciprocity as the touchstone of social capital. This is the idea that:

> Each individual act in a system of reciprocity is usually characterised by a combination of what one might call short-term altruism and long-term self-interest: I help you out now in the (possibly vague, uncertain, and uncalculating) expectation that you will help me out in the future.

> Reciprocity is made up of a series of acts each of which is short-term altruism (benefiting others at a cost to the altruist), but which together typically make every participant better off.
> (Michael Taylor, quoted by Putnam, 2000: 134)

Putnam argues that for generalised reciprocity to be effective, trust is essential. Trust, for Putnam, can be thick or thin. Thick trust is 'embedded in personal relations that are strong, frequent and nested in wider networks' (Putnam, 2000: 136). This is the form of trust that exists between individuals who know they can rely on one another as a result of long-standing, shared personal experience. A second form of trust is described as 'thin trust'. This is social or generalised trust that extends beyond one's immediate and personal connections to one's fellow citizens with whom there is not a direct relationship. It is thin trust that Putnam identifies as strongly associated with civic engagement and social capital. In discussing the notion of trust, he draws an important distinction between trust and trustworthiness: 'Social trust is a valuable community asset if – and only if – it is warranted … Generalized reciprocity is a community asset, but generalized gullibility is not.' (Putnam, 2000: 135-6). While institutions may play an important role in assuring citizens that placing trust in others is warranted and in their interest, and not a display of gullibility, there is a distinction between political and social trust. Putnam argues that people may have little faith in political institutions, but high levels of social trust.

Networks are a fundamental characteristic of Putnam's conceptualisation of social capital. For Putnam, social capital refers to networks of social connection – doing *with*. Putnam (2000: 117) argues that 'Doing good *for* other people, however laudable, is not part of the *definition* of social capital'. Doing good for others, volunteering and philanthropy for example, are important diagnostic signs of social capital, but are not the basis of social capital. The basis of social capital is civic engagement, or the networks and relationships that we have within our communities. The title of Putnam's now famous book, *Bowling Alone*, reveals something of what Putnam means by 'doing with' – being part of a bowling team, meeting regularly, and playing together (rather than bowling alone) exemplifies Putnam's concept of doing with. Doing with means being part of, and actively engaged in, social networks or associations that connect people physically as well as socially. Putnam identifies the density of associations – that is the number of associations within a community – as an indicator of social capital.

Putnam argues that social capital is a powerful element in shaping children's development, educational attainment and well-being (2000: 266-97). Drawing on quantitative empirical data on social capital and school outcomes (particularly SAT scores) across the United States, Putnam concludes that it is levels of social capital rather than poverty or demographic characteristics that drive school test scores (2000: 300). Moreover, Putnam found that while formal institutionalised social capital is important, informal social capital is a stronger predictor of young people's educational outcomes:

> ...level of social trust in a state and the frequency with which people connected informally with one another (in card games, visiting with friends, and the like) were even more closely correlated with educational performance than was the amount of time state residents devoted to club meetings, church attendance and community projects.
> (Putnam, 2000: 300)

Thus, personal connections within states and at the level of neighbourhood and community are identified as crucial to children's educational attainment and general well-being. Neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital are described as those where 'public spaces are cleaner, people are friendlier, and the streets are safer.' In essence, these places 'tend to be good places to raise children.' (Putnam, 2000: 307). While Putnam emphasises the importance of high levels of social capital at the community level, he also highlights the importance of social capital *within* the family. Children whose parents are actively engaged in their lives and schools are argued to be more likely to achieve higher school results and reject drug-taking and delinquent behaviour (Putnam, 200: 305). In sum, Putnam argues that social capital matters a great deal for children. His focus, however, is on educational and social outcomes for children rather than their own experience of social networks and civic engagement. He is largely silent on children's own involvement in social capital, except to note that children living in communities where there are strong traditions of civic engagement are more likely to use their leisure time 'productively' (Putnam, 200: 302).

5.1.2 James Coleman's concept of social capital

James Coleman also identifies social capital as an important ingredient in children's development and, in particular, their educational outcomes. Indeed, Coleman's work was an important influence on Putnam's thinking about social capital, children and educational attainment (Putnam, 2000: 302). Coleman identifies the family as the primary location of

social capital, which he sees as a crucial ingredient in building the human capital of children. Coleman's interest in social capital grew out of his 'attempts to explain the relationships between social inequality and academic achievement in schools.' (Field, 2003: 22). His large-scale study of educational achievement among six ethnic groups in the United States in the 1960s, published in 1966 and known as the Coleman Report, found that 'family and community background characteristics tended to outweigh factors related to the nature of the school itself' in shaping educational achievement and opportunity (Field, 2003: 22). In later work, Coleman sought to explain why children in religiously affiliated schools tended to have lower rates of absenteeism and drop-out, as well as better performance. Coleman concluded that low drop-out rates in Catholic schools, and other religiously affiliated schools where the majority of the school population shared a common religious commitment, resulted from the shared norms and expectations – essentially, the social capital – of the adult community surrounding the school (Coleman, 1988: S114).

Coleman defines social capital not as 'a single entity but a variety of entities with two elements in common: they all consist of some aspect of social structures, and they facilitate certain actions of actors – whether persons or corporate actors – within the structure.' (1988: S98). From this perspective, the value of social capital is the function it performs, that is giving actors access to resources they can use to achieve their interests. One function of social capital is the provision of information that is important in everyday interactions. Another function of social capital is prescription of social norms, for example norms that "one should forego self-interest and act in the interests of the collectivity." (Coleman, 1988: S104). Coleman notes that effective social norms may inhibit crime, making neighbourhoods safer for all. They may also dictate and constrain the behaviour of young people, including around school attendance and behaviour. While effective norms can curb deviant actions that harm others, Coleman notes they may also reduce innovation and deviant behaviour that benefits everyone (S105). For Coleman, certain types of social structure facilitate social capital. Of particular importance is the concept of closure, whereby one's associates are known to each other, forming a closed social network. This type of social structure is considered effective in promoting trust and in ensuring that there are sanctions from within the social group if norms are violated. Intergenerational closure exists when there are links between parents of children within a school. When linkages exist, parents "can discuss their children's activities and come to some consensus about standards and about sanctions." (1988: S107). Parents reinforce one another in monitoring and sanctioning children's

behaviour, providing what Coleman describes as "quantity of social capital available to each parent in raising his [sic] children – not only in matters related to school but in other matters as well." (1988: S107).

Coleman also identifies social capital within the family as important in the creation of human capital in the next generation. For Coleman there exists within a family three forms of capital: (i) financial capital, approximately measured by income or wealth; (ii) human capital, approximately measured by parents' education which indicates the potential cognitive environment available to a child; and (iii) social capital (1988: S109). Social capital is the nature and intensity of the relationship between parents and children and the extent to which parents engage actively with their children. High levels of social capital may compensate for low human capital of parents, traditionally measured by parents' years of schooling. Conversely, high levels of human capital among parents "may be irrelevant to outcomes for children if parents are not an important part of their children's lives, if their human capital is employed exclusively at work or elsewhere outside the home." (Coleman, 1988: S110)

Coleman argues that social capital within the family is undermined by 'structural deficiencies', of which two forms are prominent. First, "the nuclear family itself, in which one or both parents work outside the home, can be seen as structurally deficient, lacking the social capital that comes with the presence of parents during the day, or with grandparents or aunts and uncles in or near the household" (1988: S111). The second, and for Coleman the most prominent, element of structural deficiency in the modern family is the single parent family. According to Coleman, in each of these family structures, parents are less able to be physically present and have less time and capacity to provide attention to the child, thus diminishing the social capital that facilitates a child's access to the adult's human capital. While Coleman identifies physical presence as important, he emphasises that it is not sufficient alone – social capital is still lacking in a family if parents are present but do not have a strong relationship with their children. The lack of strong relationships is attributed to a range of factors, including "the child's embeddedness in a youth community" and "the parents' embeddedness in relationships with other adults that do not cross generations" (1988: S111). Coleman also argues that a larger number of siblings impacts negatively on social capital within families as each individual child receives less adult attention (1988: S111).

5.1.3 Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social capital

Pierre Bourdieu, generally identified as one of the key theorists of social capital, wrote very little directly on the topic. The primary aim of Bourdieu's extensive body of scholarship was to understand social hierarchy, social reproduction and the ways in which dominant classes maintain their position (Field, 2003). It is within this broader context that Bourdieu's concept of social capital is located, providing a framework for understanding and analysing social inclusion and exclusion.

Bourdieu argues that the social world should be understood through the concept of capital, not only in the form that dominates economic theory, but also cultural and social capital (1986: 47). In analysing the unequal educational achievement of children from different classes, Bourdieu identified cultural capital as a key explanatory factor. Cultural capital is personally embodied within the individual, possessed through goods that have cultural value (Bourdieu refers to pictures, books, dictionaries, machinery), and institutionalised through educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986: 48). Cultural capital is both material and symbolic. Families with high levels of cultural capital are able to pursue 'cultural investment strategies' to ensure their children gain optimal benefits from education. Cultural capital can be converted into economic capital. In this way, cultural capital – and social position – is reproduced. For Bourdieu, social capital operates alongside cultural and economic capital to maintain social hierarchies.

Bourdieu (1988: 51) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group." Social capital provides members of a group with collectively-owned capital with can be exchanged for both material and symbolic benefit – Bourdieu describes this as convertibility, with social capital able to be converted into both economic and cultural capital. The volume of one's social capital is dependent on the extent of one's social connections. Portes and Landolt have argued that Bourdieu's key insight was that not only can social capital be traded, but that trading is necessary to increase social capital. For them, "social capital of any significance can seldom be acquired without the investment of some material resources and the possession of some cultural knowledge, enabling the individual to establish relations with valued others" (Portes and Landolt, 2000: 531). Here, Bourdieu's

theory of social capital provides a framework for analysis, but not the policy direction of Coleman or, particularly, Putnam.

For Bourdieu, the relationships that form the basis of social capital can be produced (formed) through particular types of social institutions (such as kinship relations). Relationships can also be reproduced (extended) through exchange (Bourdieu refers to gifts, words, women/marriage). But ultimately, the limits of the group are clearly defined and maintained – "these are the limits beyond which constitutive exchange – trade, commensality or marriage – cannot take place" (1988: 52). Thus, Bourdieu's conception of social capital is essentially exclusive. Rather than being a means through which communities can be connected or strengthened, it is the means by which groups maintain and reproduce their dominant position within social hierarchies.

5.2 Where do children feature in Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu's conceptualisations of social capital?

Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu have each been charged with ignoring children entirely within their theories of social capital. This charge is not entirely justified. For Coleman and Bourdieu, the search for explanations of children's differential education achievement and outcomes is a catalyst for their thinking about social capital. Putnam presents social capital as a means of increasing children's educational chances. Thus, children – as objects of education and as future human capital – feature in the theories of each. Significantly, both Bourdieu and Coleman define social capital in terms of its function; that is, what it does for social actors in terms of increasing their resources within society. For children, the main function of social capital is to enhance life chances in adulthood. Thus, the primary analytic and empirical focus is on children's 'future' outcomes rather than their 'current' experiences. Children's social capital is conceptualised largely as a by-product of their parents' social networks. Moreover, social capital is "regarded as an asset that children can draw on and benefit from in their future lives rather than in their lives in the present." (Leonard, 2005: 607). Alanen (2003: 31) has highlighted and critiqued the 'pseudo-inclusion' of children in sociological research. She observes that very often children appear to be a genuine concern, but "in the end they disappear from view." At one level, children are of genuine concern in each of the grand theories of social capital, but ultimately they are theoretically and empirically invisible or, at best, "appendages to some category of adults (such as parents)." (Alanen, 2003: 31; see also Leonard, 2008).

In their theorising of social capital, Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu locate children as passive. Children may either benefit from high levels of social capital, however defined, or be impacted deleteriously by its absence. Children are not, however, considered to have their own social networks or to be active within the social networks of their communities. Studies of social capital from within the social studies of childhood have sought to fill the lacunae through both empirical studies and theory. Such work has been an important step forward, but beyond the social studies of childhood, most research on social capital remains adult-centric. As Leonard (2005) has pointed out, we know far more about adults' everyday lives than we do about children's. This is particularly true for children's lives beyond the family and school.

5.3 Child-focused studies of social capital

One of the first studies of social capital from a generationally-sensitive perspective was Morrow's 1999 article, which sought to conceptualise social capital in a way that is inclusive of children and young people. Morrow is particularly critical of both Putnam's and Coleman's conceptualisation of social capital, finding them ethno-centric, insensitive to gender, and exclusive of children. She also notes that Bourdieu pays insufficient attention to children, but argues his theory of social capital offers a "more complex and contextualised account of different forms of capital" and provides a more useful foundation for thinking about children and social capital (1999: 754-5).

Importantly for our purposes, Morrow draws out – in the UK context – the ways in which policy has linked social networks and communities, human health and well-being, and social capital (Morrow, 1999: 744-74). In doing so, she is critical of the ways in which Coleman's – and to some extent Putnam's – concept of social capital was used to serve a particular political agenda in the UK:

> ...a powerful political and popular rhetoric has been generated about the harmful effects of family breakdown on children, and the social capital literature both draws on this and feeds into it. While the reasons for the development of this rhetoric are undoubtedly partly economic and political (lone parents cost the State more), the pathologising discourse has the effect of generating an image of children in the 'wrong' kinds of families as being damaged.
> (Morrow, 1999: 752-53).

Morrow argues that the emphasis on 'parenting deficits' both ignores the multiple forms that 'family' can take both between and within cultures, and represents the 'familialisation' of children that has occurred, particularly in Anglo-Saxon constructions of child, parent and family. Edwards (2002: 4-5) argues that the familialisation of children – that is their relegation to the private sphere of home and family as both necessary and natural – dates to the nineteenth century as motherhood was also domesticated. Oakley (1994: 18) argued that while critical feminist research made women visible within the family and household, the generational inequalities experienced by children, including within the family, remain unexposed. Two decades on, Oakley's assessment remains germane to much mainstream (adult-centric) research on social capital. This is not to suggest that family is not important to and for children – but to argue that children's lives are lived both within and outside the family. Offer and Schneider (2007) found that adolescents are creators of social capital independent of their families and parents. Indeed, they conclude that "focusing on the flow of resources from parents to children can lead to an inaccurate depiction of family dynamics... further research should attribute a more active role to children and seriously investigate the ways in which they shape familial processes [of connection and social capital] (2007: 1137). Similarly, Weller and Bruegel's (2009) study of children and social capital across five sites in England found that children have both their own independent social networks and are instrumental in parents' levels of social capital. Weller and Bruegel identify the tension many parents felt between supporting their children to actively engage in their neighbourhoods and develop their own social connections, and protecting their children from the public sphere, in line with dominant parenting discourses.

Edwards (2002: 5) argues that the "familialisation of children has been accompanied, and reinforced by, the concept of the institutionalisation of childhood. The result has been an emphasis on children's status and location as pupils in schools, accompanied by a focus on their educational attainment that can steadily increase as an institutional structure for their lives as they work towards educational qualifications." School, conceptualised as the appropriate site within which children's lives play out, is a primary focus of research on, about, and with children – including in the areas of social capital and community. While some studies have indicated the importance children place on school as a site of social connection as well as learning (see Eriksson *et al.*, 2010), the focus on school illuminates only one aspect of children's social worlds. Moreover, the focus – particularly in the social capital literature – has often been on the future benefits of educational attainment rather than

present experience. Important exceptions here are the relatively few studies that adopt a child-centred approach, seeking to uncover children's own social networks (Weller and Bruegel, 2009; Offer and Schneider, 2007; Eriksson *et al.*, 2010).

Several studies have explored the way in which children and young people employ social capital within their own sub-cultures, in order to access social support, self-respect, and in some cases, material goods in the face of exclusion from broader society (Portes and Landolt, 1996; Morrow, 1999; Beazley, 2002). Drawing on Bourdieu, Thornton (1995: 202) argues that young people's (like adults') sub-cultural capital can be either objectified (for example as music collections or certain types of clothing) or embodied (such as hair-cuts or having the 'right' sub-cultural knowledge. Leonard (2008: 237) presents children and young people's sub-cultural capital as largely positive, enabling them "to assert their distinctive character ... [and] ... create social spaces not contaminated by adult values and cultural norms." For Leonard, the separation of adult and youth cultures is largely positive for children and young people. Moreover, children's and young peoples' cultures are considered to be the same.

Portes and Landolt present a less positive assessment of sub-cultural capital. They identify youth gangs as an example of a form of social capital, but one that, ultimately, may hold a young person down rather than provide support to move ahead (1996: 21). Portes and Landolt's work draws attention to the potentially negative side of social capital, recognised by Putnam to some extent, whereby strong social networks may bond people together within a common context, but not provide the means by which they can improve their lives.

Portes and Landolt's critique of youth sub-cultural capital draws on a conceptual distinction that is important in the social capital literature generally: that between bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital exists through intra-community links and often excludes 'outsiders'. Bonding social capital is built on the thick trust of well-established, personal relations that Putnam describes, and is often important in providing the kinds of support that enable 'insiders' to 'get by' (Putnam, 2000: 136). Bonding social capital may, however, be harmful to individuals' prospects of 'doing better' or 'moving up', as it limits social networks to those within a given community (see Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). Bridging social capital by contrast. is inter-community in nature and provides individuals with networks beyond their own immediate community or social group. It is bridging capital that enables people to 'get ahead' in life (Woolcock and Narayan, 2000). While the different 'types' of social capital have been accorded considerable attention in the general social capital

literature, relatively little attention has been paid to how they impact on children's social networks and experiences of community. Generally, bonding social capital – in the form of Coleman's closure – is considered positive – or at least unproblematic for young children, although it becomes limiting as young people seek employment and other forms of 'adult' engagement. To the extent that bridging social capital is considered relevant for children, it is through proxy benefits of adults' (generally parents') networks (Hoffman-Ekstein *et al.*, 2008: 5).

Much of the social capital literature has been criticised as being blind to gender and assuming that the kinds of networks that produce benefits for men operate in similarly positive ways for women (see Molyneux 2002). Similarly, a significant proportion of the studies that do exist on children and social capital pay little attention to gender. In her study of children's experiences of their neighbourhoods, Morrow found that there were differences between boys and girls, but emphasised that age and ethnicity were as salient as gender in children's accounts of their experiences (Morrow, 2003: 5). Morrow's study found that gender shaped the ways in which boys and girls were able to earn an income, with baby-sitting available to girls. Gender was also significant in children's engagement with sport, with boys more likely to play and girls' to watch (if involved at all), and in their use of public spaces. Notably, girls felt that leisure facilities and activities in their neighbourhoods were designed for boys. Clampet-Lundquist *et al.* (2011) in their study of teenagers in 'high risk' neighbourhoods found gendered differences in the ways boys and girls used public space. In this study, boys were found to be more likely to engage in activities that draw negative attention from neighbours and police.

Both Morrow and Clampet-Lundquist *et al.* observed the importance of same-sex adults in young people's lives. Clampet-Lundquist *et al.* (2011: 1183) found that father figures play a very important role in the lives of young men in low-income, violent neighbourhoods in the United States of America. In Morrow's study in the United Kingdom, girls were considerably more likely than boys to identify their mothers' emotional support as important.

While there is an important and growing literature that examines social capital from a perspective that is inclusive of children, the general social capital literature has ignored children, rendered them invisible or considered them as appendages of adults. While child-inclusive studies have demonstrated the existence, complexity and importance of children's networks, much of the literature assumes that increasing social capital among adults will

necessarily have flow-on benefits for children in the present and, more importantly, in terms of future achievement and outcomes. Thus, in relation to children, social capital has taken on a highly instrumentalist nature. The ways social capital shapes children's experiences of, and roles within their communities, particularly in Australia, has been given far too little attention.

Chapter 6.   A brief overview of policies relating to children and community

Social capital entered the policy lexicon in Australia in the late 1990s, as policy interest grew in the ways governments can draw non-government stakeholders into social policy processes. From 2000, significant policy developments centred on fostering social capital, as well as strengthening families and promoting 'local solutions' to problems. In April 2000, the Commonwealth Government launched the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, which aimed to strengthen communities and assist them to "increase their capacity to meet the challenges of economic and social change and to cope with the pressures that can lead to family and social break down" (Emmerson, 2000: 66). The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy was based on the idea that investment in family and community relationships can assist in "preventing difficult and expensive social problems happening in the first place" (Emmerson, 2000: 71). Central to the Strategy was the idea that communities are better placed than governments to identify and respond to local problems, including strengthening families through early childhood development and effective parenting. Funding was provided for parenting support, local play groups for young children and their parents, marriage and relationship education, and family counselling. The Strategy combined ideas of investing in prevention and early intervention before problems become entrenched, with the agenda of the incumbent government of Prime Minister Howard which sought to maintain and revitalise the traditional family.

The concept of social capital as local networks of support and self-help was central to the Strategy and presented as a new way of working. Emmerson (2001: 68) describes the approach underlying the Strategy as:

> A basic belief that governments alone cannot build capacity or trust, ie: they cannot create social capital. The Strategy also recognises that while a traditional model can support a large number of services and help to do some important work, equally it can waste opportunities through lack of coordination, duplication and rigidities.

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy was part of a broader rethinking of social policy in Australia under the Howard government from the late 1990s. Social capital was central to this rethinking, with the conceptual debates and important theoretical differences,

particularly between the three key thinkers – Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu – reduced to the lowest common denominator of "networks of social relations characterised by norms of trust and reciprocity" (see Stone, 2000: 10). Social capital was considered as necessarily positive, fostering economic growth, providing families with 'bonding capacity' that assists families to get by, and enhancing 'bridging capacity' which can assist families to get ahead (Stone, 2000: 11). Communities were positioned as central to the development of social capital, but not always in ways that were clear or well defined. Stone and Hughes (2000) have observed that 'community' was used to refer both to the community sector, which they describe as "the mostly not-for-profit organisations involved in the day to day delivery of welfare and services, and the community at large, which they define as 'civil society'."

This ambiguity as to what precisely 'community' is remains within policy discourse. Volunteering was identified as central to the development of social capital. Very often community appears to mean the not-for-profit sector or business. The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy identified family as the bedrock for strong communities with large stocks of social capital (see Stone and Hughes, 2000, for a useful discussion). Thus strengthening communities was intrinsically linked to building social capital, in a manner reminiscent of Coleman's approach. In a 2000 policy document, then Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Minister for Family and Community Services, Jocelyn Newman, set out the ideas underpinning the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy:

> …[S]trong family and community networks nurture children, care for those in need, and help people take up opportunities and find work. It's about neighbours and families helping each other in times of crisis. It also involves the commitment of local volunteers who provide much-needed community services and who work on community projects. It's about community leaders pulling their communities together in times of change.

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy included a number of significant initiatives for children, initially focusing on the age cohort from birth to five years. Children were identified as beneficiaries of strong communities and of high levels of social capital, but did not feature as social actors or as contributors to community, or to the development of social capital. Child-focused initiatives prioritised two issues. Firstly, the collection of large-scale, longitudinal data, to provide an evidence base for policy. Secondly, early intervention, to support children in the early years and to promote school readiness, while engaging families

in economic and community life (Howard and Newman, 2000). Engagement of families in economic life was clearly defined by reference to paid employment or formal education and training. The meaning of engagement in community life was less clear. Two initiatives funded under the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy have been particularly significant: The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) and Communities for Children (CfC). Funding for each was continued by the Labor Government upon its election in 2007.

The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC) commenced in 2004 and follows the development of 10,000 children and their families. LSAC aims to "identify policy opportunities for improving support for children and their families and for early intervention and prevention strategies" (Growing Up in Australia website). LSAC focuses on eleven key research questions, relating to themes of child and family functioning, child care and education (see Edwards, 2012; Sanson, et al, 2002). LSAC includes questions relating to the influence of social connections and community on children's developmental outcomes, including the impacts on individual outcomes of broad neighbourhood characteristics and community connectedness, engagement, trust and violence (Edwards, 2012: 8). This has potential to provide a quantitative picture of general themes and trends.

Under Communities for Children (CfC) non-government organisations are funded to "develop and implement a strategic and sustainable whole-of-community approach to early childhood development in consultation with local stakeholders." (Stronger Families Stronger Communities National Evaluation Consortium: 4). Communities for Children was initially implemented in forty-five sites around Australia and focused on children aged zero to five years and their families. Drawing on similar place-based initiatives in the United Kingdom, such as SureStart (see Eisenstadt, 2011), Communities for Children sought to improve outcomes for children in geographic areas of disadvantage. The CfC model was based on the idea that coordination between services within a geographic area is essential to building trust and engaging with the most disadvantaged families (Muir, et al, 2010, p. 36). A 2009 evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy found that CfC had been 'modestly successful'. It concluded that "the CfC model can make an important contribution to the family and community contexts in which disadvantaged children grow up, and in terms of their well-being. Whether the CfC is a strategy that can sustain benefits in the long term, and whether longer exposure to the CfC initiative at a later stage in operation can produce greater benefits is, as yet, unclear" (Muir, et al, 2010). Consultation with communities was

identified as a particularly important and effective dimension of CfC (Muir, et al 2009). Community consultation was undertaken with families, parents and other adult stakeholders. While community consultation was important to the CfC approach, consultation with children was not a feature of the initial design, most likely because of the very young age of the children involved. In 2009, the services provided under CfC were extended to include children up to the age of twelve years. It was not clear whether, or to what extent, the extended age focus was accompanied by a commitment to, and procedures for, consultation with children.

With the federal election of a Labor Government in 2007, the policy rhetoric shifted from that of social capital to social inclusion. However, the idea that government was no longer best placed to deal with issues of disadvantage remained a central theme, albeit presented differently. Immediately prior to the 2007 election, then Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Julia Gillard, mapped out the Australian Labor Party's social inclusion agenda:

> We have to change the way Governments at all levels deliver services to tackle disadvantage. It's going to be about bottom up not top-down measures to tackle disadvantage – so we will be asking local governments, non-government organisations and businesses to participate in new place-based governance arrangements that bring together Commonwealth, State and local funds in the most effective way to lift up disadvantaged communities.

In May 2008, the Labor Government established the Social Inclusion Board, "as the main advisory body to Government on ways to achieve better outcomes for the most disadvantaged in our community" (Social Inclusion Board website). The Social Inclusion Board was located within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Arguably, the concept of social inclusion and social exclusion, unlike the concept of social capital, is not embedded in clear theoretical frameworks. It does however, have a relatively long history of usage in policy circles, particularly in Europe. It was initially used in France in the 1970s, to refer to those who fell through the formal social protection net and were administratively excluded by the state (Burchardt, et al, 2002, p. 2). The concept was later expanded to include disaffected youth and isolated individuals (Burchardt, et al, 2002). Burchardt et al (2002: 30) propose a working definition of social exclusion as follows: "An individual is socially excluded if he or she does not participate in the key activities of the society in which he or she lives." They

identify four dimensions of social exclusion which they consider relevant to Britain in the 1990s:

(i)   **Consumption**: the capacity to purchase goods and services;
(ii)   **Production**: participation in economically or socially valuable activities;
(iii) **Political engagement**: involvement in local or national decision-making; and
(iv)   **Social interaction**: integration with family, friends and community.

In a 2008 paper prepared by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) for the newly formed Social Inclusion Unit, the authors noted that there is no generally accepted definition of social exclusion (Hayes, et al 2008). That paper mapped the various definitions used, highlighting Burchardt et al's work in the UK context. Significantly, the 2008 AIFS paper highlighted the importance of personal and social relationships to social inclusion (Hayes, et al, 2008: 31), noting that the success of child-focused interventions is strongly associated with the nature and extent of social supports. The paper did not, however, canvas the nature or importance of children's personal and social relationships.

The Social Inclusion Board adopted a vision where a "socially inclusive society is one in which all Australians feel valued and have the opportunity to participate fully in our society." (Social Inclusion Board website). The Labor Government's social inclusion agenda was set out in Foundations for a Stronger, Fairer Australia. That document began with a message from the Minister for Social Inclusion, Tanya Plibersek, which referred to John Dewey and stated that "what the best and wisest parent wants for their own child is what our community should want for all its children." The Minister's message went on to state, "That applies to all the obvious things: education, health care, safe and secure housing, a rewarding job when they grow up; it applies also to the less tangible building blocks of life." Thus, children were positioned as benefitting from social inclusion, while the social inclusion agenda was presented as crucial in providing a foundation for children. The document referred to several areas where the social inclusion agenda aimed to support children, including through support for children with a disability and the Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians initiative.

Of particular relevance to this research are two focus areas identified in Foundations for a Stronger, Fairer Australia: early childhood services and early intervention and employment promotion strategies for parents. The Labor government identified initiatives in the area of early childhood services and early intervention such as the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters; the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education, which

includes a National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care; the establishment of the Australian Early Development Index; and ongoing support for – and expansion of – Communities for Children. The Labor government identified initiatives to help jobless families with children such as rebates for child care and compulsory workforce participation requirements. The latter demonstrates the extent to which the social inclusion policy agenda identified integration into paid employment as the means of overcoming social exclusion (see Nevile and Nevile, 2006). As in the previous Coalition Government's approach to social capital, the Labor Government's approach to social inclusion identified children as beneficiaries of an inclusive society, rather than active members. In particular, parent's employment was considered to have flow on benefits for children's social inclusion.

