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The cover word cloud is an unfiltered representation of word frequency across all this project’s surveys and conversations.

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Respondents were from:

- Blackheath Playgroup
- Blackheath Public School
- Blaxland High School
- Blaxland Public School
- Blue Mountains Grammar School
- Blue Mountains Youth College
- Blue Mountains Youth Council
- Ellison Public School
- Have Your Say online respondents
- Hazelbrook Public School
- Katoomba High School
- Katoomba Public School
- Kindlehill School
- Lawson Public School
- Mountains Youth Services Team Youth Space
- Parenting Young
- “Project Now” Youth Congress
- Warrimoo Public School
- Winmalee High School
- Winmalee Playgroup

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Ryn Vlachou (Blue Mountains City Council)

Danielle Wilding-Forbes (Mid Mountains Neighbourhood Centre)

We would like to make special mention of the **BLINN** (Blue Mountains Lithgow Integrated Neighbourhood Network, comprising all neighbourhood centres in the Blue Mountains and Lithgow) who conducted some of the surveys and conversations and generously shared their data with Council and the Stronger Families Alliance. It is by working together that we strengthen opportunities for children and young people to thrive in our community.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

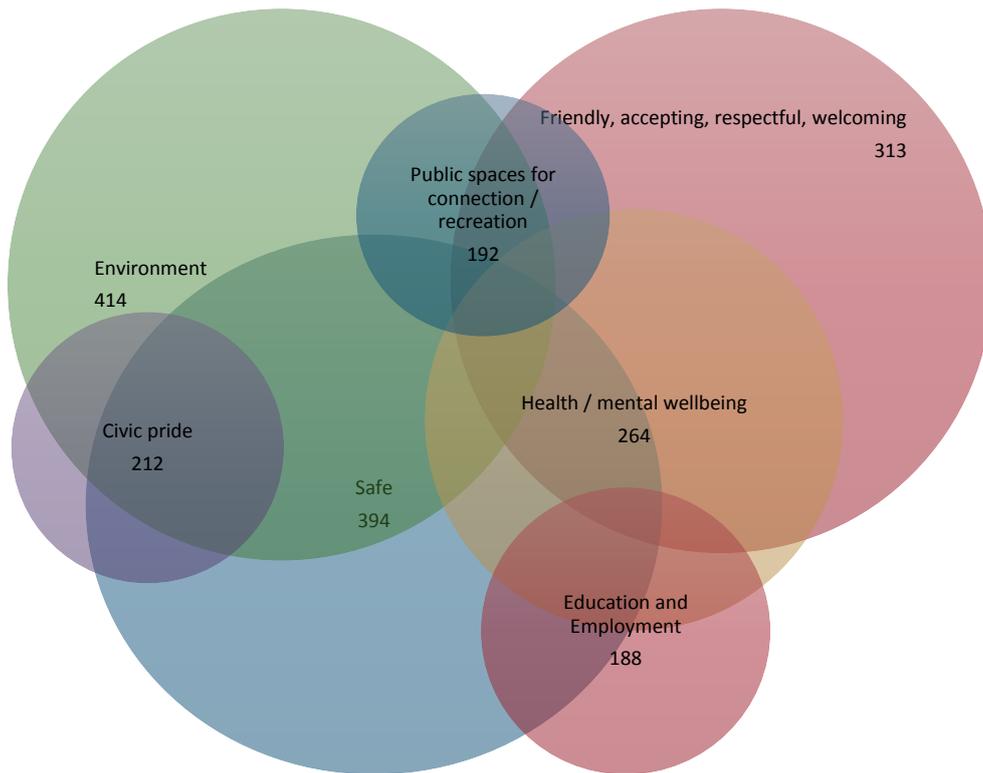
In 2016 Blue Mountains City Council and the Stronger Families Alliance undertook a number of conversations and surveys with children and young people living in the Blue Mountains using the Harwood method of community engagement. The consultations were conducted for the purpose of informing Council and the Stronger Families Alliance's Child and Youth Plan. The Plan will clearly articulate a high level outcomes framework that ensures that children and young people from 0-18:

- Are safe, materially provide for, physically healthy and flourishing
- Have positive connections with their family, community and culture, and the economic and cultural systems and
- Meet their developmental, educational and life skills milestone.

Almost 500 children and young people, and approximately 40 adults, from all over the Blue Mountains were consulted through group conversations or surveys. The Stronger Families Alliance and Council chose to use the Harwood approach because it is a sophisticated method of community engagement which seeks to uncover a community's aspirations, their concerns, and how they see their community in plain language that everyone understands. Responses were entered into NVivo software to provide robust statistical analysis to inform and complement the thematic reading and synthesis of people's views.

Overall, children and young people described a strong connection to their local area, and appreciation for both the social and environmental features of living in the Mountains. They described a Blue Mountains which has retained a unique character with regard to both its built and environmental heritage, while gaining the benefits of sympathetic and environmentally sustainable development. They aspired to communities which are safe, welcoming, friendly, accepting and respectful. There was a desire for fairness, and for opportunities, services and facilities to be available equally across the community. They hoped for more opportunities to be healthy, and to connect with peers and people of all ages and backgrounds through inclusive public spaces, events and recreational spaces. Safe, well maintained streets with proper lighting, along with adequate foot paths, bike paths, trains, buses and town centres were seen as important enablers for connecting with others and being active.

The following diagram is representative of the relative frequency of words used in connection with the themes, and some aspects of how the themes are inter-related.



Children and young people engaged with the conversations with significant trust, insight, self-reflection and responsibility. They proposed solutions which were realistic and reasonable, and largely in alignment with what adults also wanted for their communities.

The draft Outcomes Framework for the Stronger Families Alliance connects well with the aspirations of children and young people for the Blue Mountains through the themes of safety, community connection, health, wellbeing, education and employment. Young people’s aspirations regarding the mental health of their peers, and strong desire to contribute to their communities and caring for others, could be more strongly represented in the Framework in order to better match the priorities expressed through the conversations and surveys.

This report and the input of children, young people and adults gained through the conversations and surveys will be used to inform the plans and actions of the SFA, Blue Mountains City Council and other organisations and levels of government interested in the voice and wellbeing of children and young people in the Mountains.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016 the Stronger Families Alliance undertook a number of conversations and surveys with children and young people living in the Blue Mountains using the Harwood method of community engagement. The consultations were conducted for the purpose of informing Council and the Stronger Families Alliance's Child and Youth Plan. The Stronger Families Alliance is a large network of government and non-government organisations that are working to develop a shared outcomes framework that will inform their work over the coming years. In writing the plan it is important that the outcomes desired by children and young people are congruent with the outcomes framework developed by the Stronger Families Alliance.

The Stronger Families Alliance and Council chose to use the Harwood approach because it is a sophisticated evidence based method of community engagement used extensively in the United States, Canada, and increasingly in Australia by Councils, community organisations and Family and Community Services. The Harwood method seeks to uncover a community's aspirations, their concerns, and how they see their community in plain language that everyone understands (*Harwood: Theming and Using Public Knowledge Workbook*). This understanding is referred to as public knowledge, and it enables organisations to then work with the community in a realistic and authentic manner to bring their aspirations to fruition. The Harwood method harnesses community strengths by discovering a sense of common purpose and setting realistic goals with, and not just for, the community.

Conversation leaders started with the assumption that they didn't already know what people thought and felt about their community, and were there to listen and learn and gain a deep understanding about what really matters to people. The Harwood method was chosen as an engagement tool because it provides a framework for questioning and listening that:

- Provides a way to collect and share public knowledge
- Allows themes to emerge that can lead to actions
- Involves the community in determining their aspirations and hopes
- Doesn't ask what's wrong but asks questions that unearth the values that are important to the community
- Takes the premise that organisations have a lot of expert knowledge but know little about public knowledge
- Roots organisational decisions in a combination of expert and public knowledge for stronger impact and authenticity.

STRUCTURE OF CONSULTATION

The Harwood consultation used by Council and the Stronger Families Alliance has been flexible in its approach to accommodate different audience needs. The following approaches to gathering the views of children, young people and parents have been employed:

- A paper based survey with children in primary and high schools using the "Quick Ask" questions, which are a set of four structured questions (see Page 9). The surveys have

been the main approach used in schools. They are in written form and consist of one survey per child. More than 300 surveys have been completed with seven schools, the Youth Congress and on line.

- A series of group “conversations” where small groups of children or young people and three groups of adults (8 to 15 participants) have been brought together to discuss either four questions or a longer set of ten related questions, in sessions lasting from half an hour to two hours. Each conversation entails a facilitator and scribe. Sixteen short conversations have been conducted and one long one. The notes were then compiled into one short summary for each group conversation.

