

COMMUNITY IMPACT FINDINGS 2026

Little BIG House Summer Hill

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Foreword

Little BIG exists for a simple reason. We believe communities can be happier, healthier and kinder, and that this is something you can design for rather than hope for.

Five years ago we started testing that belief by asking our neighbours some fairly direct questions. Do you know the people who live around you? If you were sick, could you count on someone to bring you groceries? How many days last week did you feel lonely?

This is the fifth year we have asked. What people told us in 2026 makes me more confident than I have been at any point since we opened.

Happier. More than nine in ten of our hyperlocal community agree they live in a kind and caring community. Three quarters know many of their neighbours by name, comfortably ahead of the national figure of 62%[1]. Four in five say they have face-to-face contact with family or friends at least weekly, against around half of Australians[3].

Healthier. Loneliness in our hyperlocal community runs at well under half the national rate[4]. Those who volunteer with us are less lonely again. Nearly all of our hyperlocal residents say that after attending our programs they interact more often with their neighbours.

Kinder. Two thirds of our hyperlocal community say they could count on people around them to bring groceries if they were sick, against 48% of Australians[2]. When we asked for an example of kindness received, people described parcels carried upstairs, soup left at a door, plants watered and bins brought in. One told us: “Almost every time I go out my door I experience kindness from neighbours and community members - from opening a door to checking if I need any help. As an older woman living alone, this is truly welcome.”

I want to be straight about one thing, because it matters for how our sector talks about this work. Across the wider community, loneliness has held steady over five years. That is also the national pattern. What the evidence does show is that the experience inside our hyperlocal community is different from the one around it, and the closer people live to the Little BIG House, the clearer that difference becomes. Same is true for our volunteers and community leaders. Each year is showing the same theme, but stronger. That is deep participation delivers deep results.

The case I want to make to funders, developers and planners is that these outcomes were not produced by anything expensive or convoluted. They were produced by a large shared table, a kettle, programs that meet every week, and humans who notice when you walk in. Even for those who don’t participate regularly, living near by and ‘knowing it is there’ has measurable value.

My thanks to our Board for backing an approach that is intimate and deeply personal. To our leadership committee, volunteers and hosts, who are the reason any of this works, and who our own data shows are the most connected people in this community.

Most of all, thank you to everyone who answered. You have given us something genuinely useful to learn from and to improve upon.

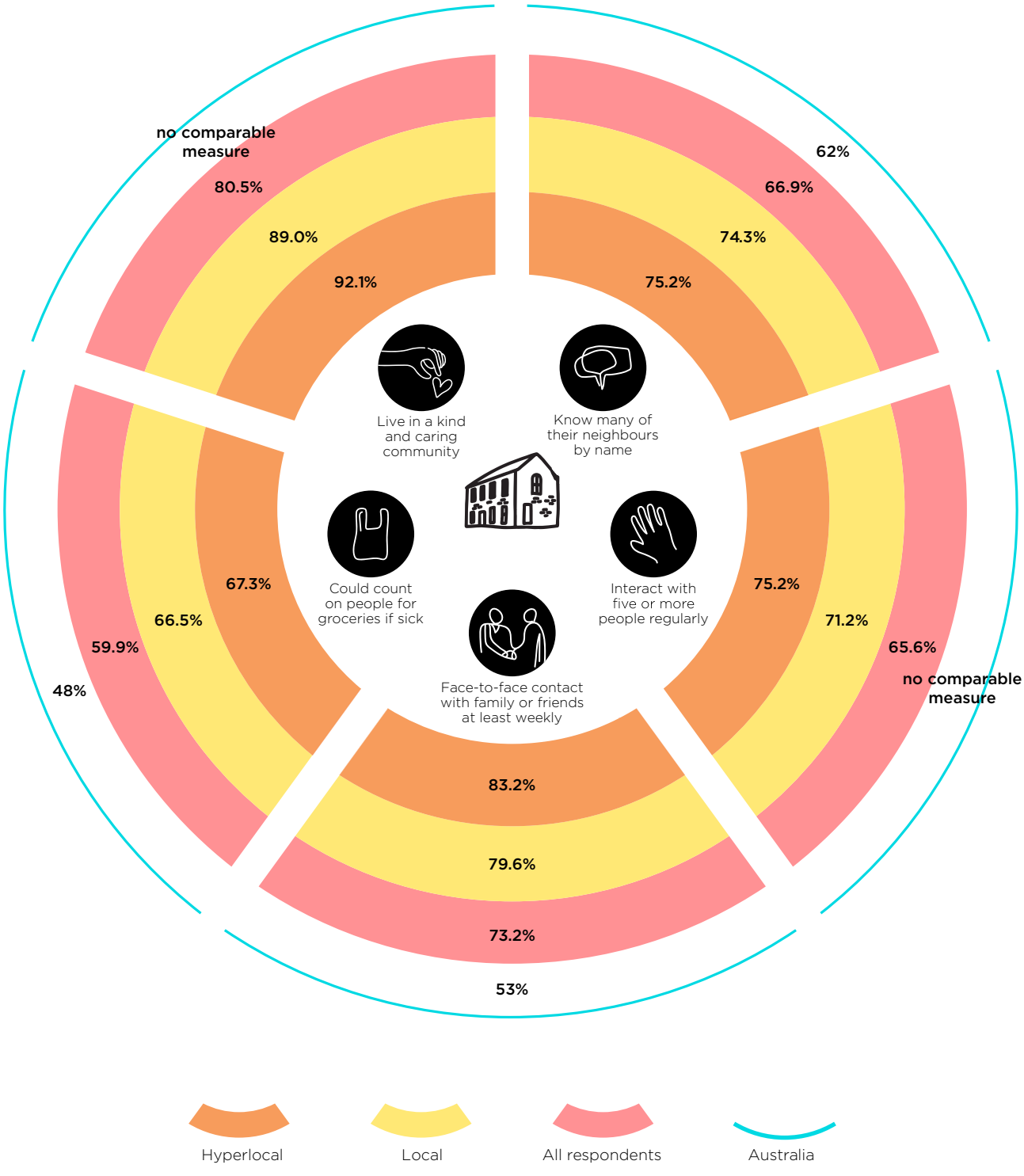




Sarah Mathews
CEO
Little BIG Foundation

1. Community and Connection in Summer Hill, 2026

Four in five respondents agree they live in a kind and caring community. Almost every measure of connection we track is rising the closer people live to the Little BIG House, and most sit above the national figure.



Theme 1: Connection here is built on recognition

When people describe what connection feels like in this neighbourhood, they rarely reach for the word friendship. They describe being recognised, and that lower and more achievable bar is what almost everything else is built on.

Here, three quarters of our hyperlocal community know many neighbours by name[1], against 62% of Australians. The insight people offer in their own words is smaller than that. Often the nod, the familiar face, the short conversation that happens because you have seen someone before.

> I meet new people all the time in the classes, and given there are so many people who come back multiple times it makes it accessible to form friendships when you see the same people multiple times.



> Because there are such a large number of people from around the neighbourhood that attend the markets, we get a chance to stop and talk to people we otherwise only pass briefly on the streets or in the lift.
>
> A hyperlocal resident

> Seeing familiar faces and having the space and time to connect and get to know each other better. Being introduced to other neighbours. Connecting over music, food, mutual friends and dogs.



> Haven't kept in touch with anyone I met at an activity - that I didn't already know - but it's nice to see a familiar face the next time [at the same event].

Theme 2: Recognition turns into practical help

Knowing a neighbour's name and being able to ask that neighbour for something are different things, and the distance between them is where the practical value of a community sits. Two thirds of our hyperlocal community have crossed it, and the examples they give are small, specific and repeatable.

67.3% of hyperlocal residents agree they could count on people in their community to bring them groceries or essentials if they were sick[2], against 48% of Australians.

Asked for an example of kindness received, people overwhelmingly describe small practical acts. Sharing food appears in a quarter of examples, lending or giving things away in a fifth, and everyday greeting and small talk in one in six. A reminder that small gestures go a long way to community building.

WHAT DOES KINDNESS LOOK LIKE?

26.2%

SHARING FOOD AND PRODUCE

"Neighbours held a street party and we all brought plates of food and drinks."

20.7%

LENDING, GIVING AND PASSING THINGS ON

"I got given a keyboard from a local Pay It Forward site which was perfect as I want to get back into my music."

15.9%

EVERYDAY GREETING AND SMALL TALK

"Whenever I leave my apartment I will stop and chat with one of my neighbours. Some have invited me to their home for social get togethers."



Behind the top three: parcels, mail and bins 15.2%, help when sick, injured or grieving 13.4%, checking in and emotional support 12.8%, practical rescue such as being locked out or needing something carried 11.6%, pets and plants looked after 9.1%, and traced back to a Little BIG House connection 8.5%.