A set of indicators were developed, designed to measure and monitor 'how Australia is faring' in relation to social inclusion. Of the twenty-seven 'headline indicators' used to measure social inclusion, only three related directly to children: (i) children assessed as vulnerable on the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI); (ii) child protection substantiation rates; and (iii) children living in jobless families. Children are positioned as either 'developing', as in the indicator relating to position on the AEDI; as 'in need of protection'; or as 'dependent'. Children are not positioned as members of the community. While each of these indicators may be important, they provide only a very narrow understanding of children's inclusion or exclusion. Indicators relating to issues such as feelings of safety, having a voice in family or community, and social connectedness, related only to adults (or in some cases people aged over fifteen years). As the findings of this research discussed at length in part two of this report make clear, feeling safe. having a voice in family and community, and social connectedness are all identified by children as very important to their sense of community. Moreover, they are issues on which the children who participated in this research had very clear views – views that they wanted to share and have taken seriously.

A particular focus of the federal Labor Government's social inclusion agenda was the importance of workforce participation for families with children. The Foundations for a Stronger, Fairer Australia document stated, "Employment is a powerful vehicle to increase family wellbeing and social inclusion." Parental employment was identified as a way of ensuring vulnerable children have a good start in life. Indeed, promoting paid employment, or formal education and training that would lead to employment, was a central principle of Labor's social inclusion agenda.

Efforts to encourage or require parents to enter paid employment were strengthened in 2007, when parents applying for government allowances were eligible for parenting payments only until the youngest child turned six years in the case of couples and until the youngest child turned eight in the case of sole parents. A grandfathering arrangement enabled parents with children aged between eight and twelve years, and already on parenting payments, to maintain existing parenting payments. Over time, requirements were tightened and in 2013, changes first introduced in 2007 became applicable to all people on parenting benefits. Following the 2013 changes, no sole parents were eligible for parenting payments once their youngest child turned eight years of age and were instead moved onto Newstart allowance with its more stringent employment participation requirements. Interestingly, the Social Inclusion Board identified 'work' as "participating in employment, in voluntary work and in family and caring," but changes to parenting benefits clearly prioritise paid employment over unpaid roles involving caring for children (Social Inclusion Board website).

While the federal Labor Government's social inclusion agenda appears to have largely excluded people under the age of fifteen, there were other important policy initiatives in recent years focusing on children. In 2009 the Council of Australian Governments endorsed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020. The Framework identified strong families, strong supportive communities, and government services and supports as central to protecting children. The Framework includes six supporting outcomes, the first of which is that "children live in safe and supportive families and communities." This supporting outcome states that "Businesses and the broader community can play a part in supporting families through child and family-friendly policies and practices." It is not, however, clearly defined within the Framework what child-friendly policies, practices or communities might look like.

As part of the National Framework, the federal government established the 'Child Aware' initiative. The initiative included funding to organisations for relevant projects and a 2013 commitment to provide $400,000 for a pilot scheme to build twenty local 'Child Aware Communities' over three years'. The Child Aware initiative was couched in the language of child safety, but provided little detail as yet on what might characterise a 'child aware' community.

In 2012, the federal Labor Government announced its intention to establish a National Children's Commissioner, an initiative long advocated by children's rights organisations in

Australia. The following year, Megan Mitchell was appointed to the role. The establishment of a National Children's Commissioner can be seen as an important step forward in the national policy agenda for children.

At the Commonwealth level, there has been a focus on the role and importance of communities since the late 1990s. Under the Coalition Government (1996-2007), the language of building social capital was central. Under the Labor Government (2007-13), the language of social inclusion dominated. Each highlighted the importance of strong communities. While important policy initiatives relating to children were adopted under each government, such as Communities for Children and the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children, children have been represented and positioned as benefiting from the social capital or social inclusion of adults (particularly their parents). Very little attention has been given to children as active members of their communities. A form of generational ordering is clearly apparent in policy initiatives at the federal level, whereby children are to be developed, protected and provided for, but are marginalised within mainstream social capital or social inclusion building agendas.

The federal election on 7 September 2013 saw the Coalition returned to government. On 18 September 2013, the new Government announced the abolition of the Social Inclusion Board. At the time of writing, the Coalition Government had not announced its plans in relation to community strengthening, social inclusion, and/or social capital. Given the policy focus on the importance of fostering a strong, inclusive communities and supporting local solutions to local issues for more than a decade, it is likely that the Coalition Government will develop a set of policies in this area, ideally with children clearly positioned as active members of their communities.

There have been important initiatives at State and Territory levels, such as the New South Wales Parliament Committee reviews of the 'middle years' of childhood (nine to fourteen years) in 2006, 2009 and 2010. At State and Territory levels there have also been efforts to consult with children on matters relating to community development. Similarly, there are examples of local governments consulting with children and young people, particularly on matters relating to urban planning. In 2009, Bendigo was the first city in Australia to be recognised by the United Nations as a Child Friendly City, with other local jurisdictions now actively seeking to achieve child-friendly status.

In several States and Territories, initiatives to promote schools as community facilities have been prominent over the past ten to fifteen years. Such initiatives have sought to link schools to local communities and to form partnerships between schools and local communities and businesses. As an example, there are now forty-eight Schools as Community Centres (SaCC) operating across New South Wales, whereby local SaCC facilitators, schools and interagency partners collaborate to provide support for children aged between birth and eight years (http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/studentsupport/programs/ecip/schcommcentres/). Queensland's 'Parent and Community Engagement Framework' identified schools as a "central hub of their community." The Framework seeks to promote partnerships between schools and the wider community, while providing community members with a (somewhat unclearly defined) role in school decision-making (Queensland Department of Education, Training, and Employment, nd). Such initiatives identify school as central to children's lives, development and sense of community. They have also extended the role of schools to include community facilitation and promotion of not only educational outcomes for children, but broader positive outcomes for children and families (ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, nd; Department of Education and Training, 2005)

While a detailed overview of developments across state and local jurisdictions is beyond the scope of this report, preliminary policy mapping indicates a very large number of policies relating broadly to children and community. While policies extend beyond education, school is generally represented as the primary site of community for children. Our preliminary mapping suggests gaps at state levels – similar to those at the federal level – between policies for children and mainstream policies focusing on community strengthening. It also suggests an absence of policy focus on the issues identified by children in this research as of importance to them.

Far greater and more systematic research is needed of the ways in which policies relating to community, social capital and social inclusion across all levels of government in Australia, position children. An important contribution of this research is to provide a lens through which to analyse those policies, based on the issues that children have identified as important in their communities.

PART TWO: FINDINGS

The second part of this report focuses on the findings of the research with children. Findings are presented in five broad sections, each of which examines in detail what children across the six sites said about key dimensions of their communities. Reflecting the community jigsaw discussed in section 4 of this report, the broad sections are: relationships, safety, place, and resources. This part of the report also discusses what children told us about school and its role in their communities. Each section begins with a brief overview of the relevant literature, with the aim on examining the extent to which children's views and experiences, as illuminated by this research, support or challenge existing understandings. Each section then details and analyses what children told us and, finally, provides policy implications arising from this research.

Chapter 7.   Relationships

7.1 A brief overview of the literature

Relationships, usually described as 'networks', are central to the social capital literature. Indeed, McGonigal et al (2007: 79) correctly observe that despite the significant differences in Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam's definitions of social capital, all see it as "intrinsically relational." They go on to argue that interpersonal and social relationships are "the oxygen of social capital, providing either a potentially rich environment for growth and change, or a limiting context" (McGonigal, et al, 2007: 80). Portes (1998: 7) has observed that while "economic capital is in people's bank accounts and human capital is inside their heads, social capital inheres in the structure of their relationships." James Coleman describes social capital as inhering "in the structure of relations between and among actors." Coleman sees the quality of social capital among adults as crucial to the development of children's human capital. Significantly, he also notes the value of social capital whereby adults 'look out for' children other than their own (1988: S100). For Coleman, social capital applies in situations where people accumulate 'credit slips' through doing for others, while high levels of trustworthiness ensure that obligations of reciprocity are fulfilled. When children's (and indeed adults') lives are embedded in webs of reciprocity and trustworthiness, they are more likely to be bound by particular social norms. The social relationships that result may be

supportive and create protective environments for children that, for example, mean it is safe for them to move around their communities independently of their parents because other adults will look out for them. On the other hand, the resulting social relations may result in high levels of surveillance and control, whereby - in Coleman's words – young people are kept from 'having a good time'. Erikkson et al's (2010) study of children's experiences of social capital in rural Sweden highlights the fine line between supportive communities and restrictive social control.

A good deal of mainstream theorising of social capital and empirical studies have highlighted the importance of adult relationships to children's life chances, but have paid little attention to children's social networks, with other children and with adults. Leonard (2008) is critical of the lack of attention paid to the ways in which children and young people develop their own stocks of social capital within theories of social capital. Child-centred studies provide important insights into the ways in which relationships structure children's lives in both positive and negative ways. Many studies of children and social capital focus on children's peer relationships and friendships with other children. For example, Leonard (2008), drawing on Bourdieu, explores the ways in which teenagers in Northern Ireland utilise 'sub-cultural' capital to develop and maintain their own social relationships, independent of adults. Morrow (2001), in her study with twelve to fifteen year olds in the United Kingdom, states that children often spend more time with friends than with their families, particularly as they get older, and suggests that friends are central to children's out-of-school activities. While friends feature centrally, particularly in accounts of teenagers and social capital, less attention has been paid to intergenerational relations. Erikkson et al (2010) highlight the importance of peer friendships, but also draw attention to children's relationships with neighbours and other adults within their communities. They observe that close relationships with adults in the community can produce both control and safety, often simultaneously. Erikkson et al also emphasise the importance of acknowledging children's relationships and family.

7.2 What children said about relationships in the research

The children who participated in this research, across sites, indicated that relationships are central to a good and supportive community. While children spoke of the high level of importance placed on peer friendships, most also considered intergenerational relationships important. Family – parents, siblings and in some cases extended family – were identified by children as central to their lives and communities, and in five sites, the majority of children

spoke of the value they place on time with their parents. A significant proportion of children, particularly in the less advantaged sites, spoke of wanting more time with their parents, raising the question of whether Morrow's (2001) finding that teenagers spend more time with friends than family reflects their preference or is a response to the limited availability of parents' time during middle childhood and the need for children to develop their own, separate social networks. Beyond family, children identified neighbours and people living close by as important. Significantly, the focus for most children was on the nature and quality of relationships – while caring people make children feel included and supported in their communities, rude, hostile or disrespectful people undermine children's sense of community.

7.3 Family

The mainstream literature on social capital has tended to locate children within their families, with very little consideration of children as contributing to or benefiting from social capital in their own right. Similarly, policies aiming to foster social capital and to strengthen communities have considered children primarily, often solely, within the family unit; a trend that is in line with policy approaches in other English-speaking countries (see Morrow, 1999). The idea that dominates both the mainstream social capital literature and relevant policies can be described as representing the 'familialisation' of children. Edwards (2002: 435) argues that children have been subject to familialisation whereby "there is an emphasis on them being the responsibility of their parents, and on their upbringing and home lives as shaping their behaviour and attitudes." Edwards goes on to argue that children are "located as supervised sons and daughters in the home, and conceptualised in terms of their familial dependency." Despite marked theoretical and conceptual differences, Putnam, Coleman and Bourdieu's accounts of social capital familialise children, consequently rendering them invisible as social actors. Mason (2004) has argued that the familialisation of children "subordinates the social visibility of childhood and children so that children exist only as minors or dependants" and as a consequence, "children are not generally recognised as recipients of policies." Mayall (2000: 250) has challenged those engaged in research, policies and services relating to children to critique how the lives of children as a social group fit with dominant accounts. In this section, we discuss what children said about families within this research.

Given our emphasis on children as a social group and as individual actors within their communities – and our associated desire to avoid 'familialising' children – it may seem odd

to begin the discussion of children's views about the importance of social relationships with 'family'. Yet there is a crucial distinction between 'familialisation', whereby children are not considered other than as dependents within the family unit, and acknowledging the importance of family in children's lives. In line with Mayall's (2000) finding of her study with nine year old children in London, our research found that family matters a great deal in children's lives. While there was some variation across sites, the starting point for most children thinking about community was family. When asked what community means during an early session at Riverside, C (girl, aged 11) said "Friends and family are most important." M (girl, aged 10) added, "Family is definitely the best though," to the general agreement of the group.

The importance placed on families in discussions of community varied across the sites, but generally family was absolutely central to children's sense and experience of community. Most children in all the sites described family (and often their home) as the centre of their lives. Across all sites, children described a wide range of relationships with their families, and in three sites the majority of children had complex family arrangements often resulting from parental separation or some form of family breakdown. Even in those instances where children described very difficult family situations, they nevertheless identified family as very important. For example, C (boy, aged 10) asked in a one-on-one discussion with an interviewer "Do you think, like, my dad still loves me? Even if he yells and says I'm stupid."

Many children had strong relationships with their parents. One girl said "my mum is like really funny. She is like, she just cherishes us, she like, loves us a lot. So she is really nice to us and she talks to us a lot and she says 'hi daughter'." When talking about the place within her community that she felt safest, A (girl, aged 9) replied "In my mummy's arms."

At Gardenville, there was less emphasis on family than in other sites, with only a minority of children explicitly identifying their family as central to their definition and experience of community. For this minority of children, family was of utmost importance. Several other children spoke of their parents and siblings, but not in great detail. When discussing communities in Gardenville, more children drew on abstract notions of community than in other sites. It may be pertinent that at Gardenville, most children who participated in the research spent the majority of their non-school time in organised activities or lessons (such as music, dance or swimming), and had relatively little time to spend with their families. It may have also been significant that all but two of the children who participated at Gardenville

attended after school care at least some afternoons every week and some also attended before school care. This also limited the amount of time spent with their families.

Across the sites, several children noted that their families can be embarrassing at times, particularly in front of friends. Children participating in the research also observed that siblings can be very annoying. Ultimately, however, children held their families at the centre of their lives. Significantly in terms of social capital theory, children's accounts also indicated that families are significant in influencing how children engage with their communities and are often a conduit between children and their communities.

7.3.1 Brothers and sisters

In five of the six sites – and for a small minority of children in the sixth site – brothers and sisters were identified as very important, but relationships were often described as complicated. As A (girl, aged 8) put it, "We're [my brother and I] always having fights. And he can read my mind really well." In all sites, children described spending time with brothers and sisters and engaging in public spaces together, for example, going to the park or the local shop. G (boy, aged 10, Parksway) described teaming up with his brother, older sister and sister's friend to busk in a local park with the aim of raising money for charity. G described their efforts with great pride and said they had raised "a little bit" already. Spending time with brothers and sisters, and having social networks with the friends of siblings, was a significant theme at Lakeview, and was raised by some children at other sites.

In Surfside, approximately one quarter of children who participated in the research said they did not engage with their brothers or sisters as much as they would like. Age differences were sometimes described as limiting the amount of engagement children had with brothers or sisters. For example, N (girl, aged 10) said she does not have a great deal to do with her brothers because they are too old. B (girl, aged 10) who had an older sister, said "I am lonely because my sister is busy playing her DS and stuff like that."

In Surfside, Riverside and Longridge, a significant minority of children explained that they had little engagement (and in some cases contact) with some siblings as a result of family separation. A (boy, aged 10, Longridge) said "Well I have got three sisters and one brother but they don't really live with me." F (girl, aged 10, Surfside) described her situation: "I have two brothers that we don't really see that much because they are really older. Like one is like 24 and one is 19. And we have different mums but the same dads. And they both live up in

[another city]...We haven't seen B, he is 19, we haven't seen him in like four years. We haven't seen my other brother in one. And they never ring up or anything."

7.3.2 Extended family

The significance of extended family in children's lives varied considerably, with differences across sites as well as between individuals. Children at Longridge were most likely to describe having regular engagement with extended family, while extended family was important for a significant proportion of children at Parksway and Lakeview.

In Longridge and Parksway, children described the importance of extended family in times of difficulty. For example, in Longridge, several children said that families helped out in times of financial hardship, including providing emergency accommodation. A significant minority of children in Longridge, most from Pacific Islander backgrounds, described helping or being helped by extended family members (aunts, uncles, cousins and more distant relatives) who needed a place to stay for a few nights up to several months. E (girl, aged 12) described often having relatives staying with her family, noting at one time eighteen people were living in her three-bedroom house. While this very large number was out of the ordinary, having many people and a high rate of visitor turnover was not unusual in her home. While E valued her relationship with her immediate and extended family, she found it difficult to find a place of her own, or to do her homework, when the number of people in the house became very high. In contrast to children's very intimate experience of extended family in Longridge, children in Lakeview described getting together with extended family to celebrate important events, such as Christmas and birthdays.

Grandparents were described as significant for some children. In two cases, children described living with their grandparents following parental separation. In these two cases, the experiences were quite different. One girl described enjoying living with her grandparents, and feeling safe, happy and at home with them. A boy explained that he, his father and sister had moved into his grandparents' house after the separation of his parents, describing the situation as "very difficult." In other cases (two in Longridge and five in Parksway) children discussed living with their grandparents as part of the extended family arrangement. One boy lived with both his parents and grandparents, and because his parents worked very long hours, his grandparents had a more significant presence in his daily life than his parents. His grandparents were important to him both practically and emotionally, but as they spoke little English and did not have their own social networks beyond the family and immediate cultural

community, they found it difficult to understand and support his social life. In contrast, in Parksway, a group of twelve year old girls explained that their grandmothers, who lived with them, knew one another socially although not always intimately. According to the girls, this was important for their own social lives, as parents were more likely to give them permission to go to one another's houses when grandmother knew the family and approved.

Extended family or familial connection overseas was important to some children's conceptualisation of community. In nine cases, (one in Riverside, two in Longridge, five in Parksway and one in Lakeview) children drew a map or picture of their community overseas rather than their local community. In all cases children had relatives living overseas, and four of the nine children had been born in the country they described as their most important community. In one case, the girl had not visited the country, but felt a close connection because her parents were born there and maintained connections with friends and family.

Across all sites some children said that their extended families lived overseas, and described staying in touch via telephone, Skype or Facebook. While the children who participated in this research did not consider social media to be part of their community, several indicated that technology is very important in connecting families and communities who are geographically separated. In Parksway, children described visiting the country of their or their parents' birth every few years and having relatives visit Australia regularly. Several children felt a very strong connection with their parents' country of birth, but had not visited it themselves. In some cases children had what might be described as a 'romantic' vision of their 'other' country, and thought that community would be stronger and happier there than their community in Australia.

7.3.3. Children's contributions to the families

Children's descriptions of their family lives highlighted the extent to which some children contribute to their families. This was particularly so at the disadvantaged sites.

Children's contributions within their families were commonly shaped by gender, with girls far more likely than boys to do (or be expected to do) household chores or care for younger siblings. Gender differences were particularly apparent in Parksway. Five older girls aged 11-12 from Muslim families described being required to do chores at home, while their brothers were not expected to contribute. One girl said "We [girls] have to wash the dishes, put the clothes on the line, fold the undies. My brother, he watches TV or plays with his DS." These

girls discussed among themselves and with the researcher the prospect that their family would change markedly in their late teens, as it was possible that their families would find husbands for them from overseas. The girls had seen female relatives follow this path. The girls appeared accepting of the prospect, but wanted to make the most of their time as children now. They were not happy having to spend their time doing household chores, particularly when their brothers avoided such responsibility.

In a very small number of cases, children played a major caring role within their family. In describing her own situation, J (girl, aged 11) reflected the experience of several others: "I don't have much time with my mum. She goes out, you know, with her friends and to the Club. I look after the little ones, my brother and sister. I don't have much time for myself and I don' see my mum much. She has her own friends." What was distinct about this girl's situation was the amount of time she spent looking after her younger brother and sister. Her afternoons, evenings and weekends were almost exclusively dedicated to caring for her younger siblings, including cooking for them, cleaning and keeping them entertained. Her brother suffered from epilepsy and she felt an enormous weight of responsibility for him. She worried that he would take ill while she was looking after him, as had happened in the past. When asked if she liked looking after her little brother and sister, J replied "Well, no, I don't like it. But I love them, so I do it because I love them." J also worked sometimes on the weekends in her mothers' boyfriend's business, which she said she enjoyed. In her poster of what she would like her community to look like, J drew a picture of herself on a swing. She explained "I'd just like to be a child and to play a bit myself – just sometimes."

While J shouldered a very large responsibility within her family, other children involved in the research also assumed responsibilities to varying degrees. M (girl, aged 10) explained that since her parents had divorced, her mother had been very sad. M worried a great deal about her mother, and tried to spend as much time with her as possible – she did not feel comfortable leaving her mum alone while she was at school and described hurrying home each day. M tried to support her mother both emotionally and by doing things to help around the house, such as cooking and cleaning.

N (boy, aged 11) tried to take responsibility for and protect his father by encouraging him to drink alcohol at home, rather than in pubs or other public places. N explained: "I prefer it if my dad drinks at home. When he gets drunk, he can get a bit stupid, you know. When he gets drunk and he's home then he can go to sleep and we can put him to bed and know he is OK.

When he goes out and gets drunk, he might get stupid and then get into trouble – you know, do stupid things. At home I can look after him and know he is all right."

The situations of J, M and N demonstrate how children not only benefit from social capital within their families, but actively contribute to it. Using concepts of bonding and bridging capital, each of these children were essential to the intimate family support networks that help people to get by. Yet their ability to form social networks outside the family was limited by the extent of their responsibilities – this was particularly the case for the two girls, J and M. Each of these children could be described as experiencing some degree of parentification – M and N, primarily emotional parentification and J instrumental and emotional (see Jurkovic 1997). In preliminary presentations of the findings of this research, one relatively common response from professionals, particularly those involved in child protection, is concern that these children, and particularly J, are parentified. Several professionals have suggested that J's situation should be understood as requiring child protection intervention because of the extent of parentification involved and the neglect of J's own developmental needs. Yet, as Jurkovic et al (2001: 256) have pointed out, "it is important to entertain the possibility that parentification, even if embedded in an unjust familial context, has not only deleterious but also beneficial effects." From a child's standpoint, the language of parentification and the framing of significant (even burdensome) filial responsibility as a child protection issue, obscures the complexity of children's lives and renders their contributions problematic rather than valuable. J, in particular, would have benefited from forms of support that lessened her load, provided her with time to play and develop social networks outside her family, while recognising the value she placed on her family, particularly her little brother and sister. When framed as a child protection issue, however, the scope for the kinds of support that would most benefit J, is severely diminished. Moreover, when children such as J become concerned that child protection authorities may step in, the likelihood that they will withdraw further and become more isolated, increases.

7.3.4 Families facilitating connectedness

Children's families were important to their experience of community. For some children, social networks and their sense of trust in their communities were linked to their family's engagement with the community. Others felt that their own social networks were limited because their parents did not actively engage in the community. In Lakeview, several children spoke of the ways in which they engaged in networks and relationships within their

community through their parents. For example, when describing their relationships with other people in their community, at least half the children did so in terms of their family's relationships with other people. In Longridge, as discussed earlier, girls' social networks with friends outside school was facilitated by networks between their grandmothers, which created sufficient levels of trust within socially conservative families to allow their daughters to socialise with other girls.

A significant theme in Gardenville was the need for parents to be a conduit for their children's involvement in the community. This was particularly important because school friends were often geographically dispersed, and approximately half the children participating in the research indicated that they considered networks within the local communities to be important. However, only three children in Gardenville described having strong local networks independent of school. Most children felt their parents were detached from the community and this impacted on their own ability to be part of the community. K (girl, aged 10) was aware of a number of community events in her local area, but said her parents didn't like to be part of such activities. This meant that she was unable to get involved herself, although she would have liked to. K noted "At school, as we were talking about groups of friends, you don't really need you parents, at school [to help you be part of a community]." Beyond her school, however, K was aware that she needed her parents to facilitate her involvement in her local community. B (girl, aged 10) described a similar experience: "I don't really know much about my community because my parents, they don't like being part of the community, they don't like being involved with it. And I feel like that's a letdown with me because I want to be part of the community and know people."

7.3.5 Family and loss

At Longridge, V (boy, aged 10) defined community as "a place where people live and come together and have fun." This statement led to a discussion as to whether having fun should be defined as a necessary part of a community. There was a general consensus among children that a good community should involve fun sometimes, but not always. H (boy, aged 10) said, "it's when things get really bad that community is really important." This concept of community as providing support during bad times was reflected in children's discussion of family and loss. Across all sites, some children spoke of experiencing grief within their families and described the ways in which that grief related to their communities. In some cases, communities provided support when families most needed it, for example following

the death of a loved one. In others, children spoke of losing their community following parental separation.

For many children, family was the site of loss at the personal level and in terms of community. At two sites, children participating in the research had lost sisters to cancer, an experience that had profound effects on them, their families and communities. In one case, a boy whose sister had died described the ways in which the school and broader community, including neighbours and local religious leaders from different faiths, had provided support to his family. The ongoing support and comfort provided by his friends was evident during the research. While the terrible loss of his sister was deeply personal, and something his family struggled to deal with together, the local community had been important in providing support. At Longridge, another girl, who was one of ten siblings, spoke of her mother having experienced two miscarriages recently, which made her mother cry. Family tragedies, such as these, were sometimes difficult for children to talk about, but were experiences these children wanted to share as central to their lives.

A number of children described their sense of loss following family breakdown. In Riverside, where over half the children who participated in the research were from families where their parents had separated, this was a significant issue. For many children, parental separation came with a sense of loss both at the level of the family (that is, the end of the family unit as it had been) and in terms of community. At the personal level, children's experience and sense of loss was often intense. At Riverside, two children explained that they had no contact at all with their mother. B (girl, aged 8) explained that her Dad was often tired and probably sad too. She explained that he did not ask her how she felt about not having her mother in her life, but told her to toughen up, which caused her considerable distress. For B, her family, which now consisted of her father and brother, was of utmost importance and she described how much she loved them both, even when they were annoying. However, B also described her family as being socially isolated. Her father occasionally went to the pub, but generally the family had little contact with others. B's social networks were largely limited to school.

While B and another child at Riverside had lost contact with their mother following parental separation, it was more common in Riverside and in other sites, for children to lose contact with their fathers. At Riverside, one teacher described the local community as characterised by the absence of fathers or father-figures in the lives of many children. She explained that many families had neither the time, motivation, nor – particularly – the money for sporting

and other organised events through which children might come into contact with positive male role-models. She, and other teachers, described the school as trying to build a sense of community and to find ways of providing a male presence in children's (particularly boys') lives, including through volunteers coming into the school to work with children:

> ...the children love the older, more grandfatherly sort of men that come and read to them. There's one chap that comes and he does go-carts with them and car engines and things like that and the boys that aren't really engaged in learning literacy and the more formalised work can engage with them on that practical level – "Oh this is how we pull a car apart and put it back together" and the boys just think that's wonderful. Once again I don't know if that's a hands-on thing or it's also having an older man who's interested in them teaching them that male stuff…

The school at Riverside was aware that many families who had experienced separation did not have the networks or connections to provide support to children when mothers or fathers left. The kind of social isolation that B and her family experienced after the departure of her mother, was – according to both children and teachers involved in this research – a common experience. Some children explained that their parents sometimes drew on their own social networks, often centred on the local RSL club or pub. Often, these networks were exclusively adult, particularly those that involved involvement in alcohol use or gambling, and intensified children's sense of isolation and exclusion.

While children described often intense personal loss when their families separated, some also described a loss of community. When families separated, the loss felt was not necessarily just that of family. Loss of community was also significant for a number of children. H (girl, aged 10) explained that her parents had separated and that she lived mainly with her mother but also spent considerable amounts of time with her father. For H, her parents' separation had meant a move to a new neighbourhood and the loss of her existing networks in her old community. H said that she did not feel part of the local community at her Dad's house, but did at her Mum's. Another girl at Riverside, M (aged 10), explained that she and her mother had recently moved into her Mum's boyfriend's house. M had lost the sense of community she had felt in her old community and did not yet feel part of her new community. When M talked about community, she emphasised that she was thinking of her old community, where she had felt "a part of things."

In Surfside, as in Riverside, slightly more than half the children who participated in the research lived in families where their parents had separated. Several children at Surfside described experiences similar to H's at Riverside: life and engagement with their communities was determined according to which parent they were with on any given day. L (girl, aged 10) explained "Well usually when I go to my dad, when it's Thursday, I have treat day. But we do lots of special things. We go out heaps with my daddy on the weekend. But with our mum we usually just stay home and I don't really like it." L also explained that her mum had very little money with which to do fun things. W (boy, aged 9) explained his situation as follows, "This week I am with my mum. Next week I am with my dad. And the week after that with my mum and ... it's a pattern." W found it difficult to take part in out of school activities because his parents lived some distance apart; as a result, his engagement with his community was restricted.

