

## Collective 2518 Engagement and Community Conversations

### What we did and who we spoke with

Between June and August 2015, the Collective 2518 team held 19 group and a number of one to one conversations with a total of 133 community members from across the 2518 postcode area (Corrimal, East Corrimal, Bellambi, Towradgi, Tarrawanna). These conversations were based on the Harwood approach (<http://www.theharwoodinstitute.org/>) which seeks to authentically engage with communities to better understand their aspirations, concerns and readiness to act.

We also engaged with approx. 50 representatives from local businesses, community organisations, schools, early childhood services and government agencies who are located and work in the 2518 area. As well as helping to better understand local communities, this engagement aimed to tap into their local knowledge, raise awareness of the collective work and invite input into ongoing collective planning activities.

Our engagement activities built on two earlier community consultation initiatives from which similar themes arose. These were:

- One-to-one consultations with residents of public housing in Bellambi undertaken by Judith Stubbs & Associates (JSA) in late 2014-early 2015. JSA were engaged by FaCS ISD (Housing) to develop a community renewal strategy for Bellambi public housing estate; and
- Ask Illawarra Shoalhaven day of community engagement held on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2015 where volunteers held community conversations with 213 people across a broad range of ages and mix of cultural backgrounds living in the 2518 postcode.

### What people told us

#### Aspirations

Community members we spoke with in the 2518 postcode want a safe, supportive and connected community, with a “sense of oneness”, where they aren’t judged because of the street or suburb they live in.

*“A place that’s friendly and safe, where people look out for each other and say hello.”*

Many people we spoke with said that while they had positive relationships and trust with their neighbours or others who live close by, they felt that there was a lack of connection across many parts of the postcode area.

People said that they want to feel safe when they are out in public and in their homes. This was consistent across all ages, “I want to feel safe walking home from school.”

Many people said they wanted a community where people had respect for themselves and others, as well as for public property and the property of others. They spoke about a community where children and young people could grow up in a healthy, positive and supported environment.

People also said they want a community with local facilities, activities and opportunities, including employment, which are accessible to a range of community members, particularly children and young people. Several people said that where they lived provided this, for example Corrimal and Towradgi where transport, playgrounds, parks and shops were all close by.

*“Where people can work together on projects – clean up the environment and enjoy it together.”*

People want to live in a place that is physically welcoming which includes clean from litter, graffiti and generally looking well-kept. Many people spoke about their love for the natural environment in this beautiful and unique part of the coast, where the escarpment meets the sea.

## Concerns and actions that can make a difference

From our conversations, a number of clear themes emerged in response to our questions to community members about their concerns and issues for their local communities.

Alongside their concerns, people we spoke with had numerous ideas on the actions they felt could make a difference in their communities, from actions that individuals could take to broader systemic changes that will take a collective approach on the part of decision-makers.

We spoke with people who are taking their own action to create the kind of community they would like to live in based on their passion and concerns about their community. For example, the Project 291 Swim program for children and young people which is a collaboration between a range of local community organisations, schools and businesses. Many community members had positive things to say about this program, not only because of the benefits to children and young people who are involved but also its genuine local collaborative approach and the positive story about the strengths of the Bellambi community it is creating.

### 1. Safety

Many people are concerned about their personal safety in public places and perceived threats on theirs and others’ safety in their communities.

When people spoke about safety they raised concerns about drug users and sellers, particularly in Bellambi, East Corrimal and Corrimal. They described their concerns about being approached for money or having property stolen, both from them personally and their homes. Their concerns about safety were also because of people from outside the local area who visited in order to purchase drugs locally, who were perceived as potentially dangerous.

As with most communities, concerns about safety arise from both personal experiences and perception. While some groups of people we spoke with felt that there were significant problems associated with drug use and selling in their communities, others felt that it was no worse than any other area in the Illawarra. People we spoke with who said they weren’t too worried about their safety said this was because they “know everyone around here, who to steer clear of and where not to go.”

A number of parents spoke about concerns around recent incidents of strangers approaching children across the Illawarra. As a result they were now less likely to let their older children walk home from school or play in public places without a trusted adult supervising. Many people were clear in defining where they would and wouldn't let their children go in their local areas, based on the places they experienced or perceived of as being unsafe.

Another issue that people said impacted on their perception of safety were incidents of violence and intimidating behaviour in public places. Children talked about people yelling and swearing in public, or hearing people arguing in their homes and said that this was frightening. Older people spoke about feeling threatened by groups of young people.