Base: the 164 respondents who gave a usable example of kindness received, out of 176 who answered the question. A single example can carry more than one theme, so the figures do not sum to 100%.

Around one in seven kindness examples names a Little BIG House group as where the initial relationship came from.

> The chain from program to practical help shows up directly. “I was recovering from surgery, and <redacted name>, who lives in another building in our complex, picked up my veggie box and brought it to my apartment. I wouldn’t have met, <redacted name> without the Organic Buyers Group, and the way LBH makes it possible for the group to operate so seamlessly.

> Neighbours offering to get food or meds when I’ve been sick (I live alone) and I have done the same for my neighbours.

> In whatsapp group, [I] asked if anyone had crutches and a Neighbour came to the rescue.

> My neighbours always look out for each other with packages and treats when we’ve made too much cake/cookies etc.



Theme 3: The space is key

Agreement that a shared physical space matters is the nearest thing to consensus in five years of this survey. It holds across every segment we measure and it has risen in every year we have asked.

- 98.7% of respondents agree it is important to have physical spaces available for community interaction. A figure that is growing year on year.
- 93.0% agree the Flour Mill Markets and Food Festival should continue. In the hyperlocal community, those most impacted, 95.0% agree.
- Half of all respondents, and 61.8% of our hyperlocal community, agree that the connections they have made through Little BIG are one of the reasons they continue living here.

> Having constant activity at the Little BIG House (even if I'm just walking by) - gives our community a heart. There's constant activity and signs of life. Not only is it welcoming but at a practical level - having people come and go, keeps our neighbourhood safer.
>
> A hyperlocal resident





> It's nice to have a creative space (or any communal space) for that matter that can be used in many different ways. We need spaces to connect with people and the Little BIG house achieves that goal (although more varied events could be added).

> It's wonderful that the space isn't just a commercial space but a community one.

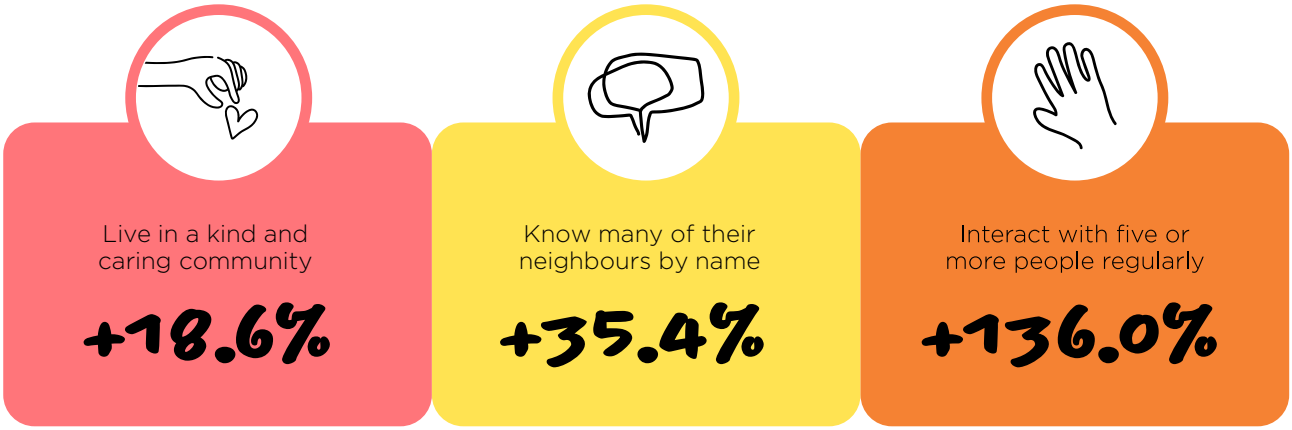


2. Five years of change, and how we compare with Australia

All connection measures have risen since 2022 and sit above national benchmarks. Loneliness has held steady, which is also the national pattern. Both of those things are true at once and it presents an interesting picture of community connection.

Theme 1: Connection and trust are up, and ahead of the country

Every connection measure we track stands higher in 2026 than it did when we started asking in 2022. On the three questions with a credible national equivalent we have also moved from below the country to above it.



All respondents	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	Australia
Live in a kind and caring community	67.9%	73.5%	73.0%	85.6%	80.5%	no comparable measure
Know many of their neighbours by name	49.4%	63.1%	57.1%	69.4%	66.9%	62%[1]
Could count on people for groceries if sick	not asked	56.4%	53.2%	65.0%	59.9%	48%[2]
Interact with five or more people regularly	27.8%	56.4%	52.1%	64.4%	65.6%	no comparable measure
Face-to-face contact at least weekly	66.5%	75.9%	74.3%	76.7%	73.2%	53%[3]
Community spaces are important	87.0%	96.0%	94.1%	98.8%	98.7%	92%[7]

- 2025 is the high point on several measures and 2026 sits a little below it. With a much larger 2026 sample, some of that gap is sample composition rather than real decline.

Theme 2: Loneliness is well below the national rate, and steady against our own baseline

In 2026 we measured loneliness two ways. The UCLA Loneliness Scale, four-item scale, and a direct question about how many days in the past week a person felt lonely[10]. Both put our respondents well below the national rate, and both show that figure holding steady on the 2022 baseline.

Loneliness, 2026	All respondents	Local	Hyperlocal	Australia
Lonely(UCLA-4 score of 11 or more)	15.6%	11.2%	7.8%	28%[4]
Severely lonely (score above 12)	6.3%	4.1%	1.0%	16%[4]
Felt lonely at least one day in the last week	41.9%	35.0%	27.5%	50.5%[5]

National loneliness and severe loneliness from Ending Loneliness Together, State of the Nation 2026, fieldwork January to February 2026[4]. Days-lonely comparison from the Australian Loneliness Report, fieldwork 2018[5].

FINDINGS:

- Loneliness among our survey respondents is about half the national rate. In our immediate local community, it's around a quarter. That's using the measure and cut-off from Ending Loneliness Together, the national peak body for loneliness, with both sets of data collected in the same months[4].
- Severe loneliness in the hyperlocal community runs at a sixteenth of the national figure[4].
- Against our own 2022 baseline, loneliness across all respondents has held steady. The national picture over the same period has not improved either.
- The hyperlocal community is the exception. Those reporting at least one lonely day fell by about a tenth between 2022 and 2026, and those reporting three or more lonely days fell by about a fifth.

A note on cut-offs. Ending Loneliness Together publish two different sets of UCLA-4 thresholds[10]: 11 or more in their national reporting, and 14 or more (age 45 and under) or 13 or more (46 and over) in their guidance for community organisations. These are not interchangeable. The figures above use the national thresholds, because those are the only ones comparable to the national number.