At Gardenville, only one girl (J, aged 10) lived in a family where parents had separated. Interestingly, she described experiences similar to other children who lived across two households and communities. J liked being at both her mother's and father's house, but liked her neighbours more at her mother's house – although she said she did not know them well. At her father's house, she did not know and rarely saw her neighbours. Her parents lived several suburbs apart, and J did not feel part of a local community at either house. Y (girl, aged 8), also at Gardenville, lived with her father and brother. Her parents were a couple, but lived in separate states due to work commitments. Y did not know her neighbours and described having no engagement in her local community, although she participated in a significant number of extra-curricular activities. Y explained that because her mum lived away, her dad was too busy to spend time with neighbours or engage in community activities. Moreover, her busy schedule of structured activities allowed little time for anything more.

7.4 Time with parents

Given the importance the majority of children placed on family, it is not surprising that many children said they wanted more time with their parents. It has been observed that when social discourses refer to parents spending more time with their children, the coded meaning is mothers spending time with children (Hughes et al, 1991). In this research, children who spoke of valuing or wanting more time with their parents were very clear that they meant mothers and fathers. Children were also aware that different issues and time burdens impacted on their mothers and fathers' time availability.

Coleman's theorising of social capital within the family is relevant here. For Coleman (1988), social capital within the family is the nature and intensity of the relationship between parents and children and the extent to which parents actively engage with their children. Social capital within the family, according to Coleman, is increased by parents' physical presence and the strength of their relationship with their children. While Coleman emphasises the effects of social capital within the family on the development of future human capital, the children in this research spoke of social capital within the family as important to their lives and experiences in the present. The distinction between parents being physically present and being engaged in their children's lives was raised by a number of children. In Riverside, Longridge, Surfside, and Parksway – the four less advantaged communities – the problem of not having time with parents despite parents being physically present was significant for many children.

DJ (boy, aged 10) explained that he did not spend as much time with his parents as he would like. DJ said "I think that parents should spend more time playing with their kids and doing fun stuff with their kids. Even if they are trying to find a job they should put some time aside to spend with the kids. Because otherwise, like if they only have one child, the child would get lonely and get bored. They might even think the parents don't love them."

Like DJ, other children associated spending time and engaging with parents with love. For example, O (girl, aged 10) described spending a lot of time with her mother, which she valued greatly. O said "I know my mum loves me because she does stuff with me and my brother." At Lakeside, spending time with parents was a stronger theme than elsewhere, and was central to children's positive experiences of their broader community. M (girl, aged 9) drew a picture of things she does in her community and then explained it as follows: "Well, me and S are peeking out the window at Daddy watering our blue flowers. I'm about to draw Mummy and R coming back from Little Athletics." This comment is typical of the way in which the majority of children in Lakeview spoke of time and engagement with parents, home and broader community activities as intersecting aspects of their lives. For the majority of children in Lakeview, engaging in activities with their parents was a significant theme. Activities they enjoyed doing with their parents included bike-riding, having picnics and going to the park together. An example of the way in which children spoke in very positive terms of active engagement with their parents, was T's (girl, aged 9) description of how her father liked to play on the flying fox with her at the local park. In Longridge, the majority of

boys played football, and several said their fathers also played. Several boys described greatly enjoying the opportunity to play football with both their friends and their fathers.

According to the children who participated in this research, three factors are central in explaining why parents spend less time and engage less with their children than children would like: (i) the time parents spend in both paid and unpaid work; (ii) the impact of parents' illness or injury; and (iii) parents' preference for socialising with adults rather than with their children.

7.4.1 Parents and work

Children identified a key reason for the limited time they spent with their parents as the demands of paid and unpaid work. In many cases, children understood that their parents were under considerable pressure and identified this as a problem. Children observed that time with their mothers was often limited because their mums had to juggle paid work, household chores, and in some cases care for younger children. G (girl, aged 9) said "Mums and dads do work and after they work they get busy, they are still busy with their house, like mums. But they should like make time like a little bit, like five minutes to spend time with their children." She went on to say "I think, actually, that can change," describing again how parents could make just a few minutes a day for their children.

N (girl aged 11, Riverside) had four younger sisters when her mother re-partnered and had a fifth child. N described the way things changed when her fifth sister was born: "Before [baby sister] was born my mum, we just went to the park and stuff and it was really, really nice and calm. I want more time with my mum. But I have five sisters, so that's probably never going to happen." Similarly, M (girl, aged 10) described longing for more time with her mother, but said that her mother was too busy with her two younger siblings to spend time with her. We do not aim to suggest here that Coleman's claim that more siblings result in less social capital within a family. Indeed, as discussed in the sub-section on brothers and sisters, sibling relationships may themselves be an important source of social capital within a family. However, this research indicates that parents' limited time, whether resulting from the need to care for other children or from other factors, is a problem.

Children were far less likely to identify fathers' unpaid work within the household as a major reason for the limited time their fathers had to spend with them. Rather, fathers' paid work was a focus for children. In particular, in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside, and Parksway,

fathers' working either long hours or afternoon and night shift was a significant problem for children, as they were rarely home at the same time as their fathers. Several children described their fathers as working more than one job, either currently or in the past. Children described their fathers, and sometimes mothers', long working hours as driven by economic necessity. D (boy, aged 11, Riverside) described his situation: "We only have our Dad and he works full time. Seven in the morning to six at night. And we have to get up at 5.25 every day. And we go to our Nana's for two hours because he takes a while to get back. So we barely see our Dad." In Longridge S (boy, aged 10) lived with both parents, but their long working hours limited the time he could spend with them. S's mum worked particularly long hours, leaving home at 7.30am and returning at 7pm. S said he very rarely saw his mum. T (boy, aged 11) described his situation with regret: "When I first moved here me and my parents had a lot of time because they weren't working and we used to go fishing and have a lot of fun. But now they, they work most of the day and I normally never see my Dad." T was aware that paid employment was essential for his family's survival, but he was saddened that he no longer had time with his Mum and Dad.

In Lakeview, children described having considerable amounts of time with their parents, which most valued greatly. However, here too, children felt that paid work often intruded on family time. K (girl, 9 years) raised this as a major issue, explaining that "Because my Dad even has to work on Saturdays sometimes, so that's actually quite annoying, that they have to work, they can't have more fun with us. Because it's just wasting, you can't have family time with your family." K felt that it was very unfair that parents should have to work on weekends, as she considered this to be family time. K went on to say:

> "Some people get let off work when other people, who have children, can't get
> let off work - like my Dad. And some other people at the work, they don't have
> any children, they've got a girlfriend, and they can go home earlier. And my
> Dad, he's not one of the bosses or anything, he's just a worker like everyone
> else, he has to go home late. Me and my brother have to stay home for a little
> bit and wait for my Dad, because my Dad can't take time off work. Same with
> my Mum, because she's got a new job, and she's a child care worker."

As K made her case that parents should be able to have time with their children rather than have to work, the majority of other children were in strong agreement. Significantly, and somewhat unusually, no-one disagreed with K's point.

It is important to emphasise that we are not arguing that paid work is unimportant to families' well-being; clearly it is and there is a good deal of evidence to demonstrate the benefits of paid employment. The point that is highly significant from a child's standpoint, is that long working hours that intrude on family time, limit the length and nature of children's engagement with their parents and this is problematic. From a child's standpoint, the work-family balance so often espoused by adults and policy makers as an important principle, is not being given adequate priority in reality. The problem is particularly acute in low-income working families, where long hours are necessary for basic livelihood. Long working hours, or working times that consistently prevent children from seeing their parents, may undermine social capital within the family and limit the extent to which children can engage in their communities alongside their parents.

In high-income households, where disposable income may result in a range of both consumer goods and fee-for-service activities (such as dancing, horseriding, or music lessons), such items were often effective substitutes for parents' time and engagement. In Gardenville, the majority of children described having very limited time and engagement with their parents. It is important to note here that all but two participating children attended after school care, which necessarily meant their time outside of the school environment was reduced. The majority of the children who participated in Gardenville also engaged in a range of extra-curricular activities. For example, J (girl, aged 8) described having music, language classes and homework club on weekdays before or after school, in addition to attending after school care. On the weekends she had music, dancing and swimming lessons. Her very busy schedule allowed little time with her parents, although she said she liked to relax with her parents and brother on Sundays, but was often too tired to do anything at all. J was not the only children at Gardenville with a hectic schedule, and several children said they found their routines tiring.

While some children indicated that they would like more time with their parents, the majority accepted that their parents needed to work and were required to work long hours. Several children felt they benefitted from their parents work, as they were given a wide range of consumer goods and were able to engage in a range of structured out of school activities. Interestingly, at Gardenville, most children were aware of the trade-off being made and accepted it. Only three children at Gardenville described spending considerable amounts of time with their parents, and said they valued it more highly than organised activities or time spent using consumer items. In Parksway, a group of year six girls described their fathers as

often working long hours. However, these girls described a 'pay-off' for them from their fathers' work in the form of consumer items. K (girl, aged 11) said her father earns a lot of money and buys her whatever she wants. A small number of children in Parksway (approximately one quarter of children) described their fathers as earning high incomes. O (girl, aged 11) described her fathers' work as follows: "My dad spends so much on me. I've got a hundred pairs of shoes. He spends like… because he's a plumber. Plumbers get paid so much. He works every day so he gets like a $1,000 every day or something. He's a very good worker." O considered the trade-off between her fathers' time and the financial benefits of his work as worthwhile. Significantly, in low-income sites, children also spoke of the consumer items their parents' provided, recognising these to be benefits of parents paid employment (particularly DSs, x-boxes, Wii, and for some girls, clothes). Within children's own social groups, particular consumer items were considered important; a source of fun and a way to stay entertained, particularly in the absence of people with whom to engage. The right form of consumer item was also a form of (sub-)cultural capital for children within their own social groups, representing goods that have both material and symbolic value.

While the majority of children prioritised time and active engagement with their parents over other activities or goods, a significant minority recognised that their parents' long working hours gave them access to activities and goods they would not otherwise have had. Some children considered this simply to be the norm. Others, recognised a trade-off, but had very different views about that trade-off. While some were satisfied with the material benefits they received, a significantly larger proportion of children involved in this research, indicated they would have preferred more time and engagement with their parents. Significantly, the children who described benefitting most substantially from their parents' income (most notably those who participated at Gardenville and a smaller proportion of children at Parksway) were also least likely to know their neighbours, described having few social networks outside of school, and had limited engagement in their local communities. It appears that trading-off time and engagement with parents for consumer goods and fee-based activities may undermine social capital within families and children's sense of connectedness to their broader communities.

7.4.2 Parental illness or injury

A second factor identified by children as impacting on the length and quality of time spent with parents was parental illness or injury, particularly among fathers. Taylor and Fraser

(2003) have noted that parents on low incomes are more likely to suffer from serious health issues. At Surfside, S (boy, aged 9) explained that his dad had a bad back, which was caused by a work injury. S said his Dad's back had been bad "ever since I was born." His father had undergone surgery when S was in kindergarten, but the pain had not gone. S's dad also had a knee problem, also described by S as work related, which caused him pain. As a result, S's Dad rarely felt like playing. S explained that he understood because his Dad's back and knee "really do hurt a lot," but he wished his dad could "do stuff" with him.

Three children in Parksway described their fathers as having suffered injuries at work, which then impacted on their fathers' ability and desire to spend time with them. One boy (G, aged 10) described his father as having suffered a serious head injury at work. After this, his father found it difficult to do anything and was off work for what G described as "a long time." During that period, G's Dad did not want to play or even talk. G understood why, and did not blame his Dad, but was saddened by the turn of events. He was also angry that his father was not "looked after" by his employer – either before the accident in terms of adequate safety equipment, or afterwards in terms of compensation. The family had suffered financially during his father's convalescence.

7.4.3 Parent's preference for socialising with adults rather than with their children

A significant factor in limiting the time children spend with their parents was some parents' preference for socialising with adults rather than their children. At Riverside, about half the children participating in the research said that a major limitation on time with their parents was their parents' busy social life. Children talked about being excluded from their parents' social lives and described how for their parents, going to the local RSL Club (to gamble and drink) and drinking alcohol (out, or at home) was the most common form of social activity for their parents. The majority of children described their parents – both fathers and mothers – going out to drink with friends or drinking at home, often to the point of drunkenness. One girl observed that parents "only get drunk when they have parties." Others suggested it was more regular. One girl said "Well, if your mum is single, then they go around."

When parents went out to socialise, children were either left at home alone or taken to the 'children's room' of the local club. Several children described being home alone regularly while their parents went out to socialise. A smaller sub-set described feeling frightened when home alone at night. Spending time in the children's room of the local RSL club was a common experience.

The children in this research at Riverside who were taken to the club with their parents universally hated the 'children's room' where they were left. One girl described it as the "holding pen." They found the children's room incredibly boring, often crowded, and designed for young children. Moreover, they had no control over who else would be in the children's room and often found themselves left with children they did not know or, in some cases, like. Children described spending very long periods of time in the children's room, despite restrictions whereby children should only be left for three hours with hourly checks by parents. It should be recognised that even when restrictions are fully implemented, three hours is a long time for a child to be left in a place they do not like and cannot leave. At the club in Riverside, like similar clubs across Australia, children are not allowed to walk around unattended and, therefore, are stranded in the children's room until their parents return.

Children at Surfside also described being taken to the children's club at the local RSL club. Interestingly, children's views of the club at Surfside were far more mixed than in Riverside. J (boy, aged 10) and C (boy, aged 10) both spoke about the children's room at the local RSL club. C observed that the RSL club is a place "for adults to go have a really nice time and make sure, maybe their kids won't be bored and they can still be alright and have fun." C was ambivalent about the children's room. He thought that the idea of a place for children to be while their parents enjoyed themselves was a good one, but at times he thought the children's room could be boring. Children considered the food at the RSL in Surfside to be quite good and saw it as a meeting place for adults. G (girl, aged 9) described the RSL club as follows: "It's a place – a club – where you can go and eat and you can play poker and everything."

The provision of children's rooms in clubs and similar adult-focused venues are often presented, particularly in the promotional material of the venues as being child or family-friendly. Indeed, the nature of gambling and alcohol use in some venues suggests that they are not appropriate places for children, and children's rooms have been presented as the answer. Venue operators have presented children's rooms as part of their social responsibility, and as a preferable alternative to children being left at home alone or in cars. This research finds rather than being child-friendly, spaces that segregate children and restrict their ability to interact with others beyond a circumscribed age group (usually children aged between five and twelve years) are exclusionary spaces. They provide to children a clear message that adults prefer to socialise in child-free spaces, and that children's place is on the margins of adult-focused spaces. When children's parents or guardians spend considerable amounts of time at clubs or similar venues, and children subsequently spend considerable

amounts of time in children's rooms, children are disconnected from their social worlds and restricted to artificially constructed spaces designed to occupy them while adults socialise. The kinds of social relationships that children value, including relationships across age categories, are not able to develop. The underlying issue is not the children's rooms per se, or individual parents' use of them, but the nature of the structuring of social relationships that exclude children. 'Children's rooms' are symptomatic of a social world in which children are managed rather than included.

While parents' socialising patterns were identified by children in Riverside as a major reason for their limited time together, similar issues were raised by some children at other sites and were strongest in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway. N (boy, aged 9) said "What I think is like kids should be involved in more stuff. Because lots of stuff is just for adults and then kids can't really do it." Some children indicated that even when their parents were home, they preferred not to engage with their children. For example, K (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said she would like it if her parents played with her but added "They are too busy. They are too busy watching The Bold and The Beautiful."

H (boy aged 9, Parksway) said that instead of going out to socialise with other adults, parents could play a game with their children. He suggested that each person in the family could choose a game and play it together. H argued that this would have many benefits: it would be fun, families would spend time together 'just playing', and it would be less expensive than going out. H, like many children participating in this research, observed that the family time he longed for was a rarity.

7.5 Friends

Across all sites, children who participated in the research identified friends as very important to community. When defining community, children spoke of the importance of inclusive and supportive friendships, and friends' houses often featured prominently on children's maps of their communities. School was the most significant source of friendships for children in all sites, although across all sites children described having friends from outside of school, which they considered important. The extent to which children could engage with their friends depended on where their friends lived or the preparedness and ability of parents to facilitate visits and play dates. When friends lived close by, engagement outside of school often depended on whether children were allowed to move around their neighbourhood independently and felt safe in doing so. At Lakeview and Surfside, children were more likely

than at other sites to visit their friends regularly outside of school. In Longridge, in particular, children described their cousins as their primary friendship group outside of school. At Longridge and, to a lesser extent, Surfside, church provided children with an important source of friendships. O, (girl, aged 10) described her friends from 'kids' church' as a very important part of her community. O explained that her family goes to church every Sunday, where "we get to do lots of craft and we have got lots of friends." O also said that she, her sister and father often visited their church friends' houses and received regular visits to their own home.

Having other children living close by was described by the vast majority of children as a very good thing. K (girl, aged 10) said "The street is like a community. Whenever we [K and her brother] get bored we can go outside and then we find somebody to play with because we know just about everyone in the street." When friends lived within close proximity to one another, they tended to describe a shared experience of community.

Significantly, neighbours were commonly described as friends in Lakeview. Child neighbours were considered important and valued as playmates, but children also described adult neighbours as friends. For example: "Well, I make friends with them [neighbours], and my family makes friends with them too, and then we talk to them together." While this was a strong theme in Lakeview, a similar view was expressed by a smaller number of children (about one quarter) in Surfside.

Friends of the same or similar age were described across all sites as essential to a good community. Friendships both at school and outside school are considered important by children. Significantly, while children described the importance of child friends, adult friends – or intergenerational friendships – appear to strengthen children's sense of community.

7.6 Good neighbours

Neighbours were central to children's experience of their immediate, local community; in both positive and negative ways. While children's relationships with their neighbours varied considerably within sites, the importance of neighbours was a broadly identifiable theme in each site.

Children at Lakeview were most likely to know their neighbours and to have positive relationships with them. All but one child in Lakeview knew at least one of their neighbours. The girl who did not know any neighbours had recently moved into the street. She said "No,

I don't know anyone in my street. I really want to know them." The majority of children knew several neighbours and a significant proportion described knowing their neighbours well.

Social interaction and reciprocity were important dimensions of interactions between children, their families and neighbours in Lakeview. A (girl, aged 11) said "I think neighbours are important in our community, because it would be pretty boring if you were just sitting in a house with no one around. And I like my neighbours because they have a little daughter named M who is very cute. And our neighbour, she always like gives us cupcakes, and they give us seeds to plant in our veggie garden, it's really cool." L (boy, aged 9) spoke of neighbourly exchange: "I think neighbours are really important in the community, because like, my neighbours, we both have a veggie patch, and sometimes we give them some food that they don't have in their patch, and they give us some of their food." K (girl, aged 9), described a similar relationship between her family and her neighbours: "Yeah, every year in spring our cherry tree grows, and we always give a bag of cherries to our neighbours."

While the majority of children described their adult neighbours as an important part of their community and, in some cases, as friends, child neighbours were considered very important. T (girl, aged 9) said "They [neighbours] are very important because, well, because sometimes if you're not very entertained at your house or something, and my neighbours, they have two little kids, and they always keep me entertained, even though sometimes they get a bit annoying."

At Lakeville, relationships with neighbours gave children a strong sense of social connectedness and safety. All children at Lakeville described generally feeling quite safe or very safe in their local community, primarily because they knew people living in the area and could rely on them if they needed help or experienced a problem. In Coleman's terms, there was 'someone looking out for them.'

At Gardenville, most children did not know their neighbours. A small number of children (three) described knowing their neighbours very well and socialising with them. These children talked of both friendship and reciprocity with neighbours as very important to their sense of community. One girl explained that her neighbours remembered her birthday each year and other important dates, which they celebrated together. This girl described her adult neighbours as her friends and said she knew almost everyone in her street. When asked

whether she had ever been into her neighbours' houses, she replied "Yeah. Of course. We pop by to say hello or to have a cup of tea. Or to play with the dogs. We always visit for Christmas and birthdays. And sometimes we give our neighbours home-made jam. They give us things too." She described getting together for a street Christmas party each year. Another girl described playing with her child neighbours next door and across the road. Her next door neighbours sometimes gave her family honey from their bees. However, this close sense of connectedness to neighbours was not the majority experience at Gardenville. K (9 years) said 'My Mum and Dad know one of my neighbours. But I don't really know them, and then I don't really know my other neighbours. But I've seen my other neighbours.' MM (10 years) said 'We live on a busy street. I know this sounds weird but we live so close to these busy areas, our community doesn't really get together much.'

Three children had recently moved into Gardenville (one from interstate and two from other parts of the city), and all three spoke nostalgically of their previous communities, referring to community in the geographic sense. They described feeling a stronger sense of community in their former locations where they indicated that they had known more people and that they had found it hard to get to know their neighbours in their new area. They indicated that their parents did not know their new neighbours either. Lack of time was a significant factor in children, and their families, not knowing their neighbours. One girl, J (aged 8), described moving to her house the previous year. She described her neighbours as really nice because they had come to her house to welcome her family to the neighbourhood. Her neighbours had invited her family over, but her father had said they were too busy unpacking. J said that her parents had not taken up their neighbour's invitation to visit because they had too much work to do.

At Gardenville, the majority of children's experience with their neighbours was one of unfamiliarity and disconnectedness. Using Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social capital, most children at Garedenville could be described as having high levels of economic capital (financial assets) and cultural capital. Most children's parents' were in well-paid professional occupations and parents' social connections through membership of dominant social and professional groups provided potential assets on which their children could draw, currently or in the future. In this sense, children at Gardenville could be described as having relatively high – or perhaps more accurately, valuable – levels of social capital. If social capital is defined as social networks, connectedness to community, and patterns of reciprocity, as

Putnam directs us, the level of social capital available to children at Gardenville was relatively low.

In Riverside, Longridge, Parksway and Surfside, children described mixed experiences and some children described very positive relationships with their neighbours. L (girl aged 11, Longridge), for example, described her next door neighbour as very important to her and her family. The neighbour, an older lady, baked muffins for L and her sisters. In return L and her family watched out for their elderly neighbour and played board games with her. T (girl, aged 10, Longridge) explained, "I know all the grown-ups in my community because I play with all their younger children." In Parksway, two children spoke in very positive terms about neighbours. M (boy, aged 8) said his neighbours helped his family by providing food and J (boy, aged 10) said he knows his neighbours and says "hi," which made him feel safe when he moved around his community because he knew people. These interactions and examples of reciprocity can be categorised as bonding social capital, which helps people to get by on a daily basis. Bonding social capital appears to be particularly important to children when it helps to build a sense of community. The interactions with neighbours described by children in five of the six sites, and particularly in Lakeview, contributes significantly to community as defined in this research; that is 'a social space within which people are personally connected and known to one another. Within this social space, people provide friendship and support to one another and work towards common goals….' (see Section 4.1 of this report for a detailed discussion of this definition).

However, children across all sites described negative experiences with neighbours, ranging from inconsiderate behaviour to violent encounters. Children in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway were far more likely to describe such negative experiences. A number of children across these four sites described negative experiences as occurring frequently. J (girl, aged 10) described her interactions with her next door neighbour as difficult. When J and her friends were playing, the neighbour called them names and was "very mean." J emphasised the fact that this name-calling neighbour was an adult, not another child. R (girl, aged 11) also described a difficult family living in her street. The children of the family had punched her on several occasions and broke her younger sister's eye-glasses. R was scared of this family and tried her best to avoid them, which was not easy as their house was located along her path to school.

Several children across Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway lived in streets where neighbours behaved violently or in ways children considered to be weird or worrying. For example, A (girl, aged 11) said "I live next door to this guy who is a bit crazy. He always yells at his mum who ... because he has been to jail and he is divorced now and he lives with his mum next door. And his mum kept telling him to get a job but he was screaming and swearing all the time, he was bashing everything, throwing glass around." Z (girl, aged 10) described the difficult situation she faced in her street: "There is these people up in the units up the road and ... they always fight all the time. They wake me up in the morning swearing and everything. And I think ... I don't know. They just always fight." Several children described police coming and going in their street, in order to deal with situations (often relating to violence, alcohol or drugs). At Riverside, Longridge, Parksway and Surfside, some children had experienced very noisy neighbours who played loud music late into the night and prevented them from getting to sleep. At each site, some had witnessed people who lived in the immediate vicinity engage in alcohol fuelled violence, aggression, or anti-social behaviour such as yelling and swearing, breaking bottles and vomiting.

Not surprisingly, when neighbours were violent, inconsiderate or unkind, children generally described feeling unsafe in their street. This resulted in a generalised lack of trust in people living nearby, unless they were known to be 'safe'. Children's views of neighbours they did not know were very different in Lakeview compared to Riverside, Longridge, Parksway and Surfside. While children in Lakeview knew their existing neighbours, there was also a strong consensus that if a new neighbour moved into the community, that person or family should be greeted and made to feel welcome. As J (boy, aged 10) put it, "Well, if a new neighbour moves in, you just go and introduce yourself. Go and say hello." In contrast, at other sites many children were suspicious of neighbours they did not know. Children's lack of trust in new or unfamiliar neighbours in Riverside, Longridge, Parksway and Surfside was typified by the comment: "If you don't know them, they might do something bad to you or something, like you never know."

7.7 Caring people

People and relationships were at the heart of children's conceptualisation of community. As discussed here, people with whom children have the most intimate relationships – family, friends and sometimes neighbours – are central to children's definition and experience of their communities. While children identify the people who are 'closest' to them as occupying

the most important place in their lives and communities, this research suggests that more distant people are also important. Across all sites, children described in positive terms people who help out and support a community. At some sites, and for some children, it was, however, difficult to clearly identify such people within their own communities.

Caring and supportive people were often central in creating a sense of inclusion for children. In some cases, individuals made a significant difference. For example, at Riverside, the library was identified by most children involved in the research as a good and safe place to go. Indeed, the library was one of the few places consistently described by children in positive terms. The library had become a gathering place for children after school as a result of the efforts of the head librarian. He had gone to considerable lengths to make children welcome and to offer a range of activities beyond reading and borrowing books. The library offered computer access, which was of great interest to most children, and an opportunity to play Wii and other games every second Friday afternoon. The librarian noted that he would have liked to offer the games evening every Friday, but had insufficient resources available to do so.

The librarian explained that he had established these activities because he was aware that many children had nothing to do after school and were often at home alone or wandering the streets alone. He proactively set out to create a space where children would feel welcome and safe, and have fun. He described setting clear rules about behaviour in the library premises and made it clear that bad behaviour, aggression and bullying were not acceptable. He also told teenagers they were welcome individually or in groups, but could not use the library for 'gang' meetings or behave in ways that intimidated others. This enabled the younger children to feel safe in the library. The librarian was careful to structure activities, particularly the use of the Wii, so that girls as well as boys would feel comfortable participating. On Friday evenings when the Wii games were available to children, the librarian ensured that both he and a female staff member were available. Moreover, the double doors to the games room were opened on Fridays, so that other library patrons – both child and adult – could see what was happening and join in or watch if they wished.

The librarian had also set up informal ways of engaging with children and young people who used the library:

> The other thing is to have the flexibility with youth. A lot of people walk in with structured programs and the children have got to turn up to training or they've got to

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turn up to this at this time and do it this way – it just doesn't work. So informality within a framework is needed. So here they can draw on the whiteboard and actually they start drawing things up and we talk about that and they draw up characters I don't know and we joke about it....Writing on a whiteboard at school is a no no, here they can. I didn't realise how much they like writing on a whiteboard.

The librarian at Riverside provides a powerful example of how a caring and engaged individual can contribute to children's sense of being part of the community. At the library, children were included, welcomed and valued – rather than seen as causing problems by 'hanging out'. Significantly, a number of the children at Riverside spoke positively not only about the librarians but also about the security guard, whom several knew by name. The security guard was considered to be nice and always available to help out. If there was a problem at the library – ranging from being unable to log-on to the computer to being bullied or harassed – children said they could go to the security guard. Clearly, his role was not one of enforcement and exclusion, but creating 'security' in a more positive and inclusive sense. The informality of some activities (such as whiteboard drawing) gave children the opportunity to get to know library staff, creating broader social networks. The library was a place to be, as well as a place to access information and material resources (such as books, computers and games) that would not otherwise be available to many of them. The library could well be described, using Woolcock and Narayan's description, as facilitating bridging social capital. That the library's activities were informal appears to have been considered a great strength by children but it did present some resource and funding challenges for the library itself, as it struggled to provide a range of 'out-of-the-ordinary,' highly valued and valuable activities.