While some people spoke about being disheartened with Police responses to what goes on in their community, particularly in Bellambi, on many occasions people felt that a greater Police presence was needed. People said they want Police in the community not only when there is trouble but at other times so that they could build trust. Many people spoke about being scared to report incidents to Police because of possible retribution or feeling that it "doesn't do anything." In particular, people want Police to work with other government agencies such as FaCS (Housing) to address drug selling in public housing.

## 2. *Environment and place*

People are concerned about both the natural and built environment in their communities. In regard to the natural environment, people said they were concerned about how to preserve its beauty while at the same time making the most of all it has to offer. People we spoke with mentioned specific places of importance to them such as local beaches, Bellambi Lagoon, parks, playgrounds and Bellambi Point, including the special cultural significance of Bellambi Point to the local Aboriginal community. Children said they were concerned about rubbish and drug using equipment being scattered around the streets, parks and beaches. While older people also shared these concerns, "there are large parts of the natural environment that people still trash".

In regard to the built environment, while we were given examples of places that people thought looked and felt good, there were also many more examples of places that people feel have "let the community down". Some of the places that people mentioned as looking welcoming and cared for included Luke's Place Playground in Corrimal Memorial Park, the new Happy Valley playground at East Corrimal and Access Community Group's Corrimal Community Garden.

However, as one person described to us, "the place just all looks a bit grey and tired".

Many people spoke about the old Mitre 10 building site on Underwood Rd, Corrimal and the need for it to be fixed up. As one community member told us, she avoids going near that area because it not only feels unsafe but "its depressing to look at". The site is in a state of disrepair, with graffiti and litter strewn across the block. People saw great potential for the current unused block to become a space for community, housing, shops or services. The Corrimal Town Centre Plan being developed by Wollongong City Council in consultation with community members and local business was seen by many people we spoke with as a great opportunity to revitalise the area in this regard.



People felt that improving the appearance of public facilities and public housing was key to creating a more welcoming community. When speaking about their local area, many people talked about the “good side/part” and the “bad side/part” of the suburb, which reflected not only perceptions of who lived in particular areas, but also the look of the place such as homes with rubbish out the front and that looked unkept.

On a practical level, children we spoke with said they would like to contribute to cleaning up their community by taking part in clean-up litter days. People also suggested simple improvements such as better lighting along parts of the cycle paths and nearby train stations.

People spoke about the role of FaCS (Housing) in repairing and revitalising public housing regularly. People felt that this would address their concerns “that people don’t care about this place” and set an example, particularly for children and young people to take care of their homes and environment.

The role of Wollongong City Council in working with the community was also often raised by people. They saw Council’s role in maintaining public spaces and developing new places as important to also set an example to the community that “someone actually cares”. “Council needs to be here cleaning up graffiti and vandalism as soon as it occurs.” There were specific concerns in relation to Bellambi Pool which people mentioned needed to be cleaned more often. A number of people spoke about diving into the pool only to find the bottom covered in broken glass.

### 3. Children and young people

The wellbeing of children and young people is a specific concern to many people, including the young people we spoke with. In particular, community members are concerned that many children are growing up in a community with negative role models and where drug taking is viewed as the norm. As one person described, “it’s not uncommon to walk into someone’s house and see a bong on the table, regardless of how you feel about it that’s normal for many people here”.

People felt that many children and young people, particularly in Bellambi, were not receiving adequate support and supervision from their parents. People gave examples such as parents being disengaged from school and not taking an interest in their children’s education. They were concerned that many children and young people had a lack of aspirations for their future and connection to school and education as a result.

It was largely recognised that when children and young people were not getting the support they needed at home they were more likely to be out more with their peers and because there was often nothing to do they would become bored and engage in anti-social and sometimes destructive behaviour. There were also concerns that these children and young people were seen as “easy targets” for local drug dealers to engage in their business.

People felt that many families need more support to help look after their children, which could take a number of forms. More on this is discussed below.

It was also suggested that community and youth workers in schools would be a positive way to support children, young people and their families. Some people mentioned the work that Youth Off the Streets was doing with students at Corrimal High School as one of example. Many people said that Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre was a



valuable resource for the community, and particularly children and young people. “I come here every afternoon.” However, people also suggested that the Neighbourhood Centre needed to have more programs and activities that were suited to young people’s interests such as DJing and aerosol art.

