

Building Communities

Background Paper | by Nancy Rogers | April 2012



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and Social Inclusion



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1. Introduction

Local communities matter to people. Where we live influences our access to opportunities; our daily lived experience; and our health, safety and wellbeing. And, despite changes in how and with whom we relate, local communities remain an important site for relationship and connection; identity and care; and for access to services and resources.

The Department for Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) has been created to support and enable the South Australian Government's commitment to engage with and build communities. The Department brings together a range of services, funding, planning and policy functions designed to support vulnerable people in the community and build community capacity and engagement.

This Paper – the first in a series - aims to stimulate thinking and debate around supporting and strengthening local communities. It brings together ideas from many different fields and sources; discusses the importance of community and how it affects people's lives; suggests the attributes of healthy, livable communities; and proposes a conceptual framework for building communities.

DCSI is, of course, only one of many partners committed to working with and for communities. Local Government, other State and Commonwealth Government departments, business, non-government organisations and community groups are all active and engaged in this space. We hope that this paper can also contribute to this broader effort, and support consistent and joined-up engagement with communities across South Australia.

The central premise of this paper is that communities matter to people and have a strong influence on wellbeing - and therefore they should matter to all of us.

2. Why do communities matter?

“Where people live affects their opportunities and contributes substantially to wellbeing or difficulties.”

Fincher & Iveson, 2008

“The idea of community is both evocative and problematic. Community is both acknowledge and contested, sought for and lamented. It suggests images and feelings of identity, of belonging, of shared circumstance and common cause. It can also be a tool for exclusion and a site of division and conflict. Indeed the search for community, fears about its demise, and renewed efforts to establish its strength have been ongoing, emerging and re-emerging as an explanation of current social ills or as solutions to them.”

Chaskin, 2009, p 31

The concept of community, and the role it plays in people's lives, has changed enormously over recent years. People in the 21st century are mobile and their communities diverse and scattered, built around multiple roles and interfaces (such as work, interests, culture, identity) and accessed through different mediums (face-to-face or online). Geographic communities have also become more fluid and boundaries less clear, as they abut and overlap flexibly with neighbouring areas.

Whilst these trends may suggest a declining significance for local, place-based communities, there are also trends in the opposite direction. For example, there is now strong and growing evidence on the impact of the area in which we live on health and wellbeing; growing public debate about what has been called

‘an epidemic of loneliness’ and the social isolation and disconnection in modern western societies; increasing interest in quality local environments which facilitate active engaged lifestyles; and a renewed valuing of local relationships, connections, and neighbourliness. This interest in local community also perhaps acknowledges what ‘local’ can mean and offer in an increasingly globalised and potentially alienating world.

There is clear evidence that many problems and issues are geographically clustered. In South Australia, for example, the Social Health Atlas¹ maps the clustering of health outcomes and their correlation with social-economic status. Locational disadvantage is now an accepted concept – where a person lives affects their opportunities and contributes substantially to wellbeing or difficulties².

But what exactly is this connection? How does where we live come to impact so significantly on our health, wellbeing and prospects?

Reflecting on our own lives can help illuminate this question. Every day we are influenced by our local area in many different ways. Where we live affects and shapes our daily routines (travel to and from work, getting children to and from school), our shopping patterns and our leisure options and behaviour. Location is often pivotal in decisions about where to live: when buying a new home, for example, people usually consider the actual ‘bricks and mortar’ house in its local context, considers features such as access to schools, facilities, transport and the quality of the local environment. A local area (more than just a house) is critical in these choices.

Taking a less subjective approach, research suggests two mechanisms by which local areas influence people's health and wellbeing, namely:

1. the quality and nature of the resources and community settings available and
2. the people in the area – including relationships, values and attitudes, behaviour and culture.

¹ <http://www.publichealth.gov.au/publications/a-social-health-atlas-of-south-australia-%5Bthird-edition%5D.html>

² *Fincher R & Iveson K 2008, Planning and Diversity in the City*

Think, for example, of a child. The major influence on their development is their family - but this family does not exist in a vacuum. The quality and accessibility of schools, kindergartens and playgroups; family services, supports and networks; health care; play and recreational opportunities and good quality food - all impact on the growing child. A child is also influenced by the people who surround them in the places they live, play and learn – in child care, at kindergarten, school, in the park and on the streets. These people, their behaviour and attitudes, help set expectations and norms and shape a view on life. Further, poverty, high-risk neighbourhoods and the associated stressors impact negatively on parents as well as children and can create strains on parenting. Social isolation in highly disadvantaged neighbourhoods may actually be a protective, rather than a risk, factor³.

Communities provide a set of risk and protective factors that influence community members. There are two aspects of communities that seem to matter for the wellbeing of children and families:

1. compositional factors – that is, attributes of community make-up, structure and circumstance (eg poverty, crime, housing quality, environment)
2. the set of mechanisms and processes by which communities function (eg social capital, relationships).

Chaskin, 2009, p 32

“There is considerable evidence that high concentrations of deprivation reduce the quality of life of all residents of an area. Unemployment rates and ill health tend to be higher, crime and vandalism are prevalent and the quality of schools and educational attainment are lower. In addition, the most deprived areas often lack access to employment opportunities, a broad range of shops, health facilities and entertainment, which the better off take for granted. The quality of the local environment and the provision of environmental services is also often well below standards taken for granted in more affluent areas.”

Bailey et al, 2011

Communities can also contribute to a sense of belonging and identity; and provide opportunities for activity, participation and involvement, for getting to know others (even superficially) and feeling connected. These benefits can be very significant for people who, because of age, disability, poverty or vulnerability, have few alternative communities of interest (such as work and study); less financial and other resources; fewer options and opportunities; and are most at risk of social isolation, boredom and exclusion.

People who are disadvantaged by poverty and other circumstances are often those who are most dependent on their local community (for resources, services and social contacts) and therefore affected by it. People in these circumstances often have a greater need for services and fewer choices as to where or how these will be provided. Thus, although local community matters to all, it matters more to some than to others – and those who stand to gain or lose the most include children and families at risk; people with disability; people who are aged and frail; those who are isolated or socially excluded and those living in poverty.

³ Formoso D, Weber R & Atkins M 2010, 'Gentrifications and urban children's well-being: tipping the scales from problems to promise', *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 46:395 - 412

Communities also play a broader social role. Whereas in previous generations local communities tended to be places marked by heterogeneity or 'sameness' (exemplified by the concept of 'the village'), with strong community norms⁴, this is no longer the case. Australia is now a mixed pluralistic society, with increasing cultural, social and religious diversity. Local areas and shared spaces are now places where people can and do encounter difference. Increasingly, local communities are where we have the opportunity to learn to live together in our diversity, across age, religious beliefs, race and culture. Communities can therefore be places which support social inclusion, understanding and tolerance. Building a sense of social cohesion and trust, based on diversity and not heterogeneity, is one of the challenges of community building in the 21st century.