Children at Riverside identified another example of someone who is important in the community: a community worker. This worker provided school breakfast once a week, and Sunday breakfast in a low-cost housing estate. However, many children at Riverside found it difficult to identify people in the community who would help them if needed. Most children viewed people outside their immediate, known networks with considerable suspicion.

In other sites, most children were able to identify people who would provide help if needed. Those people were often part of existing, familiar networks; for example, at Longridge most children had extended family or neighbours to whom they felt they could turn if necessary. As in Riverside, however, children in Longridge also viewed strangers with suspicion. In the absence of informal networks of 'caring people', several children described more formal networks as important. For example, at Longridge, one boy discussed a community centre

close to the park where he played. He explained "I go there if I ever get injured. And they always have a first-aid kit and they help me and they just put on band aids." Other children referred to the same community centre as a place they could go if they needed anything (particularly band-aids). The Police-Citizen Youth Clubs (PCYC) was also an important presence in the lives of many children, offering a range of affordable activities, particularly boxing and gymnastics. Several children described the people at the PCYC as really nice and very much part of their community.

At Lakeside, the presence of caring people in the community was also identified as important by children. There, however, children spoke rather differently – and far more positively – about caring people in their own community. While caring people were identified by children in all sites as important to a community, it was often in abstract terms: a vision for a strong supportive society, rather than being based on their experience. In Lakeside, several children spoke of the importance of being friendly to people in your community, even if you do not know them well. A significant difference between Lakeside and other sites was that most children felt that their community was generally caring and supportive, and were able to describe many examples of positive encounters with people in their community. A's (girl aged 10) description of her interactions with a man living close by her house demonstrates this, 'Every time I walk to school I meet this man, he always says hello to us when we go to school. Every time he drives past, even today, he was driving out his driveway, and he always lets us pat his dog, because his dog loves us, and goes round and licks us. But today I was going up to talk and he had a trailer and he said hello and the dog started barking and everything. And when we're coming home [from school] sometimes we're allowed in his house and he lets us sit down for a little while and have a little drink and everything." A went on to explain that she feels she knows this man quite well and likes having someone nice like this in her neighbourhood.

S (girl, aged 10) shared her experience of nice, friendly people in Lakeview: "This lady, she lives a bit further down the street. Sometimes she beeps the horn and I always say hello. And every single time I walk to school, she's always out there, and I always pat her dog before I leave for school." Another girl spoke of being thanked by a lady for her actions: "One of my neighbours, she's not really my neighbour, she lives down the road from me, her dog keeps on getting out, and her dog has cancer, so she's really worried about it. And I found the dog so I took it back, and she invited me in, she gave me a box of chocolates for finding her." In Lakeview, children placed great value on these informal connections with

people in their community who seemed caring, kind and friendly. Essentially, children described feeling included as a result. At other sites, fewer children described having such experiences and a significant proportion described regular encounters with people who were quite hostile.

Interestingly, teachers generally were not a major theme in children's discussions and there was some ambivalence among most of the children who participated in this research as to whether or not teachers were part of their community. Children generally recognised the importance of teachers in their lives – and to their futures – but had different views as to whether they should be considered community members. B (girl, aged 10) described the children at school as part of her community, but said "the teachers are more like workers here." This reflected the view of some children across all sites, who observed that most teachers leave the area at the end of their working day, and so are not part of the community. In contrast, S (boy, aged 9) had a different perspective "Teachers are part of our community, and they teach us how to be a part of that community by learning maths, so we could be a shopkeeper, or they teach us how to build stuff from blocks so we could be a builder." There was consensus among children across sites, however, that it is important for teachers to be kind and caring, and to listen to and understand children. Moreover, while there was some disagreement about the status of teachers, the majority of children identified a small number of teachers they considered to be part of their community (regardless of whether they lived in the area) because they were kind, caring and supportive. These teachers were identified by children as very important to their lives and their experience at school.

7.7.1 Rude, disrespectful or aggressive people

While caring people were important to children's experience of community in a positive sense, rude, disrespectful or aggressive people created for children a sense of unease, and sometimes fear, within their communities. Moreover, rude, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour, which some children described experiencing regularly, left children with a sense of being excluded from, or not valued within their community. Such behaviour also made them fearful.

At Riverside, children chose to focus intensely on issues of child-adult relationships during one group discussion. While the children who participated in this discussion described positive relationships and interactions with caring people, all described incidents whereby strangers or people with whom they had a passing acquaintance (ie: shopkeepers or bus

drivers) as treating them with disrespect. The children said that children in middle childhood are more likely to be treated rudely by adults. Their reasons for this claim give us some important insights into the generationally ordered position of childhood. Children said that by the age of nine or ten many children are beginning to have some level of independent mobility, for example, catching the school bus, walking to the park, going to the local shop, or riding their bike or scooter in local streets. As a result, they are beginning to come into contact with adults beyond their immediate circle. During the discussion, children observed that many adults are nicer to very little children, whom they consider to be cute. Interestingly, the children said that many adults are not rude to teenagers, because teenagers are likely to 'answer back'. Children between the early, 'cute' years and adolescence were most likely to be the target of adult frustration, aggression and rudeness.

Across all sites, children described having experienced some rude, disrespectful or aggressive behaviour from unfamiliar adults. As discussed in the section on 'safety', such encounters often made children feel extremely vulnerable and unsafe. The analysis of the children at Riverside was echoed, although not so explicitly, by children at other sites.

While, not surprisingly, children disliked being the target of rude, disrespectful and aggressive behaviour themselves, they were also deeply concerned about their friends and family being subjected to such behaviour. For example, G (boy, aged 10, Longridge) said a man living in the same housing complex as him always gave G's mother rude finger gestures when he drove past. G found the man's behaviour both perplexing and inappropriate. He described feeling worried about why the man behaved in this way, and also feeling very upset that his mother was treated in such a disrespectful manner. It was difficult for G to feel positively about the community in which he lived when his mother was regularly subjected to such rudeness.

7.8 Being listened to

Being listened to and having one's view treated with respect was an important dimension of relationships for the vast majority of children who participated in this research across all sites, and was a particularly strong theme in Parksway. GC (boy, aged 10) said "I think give kids a voice, um ... because kids don't get to really say anything these days. It's all about the adults and what they want to say but how, how do you know what the kids want? Because

you are not them and they might change it every day. So how are you meant to know what they want?" Along similar lines, A (girl, aged 10) said "They should give kids a try and kids are as intelligent as adults. Kids could make a difference to the community as well as adults. Give kids a chance and adults start listening to kids. That's it." While children across all sites felt that their views on some issues were dismissed on a regular basis, children in Parksway felt they were very rarely listened to.

In some cases, children pointed out that their views were not listened to in their communities or at home. In sum, they were never listened to. At Riverside, M (girl, aged 10) said "My parents don't even listen to me and my sister. We literally have to talk to each other about our problems. Like...hello!" One boy said "I just want him [father] to care about me. I want him to listen."

At Longridge and Surfside, children spoke of the importance of people within communities and families listening to one another regardless of age. In Longridge, several children said that adults rarely listened to children. H (boy, aged 11) attributed this to the fact that "there are nearly always more adults than kids in communities, so maybe adults wouldn't be very interested." The majority of children thought that children were not consulted when decisions were being made within their community.

At Longridge, one group of children suggested that the problem of not listening to others is complex. N (boy, aged 11) explained "Sometimes the children want the adults to listen to them but at the same time the adults want the children to listen to them. So ... my family we have to like ... we have to listen to our parents first and then they listen to us." He said this worked very well. Other children agreed that this was a good approach. J (girl, aged 11) responded "Yeah so it's not just about adults listening to kids but it's about people listening to each other." These children spoke of the need for respect and courtesy when dealing with other people, regardless of age. They considered listening, taking seriously and respecting the views of others as an important aspect of good social relationships and a good community. Significantly, they emphasised that it was not necessary to agree with everyone, but to listen and discuss issues in a respectful way.

While there were many issues on which children wanted to have their views heard, the majority of children identified smoking as an issue on which adults should listen to them – and reason with them. At all sites children were extremely negative about smoking. Adult smoking intersected with child-adult relationships and the sense of not being listened to, in two important ways. First, children were aware of and highly concerned about the negative health consequences of smoking. In particular, children worried about the impact of smoking on the health of their parents, grandparents or other loved ones. At Lakeview, A (girl, aged 10) explained with great sadness that her grandfather had died from lung cancer. She wanted people to understand the seriousness of smoking on their health and to stop. Children knew of the health dangers of smoking and have been exposed to public health messages at school – they wanted adults (particularly those they loved) to listen to their concerns. Second, a significant proportion of children considered smoking to be an example of adult hypocrisy, whereby adults engaged in an activity they knew to be unhealthy while telling children to behave in certain ways. Children were also perplexed that adults would smoke around the children they claimed to love, despite knowing that passive smoking can damage a child's health. Again, this was an issue that many children felt they could not discuss with adults who did smoke. While smoking in itself was something that worried many children, it is also an example of an issue on which children wanted to have a say, but were prevented from doing so.

7.9 Get-togethers

In Riverside, local community groups were actively involved in organising community get-togethers. These fun days were alcohol-free and involved amusement park style rides, food stalls, and entertainment from local groups. One community group, run entirely by local volunteers, surveyed young people in the area in an endeavour to find out what kinds of activities they would like to see at the fun days. Additionally, this group actively involved adolescents in organising the events. Community organisations also arranged an ANZAC Day march and associated activities, as well as celebrations to commemorate the settlement of Riverside. The local school was active in organising community gatherings, such as talent nights. It is notable that children in Riverside felt least safe and had fewest social networks of all the sites. The various get-togethers held in the area were an explicit attempt to bring together people struggling with poverty, unemployment, alcohol and drug issues, and family and social violence. The get-togethers focused on families, and aimed to be very inclusive of

children. The children at Riverside loved these gatherings. They considered them to be one of the few examples of a positive community experience in their area.

In other areas, community gatherings – generally formally organised by the local council or a community-focused agency – were held from time to time. Children generally spoke very positively about these events, which gave them a sense of engagement with their community. Several children indicated that they would value having more such events.

In Gardenville and Lakeview, children spoke about informal – rather than formally organised – community gatherings. While in Gardenville only three children described being involved in regular, informal community gatherings, each considered them a very positive aspect of their community. M (girl, aged 10), whose street held a Christmas party every year, said "In a community especially in a street or a suburb, you can actually set up fun things for each other. You might have a street Christmas party where you all come down and have fun, or you might invite people over to your house or just have some gatherings outside." M said her street did such things and considered them important to making people feel part of the community. She emphasised how much fun they were. K (girl, aged 10) said that in her previous community (a semi-rural estate on the periphery of the city) there were Halloween parties, which she described as fun and important for bringing people together. K had moved into a built up area in the centre of the city. She felt there was a weaker sense of community in her new area and missed the sense of community she had felt in her old area.

In Lakeview, the kinds of informal celebrations described above by M were more common than in other sites. The local council in Lakeview also organised formal community celebrations in a large park by the edge of the lake once or twice a year. Children considered both the informal and the more formal get-togethers important in connecting people and fostering a sense of community.

7.10 Summarising what children told us about relationships

Children told us that relationships are at the very heart of community. The kinds of relationships children experience fundamentally shape their sense of belonging and trust.

Children described a community as composed of rings of relationships, presented graphically in Figure 2. When a child is surrounded by thick and supportive rings of relationships, his or her sense of community is stronger and more positive. The closer the ring to the child, the

more intimate the relationships. While the inner ring of relationships is most important, each ring makes a significant contribution to children's experience of community.

Figure 2: Rings of relationships
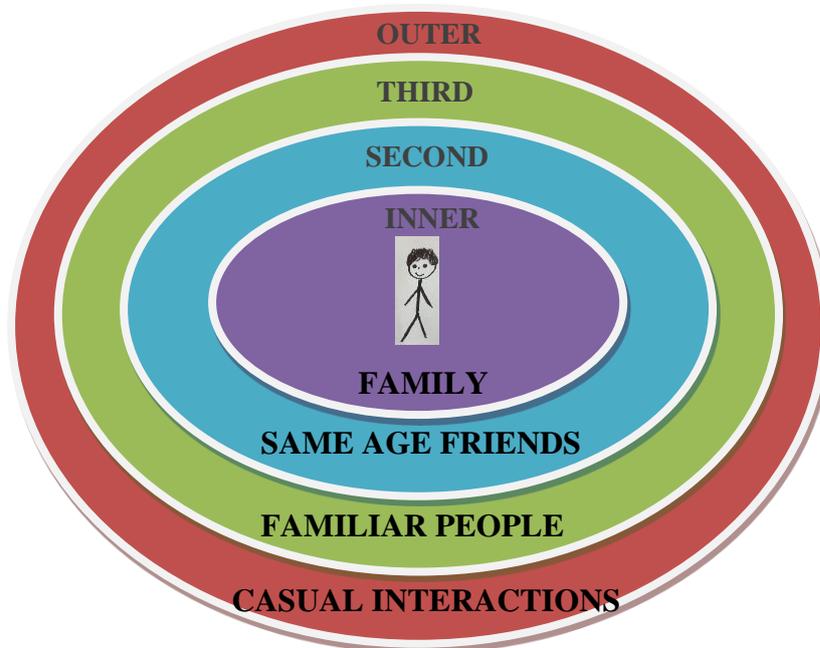
The inner ring is created by family, who provide the most intimate, and for many children the most significant, relationships. For children, family is at the centre of community and is important to most children, even when the nature of those relationships is difficult. Family, and particularly parents, act as a potential conduit for children's engagement with the broader community. When parents are disengaged from the community, it is more difficult for children to engage, largely due to the nature of social relationships and generational ordering.

Children told us that time with family, and particularly parents, is important. A significant number of children expressed the desire to have more time with their parents and identified three key factors that prevent them from doing so: the amount of time and energy parents must or choose to spend at work; parents' illness or injury, which was often work-related in the disadvantaged sites; and parents' preference for socialising with adults rather than their children.

For the children in this research, familial relationships are not necessarily marked by children's dependency. Children described the sense of responsibility they feel for their families and the contribution they make.

The second ring of relationships is made up of friends of a similar age, who are essential members of a child's community. While friendships are often formed and maintained at school, children also identify out-of-school friendships as important to their sense of community. The third ring of relationships is composed of neighbours, teachers and other familiar people who contribute to a positive community environment. While the third ring can consist of children, teenagers and adults, caring and supportive adults are particularly important in breaking down negative dimensions of generational ordering and creating an environment within which children feel included and respected. As the children described it, cross-generational relations have intrinsic value as well as instrumental value in promoting a sense of belonging and safety.

The outer ring of relationships is composed of people within the community with whom children have passing contact and little or no familiarity. Examples of people in this ring of relationships are shopkeepers and bus drivers. The nature of casual interactions with such people makes a difference to children's sense of inclusion and connectedness. The majority of children had experienced interactions with adults in their communities that were characterised by rudeness, disrespect or dismissal on the part of the adult. Children in more disadvantaged sites were more likely to experience negative interactions. From a child's standpoint, respect, kindness and civility in relations makes a significance difference to a sense of inclusion and belonging. Children's sense of thin trust is fostered by positive and caring relationships. Community get-togethers, both formal and informal, are an important way of reinforcing relationships across the rings and fostering a sense of community.

The deeper and wider each ring of the relationship, the more supportive a community is for children. A child-inclusive community is characterised by positive, caring and respectful relationships within each ring.

For the children in this research, good communities are characterised by people listening to one another regardless of age. Children generally felt that their views were not always listened to within their communities, and children at the disadvantaged sites were more likely to feel that their views were dismissed or ignored.

7.11   Policy implications relating to relationships

Policy Implication 1

Labour market policies, including workforce participation requirements placed upon parents (such as those implemented through Centrelink), should take serious account of the centrality of time spent with parents to children's sense of community.

> 1.1.   In particular, Centrelink participation requirements should be eased to take account of parents' caring role and the importance of time spent with children not only in the early years but also in middle childhood.

Policy Implication 2

Planning and design processes should take greater account of creating entertainment and recreation spaces that are genuinely child-inclusive.

> 2.1.   Clubs and similar venues should redesign 'children's rooms' so that they are supportive and inclusive places, rather than exclusionary places, for children. Such redesign should be based on serious, meaningful and independent consultation with children.

> 2.2.   Clubs and similar venues should promote and adhere to limits on the length of time parents are permitted to leave children in 'children's rooms'.

Policy Implication 3

Broad-based community events should be supported with particular attention paid to making them inclusive of children. Such events should be alcohol-free or severely restrict the amount of alcohol available.

Policy Implication 4

Government and non-government agencies should promote local, place-based initiatives designed to create familiarity between neighbours, including children.

Policy Implication 5

Measures and indicators of social inclusion, social capital and community strength or support (such as those developed by federal, state and local government) should explicitly include

data relating to children in middle childhood, including self-assessment where such an approach is used for other age cohorts in the community.

Policy Implication 6

Attention should be given by agencies such as the Human Rights Commissions and Children's Commissioners at federal and state levels to promoting social attitudes that value and respect children.

Chapter 8.   Safety

8.1   A brief overview of the literature

Across all sites, children considered personal safety to be an essential element of community. At Gardenville, M (girl, aged 10) summed up the view of the majority of children from all sites when she said "Safety is important because in a community you should feel safe, like you're being protected by somebody." Research with children on a range of issues has highlighted the importance of being safe and feeling safe. A US study of children's involvement in physical activity found that children's feeling of safety and the provision of safe places are essential if children are to engage in physical activity in their communities (Heitzler et al, 2006). Particularly relevant to this study is Fattore, Mason and Watson's (2007, 2009) research with children on their definitions of well-being, which highlighted the importance to children of feeling safe and secure. McDonald (nd: 31), in her review of the literature on children's experiences of poverty, observed that neighbourhood safety is a particular concern for children growing up in poverty. As will be discussed, safety was an important issue for children across all sites in this research, but was most acute for children living in more disadvantaged areas. Moreover, children living in more disadvantaged areas were less likely to feel safe in their neighbourhoods and communities.

In their review of the literature on child-friendly community indicators, Woolcock and Steele (2007: 19) note that "the safety of children has emerged as one of the dominant concerns within communities," both in Australia and in other wealthy countries. Indeed, some have argued that a preoccupation with children's safety has resulted in children's lives being heavily regulated and restricted, and children's mobility being severely limited (see, for example, Valentine, 1997 in relation to the UK context and Malone, 2007 in relation to the Australian context). The familiarisation and institutionalisation of children described by Edwards (2002) as broad trends defining contemporary childhood are in part related to concerns for children's safety in unsupervised spaces. Taylor and Fraser's (2003) longitudinal study of the impact of family income on life changes found that parents in low-income communities in particular, are often highly concerned for their children's safety, with some restricting children's mobility as a result. Notably, Taylor and Fraser's study found that

parents were aware that they were placing restrictions on their children, but felt on balance that safety outweighed greater freedoms. Parents in low-income areas generally perceived drugs and strangers as the key safety concerns. For many parents, these concerns arose from the experiences they encountered on a daily basis.

A good deal of parents' reluctance to allow their children to be unsupervised in public spaces relates to fear of strangers abducting or harming them. A study undertaken in metropolitan and regional Victoria by the Australian Council on Education Research, indicated that the majority of parents did not believe it to be safe for children aged between five and twelve years to move about their neighbourhood independently (Underwood, 2012). Of course the five to twelve age range may have influenced results, and most parents are likely to allow a twelve year old a level of independence that they would not allow a five year old. That caveat aside, it is notable that only twenty-four per cent of parents in metropolitan areas and thirty-five per cent in regional areas said they would allow their children to travel alone to places other than school. Forty per cent of parents in metropolitan areas and thirty-six per cent in regional areas said they would allow their children to travel independently to school (Underwood, 2012). In both metropolitan and rural areas, stranger danger and road safety were the major reasons for parents restricting their children's movement. The study concluded "parents of children aged 5 to 12 years had a very positive view of their neighbourhood for their family. However, parents reported concerns about how safe they felt their neighbourhood was for their child to move around independently, especially because of traffic and fear of strangers." (Underwood, 2012: 3)

Interestingly, while parents identify both stranger danger and road safety as dangers for children, the media tends to focus on the former. For example, May 2013 the *Daily Telegraph* published a list of thirty-two incidents of children being approached by strangers in the period January to April 2013. The article provided dates, places and the sex and age of the children involved. The following month, the *Sydney Morning Herald* ran a story stating that parents were enrolling children in martial arts courses as a response to 'stranger danger'. A martial arts instructor was quoted as saying "What people are really frightened about now is abductions [sic]. The big spike has been in stranger danger. It's making a big comeback." The story provides no evidence to suggest that there has been an increase in child abductions, but sends a clear message of danger, linked to an institutionalised response of formal martial arts training. A similar story was published in the *Courier-Mail* in July 2013, also presenting martial arts as a means of young children protecting themselves against strangers; in this case

the children learning martial arts were aged between two to four years. Both the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Courier Mail* stories stated that teaching children martial arts is also an "anti-bullying technique."

Malone (2007: 521) argues that there is sometimes a gap between perceptions of danger and the data available for crime against children, with perceptions driven by past events and urban 'folk tales'. Even a cursory examination of media reporting suggests, however, that parents and children's concerns are likely fuelled by stories of stranger danger; actual, attempted or perceived abductions and the need to equip children to fight off strangers. An incident, relating to social rather than traditional media, highlights the point. In July 2013, the *Bendigo Advertiser*, reported that concern had spread among parents and schools in a local community following a Facebook posting that a man had tried to 'pick up' children after school the previous day. A police spokesperson was quoted as saying: "At no stage did the man attempt to grab the girl or make any threats towards her. Police have made a number of enquiries in relation to the incident and believe we may have identified the vehicle. We are yet to speak to the driver but at this stage there is no offence involved and the man may have had good intentions." The spokesperson added that the girl involved had made the right decision to report the incident because she was aware of stranger danger principles (Alebakis, 2013).

Children in this research spoke of their own and their parents' anxiety about stranger danger and were highly aware of media reports of potential threat or actual incidents. Notably, children across all sites – like media reports – used the term 'stranger danger', despite adult interviewees noting that the term is no longer used and has been replaced with terms such as 'protective behaviour' and 'safe adults'.

8.2 What children said about safety in this research

Feeling safe within their communities was very important for children across all sites, and a dominant issue in the less advantaged communities. However, the ways in which children discussed safety differed markedly across sites. Four elements were central in explaining whether or not children felt safe in their communities. First, when children frequently experienced positive interactions with people in their community, as in Lakeview, they felt safer. These children were confident that someone would help them if they were confronted by a problem or threat within their community. Second, children across all sites identified the over-use and misuse of alcohol as severely undermining their sense of safety. Third, witnessing or experiencing violence within their communities made children feel unsafe. Finally, and related, bullying from other children – which was most likely to occur at school – made children feel unsafe. Concerns about stranger danger and road safety, which were identified as very important to parents in the Australian Council on Education Research study, were identified by children across all sites as central to their sense of safety, albeit to varying extents and in different ways. This research provides important insights into how and why these two issues are so important to children.

8.3 Positive interactions

The nature of children's day-to-day interactions with the people around them was important to their sense of safety. Positive interactions can be described as respectful, supportive and friendly. Children whose day-to-day interactions with others were positive tended to describe a social network that extended beyond their families and friends to include a wider range of people, including those with whom they did not share a close or intimate relationship. These children were more likely to have what Putnam calls a sense of 'thin' trust, and identified by him as being strongly associated with civic engagement and social capital. Thin trust, for Putnam, is social or generalised trust that extends beyond immediate and personal connections to fellow citizens with whom there is not a direct relationship (Putnam, 2000). Children who appeared to have thin trust were conscious of the potential danger of strangers, and described being taught in school and in some cases within their families to be aware of

stranger danger. Yet this consciousness did not appear to dominate their social interactions within their communities or create a climate of fear or threat.

In contrast, those children who described experiencing negative interactions with people in their communities on a regular basis were more likely to be fearful for their safety, to feel vulnerable within their communities, and to express high levels of mistrust in people outside their immediate and personal connections. While there were differences between individual children in their descriptions of day-to-day interactions, the differences between sites were marked.

8.3.1 Feeling safe in Lakeview

In Lakeview, children said that being and feeling safe was important in a community – and the majority described feeling very safe in their own community. J's (boy, 11 years) response to the question of what was good about his community was typical of the general view among children who participated in the research at Lakeview: "Everything's really close by and it's also really safe."

Interestingly, when children considered safety issues in their community, most did so in terms of stranger danger. Three children described having experienced stranger danger encounters. One boy described an incident that had frightened him: "Once me and my friend in Year 2, we were just walking to his house, and then a guy stopped near us and said 'Get in the car, because I'll drive you to which place you want to be,' and we said no, and he just drove off." Another boy said that one day he had seen two drunk people near his house (he did not know them). One of them had asked "Do you guys want to come back to our house?" This made him feel very unsafe. One girl said that once she was walking her dog and saw a stranger who made her feel uncomfortable. Generally, however, children considered their community very safe. The majority also said they felt confident that they could respond appropriately if approached by a stranger. N (boy, aged 8) said, "Well, if someone I don't know comes up to me on the way to school and says 'get into my car,' then I'll just yell and yell and someone will come." When asked what made their community feel safe, children identified the relative absence of strangers. For example, in describing what he liked about his street, L (boy, aged 9) said "There's no strangers at all." L explained that as a consequence, he feels very safe.

In Lakeview, children were more likely to know or be familiar with the people living around them. Most children described having friendships with both children and adults living around them; most also described being on 'friendly terms' (saying hello, waving) to people they saw regularly but with whom they did not have friendships. Children at Lakeview, more than at other sites, described most people in their community being friendly, kind or caring. As a result, children's lives were enmeshed in a web of familiar and supportive relationships.

Lakeview is a middle-income community. While there is a mix of lower and higher cost housing, average income is approximately the national average. The population is relatively stable, based on the percentage of people who have moved in the past one and five years (second only to Parksway in this study). The suburb is not a thoroughfare; with the small shopping precinct located on the periphery of the suburb, it is best described as a residential enclave. During the research, we saw no visible presence on the streets of people affected by drugs or alcohol or behaving in an anti-social manner; nor did children describe such behaviour. This description of Lakeview contrasts with the less advantaged sites of Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, as do children's experiences and views of safety.

8.3.2 Feelings of safety in less advantaged communities

It is important to emphasise that not all children felt unsafe in the less advantaged sites of Riverside, Longridge and Parksway – but feeling unsafe was a strong theme in each. In Surfside, children's experience of and views about safety in their community were diverse.

In Surfside, children's sense of personal safety tended to be shaped significantly by the 'kind' of street in which they lived. Children who knew and liked their neighbours tended to feel safe. O (girl, aged 10) described Surfside in positive terms: "It's not really dangerous because there are a lot of places in your community that are safe. Like home is safe, school is sometimes safe, like the shop." O described her street as a nice place, with friendly neighbours. In contrast, children who lived in what they described as 'bad' streets tended to feel insecure. F (girl, aged 9) said "I don't really like my street. Because there is a lot of bad people in it. They break into houses and stuff." Y (girl, aged 10) said "My street's not safe. It's ... like ... like the people are probably nice, but my mum doesn't really want me running down the street by myself because like there is like drugos on my street and everything. It's a really bad street. Yeah. Because like there is this crazy woman, and she comes up to us when my mum is not there – she's scary." K (boy, aged 10) said there was a need for more security guards and more police so everyone can feel safe. Morrow's (2001: 27) study of

children's perspectives of their neighbourhoods in the United Kingdom also found that children differentiated down to street level when making their assessment. Similarly, in Surfside, children's assessments of safety in their community were highly localised – reflecting the diversity within the area. In Riverside, Longridge and Parksway, however, children's experiences were more generalised and, overall, very negative.

Frightening, anti-social and unpredictable behaviour on the part of other people, most often adults but sometimes adolescents, was a key factor in children feeling unsafe in their communities in Riverside, Longridge, Parksway and Surfside. Most children described experiencing negative interactions with other people in their communities on a regular basis. These ranged from receiving hostile looks or being told to get off the footpath or road while riding bikes or scooters, to frightening and threatening encounters. The majority of children across these sites could describe situations that had frightened them and left them feeling highly vulnerable. H (girl, aged 12), for example, said "It was six o'clock at night and it was dark. We were walking back from the [local] shops, then we started running – we saw this car, we started running and then we just ran into this random house." H said the car was slowly following her and her friend and the driver looked scary and suspicious. H and her friend did not know the occupants of the house they ran into, but the woman who lived in the house came out and stood watching the driver. The car then drove away. This incident is interesting in that the girls felt comfortable – or were sufficiently frightened – to run into a stranger's house to seek help. Despite the woman in the house behaving in a supportive manner, H said that generally she felt that strangers could not be trusted. In describing the incident, her fear of the car driver overshadowed the positive experience with the supportive stranger.