A number of people said that opportunities to connect positive local role models, such as sports players, surfers and teachers, with local children and young people are needed. Some parents suggested that engaging with these role models through mentoring programs might be one such way to support children and young people who were going through tough times and needed a positive relationship in their life.

Many people also spoke about the lack of local job opportunities and barriers to employment for young people. Both young people and parents felt that school was not always engaging for young people. They suggested more practical learning opportunities and alternatives to suspensions that keep young people engaged in learning, even if it is not in the traditional classroom.

A lack of opportunities for part-time and casual after school/weekend jobs was also seen as an issue locally. People suggested that creating opportunities for young people to work and earn money locally was needed, such as market stalls on weekends or more small business and enterprises in the Bellambi area.

#### 4. *Activities and “things to do”*

Many people spoke about there not being enough “things to do” that were local and accessible. Safe and accessible playgrounds and parks were identified as important not only to keep children and young people active but as places for families and parents to socialise at. However, people said they wanted more than only places to go. They wanted events and activities that build on the interests of a diversity of community members. People saw these kinds of activities as needed to bring community members together to break down perceptions between sections of the community, to address isolation and “draw people out” of their homes.

However, such activities need to be affordable. Many people spoke about the cost of activities, particularly for children and families as being prohibitive. For example, some people mentioned being able to regularly take their family to Corrimal Pool was unaffordable, particularly in Summer holidays when they’d like to go almost everyday.

Children and young people consistently spoke about the need for more places to go and activities to get involved in locally. As children told us “the playgrounds are boring, equipment is old and ruined, there’s graffiti on everything.” Their most common suggestions, which many adults also agreed upon, were:

- Skate park at Bellambi Point or Corrimal
- BMX track at Bellambi Point
- Legal street art wall with artists providing lessons and support to children and young people
- Create walking tracks on the escarpment above Corrimal
- More opportunities for a range of different sports, not only team sports but also gymnastics and boxing such as those provided by PCYCs. A number of people in Bellambi spoke specifically about concerns that Bellambi Junior Football Club had no juniors playing this season.





Redeveloping the open space and playground at Bellambi Beach and Point to increase the local community's use of the area was also suggested by many people we spoke with, both who lived in Bellambi as well as in the surrounding suburbs. However, many people pointed out that this needs to be done in partnership with the community to create local ownership of the place and reduce vandalism. It is also important to people that any development in that area be culturally appropriate to the local Aboriginal community.

### 5. *Connections, supports and inclusive communities*

People are worried about an increasing sense of isolation across their communities, particularly amongst older people in the community. They mentioned often not having, or making, the time to connect with neighbours. However, during a number of our conversations some people saw this as something they could do to create the kind of community they want, "I feel I should do more to connect with others."

People suggested one way to increase connections between people are more practical, informal community projects that people, both young and old, can get involved in that create a place for everyone. Some children and young people spoke about previous local projects that they wanted to participate in but because of limited numbers didn't get the opportunity or weren't chosen and felt disheartened by that. People saw such community projects as having the potential to also provide people with supports when they need them, such as referrals to services.

A number of people felt that there were some gaps in services and supports locally, and that travelling to services in Wollongong or further south can be a barrier to accessing such services, in particular health services. However, many people spoke about being able to access services in Corrimal, through their local churches, Big Fat Smile and Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre.

Parents identified a number of services and courses that were provided locally, such as the Triple P program, 123 Magic, etc. but felt that these supports aren't reaching the people who need them most. As one parent said "we don't need more services and programs, but need to work with the right people." It was suggested by some parents and grandparents that trusted people in the community such as local parents could be engaged by services to spread news of programs and courses by word of mouth through their own local networks. We were also told about a program previously at a local school where parents were trained in basic speech therapy skills and volunteered to work with children who had speech difficulties. Parents said this had positive impacts on the children and also built confidence and skills for the parents. This capacity building was identified as an important need for many community members, some of whom felt that too many aspects of their lives had become "professionalised" and that people had lost the confidence to identify and address their own issues and those of their neighbours and peers.

Local community organisations such as Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre, Big Fat Smile's Communities for Children program and churches were all seen as organisations that people trusted. Importantly, people spoke about the need for community organisations and services to be in the community for the long term to build trust and move with the community's "pace" in order to create more connected and inclusive communities.