“...there appear to be some fairly robust, demonstrated links between living in a disadvantaged location and the outcomes in the lives of residents (including) concentrations of deprivation reduce private sector activity.... high levels of worklessness limit job networks and employment ambitions; schools struggle to educate overwhelmingly poor populations; poor neighbourhoods stimulate higher levels of crime and disorder; area-based deprivation exacerbates health inequalities.”

Ware et al, 2010, p 13

“Germany, desperate to lift its birth rate, is proposing a law to allow children under six to laugh, shout and play at any volume. The move follows a series of lawsuits over noisy children and calls to ban kindergartens from residential areas because they were too loud.”

The Age, Feb 23 2011

The Jerusalem city authority has erected a fence in a kindergarten playground to separate ultra-orthodox Jewish children from secular Jewish children who share the same building...

“I cried when I saw the fence. These children are very small. I had hoped that we could live in peace together. If we separate the children at such an early age, how will they learn to live together?”

The Age, March 9 2011

Finding a way to think about communities

We have now identified that the quality and nature of a local area matters, influencing health and wellbeing, people's daily lived experience, and access to opportunity. In order to maximise the potential benefits of community, however, it is important to identify the elements and features within local areas that make a difference, that is, what it is that we might want to 'build' and develop. Or, what constitutes a strong, healthy community?

One of the challenges when surveying the literature and research relating to communities is the different perspectives and orientations from which issues are approached, and subsequently solutions and strategies proposed. Urban planners, for example, focus on the physical elements of the local environment, including factors influencing social composition; social theorists and social workers write in terms of people (building connections and relationships; social capital, organising for action; empowerment from the 'bottom up', building community capacity). There is a large literature focused on housing and urban renewal and place-based solutions; another stream on economic development and the private sector; and yet more from a primary health perspective, focused on health influences and health promotion.

Added to this is work that focuses on distinct target groups, for example, children, the aged, urban or rural communities, or communities in extreme poverty and deprivation in the developed or developing world.

⁴ Fincher R & Iveson K 2008, *Planning and Diversity in the City*

Across the diverse and generally disconnected literature there is, fortunately, remarkable consistency in analysis as to the value of local community and the positive attributes that we should strive to support and develop. Community is consistently identified as a valuable site for:

- > social connection, relationship and care
- > physical shelter and safety
- > meaningful activity, participation and engagement
- > access to jobs, opportunities, resources and services and
- > the nurturing of shared norms and values, and a sense of belonging and identity.

Further, it is also consistently identified that features of a local area (such as urban design, infrastructure, community safety, accessibility and attractiveness) affect people's actions, behaviour and experiences (eg if people are more or less sedentary) which in turn impacts on their physical health and wellbeing.

Thus, the literature on the communities generally refers to:

- > supporting and building relationships between community members (social capital, organised groups, neighbourliness and informal care)
- > opportunities for civic participation and engagement
- > the quality, layout and features of the physical environment
- > the quality, availability and accessibility of local services and infrastructure
- > providing safety and care for the vulnerable
- > social inclusion
- > population mix and density
- > economic viability
- > employment opportunities
- > connections with neighbouring areas, including through transport and infrastructure and
- > those more indefinable qualities which nurture the human spirit and soul – such as beauty, culture and the arts.

We could also approach the question of 'why communities, and what is important about the local?' differently, from the perspective of people who are vulnerable and at risk. We could quickly conclude that issues common to many include:

- > boredom and lack of meaningful activity
- > social isolation, disconnection from family and friends and limited social supports
- > low education and high levels of unemployment
- > poverty and few resources
- > poor health status
- > higher need for services and support
- > accessibility issues and
- > multiple life challenges and complex circumstances.

Communities are no magic solution for complex human ills, but can offer something for all these challenges.

For example:

- > opportunities to connect with others – to join groups, meet people and develop relationships (from casual interactions to real friendships)
- > chances to get involved, to join a group and do things that are enjoyable or rewarding
- > professional services as well as informal supports
- > affordable housing and housing security which allows people to live in a well resourced area and put down some roots
- > attractive places to go and things to do that are (physically and financially) accessible
- > access to education, training and employment and
- > enablers to being out-and-about and active, including access to transport and interesting public spaces.

Building Communities

Bringing these ideas and elements together, therefore, leads to the attributes of strong, healthy communities which enable access to opportunities for their members. These attributes are the focus of discussion in the next section, where they are presented as:

- the mixed community
- the interactive community
- the supported community
- the accessible community
- the vibrant and viable community
- the healthy community
- the attractive community
- the unique community
- the sustainable community



A sustainable community has...

- > A flourishing local economy to provide jobs and wealth
- > Strong leadership to respond positively to change
- > Appropriate size, scale and density, and the right layout
- > A well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes
- > A safe and healthy local environment, with well-designed public and green space
- > Housing and other buildings which meet different needs over time
- > Good quality local public services
- > A diverse vibrant and creative local culture, encouraging pride in the community and cohesion within
- > A sense of place, but well connected to its surroundings
- > The right links with the wider regional, national and international community
- > A network of safe, well-designed streets and public spaces
- > Good public transport and transport infrastructure
- > Effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses.

Bailey et al, 2011

3. The attributes of strong communities

From across the literature, themes emerge which have here been crafted as the 'attributes of communities that work'. Building and supporting these attributes (described below) is thus a major focus in building communities.

1. The mixed community

We have already discussed the negative impacts of area-based disadvantage. Concentrations of deprivation significantly impact on life prospects, opportunities, health and wellbeing. One of the key aspirations in building communities is, therefore, to support and sustain mixed communities – communities which attract and retain a diverse population across income, age, cultural background and ability.

Mixed communities have many advantages, including:

- > a higher quality of community assets, infrastructure, services, groups and resources (due to factors such as the stronger economic base of the community and the personal resources of community members)
- > the vibrancy that can accompany diversity, alongside opportunities for encounter and relationship across age, culture and social group
- > diversity in social norms and aspirations
- > greater economic viability and opportunities and
- > a more attractive environment.

The desire to achieve mixed communities should not be seen as an end in itself but as one important precondition for achieving successful and sustainable places to live. These residential environments should not only be well designed and well managed but also provide access to the full range of high quality services including leisure and employment opportunities. The benefits of mixed income developments include:

- > Residents of all ages, ethnic groups, household sizes and class have the opportunity to interact and develop weak or strong ties
- > The potential for negative area affects, such as low aspirations, low educational attainment and low-level crime, is reduced
- > Local schools can attract pupils from a wide range of backgrounds
- > The area may be able to attract and support a higher level of local services, activities, and facilities
- > Residents are able to move within the development in order to accommodate changes in circumstances
- > Higher average levels of income may create employment opportunities in the area.

