



SOCIAL CONNECTION IN LITTLE BIG HOUSE COMMUNITIES

**Baseline survey of social connectedness
in Summer Hill and Lewisham**

Research and analysis conducted by Social Venture Australia Consulting
31 October 2022



PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

Social Ventures Australia (SVA) have prepared this report in good faith on the basis of our research and information available to us at the date of publication, without any independent verification. Information has been obtained from sources that we believe to be reliable and up to date, but SVA do not guarantee the accuracy, completeness or currency of the information. The information in the report is general in nature and is not intended to and should not be used or relied upon by readers as the basis for any strategic, business, financial, tax, accounting, legal or regulatory decisions.

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The Little BIG Foundation is a registered charity which aims to reduce loneliness by inspiring communities to become better connected. This research was commissioned to better understand the community in Summer Hill/Lewisham surrounding the Summer Hill Little BIG House and the potential impact that can be made.

The Little BIG Foundation is founded and funded by EG, a leading Australian real estate fund manager and property developer who seeks to curate communities and have an ongoing commitment to community development.

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FROM THE LITTLE BIG FOUNDATION

Like many parts of the world, Australia is experiencing a pandemic of loneliness. We are less likely to know our neighbours' names, we withdraw from community groups, and we participate less in civic activities. Loneliness impacts our physical health, mental wellbeing, and sense of community - this is not something that can be ignored.

Much is being done right now to highlight the need for community interventions. In 2016, Ending Loneliness Together was established to bring together like-minded groups to develop the evidence base for measuring loneliness. In late 2022, the Grimshaw Foundation released a report with KPMG calling for 'public, private, and not-for-profit organisations to prioritise and address loneliness'. Every day, many organisations strive to bring communities together.

Little BIG Foundation (Little BIG) is one of those organisations. The journey is not always smooth; only some programs are an 'overnight success', but we are 'doing the doing'. We are learning by trialling ideas and constantly evolving.

We are pleased to present our first report on social connection in the Summer Hill / Lewisham Little BIG Community. This report has been prepared in partnership with Social Ventures Australia (SVA) to draw our metaphorical 'line in the sand', baselining loneliness and social connectivity in a space dedicated to improving loneliness.

I want to thank all of those involved to date. Thank you to the 48 volunteers & partners who have activated the Little BIG House this year. With your help, we have offered 69 different programs with over 1,500 individual events. That's over 17,000 "Little BIG Moments"—the little moments of interaction that make a BIG difference in the lives of your neighbours.

Thank you to our tiny and hardworking team of staff - both those working with us today and those who played a role on the journey to date. Thank you to the Flour Mill community, strata groups and building management, who graciously allow us to use the park and plaza for our larger events. Finally, thank you to our funding partner, EG, without whom, none of this would be possible.

I hope this report inspires and connects people in this community and beyond.

Keep smiling!



Sarah Mathews
CEO
Little BIG Foundation

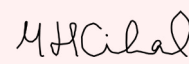
FROM SOCIAL VENTURES AUSTRALIA

SVA was delighted to support the Little BIG Foundation to undertake this research, to explore experiences of social connection in the Little BIG House community. Social connection has an enormous impact on people's life experiences and multiple studies demonstrate its importance to our health and even our longevity. Yet, it is an area that is often overlooked.

In compiling this report, we had the opportunity to hear from over 200 local residents and other users of the Little BIG House. The responses paint a fascinating picture of the array of experiences across the community and provide a strong starting point for Little BIG to understand the strengths, challenges and interests of their community. They show that people are already gaining value from the additional community space and programming, but that there is much more work than can be done.

While the Little BIG House is located in a relatively dense and physically well-connected area in Summer Hill and Lewisham, the local community is not immune to loneliness and social isolation. Our research shows that there is a strong community spirit, yet neighbourly connections and community participation appear to be lacking - leaving a clear role for organisations like the Little BIG Foundation to create intentional connection opportunities.

As our cities grow and change, it is increasingly important that our physical environment include spaces for people to socialise and get to know the people around them. It is exciting to read stories of how the Little BIG House and its programs have already led to new connections and friendships, and we look forward to seeing more of these stories over time. Moreover, we are excited to see Little BIG continue to share its learnings as it grows and evolves, as part of a collective effort to create a more connected and inclusive world.



Hanna Cihal
Researcher and Manager
Social Ventures Australia

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The survey examines the experiences of social connection in the community served by the Foundation's 'Little BIG House' in Summer Hill and Lewisham, NSW, in order to provide a baseline against which the Foundation can measure changes over time.

EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL CONNECTION

Our survey shows that residents of Summer Hill / Lewisham have average levels of loneliness but higher levels of social contact when compared to Australia as a whole. However, it indicates that they have weaker local community connections, based on the number of neighbours they know and levels of participation in community organisations.

TABLE 1 - SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESULTS AS COMPARED TO AVAILABLE NATIONAL DATA

Indicator	Summer Hill / Lewisham result ²	Relation to national results	National comparison
Proportion of people who report feeling lonely at least some of the time	36%	=	36% ³
Proportion of people who had social contact with someone outside once per week or more	64%	↑	46% ⁴
Proportion of people who know many of their neighbours by name	48%	↓	62% ⁵
Participation in community organisations			
Social groups	30%	↓	46% ⁶
Community support groups	19%	↓	21% ⁶
Civic / political groups	15%	↑	7% ⁶





48% of respondents reported knowing many of their neighbours by name. Well below the national result of 62%¹.



While residents may not have deep connections with their neighbours, they do tend to reflect positive feelings about the local community. Two-thirds reflect that they live in a kind and caring community and more than half report that they are recipients of acts of kindness in the community on at least an occasional basis.

This positive community spirit may lay the groundwork for future connections, especially considering a substantial proportion of residents would like to know more of their neighbours. Only around two in five people were happy with the number of neighbours they know right now, which suggests a majority might be receptive to opportunities to deepen neighbour connections.

69%

feel that they live in a kind and caring community

56%

are recipients of acts of kindness on at least an occasional basis

40%

are unhappy with the number of neighbours they know

ROLE OF THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE

The survey shows that residents strongly value having local community spaces to interact and many feel strongly about the value the Little BIG House brings to their community. Some have already felt the impact of the space, describing new friendships they've made through interactions there.

87%

feel it is important to have physical spaces for community interaction

86%

have attended at least one Little BIG House event

25%

have met someone new via a Little BIG House event

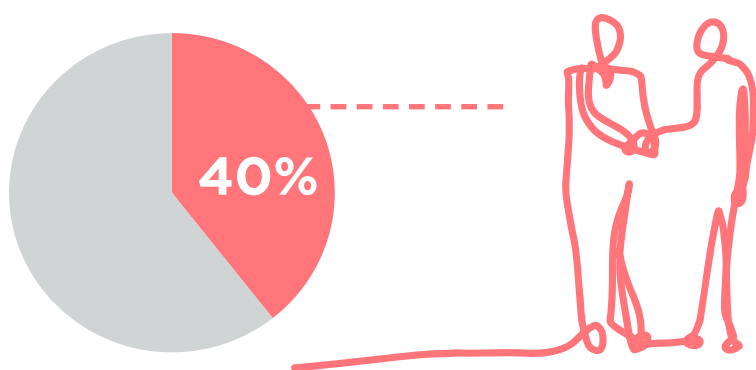
IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The survey results support the overall mission of the Little BIG House. It shows that the concept is well valued by the community and already demonstrating outcomes through new friendships formed. It also shows that there is scope for Little BIG to have further impact, by increasing rates of community connection and participation from their relatively low current levels.

The current mix of activity types appears to be well received. The large-scale events such as markets and food trucks were very popular, with almost all respondents having been to at least one of them, but the majority of new friendships described in the survey were formed through smaller recurring events such as yoga, parents' groups or games nights. This is worth considering for future Little BIG Houses in other communities, as this mix of both intimate and large-scale gatherings appears to be a positive contributor to its overall perception and impact in the community.

To increase the impact, there are opportunities to expand the range of programs on offer. Many suggestions were raised through the survey. Awareness raising should be a key priority, with many survey respondents unaware of the current activities on offer.

The majority of new friendships described in the survey were formed through smaller recurring events such as yoga, parents' groups or games nights.



Approx. 40% of the community would like to know more of their neighbours.

