



# SOCIAL CONNECTION REPORT 2023

**Second annual survey of social connectedness in  
and around the Summer Hill Little BIG House**



SVA and Little BIG acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present and future traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work. We also accept the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart to walk together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

## 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.

This report was prepared by SVA for the use and benefit of our client only and for the purpose for which it was provided. SVA does not accept any liability if this report is used for an alternate purpose from which it was intended, nor to any third party in respect of this report.

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# Foreword

## From the Little BIG Foundation

In the last year, we have seen disclosure of loneliness increase across the country, particularly in the middle-life<sup>1</sup> cohort who we initially thought were better protected from social disconnection. There is no denying that everyone experiences loneliness. It's as common as feeling hungry or thirsty. Feeling lonely is a natural response to a lack of social connection, just like hunger is a response to a lack of food. It comes and goes at different times and is not a problem unless left unaddressed.

Last year, we learned that people in our community lacked social connections and demonstrated a strong desire to know their neighbours. Knowing this, community hosts and volunteers have ensured that ample opportunities for connection have been made available. In response to the identified need for greater social needs, Little BIG provided enhanced opportunities for connection in the community through our volunteer network and partners. They have delivered 48 different programs and almost 2000 individual events. This has led to improved social participation, a society where kindness is experienced frequently, and reduced loneliness compared to national averages and last year's results.

We take on the reported positive progress of the last 12 months as an encouraging step, however, we need to continue to evolve and develop to meet the needs of our community.

Thank you to Social Ventures Australia (SVA) for this report. You bring a level of rigour that keeps us on track. Thank you to the Flour Mill community, the Precinct Committee and Building Management, who graciously allowed us to use the park and plaza for our larger events and as you will read, these events are some of our most popular. To our tiny team – Maggie, Faith (and the much-missed Susannah), I know this is much more than a job for you all. Finally, thank you to our funding partner, EG, and our Board, George, Holly and Adam, without whom none would be possible.

Ultimately, this year's success is credited to our exceptional group of volunteers and community hosts. Look what you have achieved in one short year.

Wow, just, wow!



**Sarah Mathews**  
CEO  
Little BIG Foundation

## From Social Ventures Australia

It was wonderful to have the opportunity to revisit the Little BIG House 12 months after our initial baseline research, and observe the changes that have happened in this community.

At SVA, we recognise that data can be incredibly valuable to help organisations understand the communities in which they work, and to identify ways to continually iterate and improve their impact. We've been delighted to be able to be a part of this process with Little BIG, and to witness the power that the data has had for Little BIG's ongoing growth and maturation as a community organisation.

Rarely do we see such a dramatic increase in results in such a short time period, like we've seen in the Little BIG House community in the last 12 months. This is a major testament to the dedication of the team and a strong indication that the model is working. The local community appears to be a warmer, better connected community than it was before – and Little BIG appears to have played a significant role in facilitating this for many people.

Little BIG is now faced with an exciting, but challenging, set of questions about 'where to next?'. Over the coming years, there will be ongoing opportunities to increase Little BIG's reach and to adapt to changing needs in the local community. With its deep community connections and strong network of volunteers, Little BIG is well placed to innovate and identify local solutions.

A bigger challenge will be replicating Little BIG's impact in additional communities – something that Little BIG has aspired to do since its inception. Replication is no easy feat, especially for small community based organisations, but to see the types of outcomes observed in this study replicated across additional communities would be an incredible achievement. We look forward to seeing Little BIG trial programs in new locations to understand what works in communities with different dynamics, and what other community organisations can learn from Little BIG's experiences.

To all those who've participated in this research, thank you for sharing your reflections and feedback, and for entrusting me with your stories. I hope that you'll find value in this report and the lessons that it contains.

To the Little BIG team, hosts and volunteers, congratulations on the achievements of the past 12 months and all of the hard work that has gone into them.

We can't wait to see what comes next!



**Hanna Cihal**  
Researcher and Manager  
Social Ventures Australia



# Introduction



This report contains the findings of the second annual community survey by the Little BIG Foundation (Little BIG) and undertaken by Social Ventures Australia (SVA). This survey is an important tool that the Little BIG House uses to understand change in our community, inform our approach to community programs and events and identify opportunities to increase impact. It also helps Little BIG to understand if its activities have been successful in helping to reduce loneliness and increase social connection in the community.

The report uses multiple social connection indicators to evaluate the impact of Little Big on community social connection and loneliness. The results of this report indicate enhanced social connection in the past 12 months in the Summer Hill community (of where you surveyed), and that the work of the Little Big house is making a positive contribution to enhancing social connection.

The report considers three groups of communities to compare the depth of impact. These are the hyperlocal community in the Flour Mill Development in which the Little BIG House resides, the local community of residents in walking distance to the Little BIG House (the suburbs of Summer Hill, Lewisham, and Dulwich Hill.) and finally, anyone who resides in the Inner West Local Government Area.

Additional information about the Little BIG House and the survey methodology are contained in Appendix A which can be found at the end of this report.

# A snapshot of findings

The following data refers to the changes in the local community between the 2022 and 2023 surveys.

## Reduced loneliness and improved social participation

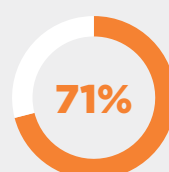
**7%** less loneliness is being experienced in the local community.

**17%** increase in the proportion of people who had social contact with someone outside the home.

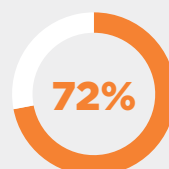
**7%** more likely to participate in community organisations (social, support or political).



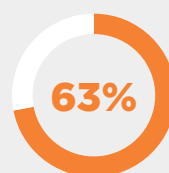
## Improved community sentiment



feel that they live in a kind and caring community (2% increase since 2022).



are recipients of acts of kindness on at least an occasional basis (16% increase since 2022).



are happy with their level of community interaction (28% increase since 2022).

## Deepening relationships

**18%** increase in the proportion of people who know many of their neighbours by name.



**59%** of people who felt they could count on a neighbour to bring groceries or essentials if they were sick.

## Increased rate of new connections

**73%** of people have met someone new at Little BIG House event (33% increase since 2022).

\*Excludes markets and food festivals.

**44%** of people agree that they interact with more people in the community after attending just one event at the Little BIG House.



## Volunteering leads to deeper connections



**88%**

of volunteers and hosts feel that volunteering has increased their sense of belonging in the community.



**83%**

of volunteers and hosts have formed new friendships through volunteering.

“

Regular volunteering has introduced me to so many people in the area that it feels like I belong.

**- Volunteer, 2023**





## National Comparison

The following data compares the local community response to national comparison sources. An improvement can be seen across all indicators of social connection. It also indicates that the Little BIG House is having a noteworthy impact on these results, by creating opportunities to meet community members, form new connections and strengthen bonds through repeat interaction.

Table 1 – Summary of survey results as compared to national data (arrows indicate trend since 2022)

Indicator	Hyperlocal community in 2023	Local community in 2023	National comparison
Proportion of people who report feeling lonely at least some of the time	20% ↓	29% ↓	32% (2023) <sup>1</sup>
Proportion of people who had social contact with someone outside once per week or more	89% ↑	81% ↑	46% (2022) <sup>2</sup>
Proportion of people who know many of their neighbours by name	65% ↑	66% ↑	62% (2021) <sup>3</sup>
Participation in community organisations			
Social groups	28% ↓	37% ↑	51% (2019) <sup>4</sup>
Community support groups	23% ↑	31% ↑	25% (2019) <sup>5</sup>
Civic / political groups	18% ↑	17% ↑	9% (2019) <sup>6</sup>
Proportion of people who felt they could count on a neighbour to bring groceries or essentials if they were sick (new question)	56%	59%	48% (2023) <sup>7</sup>

Sentiment about the community has increased as well. Notably, the proportion of local community members who report experiencing acts of kindness has significantly increased (from 56% to 72%). In addition, the majority (63%) of people in the local community now say they are happy with their level of community interaction, up from just 35% in 2022.

Table 2 – Summary of survey results on community perceptions (arrows indicate trend since 2022)

Hyperlocal community in 2023	Local community in 2023	Indicator
75% ↑	71% ↑	feel that they live in a kind and caring community
72% ↑	72% ↑	are recipients of acts of kindness on at least an occasional basis
63% ↑	63% ↑	are happy with their level of community interaction



# Part 1: Experiences of social connection across Australia

Australia has seen a decline in social contact over the past decades, with this trend severely worsened by the recent Covid-19 pandemic<sup>2</sup>. Unsurprisingly, reduced social contact is closely associated with loneliness. Loneliness has profound impacts on the body and mind. People experiencing loneliness often report feeling headaches, stomach problems and physical pain<sup>3</sup>. Loneliness can affect cognitive function, physical health and immune system function and can even lead to premature death. For these reasons, researchers often compare the risks of loneliness to well-known health risk factors such as obesity or smoking<sup>4</sup>.

The recent “State of the Nation Report: Social Connection in Australia 2023” found that almost one in three Australians feel lonely and one in six people (15%) feel lonely all or most of the time<sup>5</sup>. The highest levels of loneliness were found to be among young and middle aged people (at 22% and 18% respectively). The study found no significant differences in loneliness due to gender, with men (32%) and women (33%) reporting similar levels of loneliness in 2023<sup>6</sup>. Another study found a greater risk of loneliness in certain populations, including older people, single parents, parents with children under the age of 18, First Nations people, LGBTQIA+ Australians, migrants, single person households and lower socio-economic status people<sup>7</sup>.

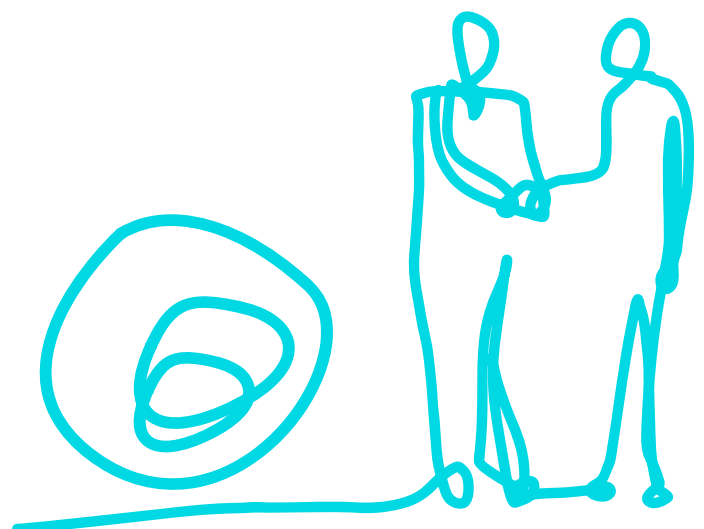
According to the “State of the Nation” report, the people Australians are least socially connected to are their neighbours. This has a significant impact on loneliness, with the lead researcher, Dr Michelle Lim, noting that *“where you feel like you can go to your neighbours for help, feeling that your neighbourhood is safe, and that you can rely on other people, those sorts of things are very much more associated with lower loneliness”*<sup>8</sup>. Several studies have found a link between a sense of neighbourhood belonging and reduced loneliness<sup>9</sup> and knowing more people in one’s neighbourhood is also associated with reduced loneliness<sup>10</sup>.