Bailey et al, 2011

“An increased diversity of housing types and choices can enable grandparents to downsize and stay local, and can provide more affordable options for grown-up children to stay in the neighbourhood. More households mean more diverse local shops and more rates, which can be spent on better public spaces and local services.”

Kelly et al, 2011, p 10

2. The interactive community – community as meeting place

Encouraging and supporting interaction, connection and relationship between people, is one of the most important goals in building communities. Human beings are intrinsically social. We need to relate and connect with others, to belong, and to give and receive care. Community can be a meeting place where people's lives are enriched through relationship and connection, especially those who are isolated and have limited social supports. Supporting an interactive community means planning, facilitating and creating opportunities for encounter and contact between people in day to day life⁵ and building social capital. It also means recognising the importance of relationship to people and directly targeting issues such as social isolation, social support and mutual care in work with communities, groups and individuals.

Community groups and organisations are fundamental to the concept of the interactive community. The simple act of joining and being regularly involved in a group can have very significant impacts on health and well-being, especially for people who are isolated and outside the world of work or study. Building communities includes supporting a community's associational life, or its social capital – that is, community groups and organizations. These include those based on interests or social activities such as sports and recreation, the arts, or with a focus on community interest such as the local environment or local services, organisations which provide opportunities for volunteering and involvement, and the infrastructure which enables and supports these (eg libraries, meeting places, sports facilities etc)⁶. The greater the diversity of groups available in a community, the more opportunities are available to those who live there.

“We need to facilitate *encounter* in urban spaces – planning for encounter means facilitating opportunities for contact in day to day life. Places of encounter include workplaces, schools, community organisations, public spaces, events.”

Fincher & Iveson, 2008

⁵ After Fincher R & Iveson K 2008, *Planning and Diversity in the City*

⁶ After Fincher R & Iveson K 2008, *Planning and Diversity in the City*

“Social mixing in communities will often need to be facilitated. Creating and supporting settings for interaction among neighbours seems critical to building the neighbour to neighbour relationships that can foster collective socialisation. Schools, day care centres, parks, recreation centres, can all serve as such settings.”

Formoso, Weber & Atkins, 2010, p 404

Robert Putnam – social capital and ‘Bowling alone’

Robert Putnam's work on social capital has become very well known and highly influential. In *Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital* (1995) Putnam surveyed the decline of social capital in the USA since the 1950s. Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

In other words, interaction enables people to build communities, to commit themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric. A sense of belonging and the concrete experience of social networks (and the relationships of trust and tolerance that can be involved) can, it is argued, bring great benefits to people.

Putnam makes a distinction between two kinds of social capital: bonding capital and bridging capital. Bonding occurs when you are socializing with people who are like you: same age, same race, same religion, and so on. But in order to create peaceful societies in a diverse multi-ethnic country, one needs to have a second kind of social capital: bridging. Bridging is what you do when you make friends with people who are not like you.

From Putnam, 2000 and
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_D._Putnam



3. The supported community

Every community depends for its existence on underpinning infrastructure and services which support and enable a shared human life and promote opportunity and wellbeing. These supports include health and community services, education and training, policing and community safety, and transport facilities, routes and systems.

Although often not prioritised in community building strategies, the availability, quality and responsiveness of this infrastructure has a major daily impact on the wellbeing and experiences of community members, as well as on their opportunities to participate and share more fully in what the community has to offer. Thus, services, protection and support need to be very much on the agenda in community building.

In closing the gap between areas of affluence and poverty, greater economic diversity and the delivery of improved public services should receive as much attention as the quality of housing.

Bailey et al, 2011

4. The accessible community

Accessibility is about ensuring that the benefits within and surrounding a community are available to all, regardless of age, frailty, cultural background or income. Accessibility has a number of dimensions, including:

- > physical – built form, urban design, transport etc which is accessible to people with restricted mobility, including older people, those with a disability and parents with young children, as well as infrastructure and services (such as transport networks and public transport) which enables connection and access
- > cultural – services and resources that are accessible and welcoming to people from diverse backgrounds (cultural, religious and socio-economic)
- > financial – services, resources and opportunities which are accessible to people on a low income and
- > informational – information about services, events or resources (people can't access what they do not know about).

Gaps in any of these areas can limit people's ability to access services and be active and involved thus reinforcing isolation and exclusion. Accessibility issues are highly significant to people who are aged, living with a disability, on a low income or are Aboriginal or from a culturally or linguistically diverse background.

World Health Organisation Age-friendly cities checklist

The World Health Organisation guide to 'age-friendly cities' makes clear the complexity and diversity of accessibility issues, and what might be involved in ensuring local communities are really accessible places for all their members. Features from this guide are summarised before.

Outdoor spaces and buildings

☐ *Environment*

- > clean and pleasant (dirtiness can detract from quality of life/enjoyment)

☐ *Green spaces*

- > well-maintained and safe, with adequate shelter, toilets and seating
- > pedestrian friendly

☐ *Outdoor seating*

- > particularly in parks, transport stops and public spaces
- > well maintained

☐ *Pavements*

- > well maintained and smooth, non-slip, wide enough to allow for wheelchairs
- > clear of obstructions

☐ *Roads*

- > with adequate pedestrian crossings and other physical structures to assist pedestrians
- > audible signals for those with impaired hearing

☐ *Traffic*

- > enforcement of traffic rules and regulations

☐ *Cycle paths*

- > separate paths for cyclists

☐ *Safety*

- > public safety in all open spaces and buildings is a priority

☐ *Services*

- > are clustered, located in proximity, and can be easily physically accessed

☐ *Buildings*

- > accessible building features

☐ *Public toilets*

- > convenient, accessible, well-maintained and clean

Transportation

☐ *Affordability*

☐ *Reliability and frequency*

☐ *Travel destinations*

- > available to key destinations such as health services, parks, shopping centres
- > services connecting within the neighbourhood, not just to main city centres

☐ *Accessibility*

- > eg buses, taxis

☐ *Sufficient specialised services and prioritised seating*

- > eg for people with a disability

☐ *Safety & comfort*

☐ *Transport stops and stations*

- > are sheltered, safe and clean
- > physically accessible

☐ *Information about services is available*

☐ *Community transport services*

☐ *Taxis (affordable, accessible)*

☐ *Roads*

- > well maintained, wide and well-lit
- > traffic calming devices
- > traffic controls