M (boy aged 10, Longridge) provided a detailed account of a frightening experience:

> Once, I was walking up [to the shop] to buy something. I was looking at this lady's dog. Then she told me to come closer to her house and I was just thinking I shouldn't. And I walked up a bit and she came out, she called her husband, her husband is like pretty big and he has got tattoos. He came out and I don't know if he was going to chase after me. And I stopped. Then she started running at me and she called her husband to run after me too. I just ran all the way around the block and after that I wanted to walk home but the direction to walk home was like next to her house so ... I decided to walk around the whole block to get home.

Children participating in the research at Riverside were generally anxious about being in public spaces. All children in Riverside had heard stories of local children being approached by strangers in cars. Children described two cases of children at their school who had been 'grabbed' by strangers, but had managed to escape. One group of children described this as having happened to their friend, who was then away from school for a considerable time. In other sites, too, children were aware of local stranger danger incidents. For example, in Longridge J (girl, aged 11) said a friend of hers had been grabbed by a stranger, while others said they knew children who had been in situations where they were approached by threatening strangers.

The strong sense of stranger danger made children at Riverside feel under almost constant threat in public spaces, and made them extremely fearful of any adult they did not know. Children's sense of trust in others was extremely low at Riverside, and they did not feel able to turn to any stranger if they did feel under threat. The view of children at Riverside was echoed by A (girl, aged 10) at Parksway when she said: "I think you should always be scared of people that you don't know. Because you don't know what they might be doing or what they might be thinking." Other children at Parksway, as well as at Riverside, Longridge and Surfside, spoke of feeling particularly vulnerable in public spaces when alone. B (girl, aged 11) said "I feel scared in the alley way and even at the train station. If you're there by yourself it's scary … if you have lots of friends with you and you feel safe then." K (girl, aged 11) said "It's scary on your own because nobody's there to help you or nobody's there to protect you."

At Parksway, one boy (J, aged 10) spoke in positive terms about his sense of safety. Significantly, J also spoke positively about his day-to-day interactions with people in his community and described knowing the people who lived in the immediate area around his house and along his street:

> It feels safe because I know my community – I know them very well and I know that they'll never hurt me or never do something bad. For example, there's no strangers in our community – I know my whole neighbourhood so it's OK. I ride my bike sometimes and say hi to my neighbours.

J described feeling less safe beyond what he described as his community, that is, beyond his immediate geographic space and beyond those with whom he had established personal interactions.

While strangers were viewed with suspicion and fear by children at the four disadvantaged sites, some familiar people were also identified as frightening. For example, all children involved in the research at Riverside spoke at varying lengths about a man who hung out by the park, which is a very short walk from the school. Several adult participants also referred to the man, who was described as having mental health issues. The man regularly screamed and yelled abuse at passers-by, and while children noted that the man sometimes yelled at adults he was most likely to target children. On some occasions he jumped out at them from behind rubbish bins, lamp posts or buildings. The children knew the man had problems, but his behaviour terrified them. Children, who could not avoid the area where he loitered, spoke of their fear of passing him regularly.

At Parksway, children also described people who are homeless and junkies as making them feel vulnerable and concerned about their personal safety. As in other sites, and as will be discussed in detail in section eight, drunk people were also a key source of concern. It is important to note that children's concerns were not based on pre-existing biases about particular types of people, but about the negative interactions they encountered regularly with many.

While children were anxious about personal safety and highly suspicious of strangers in the less advantaged communities, they were not necessarily passive. In some instances, children were proactive when they saw suspicious strangers in their community. For example, J (girl, aged 10) said "Well I told the office a couple of days ago that there is this guy been walking around and he looks really suspicious when I walk to school. And my dad tried to say hello and he just ignored him and he walked away. And he has been there for a couple of days and he just keeps watching kids and it's making me really uncomfortable sometimes. So I ended up telling the [school] office that I am not feeling comfortable." In this case, J felt that the school had intervened in an appropriate way, as the man had stopped hanging around.

Children at Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway described their concerns about personal safety as arising from their own experiences and those of their friends, as well as from media reports and stories. While children's anxiety for their personal safety was grounded in negative everyday experiences, it appeared to be exacerbated by media reports and some forms of popular culture. In Riverside in particular, children were aware of cases of children being abducted or murdered, and such stories were shared among children. Several adults, who were interviewed for the research, attributed children's fear for their safety to a

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particular case. Yet none of the Riverside children specifically mentioned that case. Most, however, knew of the case of an eight year old girl who was murdered in a shopping centre in a city distant from their own community approximately five or six years before the research. This case made children extremely frightened and several used it as an example of what can happen to children. Children also spoke of other cases they had heard about either in the media or through conversations. Some children described hearing about child abductions from adults as 'cautionary tales' about the dangers posed by strangers. In some cases, again particularly in Riverside, children described watching movies and television programs about serious and violent crimes, including against children, which exacerbated the anxiety described by some.

8.3.3 Feelings of personal safety among children at Gardenville

Approximately one third of children who participated in the research at Gardenville said they felt some level of concern for their personal safety. However, unlike the children in less advantaged areas, children at Gardenville's direct experience of situations that could be considered threatening was limited. There had been a murder in the local area some months prior to the research. Such violent crime was very unusual in the area and had been widely reported. Children living close to the area said they found it scary. However, this did not necessarily equate to feeling fearful for their personal safety.

A small number of children at Gardenville felt scared or uncomfortable as a result of the behaviour of some people who lived near them. These people fell into two categories: people they described as having a mental problem, and a minority of teenagers who behaved in a reckless or intrusive way. I (girl, aged 10) described feeling afraid when at home alone. Most children were not left at home without adults present. Few children at Gardenville described moving independently around their community, and their interactions with others were largely limited to people known to them within an institutional setting (such as school or formalised before or after school activities). At Gardenville, most children commented on the need to be conscious of strangers, but few felt under any threat themselves.

8.3.4 Parents' concerns about children's safety

While children in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway described their concerns about personal safety, some children also described their parents concerns. For example, E (girl, aged 11, Riverside) said that her mother would not let her go out into the street. E

explained her mother's reasoning: "She's just keeping me safe from people who are really mean. The bad peoples," and added that there had been some burglaries in her street and "mad people who do donuts on the road." Yet, while E described feeling unsafe in public spaces, she found her mother's protectiveness to be annoying at times, even though she understood why her mother restricted her activities. E worried about her safety, but also felt confined in her ability to engage in her community and described having no scope for negotiating with her mother.

At Gardenville, a significant number of children said that while they felt safe, their parents worried about their safety and would not allow them to go out alone. These children were frustrated by their parents' concerns and felt that it placed unreasonable limits on their mobility. They felt their parents were behaving in an overly protective manner. The discussion of parents' concerns about safety led to a discussion about the role that adults should play in keeping children safe. The children observed that while some parents and adults are over protective, some are not sufficiently concerned about safety and fail to protect their children. In this case, children did not use personal examples but debated the issues. When asked how old children should be before they walk alone to places like the park, one T (aged 9) said "If you're like really young, like 7 or 8, then you might not know about strangers and stuff, and someone might like come and say "I've got some sweets, and I know your friend, and she's at my house," so they might take you away for ransom or something. Probably when you're 12 or 13, when you still want to play, but you're old enough to know better. And not to go with strangers." When asked if she worried herself about strangers or being taken away, she replied "no, not really."
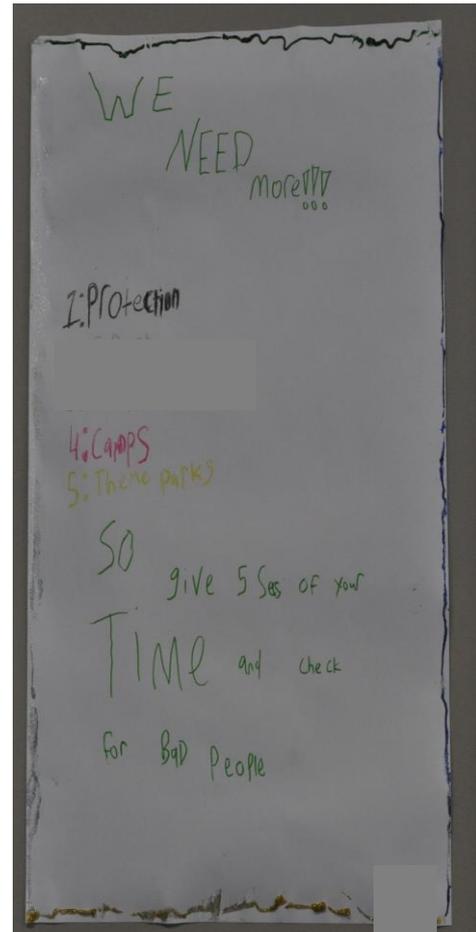
While Taylor and Fraser (2003) found that parents in low-income areas were extremely concerned about the dangers posed by strangers and placed restrictions on their children's movement as a result, children who participated in this research indicated that parents with higher incomes share similar concerns and impose similar restrictions. The site in which

children described their parents as allowing them relatively greater levels of independence, Lakeview, can be described as middle-income. What was distinctive about this community, however, was the extent to which children described themselves and their parents knowing the people who lived around. In Lakeview, Coleman's idea of credit slips, reciprocity and obligation appears to operate in ways that support children and parents to feel safe because someone is watching out.

Some children across all sites sometimes found their parents' concerns overly restrictive, but many described wanting parents and importantly, adults generally, to take greater responsibility for making children feel safe and included within their communities, and for fostering positive interactions. D (boy, aged 11, Riverside) emphasised this in the 'main message' he wanted to deliver about communities. D drew a poster that read:

"We need more protection! So give five seconds of your time to watch out for bad people!"

8.3.5 Child-adult relations

The nature of children's day-to-day interactions is interwoven with the nature of child-adult relations, which are crucial in shaping children's sense of safety and security. While there are elements of child-adult relations that were common across all sites, there were significant differences. In particular, children in the less advantaged sites were more likely to be subjected to overtly negative displays of power on the part of adults. At Riverside, this problem was described by children as particularly acute. All children involved in the research at Riverside described experiences of being verbally abused by passers-by or strangers. While this was not a common experience for all, all had experienced negative comments. E (girl, aged 12) argued that the town should be divided, with half for adults and half for children. She felt that it was not possible for happy co-existence, given the way in which many adults engaged with children. Other children did not agree with the idea of age-based segregation, but did agree that some adults are 'grumpy' and 'mean'. Common experiences were adults yelling at children to get off their lawns, to get off the road when riding their bikes, or to get off the footpath when riding scooters. Indeed, children's accounts suggested that there were few public spaces where children were welcome. One boy observed that people often yell at him and his friends to get off the road, even when they are riding their bikes in the bike lane. His analysis was telling: "They do it to us because we are young. They won't do it to teenagers." A girl agreed "If they're like, an adult, or someone on like a proper bike, or a teenager or something, then they'll all be like "yeah, okay, that's okay." But if

you're like younger like us, they'll be like 'oh get off the road, you stupid little beep'." Along similar lines, several children described incidents when bus drivers had been rude to them. The children said they had not done anything, but assumed the bus driver may have been grumpy with teenagers, and was taking it out on younger children.

At Longridge, most children had some experience of unfamiliar adults being rude or aggressive towards them, several had been sworn at by adults they did not know. Children's trust in adults in their communities was also undermined by what the children saw as irresponsible behaviour on the part of adults. Most notably, children were unhappy with dangerous driving and over-consumption of alcohol.

8.3.6 Child-teenager interactions

Across all sites, children had mixed experiences in engaging with older children and teenagers. In some cases, children described very positive, supportive relationships with teenagers in their communities.

At Longridge, N (boy, aged 12) was part of a community group that included children and young people of all ages. Involvement in this group gave N a sense of both connectedness and contribution, and provided very positive interactions. N explained: "I do some community bonding and if there is little kids that are in trouble I go." When asked to explain 'community bonding' he said "What we do is we get, there is a small group of kids around the age of teenagers and that who take some little kids out and do some fun things with them around the parks and communities around the area. And if any of the kids get hurt or injured we have to help them out." N and his friend J were actively involved in the local Police-Citizens Youth Club PCYC, including organising a fortnightly movie evening in the park for very young children. N and J helped to choose the movie and made sure the evening was 'fun and safe'. They were extremely proud of their contribution, which made them feel very much a part of their local community. Through their activities, both N and J had good, if not close, relationships with a number of teenagers in their community.

Many children, however, also spoke negatively about child-teenager relations. At all sites, some children described teenagers as dominating spaces and making younger children feel unwelcome. This was a particular problem at skate parks, where older boys tended to hang out, and sometimes in regular parks. Some younger children were also cautious about

possible negative and threatening behaviours on the part of teenagers, including swearing, drinking and taking drugs.

8.3.7 Positive interactions matter

Children who experienced frequent positive interactions with people in their communities were more likely to feel safe. While familiar people, such as friends, neighbours and extended family who behaved in caring, supportive and friendly ways, were important in creating children's sense of safety, friendly people known only to children by sight were also important in creating an environment in which children felt safe and secure. When children experienced – or feared experiencing – negative interactions, their sense of safety was greatly undermined. While more investigation of this issue is warranted, this research suggests that children in disadvantaged areas are more likely to experience negative interactions both with people living in their communities and known to them, as well as with strangers. Notably, each of the disadvantaged areas were something of a thoroughfare, whereby people (generally adults) not known to children were often present in the community.

8.4 No drunkenness

As discussed earlier, other studies have shown that parents are concerned about strangers (Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Underwood, 2012). While children share concerns about strangers, the most deleterious impact on children's sense of safety is the cultural acceptance of excessive alcohol consumption by adults.

If a single issue made children across all sites feel unsafe, it was adults' over-use and misuse of alcohol. There has been increasing public discussion in Australia over recent years about the nature of alcohol use and the anti-social and often violent behaviour that accompanies it (see for example Laslett et al, 2010; The Conversation, 2013). The Australian Medical Association describes alcohol use in Australia as 'high' by global standards, with one in ten Australians over the age of fourteen years drinking at levels that present risks to their health (AMA, 2009). New South Wales Police Commissioner Andrew Scipione has been particularly outspoken about the individual and social damage caused by excessive use of alcohol (Gridneff, 2012; Ralston, 2011). That excessive alcohol

use causes harm to others has been well-documented (see Laslett, 2010). The negative impacts on children have focused on young people's drinking patterns (Bonomo et al, 2004; King et al, 2005); child protection issues (O'Donnell et al, 2008; Laslett et al, 2012); and the impact of alcohol advertising on children (Phillipson and Jones, 2007). Yet we know almost nothing of children's views on adult alcohol consumption and the impact of alcohol use. There has been little research on the impact of excessive alcohol use on children's sense of community and social well-being. Indeed, this research is among the first to provide insights into children's views on alcohol use within communities. While children identified the absence of drunken behaviour as vitally important to a 'good' community, it is important to note that the researchers did not directly ask children about alcohol. Indeed, somewhat naively in hindsight, we did not anticipate that alcohol would be a major focus of discussions. The issue of alcohol use was, however, raised at every site, and was an overwhelming concern at some.

Excessive alcohol use was identified by children as a major factor in undermining their sense of safety in three communities, and as a significant factor in a fourth. Children in the two more advantaged sites described experiencing only limited problems related to alcohol, but in these sites children who did raise the issue of alcohol, did so in negative terms. For example, at Lakeveiw J (boy, aged 11) said "There should be a curfew on serving alcohol. So they should stop serving it at like 12 o'clock or 1 o'clock because they might do stupid things when nobody's out there to stop them, right." When asked if alcohol was a problem in his community, J replied "I don't see a lot of it but sometimes it can happen."

In Riverside, Longridge and Surfside alcohol was an overwhelmingly decisive factor in shaping children's experience of their community. Excessive alcohol use, and the violence and anti-social behaviour often associated with it, were identified by children as major issues. For many of the children, these are overwhelming problems that cast a constant shadow over their communities and their lives. The vast majority of children had witnessed adults (and often teenagers) in a drunken state, often in public spaces. The most negative interactions undermining children's sense of safety in communities were often driven by drunken behaviour on the part of adults – both familiar adults and strangers.

For some children, encountering drunk people was an unpleasant but not unusual experience. For example M (boy, aged 10, Surfside) said he didn't like seeing drunk people. When asked

if he often saw drunk people he replied "Yeah. Sometimes we have to pick up a few beers from the pub and that's mostly how we see drunk people."

8.4.1 The location of pubs and clubs

A notable difference between the more and less advantaged communities was the location of pubs. Some children at both Gardenville and Lakeview said that they considered pubs to be adult places that can be unpleasant and even threatening for children. For example, S (boy aged 9, Lakeview) said "Yeah, it's good not having a pub nearby because drunk people normally come out of bars." M (girl, aged 10, Gardenville) described a pub on the periphery of her local shopping precinct. She had never been into the pub but said "People get slightly drunk and very loud. And it smells." When asked what it smells of she said "I don't know what it is, I think it's wine or beer or something. And it must be spilt all over the furniture and it just soaks in and is very smelly." S (girl, aged 10, Gardenville) described another pub, which would generally be seen as an upmarket venue for professionals. Independently from M, S described this pub in similar terms, observing that it is very smelly and the people there are very loud and made her feel uncomfortable. S said that she passed the pub sometimes on the way to the supermarket or to her favourite bookshop, and hated having to do so. No children at Lakeview or Gardenville spoke of living close to pubs.

Similar to Lakeview and Gardenville, children at other sites had a largely negative impression of pubs. Pubs, and to some extent clubs, were considered places that are unwelcoming of children; places where adults go to socialise and to get drunk. For example, S (girl, aged 10, Parksway) said that she did not like places where people drink alcohol. She said "They go to the bar and all that – sometimes when people are drinking they get silly. Whenever we're walking past, it makes me scared. And sometimes when people come out they are silly." When asked whether there were a lot of places like that in her community, S said "In our community there are only a few, but they can make it bad."

While children's views of pubs were similar across all sites, a significant difference between sites in this research was the location of venues serving alcohol in large quantities. Unlike Lakeview and Gardenville, pubs were located within residential areas at Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway. A significant number of children at these sites described living close to pubs or clubs. All children living near a pub described this as presenting problems. Z (girl, aged 9, Surfside) explained "The pub is just down my street. If you look out the window you can see drunks going past. One time there was a woman and she had to

go to hospital because she got beaten up by her boyfriend because he was drunk and he got into this punch up." Z said she did not like having a pub near her house "Because they yell and swear." J (boy, aged 11, Surfside) also lived near the pub and said it is sometimes very noisy. J said that sometimes the drunk people walking past his house from the pub said funny things, at other times they said "weird stuff." R (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said "I live near a club unfortunately. I want to move but I don't want to move schools. And I don't want to leave my house, I love that. And I love the neighbours. But I hate that club." Only one child (S, boy aged 10, Longridge) identified having a pub close to home as having any positive aspects, saying "If there is a pub near your house well then it would be good for your mum and dad because then they can nick down there and grab a drink." Like other children, however, S identified the behaviour of drunk adults leaving the pub near his house as a problem.

K (girl, aged 10, Longridge) explained that her house was located not far from a pub and drunks often woke her family as they left. Like other children in Longridge, K described regularly witnessing intoxicated people fighting in the street and finding broken glass and vomit on the streets in the mornings. K said that the problem had become so bad that her parents had moved her and her sister into the main bedroom at the back of the house, so they would be further from the street. Her parents had moved into her smaller bedroom at the front of the house.

In Riverside, the school was situated adjacent to a pub, with a high wire fence separating the pub from the school oval and playground. Every child who participated in the research identified the pub as a problem. Some children said that some staff and customers at the pub were sometimes nice, waving or throwing back balls that strayed from the school oval into the pub grounds. However, all spoke of some pub customers being drunk and occasionally making comments to the children. H (girl, aged 10) spoke of feeling unsafe at school because of the location of the pub: "Well there's a pub right next to our school so people can come and bash you up whenever they want." To our knowledge, and based on discussions with both children and school staff, there has never been an incident of a person from the pub assaulting a child in the school grounds. However, children were anxious about the location of the pub, and their experience of drunken behaviour gave them good grounds for fearing the possibility of violence. The children's most common complaint, however, was that every morning they found broken glass and cigarette butts on their oval, basketball court, playground and sandpit as a result of the previous night's revelry at the pub.

8.4.2 Drunkenness and violent behaviour

The vast majority of children at Riverside, Longridge and Surfside had witnessed drunken behaviour within their communities and sometimes also within their families. At Parksway, a significant proportion of children had witnessed drunken behaviour, and in Lakeview and Gardenville a small number.

A significant proportion of children in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway associated drunkenness with violence. For example, H (girl, aged 10, Longridge) said "People that are dunk are most likely to be violent because ... because they don't know what they are doing and they are not feeling so well. And they can't control what they are doing." A significant number of children described witnessing random threatening behaviour by drunk People. K (girl, aged 10, Surfside) described one such situation:

> "Once there was a big storm and we left the gate open that night and this drunk person came yelling down the street going all through there and my mum was scared he was going to come inside because we left the gate open and the back door isn't always locked. So she wasn't sure if it was locked or not but she didn't want to get out of bed. But he didn't come in. And once there was a drunk guy when our car stopped at the stop sign he ... he ... like ... he came up to the car and said you are taking me to [place]. He kept walking in front of the car. He was really drunk."

J (girl, aged 10, Surfside) described her experience of witnessing drunken violence: "We were driving down the street because we went out on Christmas Eve to go looking at Christmas lights. And we were driving down the main street at Surfside, and there was this man punching up his girlfriend, pulling her hair. He had this huge chunk of hair in his hand and he punched her in the eye and then she just collapsed. So mum rang up the police."

Y (girl, aged 11, Longridge) described walking home with her parents and sister when two drunk people approached them, smashing glass and yelling. She said that her dad tried to protect her, her sister and mother by placing himself between them and the drunks. She described being very scared by the incident.

8.4.3 Children's sense of vulnerability

Some children described alcohol as a means by which adults socialise, relax and have fun. For example, at Riverside the majority of children described their parents – both fathers and mothers – going out to drink with friends or drinking at home, often to the point of drunkenness. One girl observed that parents "only get drunk when they have parties." Others suggested it was more regular. Most children in Riverside and Longridge, and a significant number in Surfside, described their fathers relaxing with a beer (but not getting drunk) when they came home from work.

At Lakeview, two boys indicated that their fathers sometimes consumed significant amounts of alcohol. Both said they did not like it and both described their main message for making a better community as 'stop drinking'. R (boy, aged 9) said he doesn't like the smell when his father drinks a lot of beer and described it as a 'bad drink'. He described drinking beer as "making your heart feel sad." S (boy, aged 9) said "No drinking beer. I do not want no-one drinking." He said that drinking "sometimes puts other people in risk if they're in your family. Like, if it was your dad, like you're right next to him when he's drunk." He went on to elaborate: "Yes because it puts other people at risk because sometimes people can like, go crazy, sometimes." K (girl, aged 10, Parksway) was also concerned about excessive alcohol use within the home context, stating "I think that parents should try to get drunk a lot less."

At Longridge, S (boy, aged 10) observed that many adults do stupid things when they are drunk, which he found entertaining and funny. This comment prompted a strong response from H (boy, aged 11) who said forcefully "People are not funny when they are drunk. They go spastic, they just go spastic, man. And its not funny at all."

Children generally identified alcohol use as a form of adult socialisation, and did not consider drinking alcohol to be necessarily bad. Rather, children clearly identified the problem as excessive use of alcohol. All children who spoke of drunkenness spoke of the ways in which people's behaviour changed. A very small minority, such as S, found the changes generally amusing albeit stupid. The overwhelming majority found the behavioural changes they observed as a result of alcohol use worrying at best, and terrifying and threatening at worst. Many children spoke of feeling vulnerable around drunk people, regardless of whether those people were known to them or not, or whether the behaviour took place in public or private. For example, P (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said that when she went to public events with her friends and family such as fireworks, she just hoped people didn't get drunk. She explained

that there were often a lot of drunks at such events which made her and her friends fearful. S (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said "Once when I was sleeping over my Nan's house. My Nan's brother, he is sort of an alcoholic and he is not very nice. He ... he nearly fell into the fire." Other children spoke of feeling unsafe or uncomfortable when their family members or parents' friends got drunk.

K (girl, aged 10) said "Sometimes I don't really want to be around them [drunk people]. Like because you don't know what they are going to do. They might ... yeah they might be really friendly but then all of a sudden they get nasty and start doing bad stuff." J (girl, aged 11, Longridge) summed up the view of most children across all sites when she said, "Because when they [adults] are drunk, they don't care what's going to happen. They should think about it, because they drink around, like, little kids." At Riverside, N (girl, aged 10) said "You have to understand, people may love you and care for you. They may not want to hurt you. But when they are drunk, they will."

In sum, children were acutely aware that adults become highly unpredictable when drunk. This made children across all sites feel vulnerable. However, feelings of vulnerability were particularly acute at the disadvantaged sites where the majority of children had witnessed drunken behaviour, and often drunken violence or aggression, on the part of adults.

8.4.4 Excessive use of alcohol and community events

As discussed in the section on relationships, most children valued community gatherings and celebrations, which they considered important in bringing people together. However, a significant number of children described in detail the ways in which drunken behaviour ruined many public or community events. At Riverside, Longridge and Surfside, this was a dominant theme.

H (boy, aged 11, Longridge) described community celebrations as a potentially good thing, but said it is better not to have them. When asked why, he replied: "Well if you celebrate more there is more drunk people. Because people drink when they celebrate more." A (boy, aged 10, Longridge) agreed: "I'd like to see less [celebrations]. Because people get drunk and they smash bottles."

D (boy, aged 9, Surfside) described the area by the beach as his very favourite place, and somewhere he loves to go. D added that he does not like the beach area at sunset on weekends, on Anzac Day or on Australia Day. When asked why not, D replied "Because

that's when all the drunks come out." Along similar lines, C (boy, aged 10) described alcohol as a big problem around celebration times. C said at other times alcohol misuse "is not too bad." About half of the children in Surfside spoke about the problem of alcohol use on special occasions, with drunken behaviour often ruining those occasions.

Interestingly, at Riverside, where the vast majority of children described excessive alcohol use as a major problem in their community, one annual community festival was 'dry'. The organisers (a local community group) described it as a family focused event and had decided not to allow alcohol. Children at Riverside spoke of this event in extremely positive terms, with the absence of drunks identified as an important factor in making it both fun and safe.

While children were particularly concerned about the behaviour of drunk people, they were also unhappy with the physical reminders of drunken behaviour that were often found in their community. At all sites, children spoke of glass from broken alcohol bottles littering the streets and often parks and playgrounds. While this was a particular problem at the four less advantaged sites, it also occurred in Lakeview and Gardenville. In Riverside, Longridge and Surfside, children observed that drunks (they assumed) often damaged public property such as fences and playground equipment. Some children also spoke with disgust of vomit on the streets near some pubs and clubs, and – in some cases – near their home and school.

8.4.5 Excessive alcohol use and irresponsible adult behaviour

Children involved in this study were very concerned about irresponsible behaviour on the part of drunk adults. This was particularly the case at the sites where children were most exposed to drunken behaviour. While many children worried about their own safety around drunk adults, they were also concerned for the safety of those who drink to excess. O (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said "I feel sorry for drunk people. I feel bad when I see them. They need help, lots of help...from a counsellor or from the police."

Unprompted, a number of children identified strategies that might help to keep drunk adults safe. H (girl, aged 10, Surfside) said that every pub and club that sells alcohol should have a courtesy bus. H said "If people get really drunk and they try to drive then it can cause crashes and all sorts of stuff. If they left their car there go there and then get their car back. If people walk there it's still dangerous because they could run across roads if they are drunk." Several children agreed that courtesy buses are a good idea and might help in preventing drunk driving.

K (girl, aged 10, Surfside) suggested that all venues serving alcohol should monitor and limit consumption: "A way to fix it could be a limit of drinks that people have. And they write down the name that's getting a drink and they are only allowed like five drinks otherwise they might get too drunk." C (boy, aged 10) agreed but added "I think less than five drinks because five drinks is quite a lot." C also suggested a 'speed limit' for drinking. K agreed, noting "Yeah. They shouldn't drink as fast because the more faster they drink, the more drink they have. And they get drunker."

8.4.6 Teenagers and alcohol

Much of the public concern about alcohol use in Australia has focused on the drinking patterns and behaviour of adolescents. Several children in this research raised concerns about adolescents drinking alcohol. H (boy, aged 8, Longridge) was particularly concerned about teenagers drinking. He explained that his sister attended high school and some of her friends drank alcohol. H said "I think if you were in high school you shouldn't like ... take like drink and get drunk because you could like hurt someone. And it might cause very dangerous accidents." B (girl, aged 8, Parksway) also raised the issue of teenagers drinking. B said "I think people in high school shouldn't drink alcohol because if they do they could get drunk and get run over by cars or ... they could do something really silly like hurt their friends." Several children identified the completion of high school as a time when many teenagers drink to excess, behave in a stupid and dangerous manner, and are likely to injure themselves or others. At Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, several children (usually boys, but a few girls) raised the problem of teenagers using alcohol at local skate parks. Overall, however, children identified excessive use of alcohol to be a major problem not among adolescents, but among adults.