ABOUT LITTLE BIG COMMUNITIES

THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE

The Little BIG Foundation is a registered charity which aims to reduce loneliness by inspiring communities to become better connected. It does this by developing programs, working with the local community to bring their ideas to life and creating opportunities for social connection. It works to achieve a vision for a future where people enjoy kinder, happier and healthier lives.

The Little BIG Foundation operates the Little BIG House, located at 16 Flour Mill Way in Summer Hill NSW. The Little BIG House is a hub which can be used to run community programs, host private events and provide a casual space for neighbours to get to know each other.

The Little BIG House first opened in 2021 in the height of the Covid-19 pandemic and prior to this ran events under the brand of the 'Flour Mill Community' throughout 2020. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, multiple lockdowns and rising disconnection, Little BIG was able to run a range of Covid safe events throughout its first year, and witnessed countless examples of community strength and connection. Little BIG House was finally able to fully open to the public in 2022 and has now been the site of 69 different community programs in 2022 and events (either one-off or recurring).

THE FIRST LITTLE BIG HOUSE COMMUNITY - SUMMER HILL / LEWISHAM

While anyone can access the Little BIG House, for the purposes of this research the Little BIG House community is considered to be the area within a 500-metre radius. This includes residents of both the Summer Hill and Lewisham communities and comprises the Flour Mill development, adjacent apartment blocks and single-family houses in the surrounding streets. It is estimated that the area includes around 2,000 people. Private bookings of the Little BIG House are limited to Sydney's Inner West LGA but no one is excluded from participation in events.

The community is located within Sydney's Inner West suburbs and is well connected to other parts of the city by both the light rail station at the Flour Mill and heavy rail station in Lewisham, as well as a range of buses, walking and cycling connections. The community is relatively young, with the most common age demographic being 30 to 34 year-olds. In recent years, the area has transformed from primarily single-family dwellings and small apartment blocks to including several larger-scale apartment buildings. The Flour Mill development in particular presented a major change in the area, transforming a former commercial site into a mixed-use residential and commercial space with new parklands and community facilities (including the Little BIG House).

Drawing on the lessons learnt from the first Little BIG House in Summer Hill, Little BIG Foundation aspires to launch additional Little BIG Houses in communities across Australia. The research undertaken in the Summer Hill / Lewisham community will help to inform the Foundation's work into the future.

"We believe it's the little things that make a BIG difference." Little BIG Foundation



ABOUT THIS REPORT

OBJECTIVES

This report details the findings of a community survey undertaken by the Little BIG Foundation with the support of SVA Consulting. The survey examines the experiences of social connection in the community served by the Foundation's 'Little BIG House' in Summer Hill and Lewisham, NSW, in order to provide a baseline against which the Foundation can measure changes over time. The survey also provides insights into the role of the Little BIG House in the community and opportunities to increase its impact into the future.

This report details the findings of a community survey commissioned by the Little BIG Foundation and undertaken by Social Ventures Australia (SVA). The purpose of the community survey is threefold:



To provide a baseline understanding of social connection in the Little BIG House community, against which change can be measured over time.



To inform the role the Little BIG House can play in meeting local community needs, including informing local programming and community events.



To identify opportunities to increase the impact for community members over time.

The analysis referenced in this report was conducted by SVA, unless otherwise stated. SVA is Australia's leading social purpose strategy consultancy firm and supports a range of social purpose organisations to develop and implement clearer strategies, find solutions to partner and collaborate for greater social impact and better measure and evaluate their work. In undertaking research for our clients, we seek to generate actionable insights which provide our clients with the information needed to make sound decisions on the best path forward.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

A 20-question online survey instrument was developed in collaboration between SVA and Little BIG Foundation, using a combination of bespoke questions and questions linked to existing national datasets. The survey instrument was tested with a group of Little BIG Foundation volunteers, resulting in refinements to introductory text and survey promotions, wording of several questions and responses and order of questions in the survey.

SURVEY PROMOTION

Survey promotion was undertaken by the Little BIG Foundation team. The survey was promoted to residents living within 500 metres of the Little BIG House, via a number of channels, including emails to residents' distribution lists and Little BIG House distribution lists, flyers dropped in letterboxes, posters, communications via posts on Little BIG social media sites as well as paid social media advertising, and communications via local messaging/Facebook groups. Direct links were available for those receiving digital promotion, while the hard copy materials featured a QR code which linked to the survey form. The survey was actively promoted by Little BIG for a one-month period, from 29 July to 31 August 2022.

AVOIDING NON-RESPONSE BIAS

Effort was taken to avoid potential non-response bias, in which results are skewed due to the absence of perspectives of one or more group. To mitigate against this risk, we sought a minimum sample size of at least 10 per cent of the estimated population (at least 200 responses). We also included basic demographic questions at the start of the survey that allowed us to track the make-up of the sample as results were received. Where needed, Little BIG was able to target extra promotion at underrepresented groups to increase response rates (particularly to address potential gender bias). Despite these mitigating efforts, it is worth noting that there is still some risk of non-response bias, particularly as survey participation was on an opt-in basis and may have attracted respondents skewed towards particular views. The results are presented unweighted, however are broken down by different subgroups in several sections to allow comparison.

The final survey sample included 258 responses, including 193 complete responses and 65 partial responses. This includes primarily residents of the Summer Hill / Lewisham community (as intended) with coverage across multiple age groups, living situations and dominant gender groups. In the sections of this report which describe local community outcomes, the results have been filtered to include only residents of Summer Hill / Lewisham.

It is worth noting that the final sample featured more responses from people identifying as female than male, despite attempts to achieve greater balance via targeted promotion. To understand the potential impact, results were analysed using a gender filter and where there are substantial differences between males and females these are noted in the report. (The sample size for other gender responses was too small to enable further analysis). Results have also been broken down by age and location where relevant.

ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

This report contains a summary of the most material findings of the survey analysis, with full results included as an appendix. Any identifying information has been removed from the results.

A small number of qualitative interviews were conducted to test emerging insights and provide additional depth of insight to the survey results. These are not intended to present representative views of the community, rather to provide examples and stories that can bring the findings to life. Each of the interview participants have some connection to the Little BIG House (either as volunteers or frequent users of the space). Excerpts from these interview conversations are included throughout the report.

LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This report should be read in the context of its intended purpose as described above. It has been specifically designed to inform the work of the Little BIG Foundation and the level of rigour applied to the data collection and analysis is proportional to its intended purpose. In particular, the following limitations should be noted:

- While efforts have been made to avoid non-response bias (or to provide transparency where bias may occur) there is still a risk of sampling errors which may cause misleading results.
- This report presents the unweighted results of the survey, with responses filtered by subgroup in some places. It does not contain any advanced statistical analysis or testing.
- The national studies listed for comparison may employ different methodologies to this survey. Caution should be used when drawing conclusions based on these comparisons.
- The conclusions drawn in this report are based on the data available at the time, with consideration given to the limitations described here. Depending on the intended use, further research may be needed to verify the findings contained in this report or to provide additional depth of insight.



EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL CONNECTION ACROSS AUSTRALIA

Like many parts of the world, Australia is experiencing a pandemic of loneliness. Loneliness has a range of adverse effects, including impacts to mental health, cognitive function, physical health and immune system function and can even lead to premature death. The risk of premature death associated with social isolation is similar to well known risk factors such as obesity or smoking. People experiencing loneliness often report feeling headaches, stomach problems and physical pain.⁷

In August 2022, more than one in three Australians (35.6%) reported feeling lonely at least some of the time⁸. Loneliness is typically more common among young adults, men, those living alone and those with children⁹. Some of the risk factors for loneliness were exacerbated by the lockdowns and social distancing rules in place during Covid-19, such as living alone. Interestingly, one effect of Covid-19 appears to be a change in the typical gendered experiences of loneliness, more women reporting loneliness than men during the pandemic¹⁰.

While loneliness is associated with a range of negative health impacts, social contact is conversely associated with a range of positive health benefits. In Australia, the findings of the annual Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey (HILDA) demonstrate a positive association between frequent social contact and higher life satisfaction and overall health¹¹.

Prior to Covid-19, Australians were reasonably well connected to friends and family, with three in five (68%) having face-to-face contact with someone outside their home at least once per week¹². In 2020, this dropped substantially, and as of August 2022 remained much lower than pre-Covid-19 levels, with only two in five (46%) having this type of face-to-face contact¹³.