☐ *Parking availability*

Building Communities

Housing

- ☐ *Affordability*
.....
- ☐ *Design (accessible)*
.....
- ☐ *Close to services and transport*
.....
- ☐ *Older person's housing integrated into surrounding community*

Social participation

- ☐ *Accessibility of events and activities*
 - > location
 - > able to bring friend/caregiver
 - > timing of events
 - > cost.....
- ☐ *Affordability*
.....
- ☐ *Range of events and activities*
.....
- ☐ *Facilities and settings*
 - > including accessibility
 - > events occur in a variety of community locations.....
- ☐ *Promotion and awareness of activities*
.....
- ☐ *Addressing isolation*
 - > organisations make special efforts to address the isolated.....
- ☐ *Fostering community integration*
 - > community facilities promote shared and multipurpose use
 - > local gathering places and activities promote familiarity and exchange

Respect and social inclusion

- ☐ *Respectful and inclusive services*
.....
- ☐ *Intergenerational and family interactions*
 - > community wide settings, activities and events attract people of all ages
 - > activities that bring generations together.....
- ☐ *Community inclusion*
 - > included as full partners in community decision making affecting them
 - > recognised for community contributions
 - > community action to strengthen neighbourhood ties and support.....
- ☐ *Economic inclusion*
 - > economically disadvantaged people are able to access community services and events

Civic participation and employment

- ☐ *Volunteering options*
 - > a range of options for people to volunteer and contribute
 - > voluntary organisations are well-developed, with infrastructure, training and support
 - > skills and interests of volunteers are matched to positions
 - > volunteers are supported in their volunteer work.....
- ☐ *Employment options*
 - > range of employment options
 - > employers and employee organisations support flexible work options.....
- ☐ *Accessibility*
 - > physical access to workplaces (both voluntary and paid)
 - > transportation is available
 - > workplaces can meet the needs of people with a disability

Civic participation and employment - (cont.)

❑ *Civic participation*

- > advisory councils, boards, etc include older people (or other target groups)
- > support exists for older persons (or others with special needs) to participate in meetings and civic events

❑ *Valued contributions*

- > people are respected and acknowledged for their contributions

Age (or as relevant) friendly communication

- > basic, universal communication system to reach every resident
- > regular and reliable distribution of information
- > accessibility principles
- > plain language

Community and health services

- > accessibility (physical and other)
- > coordination
- > range of services available

World Health Organisation, 2007

5. The vibrant and viable community

Strong communities are places that are alive and economically viable, and where ‘things are happening’. Such communities attract and retain successful businesses, facilities and services; have environments that are more attractive and less degraded; and generally offer more options and choices to residents. They are, simply, more interesting and attractive places to be and are more likely to be economically sustainable. Population density and social mix are critical components in achieving this aim (having enough population, with sufficient income, to attract and retain local businesses, services and resources). As well, urban design (‘good spaces’) the stewardship of local resources, (including the maintenance of streetscapes, gardens, buildings, recreational areas etc), good transport connections with neighbouring areas (supporting easy access in and out of the local area) and community activity, events and social capital are critical.

“People gather where things are happening and spontaneously seek the presence of other people. Faced with the choice of walking down a deserted or a lively street, most people would choose the street with life and activity. The walk will be more interesting and they will feel safer.”

Gehl, 2010 p 25 & p 63

“The lively city sends friendly and welcoming signals with the promise of social interaction. The presence of other people in itself signals which places are worthwhile. A theatre with a full house and a theatre that is nearly empty send two completely different messages.... Life in public places is a key urban attraction.”

Gehl, 2010 p 25 & p 63

6. The healthy community

The healthy community is one which, by its design, features, infrastructure and supports, encourages and enables a healthy, safe lifestyle⁷.

This includes, for example:

- > design and conditions which encourage and enable physical activity, such as walking or bike riding (eg shops within walking distance, well maintained footpaths and accessible walking trails, bike paths and effective traffic controls)
- > freedom from pollution and environmental health hazards
- > safety in public places and on the streets that encourage people to be out and about
- > sport and recreational facilities and spaces which are attractive, available and accessible to all.

“Simple individual urban crime-prevention solutions are not of much help, where the invasive sense of insecurity is often deeply rooted in social conditions.... In almost all situations there are good arguments for working carefully to reinforce real and perceived safety, a prerequisite for using common city space.”

“If we reinforce city life so that more people walk and spend time in common spaces, in almost every situation both real and perceived safety will increase. The presence of others indicates that a place is good and safe. There are ‘eyes in the street’ and ‘eyes on the street’ as well A live city becomes a valued city and thus also a safer city.”

Gehl, 2010, pp 97–99

Real and perceived safety: the impacts

Concerns about personal safety (whether real or perceived) can be a major factor driving people ‘off the streets’ and out of shared public spaces, into a more privatised existence in their own homes. Conversely, the more people are ‘out and about’, the safer our urban spaces become (there’s safety in numbers); and the more opportunities there are for interaction as well as for a healthy active lifestyle.

In **Cities for People**, Jan Gehl identifies a strong link between goals of strengthening community life and safety issues:

“Being able to walk safely in city space is a prerequisite for creating inviting, well-functioning cities for people. Experienced as well as perceived safety is crucial....Juxtaposed with the idealistic visions for safe open cities is the reality of many urban societies. Social and economic inequality is the backdrop for high crime rates and ...attempts to protect property and private life. Barbed wire and iron bars fortify houses, security patrols cruise residential areas, security guards stand in front of shops and banks, signs threaten ‘armed response’ outside houses in exclusive quarters, gated communities abound: all of these are examples of people’s attempts to protect themselves against invasion and trespass of private property. The examples also illustrate a general retreat to the private sphere....”

7. The attractive community

The visual and sensory aspects of an area (sight, sounds and smell) have a great impact on people and on the capacity of an area to attract and retain a diverse population. An environment which is attractive, pleasant to be in, well cared for, clean and maintained, is good to be in, and will offer more benefits and opportunities for residents and visitors. It is, for example, more likely to encourage people out-of-doors, into shared spaces and into activity.

⁷ See, for example, *Health in All Policies: the South Australian approach*, available at www.sahealth.sa.gov.au

8. The unique community

Communities can carry with them a history, tradition, culture, population and 'way of being' which is distinctive to themselves, and enormously enriching. This distinctiveness is often what makes communities interesting (in contrast to homogenous suburbs or characterless developments).

There are no easy or simple pathways to achieving uniqueness and identity – partly it's time, but it is also people belonging and feeling connected to place and each other. Art, culture, history and population mix can all make a contribution. Preserving the character and uniqueness of an area is also an important consideration in urban planning and new developments. Those working within communities, or on major community redevelopments, are wise to be attuned and sensitive to such elements.