8.5 No violence

As discussed in the previous section on drunken behaviour, violence associated with alcohol was identified as a major problem, particularly in the less advantaged sites. Children also raised violence generally as a problem or potential problem, most often in connection with fear of strangers. It is important to note here that the focus of this research on community directed the discussion towards public issues, with children identifying violence as a major problem without any promoting from researchers. Significantly, it is apparent from this research that a significant proportion of children participating had experienced or witnessed

violent behaviour in public spaces. That children generally did not discuss the problem of domestic violence in this research is likely to reflect the nature of the research, and should not be interpreted as suggesting that children are not concerned with violence in private spaces. Rather, it tells us that children are also concerned about public violence – and that such violence has a highly deleterious impact on their sense of safety.

In Parksway, children identified the issue of violence within their community as a major problem. In particular, drug-related violence was a very strong concern. Here, children were not talking about fear of junkies behaving in dangerous or threatening way, but of the violence perpetrated by drug dealers and drug-related gangs. One boy (A, aged 10) said "They shoot people over drugs or something like that." A observed that most of the violence was committed by men "not ladies," and that the police often come to take perpetrators away. All children at Parksway were aware of drug-related violence. C (boy, aged 9) said "The park is a scary place. There are scary people there." When asked why, C explained "There was a shooting, in the park. My family was there. We were having a picnic. And some guy shot someone - over drugs." A (girl, aged 10) said it is important to "make the parks safer for kids, like, for instance, no more shooting in parks because it's scary and it makes people not want to go to our community's parks."

Several children mentioned drug-related shootings and killings. Apart from C, three other boys had been in the local park at the time of one very serious incident. These boys felt that such extreme violence was a terrible thing for their community and approached the researcher at the end of one research workshop to discuss it in more detail. They said it upset them but it was not a direct threat because it was about drugs – although they noted that an innocent person could be accidently shot in such situations.

Drug-related violence made many children at Parksway worried about going into public places, particularly the park. M (boy, aged 10) said he and his friends sometimes went to the park, but added "We usually walk around – we don't really play that much because there's lots of fights and drugs." While children's fears for their safety are sometimes dismissed as resulting from an overly protective society that seeks to 'bubble wrap' children (see Malone, 2007), it is important to note that in Parksway, and indeed in other sites, violence was a very real part of children's lives. In Parksway, in particular, people had been killed in the immediate and surrounding areas. While children were not – and knew they were not – the targets, they were nevertheless disturbed by the existence of extreme violence in their

community. In a similar way, most children did not consider themselves to be direct targets of the public violence associated with drunkenness. Nevertheless, they felt anxious as a result of it. As Morrow (2003) has noted, children's concerns for their safety do not always arise from an ill-defined or adult-driven sense of 'stranger danger', but from very real episodes of violence.

8.5.1 Car-related aggression and violence

One form of violence to which many children were regularly subjected, particularly in Riverside, Longridge and Parksway, was car-related aggression and violence. At Gardenville, Lakeview and Surfside, speeding cars in suburban streets were referred to as a problem, albeit not a particularly common one. At Lakeview, one girl spoke of a passenger in a passing car – which she described driven as a young person with P plates – throwing a bottle containing an unidentified substance at her as she walked down the street near her house. There were a few such incidents at Lakeview around the time of the research, with adults as well as children targeted. Around the time of the incident in Lakeview, there were media reports of similar incidents in another city. At Lakeview, children also described a lack of consideration (not aggression), as people parked cars across footpaths meaning that children had to walk or scoot on the road rather than the footpath, which they considered more dangerous.

At Riverside, Longridge and Parksway, children described a high level of car-related aggression and violence. Children described dangerous driving as severely limiting their mobility because of their (and often their parents') concerns about safety. In each of these sites, speeding, burn-outs and donuts were all identified as creating serious safety issues. Several children at Riverside described having had 'close shaves' with speeding cars or cars doing burn-outs. A number of children were concerned about their safety when playing in the streets or riding their bikes and scooters because they were aware that not only can cars be dangerous, but that drivers are often unpredictable.

In talking about the problems of dangerous driving, J (aged, 12, Longridge) emphasised the potentially negative impact on younger children. L (girl, aged 11, Longridge) explained that cars commonly sped down her street and that there were (generally minor) accidents most weeks. She said that it was lucky that more cars did not crash, given how fast they travel. She associated alcohol consumption with speeding and reflected:

We all get really sad because we don't understand why people would drive how they drive. Some people, they are very silly because some of these people live in the community and they go to a friend's ... a friend's house that, like they could walk there but they decide to drive there. And then they go, they try to go home but they speed and it's not very far away.

This is one of several examples where children found adults' behaviour irresponsible and quite inexplicable. Several children noted that much of adults' bad behaviour in cars is associated with alcohol consumption. At Longridge, several children drew maps or pictures with speeding cars as examples of things that should change in their community. For example, one boy drew what he described as "a man drinking while he is driving and doing a burn-out near the park," he went on to explain that he had witnessed a fatal accident when he was little, which he said was caused when the driver of a ute was drinking and speeding.

At Parksway, dangerous driving and safety in the streets was a dominant issue, with strong consensus among the children participating that too many people drove in dangerous ways. J (girl, aged 11) said "There are crazy people. Some people just speed. Sometimes they could be drinking, they're just crazy." D (boy, aged 9) said "Some people are totally stupid because I have a man in my street – he tries to show off in his car and he comes in front of my road and he makes the whole road all smoky and it stinks."

Children were especially concerned that people ignore road rules. G (boy, aged 10) said "Well people shouldn't be driving without a license, because an example, there is a person in the street who drives a motor bike without a license – the police came and gave him a caution and he still drives it and breaks the rules and makes a loud noise every night and you can't really go to sleep. He breaks the rules a lot." The children who discussed dangerous driving and road safety in detail were in agreement that speed limits are important. G (girl, aged 9) said "I like some of the speed limits. Especially near the schools – the school is safer when there are lolly pop people and when they [police] patrol the streets. Then there's "Go 40" and they [drivers] listen to that but then when they're on the highway and it says "Go 100" they go 110 or 120."

Several children wanted more police on their streets to enforce road rules. However, they were hesitant to call the police themselves. J (boy, aged 10) said that it would be better to ask someone else to call the police, as he was concerned that there would be negative repercussions for him if the drivers of cars knew he had phoned the police. J explained "If

they ring the police then it's not us doing it; it's them. And then the police can give him warnings…" C (boy, aged 10) said "[the police] should be real strict about people going crazy, street racing, and [we need] more speed bumps."

In some cases, children spoke of an individual who regularly drove in dangerous ways. In one small group discussion, J (boy, aged 10, Parksway) said "There's some guy in my street with a motor bike – he drives it around doing weird things." A (boy, aged 10) described a person and his bike and asked if it sounded like the same person. J thought it did, and A replied "I think he comes to my street sometimes and does burnouts." In that group, five of the eight children thought they had seen the man in question and agreed that he did silly and dangerous things.

Several children described a culture of road racing and dangerous driving, rather than isolated events. For example, M (boy, aged 10, Parksway) described the situation near his house: "Lots of people speed past my street and they do street racing. There's lots of speeding and it has a street in the night, they block the roads and they start racing; speed racing. They do it all night. I come out at 12.00 o'clock in the night and I look and I saw all these cars parked and all girls standing on the cars and men and they're all speeding."

Several children, particularly in Parksway, described having experienced incidents of 'road-rage' or aggressive behaviour when in the car with their parents. Children were often particularly distressed when their parents were subjected to rude or hostile behaviour from other drivers.

8.6 No bullying

A form of violence that concerned children at all sites, and undermined their sense of safety in their community, but particularly at school, was bullying. The problem of bullying is now well recognised and at all sites, schools had in place programs designed to address the issue. From children's perspectives, however, the problem remains firmly entrenched. Several children across all sites said that telling a teacher is the best course of action if you are bullied, but they observed that telling a teacher does not always stop the bullying. T (boy, aged 11, Lakeview) said that whether or not teachers can help "depends on what the problem is." He explained situations where children repeatedly trip others over, but say it is an accident. T said "There should be more attention aimed at bullying. Because there's a lot of

bullying going unnoticed in schools." J went on to say that bullying was particularly a problem when there are not teachers around "because that's when they hurt you."

At Gardenville, a group year five girls (aged ten or eleven years) described bullying as a major problem, generally in the form of girls excluding others, continually making nasty comments and 'making fun of' others. The discussion in Gardenville, and a similar discussion with year six girls in Parksway, revealed the complex nature of bullying. Some girls described being bullied by those who they had thought to be friends. In some cases, the girls who described being bullied also described their own behaviour toward others, which fitted definitions of bullying. At Riverside, one boy described being subjected to bullying throughout his school life. As a result, he felt both unsafe and unwelcome at school. He made it clear that he did not consider school to be part of his community, but an institution that he had to endure.

Bullying and violence were major issues in the discussions of school in Parksway. A group of boys aged between nine and eleven were particularly concerned about bullying and violence, which was a problem that shaped their experience of school. K (boy, aged 10) observed that "There's too much fighting in schools." This comment was taken up by several other boys. A major concern was being unwillingly caught up in fights. One boy explained his experience of trying to stop a fight, but then getting into trouble himself. Several boys said they are afraid to use the school toilets because there was very often fighting in and behind the toilets. Several boys said that teachers did not do enough to stop the fighting, as one boy (J, aged 10) said "Some of our teachers let them go, they don't say anything. Sometimes they just get a warning, but that doesn't stop them." The problem of teachers not stopping fighting, bullying, and violent or aggressive behaviour was a common theme, particularly among the nine to eleven year old boys. The boys recognised, however, that the teachers were in a difficult position. One boy said "Sometimes they [children who are fighting] get detention. But sometimes people don't care if they get suspended." M (boy, aged 10) provided the example of a boy in his class who fights with the teacher, swearing and sometimes threatening violence. M felt sorry for the teacher, but also felt somewhat nervous for his own safety. He said that learning was made very difficult because of this particular boy's behaviour in class. Another boy added that some parents do not care if their children are suspended from school or are always in trouble for fighting.

Religious difference was identified as one reason for violence on the part of some children at Parksway. However, religious difference played out in complex ways and all children involved in the research described having very good friends who were different religions from them. Religion seemed to be an element in violence perpetrated by a small number of children (none of whom participated in the research) who held strong religious views that excluded or disregarded the beliefs of others. In these cases, violence was sometimes against children of other religions and sometimes against children of the same religion, but different denominations or sects.

At Parksway, children who had a leadership role within the school (for example, those on the student representative council, SRC) were described as being particularly susceptible to violence or aggression. One boy who was on the SRC said he had been picked on because of his role. He felt he was particularly vulnerable because he is smaller and younger than some of the children who bully or fight. Other boys agreed with this observation.

The threat of violence at Parksway meant that these boys felt they always needed to be on their guard while at school. J (boy, aged 10) explained "We try and play handball and keep an eye out. If we're playing soccer we look out on the soccer field. Once there was a big punch up on the soccer field – one of the boys kicked the ball over the fence off the ground and then there was a big fight." The boys in this group indicated that they did not want to fight or be caught up in violence – M (aged 10) said "I'm really a good boy" and others agreed quite sincerely – but they found it difficult to avoid.

While the theme of violence, and fighting in particular, was strongest among a group of boys aged ten or eleven years, other children also identified bullying as a serious problem. More than half the children at Parksway said that other children often swore at them and called them rude names at school. G (aged 9) said "at school some kids are mean, so ... and every time you try to talk they just interrupt. So ... like when you tell the teacher they usually get all grumpy and they still ignore what you are saying. So I think every time somebody is being mean to you at school you should just walk away from them." Other children agreed that walking away is the best strategy, but some noted that when they walked away, the bullies followed.

8.7 Summarising what children told us about safety

Children considered safety to be an essential element of a good, supportive community. Significantly, at the four disadvantaged sites, most children felt unsafe in their communities some or most of the time. Poverty and social disadvantage matter greatly to children's sense of safety. In line with adults' concerns identified in the Australian Council on Education Research, children's concerns revealed by this research emphasised issues about strangers and road safety. However, hearing a child standpoint on safety provides important detail and nuance – it contributes much to an understanding of how and why these issues undermine safety within a community.

From a child standpoint, concern about strangers is closely interwoven with the nature of day-to-day interactions with others – particularly adults – in the community. Respectful, supportive and friendly interactions enhance both children's sense of thin trust, and their sense of safety. When interactions are disrespectful, hostile or violent, children's sense of thin trust is eroded and they describe feeling unsafe and fearful. The nature of generational ordering, which is reflected in day-to-day interactions between children and adults, is fundamentally important to children's sense of safety within their communities. While generational ordering as a concept alerts us to children's place within unequal social structures, children experience generational ordering differently. This research clearly indicates that children's experience of generational ordering, reflected in interactions with both known and unfamiliar people, has important implications for their sense of safety.

Importantly, children's concerns about strangers are not based solely or primarily on the urban folk tales, identified by Malone as influencing young people, in her study in Victoria. In this research, children's concerns were based on their lived experiences: their treatment by others; their observations of adult behaviour; as well as the messages they received from a media industry that often highlights the dangers facing children in contemporary society.

For the children in this research, road safety was a priority issue. However, hearing a child standpoint makes us aware that 'road safety' is intrinsically linked to generational ordering and to the aggressive and violent behaviour in which some adult drivers engage. In discussing safety in the streets of their community, children did not speak of the possibility that they would cross the road without looking carefully. Rather, they emphasised drivers behaving in a way that places other road users at serious risk: road-rage, street racing, speeding through school and residential zones, burn-outs, and donuts are all forms of car-related violence and

aggression identified by children. All are most common in disadvantaged areas, but are not exclusive to them. Generational ordering is also evident in the behaviour of drivers who abuse children for legitimately using public spaces and those who throw objects from cars at both children and adults.

From a child's standpoint, violence in the community is devastating to children's sense of safety. Violence must be understood broadly, encompassing the organised drug-related violence that shattered children's sense of safety in Parksway, to the car-related violence and aggression discussed above, and bullying, which most often occurs within the context of school.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, children told us that excessive use of alcohol, and resulting drunken behaviour in public and private spaces, creates a climate of fear for them, within which trust is eroded and a sense of vulnerability prevails. While the Australian Council on Education Research study highlights parents' concerns about drugs, the children who participated in this study overwhelmingly identified over-use of alcohol as a major factor undermining their sense of safety. Adult drunkenness provides an additional and worrying dimension to generational ordering: children who are already in relatively powerless positions, are made more vulnerable when adult behaviour becomes unpredictable and potentially dangerous. This research is among the first to highlight children's views on public alcohol use in Australia. Excessive use of alcohol is a problem that must be addressed if children are to feel safe in their communities.

8.8 Policy implications relating to safety

Policy Implication 7

Policies at all levels of government must recognise that excessive use of alcohol by adults, and associated drunken behaviour, has a direct and negative impact on children's sense of safety and inclusion in their communities, and respond accordingly.

Policy Implication 8

State and local governments should act to curb excessive public use of alcohol by adults, including by:

> 8.1.   Providing resources for closer monitoring of alcohol serving venues by licensing bodies and law enforcement agencies;

8.2. Greater promotion, funding and enforcement of Responsible Service of Alcohol (RSA) requirements.

Policy Implication 9

Greater attention should be paid to the social impact of licensing new alcohol-serving venues and extending the trading hours of existing venues. There is a particular need to restrict licensed venues in residential areas.

9.1. Social impact analyses should be seriously undertaken and should not amount to tick-a-box exercises.

9.2. Specifically, child-focused social impact analyses should be developed and implemented.

Policy Implication 10:

State and local governments should develop and strengthen existing strategies to make public spaces such as parks safe and attractive for children, including children in middle childhood. More resources should be allocated to maintaining parks as alcohol-free, drug-free, clean spaces where communities, particularly families and children, can socialise.

Chapter 9.   Places

9.1 A brief overview of the literature

Edward Casey (2001: 683) has described 'place' as the immediate environment of a person's "lived body, an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural." While a large number of studies have emphasised the instrumental importance of places for children to play and to 'hang out', many also recognise the importance of intangible aspects of 'place' (Burke, 2005; Malone and Trantner, 2010; Woolcock et al, 2010). Rasmussen and Smidt's (2003) research with children in Denmark concluded that "neighbourhood is perceived by children through a number of concrete parts, where social, cultural and physical elements are inseparable and interwoven." This interconnectivity of physical place with social and cultural dimensions of community was highlighted by children involved in this research. Similarly, Christensen and O'Brien's (2003) representation of home, neighbourhood and community as overlapping domains resonates with the views of most children who participated in this research.

One of the strongest themes emerging from the literature relating to children and place over the past three decades is the idea that children no longer have access to public places as their mobility and independence has been constrained by increasingly institutionalised childhoods. Based on questionnaires administered to 1310 children aged between nine and twelve years, and 1684 parents, Tranter and Whitelegg (1994) argued that children in Australia have lower levels of independent mobility than in Germany or England. They attributed this to car-dependency and children's reliance on adults to drive them to school, local shops or recreational activities. As discussed in section eight, others have identified safety concerns – particularly stranger danger and road safety – as key factors in explaining restrictions on children's independent mobility (Taylor and Fraser, 2003; Underwood, 2012). Valentine (1996) has argued that the constraints on children's engagement with physical spaces results from two contradictory concerns: first, that children must be protected from the dangers of public spaces and second, that the public should be protected from the potentially unruly and disruptive behaviour of (particularly older) children.

Within the social capital literature, place and space have been identified as important, particularly for children. Robert Putnam, for example, places great emphasis on the importance of safe and productive neighbourhoods for children. Putnam (2000: 307) argues that "Neighbourhoods with high levels of social capital tend to be good places to raise children." Putnam argues that the level of social capital in a neighbourhood is significant in determining the level of vandalism, graffiti, street crime and gang activity. Putnam does not, however, examine the ways in which children engage with their neighbourhoods, locating children as largely passive beings who can be shaped, positively or negatively, by their local context. Morrow's (2001) study of children, social capital and local neighbourhoods sought to investigate children and young people's perspectives, social context and environments in a community north of London. That study is important in identifying the factors that limit the way children use neighbourhood space, including prohibitions on children playing in some communal areas and dirty, heavily littered public places (including parks and streets). Morrow's study also found that the presence of aggressive dogs and dog faeces made children disinclined to use public places.

The UNESCO Growing Up In Cities project, initiated in the early 1970s, has provided an important source of information about children's perspectives of their urban environment in Argentina, Australia, Mexico and Poland. In 1995, the project was revived under the leadership of Louise Chawla and research was undertaken in eight countries: Argentina, Australia, Poland, India, South Africa, Norway, England and the United States (see Chawla and Malone, 2003). The Growing Up In Cities project identified key dimensions of community that are important to children: "whether a community was a place of social stigma or a place with a hopeful positive identity; whether it was a place of isolation and alienation or social integration; whether it was a place of boredom or engagement." (Chawla and Malone, 2003). Chawla and Malone argue that the "availability and physical quality of public places determine whether or not children have opportunities to be part of their larger society, at the same time as the quality of social relations determines whether or not public places appear open and inviting."

9.2 What children said about places in this research

The children who participated in the research identified places as important within a community. In doing so, they provided a perspective very similar to the conclusion drawn by Chawla and Malone: that the availability and physical quality of public places is very

important – litter, dog faeces, graffiti and broken playground equipment all discouraged children from engaging with public places, and that unsafe streets, damaged pavements, or lack of footpaths made access difficult. Moreover, as discussed in earlier sections, social relations, and importantly the nature of child-adult relations and the nature of daily interpersonal interactions, created a sense of inclusion or exclusion among children.

While children considered public places to be very important, most began their discussion of significant places within their community with their own house. In each of the sites, to varying extents, three broad elements of place emerged as important to most children: home; inclusive places and a good environment.

9.3 Home

Most children identified their home as the most significant place in their community. When drawing maps of their communities, the vast majority of children began by drawing their house at the centre and locating other places in relation to it. Children often described their home in great detail. For example, C (girl, aged 10, Surfside) described a drawing of her community which placed her house (which was under construction) at the centre. She explained: "This is our veggie garden, this is my house. That's where mum and dad's bedroom is going to be. My bedroom is here at the moment. That's where mum and dad's bedroom is going to be. That's going to be my bedroom. That's the front deck." From her house, C's map moved 'outwards' to identify other important places in her community.

In Gardenville, most children found it challenging to identify places on their community maps beyond their house and school. These children explained that they spent most of their time either at school or in structured activities; as a result it seemed they had little sense of the geographic area around their home. While these children all identified home as important, it was disconnected from the physical places surrounding it. In other sites, children tended to have a stronger sense of their home being embedded in a local, physical community.

Several children described having their own special place in or near their home. In three cases, this was their bedroom. A (girl, aged 8, Riverside) said of her bedroom "It's very special. I treasure it. I've got this secret area in my room; really secret. Nobody really knows about it." Another girl described a special place in a tree close to hear house.

A significant proportion of children in Riverside and Longridge described spending a great deal of their time at home watching TV or DVDs or playing computer games (particularly DS

or Wii). Notably, most children – including those who described financial hardship in their families – had some form of home computer game. In Lakeview, most children also said they had computer games, but a far greater proportion spoke more of spending time playing in their yards rather than playing inside.

A significant proportion of children, however, had either mixed or negative feelings about home, despite identifying it as important. At Riverside, for example, more than half the children who participated in the research described spending a good deal of time at home alone, but not by choice. Parents work or desire to socialise with other adults, discussed in Sub-section 7.3.4, were the primary reasons for children being home alone. Children indicated that either their family's financial situation gave parents no choice but to leave them alone, or that their family's social situation is such that there was no-one available to be with them when their parents go to work. Children also spoke of being left alone, often at night, when their parents 'go out', either to friends places or to local pubs or clubs. Many children felt afraid when left alone. Of all the children who talked of being left alone, only one boy (N, aged 11) indicated that he liked it. For N, his parents absence gave him much desired time alone and he said he rarely felt scared.

A significant proportion of children – particularly in Riverside and Surfside – have more than one home, usually due to parental separation and occasionally because they spend some of their time living at grandparents' houses. Of those children who have two homes, a number have a strong preference for one and it was not uncommon for children to describe feeling more comfortable or safer in one house – and indeed one community – rather than the other.

In Longridge, several children said they shared their home with extended family or friends, sometimes resulting in very crowded living arrangements. E (girl, aged 12) described often having relatives staying with her family, noting that at one time eighteen people were living in her three-bedroom house. While this very large number was out of the ordinary, having many people and a high rate of visitor turnover was not unusual in her home. While E valued her relationship with her immediate and extended family, she found it difficult to find a place of her own or to do her homework when the number of people in the house became very high. D (girl, aged 8) explained the arrangements when her extended family came to stay: "There's four kids in one room and the baby gets their own room and so does the grandma. Usually my dad gets kicked out of his room because he snores." Like E, D valued her

extended family, but the reality of a very crowded house was often difficult for her. D described her 'own space' as being under her bed.

One consequence of a large number of people living, temporarily or permanently, in the one house appears to be – in many cases – a division between the activities of children and those of adults. D described the adults socialising and drinking together in the house or going out, while the children watched DVDs together in a separate part of the house. Notably, in D's case, the DVDs she watched with older children were ones she described as "very scary." D said "I'm scared of the movie Coraline – it's really scary. It's about this evil lady – she wants to get this little girl's eyes off and sew buttons on because the girl, she's got buttons as eyes and she wants to get the eyes instead so she chases her and takes the little girl's from her." D spoke of being frightened both at home and in her local area in case characters from films she had seen were real. D also spoke of scary stories told to her and her young relatives by her grandmother, which she said also made her frightened at home. Other children spoke of regularly watching adult horror movies, several, but not all, found them frightening.

Children from Pacific Islander backgrounds were most likely to talk about having a lot of people living in one house, reflecting cultural values and traditions of reciprocity and obligation. It also reflects the challenges of unemployment and lack of affordable housing facing Pacific Islander families who have relocated to Australia. In some cases, the living arrangements among extended families exemplifies a form of bonding social capital, which allowed people to get by on a day-to-day basis. For many children, this provided both a support network and a readily accessible group of playmates. For some of the older girls, it brought additional household chores.

The other group of children who tended to talk about problems of the crowded living arrangements were those in complex or blended families. H (girl, aged 10) found the situation at her mother's house (where she spends most of her time) quite challenging, in part because of her difficult relationship with her step-sisters. H described her situation as follows: "Well my real sister lives at my mum's house and then we've got two half sisters and two step and me." While home is important in H's life, she described feeling she has no place of her own. In some instances, children felt both crowded and unsafe, having no control over their immediate environment and no say over who stayed in their homes or for how long.

In many cases, children's sense of safety within the broader community influenced how safe they feel in their own homes. M, (girl, aged 10, Riverside) described her house as 'half safe' because the dog flap was broken and she worried that someone might break in. M was aware that burglaries were common in her area. H (girl, aged 10, Riverside) was particularly anxious about burglaries. She said "I just feel my home's not safe because it's always got glass around it so it's like 'Oh look, those guys have got a plasma TV; let's go steal it' and they break in and take all your valuables." In contrast, J (girl, 11 years, Riverside) described feeling safe at home: "I think I am really safe [at home] because we have really heavy doors – you open the door and there's another door you have to open."

At Riverside and Longridge, children described feeling least safe in their homes. Their lacking sense of safety resulted from their broader concerns about safety in their community. At these sites and at Surfside, children who lived near pubs or in places frequented by alcohol-affected people also felt less safe at home. In Lakeview, where children knew their neighbours and felt very safe in their communities, they also felt very safe at home and felt that their home provided a physical connection to their local physical community.

Some children across all sites identified their friends' houses as part of their community, and friends' houses featured on many children's maps.

9.4 Inclusive Spaces

In defining community, children across all sites prioritised people and relationships. Places were, however, also identified as very important – if not as important as people. In particular, children valued safe, fun and inclusive places within their communities. Physical places were described by children as very important, but equally important was the socio-relational nature of the space. By 'socio-relational,' we mean the extent to which children felt welcome and included, and the nature of social networks and relationships among those who used the space.

A common theme at the four less advantaged sites was the lack of fun, inclusive places for children in the eight to twelve years age group. E (girl, aged 11, Riverside) said: "There's not much for kids of our age. There's lots of stuff for little kids, like the little kiddle rides at the playground; and stuff for teenagers to do. But there's not nothing for us in our middle age." A number of children felt that they had outgrown the moulded plastic playgrounds that had appealed to them when they were younger. Several also observed that the parents of the very

little children who used such playgrounds were often less than welcoming of bigger children who tended to play more physical games on the equipment. Most children also considered there to be more places for teenagers. Skate parks were identified as places primarily, if not exclusively, for teenagers. Several children also observed that teenagers have greater independence to go to places such as shopping malls or the cinema. Many of the children participating in this research were of the view that those in middle childhood fell through the cracks.

Importantly, most children participating in the research across all sites wanted to play. This included the eleven and twelve year olds. Yet, some felt that they were no longer expected to play once they were in later primary school, and that the places for the kind of play in which they wanted to engage were limited. At Riverside, a group of four children – two boys and two girls all aged twelve – envisioned the kind of playground they would design if they could have anything at all. They were not asked to reach a consensus, but after much consideration there was agreement that the 'most cool, most fun thing' would be a trampoline playground. K (boy, aged 12) said that he had been to an indoor trampoline playground while on holidays and described it as awesome:

> Yeah and they've got like trampolines and mats and everything and you can just like go there and just do whatever. So, yeah, and we went there and it was like really, really fun because we were like jumping on the trampolines. And there's a big foam pit, so you can just jump off stuff. It was fun. They've got the big ropes. They've got the big ropes and they go up high as the ceiling.

All three children said that a trampoline playground would be fun, so long as it was not taken over by adults or teenagers. They liked the idea of being able to engage in somewhat risky, high energy activity but in an environment that would ultimately be safe. None of the four could think of an existing place that fitted this description.

An important issue emerging from the discussion about an indoor trampoline at Riverside was that there are relatively few fun places for girls aged eleven or twelve play. Similar discussions took place across other sites. Essential here, is that many girls of this age explicitly stated that they wanted to be able to play, but a significant number felt social expectations that they were too old. There were a minority of girls aged eleven or twelve who said they now prefer shopping and hanging out to playing, but the majority felt differently. While there were places for boys aged eleven to twelve years to play, particularly football

fields, cricket nets, and (sometimes) skate parks, there were few places for girls. While some girls said they played soccer, few used football fields to play for fun. Generally, girls said they would like more and bigger slides, swings, climbing frames and netball or basketball courts.

When boys talked about places to go, skate parks featured heavily, but in rather ambivalent ways. Some boys liked going to the skate park, but many considered skate parks to be somewhat dangerous because of the behaviour of older boys, and sometimes because of alcohol and drug use and drug dealing. Those boys who described using and enjoying skate parks did so in the context of having positive relationships with older boys. Girls, with only one or two exceptions, did not use skate parks.