While overall social contact levels have changed in recent years, Australians have reported low levels of connection with their local communities and neighbours both before and during the pandemic. In 2018, almost half of Australians (47%) reported not having neighbours to call on for help¹⁴. In 2021, over a third (38%) stated that they don't even know their neighbours by name¹⁵.

Disconnection from community is a known risk factor for loneliness, especially for lone households and lone-parent households¹⁶. Participation in community organisations may have a protective effect against loneliness¹⁷. Across Australia, 51% of people participated in social groups in 2019, 25% participated in community support groups and 9% participated in civic or political groups. (These numbers decreased in 2020 due to Covid-19)¹⁸.

There is some evidence that apartment dwellers are more likely to experience community disconnection or dissatisfaction with their living arrangements. In 2016, a nationwide survey showed that fewer apartment dwellers were happy with their living arrangements compared to those living in houses (78% versus 88% respectively)¹⁹. Research by Macquarie University suggested that people living in apartment buildings may have been more affected by loneliness during the Covid-19 pandemic²⁰. While this remains a relatively under-researched topic, it can be expected that it will become increasingly important given the rise in apartment living in Australia and the role that apartment developments will play in meeting our growing housing demand.



EXPERIENCES OF SOCIAL CONNECTION IN THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE COMMUNITY

SOCIAL CONTACT AND LONELINESS

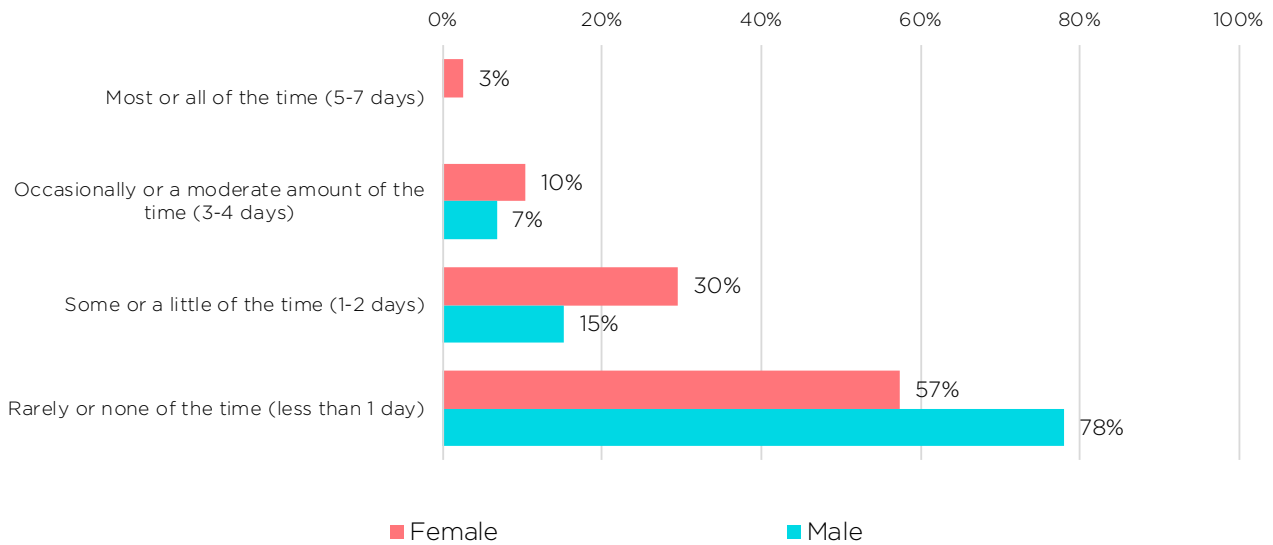
In the Summer Hill / Lewisham community, the proportion of people who report feeling lonely is consistent with the national average. More than one in three (36%) residents reported feeling lonely at least some of the time (the result was also one in three (35.6%) in national polls undertaken in August 2022²¹). Men responding to the survey were less likely to report feeling lonely at least some of the time (43% for women versus 22% for men). This is consistent with the Covid-19 associated change in national statistics from men being more lonely to women being more lonely.



More than one in three (36%) residents reported feeling lonely at least some of the time.

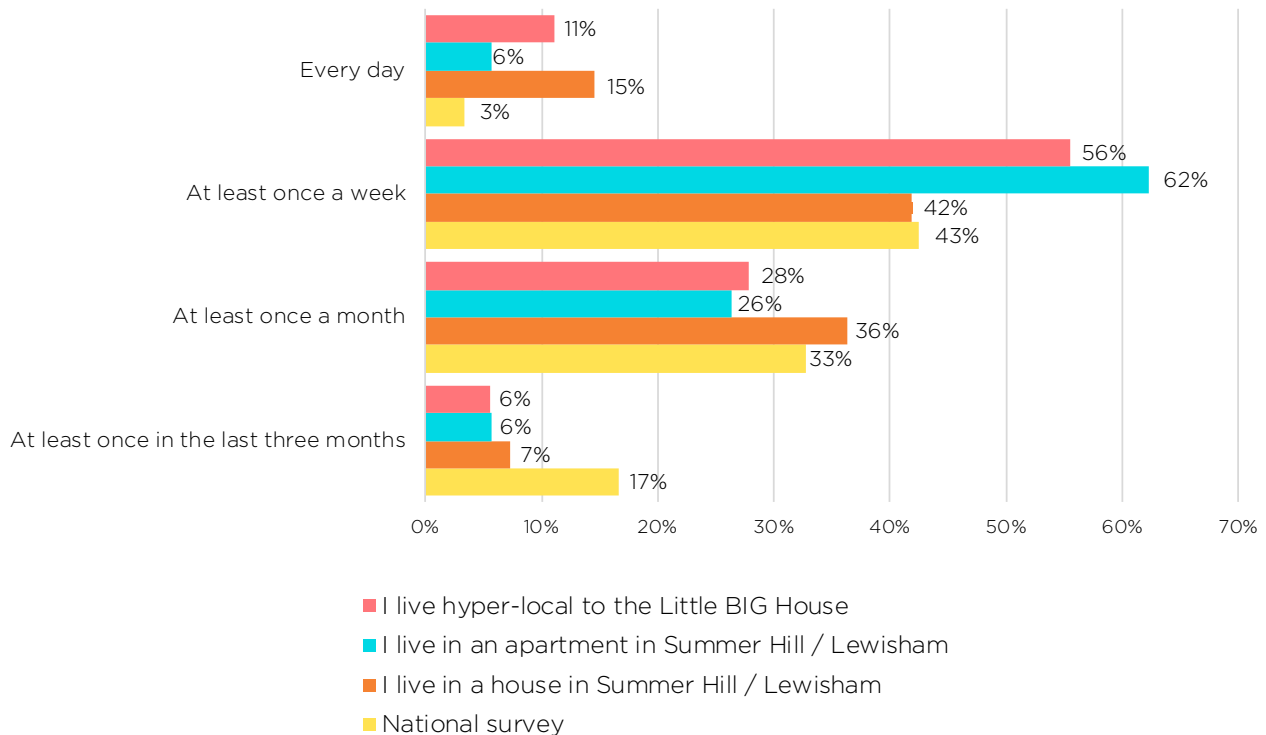


FIGURE 3: ON HOW MANY DAYS OF THE LAST WEEK DID YOU FEEL LONELY? (N=174)²²



Compared to others across Australia, residents of the Summer Hill / Lewisham community are fairly well connected to friends and family. Around 64% of people reported having face-to-face contact with someone outside their home at least once per week. This is well above the national result for 2022 (46%), and similar to pre-Covid-19 level nationally (around 68% in 2019²³).