9. The sustainable community

The sustainable community is one whose life, attributes and qualities can be sustained into the future including:

1. environmental sustainability and
2. the sustainability of the positive attributes within the area over the long term.

Environmental sustainability is an imperative in all planning and development in the 21st century, including aspects such as energy consumption, emissions, water, waste and transport. Sustainability issues can also be a rallying and gathering point for local community action and for community members coming together to work on shared concerns and local solutions.

Another concern is with the stewardship and care into the longer term of all the benefits and assets (tangible and less so) within a local area – for example:

- > effective governance and management systems for community assets
- > the community's traditions, culture and individuality
- > maintaining housing affordability so the community can continue to be home to a diverse population
- > the cleanliness and quality of local areas – public plantings, green spaces, facilities and art work all need to be well-maintained once established and
- > local leadership.

These issues are important for new build communities or developments, that is, ensuring the stewardship and care of the attributes in the original vision and development. However, managing change and redevelopment within an existing community whilst retaining its identity, assets and uniqueness, is equally crucial.

DCSI is committed to working with and for communities, and in partnership with others, to support vibrant and viable, diverse and interactive communities that support good health; and are attractive places in which to live and work. We recognise that every community is unique, and work to ensure benefits are accessible to all and sustainable into the future.

“Where you live shapes your access to opportunity. To create a fully inclusive nation, we must ensure that all people live in communities of opportunity – places with quality schools, access to good jobs with liveable wages, quality housing choices, public transportation, safe and walkable streets, services, parks, access to healthy food and strong social networks.”

PolicyLink, 2010

“Local communities know more about their neighbourhoods, and care more about them, than anyone else. Almost all Australians see themselves as members of their local community. A quarter work to improve their local area, and many more are willing to.”

Kelly et al, 2011, p 11

4. A framework for building communities

We have now identified the attributes of the ideal 'communities of opportunity'. These attributes can guide and focus community-building efforts – that is, they set out what it is we are trying to achieve with and for communities.

The next question then becomes – how do we actually do it? This is much harder question, that has no simple or definitive answer. What we offer here instead is a framework that can assist in understanding and conceptualising the layers of influence on communities, and therefore the range and type of strategies that can be applied. The framework, by its nature, demonstrates the need for multiple and varied actions and approaches, which can and should still link to a coherent whole.

Communities are complex, multi-layered and diverse. They are not single contained entities and they are influenced by an endless array of global, local, historic and current factors; economic, social, cultural and environmental. People within communities have different – and often competing - needs, stories, concerns and priorities. Building and strengthening communities is never simple, and the challenges can seem overwhelming. When actions are taken, results may seem inconsequential against the scale of the issues (eg turning around entrenched deprivation and long-term unemployment in a highly disadvantaged community). Initiatives may appear to yield only tiny outcomes – for a few people – or take years to come to fruition.

However, the positive side of this complexity is that there are many different influences on communities – and thus many opportunities to make a difference.

The framework here identifies three so-called spheres of influence on a community⁸, namely:

1. Supporting infrastructure
2. Local social and urban planning
3. Local community development.

Thinking about these spheres gives us a way of understanding the complex factors and their interactions which affect people's experience in, and the nature of, a local area. It can guide us as to how we might work to support communities and the people within them; and help us place into a unified framework the different strategies and approaches that can be employed, in a way that 'fits' with different roles, responsibilities and foci.

This means that building communities can be the business of many stakeholders – including, from a government perspective, those involved in direct service delivery, as well as those in large-scale infrastructure projects or policy, planning, and funding. Decisions, actions, approaches and service models can all contribute to, or detract from, the goals of connecting people and building strong, safe and inclusive mixed communities.

⁸ There are also, of course, other broader influences on local areas and communities – for example the national/international economy; policies; culture. These aspects, whilst recognised as significant, are not the focus for the discussion or strategies in this paper.



Sphere One: Supporting infrastructure

Communities of opportunity have within them, or accessible to them, high quality and thriving infrastructure and resources, both public and private, including services, transport and job opportunities; and leisure, recreational, shopping, commercial, educational and training facilities. Communities should be able to attract and retain a diverse population as well as businesses, and support successful economic development. All members of the community should be able to access and enjoy the resulting benefits.

Every community has underpinning infrastructure which influences the lived experience of its residents, sustains a community over time and helps deliver a basic quality of life. This infrastructure includes:

- > water, sanitation and power
- > transport systems and routes with roads and public transport within, and connecting to adjacent areas
- > social and health services and facilities (including libraries, child care etc)
- > education and training (schools, kindergartens, post-secondary and other training facilities)
- > commercial infrastructure (including shopping precincts and businesses)
- > job and employment opportunities
- > leisure and recreational facilities.

Not all this infrastructure will be within the immediate local area (much will be servicing a larger region): however, it is still essential to the functioning of the community. Access, mobility and connection issues are therefore critical (for example, how easy is it to travel to surrounding areas to connect with services, jobs, and training, or to get children to school?).

Working to improve the quality, accessibility and breadth of this infrastructure is a significant contribution to building safe and strong communities, especially in disadvantaged areas.

“In central and inner Melbourne in 2008, there were more than three local jobs for every resident of working age, but fewer than one in outer western and eastern Melbourne.....Commuting to work costs outer-suburban households more than \$500 per week, compared with around \$300 for those living in inner areas..... Access to opportunities (including jobs and education) is therefore affected by city structure. Indeed, it could be argued that the structure of these cities makes some of our most economically vulnerable households yet more vulnerable....The structure of a city also affects its overall economic productivity. High commute times mean that some jobs have a smaller labour pool from which to draw, potentially affecting the fit between employer and employee.”

Kelly et al, 2011, p 6

“Poor linkages can prevent people living outside the given community from coming in to patronize local shops and other businesses and services. These commercial operations thereby become unviable and move to other locations, further concentrating the disadvantage in the initial location. ...Addressing this disconnection through improving physical integration with the surrounding urban area has been a major contributor to economic and physical regeneration.”

Ware et al, 2010, p 19

Sphere two: Local planning and stewardship – from built form to community services

Communities of opportunity are diverse and sustainable, good places to work, play and live. Planning and facilities at the local level (urban design, services, housing and infrastructure) create an attractive environment and promote opportunities to meet together and enjoy a vibrant and active lifestyle. All members of the community should be able to access and enjoy these benefits.

The local planning sphere is concerned with the immediate local area and its planning, design, regulation, maintenance and development (relating to built form and environment, but also services and resources). What happens in this sphere has a major impact on people's day to day experiences; on how an area is perceived (by residents and others); whether it is successful in attracting and retaining a diverse population; and on people's interactions with each other.