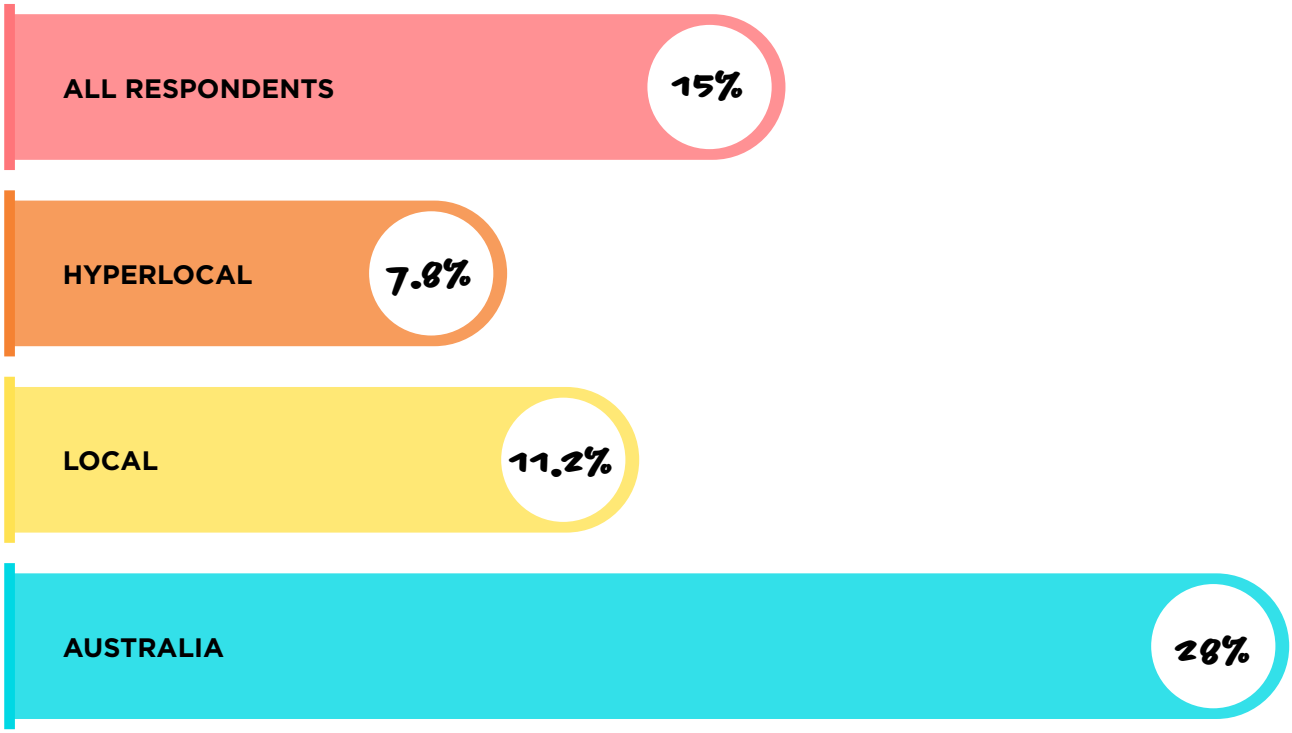








Lonely, on Ending Loneliness Together's national measure



Anecdotally, we understand another contributing factor is weather the attendee is using the Little BIG House to 'build community' (prevent and guard against loneliness) or to work on their chronic loneliness. It stands to reason that that people living nearby fall more-so into the first group, and people travelling from further afield do so because their needs are not being met in their local community and in an effort to make a change in their life. This may be a contributing element to the data.

Theme 3: The five-year gain is concentrated closest to the Little BIG House

The biggest gains over five years are among people living closest to the Little BIG House. The averages for all respondents hide this. It only shows up when we split the results by where people live.

FINDINGS:

- Since 2022 the share agreeing they live in a kind and caring community has risen by around 30 percentage points among hyperlocal residents and around 20 points across the local area. In the wider Inner West it has barely moved.
- Knowing many neighbours by name follows the same shape: up around 33 points among hyperlocal residents, around 26 points locally, and around 7 points in the wider Inner West.
- Weekly face-to-face contact with family or friends outside the household is up around 17 points among hyperlocal residents and down around 10 points in the wider Inner West. It remains our widest margin over the national figure[3], at around 20 percentage points.
- Loneliness runs the same way. Hyperlocal and local respondents report slightly fewer lonely days than in 2022, while the wider Inner West reports considerably more.
- The all-respondent line therefore understates what happens closest to the Little BIG House, because it averages groups moving in opposite directions.
- Two cautions. The wider Inner West is the smallest group in the survey, so its year-to-year movement is noisy, and each year is a fresh sample rather than the same people followed over time.

3. The hyperlocal experience

Our hyperlocal community reports less loneliness and more connection than any other group in the survey, and than the country. This is the clearest result in five years of research, and the most useful one for developers considering the benefit of ongoing community building initiatives.

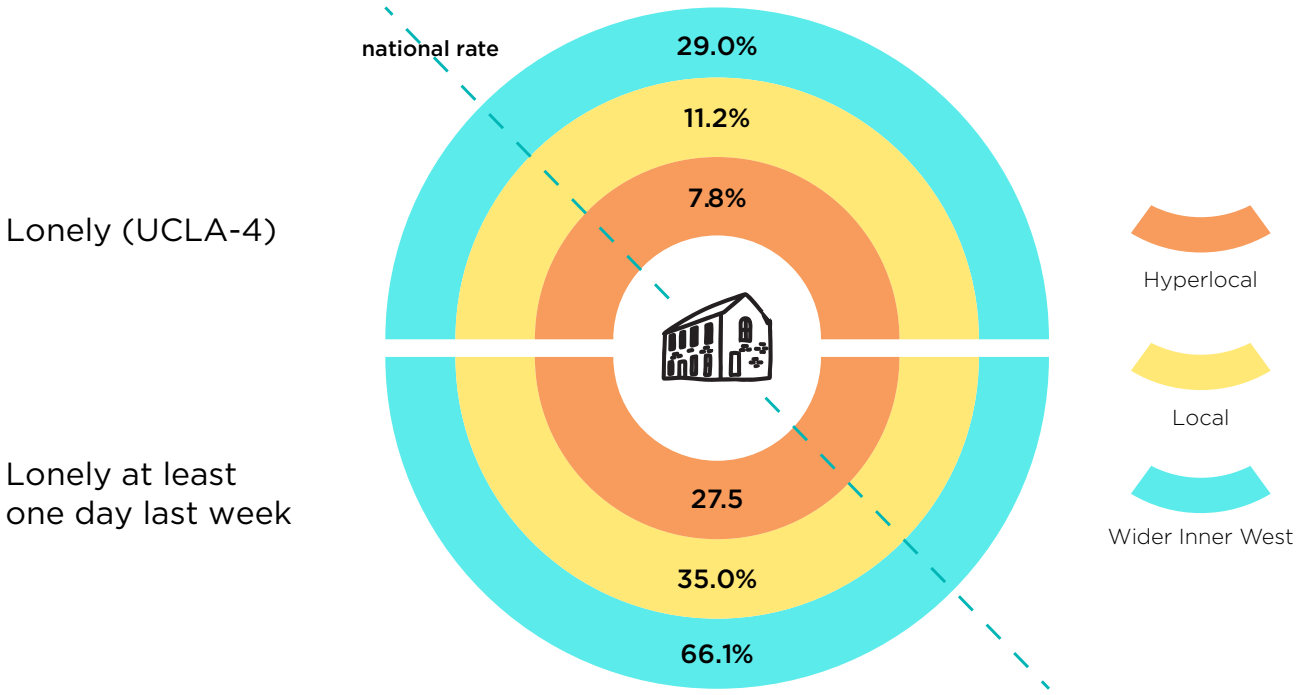
Theme 1: Loneliness falls as you get closer to the hub

Loneliness in this survey falls as people live closer to the Little BIG House. The table below sets the four groups against one another and against the national figure, and the gradient runs the same way on every row.

Little BIG House survey, 2026	Lonely (UCLA-4)	Lonely at least one day last week
Hyperlocal	7.8%	27.5%
Local	11.2%	35.0%
All respondents	15.6%	41.9%
Wider Inner West	29.0%	66.1%
Australia (national benchmark, not our data)	28%[4]	50.5%[5]

- Our hyperlocal community is lonely at roughly a quarter of the national rate[4]. People who come to events but live further away sit slightly above it.
- This is also the only group where loneliness has improved against the 2022 baseline, falling by around a tenth on the days-lonely measure and around a fifth among those reporting three or more lonely days.
- The gradient holds on every connection measure, not only loneliness, which makes it harder to dismiss as noise.
- We cannot separate cause from selection. People who choose a development with a locally programmed community house may already be more sociable. What the evidence shows is a strong and consistent association.





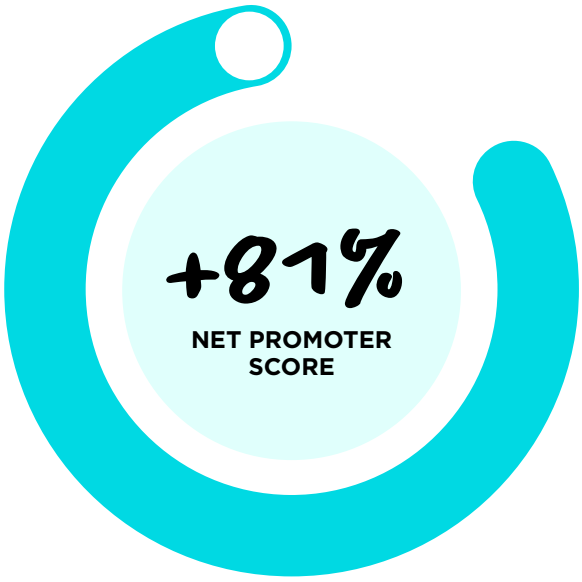
We note that several of the factors known to correlate with loneliness also track with geography, so part of the gap between our figures and the national ones belongs to Summer Hill rather than to the Little BIG House. Ending Loneliness Together's State of the Nation 2026 reports that people living in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods are nearly twice as likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and that people in regional and remote areas are 1.3 times more likely than people in urban areas[4]. Summer Hill sits on the favourable side of the second of those.

Other factors in the same report run against us rather than for us. People living alone are around twice as likely to be both lonely and socially isolated, and people in shared accommodation around 1.5 times more likely, than people living with family[4]; Summer Hill has a markedly higher share of lone-person households than the national average[9]. Part-time and casual workers show the highest levels of both, and nationally the 45 to 54 age group is the loneliest and most socially isolated, while our own respondents are concentrated in the 31 to 60 range. The honest reading is that some of the local context helps these results and some of it works against them, and none of it can be separated cleanly from the effect of the program.

