

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE

Mothers Living Well Bayswater Community Plan



The Mothers Living Well project seeks to improve the physical and mental health of mothers and their children in Bayswater.

The project has sought input and participation by local women – including those parenting in difficult circumstances - in order to understand what women want and hope for in relation to being healthy, active and socially connected in the communities and neighbourhoods where they live.

The work has particularly focussed on active transport (walking and cycling) as there is evidence that this is an area of significant change for communities with respect to both physical activity and social connection/interaction. (Hart, 2003)

Background

The Mothers Living Well project is a partnership between local mothers, Knox Community Health Service (KCHS), Knox City Council, Care Connect and the Victorian Department of Transport (Walking & Cycling Branch). The project was initiated in 2006.

The project is informed by a growing body of evidence about the importance of local neighbourhoods to wellbeing. Recent evidence includes initial data from the VicLANES project (Kavanagh, Thornton, Tattum, Thomas, Jolley and Turrell, 2007) suggesting that **“Place does matter for your health”** as well as international efforts to build social inclusion by revitalising community spaces:

...public spaces are one of the only environments where all citizens, regardless of income, can meet as equals “high quality public pedestrian space...(is) evidence of a true democracy at work”. One of the most essential roles of public spaces is therefore to give all people a sense of belonging and create a more socially integrated community (Enrique Peñalosa, cited in PPS, 2008)¹

Using a community based participatory research methodology we sought to engage local mothers in all parts of the research and action planning processes (Minkler & Wallerstein 2003). This included mothers as members of the steering group, as peer researchers conducting interviews, in analysing data and report writing. Many other mothers contributed through:

- ✱ surveys (conducted at key Bayswater destinations, n= 173),
- ✱ interviews (Mum2Mum peer research and women identified via partner agencies as parenting in difficult circumstances, n= 37),
- ✱ focus groups (Carer groups & Playgroups, n=13),
- ✱ community environmental audits (n= 21),
- ✱ photo collections (n= 20 mothers contributing photos) and:
- ✱ action planning workshops (n=27).

Children also contributed to developing a picture of mothers' experiences through Travel to School surveys (n= 80 children) and 'Hands Up' surveys (n=310) at local primary and secondary schools. This also provided important data on the independent walking, cycling and play of local children.



¹ Words by Enrique Peñalosa cited in text from a web page authored by the Project for Public Spaces, available from: www.pps.org



For more information

For more information, or a copy of the Mothers Living Well Research Report:

A Vision for Bayswater or the Mothers Living Well Bayswater Community Plan see:

Website: www.kchs.org.au/healthpromotion.shtml

Email: healthpromotion@kchs.org.au

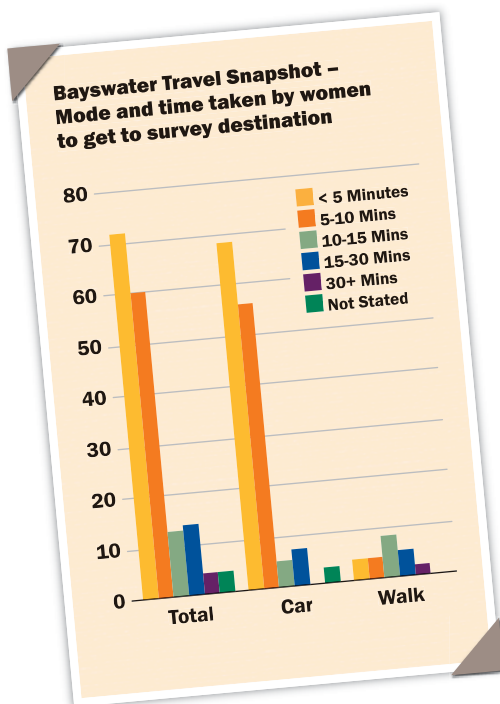
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Research Findings: Experiences of mothers in Bayswater

The initial Snapshot Survey showed that most trips being undertaken by women in Bayswater are short and overwhelmingly by motor car.

Pedestrian and cycling counts on a local shared path also confirmed that few women walk and cycle.