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 help. In 2021, over a third (38%) stated that they don’t know their neighbours by name<sup>12</sup>. In 2023, less than half of Australians (48%) reported that if they were sick they could count on their neighbours to shop for groceries<sup>13</sup>.

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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 help.<sup>11</sup>

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# WE ARE LESS LONELY!

Loneliness has decreased in the local community by 7 percent over the last year.

There now appears to be less loneliness occurring here than in the local community than in most parts of Australia.





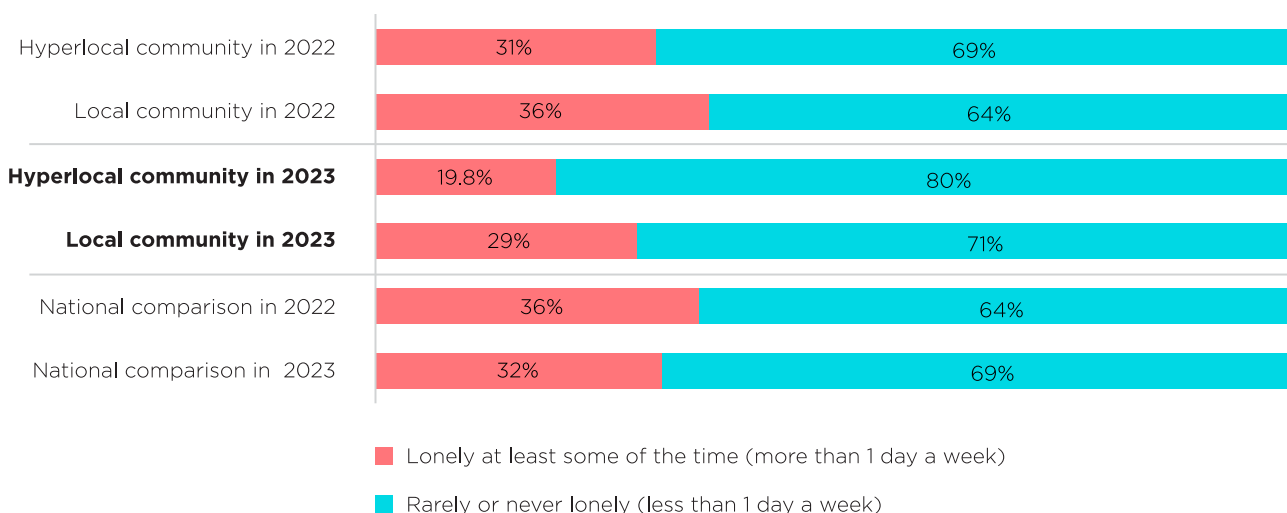
# Part 2: Experiences of social connection in the Little BIG House community

## Social contact and loneliness

Loneliness has decreased in the local community over the last year, according to the survey results. In the 2022 survey, 36% of residents reported feeling lonely at least some of the time. In 2023, this dropped to just 29%. This was lower again for the hyper-local community, in which only 20% of survey respondents reported feeling lonely at least some of the time.

There now appears to be less loneliness occurring here than in the local community than in most parts of Australia. A national poll undertaken in August 2022 showed that about 35.6% of Australians felt lonely at least some of the time<sup>14</sup>. In 2023, the “State of the Nation” report found that around 32% of Australians were lonely at least some of the time<sup>15</sup>.

Figure 1: How often do you feel lonely? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=180 for 2023, n=185 for 2022)

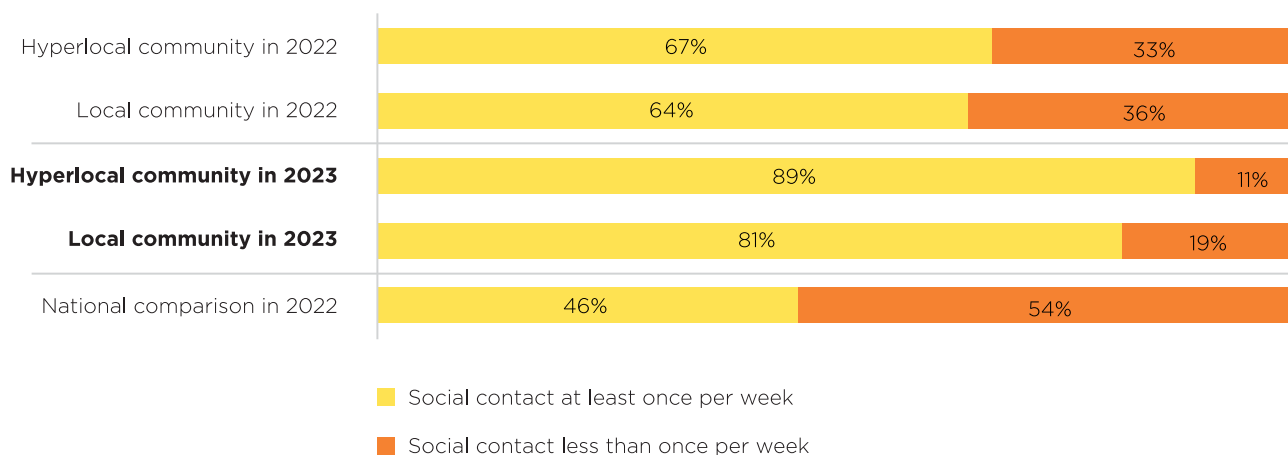


Compared to others across Australia, our local community has had more frequent contact with family and friends outside the home in the past year.

In 2022, around 64% of people in the local community reported having face to face contact with someone outside their home at least once per week. This figure increased to 81% in the 2023 survey results and was even higher at 89% for the hyperlocal community.

These results are well above the national result in 2022 (46%), which was the last year for which comparable data was collected, and even above pre-Covid-19 levels reported nationally (around 68% in 2019)<sup>16</sup>.

Figure 2: In the last three months, how often did you have face to face contact with family or friends who do not live with you? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=171 for 2023, n=185 for 2022)<sup>17</sup>

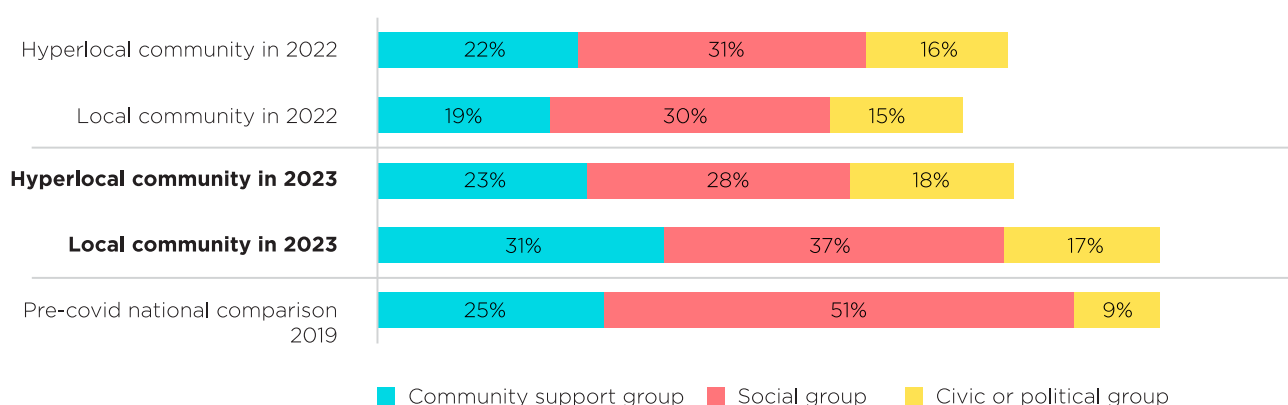


Participation in community organisations can have a protective effect against loneliness, although it is not a clear and simple link<sup>18</sup>. Where participation in such a group or event leads to a sense of community belonging, there is most likely to be a positive effect<sup>19</sup>.

In the local community, rates of participation in community support groups have increased among the local community according to the 2023 survey. Community group participation is now above national rates pre-covid-19 (for example, community support groups can include community volunteering, health or education related groups).

Rates of participation in social groups (for example, these include religious, cultural, sport or other groups who meet up regularly) is still below the national average but has increased since 2022. Interestingly, participation in social groups appears to have decreased for the hyperlocal community. Participation in civic or political groups is still above average for both the hyperlocal and local community.

Figure 3: Are you actively involved in a community support, social, civic or political group? (Select all that apply). (Excludes non-local respondents. n=178 for 2023, n=185 for 2022)<sup>20</sup>







## WE KNOW OUR NEIGHBOURS NAMES!

In 2023, there was an 18% increase in the percentage of respondents who report knowing the names of their neighbours in the local community, and a 25% increase in the hyperlocal community.





## Local community connections

The local community has had an uplift in neighbourly relationships since 2022. The 2022 survey showed that residents of the local community fared worse than the national average in terms of knowing their neighbours. However, in the 2023 survey, there is an 18% increase in the percentage of respondents who report knowing their neighbours name. This brings the result to 66% which is above the national average of 62%. In particular, residents of the hyperlocal community surrounding the Little BIG House seem to be getting to know their neighbours much better – in 2022 only 42% of these residents reported knowing their neighbours by name but in 2023 that figure was 67% (a 25% increase).

Open text responses, as well as interviews with Little BIG hosts supported the fact that local interaction is increasing and that the Little BIG House has played a role in this. For example, comments included:

“

I have noticed my answers about knowing neighbours has changed and that is due to Little BIG House.

“

I noticed when I'd done this survey that, as opposed to last year, how many more people I'm engaged with on a regular basis in the community.