Theme 2: Residents say the Little BIG House makes the Flour Mill better to live in, and is perceived as a financial asset

We asked residents about the Little BIG House in the terms a developer or a valuer would use, not only in terms of how it makes them feel. Their answer is that it improves both the experience of living at the Flour Mill and what they believe the address is worth.

- 90.2% of our hyperlocal community agree that having access to the Little BIG House makes the Flour Mill a better place to live.
- 86.0% agree the Little BIG House adds value to their property.
- Asked how likely they would be to recommend living at the Flour Mill to a friend or family member, five in six gave a 9 or a 10 out of 10, and fewer than one in forty gave a 6 or below. That is a Net Promoter Score of +81.
- 95.8% agree that after attending Little BIG House programs they interact more frequently with their neighbours, against 78.4% of all respondents.



> I have so many friends who live around summer hill and wish they could afford to buy an apartment here because of the unique sense of community that exists here!
>
> A hyperlocal resident

> Meeting people on a regular basis in the Little BIG House has created a number of friendships through regular get togethers.
>
> A hyperlocal resident

> I have photos from 3 years ago with my dog posing with Santa. I recall making cocktails [at the Little BIG House] like it was yesterday - but it was probably two years ago now. The Little BIG House is creating lasting memories for me - even if I'm not there every week.
>
> A hyperlocal resident



WHY DO WE ASK THESE QUESTIONS?

A report about loneliness that quotes property value deserves an explanation. We ask whether the Little BIG House makes the Flour Mill a better place to live, and whether it adds value to what people own, because those two answers are what decide whether anything like it gets built again.

Little BIG Foundation was founded and is funded by a property developer EG Funds, and that is deliberate rather than incidental. Our growth plan is tied to where housing and infrastructure are being built, because that is where new communities are formed and where there is still a chance to design connection in rather than retrofit it later. We hope to see every developer taking an on-going approach to community building and connection.

A developer deciding whether to give up lettable floor space and underwrite a program for several years needs evidence in terms they recognise, and so does a council deciding what a development ought to include. The 86.0% of hyperlocal residents who say the Little BIG House adds value to their property, and the recommendation score of +81 above, are that evidence. Every developer we convince is another community we reach.



THE LESSON FOR DEVELOPERS

Density on its own produces neighbours who pass each other in a foyer. A programmed space with a reason to stop is what appears to convert proximity into acquaintance, and the hyperlocal figures show that conversion happening: 95.8% of hyperlocal residents agree they interact more often with their neighbours after attending Little BIG House programs, against 78.4% of all respondents. We cannot separate cause from selection here, because people who choose a development with a community house may already be more sociable than average. What we can say is that the association is strong, that it holds on every connection measure we track rather than one, and that it strengthens the closer people live to the Little BIG House.

Theme 3: Apartment living creates a particular isolation that the Little BIG House interrupts

Density puts people within metres of each other without introducing them, and the research points to one thing that decides whether proximity turns into contact: whether shared space is actually used. A study of 113 apartment developments across Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, carried out by Kleeman, Giles-Corti, Gunn, Hooper and Foster and published in the journal Cities, found that residents who did not use their building's indoor communal areas were more likely to be lonely, and that neighbouring, meaning the ordinary business of recognising and talking to the people around you, was protective against loneliness[11]. Our respondents describe that same mechanism, but at precinct scale rather than building scale. The Little BIG House is the indoor communal space the community shares, and the program is the reason to walk into it.

The repeated image in our hyperlocal community's own words is the lift and the foyer: proximity without contact.

> All of the events create a space that brings people together with opportunities to interact far more than otherwise is possible in most urban apartment settings where people live next to each other but don't know their neighbours.

> Met many neighbours at yoga and started going for coffee socially, as well as generally chatting when bumping in to each other. Feels more like I live in a community rather than a building

> I have been here only 10 weeks and I feel that having a social hub at the centre of the precinct has seen the development of a very special community. I've met like minded people and been accepted into my cohort at the coffee mornings and this had translated across every occasion.

> We live in the Flour Mill and don't really see our neighbours much. Seeing them out and about at the markets makes it much easier than passing in the foyer to talk and make connections.

The figures behind those accounts line up in the same direction. Three quarters of our hyperlocal community know many of their neighbours by name, against 66.9% of all respondents and 62% of Australians[1]. Two thirds could count on the people around them to bring groceries if they were sick, against 59.9% of all respondents and 48% of Australians[2]. Weekly face-to-face contact with family or friends outside the household runs at 83.2% hyperlocally, against 73.2% across the survey and 53% nationally[3]. On every one of these measures the people living closest to the Little BIG House sit ahead of our wider respondent base, and our wider respondent base sits ahead of the country.

4. The hardware: what makes the physical space work

We asked people where they go when they arrive at the Little BIG House, and why. Interestingly, the answer is dominated by one piece of furniture and one appliance.

Theme 1: The fixed table is the social engine, and the kettle is what gets people to it

The Little BIG House was designed to read as a family living room rather than a hall for hire, and respondents describe it back to us in close to those words. One calls the downstairs area a place where "it feels like being in one's living room with mates". Another says it "feels like another room in my home where I can go when I feel like company or something to do". The design features people name without prompting are domestic ones: a big table, a kettle, lamps, comfortable chairs and a kitchen, rather than a stage, a lectern or a booking desk.

That shapes who ends up running things. People walk into a living room and are moved to start something in it. Other community hubs are more likely to be found by existing event hosts looking for low-cost hire.

INSIGHTS ON THE SPACE:

- The large communal table downstairs is the most-named feature in the building. One in five answers names it unprompted, and two in five name the downstairs area generally.
  - The kitchen appears in one in ten answers, almost always as the first move on arrival. Make a drink, then sit at the table.
  - “I head straight to the big table. It’s really welcoming and inviting and there is usually already someone sitting there. I can sit near them, but not right on top of them.”
- That last sentence is the design principle. A long shared table lets someone join without asking permission and without committing to a conversation.
  - “The dining table is central and allows lots of people to sit together and interact. The warm interior tones and warm lighting feel welcoming and cozy.”
  - “The big table is great for interacting and friendly non confrontational gatherings”
  - “I usually enter via The flour mill side entrance, and join the group in the lower room at the meeting table. I also usually take advantage of the kitchen facilities and make myself a cuppa tea whilst also offering to make it tea for anyone else that’s present.”
- One respondent describes using the kitchen as social cover: “Kitchen - I can do something awkward to pretend I am not alone”. A space that gives people something to do with their hands while they work out whether to speak is doing real work.



Theme 2: The two floors are described in completely different language

The same building produces two entirely different vocabularies depending on which floor people are describing. Downstairs attracts feelings and upstairs attracts functions, and that difference is a fit-out decision rather than an accident.



DOWNSTAIRS / GROUND FLOOR

Described in adjectives

“incredibly inviting”, “really welcoming and inviting”, “welcoming and cozy”, “warm interior tones”, “warm lighting”, “comfy places to sit”, “a cosy comfortable space”, “communal”, “engaging”, “friendly non confrontational”, “a nice place to be”, “like being in one’s living room with mates”



UPSTAIRS / LEVEL 1

Described in functions

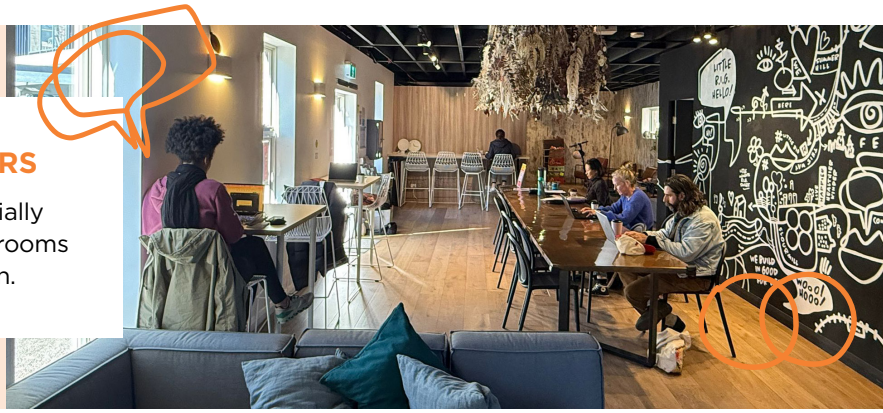
“that’s where the class is”, “where the group is held”, “the event space upstairs”, “I just go where the event is”, “Upstairs for yoga”, “Upstairs for exercise”, “the only place I have utilised”. The few adjectives that do appear are mixed: “a very open bright area”, “quieter”, “feels private but still open and spacious”, against “less inviting and cozy as it is 1 large space - I feel exposed”