Local planning issues, decisions and approaches, for both new and existing communities, have a critical impact on the nature and qualities of an area and what they offer to residents, and are therefore a key concern in community building. Although many aspects in this sphere sit within the charge of local government, state government also has responsibilities and influences, including through transport, urban renewal, education, social housing, and funding and providing services and resources in the local area. Similarly, the decisions made by businesses, non-government organisations and community groups are very influential, for example, private housing developments, local industry, the opening or closing of businesses and local services (including childcare, healthcare, education - provided by not-for-profit or for-profit groups).

Decisions, planning and actions which have a significant impact on residents, businesses and the community as a whole, thus include decisions about:

- > population density (a denser population gives more opportunity to sustain viable businesses, facilities and services)
- > community composition (supporting or limiting options for a diverse mixed community, across ages, culture, socio-economic backgrounds and abilities)
- > the quality, attractiveness, design, maintenance and cleanliness of streetscapes and the local environment, the opportunities these offer (or exclude) and the impressions they convey
- > housing mix, quality, diversity, design, affordability, placing and accessibility
- > local shopping precincts and what they contain (eg places to eat, 'street life' and small businesses within the area)
- > local resources and facilities
- > the nature, availability and accessibility of gathering and meeting spaces (indoors, outdoors and multi-purpose) which support people coming together formally and informally
- > local transport (street layout, how people get around - bus, walk, bike paths or local roads, and where they can easily get to) and
- > factors which influence community safety and whether people feel safe when out.

There are also many issues relating to local services (health, community services, children's services, aged care, education etc) including availability, the needs of the local area, cost, accessibility, location, who and serve coordination, quality and integration. Local planning and partnerships to improve service coordination and delivery, and to identify and respond to local issues, are also therefore essential in community building.

Henry Shafstoe and 'convivial urban spaces'

Henry Shafstoe is an articulate advocate of what he calls "convivial public spaces" - open public locations (eg squares, piazzas) where citizens can gather, linger or wander. He argues that such spaces, where people can be sociable and festive, are the essence of urbanity, giving opportunities for casual encounters and positive interactions between friends and strangers. He further argues that they are at the heart of democratic living and one of the few remaining places where we can encounter difference and learn to tolerate and understand other people.

He sees that such public spaces deliver benefits for:

- > health and wellbeing
- > learning
- > conflict resolution, tolerance and solidarity
- > economic
- > urban security
- > democracy.

A crucial influence on whether people will use or avoid public spaces is the degree to which they feel safe in them. 'Animation' is anything that brings public spaces to life in a positive way (for example, busking, pavement cafes, street festivals). Shafstoe advocates 'mixed use' – the balanced and varied use of a space; with some unpredictability – or chaos – thrown into the mix. A good space will offer the chance for a whole range of activities, it will offer interest (not be bland) and comfort, as well as safety. People attract people.

"What kind of urban life do we want – a mostly privatized existence, centred on well-defended homes and exclusive clubs, where we interact only with a few like-minded friends and colleagues? Or a more open quality of life in which we can wander where we please, encounter lots of different people, but take a few more risks in the process? 'New urbanism' should deliver a more 'zestful' way of life. But, many new developments are turning out to be mono-cultural and riddled with regulations. In regeneration, we should adopt policies and practices that support reasonable levels of security and encourage designs that allow for interaction and integration."

Shafstoe, 2009

In order to achieve convivial spaces, Shafstoe identifies the need for attention to the following in urban planning and design:

- ☐ *Plenty of sitting places*
- ☐ *Good quality and robust*
- ☐ *Adaptable*
- ☐ *Asymmetrical yet proportioned*
- ☐ *Variety and intriguing details*
- ☐ *Not too large or small*
- ☐ *Location*
- ☐ *Type of neighbourhood & surrounding area*
- ☐ *Clusters, sequences and strings of spaces*
- ☐ *Relation to transport*
- ☐ *Diversity of use*
- ☐ *Visually satisfactory*
- ☐ *Promotion of relaxed, round the clock culture*
- ☐ *Inclusiveness*
- ☐ *Human scale*
- ☐ *Feeling of safety*
- ☐ *Comfortable microclimate*
- ☐ *Incorporating natural elements*
- ☐ *Acoustically pleasant*
- ☐ *No bad smells*
- ☐ *Well maintained and clean*
- ☐ *Individuality and uniqueness*
- ☐ *Opportunities to eat and drink*
- ☐ *Tight control, or banning, of vehicles*
- ☐ *Adequately lit*
- ☐ *Animation*

Sphere three: local community development

Communities of opportunity are places where people can connect, relate and be actively involved. Groups and associations flourish, as do social networks, neighbourliness, local leadership and community identity. Such a community provides opportunities and advantages to all members, but particularly those who are isolated or vulnerable.

This is the sphere which is perhaps more traditionally identified as the realm of the 'grass-roots', or the community activist. It is essentially about people working with people. There are many different models and terms which apply here⁹, and which can be adapted to guide involvement, but essentially these have the same goals:

- > building people's engagement with and involvement in their community
- > building interactions and relationships across the community
- > increasing capacity at the local level and
- > addressing local issues.

Building and using relationships is at the heart of this dimension.



Action in this sphere will be focused on a number of different areas:

- > Supporting and building social capital, through community groups, associations, partnerships and networks (although it's not quite that simple, a guiding premise is almost 'the more the better'). Strong social capital increases opportunities for involvement, relationship and social connection, action and activity, skill development and participation
- > Using the community, and recognising it as a resource to break down social isolation and build participation and inclusion for individuals or groups
- > Facilitating opportunities for encounter between community members, particularly those who are vulnerable and isolated
- > Encouraging and developing community level alternatives to individualised care and support (as opposed to the complete professionalisation of care) – for example, it may be better for people to receive some informal care from family, neighbours and friends, rather than be totally dependent on professional services
- > Developing and participating in partnerships between groups and services, focused on the local area, and action to improve networks and work together on local issues
- > Building and supporting local leadership and opportunities for civic and community involvement, particularly for those who are 'socially excluded'
- > Supporting the flow of information across the community.

⁹ 'Asset Based Community Development' is probably the most widely used framework at this point of time.



One man's view – John McKnight

John McKnight argues that “Citizens and their collective relationships are the principal tools for affecting the basic determinants of wellbeing”. From his perspective, building associational networks – social capital, or ‘the social space where citizens join in face to face groups’ is the key goal of community development. He argues that the irreplaceable attribute of associational life is care – the freely given commitment from the heart of one to another. Institutions can’t be the primary sites for care in our community – this has to be families, neighbours and associations. Building relationships therefore has to be at the heart of building community – connecting assets, building social capital, forming social networks and advancing collective action.