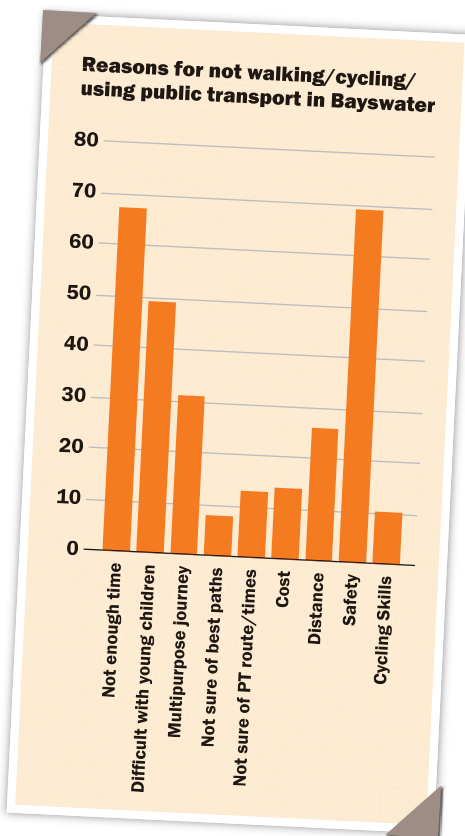
High use of cars suggests that there are limited opportunities for incidental physical activity and social interaction at a local level.



Barriers to Mothers using active transport

Safety, time and difficulties with children were the three most commonly cited factors mothers gave as reasons for not using active transport in Bayswater.

An analysis of comments across all survey/interview questions, suggested that safety was a particularly predominant theme and carries several different concerns including fear of unknown people, lack of people (isolation), state of physical environment suggesting crime, concerns about traffic speed and volume, and lack of supportive infrastructure.



Interestingly, though not able to be statistically proven it seemed that women who actually walked or cycled regularly were less inclined to cite safety as a key concern.

Bayswater Mothers - sense of belonging

The initial Snapshot Survey results suggest most mothers feel some degree (though not the highest) of belonging in Bayswater. This is demonstrated by most women (89%) agreeing with the statement, "I feel a sense of Belonging in Bayswater."

In the survey and interviews many women spoke about the importance of the social connections they had through particular settings: many related to their children, such as schools, playgroups etc. Mothers also noted the importance of neighbourhoods and raised a number of issues that could make it difficult to get to know others locally.

"Back in mum and dad's day they were friends with their neighbours. But society has changed. The old lady who used to live next door she understood (about their child having disability), we helped her and she helped us. But then she moved....(today) people are shut off, people go to work, they and people with disabilities don't mix anymore."

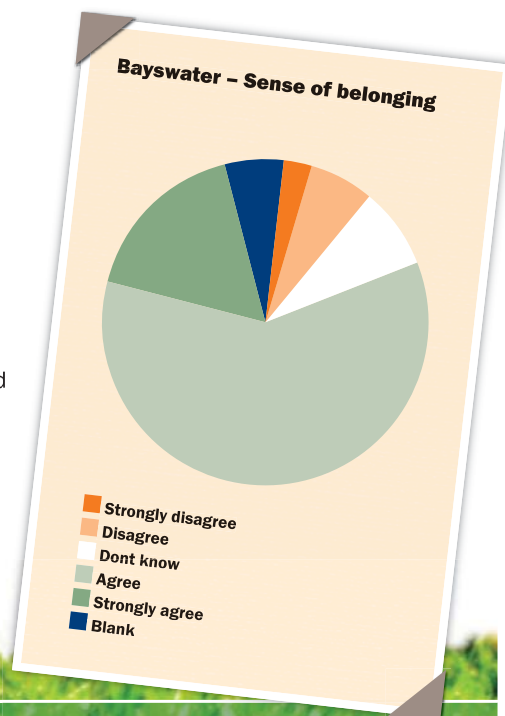
"...that's one of the reasons we wanted to send him to a local school so that when he goes out into the community, then people will recognise him rather than when he goes on a bus to a special school."

"I feel isolated because now my kids are all older you don't have the contact like you did when they were at school."

"What I like about walking because you get to talk to people when you are walking...so they can get to know people."

While some mothers noted that there were poor perceptions of Bayswater, the majority of mothers highlighted things they particularly like about living in Bayswater, such as convenient access to schools, shopping in a small area and the community atmosphere and spirit.