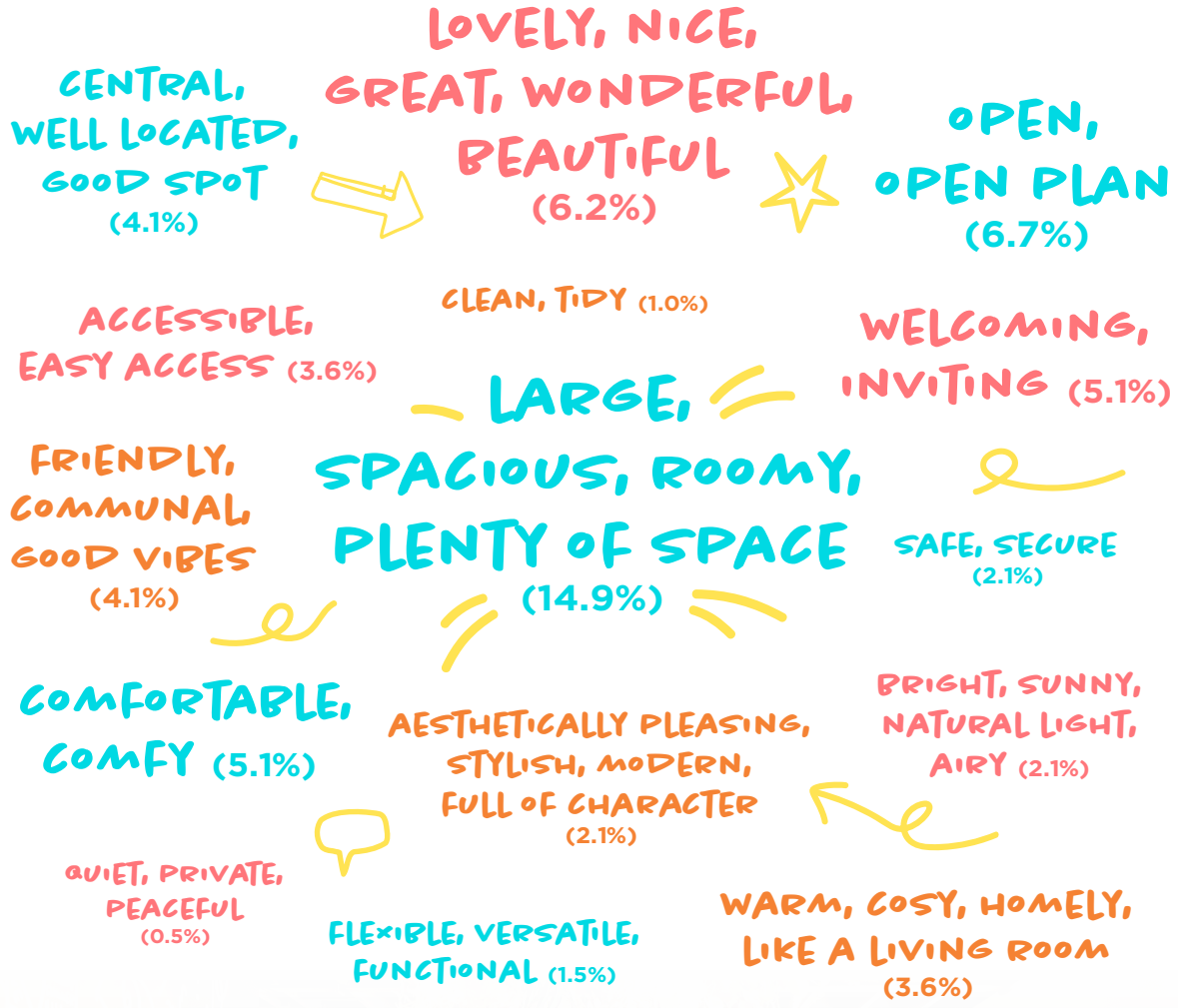
- “All the events I attend are downstairs, upstairs feels less inviting and cozy as it is 1 large space - I feel exposed.”
- “I spend most of my time downstairs. This place is so welcoming and allows for me to interact with others especially when I need company I’ve used the upstairs space for sound healing. I love the aesthetics and the tea and coffee space. It’s a cosy comfortable space.”
- “I love both levels for different reasons. Downstairs is incredibly inviting. Even if it’s just open for safe space time with candles and one or two people in there, it’s still comforting to passers-by.”

One in five respondents describes going only to wherever their event is held. For that group the building is a venue rather than a place, and they are the least likely to discover anything else on the program.

THE LESSON FOR SPACE BUILDERS

One large flexible room is efficient and socially weak. Smaller, furnished, domestic-feeling rooms are what people describe wanting to stay in.




LOVELY, NICE, GREAT, WONDERFUL, BEAUTIFUL (6.2%)
CENTRAL, WELL LOCATED, GOOD SPOT (4.1%)
OPEN, OPEN PLAN (6.7%)
CLEAN, TIDY (1.0%)
ACCESSIBLE, EASY ACCESS (3.6%)
WELCOMING, INVITING (5.1%)
LARGE, SPACIOUS, ROOMY, PLENTY OF SPACE (14.9%)
FRIENDLY, COMMUNAL, GOOD VIBES (4.1%)
SAFE, SECURE (2.1%)
COMFORTABLE, COMFY (5.1%)
AESTHETICALLY PLEASING, STYLISH, MODERN, FULL OF CHARACTER (2.1%)
BRIGHT, SUNNY, NATURAL LIGHT, AIRY (2.1%)
QUIET, PRIVATE, PEACEFUL (0.5%)
FLEXIBLE, VERSATILE, FUNCTIONAL (1.5%)
WARM, COSY, HOMELY, LIKE A LIVING ROOM (3.6%)

Theme 3: What holds us back

We asked volunteers and hosts what they had wanted to do and could not.

Issue	Share of hosts raising it	What hosts said
The stairs exclude people	21%	"The stairs are difficult for anyone other than the fit and agile"
Uncomfortable or unsuitable seating	21%	"The lounge suite is very low and uncomfortable"
Not enough table space	11%	"Multiple board games set up due to limited table space"
Lighting too dark	7%	"Lighting is poor during night time which affects anything requiring visual senses like reading"
Nowhere to store or stage things	7%	"We have struggled to find a place to leave boxes for the driver to collect"
No dishwashing or overnight clean-up	4%	"All the glasses had to be handwashed at the end of the event with cold water, or taken to someone's house for dishwashing"
Sound carries between floors	4%	"There seems to be no noise buffering between the two levels"
Signage (outside)	<1%	"I have been walking by Little BIG house for years, not going in as the signage outside the entry is hard to read from a distance and I didn't want to intrude."



5. The software: what makes a community program work

84.2% of respondents met someone new through the Little BIG House in the last 12 months. We asked what it was about the events that built connection, and separately how a stranger actually became a contact. The two questions give different answers, and the gap between them is the most useful finding in this report.

Theme 1: Repetition does the work, even though people rarely credit it

Asked what made an 'event work', only 11% call out the regularity. But when asked how they actually met someone new, 43% describe repetition: seeing the same face until a nod became a conversation. People do not experience regularity as a feature. They experience it as how friendship happened.

> Seeing the same people regularly allows you to build relationships with them and trust.

> Being a regular weekly session, it is so nice to get to know people with short chats after class, the occasional coffee together etc.

> I have new friends thanks to building up these small friendships over repeated attendances across many events at the LBH. Thank you.

> Regular connection with the same small group of people.

THE PRACTICAL IMPLICATION

A six-week run will out-produce six separate one-off events with the same total attendance. A one-off can only produce a pleasant afternoon.



Theme 2: Reach and conversion are two different jobs

Bringing people to the precinct and turning an attendee into a friend are two different jobs, and the events that are best at one are rarely best at the other. Separating them lets a very large event and a very small one each be judged on what it is actually for.

Respondents were shown the events they had attended and asked to rank those that best contributed to their sense of community.

Event	Share of respondents who attended	Share of reordering attendees who ranked it first
Outdoor X-training	6%	47%
Seniors Coffee Morning	4%	44%
Crafternoon	4%	44%
Book Club	4%	42%
Organic Buyers Group	6%	38%
Yoga on Earth	9%	35%
Flour Mill Markets	72%	22%

- The Markets have by far the greatest reach and attendance (naturally accommodating large volumes of people not possible at events inside the Little BIG House). They are the front door: they bring people to the precinct and make the place feel alive.
- The small recurring groups are where attendance turns into relationship. Frequency is the key factor here again with 5 out of the 7 events happening on a bi-weekly, weekly, fortnightly or monthly basis. Every event converting above a third is a small group that meets repeatedly on a predictable rhythm.