In summary, Harwood consultations have taken place with

- 354 children aged 10 to 12 in Years 5 and 6 across 8 primary schools
- 123 young people aged 12-18 from five high schools, as well as Youth Council, Youth Congress, Upper Mountains Youth Centre and the Blue Mountains Youth College
- 20 parents from two playgroups, and Parenting Young parents
- 20 adults through the online *Have Your Say* forum

Methodology:

- 17 conversations were held using the Harwood questions (16 short, one long)
- Individual surveys were completed in five of the primary schools and the Youth Congress using the same set of questions, as well as online
- All high school students and three parent groups were engaged in community conversations
- **Over 500 people were consulted in total**

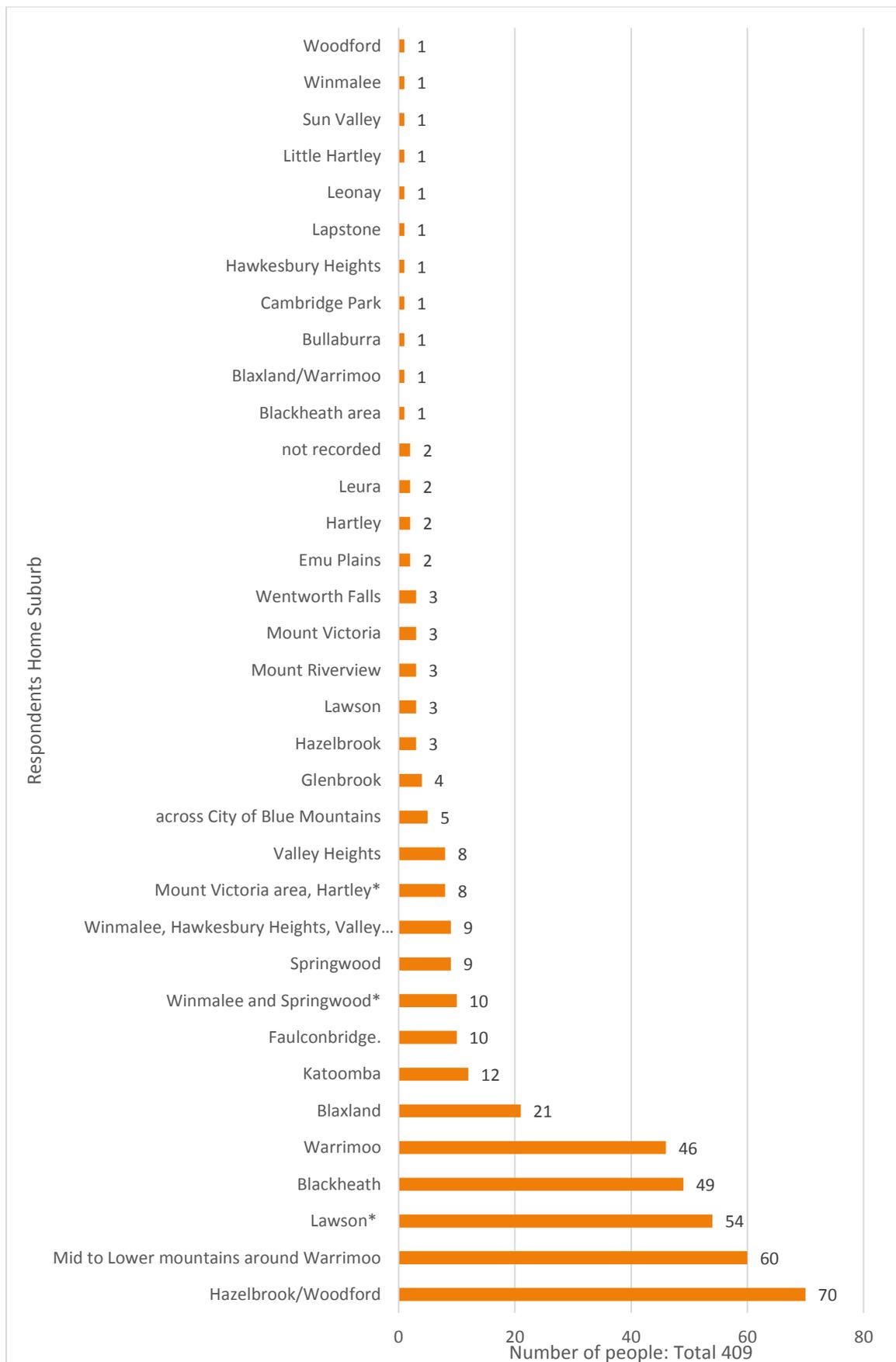
Responses were processed using *NVivo* software, providing robust analysis of word connections and frequency to inform a thematic reading and synthesis of people’s views.

WHO DID WE TALK TO?

- Almost 500 children and young people – at least 160 in group conversations, and over 300 in individual surveys. This included some young parents and approximately 20 children and young people with a disability from Katoomba High School and the Mountains Youth Services Team Youth Hangout. Children from primary and high schools, public and private schools and from youth services all provided input. The conversations proved significant context for, and insight to, the survey responses.
- About 40 adults - including parents (approximately 16) and those who work with children and families in various settings (approximately 4). These were via the Blue Mountains City Council ‘Have Your Say’ portal, and three community conversations.

These children and adults were from many parts of the Blue Mountains – as represented in the table on the following page.

A few people who lived outside the City of Blue Mountains (in Cambridge Park, Leonay, Emu Plains, Hartley, and Little Hartley) but who attended school or worked in the Blue Mountains, contributed views which were included in this analysis.



* indicates where the grouping of respondents means we are not able to be certain of the home suburb of individual respondents. Different ways of recording home suburb means some suburbs appear alone and/or in groupings.

WHAT DID WE ASK?

Across all the different forums, we asked four main questions:

1. What kind of community do you want to live in?

For adults: What kind of community do you want for children and young people?

For young people with disability: What would make [your town] awesome?

2. Why is that important to you?

For young people with disability: What's important in a community?

3. How is that different from how things are now?

For young people with disability: What would make things better?

Online: Is that different from how things are now? How?

4. What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

For young people with disability: What do we need?

One of the fora (Youth Council) included all ten Harwood questions used in longer conversations. The Quick "Ask", as the four questions are referred to, was felt more appropriate for primary school aged children, as well as high schools where the conversation leaders had limited time with the students.

STRUCTURE OF THIS REPORT

This report identifies the main aspirations shared by children, young people and adults, fleshing out the sub-themes and interconnections before briefly describing some of the accompanying concerns or obstacles that get in the way of achieving these aspirations, as identified by respondents. For each aspiration it then outlines the kind of solutions which were suggested by, and were meaningful to, the children, young people and adults who participated.

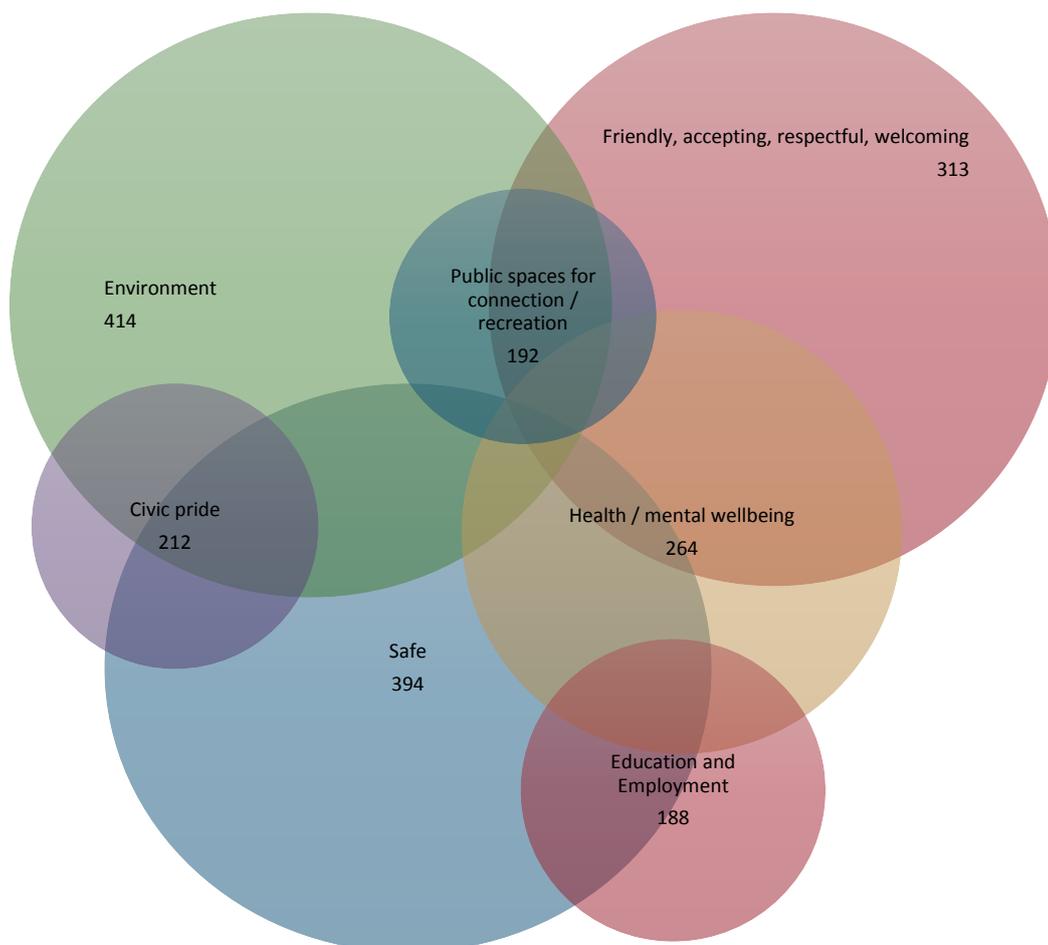
The report describes some of the wider concerns expressed by people through the conversations and surveys, and provides brief analysis of the alignment between what children and young people expressed as their desired outcomes and the draft outcomes framework being developed by the Stronger Families Alliance.

