Collective 2518 Engagement and Community Conversations

Between June and August 2015, we held numerous one to one and 19 group conversations with a total of 133 community members from across the 2518 postcode area.

We engaged with approx. 50 representatives from local businesses, community organisations, schools, early childhood services and government agencies

People said they want a community that:

- Is safe, supportive and connected where people don't judge each other and have respect for themselves and others.
- Provides a healthy, positive and supportive environment for children and young people to grow up in.
- Has local and accessible facilities, activities and opportunities, including employment.
- Is physically welcoming, looks clean and cared for.

Main concerns and actions that can make a difference

1. Safety

People are concerned about their personal safety in public places and perceived threats on theirs and others' safety in their communities, particularly from drug users and sellers. They also raised concerns raised about violence and intimidating behaviour in public places.

People said they want Police in the community not only when there is trouble but at other times so that they could build better relations and trust.

2. Environment and place

People are concerned about how to preserve the beauty of the local natural environment while at the same time making the most of all it has to offer. There was also a feeling amongst many people that "the place just all looks a bit grey and tired".

People felt that improving the appearance of public facilities and public housing was key to creating a more welcoming community and spoke about the role of FaCS (Housing) and Wollongong City Council in working with the community to do this.

3. Children and young people

Community members are concerned that many children are growing up in a community with negative role models, lack of support and supervision from their parents. People are concerned about a lack of things for children and young people to do and their engagement in anti-social and sometimes destructive behaviour due to boredom. They also identified a lack of local job opportunities, including part-time, and barriers to employment for young people as an issue of concern.

People suggested the need for community and youth workers in schools and were excited about the potential for Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre to build on its positive work with children and young people. They also wanted to see opportunities to connect positive local role models, such as sports players, surfers and teachers, with local children and young people.

4. Activities and "things to do"

Many people spoke about there not being enough "things to do" that were local and accessible. They want safe, affordable and accessible events and activities that build on the interests of a diversity of community members and bring people together.

The most common suggestions were :

- Skate park at Bellambi Point or Corrimal Town Centre
- 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 sports, including gymnastics and boxing such as those provided by PCYCs.
- Redeveloping the open space and playground at Bellambi Beach and Point in partnership with the community.

5. Connections, supports and inclusive communities

People are worried about an increasing sense of isolation across their communities, particularly amongst older people. They suggested one way to increase connections between people are more practical, informal community projects that people can get involved in, have a place for everyone and can provide supports when people 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 can be a barrier to access. However, many people said that while they were able to access services and supports locally they were concerned that services weren't always targeting those who most needed support.

It was suggested building the capacity of community members to support others was needed. People spoke also 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.

Author: Vanessa Ford, Community Development Coordinator
Participation and Inclusion,
Department of Family and Community Services (FACs)
June 2015