Theme 3: Three questions to ask of any new event proposal

What people credit for turning an event into a connection comes down to a short list.

43%	17%	15%	9%
REGULARITY	**STRUCTURED MINGLING**	**WARM HOST**	**SPILLOVER**

- **Does it recur?** One-off events might be wonderful, but they don't produce connection at the same rate.
- **Has the host planned for mingling?** The small and deliberate rather than elaborate efforts an introduction, a name tag, a shared interest to open on, a reason to talk to the person beside you. An event that puts people in the same room and leaves the rest to chance is relying on the confident ones to do the work.

> Seeing people regularly / multiple times, name tags, chatting about a common interest, chatting after an event.

> Organised and structured events that encourage people to meet new people and partake in fun activities.

- **Is there a named host who will actively welcome people?** 15% credit a host, and what they describe is 'emotional labour' rather than competence.

> The host are genuinely lovely people. Welcoming, inclusive and funny. They remember your face and name and welcome you back each fortnight. Playing games is a great way to break the ice and create connnections.

> Leaders try to include everyone, including those who have poor or awkward social skills... the leaders aren't unkind to them and instead are open and still genuinely kind/friendly. That is a real gift and skill they have.

The negative responses are the mirror image of this.

- **Is there fifteen minutes to linger afterwards?** This is where people locate the actual moment of friendship.

> After my Tai Chi we go and have coffee. Many look forward to this just as much as the actual class.

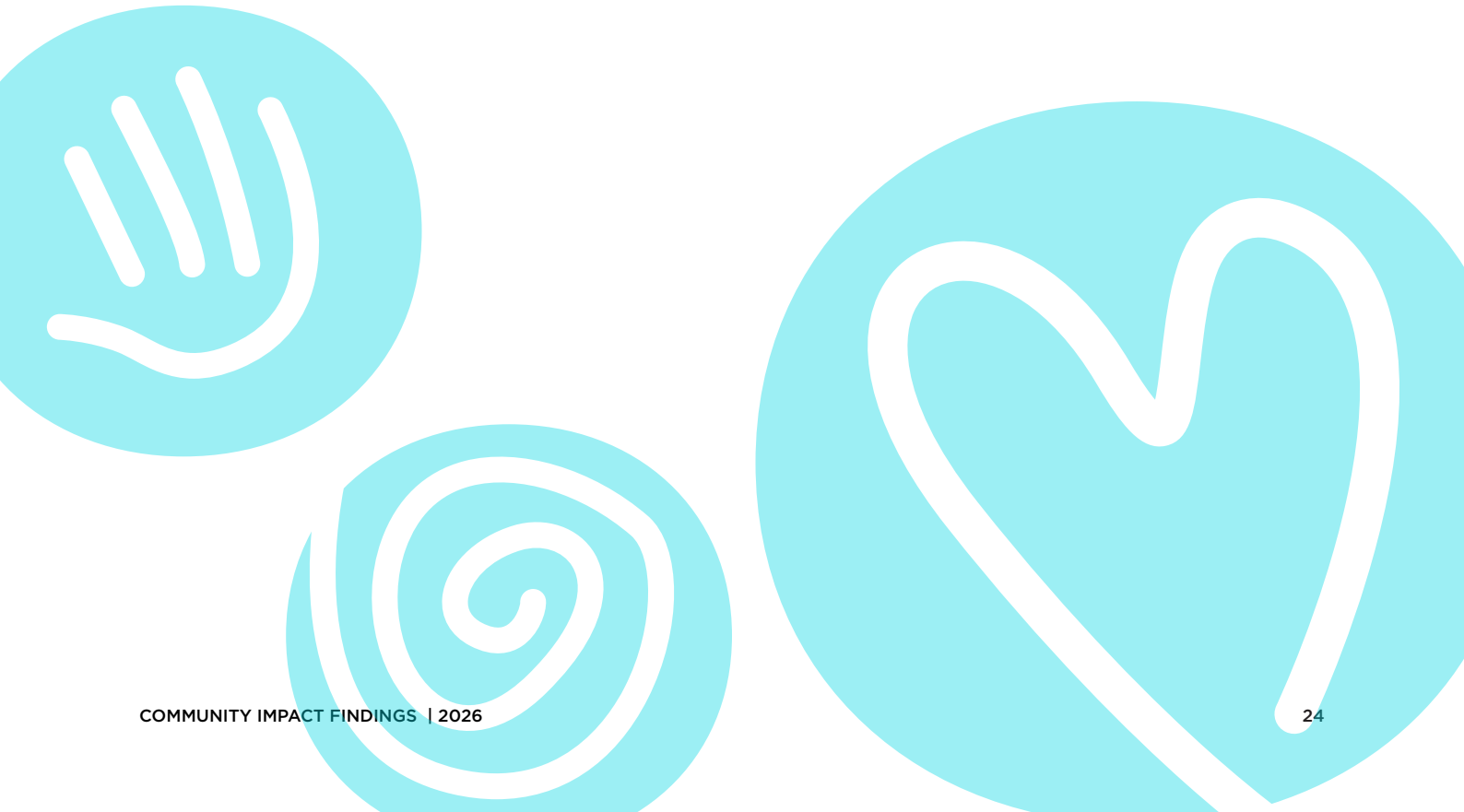
> Organised and structured events that encourage people to meet new people and partake in fun activities.

- **Post-event informal communication.** The frequency of the event WhatsApp groups was high. 22% credit a group chat with keeping a new connection alive, but only 3% mention it when asked what made the event work. It is doing far more than anyone notices, and it costs nothing.

> They started coming often to events, and are now part of the Whatsapp group created for the regulars of the event. They also come to informal hang outs organised by regular members of the Whatsapp group.

> The in person events fostered connection as people shared their experiences, the WhatsApp group really assisted outside these in person events to connect with people too.

Other factors: 18% describe the connection moving out of the room and into the neighbourhood: bumping into each other at the shops, the cafe, the markets.





SPOTLIGHT: THE MARKETS AND THE FOOD FESTIVALS

93.0% of respondents agree that the Flour Mill Markets and the Flour Mill Night Food Festival should continue, 86.4% of them strongly, against 2.0% who disagree. Support is highest among the people who live with them: 95.0% of our hyperlocal community (Flour Mill residents) agree, and 93.1% strongly agree. They are also the two best-attended precinct events by a wide margin, with 75.6% of respondents attending the Sunday markets in the last 12 months and 50.8% the night food festival.

They convert proximity into recognition:

> People are about. When people are about you bump into them. When you bump into them you might have a chat. Voilà. The markets make people get about.

They reach people who never join a program:

> I love seeing the buzz of the markets from my balcony. I don't always need to go down to feel a part of something.

And they bring the wider community in, which residents treat as a benefit rather than an intrusion: "I've made many friends through meeting neighbours at these events. And the markets are a single best thing about the complex. Friends travel from far and wide to come and visit."

For some they are a reason to stay put:

> The markets have been a big reason why we have stayed in the area. Please do not end them.



6. Volunteering: the strongest single finding in the data

Around one in six respondents volunteered or hosted at the Little BIG House in the last 12 months. On every measure in the survey, they are the most connected and least lonely group we have.

That matters more than it used to, because volunteering in Australia is in long decline. Formal volunteering through an organisation fell from 36.2% of adults in 2010 to 30.9% in 2014 and 24.8% in 2020[12], and the most recent national reading is 22.6% of people aged 15 and over, with 29.5% volunteering informally and 42.8% doing one or the other[13]. Our own rate is not a like-for-like comparison, because we ask only about volunteering or hosting at one small community house rather than about volunteering anywhere at all.

The national evidence on what volunteering gives back runs the same way our figures do. The largest recent Australian study of volunteers puts the gain in wellbeing attributable to volunteering at 4.3 points out of 100, holding demographic differences constant, and finds it rising with the hours a person gives[14].

The most common roles are volunteering for coworking, the parents' group or the seniors' group (29% of those describing a role), running your own free event (21%), running a paid event (17%) and ad-hoc or Management Committee work (15%).

Theme 1: Volunteers are markedly less lonely than everyone else

Volunteers and hosts are the standout group in the 2026 data, and the margin is not a subtle one. On loneliness, on belonging and on meeting someone new they sit well ahead of every other group we can cut the survey by.

2026	Volunteers and hosts	All 2026 data
Lonely (UCLA-4)	4%	17%
Live in a kind and caring community	100%	78%
Met someone new via the Little BIG House	93%	84%

- Every volunteer who answered agrees they live in a kind and caring community. Unanimity on any survey question is rare enough to be worth stating.
- Volunteers are lonely at around a seventh of the national rate[4].
- The direction of cause runs both ways and we cannot separate them. Volunteering plausibly builds connection; well-connected people are also more likely to volunteer.
- Given the gap, growing the share of people who volunteer looks like the highest-return focus area within Little BIG's own control.