WHAT DID THE COMMUNITY SAY?

“[The kind of community we’d like to live in would be]: Small. Clean. Green. Healthy. Quiet. *Fun-loving.*” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains)

Overall, children and young people described a strong connection to their local area, and appreciation for both the social and environmental features of living in the Mountains. They described a Blue Mountains that retains a unique character in regard to both its built and environmental heritage, while gaining the benefits of sympathetic and environmentally sustainable development. They aspired to communities that are safe, welcoming, friendly, accepting and respectful. There was a desire for fairness, and for opportunities, services and facilities to be available equally across the community. They hoped for more opportunities to be healthy and connect with peers and people of all ages and backgrounds through the provision of inclusive public spaces, events and recreational spaces. Safe, well maintained and well lit streets, as well as adequate foot paths, bike paths, trains, buses and town centres were also seen as important enablers for connecting with others and being active.

The following diagram is representative of the relative frequency of words used in connection with the themes, and some aspects of how the themes related to one another, drawn from the way people talked about each theme and its connections to other aspirations.



Young people aspired to better mental health for their peers, wanted their peers to value and make the most of education, and saw significant gaps in local pathways between education and work. Young people had aspirations not just for their peers but for their communities as a whole. They desired acceptance in their communities as young people, and the capacity to contribute vocationally, educationally, and through work and volunteering. Young people wanted to engage with other people of all ages by interacting in public places – malls, parks, bushland, shops, cafes and plazas. Their responses demonstrated a desire to contribute their ideas, energy and talents –through community art, and in the processes of governance. The safety and accessibility of public transport was important to young people.

[The community I'd like to live in would be] "One full of greenery with lots of carnivals and fetes and markets. One with everyone having friends and knowing everyone. One where everyone tries their hardest and others don't make fun of them. One with more public transport. One with more bushwalks and people to inform people about the environmental issues, local and global." (12-year-old, Upper Mountains)

Primary school aged children specifically wanted fun activities which they could enjoy with their family and through which they could extend their independence, such as parks and adventure playgrounds for 'bigger kids, 'dog parks', sports facilities, events, and bike paths. Maintaining and enhancing the natural environment was important to them – especially trees and protection of native animals from cats.

"[My ideal community] would be a place where people can go with their children and a place where you can go hang out with friends. I think that having more playgrounds suitable to older children would help with that." (Young person)

Interestingly, the responses of adults (mostly parents aged over 25 years) reflected the same themes as children and young people. This was evident from both a thematic reading of responses, and a statistical comparison of the varying responses between groups. The statistical comparison revealed a strong positive correlation between the words and phrases used by adults and young people ($r=0.51$).

Parents of preschool aged children saw room for more support for parents and carers of young children; and for affordable activities and events for connection. They said safe ('contained') play areas in public spaces would help increase outdoor time and physical activity, and reduce isolation. They aspired to be part of communities that are supportive, accepting and welcoming to young parents.

"Better infrastructure (footpaths, cycle paths, fast trains) would make a difference." (Playgroup parents' conversation, Upper Mountains)

"We want to feel safe and respected." (Young parents' playgroup conversation, Mid Mountains)

"We moved from the city to have community – we feel like we have community here – it takes a community to raise a child." (Playgroup parents' conversation, Lower Mountains)

ASPIRATIONS OF (AND FOR) CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

SAFETY

The desire for a safe community was nearly universal and the strongest theme to emerge through this process. The word 'safe' was used 235 times across 320 responses. Associated terms like 'safety' (48), 'walk' (where it related to safe paths, lighting, crossings and safe community access: 57) and 'secure / security' (14) increases this to 394 uses overall.

"I would love if everyone knew they were safe and that people choose to do the right thing. I would love a safe, kind, caring, generous, friendly community that you could count on." (10 -year-old, Upper Mountains)

"It's important for kids to feel they are safe too. We want kids to still be kids – relaxed, explore in safe ways; not growing up too fast." (Playgroup parents' conversation, Lower Mountains)

Safety was often seen as important in the context of people getting out and about to connect with others, and in this sense most strongly relates to the SFA Outcome of *Belonging - having positive participatory connections with family, friends and community.*

"I want [children and young people] to feel secure and enjoy being out and about." (Adult, online, Upper Mountains)

Safety was more of a theme among female than male respondents, and among more young people than children, as young people were moving more independently in public, and felt more vulnerable at times as a result. For young people, safety on trains, especially at night, emerged as a concern, and inhibited their ability to connect with peers and activities.

"With the trains, there's the feeling of not being safe catching the train, it isn't something people enjoy doing. It's very different overseas." (Young person, Upper Mountains)

"I don't feel safe, especially at night time." (Young person, Upper Mountains)

"I would use public transport more if it was safe." (Young person, Upper Mountains)

For children, not being able to ride a bike to a local friend's house safely because of a lack of paths mattered – they were not as connected as they would like. Respondents wanted a community that was safe and felt safe, both now and for the future.

"We want things that are more walking distance, or that you can ride there. More bike paths to ride to the shops." (Primary school conversation, Lower Mountains)

"Nice places, and easy access to safe places." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

"More footpaths and zebra crossings for pedestrians and bikes." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

"I will feel safe walking on the street." (Primary student, Mid Mountains Lawson)

"I think kids need help to be safe outside of home." (Primary student, Mid Mountains Lawson)

When asked why safety is important children recognised that safety contributes to being happy and positive. As the word tree excerpt on the following page shows, the phrase “feel safe” is one of the main phrases used, as are “be safe”, “are safe”, and “safe community”. One primary student said they wanted a safe community now, and one that would be safe for their own children:

“Safe community is important to me because when I have kids I want to have a safe community for my kids and so that they can go outside without being scared.” (12-year-old, Lower Mountains)

“We need to feel safe because there are lots of little kids, and we need everyone everywhere to feel welcome.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

A safe community where you feel secure and people listen to you rather than just talking.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“We need to feel safe because there are lots of little kids, and we need everyone everywhere to feel welcome.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

*“Nice places, and **easy access to safe places.**”* (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

Concerns

Concerns associated with the themes of safety included: a lack of safe walk ways, crossings and bike paths; drunken adults on trains; poorly lit public areas; and the sense of safety eroding as public amenity of town centres declines.

“I have to walk over 4 crossings when walking home only one of which has a zebra crossing.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“Inadequate streets with sidewalks mean that children/families have hindered mobility in the area i.e. ride bikes safely, walk easily and safely - most use the roads in suburbs. Blue Mountains has always looked and felt like a backward city without kerbs, guttering and inadequate sidewalks and a majority of the mountains is affected. It inhibits both adults (particularly the aged and disabled) and families/children from effectively moving around the Blue Mountains.” (Parent, online)

“I won’t catch a train at night without a friend.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“My ... [teenage / young adult] children have on many, many occasions felt very unsafe on our trains. I know of 6 assaults made on my friend’s children on trains, leading to permanent loss of sight in an eye and the other permanent scarring, and deformity to the face. My children are not ‘rough children inviting trouble’ nor have the children been who have been assaulted.” (Parent, online)

“[It’s] not safe on trains.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

The theme of safety crosses over with many of the following themes and connects with the aspiration to have safe gathering places to interact with peers and people of all ages.