“

There is definitely a change... from what I've seen there is definitely a community around the Little BIG House... people are a lot more comfortable in the environment and open to meeting other people.

“

There's something really nice about walking around Summer Hill and bumping into people I know as a result of being part of [the Little BIG House].

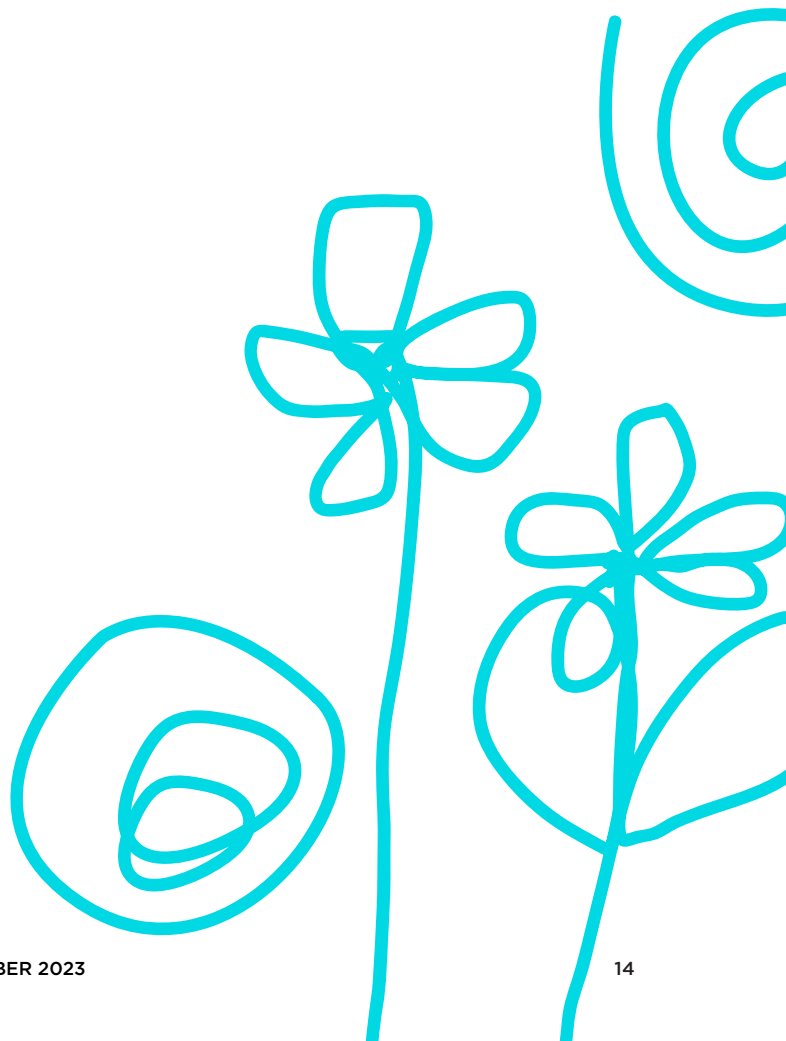


Figure 4: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "I know many of my neighbours by name"? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=162 for, n=189 for 2022)<sup>21</sup>

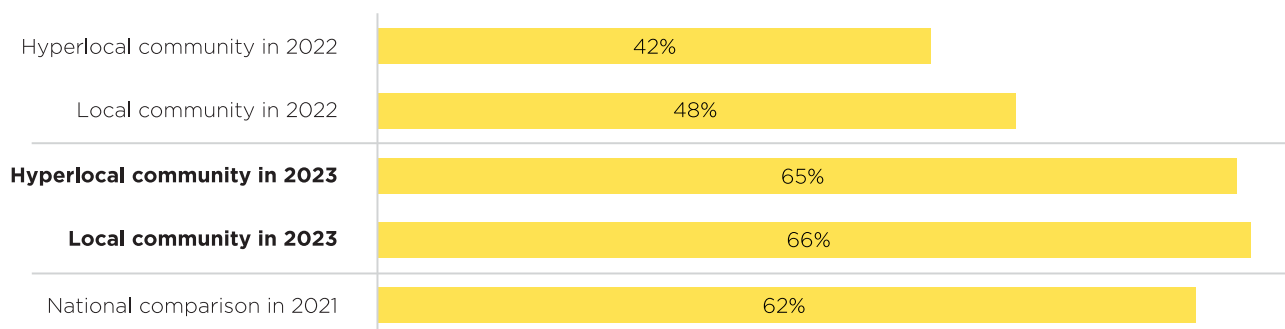
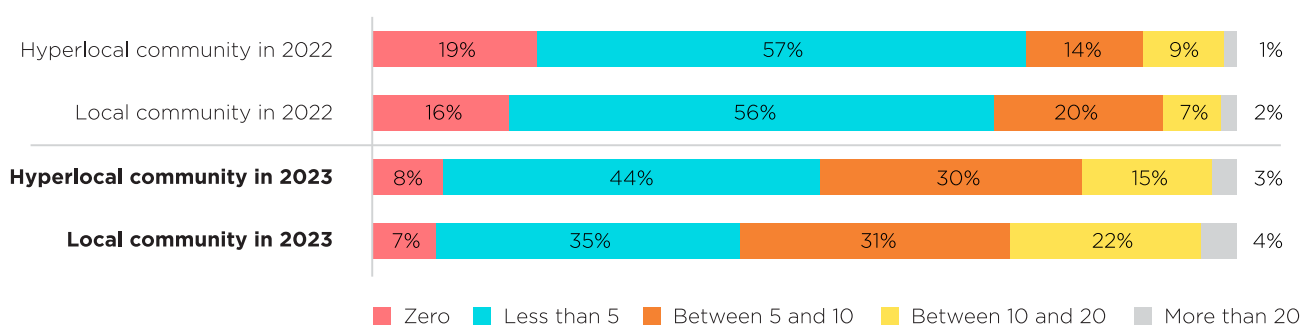
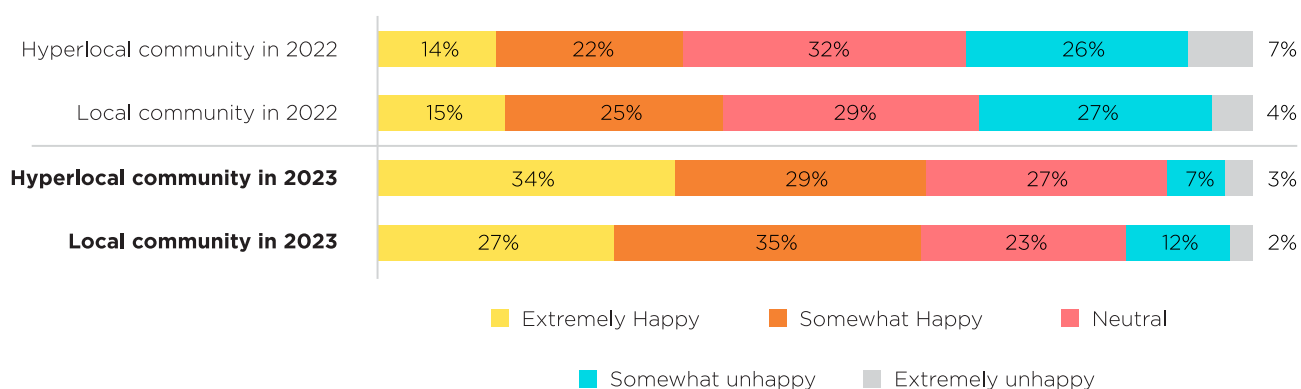


Figure 5: About how many people in the community do you interact with on a regular basis? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=176 for 2023, n=189 for 2022)<sup>22</sup>



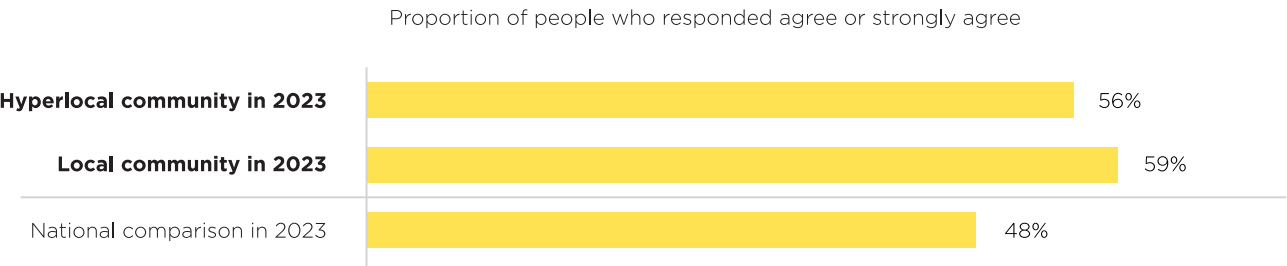
Residents appear to be happier with their level of interaction with other community members as compared to 2022. In total, around 62% of respondents reported that they were somewhat happy or extremely happy with their level of community interaction, compared to just 40% in 2022. There was an even greater increase for members of the hyperlocal community, jumping from just 36% of residents in 2022, to 63% of residents in 2023 who are happy with their level of community interactions.

Figure 6: Are you happy with the level of interaction you have with people in your community? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=176 for 2023, n=189 for 2022)<sup>23</sup>



In the 2023 survey, additional questions were added to the survey to test the depth of neighbourly connections. This included a question testing whether, “If I was sick, I could count on people in my community to bring me groceries or essentials”? The majority (59%) of respondents agreed, which suggests that local community residents have greater support from neighbours than they do in other parts of Australia. While this question was not asked in 2022, this outcome appears consistent with other results which show that local community residents are getting to know more neighbours.