McKnight, 2003

Addressing Locational Disadvantage Effectively – Best practice principles

A research synthesis undertaken by AHURI Ltd in 2010 identified best practice principles for strategies addressing locational disadvantage and creating ‘neighbourhoods of choice and connection, neighbourhoods where a broad mix of socio-economic groups are attracted to settle and raise families’. They identify successful interventions as including the following:

- > Both place-based and people-based mechanisms. Either physical regeneration or people-based programs (such as health, employment, recreation and education) in isolation are insufficient to bring major change
- > Macro- and micro-interventions. That is, addressing local issues, as well as linking to the broader urban area
- > Genuine community empowerment and involvement at appropriate levels
- > Partnership between public, private and community sectors
- > Long-term, well-resourced programs.

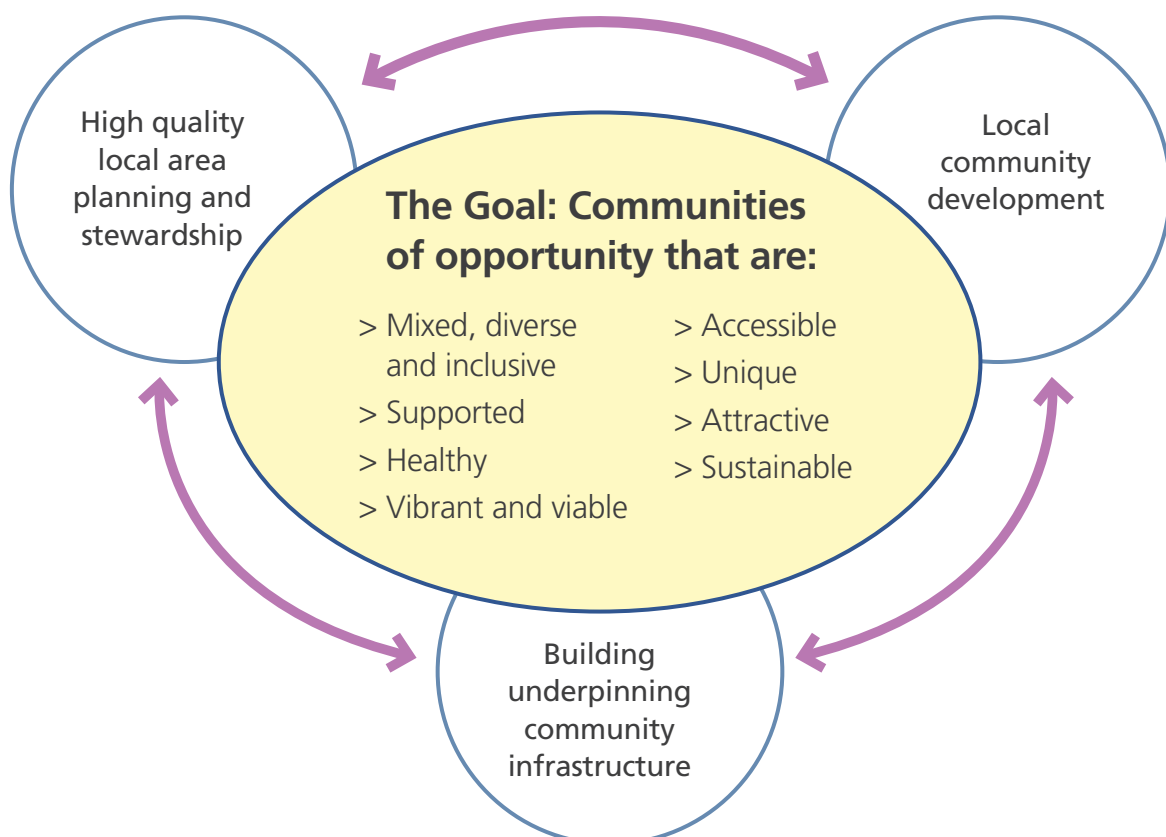
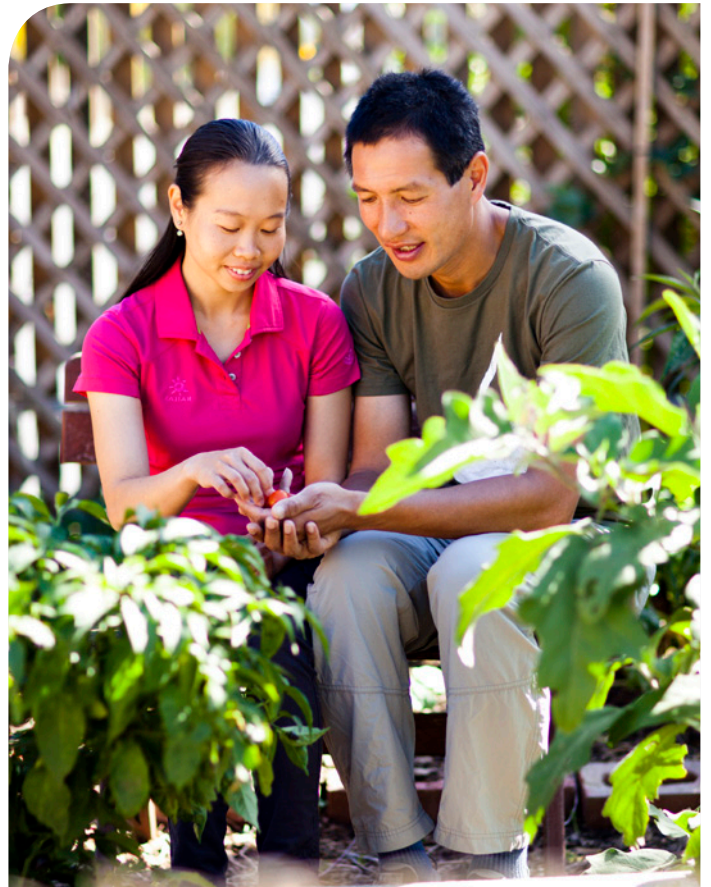
Ware et al, AHURI 2010

5. A 'think communities' approach

DCSI is committed to strengthening communities, and to working with others across our State to achieve this end.

This paper has proposed one model for understanding the many impacts on communities, and for conceptualising interventions, strategies and approaches which can support and strengthen local communities. Under this model, the actions and strategies which can contribute to strong communities are many and varied, extending far beyond traditional community building and community development. The challenge is, therefore, for stakeholders – including local communities, government, businesses, community groups, services - to be aware of the opportunities, powers and impact their decisions and actions have on local communities, and to 'think communities' in all that they do.