FIGURE 4: IN THE LAST THREE MONTHS, HOW OFTEN DID YOU HAVE FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH FAMILY OR FRIENDS WHO DO NOT LIVE WITH YOU? (N=180)²⁴



LOCAL COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

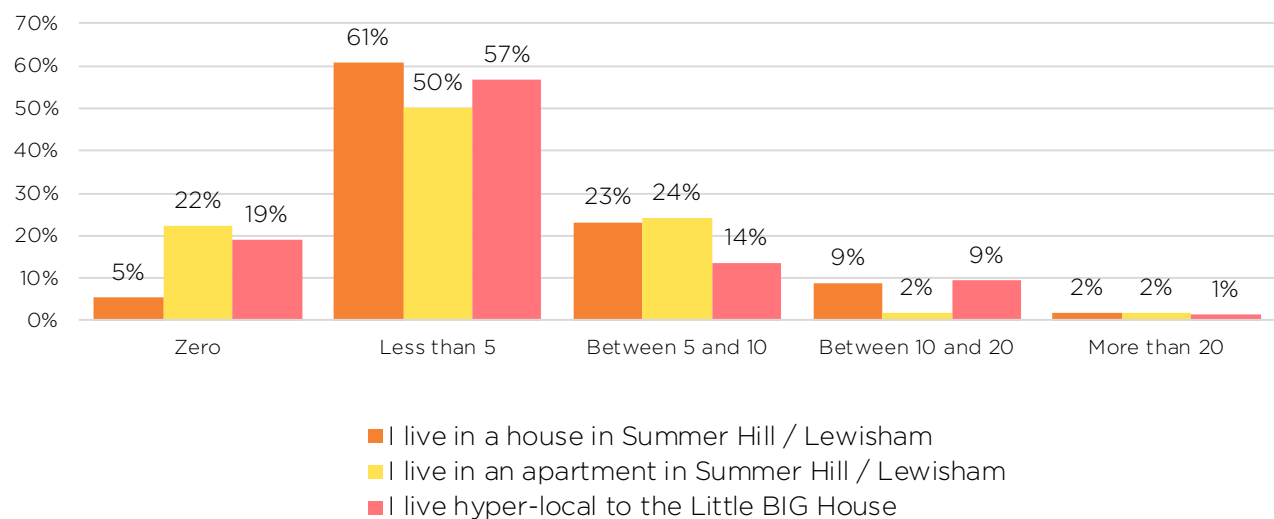
Summer Hill / Lewisham community are well connected with 64% of people having face-to-face contact outside their home at least once a week, however, these are not connections they have formed locally.

Despite having regular social interactions, residents have low levels of local community connectedness. This is in keeping with national trends, however the survey showed this was worse in the Summer Hill / Lewisham community than in Australia overall.



Fewer Summer Hill / Lewisham residents report knowing their neighbours' names, compared to the national average (48% versus 62%) and around two-thirds (66%) interact with fewer than five neighbours on a regular basis.

FIGURE 6: ABOUT HOW MANY NEIGHBOURS DO YOU INTERACT WITH ON A REGULAR BASIS? (N=189)²⁶

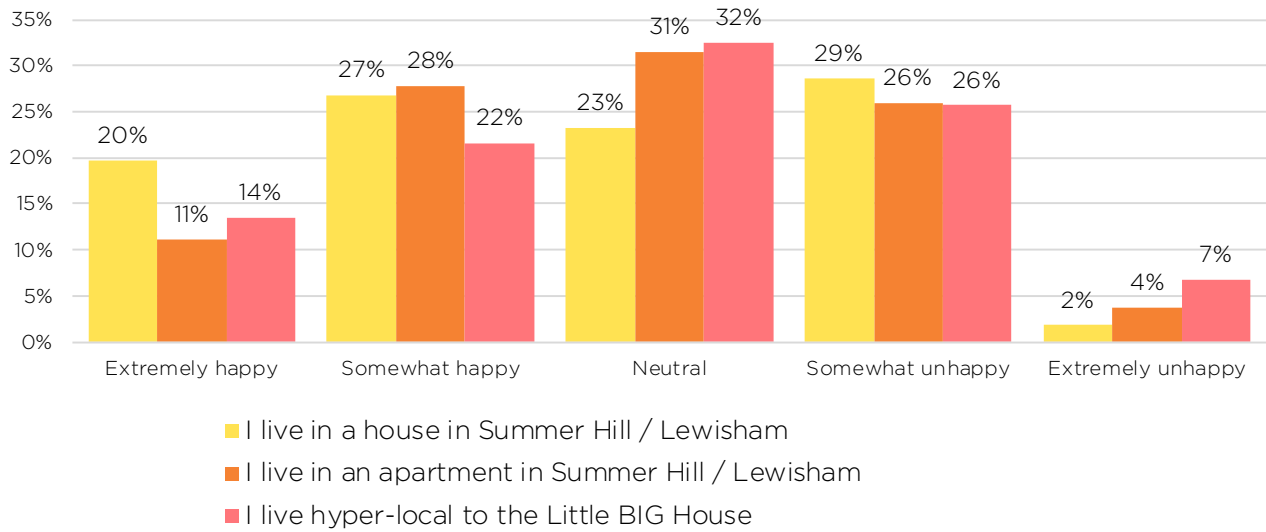




There is a strong desire for more local connections.

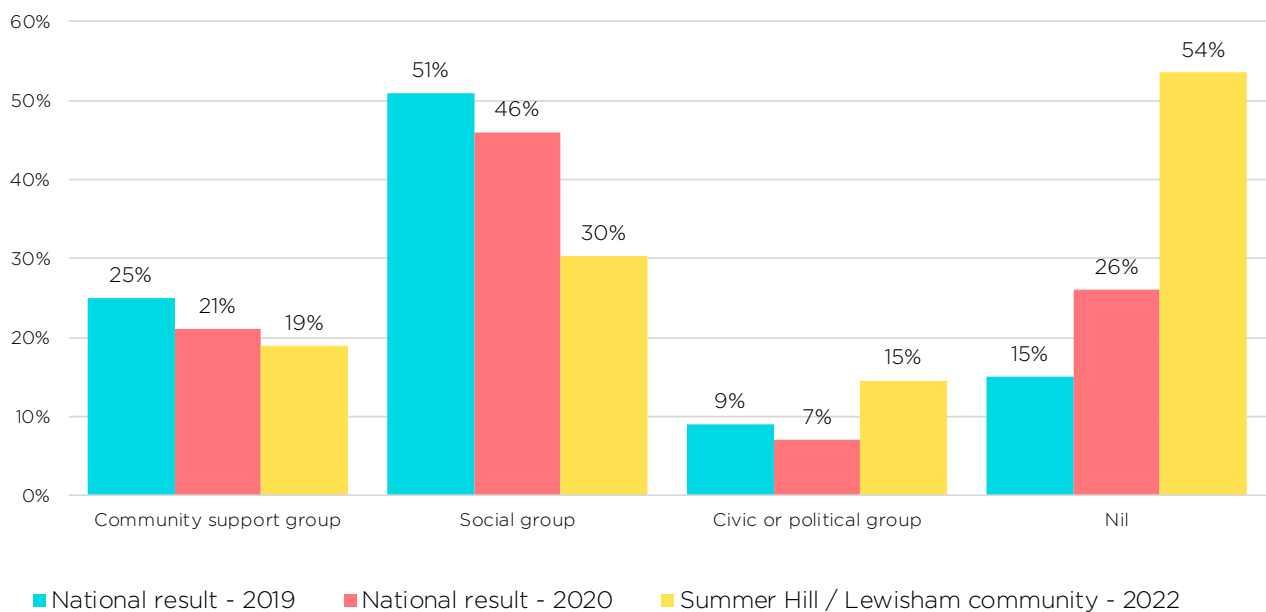
Residents are mixed in terms of how happy they are with the number of neighbours they know, but most seem to desire more local connections. In total, only 40% of respondents reported that they were happy with the number of neighbours they currently know, with an additional 29% feeling neutral.

FIGURE 7: ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE NUMBER OF NEIGHBOURS YOU KNOW? (N=184)²⁷



In addition, fewer Summer Hill / Lewisham residents participated in community or social groups, with rates of participation below both pre- and post-Covid-19 results at the national level. Around 30% of residents participated in social groups and 19% participated in community support groups (compared to 51% and 25% respectively, in the 2019 national data, or 46% and 21% in the 2020 national data). Slightly more residents participated in civic or political groups, at 15% (compared to 9% nationally in 2019 and 7% in 2020).

FIGURE 8: IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, HAVE YOU BEEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED IN ANY COMMUNITY SUPPORT, SOCIAL, CIVIC OR POLITICAL GROUP? (SELECT ALL THAT APPLY) (N=185)²⁸



INSIGHTS ON THE LACK OF LOCAL CONNECTIONS

The open text responses provide some insights into why community connections are weaker in the Summer Hill / Lewisham community.

1

Firstly, the community may still be in a transition period, following substantial change and new development.

2

Secondly, many residents are still new to the area.

3

Thirdly, COVID-19 appears to have had mixed impact, strengthening community bonds in some instances but also preventing new ones from forming.

The insights raised in the survey comments were further explored through the qualitative interviews, excerpts of which are included in the following pages.