Specifically mentioned concerns included:

“I don’t feel secure enough because I live in quite a ways away from the highway and I have to walk an hour to the shops.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“Outside one ... preschool ... there is no footpath and I can't tell you how many accidents involving pedestrians I have seen from people both young and old. Just recently an elderly grandmother fell heavily over protruding tree roots and badly injured her face, hands and knees. Many of our walk ways are in need of repair.” (Parent, online survey, Upper Mountains)

“I want it to be safe because I don't want to die at the age of 15 because some idiot ran me over.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“...but we need people to have the knowledge that [this] is a safe town and nothing bad is going to happen to them.” (10-year-old, Upper Mountains)

“Crime seems common such as stealing.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“Safety for girls to feel safe at night.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“Many people don't even have friends in the neighbourhood and the right to feel safe.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“Cyberbullying. A lot of it goes on in high school.” (Young person)

“No opportunities to find help, counselling or to talk to people.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“There are lots of bullies around right now and lots of people aren't safe all the time.” (10-year-old, Upper Mountains)

“Innovative. This means upgrading roads, transport, building houses, but also expanding National Parks. It would help us thrive.” (Primary school conversation, Lower Mountains)

Actions that would make a difference

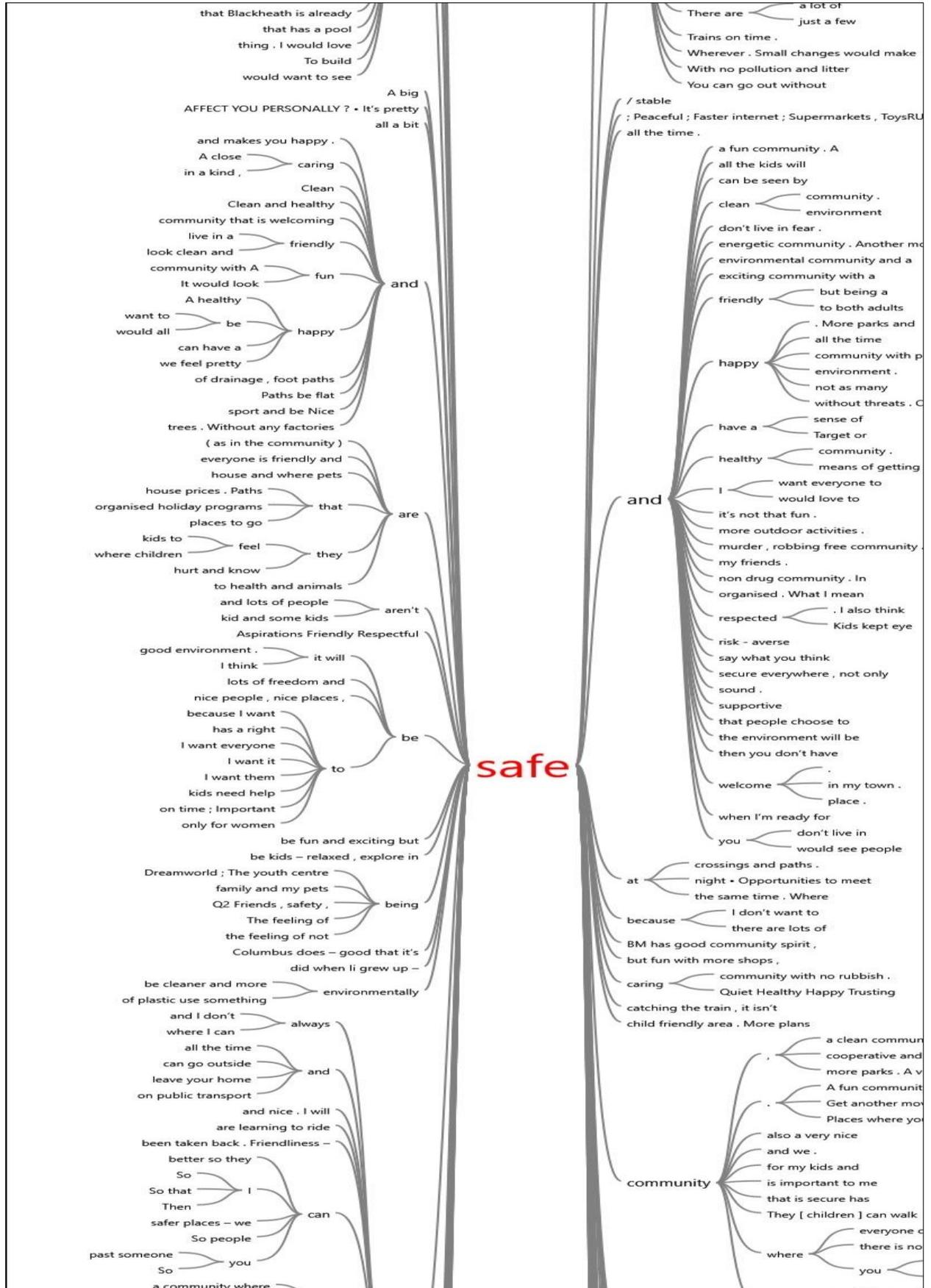
Children and young people were generally realistic and reasonable in trying to identify solutions for the priorities or issues raised. They talked about the following as means for improving safety:

- Safe paths for walking and riding bikes within local areas and between nearby villages (for example, Blackheath to Katoomba, Winmalee to Springwood)
- Well-lit and maintained public spaces
- Revitalised town centres
- Inclusive recreational areas
- Supervision and safety systems on trains
- “More zebra crossings around the school” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“Walking home from the train station we need lighting in Wilson Park [in Wentworth Falls].” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“[We need] more footpaths and zebra crossings for pedestrians and bikes.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

Words associated with the theme of safety in responses:



THE ENVIRONMENT

Aspirations for a sustainable environment were a pervasive theme. The environment was mentioned slightly more often than safety; however safety was spoken about with greater significance given its immediate impact on the routines of children and young people. The reality of feeling unsafe (on trains, on bikes, after dark, in town centres, crossing roads) impinged on their daily lived experience and sense of daily possibilities. Improving safety was not something they felt was largely within their power. By contrast, children and young people's appreciation of the environment was grounded in their lived experience, and their aspirations for the environment were within the realms of possibility.

"[The kind of community I want to live in is] a sustainable and eco-friendly town where there is a strong sense of community and interconnectedness. Everyone is equal and accepted for their beliefs and ideas and who they are. I would like it to be abundant in native flora and fauna where the environment is conserved and all products are locally grown and made by local businesses, services and farmers. Our community at the moment does have a mostly socially just environment and most people do care about conserving the environment but we could do so much more. People could help so much more to eradicate these issues together as a community. More locally grown food products. More local businesses and services. Renewable energy. Better stormwater management. Awareness about social issues. More funds to preserving and saving our environment." (13-year-old, Mid Mountains)

"Less wild cats. They kill native animals." (Primary school conversation, Lower Mountains)

"I would also want there to be more respect for the natural environment." (Primary school student, Mid Mountains)

"I care about the environment and so do the people around me." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

"This is important to me because I know the environment is just as important as our community and I want my children to grow up in a world where the people around them are not attached to screens and they know about global warming." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

"Want everyone not to wreck the environment." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

"We need to get people to be sustainable and environment friendly." (10-year-old, Upper Mountains)

"To create a green environment. More trees and seeds will need to be planted around the town and less trees should be chopped down." (12-year-old, Lower Mountains)

"I would like to see an eco-friendly and sustainable environment with lots of things for youth to do." (14-year-old, Upper Mountains)

"Good ecological environment, places to go and walk." (Youth Council conversation)

"Sustainability/permaculture course for everyone." (16-year-old, Upper Mountains)

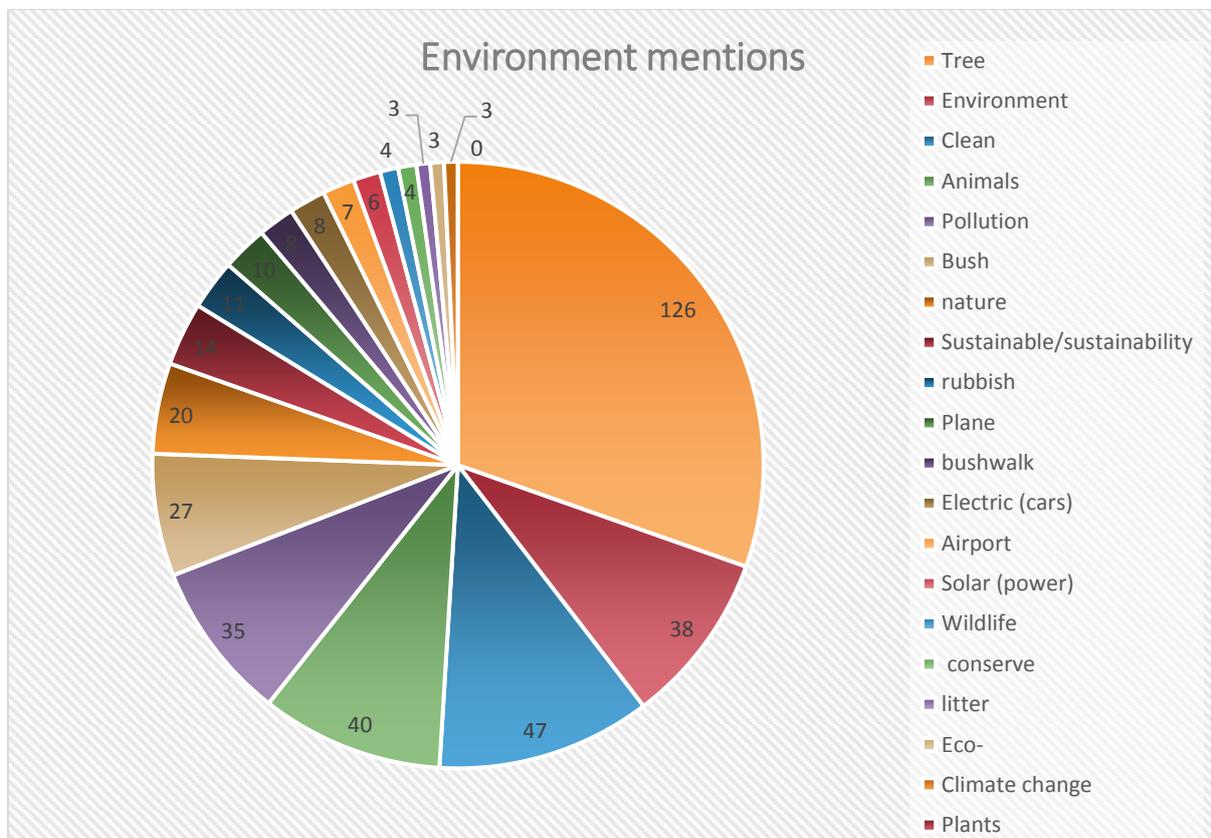
“A green sustainable, self-sufficient community where everyone is resourceful and works together to achieve this.” (15-year-old, Lower Mountains)