The skate park at Riverside provides an interesting example of how a place was transformed for younger boys in a positive way. When the research commenced at Riverside, the children involved unanimously agreed that the skate park was a dangerous, nasty place. Located opposite a large park, but out of public view, the skate park had become a hang-out for groups of teenage boys and young men who drank heavily, took and dealt drugs, and behaved in ways that the children found frightening. Over the following year, the local council intervened to clean up the skate park. Trees were removed to make it more visible from the road and park, lighting was installed, artwork was commissioned for the walls and surrounding concrete barriers, and seating was provided. A year after the research commenced, children described the skate park quite differently. While some still preferred to avoid it because they considered it to be the domain of older boys, it was no longer the intimidating place it had been. Some boys (all aged twelve) said they now used the skate park.

In Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, many children felt unwelcome in most public spaces as a result of negative interactions with other people or they felt unsafe, for the reasons discussed previously. In Gardenville, the majority of children had little connection to, or familiarity with, spaces in their local physical communities. In Lakeview, the situation was somewhat different. The majority of children had a close familiarity with the spaces in their local physical community and felt a strong attachment to them.

There are two lakes within very close proximity to Lakeview, each of which has a park and playground adjacent and bike and footpaths around the periphery. The majority of children participating in the research spoke of riding their bikes around one of the lakes (children

tended to have their regular lake). Some children described riding their bikes alone or with friends; most went bike riding with their parents. Children were very positive about their lake (and they did see it as their lake), despite the fact that they described it as smelly (as a result of algae). Children were also very unhappy about the amount of litter around their lake, which they considered as making an otherwise beautiful environment ugly and dirty. One girl (K, aged 9) said: "It's not very far for us to ride to the Lake because we go on this path, like, covered with trees and it goes like that. And when it's spring all these blossoms fall down and it looks like snow. It was wonderful. And I was, like, 'Oh, my gosh.'"

Several children, mainly boys but a small number of girls, talked of going to the local oval "to have a kick" (of the footy – AFL or soccer). This was considered a fun thing to do. One of the local ovals had a cricket net, and a minority of boys went to the nets regularly.

Children at Lakeview described local playgrounds and parks as very good places, although children did express dissatisfaction that at two playgrounds in the area, play equipment that had been considered fun and challenging (for example, wooden climbing frames and tree houses) had been removed and replaced with moulded plastic play equipment. Several children talked of having picnics in the park with their families, or playing on the play equipment regularly. Fun play equipment was identified as flying foxes, climbing equipment, swings and slides. Several children said that their parents played with them on the equipment. K (girl, aged 9) summed up the views of the vast majority of children in Lakeview when she said "I think parks are great because they're somewhere, a place, to exercise, some place to meet up with friends, have fun." T (girl, aged 9) added that it is good that adults can also play on the equipment, explaining that her dad goes on the slide and flying fox with her.

As at other sites, the local skate park was mentioned by children at Lakeview, but by a smaller number. It was described primarily as a place for teenagers rather than children of their age, although two boys said they went regularly with their older brothers or parents. One girl said that the skate park could be dangerous for younger children, "Yeah, because my brother's friend, he ran into a little kid and he felt really bad because the little kid fell over and actually broke his arm. And then his friend, he was skating, he fell down the steps when he was grinding on the rail and he split all there [pointing to her arm] open." She suggested that a 'beginners skate park' might be a good thing. In Lakeview, unlike other sites, most

children spent considerable amounts of time in places they liked and where they felt safe and comfortable.

None of the children who participated in the research had been consulted on issues relating to planning in their local communities, although several said they would like to participate in planning processes. C (girl, aged 11, Gardenville) knew of community consultation processes in her local community, but said that as her parents had chosen not to participate, she had been unable to do so herself. C said there should be a suggestion box and a feelings box at key places in the community (such as the shopping centre), so children can express their views about their community. She added "children don't usually have the chance to actually have a say."

9.5 A good environment

At all sites, children emphasised the importance of a good physical environment. Based on children's priorities, a good environment can be characterised as one that is safe and welcoming as discussed, and also one that has no litter, no broken play equipment, no graffiti, no smoking, and no excessive use of alcohol (discussed in Section 8.4). In Longridge, several children raised the problem of dogs roaming the streets and sometimes barking and snarling at them. In Riverside, dog faeces in the school playground was identified as undermining the environment.

While litter, broken play equipment and graffiti were identified as undermining the physical environment of a community at all sites, the intensity of the problem tended to be greater in the four less advantaged sites. At Riverside, Parksway and Longridge in particular, children felt that people did not treat their community well or look after it (referring to the physical state of the community).

At all sites, most children described graffiti in very negative terms. Most children were particularly annoyed by graffiti when it was close to their house or school. Several children noted that fences and walls were often covered with graffiti in the night, but on occasion it happened in daylight, usually – they said – by teenagers. Most children were particularly concerned about graffiti that used rude words, which they described as making them feel uncomfortable and sometimes disgusted. At Longridge, T (girl, aged 11) expressed concern that young children would read the rude messages contained in some graffiti, "I think it is so sad that some little children learn to read like that" she said. Another boy spoke of the seat in

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his local park, which he described as "just covered in writing and it's got really rude stuff on it." L (girl, aged 9) said "I think graffiti should stop because even if you are doing art you shouldn't do it on buildings. Because it's not your property it's someone else's and it won't actually look good. If you want to do art do it on a piece of paper, why do it on a wall?" H (boy, aged 8, Parksway) said graffiti "makes the world look dirty and not clean. And many people have to clean it over and over again." While most children at Longridge disliked graffiti, a minority of children held a contrary view. At Longridge two boys – A (aged 12) and S (aged 11) – suggested that it really isn't so bad, and might be just a form of artwork. They indicated that their interest in graffiti was quite personal. F (girl, aged 12, Parksway) described graffiti as 'awesome', although she noted that she would not like it on her car or house. Generally, however, there were few supporters of graffiti, and most children considered it ugly.

Littering was also considered a major problem and, like graffiti, one that made the community look ugly. Unlike graffiti, littering had no supporters at all. At Longridge, children said their local parks and playgrounds were littered with rubbish and, as a result, were unpleasant places to be. Broken glass in public places was a major concern for most children. Several children had experienced being cut with broken glass, or knew someone who had been cut. N, (girl, aged 11) described going to a bus stop with her father and sisters to find the area covered in broken glass. They had tried to sweep the glass under the seat, but a piece of glass became embedded in her sister's leg. She had to go to hospital to have it removed. Several children shared similar experiences of people they knew having to go to hospital to have glass removed after accidently stepping or sitting on broken bottles in public places. A number of children said that broken glass is most dangerous when it is on grass, as people cannot see it. Children also noted that broken glass could cause damage to bike and scooter tyres. While children across all sites identified broken glass as a problem, children who lived close to pubs indicated that it was worse for them.

Litter and broken bottles were a major concern for children in Surfside. As T (boy, aged 10) said "There is actually a lot of people that don't care because they leave their rubbish and then they like mess up the community and they just don't care for anyone but themselves." Children in Surfside were highly aware of 'Clean Up Australia Day' and several thought there should be more clean up days during the year. Several children were particularly concerned about the impact of litter on marine life. At all sites, children spoke in very negative terms of cigarette butts left to litter their communities.

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Both graffiti and littering were classified by most children as making their community look ugly. G's (boy, aged 10) comment was typical: "I think that graffiti and littering should stop in our community...because graffiti can cause an eye-sore and it ruins environments and beautiful nature. So I think graffiti and littering should stop."

A large number of children described the streets of their community as uninviting. This was a result of litter and graffiti, and also because of the poor state of footpaths. S (girl, aged 10) said "There's a footpath on the side of the house. It's smooth and then it goes like a bump and then there's bumps everywhere like when I'm riding to school on my scooter there's all bumps everywhere and I can't ride." In Lakeview, children who were otherwise very positive about their communities identified litter, to some extent graffiti, and damaged pavements as problems. Children also identified the problem of inadequate footpaths, making it very difficult for them to move around their communities – either on foot or on bikes and scooters. In Lakeview, for example, children pointed out that in many streets there are no adequate footpaths, only verges on which cars park. In some streets, footpaths are on a single side of the street only. In Lakeview, where children had greater levels of independent mobility than elsewhere, they identified the poor planning and inadequate provision of footpaths as a potential safety issue and a major inconvenience. In Riverside and Longridge, where children had serious concerns about their safety, including road safety, poorly planned footpaths further restricted their already limited mobility within their communities.

In all communities, children spoke with annoyance of broken equipment in local playgrounds. While some equipment was broken because of age and use, children said some equipment had been vandalised, which children found particularly upsetting. A number of children across all sites observed that at least some playground equipment in their local parks had been either damaged or in a state of disrepair for a long time.

The physical environment at school was a major concern to children at Riverside. Children described broken glass and cigarette butts from the pub next door to the school as littering their school every day. Moreover, in one group discussion, four children explained that a dog training school was held on the school oval at weekends, but the people involved did not clean up the dog faeces, meaning that the oval and basketball court were often in a poor state on Mondays. The children also said that some people buried the dog faeces in the sand pit or under the tan bark in the playground. This is a particular problem as the children do not know it is there until they step or sit on it. P (girl, aged 12) observed "Some people are really

inconsiderate." At Riverside, this lack of consideration, combined with their dislike of the pub next to the school and their sense of vulnerability within the community generally, left most children feeling that they were treated with contempt by many adults in the community. Here the socio-relational dimensions of space and place became acute in a particularly negative way.

9.6 Summarising what children told us about place

Children told us that home is the most significant place in their community. The majority of children conceptualise their physical community in relation to their home. Children's sense of safety at home is interwoven with their sense of safety in their broader communities. The location of children's homes impacted on their sense of safety and belonging, with children living close to pubs and clubs tending to feel less safe at home.

From a child's standpoint, places that are inclusive and welcoming of children create a positive sense of community. When places are generationally ordered and dominated by adults or adolescents, children are marginalised. Significantly, places to play are essential – those places should be kept in good condition, be clean and inclusive. Children preferred to play in places that are safe, but with an element of risk, excitement and provision for high-energy activities. Children described playgrounds, or fun places, in gendered terms, with more places available for boys than for girls.

Children considered a good physical environment to be essential. Footpaths are a significant factor in determining children's ability to move around their communities safely; in all communities the non-existence of footpaths or footpaths in a state of disrepair were considered by most children to be problematic. Children told us that a good environment is a safe, welcoming place free from litter, graffiti, dog faeces, alcohol and cigarette smoke.

9.7 Policy implications relating to places

Policy Implication 11

Children should be consulted in the planning and design of public spaces, in line with child-friendly city principles (such as those set out by UNICEF: http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/Australia-s-children/Child-Friendly-Cities.aspx)

Policy Implication 12

Planning processes should take greater account of gender differences in boys' and girls' uses of public spaces, with particular attention given to fun and inclusive places for girls in middle childhood.

Policy Implication 13

Public spaces for children should take account of the needs and preferences of children in middle childhood, and should cater to children's desire for places that are inclusive and safe, but also fun and exciting, with scope for engaging in high-energy play.

Policy Implication 14

New suburbs and housing estates should be designed and built with adequate footpaths to allow children to move safely around their neighbourhoods. Attention should be given to maintenance of paths in existing suburbs.

Policy Implication 15

Place-based services should be assessed to ensure they are genuinely inclusive of, and accessible to, children.

Policy Implication 16

Communities for Children and similar initiatives should ensure that children are identified as stakeholders and are consulted on the types of services that are appropriate in a given area.

Chapter 10.   Access to resources

10.1 A brief overview of the literature

A growing number of studies have indicated the importance of poverty to children's lives. Tess Ridge's (2002) detailed study of childhood poverty and social exclusion in the United Kingdom highlights the ways in which insufficient finances shape children's lived experiences and limit their involvement in a range of activities. In the Australian context, Skattebol (2011) found that children and young people's participation in activities, both within and beyond school, is shaped by their and their families' income. Skattebol et al (2011) also highlighted the importance of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds being able to engage in organised sport and other activities on an equal basis with others. In 2013, analysis carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and commissioned by The Smith Family, found that children living in the most disadvantaged communities were far less likely than other children to participate in sporting activities or cultural activities, such as playing a musical instrument, singing, dancing or art and craft, outside school (The Smith Family, 2013: 2). In communities identified as the most disadvantaged, 46.9 per cent of children did not engage in sport or cultural activities. In comparison, only 13.3 per cent of children in the most advantaged communities did not participate in such activities. The Smith Family research also found that while 36.6 per cent of children in the most advantaged communities participate in both sports and cultural activities, the figure drops to 12.5 per cent in the most disadvantaged communities (The Smith Family, 2013: 2).

Taylor and Fraser (2003: 183) argue that structural inequalities within Australian society, as well as personal factors, affect children's opportunities and outcomes. They argue that "the key challenge is how to address the gap between rich and poor, in Australian society and beyond, to ensure it does not damage the life chances of our children." In line with this, our research finds that children's experience of community is shaped by the financial situation of their families, but is also intrinsically interwoven with the socio-economic status of their community. The spatial dimensions of poverty and financial insecurity have been highlighted by a number of studies, leading to a focus on place-based interventions (see Vinson, 2007).

Children's descriptions of not only their communities but of lives, as revealed by this research, highlighted the very marked variation across sites, depending on the socio-

economic status of both individual families and of communities. In sum, the extent and nature of resources makes a great deal of difference to children's experience of community.

10.2 What children said about resources in this research

Significantly, children who participated in this research identified two kinds of resources as important: public services and financial security within families. At five of the six sites, public services were identified by most children as very important to the community overall. Children considered some public services, such as health care and support for the homeless, to be essential to social justice. At the four disadvantaged sites, children identified police as essential to community safety; in Parksway and Riverside most children wanted a greater presence of police in their community. Financial security was considered by children in the disadvantaged sites to be essential to their ability to engage with communities and to their overall well-being. Financial security was not a major consideration for children in better-off sites.

Across all sites, children spoke of using computer games (particularly DS, Nintendo, and Wii) at home. At two sites many children described watching DVDs and playing computer games as their most usual activities. Across all sites, most (but not all) children had access to games and electronic entertainment at home, even when children also described their family's financial hardship.

10.3 Public services

At five of the six sites, children spoke of the importance of adequate public services within a community, with a focus on health services and police. At Surfside, Parksway and Lakeview, children all spoke of the important role of hospitals, and at each site some children expressed concern about long waiting times at hospitals. J (boy, aged 10, Lakeview) directly linked long waiting times in emergency rooms to funding for hospitals and argued for increased government funding. At one of the research workshops with adults, a participant observed that children are most likely concerned about waiting in hospital emergency rooms because it erodes their playing time. This was a passing comment, but it does give some insight into the way some adults view children's priorities. In this research, the children who raised concerns about long waiting times did so based on two considerations arising from their own experience. First, several children had waited for medical care when they or their family members were sick or injured. They described both distress and pain resulting from having to

wait for medical attention and considered long waits unreasonable. Second, three children involved in the research spoke of having lost a close family member (one girl's grandfather had died and two children had lost siblings to cancer). These children had detailed knowledge of the way in which hospitals operated and were able to identify both the vitally important support they provide to the terminally ill, as well as the short-comings. Those children who had spent time waiting in hospital emergency rooms described the experience as boring, but did not indicate that they would have rather been playing (although no doubt they would have much preferred to be playing). Rather, children spoke of the importance of hospitals to people, highlighting the individual and public good arising from access to health services in times of need.

At Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway children identified the police as providing a vital public service, and in each of these sites a significant number of children said they would like to see more police. Those children who argued for both an increase in police numbers and greater visibility of police did so because they considered police necessary to make their communities safer. K (boy, aged 10, Surfside) said there was a need for more security guards and more police so everyone can feel safe. Similarly, P (boy, aged 10, Longridge) explained "Well my community didn't used to be safe, but now because we have got a police station near us it's been more safer." At both Riverside and Parksway, children said they would like to see more police on the streets to enforce road laws. In each of these communities children identified car-related aggression and violence as a major problem. At Parksway, children wanted more police to deal with pressing issues of public violence and drugs. At Surfside, children wanted more police to deal with public drunkenness and related violence.

At Riverside, Surfside, Lakeview and Gardenville, children raised concerns about homelessness and argued that there should be more services available to people in need. At each site, the children who raised the issue of homelessness indicated they had not had direct experience of the problem, although at Riverside some children observed that their families struggled to pay the rent. Rather, they raised the issue as one of principle, arguing that in a good community, no one should be homeless. E, (girl, aged 9, Lakeview) explained that she had gone into the city with her mother and had seen homeless people. E said: "I felt really sorry for them and I felt really upset because they would have nowhere to sleep, nowhere to find food or something, and I had seen that people had given them money for food and things." E and the five other children in her group agreed unanimously that something should

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be done to assist people without homes, indicating that both the government and people generally had a responsibility to try to help. A similar discussion took place at Surfside. G (girl, aged 9) said "A lot of people they aren't thankful that they have got a home. Well they don't think about the people who are homeless and they think that their house is really bad but they should just be thankful that they have got a home and they are not out on the street like some people are. And they have money at least." G argued that there should be support for people without a home, including the provision of a house. At one site, H (girl, aged 10) also argued that homeless people should be supported, drawing a powerful poster to illustrate her point.
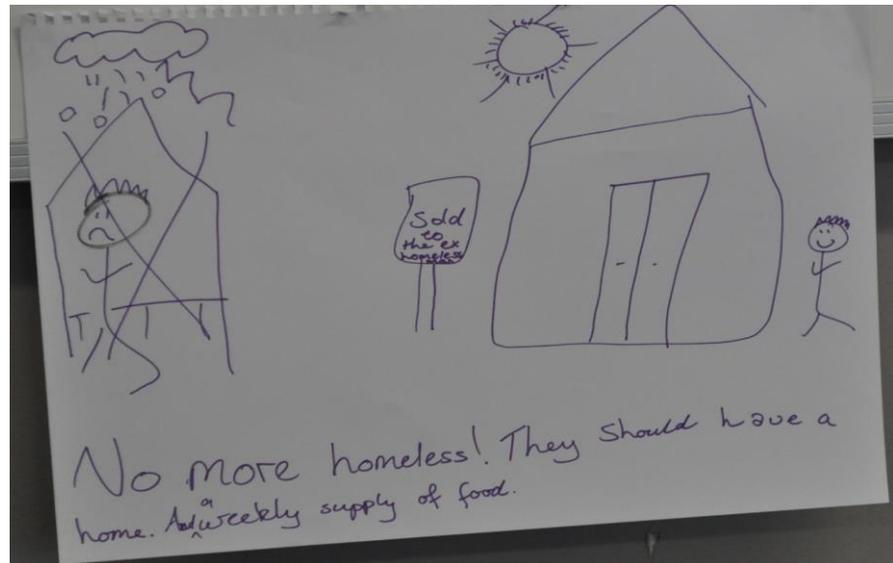
While many children felt deep concern for people who are homeless, several also indicated that some homeless people caused them to feel vulnerable in terms of their personal safety. In Parksway and Riverside, children identified specific people whom they described as homeless who made them feel vulnerable. Thus, children's concerns about homelessness was framed in terms of both justice and community safety.

10.4 Financial security

The financial security of their families was a strong theme at Riverside, Longridge and Surfside, and a significant issue for some children at Parksway. At Riverside, children were acutely aware of their individual families' difficult financial situations. E (girl, aged 11) explained that she liked going to the movies but rarely went "because we have to pay debts and taxes and all that." She went on to explain "We barely have enough money to pay for food in my house." While E's situation seemed to be particularly severe, financial difficulty shaped the lives of several children. Several children at Riverside had detailed knowledge of the cost of living, and were especially conscious of and worried about the high cost of housing. Several children explained that there were often activities in which they could not

participate because of the cost. Sport, particularly when equipment or transport was required, was not an option for at least half the children who participated in the research at Riverside. At Longridge and Surfside, children also talked about financial pressures, often related to housing costs. At Longridge, approximately one third of the children who participated in the research spoke of needing support from extended family, or supporting extended family, in times of financial hardship. At Longridge, the most common form of intra-family support was the provision of temporary accommodation. At Surfside, several children described having to move houses because they could not afford to stay in their previous home. One boy explained that he and his father and sister had moved into this grandparents' house after the separation of his parents, describing the situation as very hard both financially and emotionally. Parental separation was described by children as a factor that had impacted negatively on their family's financial situation. Children often explained that after separation, one parent, most often but not always the mother, faced greater financial hardship than the other. At Riverside, Longridge and Surfside, children spoke not only of the financial difficulties of their own family, but also that of others in their community. In Lakeview, none of the children who participated in the research spoke of financial hardship in their own family, but several were aware of others in their community who experienced difficulties. A (girl, aged 11, Lakeview) said that there are some people in the local community who need support, but that they did not always receive it. A was conscious of the negative impact on children, and clearly articulated the complex range of issues facing some children and their families. "Well [a girl at the school] seems like she needs a lot of help because she's not really that rich, and her house isn't really that clean, and it's a bit hard because when she was a baby her dad died in a car crash, and yes." At Parksway, three children spoke of serious financial hardship within their families. M (boy, aged 8) explained that at times his family could not afford food; he added that they had nice neighbours who helped out by providing food when things became too bad.

While financial security did not feature in children's definition of community, the economic situation of their families and of their wider communities was central to shaping their experiences. Children in more disadvantaged communities were not only more likely to face financial hardship at home, but were more likely to live in a 'poor quality' environment, characterised by poorly maintained public spaces, litter, graffiti and broken glass. Notably, children living in more disadvantaged communities were far more likely to feel unsafe and to live in environments characterised by some level of public violence. While speeding cars and

aggressive drivers were identified as problems by children across all sites, the extent and depth of the problems were far greater at the more disadvantaged sites.

A number of issues raised by children in relation to safety and relationships, discussed in detail in earlier sections of this report, are also relevant to the role of resources in shaping their lives. Children living in more disadvantaged communities were also more likely to be exposed to public drunkenness and violence associated with over-consumption of alcohol. Significantly, while some children described the strategies their parents used to shield them from violence and drunkenness, children's accounts made it clear that it was very difficult for parents to protect their children. An important factor here is the location of pubs, clubs and other venues that serve large quantities of alcohol. In this research, children in the more disadvantaged areas were far more likely to live in areas where pubs and clubs are located within residential areas. An important area of future research is to examine more closely the impact of pubs and clubs on children's sense of community, safety and well-being across socio-economic contexts.

Limited time with parents was a feature of children's lives in five of the six communities. In the four less advantaged sites, Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, parents' long or awkward (from children's perspectives) working hours were one major reason for this. At Riverside and Surfside, the preference of some parents to socialise with other adults, away from their children, was another factor. At Gardenville, the most advantaged community, children also had limited time with parents, not as a result of the kinds of financial pressures in Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, but because parents' busy and usually high-paid professional careers demanded long hours. At Gardenville, unlike Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, parents' high incomes meant they could purchase institutionalised activities to occupy children's time outside school hours. At Riverside and Longridge in particular, children indicated that their parents could not afford many structured out-of-school activities. This research indicates that lack of time with parents has a negative impact on children's engagement with their communities. Interestingly, at Lakeview, where children described spending significant amounts of time with their parents, children also felt safest and most connected to their community.

The lives of the children who participated in the research were structured, at least partly, by the economic situation of their family and the community in which they lived. The family economy often significantly shaped if, and how, children engaged with their community. The

economy of the broader community influenced strongly how safe children felt within their communities and how they engaged with them.

10.5 Summarising what children told us about resources

Children involved in this research described equitable and affordable public services as essential to a strong community. Children at the most disadvantaged sites felt most strongly about the importance of public services. A significant proportion of children in the 'middle' ranked community also considered public services to be important. Children in the most advantaged site spoke least about public services.

Financial security matters. It was considered by children as important to their engagement with, and experience of, community. Children's lives are structured by the level of financial security of their families, and by the socio-economic position of the communities. Children in the disadvantaged communities were acutely aware of the financial hardship faced by some people within their communities, and in some cases within their own families. For these children, community is about much more than financial security, yet financial security does matter a great deal.

10.6 Policy Implications relating to Resources

Policy Implication 17

National, state and local government initiatives providing services focusing primarily on early childhood should be extended to provide for children in middle childhood, as appropriate to their needs.

Policy Implication 18

Proposed cuts or expansions to services, such as police, hospitals and family benefits, should be assessed for their impact on children.

Chapter 11. School

Even a cursory glance at the Community Jigsaw, which both represents the elements of community that were highly valued by children who participated in this research, and provides the analytical structure for this report, reveals an omission that may surprise some. School does not appear as an element of the jigsaw. The omission of school is by no means an oversight; rather, it reflects the way in which children conceptualised and spoke of school in their lives and communities.

School is an important feature of children's lives. School attendance is compulsory for children in the age cohort this research focuses on and in many ways structures their time, friendships and social interactions. We found in this research, as many others have found, that the only way of accessing significant numbers of children and inviting them to participate was through schools. Zeiher (2011) argues that scholarisation is one important dimension of the institutionalisation of childhood that occurred from the time of the industrial revolution, but intensified in the 1960s as the economies of developed countries shifted from an industrial base to a knowledge and service base. According to Zeiher, a second intensification of scholarisation occurred in the early twenty-first century in the context of 'radical social and economic changes' and the perceived need for higher levels of human capital. In Australia, as in other contemporary societies, the development of human capital has featured prominently on the policy agenda in recent years, largely as a response to evidence of slightly declining scores on internationally comparable tests (see Leigh and Ryan, 2008; Banks, 2010).

Schooling has always played multiple roles within societies. While the development of human capital is central, it is not the only objective. In Bourdieu's terms, school is also important in the accumulation of cultural capital (particularly academic qualifications, but also forms of valued cultural knowledge). For Bourdieu, the 'type' of school determines the nature and the extent of cultural capital that is accumulated. Conceptualised in this way, some forms of schooling aim not to universally enhance human capital across society, but to reinforce and replicate patterns of privilege, inclusion and exclusion. Generally, however, school – and the resulting qualifications – are represented in policy discourse as opening

opportunities for all children, as well as contributing to future economic growth and productivity (McLachlan et al, 2013).

Beyond its role in developing human capital, the institution of school has always had strong social dimensions. These range from the efforts to socialise and control the potentially unruly children of the poor that were central to early education policies (and continue to implicitly shape many), to ideals of social inclusion and belonging. James Coleman (1988) identified a fundamental inter-relationship between the development of human capital and social capital, arguing that close social networks of people with shared values and social capital within families, positively affect the development of children's engagement and performance at school.

More recent studies have examined the role school plays in creating and fostering social capital, and children's views of school as a site for developing social networks and connectedness. Eriksson et al's (2010: 6) study with children in rural Sweden found that children considered school to be an important community in itself and a setting for social interaction, but also identified negative aspects of school. Alongside the positive aspects of school, children in that study also spoke of issues of power at school, including older children dominating younger; problems of graffiti and property damage, and exposure to frightening situations at times. Morrow's (2001) study of children, neighbourhood and social capital in the United Kingdom found that school had contradictory implications for children's well-being. She observes that a positive dimension of school is that it forms "an important kind of 'community' for young people" and is an important site of social interaction. Morrow (2001: 38) also observes that "on the other hand, the non-democratic nature of school, the content of school work, and the relationships between teachers and pupils, probably does not enhance self-esteem for some children."

Separate from the literature around school, communities and social capital, is a large literature around issues of bullying and violence within schools, and a substantial body of work aiming to develop intervention strategies to reduce bullying (Rigby and Slee, 1991; Smith et al, 2004; Vaillancourt, et al). This literature demonstrates the contradictory elements of school – at once a place of community and belonging, and of exclusion and violence.

11.1 What children said about school in this research

Children participating in this research held complex, multi-faceted, and sometimes contradictory views about school. These views provide important insights into the complicated nature of children's experience of school, and the complex social issues that children negotiate daily. While there were significant differences between sites and among individual children, the majority of children spoke of both positive and negative aspects of school. Children described school as a place they are required to go and a place they want to go; a place of learning and fun and a place of boredom; a place of safety and security and a place of bullying and domination; a place that prepares them for the future and a place that fails to inspire; a place of supportive teacher-pupil relationships and a place of adult control. While some individual children located themselves at either the 'positive' or 'negative' end of the spectrum, many described school as a very mixed experience, and one that changed according to friendship groups, teacher, subject matter and co-curricular activities.

11.2 School and community

Children were somewhat ambivalent about the relationship between school and community. Children variously located school as separate from their community; as part of their community; and as a community in and of itself. There were differences between individual children and marked differences between communities. At Riverside, children were least likely to consider school as part of their community, although children in leadership positions were more likely to see school as part of their community. At Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, there were considerable differences among children. At Lakeview and Gardenville (more advantaged sites), children were more likely to consider school as part of their community.