COMMENTS ON TRANSITION PERIOD

The local community may still be in a period of transition, following large-scale changes and new developments. Prior to the completion of the Flour Mill and surrounding developments, long-time residents were understandably nervous about the scale of change, and even if they are happy with the result, it can still take time to adjust. It can also be difficult for long-time residents to keep up with new changes.

In addition, community connections are likely affected by the fact that many residents are new to the area. It may take time for neighbour relationships and connections to deepen. This might accelerate as people settle into and invest in the area, for example by engaging in local community groups or enrolling their children in local schools.

“

There is a bit of separation... people who've bought houses stick around for like 20 years, but the people in the apartments are often renters and it seems like they don't stick around as long – that might not be true, but there's that perception.

Interview with long time resident



“

If you have children, everyone knows each other. Both Summer Hill and Lewisham are really small schools. Or if you have kids at the local preschool, that's also how you get to know people in the area.

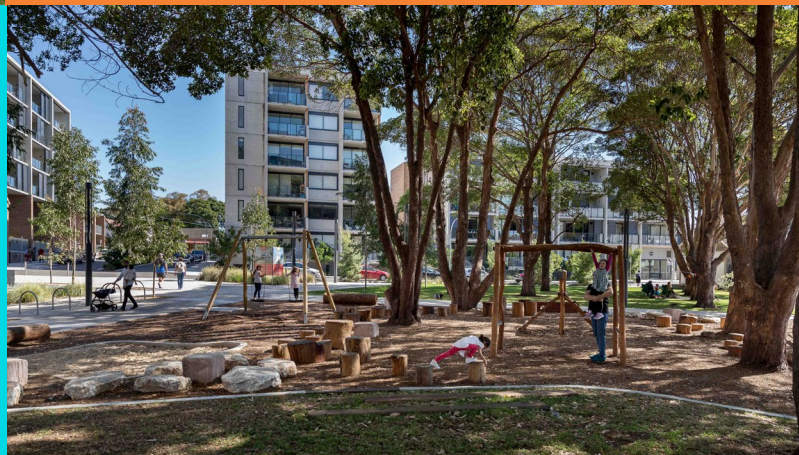
Interview with long-time resident



“

Even [Harvest Park] is fairly new. The kids haven't gotten to know each other yet. Where as at the one in Petersham, all the kids know each other, even if they don't go to the same school. But that's starting to happen at the new park and it'll keep happening over time.

Interview with long-time resident



COMMENTS ON COVID-19

Covid-19 may have had mixed impacts on community connections – with some finding opportunities to support their neighbours and others experiencing greater isolation. Many survey respondents described acts of kindness occurring between neighbours as they banded together to support each other during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, neighbours brought each other coffees and did shopping and other essential errands while others were in isolation. These acts can be expected to have strengthened neighbourly bonds and goodwill. On the other hand, there were fewer opportunities for people to make new connections in the community, with people spending more time at home and avoiding intimate gatherings.



“

We had Covid recently and people couldn't do enough for us, including bringing me coffee every morning.

Comment from survey respondent

“

I used to run my own art/craft classes at various community centres, but since I became a widow six years ago they stopped for a while. When I then moved to the inner west, I wanted to start running classes again then Covid hit...

Comment from survey respondent



“

Up until about six months ago people were not going to community events, or they were all outdoors. You're not going to go up to someone at a concert and start talking to them...

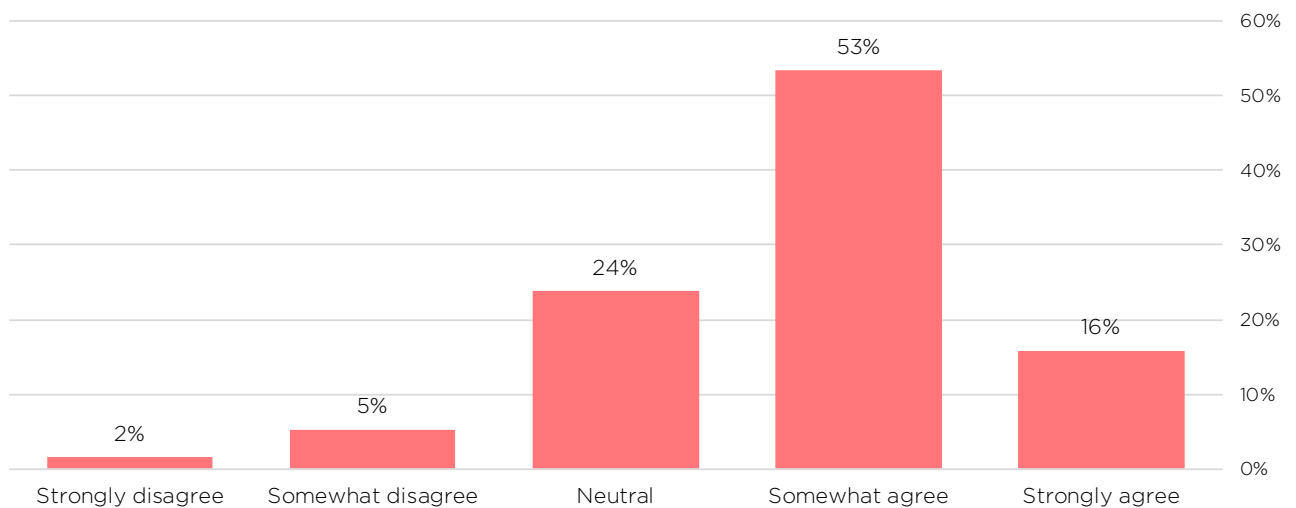
Interview with long-time resident



KINDNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

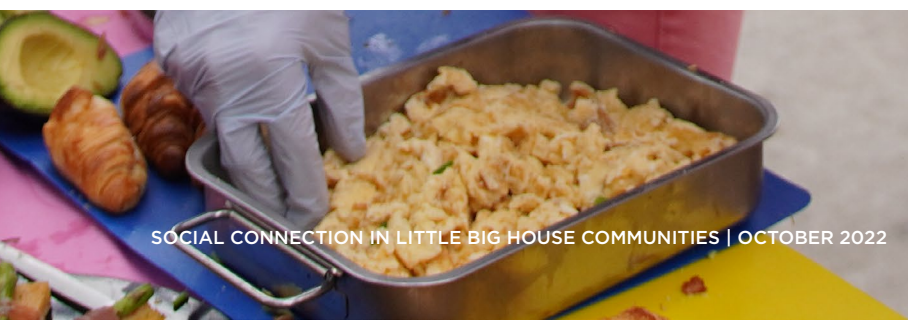
Despite their lack of regular contact with neighbours, the majority (69%) feel they live in a kind and caring community and more than half (56%) experience acts of kindness in their community on at least an occasional basis.

FIGURE 9: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "I LIVE IN A KIND AND CARING COMMUNITY"? (N=189)





The majority (69%) feel they live in a kind and caring community.





ACTS OF KINDNESS

WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

In 2020, researchers at the University of Texas published a meta-analysis of decades of academic research on “prosocial behaviour”, which showed that witnessing an act of kindness (also called “prosocial modelling”) has a contagious effect – motivating the witness to conduct their own helpful acts²⁹. For example, when someone observes a person comforting someone who is upset, donating to charity or helping a stranger with directions, they are more likely to do something helpful or generous afterwards.

This effect is linked to something called “goal contagion” whereby the witness adopts the same goal as the person conducting the act of kindness – e.g. caring for others. The effect can happen whether the person physically observes the act, reads about it, sees it on television or hears about it in some other way. The more recent the act, the more likely it is to influence people’s behaviour and if the act was well received (i.e. met with thanks) the effect was stronger.

This phenomenon presents important implications for both local communities and society at large. On a local level, prosocial modelling can help communities to become more generous and supportive places to live. On a societal level, there may be implications for how we collaborate in response to major issues including Covid-19 outbreaks and natural disasters.

WHAT DID OUR SURVEY FIND?

56%

of respondents in the local community reported being the recipient of an act of kindness on at least an occasional basis and 65% respondents provided an example of at least one occurrence.

COMMENTS ON COMMUNITY KINDNESS

The below experiences demonstrate a level of goodwill across the community, which could provide a foundation for further growth in community connections.



“

Friends and neighbours brought meals and treats over when we were isolating with Covid.