“I also would like more bush conservation in the Blue Mountains.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“One in five people care about the bush. This hurts me.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“Less pollution. Factories making less and less smoke and pollution from cars. Make cars more energy efficient, electric and solar. Can walk or ride a bike instead [of going by car]. More trees, more natural things, less chopping down of trees. Plant more eucalyptus trees and make cleaner walkways, make them nice to walk in.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains)

Chart: Concepts within the theme of environment (clockwise from “Tree”: 126 mentions)



Concerns

Whilst there were a percentage of respondents who had strong environmental concerns, there was also widespread appreciation for what was already there. Many children and young people wanted to ensure the environment remained a valued and respected part of Mountains life.

However, some specific concerns regarding the environment were mentioned including:

- A reliance on cars owing to lack of safe bike and foot paths, unreliable/infrequent or unsafe public transport, and distance to shops and services
- The removal of trees at Blackheath
- Pollution from cars and industry

- Feral animals
- The planned Western Sydney airport, and
- Climate change

Actions that would make a difference

The theme of environment encompassed a desire for more use of renewable energy (solar, wind), maintenance of national parks, conservation of native animals, reduction of air and water pollution, sustainable building practices, and increased use of active transport (by upgrading foot and bike paths).

“I’d like to see sustainable waterways that only direct clean water into the rivers and are checked regularly for things like crayfish so the rivers are kept clean.” (14-year-old, Mid Mountains)

For some, increased medium density housing was suggested as a positive move that would increase proximity to services, and drive improvements to the availability, safety and reliability of public transport. Sustainable and local agriculture and business was also encouraged.

Trees were seen as fundamental to the unique character of the Blue Mountains, and were part of the civic pride felt by children and young people.

Multiple mentions were made of trees at Blackheath, which children (and adults) wanted to retain despite the highway upgrade. (All quotes are from primary school students, Upper Mountains):

“I would like to see in Blackheath that the trees along the side of the highway not cut down to widen the road. They have been a part of our town for a long time”

“The line of trees near the highway that are going to be cut down don’t need to be”

“I would like to see more big trees because people really love those trees.”

“I’d love to see the same amount of trees that there are now. And I think that like I said before a new library would be great. And of course I can’t forget a bike track, everyone would love it so much.”

The trees were not always considered favourably, however:

“[I would like] a town with less trees and less people taking photos of the trees.”

This sentiment exemplified a more general concern amongst young people and adults in some towns (particularly in the Upper Mountains) that tourism should not be emphasised or invested in at the expense of either the environment or a local community focus.

Actions that would make a difference to the environment overlapped with those that would increase safety and community access:

- Safe footpaths and bike paths,
- Safe, accessible and reliable public transport (trains and buses), and
- More availability of local shops and services

ACCEPTANCE, FRIENDLINESS AND RESPECT

Acceptance and respect were valued globally as qualities that are both present in and desired for local communities, and specifically that an attitude of respect be extended to young people. Children, young people and adults all aspired to a local community that was accepting, welcoming and respectful to everyone, with particular reference to young people, who were perceived to be less valued and respected than young children or adults. Acceptance and respect also linked substantially to the theme of safety:

*“It’s important to be accepted. No reason if you’re gay, have less money, **you should feel safe, knowing you’re welcome.**”* (Youth council conversation)

This aspiration connects to the SFA outcomes of:

- Being – children and young people have a strong cultural identity, and
- Belonging – children and young people have positive participatory connections with family, friends and community

Children and young people wanted their local communities to have greater connections between generations and across differences as a means of increasing people’s acceptance of each other. Respondents valued the importance of people looking out for each other and wanted that to be strengthened and to include everyone.

“Even if people are different, they’re the same.” (Primary School Conversation, lower mountains)

“Belonging doesn’t mean to conform, but to be accepted ... There are some weirdos who live here and we are all in this community.” (Young person)

Equity was mentioned or implied frequently – such as, everyone should have enough money, everyone should be able to afford to go to the doctor. Acceptance and respect for diversity was associated with this, including people of diverse sexuality or gender, Aboriginal people, and people of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

*“I would like a community where everyone is kind, not racist, no discrimination, no bullying. **Everyone has a house food and water, where it is safe and don’t live in fear.**”* (Primary School student, Mid Mountains)

An awareness of a **social gradient of respect and opportunity** was present in some responses and can be linked to people wanting to care for others.

The issue of **differential respect or valuing for children versus young people** was recurrent, with several respondents suggesting that children were looked upon more favourably, treated with more respect or value, and afforded more specific recreational opportunities than were young people. Children and young people both felt less heard than adults.

“I feel that young people are currently less accepted at a community level than children are.” (Adult, online, Mid Mountains)

By contrast the parent of two young children felt that

“The physical environment of our local villages in the Blue Mountains does little to support carers of very young children. It does little to promote the safety and health of carers and the children by failing to provide footpaths in areas close to

schools/preschools and contained spaces to play outdoors.” (Parent, online, Lower Mountains)

Concerns

People expressed concerns that children and young people are not well accepted and included, and that diversity and difference are not always respected and included. Racism was a specific concern.

“Well, our community isn’t very accepting of differences.” (13-year-old, Mid Mountains)

Actions that would make a difference

People talked about a few actions that could make a difference:

- Positive community dialogue regarding children and young people, and recognition of their contributions
- Community events which bring diverse people together, run by trusted organisations
- Education as a means for understanding and valuing people’s differences
- The development of shared community values

“[I want] to build a safe, friendly, and respectful community. So children and young people aren't bored... They have positive options in their community to engage in/meet people. Gets people interactive in public places, good for health.” (Adult, online, Upper Mountains)

“Be accepting that we’re a different generation.” (Youth Council Conversation)

*“Racism happens because people aren’t educated. **Cultural education for young children in school should happen in school. They only happen depending on what subject you take.** Sometimes in history we talk about black slavery but it’s never put in [the] context of now, we know it still happens now”.* (High School conversation, Lower Mountains)

“For change to happen we need more acceptance and understanding of minority groups.” (16-year-old, Lower Mountains)

“Positive community dialogue about the importance of young people to a vibrant community and all they are currently doing that contributes to community life.” (Adult, online, Mid Mountains)

More of what people said about acceptance and respect

*“I would like to live in a town that is caring and is really beautiful and **recognises days like Sorry Day and Anzac Day.**”* (10-year-old, Upper Mountains).

“Everyone is accepted, regardless of background, religion, political views. Egalitarian.” (Young person)

“One without class. Equality and acceptance. No snobby beliefs.” (Young person)

"[I want] a community that is accepting, well informed of issues, sustainable and ecologically driven. People are seen as equals whatever their difference." (13-year-old, Mid Mountains)

"Accepting, multicultural, clean, community/family oriented, more youth activities, safer, more accessible public transport." (16-year-old, Lower Mountains)

"A sustainable and eco-friendly town where there is a strong sense of community and interconnectedness. Everyone is equal and accepted for their beliefs and ideas and who they are." (13-year-old, Mid Mountains)

"I want to live in a community where everyone is accepted for who they are, no matter their age, race, gender and sexuality." (14-year-old, Lower Mountains)

"[I] want people to feel more comfortable being themselves. Openly themselves. If there is no stereotypical things that you 'have' to be then you can be yourself." (Young person, Lower Mountains)

"Everyone is equal, safe, everyone feels comfortable. It is what a community should actually be like." (16-year-old, Lower Mountains)

"Children and young people need to feel that they belong in their local place and that they will be respected and looked out for in this local place." (Adult, online, Mid Mountains)

"Cycling: If you're an adult dressed in lycra you get paid attention to but in a school uniform it's like the rules don't apply." (Young person, Lower Mountains)

"Understand that things change. We've grown up with changes. Older people say 'this is how I did it.' Flexibility is needed. There's a stigma on young people. [We are seen as] not as experienced or intelligent as an older person. It doesn't mean my opinion matters less." (Young person)

"But young people sometimes don't even try to think about it (organising something) because they feel disempowered." (Young person)

"It looks bad when a big group of us walk through Springwood. If there is more than three kids then you're there to "disturb" other people." (High School Conversation, Lower Mountains).