At Gardenville, school was not only considered by children to be a central part of their community, but it also provided the source of children's broad understanding of community. For example, children at Gardenville explained that their school held many fund-raising activities, including raising money for a sister school in Africa. Several children spoke of this school as being part of their community. "We help them. Recently we raised, I think it was $500 or something, or more than $500, for new sports equipment for them, and recently we raised so much money to give them a water tank and roofs for their classrooms and things

like that." (K, girl, aged 11) Children described the ways in which their school encouraged them to think about their communities as both global and local.

In the other five communities, children focused more centrally on local issues – including determining the connection between school and community. At Longridge, B (boy, aged 11) initially said that school was not part of his community "because I have to ride, have to ride my bike a fair way. It took me about half an hour from school." For B, physical distance and travelling time meant that he felt a disconnect between school and home. He later acknowledged that a person could have more than one community – for example, a home community and a school community – but he maintained that there was a difference and while there could be a school community, it was a different kind of community. While B placed considerable importance on physical proximity, children at Gardenville tended to see their school as part of their community, despite the fact that most children lived some distance from their school.

In discussing whether or not school is part of the community, children at all sites raised the fact that (usually) teachers do not live locally, but return to their homes within their own communities at the end of the school day. A significant proportion of children felt this was a clear indication that school is separate from the 'out-of-school' community. At Lakeview, where children spoke very positively about their teachers, L (girl, aged 10) described the children at school as part of her community, but said "the teachers are more like workers here." S (boy, aged 9, Lakeview) had a different perspective, arguing that teachers are part of the community and also teach children to be part of the community themselves. That some children did not consider teachers to be part of the community did not mean they considered teachers unimportant people in their lives. The majority of children considered teachers to be very important to school and learning, but not to their community beyond school. This suggests that for many children, school sits outside their definition of community. For most children, the starting point for conceptualising, defining and describing community was home, rather than school.

The strongest intersection between school and community for most children was friends, who created a link between home and school for children at five of the six sites. Most children described seeing their school friends outside of school. When school friends lived close-by they became a very important part of children's community beyond school. In Riverside, Longridge, Surfside, Parksway and Lakeview, the majority of children included friends'

houses as important sites within their community and described the ways in which friendships spanned school, home and community. Significantly, some children explained that they had strong friendships with children who attended the same school and lived close by, but did not play with those children at school. Children across all sites also said that they had friendships with children who lived in their community but did not attend their school. School was an important site (often the most important site) for developing friendships, but friendships extended beyond, and were sometimes independent of, school.

Children's individual experiences of school appear to be important in determining whether or not they identify school as part of their community. For example, at Riverside the research took place in two phases with two different groups of children. The first phase included randomly selected children from the local school, while the second phase included children who were in school leadership positions. The two groups described very different experiences of school. The school leadership group was largely positive about school and actively engaged in trying to improve and contribute to school life. The randomly selected group was largely negative about school. The leadership group considered school to be an important part of their community, largely because most children who lived in Riverside attended the local primary school (or the nearby Catholic school). While children in this group noted that most teachers do not live in the community, they identified a connection between teachers, school and their community. The children in the randomly selected group were less inclined to describe school as clearly part of their community. Several children in this group said school was not really part of their community as it was a place to which they were required to go. For these children, the compulsory nature of school made it something other than community. Indeed, across all sites, children were aware of the institutional nature of school, while community was generally considered to be more organic.

11.3 School and human capital development

A significant proportion of children across all sites discussed school in terms of human capital development, and many described this as a valuable aspect of their education. Several children said that they considered school important in preparing them for their future adult lives, and particularly for their future employment. While the experience of school in the present was extremely important to all children who participated in the research, the majority considered the formal learning aspects of school to be preparation for adulthood. In this way, school and community were considered by many children to play different roles in their lives.

The exception was Gardenville, where the school placed considerable emphasis on placing the school and students within a large – often global – community. Here, the development of a sense of belonging to a sometimes abstract, and often global community was explicit within, and central to, children's learning.

11.4 Scholarisation, community and social capital

Zeiher (2011) has observed a trend whereby scholarisation has "spread into the lives of young children under school age and into older children's out-of-school time." The children who participated in this research were acutely aware of this trend. Across all sites, children mentioned homework as a negative aspect of school. In Surfside, Lakeview and Gardenville, homework was a strong theme and always discussed in negative terms. Children were strongly of the view that homework used time that should be available to them for relaxation and play. There was also a strong view that homework undermines children's abilities to engage positively with their communities and families. For example, M (girl aged 10, Surfside) commented "I want to do more things after school, and in the community but we can't because of homework." The three other children working in M's group agreed that homework prevented them from engaging in a range of other activities and social relationships. In Lakeview, E (girl, aged 9) was particularly annoyed because her cousins had visited from interstate and she was unable to spend as much time with them as she wanted, because she had to do her homework. When E shared her experience, other children agreed that homework presented a considerable time burden for them outside of school. At Gardenville, children unanimously agreed that they received too much homework, which prevented them from having any spare time or doing things they would like to in their communities. One girl observed that while she would like to make voluntary contributions to the community, she was unable to do so because homework left her with very little spare time; moreover, she said that by the time she completed her homework she felt too tired to do anything. While children were generally very positive about school at Gardenville, they felt very strongly about homework, describing it as the worst aspect of school. Children said they would like to take collective action against excessive amounts of homework. Several girls explained that they had been studying the Eureka Stockade and likened the imposition of homework to the imposition of mining licences in the Victorian goldfields in the 1850s: each an example of injustice and undemocratic practice. While adults may interpret children's objections to homework as simply a preference for play, children linked their concerns very

clearly to the negative implications of homework for their social networks and potential contribution outside the institution of school.

Children also described the way in which school expanded into other parts of their lives through after school, and in some cases, before school care. This was particularly an issue in Gardenville, where all but two children attended after school care at least some days each week. Attending after school care from the end of school until as late as 6pm meant that children had little time to explore or engage in their communities beyond school.

The impact of creeping scholarisation on children's connection and engagement with their communities beyond school appears to be extremely deleterious. The impact of scholarisation on children's levels of social capital depends on the way in which social capital is conceptualised. From a Bourdieuian perspective, children at Gardenville have and are accumulating high levels of social capital as a result of the status of their school and the social networks of their parents and school friends. These high levels of social capital are likely to provide significant opportunities to children at Gardenville, and will be tradeable for both economic capital and cultural capital. Thus, the relatively privileged position of children at Gardenville is likely to be reinforced through their school, with scholarisation supporting that process. From a Putnamian perspective – where social capital is defined by voluntary contribution, local networks, reciprocity and thin and thick trust – school, and particularly scholarisation, may undermine social capital. It is important to note that the adultist underpinnings of most social capital theory means that little attention has been paid to the connection between school and children's levels of social capital. Generally school is seen as benign or positive, and essential in developing human capital and future social capital. However, the nature of school, and how it may disconnect children from their communities, deserves far greater scrutiny.

11.5 The essential elements of school

Children involved in this research indicated very clearly that the elements that come together to create a positive community are also essential elements for a good school. These elements are important regardless of whether children conceptualise school as part of their community, separate from their community, or a community in and of itself. At school as elsewhere, relationships, safety, places and resources matter.

11.5.1 Relationships

Relationships were crucial in shaping children's experiences and views of school. As discussed earlier, friends were essential to children's sense of community and those friendships were often formed – and largely experienced – at school. Beyond friendships, peer-to-peer relationships were also very important. For example, at Riverside, CJ (boy, aged 10) said he did not feel part of his school because other children excluded him, called him names and were mean. For CJ, negative and exclusive peer-to-peer relationships made it impossible for him to enjoy school or think of it as his community (which he considered to have positive connotations). At Parksway, more than half the children who participated in the research said that other children regularly swore at them and called them rude names at school.

At Longridge, T (girl, aged 11) said that at her previous school she had been subjected to racist taunts from other children and told to "go back to your own country." T said, "So we moved here and it was way better than the old school, so yeah. So everyone respects us." At Gardenville, J (girl, aged 8) described a similar experience to T. J explained that she had been bullied at her previous school. At her current school, J felt included and valued. She described having a lot of friends and, importantly, added that even children who were not her friends were nice. J said that all schools should be like her school. Children at Gardenville and Lakeview were most positive about peer-to-peer relationships at school, despite some talking about the serious problems of bullying and exclusionary behaviour. While children spoke of bullying and negative peer relations at all schools, the balance was important. When children felt that relationships were generally negative, as CJ did, school became a hostile and unwelcoming place; a place children did not want to be. When relationships at school were generally positive, not surprisingly children were far more positive about school. C (girl, aged 10, Gardenville) directly linked positive relationships and a sense of community in her discussion of school: "Well, at school - because you've got the school community and everyone at the school's friends so they'd be like a community." An important aspect of promoting relationships at Gardenville was the school's strong commitment to a buddy program and a peer mediation program. The buddy program connected younger and older children, while the peer mediation program gave year six students responsibility for responding to playground issues, including promoting positive relationships. The peer mediation program required a commitment from the children involved to the values and objectives of the program and provided training. M (girl, aged 11) described her proactive

efforts to assist some younger children become part of games with their peers. She explained that she would ask children to include another child who was feeling lonely or excluded, and supported children to ask themselves. She said that on some occasions she watched to make sure all was OK, and sometimes joined in herself until the children who had felt excluded felt comfortable. J (girl, aged 8) said that she felt that she could go to the peer mediators if she ever had a problem or felt lonely in the playground.

While the nature of peer relationships were central in shaping children's experience of school, relationships with teachers and other adults in the school environment were equally important. Teachers who were caring and kind were greatly valued by children. Significantly, however, children across all sites noted that sometimes teachers have to be tough in order to deal with children who are disruptive, mean, violent, or engage in bullying behaviour. Being fair was perhaps the most important characteristic of a good teacher for the majority of children. At Parksway, for example, several children spoke of being blamed by teachers for something they had not done, and described this as extremely unjust. A (boy, aged 10) explained that he had often been caught up in cases of mistaken identity and blamed for things he had not done. A explained that sometimes (particularly in situations such as being in trouble for talking in class) the real culprit confessed and the teacher apologised. While A felt unhappy that such situations arose at all, he appreciated his teacher's preparedness to apologise.

Teachers who engaged with children were described in very positive terms. At Riverside, for example, children described one teacher who provided lunch time activities, during which she talked with children and joined in games and activities. When children at Riverside spoke of 'good' teachers who could be described as part of their community, the vast majority referred to her.

Being listened to by teachers and principals within the school environment was also identified as very important by most children who were involved in this research. At Longridge, a large majority of children spoke about the school chaplain as a person within the school who would always listen and take them seriously. The majority of children identified him as someone 'really cool' who they could talk to or rely on. Some children knew the chaplain from their out of school religious community, but children of different or no religion also spoke positively about the chaplain at Longridge. Significantly, children described a different type of relationship with the chaplain, compared with their classroom teacher. Their

interaction with the chaplain was usually one-on-one or with a group of their friends. Moreover, the chaplain did not engage in issues of learning or discipline, and was able to allow the children to drive the nature of their conversations and engagement. At Parksway, children noted that teachers did not always listen to their views, but most said that they felt more listened to at school than at home or elsewhere in their communities. For these children, being listened to was a very important and positive aspect of school.

Children described the issue of being listened to as a complex one for both children and teachers. A large proportion of children involved in the research felt that their class teacher did not listen to their views sufficiently. However, a significant proportion of children also felt that other children were too dominant in class, and indicated that they would like the teacher to stop those children from speaking too much. At Longridge, G (girl, aged 9) said "at school some kids are mean, so ... and every time you try to talk they just interrupt." G went on to explain that the teacher did not do enough to stop these children talking and interrupting, nor did the teacher respond appropriately to her concerns about the dominance of some children in class. In a separate group discussion at Longridge, A (girl, aged 10) said that she felt annoyed when the teacher told her not to talk, or to listen to others. A said she had a lot of ideas, but was not given enough time to explain them to the class. The problems described by G and A were a source of great frustration to each. They also illustrate the difficult line that teachers walk in classrooms of up to twenty-five children.

At Riverside, children generally said that they were not listened to at school. Several children described an experience that had occurred not long before the research commenced. The school had decided to establish a vegetable garden and children were consulted on their views about the design of the garden. The principal had gone to considerable effort to seek the views of children, and the children involved in the research were very positive about having been asked for their views. However, children said they were not told why the final garden design was chosen. The children involved in the research all said that the final design did not reflect their ideas or those of their friends and they viewed the consultation process as a farce. The principal explained that the ideas of some children had influenced the design of the garden, and was quite proud of the way in which the school had sought – and responded to – children's views. There was a clear gap between the principal's interpretation of the process and that of the children involved in the research. For the children, the problem appeared not to have been the initial consultation process but the lack of feedback and explanation of the decision that was finally taken. Several children said they considered the consultation to be a

waste of their time and would prefer not to have been asked rather than being asked and then ignored. They may not have felt this way had they known why the final decision was taken and if they felt that their contribution was valued even if it was not ultimately acted upon. This example illustrates the importance of ongoing discussion with children in the school environment, rather than isolated consultation. It also illustrates the different ways in which adults and children might interpret the same situation.

11.5.2 Safety

Safety at school was very important to the children who participated in this research. As discussed earlier in relation to bullying, children's sense of safety at school was seriously undermined by physical, psychological and emotional bullying. However, children's sense of safety at school extended beyond the issue of bullying to encompass violence or hostility from both adults and children, and societal responses to potential threats.

At the four less advantaged sites, children spoke of other children behaving in ways that could best be described as violent, rather than bullying. Interestingly, across all sites, children had clear definitions of what comprises bullying behaviour, generally as a result of the commendable efforts on the part of schools to deal with the problem of bullying. In describing some incidents, children observed that it was not a case of bullying, and emphasised that they had not been individually targeted. Rather they described these incidents as examples of violent, threatening or 'scary' behaviour, whereby everyone felt frightened. For example at Longridge, two children spoke of incidents where they felt under serious threat at school. In one incident an older boy had brought a knife to school and behaved in what the children considered to be a threatening manner. In another incident two teenagers on motor bikes sped through the school grounds. In Parksway a group of boys described their fear when two other boys, known for their violent behaviour, brought knives to school and used them in a threatening manner.

Violent or hostile behaviour on the part of adults was also identified by children as undermining their sense of safety at school. In the cases described, the adult behaviour was an extension of 'external' issues into the school. For example, in Surfside, children said they felt safer at school since a gate had been installed. The gate was locked during school hours, preventing outsiders from entering the school without first registering at the office. Several children said this stopped people fighting or behaving badly in the school grounds. The

school principal explained that there had been several incidents of parents engaging in loud and abusive arguments, and on at least one occasion a physical fight, during school hours. Clearly, such incidents made children feel apprehensive. At Riverside, children's sense of safety was undermined by the presence of a pub next to the school. As discussed in relation to excessive use of alcohol, *all* children who participated in the research at Riverside spoke in negative terms about the pub, and most linked its presence to their concerns for their safety.

Children also spoke of the way societal responses to potential threats at school impacted on their sense of safety. In particular, children spoke of their experience of lock-down drills. Lock-downs are a response to a serious situation whereby the safety of children and adults within a school depends on them remaining inside or returning immediately to the classroom. Such situations could range from a severe storm or potentially dangerous animal on the school grounds to a gunman or hostage situation. In each of the jurisdictions where this research was conducted, schools had lock-down drills at least once each year (similar to fire drills). Children's views of lock-down drills varied enormously. At Lakeview, L (boy, aged 8) described lock-downs as 'quite fun' because it was an opportunity to find great hiding spots. In contrast, most children at Riverside found lock-downs to be extremely frightening and considered them as reflecting potential danger. Three factors seem to be important in shaping the very different ways in which children considered lock-down drills in Lakeview and Riverside. First, the explanation provided to children of the need for lock-downs appears to have been significant. In Lakeview, K (girl, aged 9) explained that lock-downs were mainly in case an animal, such as a snake or a nasty dog, wandered into the school. K added that this wasn't likely, but it was to "be on the safe side and know what to do" if it did occur. K also said that a problem dog might not necessarily be vicious, but could be injured and in need of help itself. Other children in K's group agreed. They considered lock-down drills as necessary, so they knew what to do in a dangerous situation, but they did not consider the drills as scary. At Riverside, children explained that lock-down practice was necessary in case a crazy person with a gun came into the school and tried to shoot people. Staff corroborated that this explanation had been given to children as the reason for lock-downs. The different types of explanations given to children appear to have influenced the way children interpreted lock-down drills. At Lakeview, children considered lock-downs as important 'just in case'. At Riverside, children considered lock-downs to be evidence of potential threats to their safety, and potentially their lives. The second factor shaping children's views of lock-downs was their experience of threat. At Lakeview, children said

they could not remember a real lock-down.[2] At Riverside, there had been incidents of real lock-downs, including an incident a few months prior to the beginning of the research when a student's grandmother entered the school wielding a knife and threatening staff. Third, children's interpretation of lock-down drills appears to have been shaped by their sense of safety in their broader communities. At Lakeview, children felt very safe in their community and that sense of safety extended into their school. At Riverside, children generally felt fearful in their community and that sense of fear extended into their school.

This research suggests that children's sense of safety at school is closely interwoven with their sense of safety in their broader communities. For example, the fear children at Riverside described of 'drunks from the pub' entering the school appears to have arisen from their experiences of alcohol related violence in other settings, rather than any direct experience at school. At Gardenville and Lakeview children felt safe, both at school and more generally.

11.5.3 Places

Children considered the physical nature and availability of places within the school to be important. Children valued having places that were well-maintained, fun, clean and safe. Notably, at all sites to varying degrees, children spoke of toilets as negative places within their schools. Toilets were often described as unclean and smelly. In Parksway, several boys said the toilets were unsafe because the 'bad kids' hung out there and there was always the danger of being set upon while in or around the toilets. These boys said they were afraid to use the toilets and tried to 'hang on' until they arrived home at the end of the school day.

While children valued their school environment at all sites, children at the disadvantaged sites were more likely to encounter problems of litter, graffiti and damage to school property. It should be emphasised here that children at Lakeview also described these problems, and the school at Lakeview had been fenced after several incidents of vandalism and arson. Concerns about the school environment were most acute at Riverside and Longridge. As discussed in Section 9.5 on places within the community, the pub and the dog training school both resulted in the grounds of the school at Riverside being littered with cigarette butts, glass and dog faeces. At Longridge, several children were concerned about litter and graffiti spoiling their school grounds. J (girl, aged 10) expressed the views of many children when she said "We've got a lovely school, and I don't like it when people do things that damage it and

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[2] In fact there had been a real lock-down at Lakeview about 2 years prior to the research, but none of the children spoke of it.

make our school look untidy." While J said that sometimes students are responsible for damaging the school, most often damage occurred at night or over the weekends, possibly perpetrated by people not associated with the school.

11.5.4 Resources

Children across all sites had very little to say about resources within their schools. At three sites, children positively mentioned the new buildings that were built as part of the Building an Education Revolution initiative.

However, the ways in which children discussed key issues, particularly in relation to safety and places, differed markedly across the sites. Essentially, children's concerns about safety at school and their negative experiences of the school environment are closely related to the level of advantage within the site more generally. It appears that it is not only the immediate resources available to schools that matter but also the economic and social resources that exist more broadly across the community where a school is located.

11.6 A perspective from teachers

This research focused on children's views and experiences, but also included interviews with twenty-four teachers and principals. Two broad themes emerged from those interviews. First, the deep commitment that many teachers have to supporting the children they teach and engaging their families. Second, the weight of societal expectations placed on schools and teachers.

Across all sites, interviews and discussions with teachers and principals revealed a deep personal and professional commitment to teaching and to their students. While teachers spoke of the school learning experience, several also described the myriad of ways in which they supported children. For example, when asked what she would wish for if she had a magic wand, one teacher at Longridge replied 'a bus'. She then went on to explain that many children at Longridge were late for school or did not attend because parents had problems with transport or were unable to get their children ready for school in time. In some cases parents' problems related to poverty, in some cases to being newly arrived in Australia and not knowing how to operate in an unfamiliar environment, in some cases the problems related to drug and alcohol issues – and in some cases to a combination. This teacher explained that, with the school's support, she went each morning to the homes of children known to be late

or skip school on a regular basis. She would collect children and drive them to school, in some cases after helping children to dress or to prepare a quick breakfast. She used a car to do this and often had to make multiple trips from children's homes to school. A bus, she explained, would mean that more children could be collected and the task would be faster.

At Longridge and Riverside, teachers described washing children's uniforms or providing clean uniforms for children to wear at school and then return at the end of the day or the end of the week. At Riverside, Longridge, Surfside and Parksway, teachers described providing breakfast or lunch for children who would otherwise go without food. At some schools, breakfast clubs operated on some mornings however some teachers, on their own accord, quietly and informally provided food to some children.

Teachers and principals also described playing an active role in seeking to engage children's families and in providing advice to parents and carers. In many cases, advice went far beyond school and learning issues to advice ranging from discipline and nutrition, to how to encourage a child to get out of bed in the morning.

At the less advantaged sites, some teachers and all principals described the challenges of engaging parents who appeared to have little interest in their children's schooling, were highly suspicious of the institution of school, or had negative memories of their own school experience. At each site, schools used a range of strategies to engage families, but in the disadvantaged sites the challenges were significantly greater. In the less advantaged sites, schools provided not only information session on issues such as curriculum and excursions and Parent and Citizen (P&C) activities but also cultural events, employment expos for parents, and information sessions on a range of issues from parenting to financial management. Significantly, while teachers and schools in the less advantaged sites faced significant issues, the principal at Lakeview also described the challenged of engaging some parents, and of the need for the school to provide parenting advice and in some cases food, to children who would otherwise go without.

The second broad theme emerging from interviews with teachers and principals was the challenges of meeting the very high societal expectations placed on schools. Principals noted that while expectations about student performance and outcomes are growing, for example through national testing of children, schools are increasingly expected to go beyond teaching to actively raising children. Principals described feeling the burden of societal expectations as schools are identified as having a role in facilitating community engagement, providing a hub

for community activities, and not only teaching 'traditional' subjects, but sharing responsibility for issues ranging from childhood obesity to values. Principals noted that the additional roles expected of schools did not always result in additional funding or resources.

Teachers and particularly principals did see their school as an important aspect of the local community and considered engaging children's families as a central objective. They also felt the burden of societal expectations that they play such a role.

11.7 Summarising what children told us about school

The children in this research told us that school is a very important part of their lives. Children value school as a site for establishing and enjoying friendships. Children also recognise school as important in providing knowledge and skills that will be important in their futures.

The children told us that the relationship of school to community is complex and sometimes ambiguous. Children see school as an institution, a place they must attend, and a workplace for teachers as well as a place of positive relationships and experiences. While some children considered school to be part of their community, some did not. Moreover, school was not considered the most important aspect of community. Despite the ambiguity about the precise relationship of school and community, children's experience of school tends to reflect their experience of the wider community. For children in this research, school provides a sense of belonging and security when it is characterised by supportive relationships and safety. It is then that school becomes part of the community or a community in itself.

We learnt from children in this research that school is a valued and positive experience when relationships with teachers and peers are supportive and respectful, when they feel included and listened to, and when they feel safe. Bullying is a key element in undermining children's sense of safety and inclusion at school. There is a connection between children's sense of safety in their broader community and their sense of safety at school. When adults who are not part of the school behave in disrespectful, hostile, aggressive or violent ways within the school, children's sense of safety is seriously undermined.

The school environment is important. For children, a poor standard of facilities (such as toilets), litter and graffiti not only create an unpleasant environment, but also indicate a lack of respect for their school. When school grounds and property are vandalised or littered not

by students, but by outsiders, children feel that their school is not valued and, to some extent, that they are not valued by their broader community.

Children told us that school and, in particular, the demands of homework, can be a barrier to greater engagement with the broader community. While school is an important source of relationships, it can also limit the development of broader relationships and social networks as children's social worlds are narrowed to the school environment. For children, scholarisation is at odds with active engagement with, and involvement in, the community.

11.8   Policy implications relating to school

Policy Implication 19

Initiatives designed to build strong communities for children should recognise that school is only one aspect of children's communities – and sometimes not the most important aspect. Initiatives to build strong communities for children should not rely exclusively on schools.

Policy Implication 20

If the role expected of schools is expanded to include community strengthening and building, individual schools much be resourced adequately to play such expanded roles.

Policy Implication 21

The development of school curricula at national and state levels should consider evidence on the negative, as well as positive, aspects of school homework, and on the impact of homework on other aspects of children's lives and development.

Chapter 12. Conclusion: A child standpoint on community

In describing the epistemological framework for this study, Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia, we referred to the way researchers, in using the concept of children's agency, have been able to recast children as members of their own societies, rather than objects of socialisation (Alanen, 1994). This framework has been helpful in providing a rich, multi-faceted understanding of what is significant for children about communities. It has also enabled a dominant and clear child standpoint on communities to emerge. We are aware that highlighting a particular standpoint has inherent dangers. It can conceal significant variations in experiences such as those identified in our report, influenced by factors such as gender, race and class. However, identifying a child standpoint, as it clearly emerged in this research, is helpful in giving prominence to important messages children were communicating to us. It enables us to take into account and confront the way generationally ordered power relations in our society frame children's experiences of families and communities, and thus their well-being.

The child standpoint that emerged from our research has some similarities with dominant adult understandings of communities, but also challenges these understandings, as reflected in aspects of social policy. Fundamental to the child standpoint, and in accord with generally accepted views on community, was the emphasis children put on social relationships and in particular respectful, supportive and inclusive relationships. Family was highlighted by this standpoint as central to community, in a way that is not necessarily reflected in adult, etic views of community. In terms of the nature of community from a child standpoint, the emphasis put on families requiring social supports and services in times of difficulties was very important.

It is in understanding the impediments to families and communities working effectively for children's well-being, as evident in our report, that the child standpoint on communities is particularly informative. These impediments were clearest in relation to the structuring of adult work and the way school structures children's daily lives. The child standpoint draws attention to how the ordering of adult-child relations for work life results in barriers to the ways and times in which children and parents engage. Similarly, the ordering of children's lives by school policies serves to exclude them from engaging with families and their broader

communities. The intrusion of school into family and community life via homework was identified by children as particularly problematic.

The child standpoint from this research also poses a challenge to that social policy which directly targets the ordering of parent-child relations. In highlighting the complexity of children's relations with their families, a child standpoint challenges child protection policy, where it uses the language of 'parentification' to describe children who take on responsibilities for other family members. Applying the child standpoint to this example illustrates how the use of this language can camouflage the value children find in taking on such responsibilities, and result in the failure of policy makers to acknowledge the important role of resources to families, in lessening the burdensome nature of these responsibilities.

At the macro level, a child standpoint on communities, highlights the ways in which children are excluded from communities by disrespectful and hostile, even violent, adult attitudes and actions toward them. From a child standpoint, knowledge of, and actual experiences of oppressive adult actions particularly associated with alcohol and cars, pose an ongoing threat to children's sense of security and their everyday safety. The child standpoint, as it emerged from this study, makes clear that these experiences are related to the ordering of child-adult relations, as experienced in day-to-day interactions.

While the child standpoint constructed from this study alerts us to how children's social positioning frames their experiences in ways which are marginalising, excluding and controlling, it also indicates alternative ways of framing children's experiences. Children identified their experiences of respectful and inclusive attitudes as significant, referring to examples of positive and supportive relations with adults. Positive intergenerational friendships have the potential to significantly strengthen children's experience of community.

Very importantly, excessive alcohol use by adults, in both private and public spaces, locates children outside adult modes of socialising, creating among children a sense of exclusion. Excessive alcohol use exacerbates children's sense of vulnerability and highlights to them the dangers of unpredictable behaviour on the part of alcohol-affected adults. Current efforts to protect children from adult activities such as alcohol use and gambling, exemplified by 'children's rooms' at licensed clubs, reinforce children's exclusion from adult modes of socialising. In this example, a child standpoint tells us that protection has been confused with exclusion, where exclusion is used as a proxy for protection. Generational ordering has

privileged negative adult behaviour over children's needs for inclusion in safe, supportive communities.

The child standpoint that emerges from this research presents a vision of communities as safe, inclusive and respectful. This vision is contradicted by a reality shaped by exclusion and threat from the broader community. This gap between vision and reality emerged in all sites, but was far greater in some. It was also apparent that in the sites with stronger social networks and relationships, children felt more connected and safer within their communities. Children's own relationships, including intergenerational relationships, made a positive difference to their sense of connection and safety. Moreover, in sites with higher socio-economic status, children were insulated from negative behaviour such as excessive alcohol use and public violence, and from more extreme experiences of exclusion, by parental and public resources.

According to Jens Qvortrup (1994), children who share geographical, temporal, socio-economic or other criteria have common characteristics that tell us not only about the structural conditions of childhood but also about the broader society of which such childhood forms a part. The child standpoint that was constructed from children's contributions to this research conveys to us not only a great deal of knowledge about how children are positioned in our society, but also tells us a great deal about the nature of the society in which they live.

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