Comment from survey respondent

“

Years ago, I left my wallet on the counter at IGA and a staff member chased me down the street to give it back.

Comment from survey respondent



“

When my son was a baby many local business owners would give him treats when we walked past.

Comment from survey respondent





“

Neighbour saw a box of free baby girl clothes on Facebook marketplace when we were pregnant. She went to collect it unprompted for us.

Comment from survey respondent

“

When I was locked out of my house - my neighbour offered me water and a book to read while I waited in the sun for my partner to come home.

Comment from survey respondent



“

I helped someone who tripped down the stairs in my apartment building. And they left me a couple of beers later that week.

Comment from survey respondent



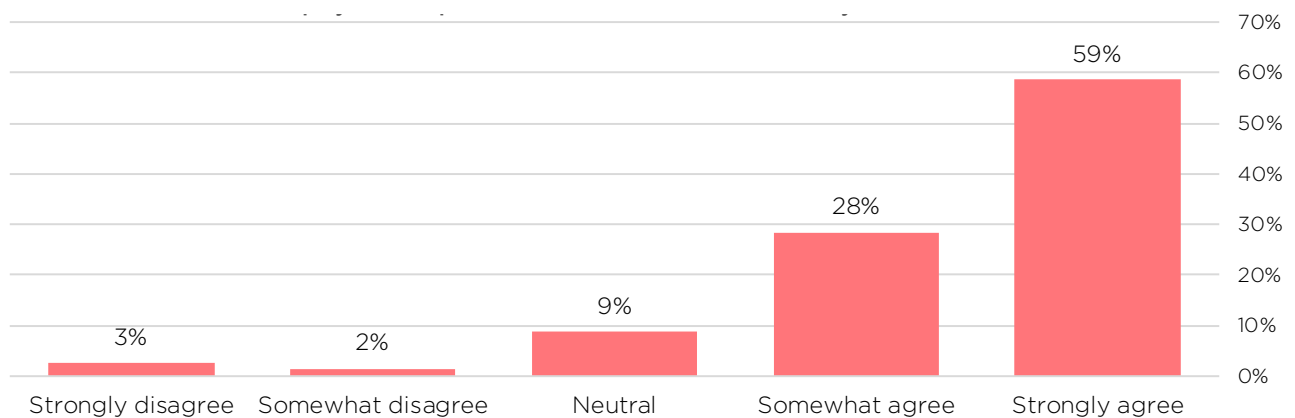
ROLE THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE CAN PLAY IN BUILDING SOCIAL CONNECTION

The survey results show that residents place a high value on physical community spaces and see benefit in having a space like the Little BIG House to host local events and facilitate neighbour engagement. Many feel quite strongly about the value that it brings to their neighbourhood and have already felt its impact.

IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY SPACES INCLUDING THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE

The vast majority of people who responded to the survey felt that it was important to have physical spaces available for community interaction.

FIGURE 10: TO WHAT EXTENT WOULD YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT: "IT IS IMPORTANT TO ME TO HAVE PHYSICAL SPACES AVAILABLE FOR COMMUNITY INTERACTION"? (N=193)



COMMENTS ON THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE

Many survey respondents felt very strongly about the value of the Little BIG House in their community. Around one in six respondents (17%) used the open text question in the survey to express support for the concept, with comments such as:



“

I think this is a great resource for me and the community at large and can't wait to participate more.

Comment from survey respondent

“

Having the Little BIG House in our community gives a warmth to our development that other such developments don't have.

Comment from survey respondent



“

I am so thrilled it is there.

Comment from survey respondent



“

I love that we have a space like this in our community.

Comment from survey respondent



ATTENDANCE AND AWARENESS OF EVENTS

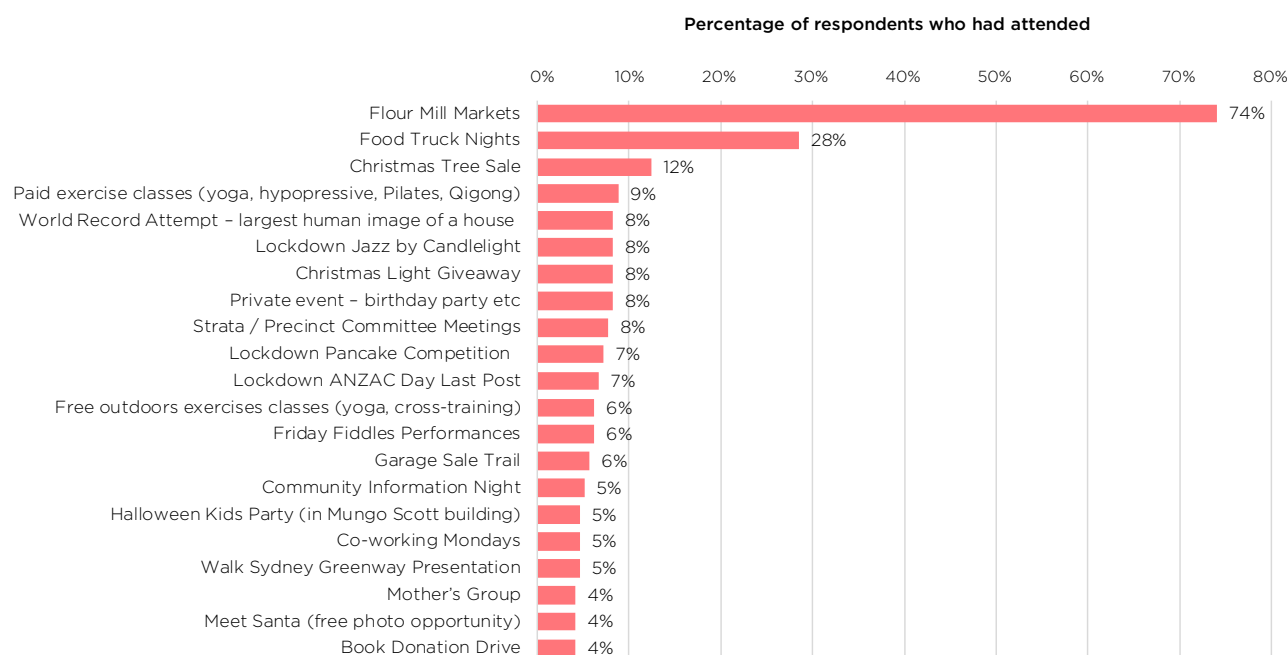
Most respondents had attended at least one event at the Little BIG House in the last 12 months, with some attending as many as seven different types of events. Only about one in seven (14%) people in the Summer Hill / Lewisham Community had never attended a Little BIG House event. The most popular event, by far, was the Flour Mill Market, which most respondents had attended. The second most popular was the Food Truck Nights, which around one-third had attended. This is somewhat unsurprising given these events have been running for some time (more than three years for the Markets and two years intermittently for the Food Truck Nights) and tend to support larger crowds.

(Note: While these events were most popular, the majority of new friendships described in the survey occurred via more intimate recurring events – this is described in the section below).

Several respondents used the open text questions to comment that they had been unaware of the Little BIG House offerings and would like to take part in more events in the future. Comments included, “I didn’t realise how many events the Little BIG House hosted until I did this questionnaire.”, “I only discovered it through our neighbour. Wish I had known about it sooner.” and “I didn’t know there was this community up to now, just discovered finding a flyer in my post. I strongly recommend more advertisement on this, people like me need all of this.”

Comments from an event organiser suggested that the mix of events has a complementary effect, saying “I’ve seen people walk past on their way to [another event in the space] and kind of peek their head in to see what we’re doing, and then a few weeks later they might turn up at [our event].”

FIGURE 11: IN THE LAST 12 MONTHS, DID YOU ATTEND OR TAKE PART IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING LOCAL PROGRAMS OR EVENTS AT THE LITTLE BIG HOUSE? (TOP RESPONSES) (N=193)



EVENT/PREFERENCES

When asked to describe the types of community-run activities they are interested in participating in, about 21% of suggestions were for large community events (e.g. markets and food-related events), 18% were for creative events (e.g. arts and crafts or writing), 15% were for fitness or movement related activities (with yoga being the most commonly mentioned) and 5% were for family friendly events. The remaining 41% were for other special interests or hobbies such as cooking, book clubs or gardening.

It is worth noting that respondents could list as many types of activities as they wanted – while family friendly activities were only 5% of the total suggestions, they were mentioned by about 14% of respondents.