PUBLIC SPACES FOR CONNECTION AND RECREATION

Many adults, children and young people reflected that there was a lack of safe public spaces available for informal social interaction, activities or for inexpensive events.

*“There is **nowhere to go hang out**. There is Coles but if there is a group of 3 kids there is no problem but if there is more than 3 kids we get told we are disturbing customers. **We are seen as troublemakers** and it’s annoying. I hang out in my bedroom or friends’ houses.”* (Conversation, High School, Lower Mountains)

Young people want to engage in public life. They want to connect with their communities by being present and engaged with each other and with other generations in public spaces. They want to be welcome in public spaces and interact with broader communities in those places. They would like opportunities to spend time with their friends and be more active.

“A town that is ‘bouncy’ [fun].” (10-year-old, Lower Mountains)

This theme has strong connections to the SFA outcomes of:

- Belonging – children and young people have positive participatory connections with family, friends and community
- Being – children and young people are physically healthy

Responses reflected that young people feel unwelcome in public spaces, and that there are insufficient public spaces for them to use. This experience of young people is well recognised in research regarding modern town centres.

This theme connected with issues of transport availability, safety, paths and lighting. It also connected to issues of civic pride – with people both proud of their neighbourhoods and communities but also wanting to see revitalisation of some towns and spaces. Children and young people were realistic that there could not be purpose-built facilities in every township but they did want to see some facilities in the Mountains, like adventure playgrounds for all ages that brought whole families and communities together.

Concerns

Specific concerns included: the costs of organised sport; that information about events does not get to young people; the current lack of options; and the active exclusion of young people from some public spaces.

“We seem to spend millions on places for very young children to spend time e.g. playgrounds, but then not much on places for young people to spend time at. Then they get stereotyped if they hang out in public places. I think it is important for young people to have safe, fun and pleasant places to spend time in. We have skate parks but not everyone skates”. (Adult, online, Mid Mountains)

Actions that would make a difference

A major category of action was the provision of **parks, public spaces, or upgrades to existing parks** that made them attractive and accessible for young people as well as for people of all ages, so that young people have places and activities to enjoy as part of the wider community. Adventure playgrounds which increased activity and allowed for outdoor socialisation were suggested in

connection with the natural environment, for example a “tree tops walk” or a flying fox using trees. Some related quotes are presented here while others are further below.

“At Glenbrook Park there’s a “childish playground” but teens don’t want to use it. More equipment would be better like flying foxes, over water (like a park in Canberra), jungle nets you climb, creative equipment, swings, a basketball/netball court. It’s good that it’s near shops, train station and cinema”. (Youth Council, long conversation)

“I think there needs to be more free places designed for kids and adults.” (Primary school student, Mid Mountains)

“It would be good to have a place where all generations could enjoy activities. To be friendly with and respectful of older people and to mix with older people apart from just family members”. (Young person)

“I think a free youth / adult playground would be awesome. I’d play there.” (Adult, online, Mid Mountains)

“If youth get together with adults and build something that’s theirs and run it together, that would be amazing”. (Youth council long conversation)

“We need engaging, interesting, well maintained spaces that invite children and teens outdoors to play, explore, challenge themselves in and hang-out surrounded by community” (Adult, online, Upper Mountains)

Renew Katoomba. A lot of discussion centred on town centres which were becoming run down and as a consequence felt less safe and were less used. Katoomba was a significant focus for this commentary for Upper Mountains children and young people. Some related quotes are presented here while others are further below.

[In Katoomba] “Buildings look scratched and old, they need repainting.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains).

“Fix up the destroyed buildings. Fix them up so they can be used, keep their old charm, not modernise them.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains).

“Katoomba has a ridiculous number of liquor outlets, it feels crazy. It really frustrates me.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

“Also all those empty shops down the [Katoomba] main street. If they [landlords] can drop prices, there’d be more prospering. It needs a paint job.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

“Katoomba should be a thriving community but people are going to Leura. We need to return character and security and a feeling of home.” (High school age conversation, Upper Mountains)

Upgrades to the bike path and pool at Blackheath, as well as an **off road recreational bike track** at Blackheath, were mentioned a number of times (bike paths and tracks were mentioned 38 times amongst responses from Blackheath residents).

Associated with a desire for public spaces were many mentions of **organised events** that were well-publicised and allowed people from varying demographics to connect with each other. A reliable and **respected source of information about community events** for young people was thought to be as important as the events.

*“Music things and concerts. **We only know about things if it’s already happened. If we knew about things we would go.**”* (Conversation, High School, Lower Mountains)

*“Monthly activities taking place like a ‘live music event’. **The Springwood Hub is a good venue. It’s important to have good advertisements for the events with lots of information & that it is well organised.**”* (Youth Council, long conversation)

Public or street art was considered to be an effective way to add visual appeal, discourage graffiti (tagging), and provide a focal point for a community project which could build relationships and allow children and young people to contribute in their communities.

“A school street art project would make a school feel proud – but they shouldn’t be too strict about what street art is chosen, just as long as it’s not offensive. It should include really young kids’ ‘cute’ artwork.” (Young person)

Other things people said about spaces for connection and recreation

“More open spaces in Katoomba with equipment for athletics.” (Primary school conversation, upper mountains)

“Plans for [a] new improved park. The community should be consulted to collectively create the park. A vote for the best park design – like the recent community vote on bins. This should be promoted well “like on TV”. The Blue Mountains radio could keep people up to date with what’s happening. Or at least some indication that the Council is making progress.” (Youth council long conversation)

“New parks to be built in 5 years.” (Young person)

“Less problems on trains – and perhaps a carriage only for women to be safe. ‘Pink ladies’ carriage. ‘But young boys are ok on that carriage.’” (Young person)

*“Perhaps **a sports area where you can hire equipment and just try the sport. Some random courts, concrete for handball, & colourful park benches.** Would be good to change activities regularly at the common play areas. Otherwise they get vandalised because people get bored.”* (Youth council long conversation)

“Skate parks are popular and it would be good to have a fenced football or court area next to skate parks”. (Youth council long conversation)

*“**A hangout zone** would be good. But not too near the bush or “parents are afraid people will drag kids off into the bush”. The open space should be convenient, not*

*hidden, but not on the highway. A **youth café**. A ‘safe haven’ hub for teenagers to go and socialise without spending money (or at least too much). Especially for those who don’t want to go home or have problems at home.”* (Youth council long conversation)

“Abandoned places where people break in could be knocked down and rebuilt as a safe space or park instead. These places need to be distributed fairly across the City.” (Youth council long conversation)

“Regarding transport, more frequent trains and train station names on all the benches. Perhaps free trains for under-18s. A buffet or kiosk on the train like on the ferries with free Wi-Fi and power sockets.” (Youth council long conversation)

*“**More activities like MYST’s free BBQs. A blow up movie projector event on a Saturday night – cheap (gold coin donation). Like what St Columbus does – good that it’s safe**”.* (Youth council long conversation)

*“**A way to link up everyone, which is run regularly with any kinds of activities**”.* (Youth council long conversation)

*“To have a place to meet, not necessarily McDonald’s (most in this conversation agreed that they did not want fast food in the Upper mountains) but “**Maccas runs bring people together**”. [The worry was overdevelopment but the aspect of getting together socially was attractive. To find a balance of having a shopping centre type place to meet, but still retain the charm of the Mountain’s heritage and natural environment].”*

*“[I want to see young people] have positive options in their community to engage in/meet people. Gets **people interactive in public places, good for health**.”* (Adult, Upper Mountains)

“It’s important that people know other people, so a few groups would be very helpful to my Nan.” (11-year-old, Upper Mountains)

*“Would like to see the older people, who are the majority in this community, mixing more with the other generations. **It would be good to have a place where all generations could enjoy activities. To be friendly with and respectful of older people and to mix with older people apart from just family members. Some examples were street parties/BBQs. (e.g.: after the 2013 fires in Winmalee)**.”* (Youth Council long conversation)

*“It is important that this happens in my lifetime **so I can see people meeting with people who they didn’t know lived in that community**.”* (15-year-old, lower Mountains).

“The Blue Mountains has good community spirit, when things go wrong everyone pitches in e.g. bushfires, lots of donations and offers of help.” (Conversation, young people, Upper Mountains)

More of what people said about the kind of spaces and activities they wanted

*“With parks, add basketball hoops. When I go to the parks, all the playgrounds are tiny and small. **We need a big kid playground.**”*

“With a really long zip line.”

“A long park for walking, climbing.”

“Giant swing things.”

“There’s great equipment at Darling Harbour.”

“There’s a climbing frame at Newington Park with a massive big slide.”

“Parks with things in it for everyone.”

“Fix up Kingsford Smith Park, it’s gloomy with trees hanging over it.”

“Kingsford Smith Park is dark and gloomy, it could be used for a music festival [if it was fixed up].”