The qualitative data analysis further showed a complex interplay of individual, environmental, socio-cultural and policy factors underpinning these results. Some of the factors that emerged from the research are listed below. A detailed analysis is provided in the Mothers Living Well Research Report: A Vision for Bayswater.



Factors influencing walking, cycling and social inclusion

Environmental Factors

“Real life can get you down and it can be accelerated when the environment is negative, run down and sad.”

- * isolated areas including closed shops
- * supportive infrastructure: seats, toilets, signage, play opportunities
- * lack of or inadequate crossings: (pram/wheelchair ramps, time to cross)
- * proximity to fast moving traffic
- * lack of lighting
- * graffiti and rubbish
- * accessibility for mothers and children with disabilities
- * the beauty or lack thereof in the environment

Socio-Cultural Factors

“I also think being a mum is hard work because people think your children should behave a certain way and if they don't that is a direct result of your parenting.”

- * gender roles and stereotypes including women as “good wife” and “good mothers”, little time to look after self
- * “Car culture”; the view that if you have a car you are successful
- * isolated in homes- don't know neighbours, not safe for children to play on the street or travel independently.
- * lack of social support
- * stigma attached to mums & children regarding having disabilities, survivors of family violence, newly arrived immigrants
- * stigma attached to other groups: e.g. youth who may be part of “gangs”
- * stigma of Bayswater by outsiders

Policy and Organisational Factors

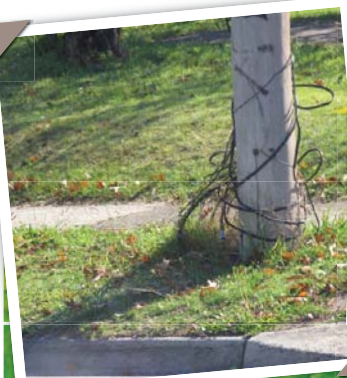
“If I ever won a lot of money in tattsлото, I would like to build some sort of place where it's free for women to go (who have had family crisis)”.

- * slow response to graffiti & rubbish removal
- * gardens, beautification
- * street planning: prioritising needs of cars /drivers over diverse people living / walking in streets
- * staffing of stations
- * shop opening times
- * bike path planning: no natural surveillance,
- * accessibility of places/streets for people with disabilities
- * lack of local, universally known and accessible services: eg. disability, family violence, mental health
- * lack of universally known community centre in Bayswater
- * government depts can be unsupportive for mums wanting positive changes

Individual Factors

“lack of confidence to actually go and study. Sometimes when you are a mum you sort of get stuck in your own little world and your house and you don't want to branch out”

- * personal history eg. family violence
- * ability to analyse and challenge social norms; (affected by education/culture/confidence)
- * level of connection & support
- * feeling accepted in the community: given their culture, ability, gender, sexuality, age versus feeling stigmatised or different
- * confidence (affected by all of above)



Moving towards a Community Vision

An important focus of the conversations, surveys, interviews and audits was a process of building a “vision” for Bayswater. This process asked mothers to imagine Bayswater as the “best place it could be”, for mothers to live, to meet others, to get around by walking and cycling and to describe what it would look like...

“Support is the absolute for mums. Having a supportive environment”.

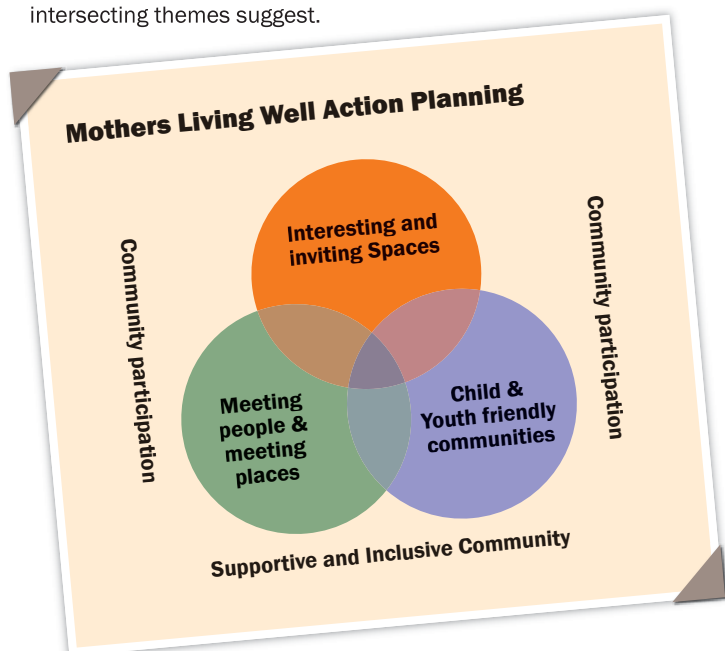
“A community centre in the shopping part of Bayswater. Mums could do their shopping and look at the list of courses that are on and maybe think about joining one of them” .