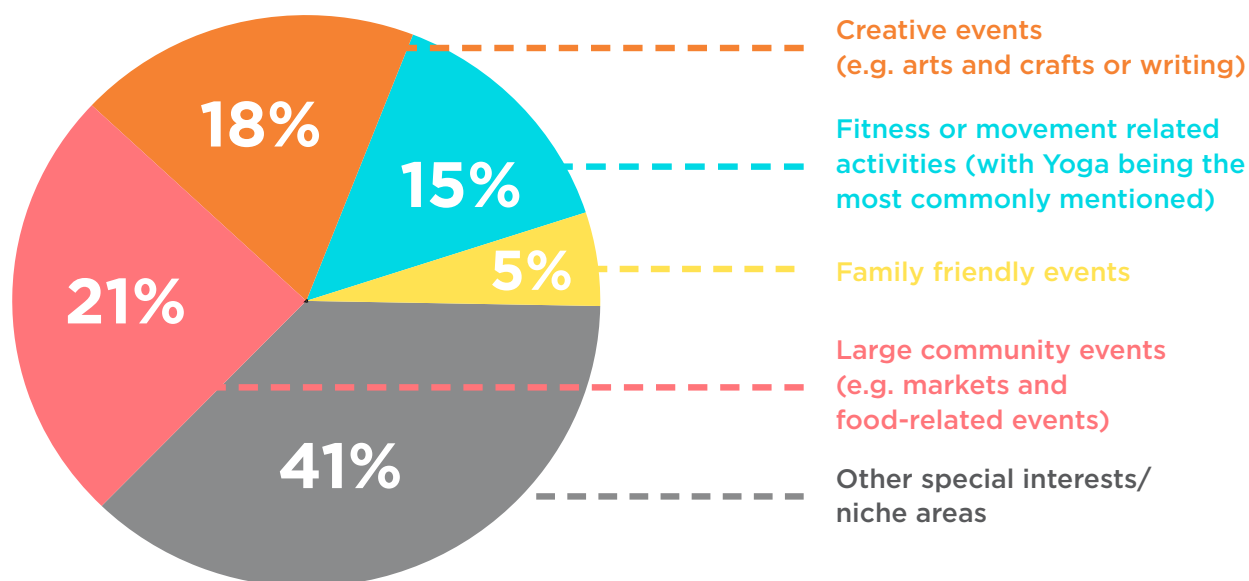
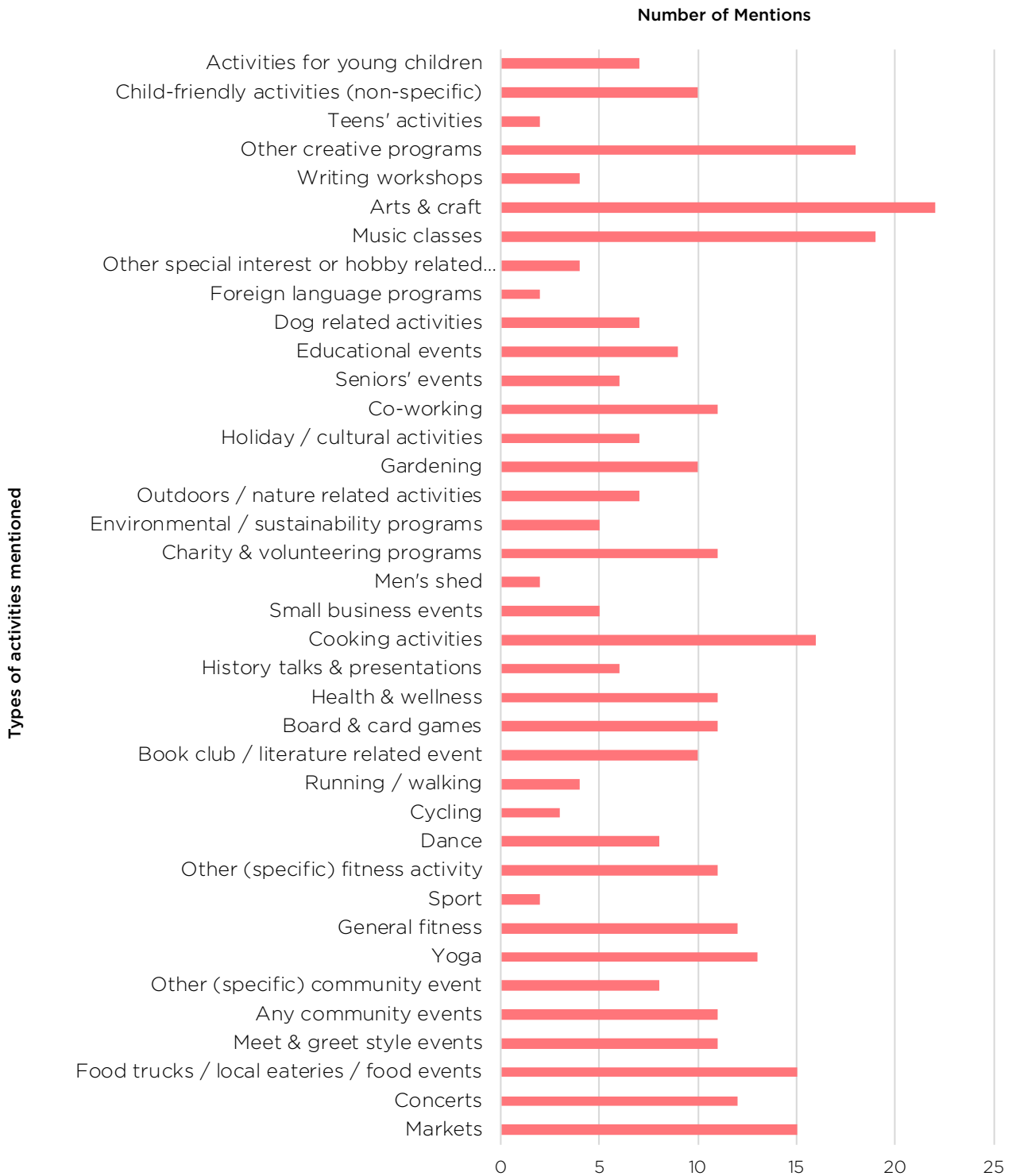


FIGURE 12: PLEASE DESCRIBE THE TYPES OF COMMUNITY-RUN ACTIVITIES YOU ARE INTERESTED IN PARTICIPATING IN. (134 RESPONSES, WITH 347 ACTIVITIES MENTIONED)

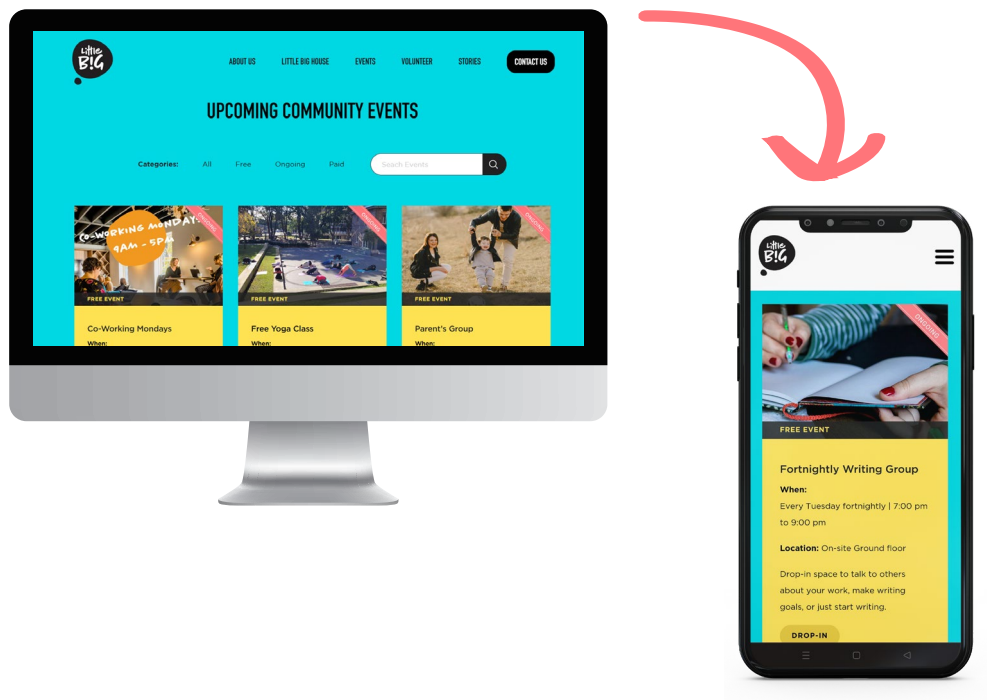


REACHING A LOCAL AUDIENCE

CASE STUDY: NEW MARKETING PLATFORMS

The Little BIG Foundation launched a new website with a dedicated events page in mid-2022 to address the growing need for publicly accessible information about events and programs available to the community.