“At the skate park the big kids knock over my brother, there should be separate parks for big and little kids.”

“You should include rock climbing walls in the park opposite Katoomba North Public School. Make sure they’re at a slight angle.” (all above: Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains)

“Basketball spaces or somewhere to kick a soccer ball.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains)

“An older kids’ park with flying foxes and challenging obstacles.” (Primary school student, Mid Mountains)

“I would also like to have a better skate park because our skate park right now is really bad and it is not much fun. I would also love to see a tree tops adventure park in Blackheath because we have so many beautiful trees here and none of them are used.” (10-year-old, upper mountains)

“I would also like a park with obstacles so we can do more in parks instead of sitting on a swing the whole time.” (11-year-old, Lower Mountains)

“I would like to see in the future bigger parks with a running track, better play equipment and a skate park. A plaza would be awesome. A sports centre and bike tracks would be good too.” (12-year-old, Lower Mountains)

“We need a youth space in Blackheath.” (Adult, Upper Mountains)

“Safe places for teenagers to socialise. Hang out in places that don’t involve money.” (Young person)

I would love to see more elaborate playgrounds for older people like giant spider webs and really long flying foxes. I also think the pool here needs a bit of T.L.C. because it looks a little bit run down.” (12-year-old, Upper Mountains)

“We should have a working day for kids. Some schools should get together and plant trees and build parks and at the end they will go to a big party.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains).

More of what people said about renewing Katoomba

“[I’d like to see] more trees and beautiful places in Katoomba.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains)

[In Katoomba] “Plant more eucalyptus trees and make cleaner walkways, make them nice to walk in.”

“People smash bottles on the ground, it’s not kid friendly, not nice to look at, or trolleys that haven’t been taken back.”

“Friendliness – feel safe in the environment and not have abusive people.”

“Improve business. A lot of things are closing down. If we have local business the town will have more money and can fund these things.”

“Do something with the library next to the movies [Renaissance Centre?].”

“Nice to do stuff with broken down buildings.”

“More shade on Katoomba St.” (Primary school conversation, Upper Mountains).

“With tourism down, businesses aren’t making enough to pay the rent. Then people see that happening and don’t go there.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

*“Leura is doing well. It has high tourism. **It’s nicer to be in [than Katoomba], warmer. There’s more vegetation.**”* (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

“Katoomba has a reputation for not being pleasant.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

*“We like the vibe Leura has. There’s a big difference in the level of safety. **I feel safe in Leura at 12am at night but not Katoomba.** We need to make it a more pleasant place, make Katoomba a place that offers different people different experiences.”* (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

[It would make Katoomba awesome if] The youth centre [was] safe; [and the town was] Peaceful; ... without assholes who beat up people; No junkies.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

[Things that would make a difference in Katoomba]: “Police patrol. We need more police in Katoomba. Sometimes I feel safe, sometimes not.” (High school conversation, Upper Mountains)

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Having good education options locally, and especially genuine pathways from education to employment, were more critical issues for some groups of young people than for the wider cohort of children and young people involved in this process. Children and young people generally valued education, and there was not much concern expressed about the quality or accessibility of schools.

This theme most closely relates to the SFA outcome of **Becoming**:

- Children and young people meet their developmental, educational and life skill milestones
- Young people have a supported post school plan to enter further education or work

For children and young people who were adequately engaged in school, education featured less prominently in their responses than for young people with a more tenuous connection to school and other forms of education. For the latter young people, having local education options – including Vocational Education and Training (VET) - which provide them with pathways into real employment is the central issue. For these young people everything else is able to be worked out if they are able to secure suitable local employment. Without those pathways there is less of a sense of hope and purpose.

“Growing up is hard. Being at school is not for everyone. Being somewhere you enjoy that connects us and makes us feel we belong.” (Youth Council Conversation)

Some young people who were adequately engaged in school saw that not all of their peers valued education or seized it as an opportunity. Others saw education as a contributing factor to the aspiration of acceptance and respect – a means to build people’s understanding of diversity.

“More emphasis on the benefits of education. So it is valued rather than seen as a ‘chore’. From the students and the community in general.” (High School conversation, Lower Mountains)

Specific Concerns

Specific concerns expressed included:

- Current strategies to support the transition from school to work being inadequate
- A lack of local job network agencies
- Exploitation of, and fairness for, young people in work
- The limited range of VET courses available in the Mountains
- The prospect of having to move out of the Mountains to study or work – some young people wanted to stay local and remain part of their communities
- Inadequacy of education aimed to prevent racism
- Some people not seeing the value of education

Actions that would make a difference

- A greater range of VET courses available in the Mountains.
- A locally based and connected job agency.

- A strategic plan for employment opportunities in the Mountains.
- Volunteering opportunities for young people.
- Community valuing of education.

“We travel all the way to Mt Druitt to do TAFE – 2 subjects; we should be able to do that TAFE course in the upper mountains.” (Young person, Upper Mountains)

“There is nothing for transitioning these young people [in alternate school streams] from school to work. No job network agency.” (Staff member, High School, Upper Mountains).

“A strategic plan should be created for youth employment and a long term plan should be put together for the future of employment to increase opportunities and reduce bad employment practice. At the moment I see the Blue Mountains is unsustainable for employment unless you own a business, work remotely and are willing to accept lower earnings”. (Adult, Lower Mountains)

More of what people said about education and employment

“People should be given a high level of education. [There should be] cultural education for young kids.” (High School conversation, Lower Mountains).

“[I want] a community that values high quality early childhood, primary and high school education; pathways to tertiary education.” (Adult, Upper Mountains).

“I would... like to see young people have more volunteering and employment opportunities.” (Adult, Upper Mountains)

[From young people with disability]: “Jobs are important in a community.” (High School conversation, Upper Mountains)

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Amongst primary school aged children in particular there was a desire for a healthy community and environment. This was associated with:

- access to primary health features like General Practitioners, hospitals, and pharmacies
- environmental factors such as clean air and water; and lowering airport and road related pollution as well as water pollution
- physical activity including walking, sport and bike riding;
- addressing inactivity, overweight and obesity
- a negative sentiment related to alcohol consumption, tobacco smoking (specifically around children), drugs (ice was named by some young people, but drugs in general were mentioned by primary aged children)

Young people expressed an appreciation for the importance of wellbeing and deeply felt concerns about mental health.

“You can’t have a functioning community without functioning human beings.”

(High School conversation, Lower Mountains)

This particularly related to the impacts on mental health of unhelpful peer interactions through social media – from bullying, to promoting unhealthy eating habits, to sexual pressuring.

“The online world plays a big part in our generation. Sites like Tumblr glorify mental illness.”

“They all band together and give tips on how to succeed in anorexia.”

“A lot of people are doing self-harm. Photographs are taken – really graphic ones.”

“Some try to express their feelings but don’t know how to do it properly.” (all above: High School conversation, Lower Mountains)

Young people also voiced a concern that the way mental health is included in the school curriculum does not adequately enable them to cope with their own or their peers’ mental health challenges.

*“They tell us what it is (depression, etc.) but **don’t teach us how to deal with it**. They teach resilience.... At the moment we are just being told about it. We are not being taught things to take through with us and actually learn the real thing and understand what is happening.”* (High school conversation, Lower Mountains).

These conversations most closely align to the SFA outcome of **Becoming**:

- Children and young people meet their developmental, educational and life skill milestones
 - Children meet their holistic developmental milestones
 - Children and young people have developmentally appropriate self-management and life skills

Specific concerns

On-line bullying and pressuring.

Physical locations for face-to-face help were identified as lacking.

“I don’t see many places where children feel they are safe. There are a lot of helplines and kids safety phone lines but I don’t see any havens or hubs for children to go for help. They have nowhere to go and this is the whole reason why we have issues like suicide and depression. I think our community isn’t too far behind but you could do more, definitely.” (14-year-old, Mid Mountains)

“Small pharmacies” needed in some villages like Warrimoo.

*“In my town I would like to see some more restaurants and cafes. Some more stores and shops like maybe a **small pharmacy** and or a \$2 shop.”* (12-year-old, Lower Mountains)

Actions that would make a difference

- Curriculum changes that would better equip children and young people to support their peers affected by mental health challenges.
- Increased options for physical activity, including safe footpaths, bike paths and activity areas.
- Increased access to health services.
- Physical safe spaces where children and young people can seek advice, or just to go to
- Programs in school that support mental health literacy
- Greater awareness of mental health services available to young people
- Educating parents about cyber safety issues

More of what people said about Health

“I’d like to see a community garden with heaps of trees and more recreational playgrounds for children. We need more footpaths to walk around. We need to get youth out of the house so that we don’t have problems like obesity.” (14-year-old, Mid Mountains)

“You need a healthy community for your children. These are important to me because if you don’t have life [health] insurance you can’t get to a hospital so you need easy access to get an ambulance.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“I want to live in a safe community with healthy people and stuff.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“I would like to live in a clean, friendly, healthy community. Also I want to be a fun and active community.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“They are important to me because if it is clean I am more comfortable touching anything; friendly because no one will get hurt, healthy so no one will do anything bad for their health, fun and active that is also connected to health.” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

“[I would like to live in a community] that facilitates safe and healthy means of getting

around - especially between villages i.e. bicycle pathways (what a shame this wasn't a part of the high way upgrade)." (Parent, online, Mid Mountains)

More of what people said about Mental Health

"Parents also need the education. Often parents think it's just, 'Oh they are just going through their teenage years.' But sometimes it's more than that. Parents need to learn the difference between mental health issues and being a teenager."