“People would be walking around. People would be happier. Happy people mean happier communities. Kids would be healthy and happy playing outside; doing things.”

“people talking to each other on the street and people visiting each other. People involved and having groups and thinking that that lady over there has a disabled son and that she can’t get to the shops, so they have a roster and once a month they go in and look after her son...”

“There would be less graffiti and women would feel safer walking the streets and parents would feel more inclined to let their kids play in the park and feel it was safe.”

Three main themes emerged from all of our research and data gathering: **Interesting and Inviting Spaces; Meeting People and Places and Child and Youth friendly communities.** As can be seen in the diagram below these themes intersect and are interdependent. Supportive and inclusive community was seen to be an important basic component of all three themes while community participation would be vital to achieving the overall vision that these intersecting themes suggest.



References

- Department of Victorian Communities, (2006). 'Indicators of Community Strength at the Local Government area in Victoria' Oversampled Data for Bayswater, Boronia and Rowville for Knox City Council
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Using these themes, possibilities for action were workshopped. The Mothers Living Well Bayswater Community Plan was developed. In summary this includes:

Summary of potential actions

- ✳ Working with council and community partners on environmental improvements to support walking/cycling, encourage children, youth and others into various public spaces including streets and which add to the vibrancy and pride of local community (see Research Report and Bayswater Community Plan for details).
- ✳ Street events to encourage social interaction by community members and promote streets as important public spaces to play and meet other people – not just traffic corridors.
- ✳ Advocating for infrastructure that gives priority for pedestrians and cyclists: crossing facilities, seating, toilets, signage, play facilities (see Bayswater Community Plan for more detail including locations).
- ✳ Public art projects to create interesting and inviting spaces and provide a diverse range of people with a sense of ownership.
- ✳ Investigate and trial skill development opportunities such as identifying and publicising places for mums and their children to practise bike riding after school, initiating a Mums on Bikes in Bayswater (MOBB) Group, providing opportunities to try out bike resources at events and activities.
- ✳ Advocating for community wide changes such as commitments to safer speeds or changes in street design to support play, walking and cycling in neighbourhood streets.
- ✳ Trialling community wide projects such as grants for locals to resource improvements – gardens, art etc, and programs to provide incentives for walking with local retailers, schools etc.
- ✳ Seek further resources for a “Streets ahead” type project: Further research examining specific issues around children’s independent mobility.
- ✳ Fun walking groups eg. History walk, café walk, youth walks.
- ✳ Supporting local efforts for important community meeting spaces eg. Library, Community Centre.
- ✳ Explore child and youth friendly space in Bayswater shopping district.
- ✳ Services such as mobile library and coffee van as a means to get more people to use locations such as parks etc (e.g. Guy Turner reserve).
- ✳ Work with schools on ideas such as schools as community spaces, as information hubs or as a resource to local neighbourhood projects.
- ✳ Communications projects such as ‘streets for people’, promoting the importance of diversity, neighbourhood friendliness and rights of children & young people.
- ✳ Strengthen opportunities for Bayswater people including mothers parenting in difficult circumstances to have a say in their community.

“The Mothers Living Well project is a partnership between The Victorian Government (TravelSmart program), Knox Community Health Service and Knox City Council. Our other important partners are Care Connect and local mothers from Bayswater.”

“We would like to acknowledge the support of a range of other organisations in completing this research including Women’s Health East, Eastern Access Community Health, Glen Park Community Centre, Arrabri Community House and Maroondah City Council”