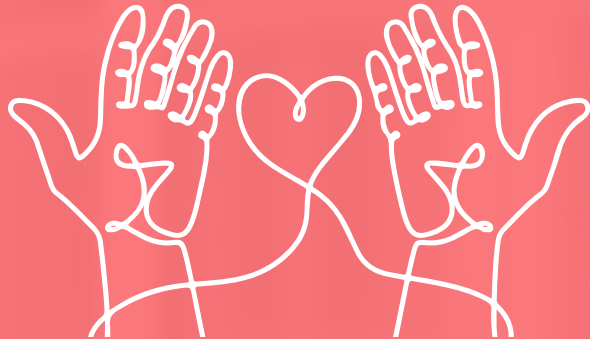
Figure 7: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “If I was sick, I could count on people in my community to bring me groceries or essentials”? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=184)<sup>24</sup>





# KINDNESS IS CONTAGIOUS

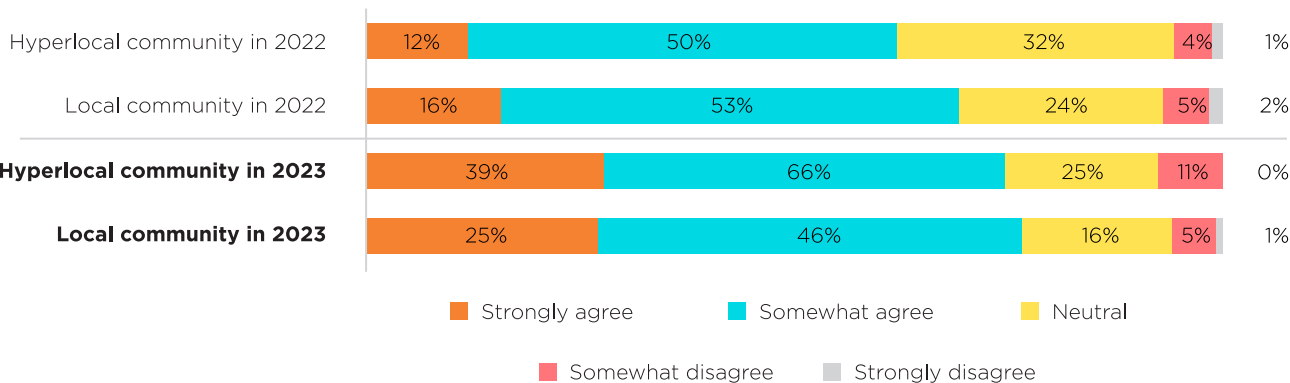
Almost three-quarters (72%) experience acts of kindness in their community on at least an occasional basis.



# Kindness in the community

In the 2023 survey, an increased proportion of respondents “strongly agreed” that they live in a kind and caring community (25% as compared to 16% in 2022). Furthermore, almost three-quarters (72%) experience acts of kindness in their community on at least an occasional basis, which is up from 56% in 2022.

Figure 8: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “I live in a kind and caring community”? (Excludes non-local respondents. n=184 for 2023, n=189 for 2022)



Witnessing an act of kindness can have a contagious effect, whereby the witness is more likely to exhibit generosity and kindness to someone else<sup>25</sup>. This phenomenon is important for community building and group collaboration against shared challenges. The fact that respondents are reporting increased experiences of acts of kindness is a positive indicator of a sense of community. Some examples described in the survey include:

“

There's an elderly lady in our building who sometimes forgets where her keys are and I have seen people helping her and being supportive. Makes me feel grateful to live in a kind community of people.

“

A neighbour recently loaned me a tin of silicon lubricant when he saw me struggling with a stuck window.

“

A neighbour bringing my bin in or dropping off some herbs or fruit from their garden.

“

My neighbour lent me a step ladder to fix my smoke alarm.

“

A member of my gym introduced me to Little Big House, which has greatly uplifted my life. The volunteers of Little Big House and the welcoming communities there, also represent a recent act of kindness I have received.

“

I put a call out on the local Summer Hill Facebook page asking for a puppy cage and someone gave one to me for free!

“

[I was] welcomed to the neighbourhood and invited over for drinks and cheese platter.

“

Say, when I have left my car lights on and both my husband and I receive texts to let us know.

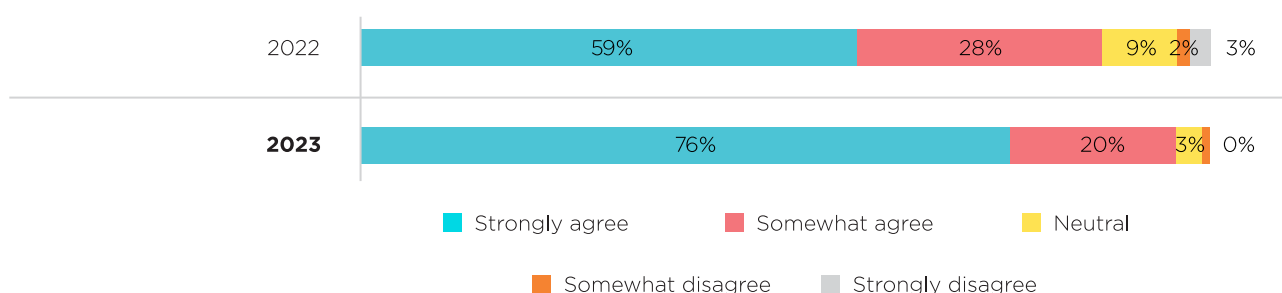
# Part 3: Role the Little BIG House can play in building social connection

The survey results show that residents continue to place a high value on physical community spaces like the Little BIG House. This was a strong theme from the 2022 survey and was even stronger in the 2023 survey. Many survey respondents and interviewees had very passionate replies about the value of the Little BIG House and have already felt its impact in their own lives and their relationship to their community.

## Importance of community spaces including the Little BIG House

Consistent with the 2022 survey, the vast majority (99%) of people who responded to the survey felt that it was important to have physical spaces available for community interaction.

Figure 9: To what extent would you agree with the following statement: “It is important to me to have physical spaces available for community interaction”? (All respondents. n=274 for 2023, n=193 for 2022)



A sizeable proportion of survey respondents felt very strongly about the value of the Little BIG House in their community. Around one in four respondents (24%) used the open text questions in the survey to express support for the concept.

Examples of supportive responses to the optional question, “Is there anything else you’d like to share about the Little BIG House or your local community?” included:

“

Having this space is an amazing asset to the community and provides a warm and inviting setting for people to make connections that wouldn’t normally have the chance to meet.

“

The Little BIG House is an example to the wider community of how a shared space should work. I applaud the Little BIG House on so many levels.

“

It is an amazing space led by passionate and wonderful staff and volunteers. If only every suburb had one!

“

More than anything, I appreciate the vibe that having a shared community space such as the Little BIG House sets for the wider connected community.



## Attendance and awareness of events

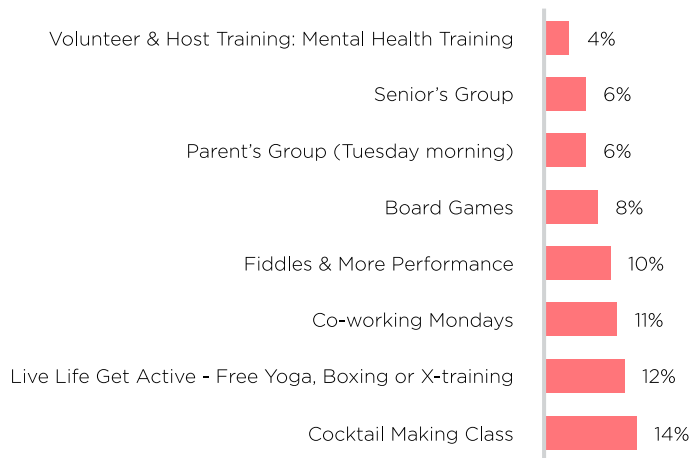
Eighty five percent of survey respondents had attended at least one event at the Little BIG House in the last twelve months, with a handful attending more than 20 separate programs or events. Local respondents were even more likely to have attended a Little BIG House event - about 91% of respondents from the local community had attended at least one. Respondents were more likely to have attended free events. 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 result is the same as 2022, and reflects the large crowds that these events draw.

Of those respondents who had attended a Little BIG House event, one in five (21.5%) had only attended a large event such as the Flour Mill Market or Food Truck Night, but the remainder had attended at least one smaller event or program.



Figure 10: In the last 12 months, did you attend or take part in any of the following FREE programs or events at the Little BIG House? (Top responses, excluding major festivals and markets) (n=274) Note: respondents were able to provide multiple answers to this question.

### Events in the Little BIG House



### Large Outdoor Events

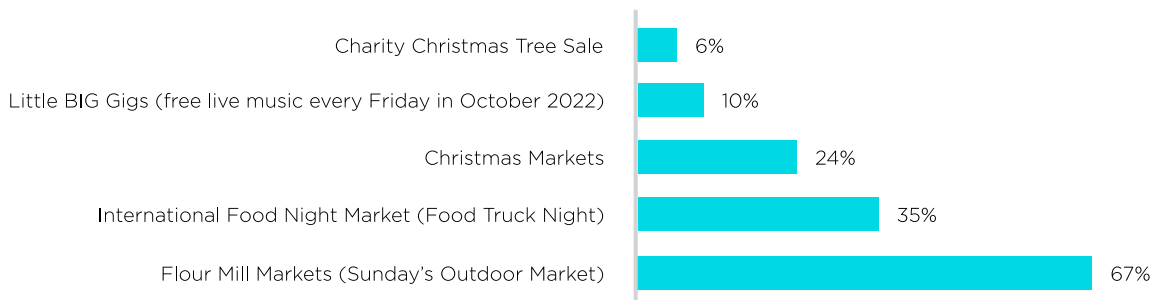
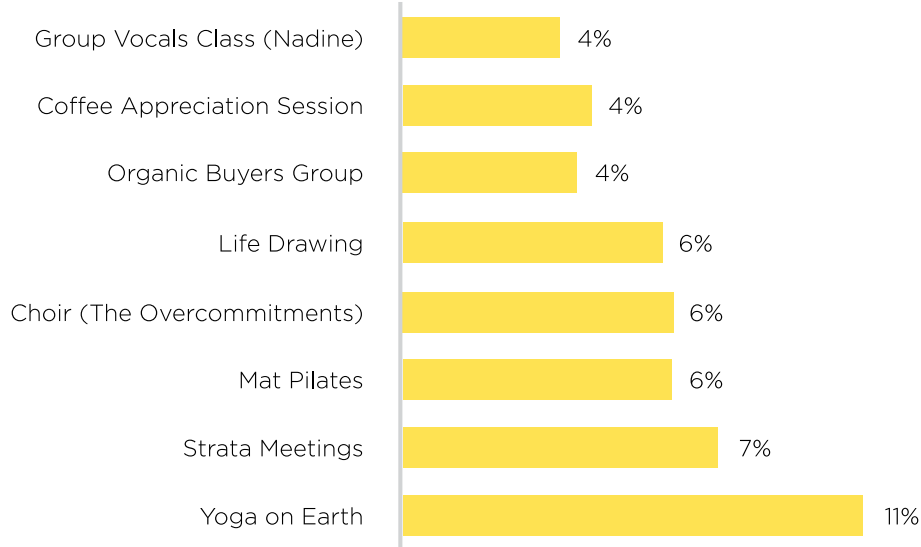


Figure 11: In the last 12 months, did you attend or take part in any of the following PAID or PRIVATE programs or events at the Little BIG House? (Top responses) (n=274)



Hosts noted that over the past year there has been an increase in the number and type of events, as well as increasing activity at the Little BIG House overall. They noted that this has a cumulative effect in attracting people to attend and return for future events.