"If parents could attend school seminars and know what their child is looking at every night (on social media). But sometimes kids don't want to open up and parents are afraid to push more."

"Sometimes you want to speak to a parent but you are scared about how they will react. It's hard to communicate."

"There is a pride too and sometimes you want your parents to think it's all alright."

"Someone should be able to understand when a normal feeling of sadness and teenage angst is different to depression."

"We need tools to deal with it. For ourselves and our friends. Numbers to call if you worry about your friend." (all above: High School conversation, Lower Mountains)

"I just think that if we all tried to make things better everyone's mental health needs would be so much better and therefore they have a good attitude towards their physical health." (11-year-old, Lower Mountains).

"A lot of mental health issues and isolation issues are prevalent in young people who feel pressures of maintaining an image, excelling academically, or being bullied." (Adult, online, Upper Mountains)

"Stop bullying. Including cyber-bullying. School programs would be good." (Primary school conversation, Lower Mountains)

"And kids need more help with disorders. Kids are getting bad information." (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

BROADER CONCERNS

Other concerns raised by children or young people but not tightly related to the above themes included:

- General concerns about the impacts of the planned **Western Sydney airport**
- a division of opinion about **development** generally, including medium density housing, and in particular the advantages and disadvantages of **fast food chain outlets** in the Mountains
- **bushfire** safety, preparation and mitigation.

CHILD AND FAMILY PLAN OUTCOMES:

The outcomes desired by the community for children and young people were congruent with the outcomes framework currently being developed by the Stronger Families Alliance (Tab 1). The outcomes of **Being, Belonging** and **Becoming**, as described by the SFA, were desired by the children, young people and adults surveyed.

That the prevention of mental health problems and the promotion of wellbeing is the overarching objective of the outcomes framework is consistent with the importance given it – especially in conversations with young people where there was a strength of feeling and a depth of understanding of its importance for their peers. This aspiration is represented (within the **Becoming** outcome) in terms of “self-regulation and life skills” which may sufficiently represent the value of resourcing peers to support each other, as identified by young people.

“Belonging: Children and young people feel they belong to the community and the place where they live”, emerges as a dominant outcome linked to several themes through the conversations and survey. This may be because the questions encouraged children and young people to look outwards at their community to identify what they wanted for their community – hence there was a focus on community. Conversations regarding safety, acceptance, respect, inclusion and public spaces all had strong connections with issues of children and young people belonging within the wider community.

The key theme of safety is well represented through the **Being** outcome, that: “children and young people are safe, healthy, flourishing and secure in their cultural identity” which also appropriately captures the interconnection of several themes in relation to safety, health and diversity.

Young people’s desire to contribute to their communities and care for their peers is reflected in the framework through the **Belonging** outcome “Young people contribute to others, the community, the place where they live and the environment.”

Some elements of the aspirations of children and young people did not fall neatly within the SFA outcomes, possibly because they reflected concerns that are common to adults, children and young people and not limited to a developmental frame of reference. These included the idea of environmental sustainability and stewardship, which most closely matches with the **Being** outcome (as above).

The general valuing of education, and the specific aspirations for local education, training and employment options expressed by some young people, are represented within the **Becoming**

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The SFA outcomes are well aligned with the priorities of children and young people, with Belonging being of particular importance.

In order to achieve those outcomes, the SFA, Blue Mountains City Council and other partners consider the specific aspirations, concerns and proposals raised by children and young people in their planning and actions.

Proposals from respondents are summarised for easy reference below.

SAFETY

- a. Safe paths for walking and riding bikes within local areas and between nearby villages (for example, Blackheath to Katoomba, Winmalee to Springwood)
- b. Well-lit and maintained public spaces
- c. Revitalised town centres
- d. Inclusive recreational areas
- e. Supervision and safety systems on trains
- f. “More zebra crossings around the school” (Primary student, Mid Mountains)

THE ENVIRONMENT

- g. More use of renewable energy (solar, wind)
- h. Maintenance of national parks
- i. Conservation of native animals
- j. Reduction of air and water pollution
- k. Sustainable building practices
- l. Increased use of active transport (by upgrading foot and bike paths)
- m. Increased medium density housing - to increase proximity to services and drive improvements to the availability, safety and reliability of public transport.
- n. Sustainable and local agriculture and business, including increased local access to shops and services
- o. Retention of the trees at Blackheath

ACCEPTANCE, FRIENDLINESS AND RESPECT

- p. Positive community dialogue regarding children and young people, and recognition of their contributions
- q. Community events which bring diverse people together, run by trusted organisations
- r. Education as a means for understanding and valuing people’s differences
- s. The development of shared community values

PUBLIC SPACES FOR CONNECTION AND RECREATION

- t. Provision of parks, public spaces, or upgrades to existing parks that are attractive and

accessible for young people as well as for people of all ages, so that young people have places and activities to enjoy as part of the wider community. Adventure playgrounds which increased activity and allowed for outdoor socialisation were suggested in connection with the natural environment, for example a “tree tops walk” or a flying fox using trees

- u. Renew Katoomba and other town centres to improve urban amenity, safety and use
- v. New or upgraded bike paths, pools and off road recreational bike tracks (especially at Blackheath)
- w. Organised events that are well-publicised and allow people from varying demographics to connect with each other
- x. A reliable and respected source of information about community events for young people
- y. Public or street art

EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

- z. A greater range of VET courses available in the Mountains.
- aa. A locally based and connected job agency.
- bb. A strategic plan for employment opportunities in the Mountains.
- cc. Volunteering opportunities for young people.
- dd. Community valuing of education.

HEALTH, MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- ee. Curriculum changes that would better equip children and young people to support their peers affected by mental health challenges.
- ff. Increased options for physical activity, including safe footpaths, bike paths and activity areas.
- gg. Increased access to health services.
- hh. Physical safe spaces where children and young people can seek advice, or just to go to
- ii. Programs in school that support mental health literacy
- jj. Greater awareness of mental health services available to young people
- kk. Educating parents about cyber safety issues

HOW WILL THIS CONSULTATION SUMMARY BE USED?

This consultation process has provided a sound basis and starting point for conducting further, targeted, longer conversations to further flesh out public knowledge around specific areas of interest. There are several themes that have emerged requiring further investigation. The aim now is to return to the community and hold a number of longer conversations (at least eight to ten), using the full set of Harwood questions that engage the community in devising solutions, and bring them on board as partners who are well placed to act at the local level.

The information in this report will be used in a number of ways. Firstly, a brief two-page summary report will be written reflecting the main aspirations, concerns and actions that would make a difference. This public document will be circulated to everyone who contributed so that people can see their sentiments reflected back to them.

Council and the Stronger Families Alliance will use the information from this report and subsequent conversations to write the Child and Youth Plan, using the aspirations articulated by the community to finalise outcomes, objectives and actions.

This report and any further conversations will provide evidence that can be used by Council staff and the SFA in planning for and allocating funding for services, facilities and programs, knowing that this is what the community, and especially children and young people, have asked for.

Conversation leaders will be brought together in ongoing “Innovation Spaces” to look at who in the broader community needs to know this information so they can get involved if they choose to, forming mini pockets of change. The aim is that actions will spring from a number of community wellsprings, with people mobilising around specific issues that matter to them, their families, their neighbourhoods and the broader community.

Tab 1: SFA Child and Youth Ultimate Outcomes framework to prevent mental health problems and promote wellbeing

		0-5	5-12	12-18
Being	Children and young people are safe, healthy and flourishing, and have a secure cultural identity.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Children and young people have equitable access to the resources they need to reach their full potential 2. Children and young people are safe, healthy, flourishing and secure in their cultural identity. 		
Belonging	Children and young people feel they belong to the community and the place where they live	Children have secure and nurturing relationships with their family, friends and the community.	Children and young people feel valued by the community have positive participatory connections with family, friends, community and the place where they live.	
				Young people contribute to others, the community, the place where they live and the environment.
Becoming	Children and young people reach their full potential	Children meet their holistic developmental milestones.	Children and young people engage in education and have developmentally appropriate self-regulation & life skills.	
				Young people are well connected with post school pathways to quality education and/or employment

Flourishing = Defined using Seligman’s PERMA model: P = Positive emotions / E = Engagement or flow / R = Positive relationships / M= Meaning or purpose / A = Achievement (subjective or self-efficacy)

Self-regulation = Resilience; emotional, social and cognitive self-regulation skills.