Theme 2: Volunteers say the experience gives more than it takes

Volunteering is usually described as something a person gives to an organisation. Our volunteers describe the exchange running the other way.

- 90% of volunteers agree that volunteering has increased their sense of belonging in their community, and more than two thirds agree strongly.
- 84% have made new friends through volunteering.

In their words:

> Being a host at the Little BIG House has made me feel more connected to the community, and let me meet and connect with new people outside of my usual circle of friends and childcare circles.
>
> A volunteer

> I am so lucky to have been accepted as a host at the Little BIG House, it is such a wonderful space - there is nothing else like it in the Inner West.
>
> A volunteer

> The LBH breaks down barriers. Getting to know your neighbours is essential for one's wellbeing.
>
> A volunteer

> Amazing and rewarding experience. A great way to connect with the local community.
>
> A volunteer

> Brings an additional sense of purpose into my life, great to catch up with regular attendees and newcomers.
>
> A volunteer

> I have made a lot of friends of all ages through volunteering
>
> A volunteer

Volunteering is also a route in, rather than a reward for already belonging. One respondent describes arriving at the parents' group with a four-month-old after a difficult night, being invited in by strangers, and later taking on the scheduling: "It gave me purpose and expanded my local community network and friendships that I continue to cherish. So, thank you LBH!"

Theme 3: Volunteers are locals

A volunteer program can be staffed from anywhere, and many are run by people who travel in to use a venue. Ours is drawn almost entirely from the surrounding streets, and that shows up clearly in where our volunteers and hosts say they live.

Where our volunteers and hosts live:

29.8% **HYPERLOCAL (THE FLOUR MILL)**

46.8% **SUMMER HILL, LEWISHAM OR DULWICH HILL**

17.0% **WIDER INNER WEST**

6.4% **NOT STATED**

It is worth noting that the hyperlocal volunteers are concentrated in the looser categories, with more than half of those describing only ad-hoc help or “other” rather than hosting specific events.

Three quarters are local, which is what you would expect if programs are begun by people who were already in the room rather than by organisers arriving from outside to hire a space.

The space does not only host connection, it prompts it.





7. Priorities for 2027: what this community is asking for

We asked which kinds of activity people most want. Set against what was offered in 2026, the gaps are specific.

Theme 1: Demand, and where supply does not meet it

We asked what people most want to do in 2027 and set it against what they actually attended in 2026. Where those two diverge is where the schedule has room to grow without inventing anything new.

What people want	Share wanting it	Share of respondents who attended something in that category
Creative and makers: painting, drawing, craft, textiles	37%	8%
Fitness: strength, stretching, functional fitness, walking	35%	18%
Gentle movement: yoga, Pilates, tai chi, qigong	28%	11%
Performances: live music, performed poetry	28%	12%
Food and drink: cooking, tasting, swaps	22%	nothing offered at the time of report
Mindfulness: meditation, sound healing, breathwork	17%	nothing offered at the time of report
Sustainability: clothing swaps, plant swaps, advocacy	93%	84%

Below these: culture and diversity 14%, self-improvement 13%, specific support programs 9%, young families 9%, pet-friendly 8%, business events 5%, tween and youth 4%.

- **Fitness is the sharpest mismatch.** More than a third want it, under a tenth attended anything in the category.
- **Mindfulness is an open space.** More than a fifth want it and nothing on the 2026 program drew attendance against it.
- **Creative is a discovery problem, not a supply problem.** Nearly half want it and eight groups run, but only one in six attended any of them.

REMINDER TO OUR HOSTS:

Marketing is key. Keep reminding and making space for people at your events.

REMINDER TO OUR COMMUNITY:

Vote with your feet. Turn up, support and engage with events that you value.



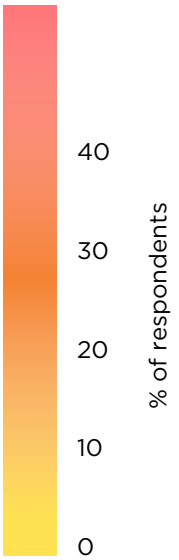
Theme 2: When people can actually come

Knowing what people want matters far less if the program runs at times they cannot come. The availability grid below is the most directly actionable piece of scheduling information in the survey. We note with positivity that the Little BIG House is heavily booked at the times which demand is greatest.

- Monday is the most-named day at 85%, noticeably ahead of every other day. Monday early evening is the single most popular time in the whole grid.
- Early evening, 5pm to 7pm, is the strongest slot: 69% named it on at least one day.
- Mid-morning (62%) and afternoon (59%) follow. Before 9am is thin, at under three in ten.
- Weekends sit at around 70%, concentrated in mid-morning and afternoon.

When people say they would attend, 2026
Share of respondents naming each day and time (n=292, multiple answers allowed).

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6am-8am	15%	13%	15%	14%	13%	14%	12%
8am-9am	8%	4%	5%	4%	6%	21%	20%
9am-noon	21%	14%	13%	14%	15%	40%	42%
noon-2pm	14%	9%	12%	10%	12%	34%	38%
2pm-5pm	16%	11%	13%	14%	13%	48%	47%
5pm-7pm	49%	35%	37%	39%	38%	32%	28%
7pm-9pm	39%	32%	36%	34%	34%	21%	16%



OPPORTUNITY

Most of the popular slots in the grid above already carry an event on the Little BIG House calendar. At the time of this report, the strongest openings left are:

- Saturday 2-5pm (48%)
- Monday 7.30-9pm (39%)
- There is also a key opportunity for a program suitable before 6-8am



Conclusion

Living close together doesn't make people connected. People and programs do. This page sets out what five years of survey data tells us about how the Little BIG House builds connection, why the community values it, and what others can copy. It also covers what we're still learning: building connection is easier than reducing loneliness, and progress isn't always a straight line.



PROXIMITY DOES NOT MAKE CONNECTION, A PROGRAM DOES

Density on its own produces neighbours who pass each other in a foyer. What converts proximity into acquaintance is a programmed space with a reason to stop: 95.8% of hyperlocal residents agree they interact more often with their neighbours after attending Little BIG House programs, and 78.4% of all respondents agree. We cannot separate cause from selection, but the association holds on every connection measure we track rather than on one, and it strengthens the closer people live to the Little BIG House. For anyone building housing, this is the finding that matters most. The room is starting point, and the program is what makes it work.

LITTLE BIG HOUSE CONTINUES TO BE A HIGHLY VALUED COMMUNITY ASSET

98.7% of respondents say physical spaces for community interaction matter to them, and 93.0% want the markets and the food festival to continue. Among hyperlocal residents, 90.2% say the Little BIG House makes the Flour Mill a better place to live and 86.0% say it adds value to their property. The recommendation score is +81. These are powerful indicators of community desire and intent and should be considered by Council's and Developers.

THE LESSONS ARE REPEATABLE

A room that reads as a living room. A long table. A kettle. An event that recurs, a host who welcomes people by name, fifteen minutes to linger afterwards, mingling planned rather than left to chance, and a group chat to carry it between sessions. None of it costs much, and all of it can be designed and planned for. We want to stress that more 'flexible space' is not the answer. Intentional space and programing delivers outcomes.

REDUCING LONELINESS IS COMPLICATED AND NON-LINEAR

Connection has risen on every measure since 2022, yet loneliness across all respondents has held steady rather than fallen, which is also the national pattern. Progress shows up by distance rather than by year. The hyperlocal community is lonely at roughly a quarter of the national rate[4], and is the only group to have improved against our own 2022 baseline.

Appendix A: Methodology

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

This report draws on five annual community surveys run by Little BIG Foundation between 2022 and 2026. Every figure comes from respondent-level survey data, not from previously published summaries.

Each year is a fresh sample, not the same people tracked over time. Where we compare years, we are comparing two groups of respondents rather than measuring change in individuals. Base sizes vary a good deal between years, and movements between 2025 and 2026 in particular should be treated with caution.

All quotes are reproduced word for word, including original spelling and typing. They are attributed only by what the survey itself tells us about the person: whether they are a hyperlocal resident, and whether they volunteer or host.

WHO WE MEAN BY LOCAL AND HYPERLOCAL

Term	Who it covers
Hyperlocal	People who answered "I live in the Flour Mill development"
Local	People living in our three walkable neighbouring suburbs: Summer Hill (postcode 2130), Lewisham (2049) and Dulwich Hill (2203). This includes the hyperlocal community, which sits inside Summer Hill
Wider Inner West	People living elsewhere in the Inner West

Segments are built from the question about where people live, which is the only form of the question asked consistently in all five years. For 2026 we checked this against the postcode question: everyone in the hyperlocal group gave postcode 2130, and the rest of the local group gave 2130, 2049 or 2203, so the two definitions agree. A small number of respondents who described themselves as living elsewhere in the Inner West gave a 2049 postcode; they are counted as they described themselves.