This model is represented in the diagram below.



Building communities – prompts and ideas

Urban and social planning, community development and place-based interventions are highly complex, diverse and extensive fields. We cannot summarise or hope to capture this diversity and richness in one document. This final section, however, is designed to help people identify and consider some of the many issues, from a number of different perspectives, which impact on local areas, and to use them as opportunities for building strong and sustainable communities.

Services and resources

- ☐ Quality services (health, education, community, housing) are accessible to, and fit with, the needs and profile of the resident population
- ☐ Services are clustered together or accessible by public transport
- ☐ Services work in partnership together for the good of the community
- ☐ Communities have available to them a range of facilities (such as libraries, recreation and sport facilities etc)
- ☐ A range of shops are available, including small businesses
- ☐ Cafes include outdoor eating spaces
- ☐ Local shopping and eating areas are attractive and can act as gathering spaces.

Social capital, relationships and community connections

- ☐ Creating opportunities (both formal and informal) for relationships and connections between people is a guiding principle in every dimension of local and urban planning
- ☐ Community groups, organisations, networks and partnerships are valued and supported
- ☐ There are good working relationships between formal services and between voluntary services
- ☐ People are encouraged and enabled to work together on local issues
- ☐ Local leadership is valued and encouraged

- ☐ High quality public spaces create opportunities for people to meet each other and have contact
- ☐ Community facilities promote shared and multipurpose use
- ☐ Voluntary organisations are well-developed with infrastructure, training and support
- ☐ Volunteering is valued and encouraged, including through:
 - ☐ a range of opportunities in place for people to volunteer and contribute, which are inclusive of people of different ages, abilities and backgrounds
 - ☐ the skills and interests of volunteers are matched to positions
 - ☐ volunteers are used, recognised and supported in their role
- ☐ Community events and activities:
 - ☐ give opportunities for neighbourhood interaction and the development of social networks
 - ☐ are accessible and affordable
 - ☐ bring people together from different backgrounds
 - ☐ include intergenerational and family activities
 - ☐ are well-promoted and targeted to reach different groups and demographics.

Social inclusion and working with vulnerable people

- ☐ Case planning and one-on-one work with vulnerable clients includes a focus on social isolation and inclusion and therefore the development of networks, social participation and social supports
- ☐ Community building methodologies (such as groups and events) are used to develop connections and mutual support between people
- ☐ Community-level alternatives to individualised care and support are developed
- ☐ People are encouraged and enabled to get 'out and about' and be active and involved
- ☐ Local support networks are facilitated and developed.

Local area planning

- ☐ Local and regional planning mechanisms and infrastructure are in place, for different purposes (social, economic), and involving different partners
- ☐ Partnerships are real and respectful, with members committed to working together on local issues
- ☐ Decision making includes plans for sustainability over the long term
- ☐ There is effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses in decisions which affect them
- ☐ Partnerships are developed, fostered, nurtured and used.

Place-based interventions

- ☐ Place-based interventions are:
 - ☐ focused on both the physical assets in an area as well as the people
 - ☐ sustained over the long term
 - ☐ of sufficient impact to make a difference
 - ☐ built on partnerships and engagement and
 - ☐ have many stakeholders around the table.

Economy and jobs

- ☐ The local economy is strong and sustainable
- ☐ Jobs are available locally and near by
- ☐ There are good transport connections with neighbouring areas, including transit routes into and out of the area
- ☐ Local shopping areas and commercial precincts include small businesses
- ☐ Assistance into the workforce is available for long-term jobless.

Residents and population

- ☐ Planning, regulation, design etc enable and sustain a mixed community, over the long term
- ☐ Enough people live in the area to support a viable community and local businesses
- ☐ Urban spaces and local events create opportunities for people to meet each other, and for neighbourhood interaction and the development of social networks
- ☐ Local schools attract pupils from a wide range of backgrounds.

Housing, developments and other buildings

- ☐ There is a well-integrated mix of decent homes of different types and tenures to support a range of household sizes, ages and incomes, across the life-course
- ☐ Affordable housing and public housing are available and integrated into the community
- ☐ Housing and other buildings can meet changing community needs over time
- ☐ Housing developments are open and connected, rather than closed and gated
- ☐ Developments have appropriate size, scale and density, as well as quality layout
- ☐ Accessible design principles are applied in public and private buildings
- ☐ Commercial and public buildings and spaces are well-designed and maintained.

Public and outdoor spaces

- ☐ Public and outdoor spaces are:
 - ☐ clean, attractive, well-designed, well-build and maintained
 - ☐ attractive spaces to be in
 - ☐ include variety and intriguing details
 - ☐ supporting a diversity of use and are adaptable
 - ☐ adequately lit

- ☐ located where people can get to them easily and
- ☐ include well-maintained outdoor seating and shelter, especially in parks, transport stops and public spaces.
- ☐ Public toilets are available, safe and clean
- ☐ There is safety for pedestrians, including audible signals at crossings for those with impaired hearing
- ☐ Footpaths are well-maintained, smooth and non-slip, and wide enough to allow for a wheelchair and clear of obstructions
- ☐ There are separate paths for cyclists
- ☐ Public spaces include opportunities to eat and drink, including outdoor cafes and eating areas.

Transport:

- ☐ Public transport is:
 - ☐ affordable and reliable
 - ☐ available to key destinations (such as health services, parks, shopping centres)
 - ☐ connects within the area
 - ☐ includes disability access and specialised and priority seating and
 - ☐ is safe, comfortable and reliable.
- ☐ Transport stops and stations are sheltered, safe, clean and physically accessible
- ☐ Roads are well maintained, wide, and well lit, with traffic calming devices and controls
- ☐ There are good roads and transit links into and out of the area
- ☐ The area has a network of safe, well-designed streets and public spaces.

Atmosphere

- ☐ People are encouraged and enabled to be in public and shared spaces
- ☐ The area has a sense of place, but is well connected to surrounding areas
- ☐ The unique local culture is respected and sustained
- ☐ People feel safe and are able to walk about safely.

Here in DCSI we will:

- > Develop programs, service models and approaches which use the community and build community strengths
- > Be involved at the local level
- > Support local place-making and community development initiatives
- > Actively target social exclusion and isolation in our work with individuals, families and groups, helping people to connect with others
- > Host or partner in local events and activities
- > Bring people together to work on local issues
- > Help people get the information they need about what is happening in their community, including services and groups
- > Develop and support community inclusion opportunities for different groups, including people who are ageing, people with disability, those who are homeless or at risk, carers, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal people
- > Value and support local organisations, groups, networks and partnerships
- > Promote and support volunteering
- > Consult and work respectfully with communities, actively involving people in decision making and planning.

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