I guess it's accelerated quite quickly. I didn't expect how fast it would go to scale. They went from a relatively unknown little house with a few events every day and sometimes booked out. Just so many events of all different types, which is great... And we've now seen more people attending more events. They're meeting people and their neighbours.



Just by sheer volume of the amount of events they run, they've catered to so many different types of people and so many different audiences, like they've got the parents group and the book club, and all these different ways to pay to connect with others.



## New friendships formed

73% of people reported that they had met someone new through a small group event at the Little BIG House.

Almost two thirds of respondents (62%) reported that they had met someone new through a Little BIG House event. This jumped to 73% for those who'd attend one or more of the smaller events or programs.

In an optional follow up question, several respondents shared how they have made new connections – either big or small.

“

Often chatting to people after yoga. I always make a point of being extra friendly and welcoming to new people. I haven't spent time with them outside of yoga, but will often see and chat to the same people every week.

“

[I met some people] through the event I attended. I interacted with them at this event and at drinks immediately after.

“

I met some neighbours from my floor at the “Make a Cocktail” event. And, yes, I have run into them since then.

“

Parents group has definitely created strong relationships with my neighbours and we regularly keep in contact outside of the sessions at the Little BIG House.

“

I've made lots of close friends through The G Spot, [Board Games Group] and yes we stay in contact.

“

Everyone is very friendly and there is a lovely sense of community there. I don't immediately become friends with every new person I meet at Little BIG House functions, but each time I meet them again, the friendship grows a little more. It's the feeling of being surrounded by friendly people that I love.



## How connections are formed

Since the time of the 2022 survey, Little BIG has made adjustments to its program schedule, to focus on recurring programs and event series, in which people have a chance to form and strengthen connections over time.

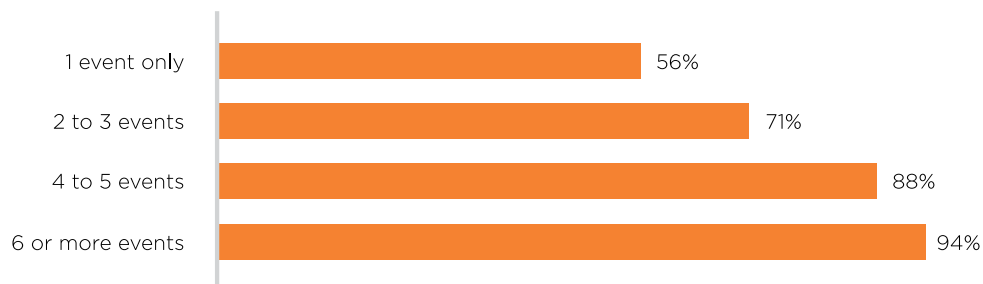
This focus on more frequent interaction is supported by the 2023 survey data, which shows that respondents who'd attended multiple events were more likely to have met someone new, and were more likely to agree with the survey question "After attending Little BIG House programs and events, I find myself interacting more frequently with my neighbours and/or community members".

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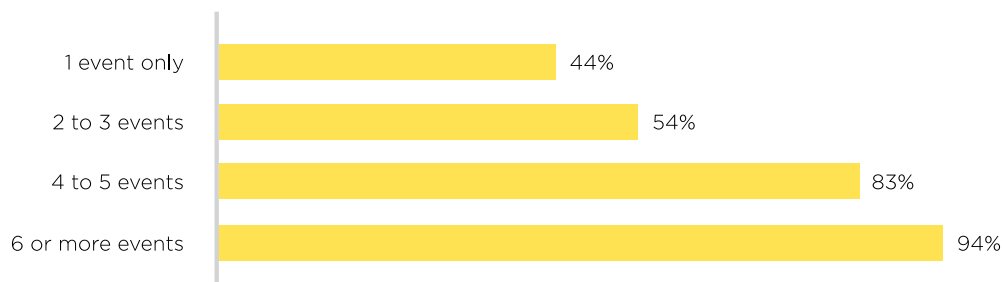
Respondents who had attended multiple events were more likely to have made a new connection.

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*Figure 12 - Proportion of people who met someone new at a Little BIG program event, based on total number of programs and events attended (Excludes respondents who only attended markets. n=183)*



*Figure 13 - Proportion of people who agreed with the statement "After attending Little BIG House programs and events, I find myself interacting more frequently with my neighbours and/or community members" (Excludes respondents who only attended markets. n=133)*





# Research Spotlight: Group membership and mental health

Being a member of a group can have a profound impact on mental health and wellbeing. Group memberships form an important part of our identity and enable experiences of belonging, self esteem, control and meaning. The more groups we're a part of, the more resilient we are to changes in life – for example, a career change, or a loss of a friend.

Because of their positive impacts on mental health, group membership has sometimes been called the 'social cure'.

When joining groups, people have different needs and desires – for example, some may prefer quieter spaces or need support with anxieties about participation. Some may want to be active group leaders or contributors, whereas others value the freedom to come and go.

While groups can often form organically, some people may need support to find (or form) groups that are a good fit, or to overcome barriers to joining. Evidence suggests that programs which support group membership aligned to social identity can have a dramatic effect, particularly if targeted to those who are already experiencing loneliness or depression. For example, one program called 'Group 4 Health' out of the University of Queensland saw significant decreases in depression, anxiety and stress among young people who took part in its program.

---

Research shows that to experience the 'social cure' benefits of group membership, it is helpful if the group has developed 'from the ground up' and if members have ownership of its activities – this can help to create a shared group identity. Having a shared group identity and sense of belonging is important to creating an impact.

---





The survey shows that there are an increasing number of people in the local community who report being part of a community, social or civic group (although, interestingly, a small dip in members of the hyperlocal community who are part of a social group). Strong group ties appear to be forming through the Little BIG House, especially among volunteers. One interview comment included:



It's almost like this micro community, the volunteers within the wider community... it's really nice to be part of it.



The fact that many programs are self-led by volunteers and hosts may also have a positive impact on group identity (as they are led 'from the ground up'). It also means that hosts and volunteers find additional meaning from the experience. For example, one comment from a host was:



I think [the focus on connection] has helped give my business a greater sense of purpose.

Hosts and volunteers seem to take an active role in encouraging participation and providing a variety of ways for people to take part, for example:



We have encouraged people to go to [Little BIG House] events and to start to build their own tribe...



Fostering group membership and identity is one way the Little BIG House can create lasting impact. To extend this even further, Little BIG House can help to raise awareness of the benefits of group membership and continue to identify ways to reduce barriers to group participation.

## Little BIG House's support for volunteers

Volunteers who responded to the survey and participated in interviews had substantial feedback about the reasons that they choose to volunteer at the Little BIG House. While some of the reasons that people chose to volunteer with the Little BIG House were circumstantial (e.g. location), the majority of comments related to other aspects of the Little BIG House space and supports provided to hosts and volunteers. Some common themes include:

### **The purpose of the Little BIG House resonates.**

Many volunteers and hosts share Little BIG House's ambition to increase social connection and reduce loneliness. They value the opportunity to work with an aligned organisation and they identify opportunities to enhance their own programs through collaboration with Little BIG.

“

The philosophy of the Foundation is genuine and the space at Summer Hill is warm, friendly and inviting.

**Survey respondent**

“

...this is a unique space and very special - I appreciate its ethos and the total openness of the space.

**Survey respondent**

### **It's free (or very low cost), which is unusual even for community venues.**

Volunteers noted that other community spaces, including those operated by councils, typically charge a usage fee. Even if these fees are low by commercial standards, they present a major barrier to local volunteers and hosts who must either cover costs themselves or else charge more for attendance (which may discourage attendance or be counter to the mission of the program). Little BIG House has a “free for free” policy, where hosts only make a donation to hire the venue if they're offering a program that is free for attendees. The fee structure for paid events with community benefit is very affordable offering a sliding scale based on the cost for the end participant and therefore encouraging lower costs events. These community event rates are 75% lower than Inner West Council venues.

“

A lot of venues in the inner West are very expensive... Even the community hall and the council rooms for hire, it's still a business, still commercial, even though they're publicly owned. It prohibits people from running events, coming to events and therefore forming new connections... it closes so many doors to so many people... That's why I think the Little BIG House is doing wonderful things, and that it is really necessary to be replicated.

**Survey respondent**

“

I probably wouldn't be hosting the board games night if it wasn't for the Little BIG House. I tried the Council but they wanted to charge me.... Little BIG House makes it easy to host there.

**Survey respondent**

### It is a warm and inviting space.

The physical space offered by the Little BIG House is a major appeal for some programs. Hosts have noted that it feels comfortable – like a living room. This can make participants feel more at ease and able to connect. Some suggested that the non-fluorescent lighting is helpful for people who are neurodiverse as well as people who may be triggered by institutional-feeling settings.

“

The Little BIG House is a versatile, clean and well maintained space that is offered to residents and the local community. It is particularly lovely attending activities inside the Little BIG House which help bring Flour Mill residents together.

“

It's local. It's a beautiful space. It provides a wonderful safe space for those who are lonely or wanting more connection to the community.

“

It is also a beautiful space, not simply a bland hall or meeting room. It's a stimulating and welcoming environment.

“

The way the Little BIG House is set up is perfect for everyone. There are different types of cosy corners and things which can be helpful for people from neurodiverse backgrounds.





### Easy to get started.

Volunteers noted that the team make it easy to run programs at the Little BIG House. There is less administrative burden to get started or to run events, and fewer disruptions than with other venues (e.g. public venues which are electoral sites or otherwise needed for public events). The access to consistent meeting timeslots is important for drop in events in particular, where hosts may not be able to contact participants about schedule changes.

“

They are just so giving and thoughtful. It seems to run seamlessly and that is great as just have to rock up.

“

We could host our organic buyers group at another community venue but I really like how the LBH has supported our group by making it really easy to start using the space and the help they have provided in promoting our group through social media/their webpage etc. LBH staff are wonderful, friendly and supportive. Not too much red tape to fast track access to affordable organic food and other like minded folk in the community.