Respondents who preferred not to say where they live are included in totals for all respondents but not in any of the three cuts.

THE SURVEYS

Year	Respondents	Hyperlocal
2022	258	82
2023	316	89
2024	384	102
2025	180	29
2026	322	102

BASE SIZES BEHIND THE 2026 FIGURES

Question group	All respondents	Local	Hyperlocal
Core connection questions	302	191	101
Little BIG House experience questions	241	147	71
Community space and 2027 priorities	298	197	102
UCLA-4 loneliness score	315	197	102
Volunteering questions	281 volunteering status, 52 describing a role		

The open-text questions were answered by between 28 and 266 people depending on the question. The smallest bases are the two questions asked only of volunteers and hosts, which are reported as percentages of that smaller group and should be read as indicative.

LONELINESS MEASUREMENT

The UCLA Loneliness Scale four-item version was introduced in 2026 and scored as set out by Ending Loneliness Together: Never 1, Rarely 2, Sometimes 3, Always 4, with items 1 and 3 reverse-scored and the four summed. Range 4 to 16, higher meaning lonelier. 315 of 322 respondents answered all four items and were scored.

Two different cut-off systems exist and are not interchangeable. This report uses 11 or more for "lonely" and above 12 for "severely lonely", which are the thresholds ELT use in their national State of the Nation reporting[4] and therefore the only ones comparable to the national figures. ELT's separate guidance for community organisations[10] uses 14 or more for people aged 45 and under and 13 or more for those 46 and over; on that basis 4.3% of our respondents are classed as very lonely. Both are correct; they measure different things and must never be mixed.

HOW THE OPEN TEXT WAS ANALYSED

1,030 free-text responses across nine questions were coded by rule. Each theme is defined by an explicit list of words and phrases, matched at a word start and case-insensitively. Coding is therefore deterministic: the same text always receives the same themes, and the trigger words are recorded against every response.

Two things a reader should know:

- The themes were identified by reading all 1,030 responses using an AI assistant, not by a human researcher.
- A response can carry several themes or none. Percentages are of everyone who answered that question and do not sum to 100. Between 7% and 19% of responses per question matched no rule; these are retained in full in the underlying analysis rather than discarded.



LIMITATIONS

- Each year is a fresh sample, not a tracked cohort. No figure here measures change within individuals.
- Respondents are self-selected. People engaged with the Little BIG House are more likely to answer a Little BIG House survey, so these results describe the community around the Little BIG House rather than Summer Hill as a whole.
- The sample is 67% female and concentrated in the 31 to 60 age range. Summer Hill itself has far more renters and lone-person households than the national average[9], which affects every comparison with national figures.
- Association is not cause. The report states where a finding is a correlation, and those statements should survive editing.

SOURCES AND REFERENCES

Every external figure in this report carries a numbered reference in square brackets. All sources, including the national comparisons that were previously listed here, are set out once in the Endnotes at the end of the report, with the publisher, the sample, the data collection period and a link.

Appendix B: About this report and about Little BIG

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Little BIG acknowledge and pay respect to the past, present and future traditional custodians and elders of this country on which we work.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report contains the findings of the annual community survey commissioned by the Little BIG Foundation (Little BIG). This survey is an important tool that the Little BIG House uses to understand change in its community, inform its approach to community programs and events and identify opportunities to increase its 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.

ABOUT LITTLE BIG

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.

ABOUT LITTLE BIG HOUSE AT SUMMER HILL

The Little BIG House is in Sydney's inner west Local Government Area on the border of Summer Hill, Lewisham, and Dulwich Hill. It 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. In 2026, the Summer Hill Little BIG House has a team of approximately 60 hosts and volunteers who contribute to the program's success in different ways. New event proposals are assessed by a volunteer Management Committee who ensures the suitability of the program and help drive both volunteer and community engagement.

DISCLOSURE

The Little BIG Foundation 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 we 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. The Little BIG Foundation 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. ©Little B.I.G. Foundation Ltd.

Endnotes

1. 62% of Australians know many of their neighbours by name. “62 per cent of Australians know many of their neighbours by name.” Australia Talks National Survey 2021, 60,000 Australians, reported by M Marozzi, “Do you know your neighbours by name”, ABC News, 29/05/2021. abc.net.au

2. 48% of Australians could count on neighbours for groceries if sick. “48% of people state that if they were sick they could count on their neighbours to shop for groceries.” Ending Loneliness Together, State of the Nation: Social Connection in Australia 2023, 4,026 Australians aged 18 to 92. endingloneliness.com.au

3. 53% of Australians have weekly face-to-face contact. “53% had face-to-face contact with family or friends living outside their household at least once a week.” ABS, General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2025, collected 1 May to 28 June 2025, persons aged 15 and over. abs.gov.au

4. 28% of Australians are lonely, 16% severely lonely. UCLA Loneliness Scale 4-item, cut-offs of 11 or more and above 12. Ending Loneliness Together, State of the Nation 2026, 4,001 Australians aged 12 to 95, data collected January to February 2026. endingloneliness.com.au

5. 50.5% of Australians felt lonely at least one day in the previous week. Australian Loneliness Report, Australian Psychological Society and Swinburne University, 1,678 Australian adults, data collected 29 May to 1 October 2018. The same report gives 27.6% feeling lonely for three or more days. researchbank.swinburne.edu.au

6. An alternative, more recent loneliness figure. “even in August 2022 more than one-third of Australians (35.6 per cent) reported having experienced loneliness at least some of the time in the week prior to the survey.” Biddle, N., Edwards, B., Gray, M. & Rehill, P. 2022, Wellbeing outcomes in Australia as lockdowns ease and cases increase - August 2022, ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, 3,510 Australians, fieldwork 8-22 August 2022. polis.cass.anu.edu.au

7. 92% of Australians rate public open space very or somewhat important in an ideal neighbourhood. Heart Foundation, What Australia Wants: Living locally in walkable neighbourhoods, published June 2025, 3,000 people, fieldwork 27 February to 11 March 2025. [CHECK: this measures public open space in an ideal neighbourhood, not community space when deciding where to live.] heartfoundation.org.au

8. Group participation and volunteering. ABS, General Social Survey: 2025 cycle gives social groups 45.3%, community support groups 20.7%, civic and political groups 7.3%, and volunteering through an organisation 23%. The pre-COVID 2019 cycle gives 50.0%, 25.0% and 9.4%. abs.gov.au

9. Summer Hill household composition. ABS, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, QuickStats for Summer Hill. abs.gov.au

10. Loneliness measurement, scoring and cut-offs. Ending Loneliness Together, Outcomes Measurement Framework series: A Guide to Measuring Loneliness for Community Organisations (Guide 1 of 3); A Guide to Evaluating Loneliness Outcomes for Community Organisations (Guide 2 of 3, December 2021); A Guide to Reporting Service Evaluations for Community Organisations (Guide 3 of 3, April 2022). The four-item UCLA Loneliness Scale, the reverse-scored items and the age-based cut-offs applied here follow Guide 2.

11. Communal areas, neighbouring and loneliness in apartment buildings. Kleeman, A., Giles-Corti, B., Gunn, L., Hooper, P. & Foster, S. 2023, ‘The impact of the design and quality of communal areas in apartment buildings on residents’ neighbouring and loneliness’, Cities, vol. 133, article 104126. A study of 113 apartment developments in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. research-repository.uwa.edu.au

12. The long decline in formal volunteering. AIHW, Australia’s welfare, “Volunteers”, updated 16 October 2025, drawing on successive ABS General Social Survey cycles: formal volunteering in the previous 12 months fell from 36.2% in 2010 to 30.9% in 2014 and 24.8% in 2020. aihw.gov.au

13. Current volunteering rates in Australia. Volunteering Australia, Volunteering Statistics: General Social Survey 2025, May 2026: 22.6% of people aged 15 and over volunteered formally through an organisation, 29.5% volunteered informally, and 42.8% did one or both. ABS General Social Survey, data collected 1 May to 28 June 2025. volunteeringaustralia.org

14. What volunteering gives the volunteer. A Snapshot of Volunteering in Australia, the state and territory volunteering peak bodies, 2023, 6,830 Australian residents surveyed in July 2023: the increase in wellbeing attributable to volunteering is 4.3 points out of 100 once demographic factors are controlled for, with each additional hour volunteered associated with a further 0.04 point. volunteeringact.org.au


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