It can be found at littlebigfoundation.com/events



In addition, event promotion can be found on



[www.facebook.com/
TheSummerHillLittleBIGHouse/](https://www.facebook.com/TheSummerHillLittleBIGHouse/)



[www.instagram.com/
summerhilllittlebighouse](https://www.instagram.com/summerhilllittlebighouse)



[au.nextdoor.com/pages/little-
big-foundation](https://au.nextdoor.com/pages/little-big-foundation)





NEW FRIENDSHIPS FORMED

About one in four respondents (24%) reported that they had met someone new through a Little BIG House event. In an optional follow up question, 29 respondents provided an example of a situation where they'd made a new friend. These new friendships occurred through recurring programs on-site, open nights and spontaneous visits.

Most of the new friendships described in the survey responses occurred via a recurring event at the Little BIG House such as yoga, board game nights or coffee mornings. One respondent said "[I made new friends] during yoga. Seeing the same people regularly, occasionally we have coffee after class now". Another said "Met all the mums through mums' group. I also recently went to the "g" spot games and really enjoyed that and the group of people there." Another, "I met with a business networking group from a recommendation from the Little BIG House and from that met many business women like myself."

Several respondents also described friendships and connections made through open nights at the Little BIG House. "I had lovely chats to a few people at the community night at LBH recently." And "Met someone else interested in climate action at an open house tonight."

Others had wandered in and met a Little BIG volunteer who they now consider a friend. Comments included "I visited the Little BIG House and met one of the volunteers there, we had a long discussion and exchanged book recommendations" and "I met a volunteer when I dropped in to the Little BIG House."

24%

of respondents reported they had met someone new through a Little BIG House event.

COMMENTS ON THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY SPACES

The survey suggests that the Little BIG House fills a gap in the community and can play a big role in bringing people together. The interviews add further context to how this might occur in practice.

“

Before the Little BIG House was here, the old [Council] community centre was kinda hard to access. No one really knew what went on and it was difficult to book rooms, so people just stopped bothering. There was nowhere to go... Now the Little BIG House has lots of things on where you can just come in and take part if you're a bit lonely or are looking for something to do... It's not embarrassing to go on your own ... and because it's a smaller intimate space you actually talk to people [as compared to larger outdoor events].

Interview with long-time resident

“

I love the space having only recently discovered it from attending an event (and I'm a local!). I've since started spending more time in that area of Summer Hill and will even deliver my own events at the venue for the community.

Comment from survey respondent

CASE STUDY: EVENTS THAT CREATE CONNECTION



G-SPOT GAMES NIGHT

A local community member identified that his passion for board games could be the conduit to bring people together in a safe and welcoming way. Playing board games strengthens relationships, improves communication skills, reduces stress and can help you meet new people. The event started small with one or two attendees and now boast 10-20 attendees at each event. The “G-Spot” games nights were called out in the survey as an example of where people have made new friends.

“

What I like most about tabletop games is that they scratch that strategic and competitive itch whilst being a vessel for human interaction. Coming into the final moments of a game can reveal a lot about the person/s you are playing with.

G-Spot Games Host

PARENTS GROUP

The Parents Group was formed by a local mum who put up her hand to hold space for other parents wanting to get out of the house and meet people experiencing a similar stage of life. The group is informal; a space to play with your children, allow them to interact with others and seek support or company from other parents.

“

Thank you for creating a space that's supporting and welcoming the community so openly and caring. This idea is so simple and yet effective and inviting.

Event Participant



CASE STUDY: EVENTS THAT CREATE CONNECTION



\$20 CLUB FOOD OUTREACH

One of the first programs to join the Little BIG House family, the \$20 Club brings together a group of locals interested in connecting with others in their community whilst doing something to 'give back'. Each member brings \$20 worth of pantry groceries which is aggregated and donated to various local charities or individual families in need. The group then spends some time, having a coffee, a chat and getting to know each other whilst creating craft-based gifts or family-oriented literacy learning tools which are packaged with the food. This program is free to attend, volunteer-led and benefits both the attendees and the families that received the donations.

“

This is something very little that I can offer this community. I'm just pleased others are interested too.

Event Volunteer

THE SAFE SPACE

The Summer Hill Safe Space is a non-clinical space that is a peer-based response to supporting people who are experiencing suicidal thoughts, behaviours, ideation or have made a suicide attempt. Volunteers with lived experience sit with attendees until they are ready to talk. They can assist with safety planning, referral or just make them a cup of tea. This program makes Friday and Saturday nights a little bit less lonely.

“

Our program would not be possible without a community space like the Little BIG House.

Event Volunteer



SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

FINDINGS

Based on the data available through the survey, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1

Residents of the Summer Hill / Lewisham community have average levels of loneliness and higher than average social connectedness, but tend to have weaker local community connections when compared to other areas across Australia.

This may be due to several factors, including the fact that the community is still in a period of transition following major change and new development as well as the fact that many residents are new to the area and still building local connections. Interestingly, the community seems to be more immune to overall Covid-19 related isolation compared to the rest of Australia (which may be linked to the intensive Little BIG initiatives offered at this time), however this hasn't always led to greater local ties. In some cases, it strengthened local bonds as people jumped in to help out affected neighbours, but it also reduced opportunities to meet new people in the neighbourhood.

2

While residents may not have deep connections with their neighbours, they do tend to reflect positive feelings about the community and perceive a general level of goodwill amongst their neighbours.

A strong majority of respondents feel they live in a kind and caring community and many listed examples of times when they'd been a recipient of an act of kindness in their community. These acts of kindness can have a contagious effect, producing increasing generosity and care across the community and creating a strong foundation for further community connections.

3

Residents value having local community spaces to interact and many feel strongly about the value that something like the Little BIG House can bring.

The vast majority of respondents agreed that having community spaces to interact was important to them and many left heartfelt comments about how much they appreciate having the Little BIG House in their community. Some have already felt the impact of the space, describing new friendships they've made through interactions at the Little BIG House.

4

The mix of activities offered by the Little BIG House seems to contribute to its overall impact.

While the larger scale events such as markets and food truck nights had greater numbers of participants, the majority of new friendships described in the survey were formed at smaller, more intimate events, especially those that took place on a recurring basis. The mix of activity types and formats may have a complementary effect – with the larger scale events helping to raise awareness of the Little BIG House and encouraging people to attend the smaller events where they might form deeper connections with their neighbours. This is worth considering for future iterations of the Little BIG House, should the concept expand to other communities.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

The research raises the following implications for the Little BIG House's continued role in the Summer Hill / Lewisham community:

1

The research supports the overall mission of the Little BIG House

The research shows that there is a clear role for the Little BIG House to play in building local community connections including providing opportunities for both new and old residents to get to know their neighbours and build meaningful relationships. The results suggest that the impact of the Little BIG House is already being felt for many residents, but there is scope for further impact to reduce the currently low levels of community connectedness.

2

The research raises a range of ideas for new activities and offerings for Little BIG to consider

Survey respondents provided a range of suggestions for the types of activities they'd like to see at the Little BIG House in the future. Many of these are already on offer, but residents may be unaware of the activities available or would benefit from alternate scheduling.

The research also suggests that having a mix of activity types is important and should be considered as part of any future iterations of the Little BIG House in other communities.

3

Awareness of the Little BIG House is a key priority

Awareness of the Little BIG House is a potential barrier to participation, with many survey respondents expressing that they would like to take part in more local activities, but don't know how. Going forward, marketing and promotion should be a key focus for the Little BIG Foundation to ensure as many community members as possible can take advantage of the space and programs provided.

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- 14 Australian Loneliness Report 2018 prepared by the Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University (see <https://psychweek.org.au/2018-archive/loneliness-study/>)
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- 27 This question was developed specifically for this survey, hence there is no national comparison.
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LITTLE MOMENTS, BIG SMILES

littlebigfoundation.org