“

It's well run and fits perfectly with the needs of the community.

“

[I volunteer] because it's on my doorstep and Sarah and Maggie make it easy.



### Support, training and collaboration.

There is regular encouragement and support from the Little BIG House team, including support to collaborate with other volunteers and hosts. Volunteers spoke about their relationships with the Little BIG House team and the friendly support they offer. Hosts also valued the regular training opportunities provided by the team – some called out their value in terms of skills development, but hosts tended to see even more value in the opportunities they generated to meet other hosts, form connections and generate ideas about future events or potential collaborations.

“

The staff are particularly amazing and I am in deep gratitude for everything everyone involved in LBH does to make it what it is.

“

The volunteering here is supportive and relaxed whereas some other NFP feel a bit pushy.

“

The training sessions are wonderful. They're an opportunity for volunteers to network and link up and meet each other. The mental health training is invaluable – especially about combatting loneliness...



# Part 4: Volunteering and social connection

Volunteers are found to report a stronger sense of community, suggesting a reciprocal link between participation in volunteering and community connectedness<sup>27</sup>.

While the events and programs run through the Little BIG House appear to be having an impact for participants, they potentially have an even deeper impact for the volunteers and hosts that run them.

Research shows that volunteering creates benefits for volunteers including social, human and psychological capital including personal rewards such as personal enrichment, self-expression, self-image and self-gratification, as well as social rewards like social attraction and group accomplishment<sup>26</sup>.

Volunteering also provides volunteers with social interaction, a sense of purpose and creates meaningful social roles and opportunities for social connection<sup>28</sup>. Volunteers meeting with and offering support to other people leads to a positive emotional state and replaces stressful emotions, such as anger or loneliness<sup>29</sup>. This is supported by the finding that people that stopped volunteering during Covid-19 were 'more likely to say they felt lonely at least some of the time' than those that continued to volunteer<sup>30</sup>.

This year's survey featured additional questions for volunteers with the Little BIG House, to understand the impact of volunteering for them. In addition, six interviews were conducted with volunteers, to gain further feedback and insight. The findings are detailed in the sections below.

## Impact of volunteering

A total of 41 volunteers completed the survey and indicated they were a volunteer or event host at the Little BIG House. The nature of volunteering varies. Some volunteers host their own events (either paid or free) and some volunteer for events hosted by the Little BIG House or other community hosts, either on a regular or ad-hoc basis. The chart below shows a breakdown of types of volunteers who responded to the survey. Respondents who selected "other" noted they were past volunteers, have run a private or one-off event or support another host.

Figure 14: Which of the following best describes how you volunteer / host? (n=41). Note: The following graph reports whole number rather than percentage due to the small sample size.

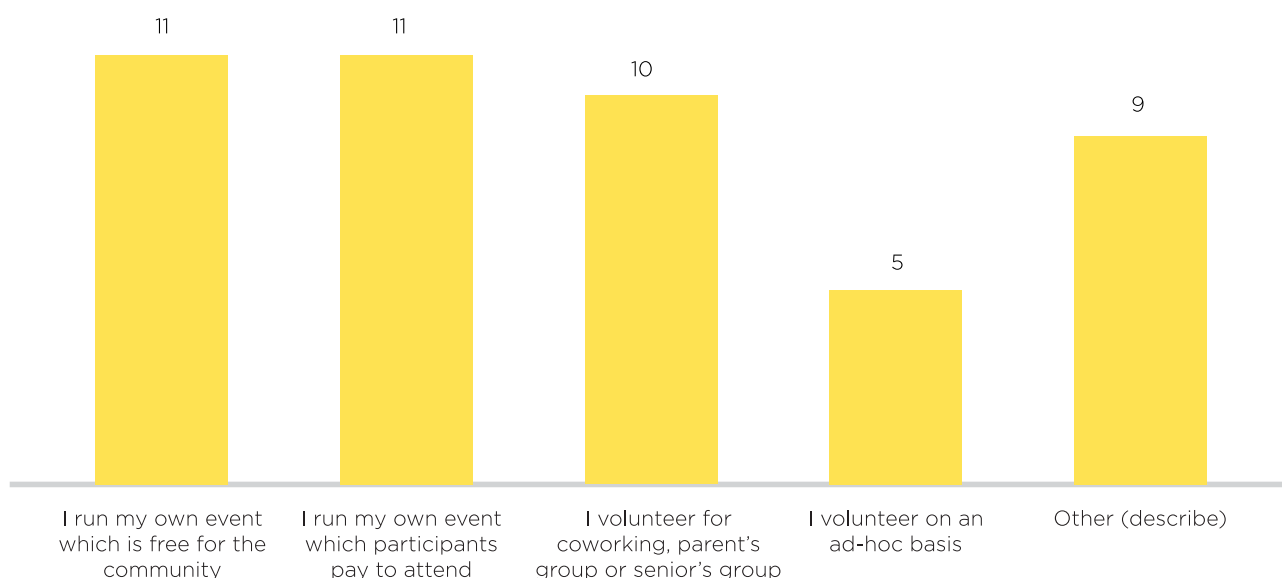
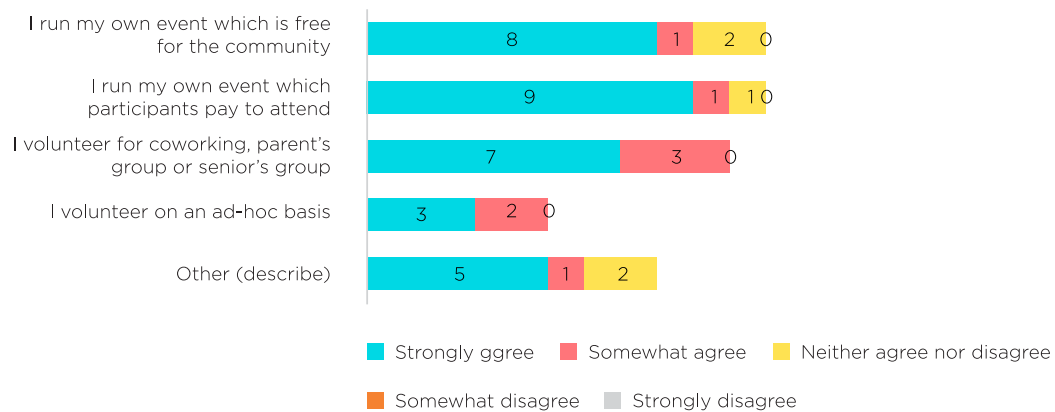




Figure 15: To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Volunteering has increased my sense of belonging in my community"? (n=41)



In open text comments, volunteers elaborated on the impact that volunteering has had in their life – some comments included:



Definitely gives me great sense of pride and gratification to help ensure a service which was so important to me in the early days if being a new parent, continues to be provided to the community.



I am new to Australia. Volunteering helps me get feeling of belonging.

Most volunteers (78%) also stated that they had made new friends through volunteering – this was especially the case for those who host their own events. The chart below shows the extent to which different types of volunteers report building friendships. Open text comments suggested this is a key benefit of volunteering, for many people:



Volunteering fills the inner cup but regular volunteering has introduced me to so many people in the area that it feels like I belong.



Huge impact in terms of feeling part, making friends, feeling I am doing something useful.

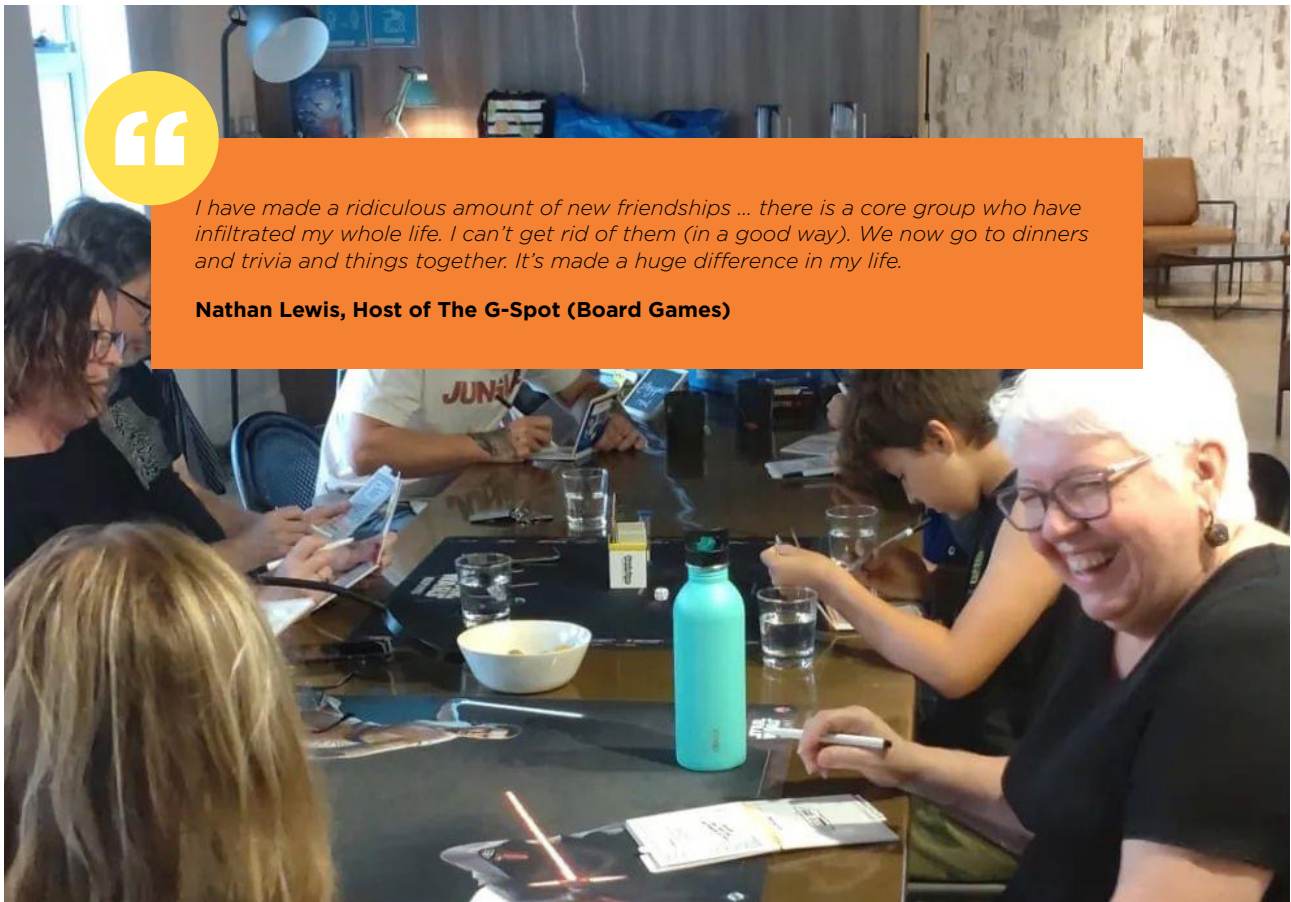
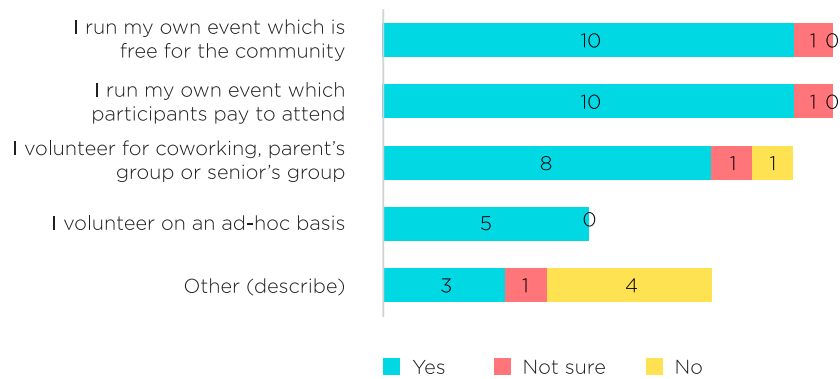


Figure 16: Have you made any new friends through volunteering? (n=41)



# Opportunities to Increase connection

While the survey results show very positive indications of the Little BIG House's impact, there are potentially opportunities to increase its reach and impact for a broader audience. Some points for consideration are:

1

## **Identifying who might be missing out.**

Given the survey sample was heavily skewed towards female respondents, there may be gaps in understanding the experiences of men and gender diverse people in the Little BIG House community. Little BIG may need to monitor the take-up of its events and programs to understand whether there are opportunities to better engage and support men and people of all genders, as well as any other population groups who may be missing out.

3

## **Encouraging people who are reluctant to attend events alone.**

Some of the respondents noted that there may be people who are anxious about attending a program or event alone, because of fears that it will be awkward or that everyone else will be attending with friends. There may be opportunities for Little BIG to encourage solo attendees, for example through its marketing and communication about events. For example, one survey respondent suggested, "It's a great space and initiative but can be daunting for people to meet other people so would be great to have a 'strangers meet and greet' maybe" and another, "I often don't feel I know enough about what to expect from the information I can find online about the events at Little BIG house and am too shy to turn up without knowing more about what the event will actually include."

2

## **Continuing to tailor events schedule to match community interests and availability.**

The survey asked respondents to name the types of activities they are interested in seeing at the Little BIG House. About three-quarters of respondents described types of activities that the Little BIG House is already running, with a large portion calling out food, music and health related activities. About 10% of respondents also called out an interest in child-friendly activities and other ideas included supporting political causes, running tv or film related events and running a men's shed (or similar). While it appears that the current mix of activities is well received, there may be ongoing opportunities to further refine the program schedule. Several respondents commented that they'd love to attend more events if they were on at times that suit them. For example, one survey respondent commented "Would love more opportunities to come to an event with children... absolutely loved the night market... Have found a lot of events have been during weekdays which I can't attend." The following table below shows the times that people were most interested in attending events.

4

## **Increase frequency of attendance.**

Individuals who attended multiple events were more likely to have met someone new and also find themselves interacting with neighbours and/or community members on a regular basis. There was a jump of 19% between 0-5 and 6+ groups participated in at the Little BIG House. This shows an opportunity to encourage greater repeat attendance and the joining of multiple groups to build deeper connection for individuals. This could be achieved through greater cross-collaboration between hosts and volunteers, incentive/discount programs for frequent users and/or other means.

5

### Continuing to raise awareness.

As with the 2022 survey, some 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 know there were community activities and would love to start getting involved.

“

[I would be interested in] all of the above – I had no idea how many you ran.

“

There were some great things in the survey that I didn't know LBH did .... I think a lot of people in the community might not know about all the great stuff they have on.

There may be opportunities to further increase awareness of the Little BIG House to broaden its reach and impact. This will likely be a continual need, given the ongoing change and movement in the area.

6

### Understanding the types of connection people want.

The survey results demonstrate that people value the Little BIG House within the community, but they also suggest that different groups of people get very different things out of it. Some have formed lasting friendships, and some have made more surface-level connections – both experiences can be valuable, and can serve different needs. There is an opportunity for the Little BIG House to further explore how it creates space for both breadth and depth of impact within the community, and really aligns to what the community wants from the Little BIG House. It would be valuable to uncover the balance between promoting the loose-ties (familiarity in the community) to the deeper friendship forming. In future iterations of the community survey it may be worthwhile asking specific questions about the outcomes that are most important to residents.

7

### Supporting people with barriers to participating.

Multiple respondents pointed out how Little BIG has a diverse range of events that appeal to many audiences, including people who are neurodiverse and people who struggle with mental health. However, there were a few survey comments which suggested that programs and events could be more inclusive and accessible – including ensuring access for people with physical disabilities. For example, one survey respondent noted that “some events are held on the second floor so I can't go because of steps!”

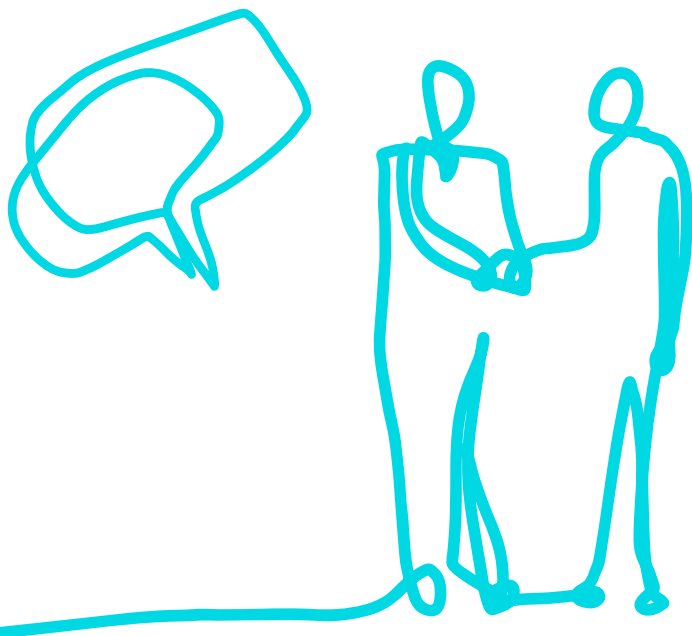




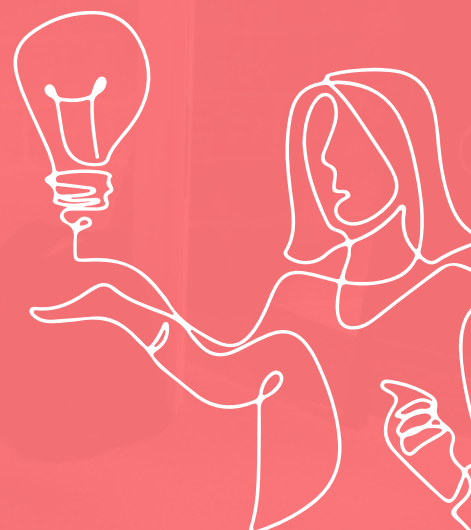
Figure 17 - When would you be most likely to attend a community activity? (Local Community only. n=171. Respondents can select multiple answers.)

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
Very early (6am - 8am)	16%	15%	15%	14%	13%	9%	9%
Early morning (8am - 9am)	8%	5%	7%	6%	7%	20%	20%
Mid morning (9am - noon)	18%	15%	15%	15%	16%	42%	46%
During lunch (noon - 2pm)	14%	11%	11%	11%	11%	34%	34%
Afternoon (2pm - 5pm)	13%	14%	13%	14%	15%	15%	44%
Early evening (5pm - 7pm)	38%	33%	31%	30%	30%	36%	31%
Later in the evening (7pm - 9pm)	29%	26%	27%	27%	30%	27%	20%



## VOLUNTEERING LEADS TO GREATER CONNECTION

The vast majority (88%) of volunteers who participated in the survey strongly agreed that volunteering has increased their sense of community.







*[I remember] after the first class I ran, I had to head back to the Little BIG House because I forgot to turn off the aircon. As I walked back out, I saw a group of people who seemed like they'd been best friends for a long time. And then I realised – Oh my god – these are my students! They only just met around two hours ago, they're already out and totally vibing. That's the magic that can happen! Trust and connection does not have to take long to build, you provide the right environment.*

**Susan Zheng, host of The Improv Life Lessons Series: Improv for Introverts**



# Conclusions

## 1

### **The Little BIG House appears to be achieving its ambition to increase community connection.**

The research suggests a notable change in the local community, with observable improvements in almost every indicator of social connection tested through the survey. While some of these changes, including levels of social contact, may be influenced by broader societal factors, there is strong evidence that the Little BIG House is also an important contributor. In particular, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of survey respondents saying they'd met someone new through the Little BIG House, for which there is clear and obvious attribution.

There are, and will always be, opportunities to continually refine the Little BIG House model to increase its reach and impact in the community. In particular, there were still a number of survey respondents who said that they were interested but unaware of Little BIG House events, or were unsure how to take part, showing there is still scope to reach additional parts of the community. As a community organisation, it will always be important for Little BIG to remain responsive and adaptive to local community dynamics.

However, the current research marks an important point in the Little BIG House journey, as it supports the overall effectiveness of the Little BIG House model and the benefit of continued development and expansion of the Little BIG approach.

## 2

### **The survey and interviews demonstrate that the Little BIG House can have a deep impact for hosts, volunteers and regular participants.**

The research supports the Little BIG's increased focus on supporting volunteers and fostering connection through social group formation. Volunteers and hosts are gaining substantial benefit and satisfaction from their involvement with the Little BIG House, and for some this is life changing. They also observe that the Little BIG House has become an active community gathering space, with people returning for multiple events, increasing opportunities to create and strengthen social connections.

Volunteers and hosts had overwhelmingly positive feedback about their interactions with the Little BIG House, including the ease of operations, the low or no cost access to the space, their alignment to the vision and mission and the support provided by the Little BIG team. For many, this was crucial to their decision or ability to host or volunteer – suggesting that continued investment in these supports is important to see the impact continue.

## 3

### **The Little BIG House is a highly valued community asset.**

Community members really value having the Little BIG House in their community. They see it as something to be proud of, and something that they feel lucky to have nearby. Many recognise that this is an unusual community asset, which is differentiated from other community halls or public spaces, both by the quality of the environment and the energy around it.

The research supports the idea that people want facilities like the Little BIG House and would take advantage of them if they had them, and if they were operated in an engaging and accessible way.



# 4

**With this increased confidence in the Little BIG House model, it is time to consider ‘what next’.**

The Little BIG House was created as a prototype, and the Little BIG Foundation intends to replicate the Little BIG House model in additional communities in order to scale its impact. (It has already expanded to serve additional office communities.)

The findings of this research present an exciting opportunity for Little BIG, as they support the success of the current prototype and progression into the next phase of the journey. From here, Little BIG is faced with important questions about the best approach to replicate and scale.

Replication is not always easy for small community-based organisations, who are often successful because of their strong community ties and ability to innovate and adapt relatively nimbly to respond to community needs. To support effective replication, it will be important for Little BIG to really understand the core elements of its model that contribute to impact and can be replicated across different sites (which will necessarily require pilots in other communities with different dynamics) and to develop a clear strategy for how it will scale, including opportunities to partner and share ‘what works’.

It is clear that the current Little BIG team is key to its impact - numerous respondents called out the members of the Little BIG team by name, and reflected on how the support they provide has been a major factor in their decision to host or volunteer. While this is a major achievement for the team, it also represents a challenge for Little BIG if it wishes to expand. As it scales, Little BIG will need to find a balance between the tailored and personal service it is able to offer to hosts and volunteers today, and the efficiencies that it may need to achieve to operate multiple sites and services. It will be important that Little BIG stays attuned to elements that make it unique and enable its impact, and adopt processes that support this to continue. As Little BIG grows, considerations about funding and financial sustainability should also be carefully balanced with the considerations about the impacts for the people Little BIG aims to serve – for example, noting how much hosts value having a free space for events.

# Appendix: Background information and methodology

## About the Little BIG Foundation

Little BIG Foundation was set up to tackle loneliness in Australia by developing places, programs and events for social connection. With a vision for happier, healthier, and kinder communities across Australia, the Little BIG Foundation operates the Little BIG House, located at 16 Flour Mill Way in Summer Hill NSW. This is a hub which is home to the volunteer and hosting program, it can be used by volunteers to run community events, by the wider community to host private events and provides a casual space for neighbours to get to know each other.

The Little BIG House first opened in 2021, during a time in which the community was experiencing regular lockdowns and restricted movement as a result of Covid-19. The organisation was able to adapt to the circumstances and run a range of Covid-safe events throughout its first year, and since then has continually expand the range and volume of events hosted on site.

In 2022, the Summer Hill Little BIG House opened to the public unrestricted and its team of 48 volunteers and hosts delivered 69 different community programs and held over 1,500 individual events at its site. The insights delivered by the 2022 iteration of this report informed Little BIG's approach in 2023. In the last 12 months, the focus has been to focus on consolidation of the most effective programs and increasing the smaller, more intimate events. In the 10-months pre-dating this report, Little BIG's 47 hosts volunteers and hosts delivered 48 different programs ran and has expanded to 1,603 individual events<sup>31</sup>.

The Little BIG House is in Sydney's inner west Local Government Area on the border of Summer Hill, Lewisham, and Dulwich Hill. The community features strong transport connections (with light rail and heavy rail stations, numerous buses and good walking and cycling connections). The community features a relatively high proportion of young adults, with the most common age demographic being 25 to 39 year olds<sup>32</sup>. There are proportionally slightly fewer children and young people under 20 years old, or adults over 55 years old, as compared to other parts of NSW<sup>33</sup>. The area has seen an increase in apartment dwelling in recent years, with multiple new residential and mixed-use developments, including the Flour Mill Development in which the Little BIG House is located. Apartment dwellings now exceed freestanding dwellings in the area (about 62% of dwellings are apartments)<sup>34</sup>.

Drawing on the lessons learnt from the first Little BIG House in Summer Hill, Little BIG Foundation has expanded to support connection in office workplace communities in Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane and Perth. The program known as 'Good Work', engages landlords, asset owners and investors in a strategy to develop stronger communities within their buildings and reduce the loneliness of employees in the building. This research will continue to inform the Foundation's work into the future at both the Summer Hill site, in the office workplace communities and future locations.

## About this report

This report details the findings of the second annual community survey commissioned by the Little BIG Foundation (Little BIG) and undertaken by Social Ventures Australia (SVA). This community survey has four areas of focus:

- 1 To measure and compare changes in social connection in the Little BIG House community over time.
- 2 To inform the role Little BIG House can play in meeting local community needs, including informing local programming and community events.
- 3 To identify opportunities to increase the impact for community members over time.
- 4 To understand the value of the volunteer program and the experience of volunteers.

The survey results are supplemented by desktop research, Little BIG event attendance data and observations from interviews with Little BIG volunteers.

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.

## Definitions

The following terms are used throughout the report to describe the communities who access the Little BIG House. Survey results are filtered in several places in this report based on questions about where the respondent lives.

**Hyperlocal Community** – This refers to the area immediately surrounding the Little BIG House, which is the Flour Mill development.

**Local Community** – This refers to the areas within a short walking distance of the Little BIG House and includes the suburbs of Summer Hill, Lewisham & Dulwich Hill.

**Inner West Community** – This refers to the broader Inner West region of Sydney, which is broadly defined as the area to the west of the Sydney CBD and before the A3 motorway, although definitions vary.

## Survey methodology

### Survey instrument

In 2022, the baseline 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 2023 survey featured many of the same questions from the baseline survey. Additional questions were also added to understand the impact Little BIG has for volunteers and hosts.

The survey was distributed and promoted 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 Flour Mills residents' distribution lists and Little BIG House distribution lists, flyers dropped in letterboxes, posters located around the Flour Mill development and within the Little BIG House, communications via posts on Little BIG social media sites, and communications via local messaging 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 24 August to 22 September 2023. This is roughly similar time of year to the 2022 survey which ran from late July to late August.

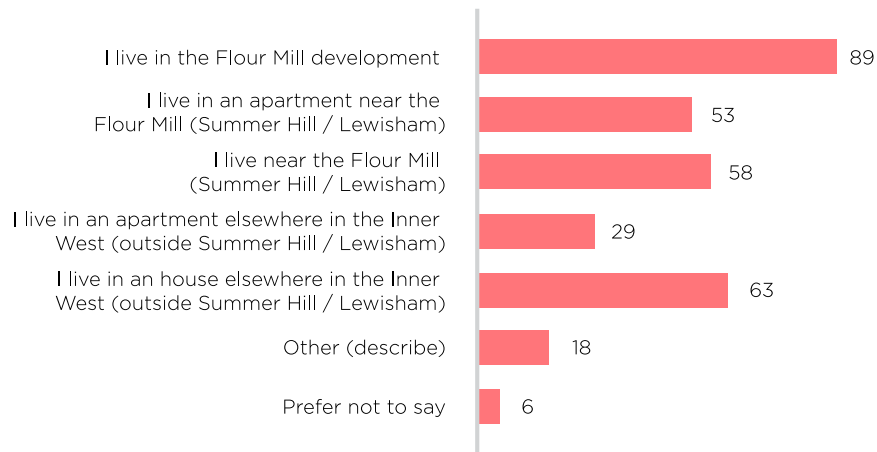
### Avoiding non-response bias

Effort was taken to avoid potential nonresponse 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. 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 (including gender, location and other sub-populations) in several sections to allow comparison.

The final survey sample included 316 responses, although around a third of 274 complete responses and 42 partial responses. This includes a mixture of residents of the local community as well as people who live in other communities but use the Little BIG House. The sample includes coverage across multiple age groups, living situations and dominant gender groups (gender of respondents is discussed below).

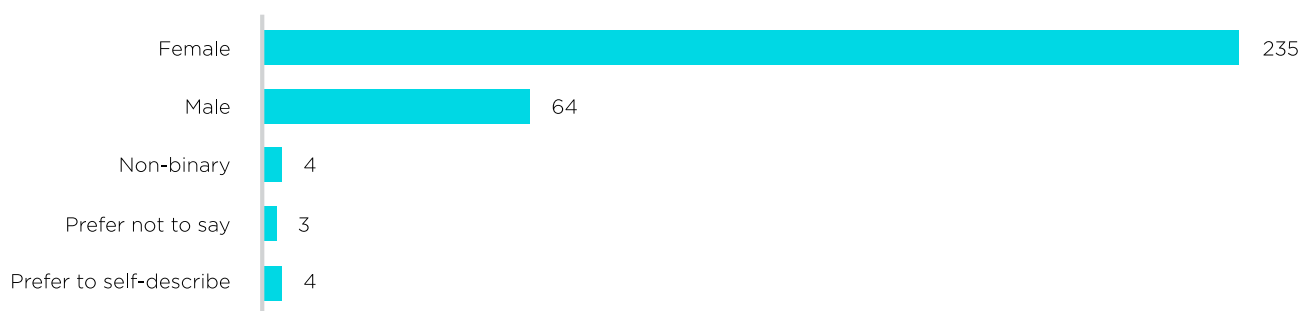
In the sections of this report which describe local community outcomes, the results have been filtered to include only residents of the local community (unless otherwise specified).

Figure 18: Location of respondents. (n=316)



It is worth noting that the final sample featured substantially more responses from people identifying as female than male, despite attempts to achieve greater balance via targeted promotion. This is consistent to the 2022 experience, and consistent with research which shows that females are typically more likely to complete surveys than males<sup>35</sup>. 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.

Figure 19: Gender of respondents. (n=310)





### **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.

In addition to the survey, six one-on-one qualitative interviews were conducted with Little BIG volunteers and hosts to provide additional depth of insight to the survey results, particularly to the elements around the impact of volunteering. The interview responses are not necessarily representative of all volunteers or members of the community. 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:

- 1 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.
- 2 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.
- 3 The national studies listed for comparison may employ different methodologies to this survey. Caution should be used when drawing conclusions based on these comparisons.
- 4 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.

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## Some of our Volunteers and Hosts







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