



Australian
National
University



CREATING CHILD INCLUSIVE COMMUNITIES

Sharon Bessell

Families ACT
Middle Years Forum II

15 November 2017



Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia

ARC Linkage project

What would make community strengthening and social inclusion policies and programs genuinely child-responsive and child-inclusive?

Generational Ordering:

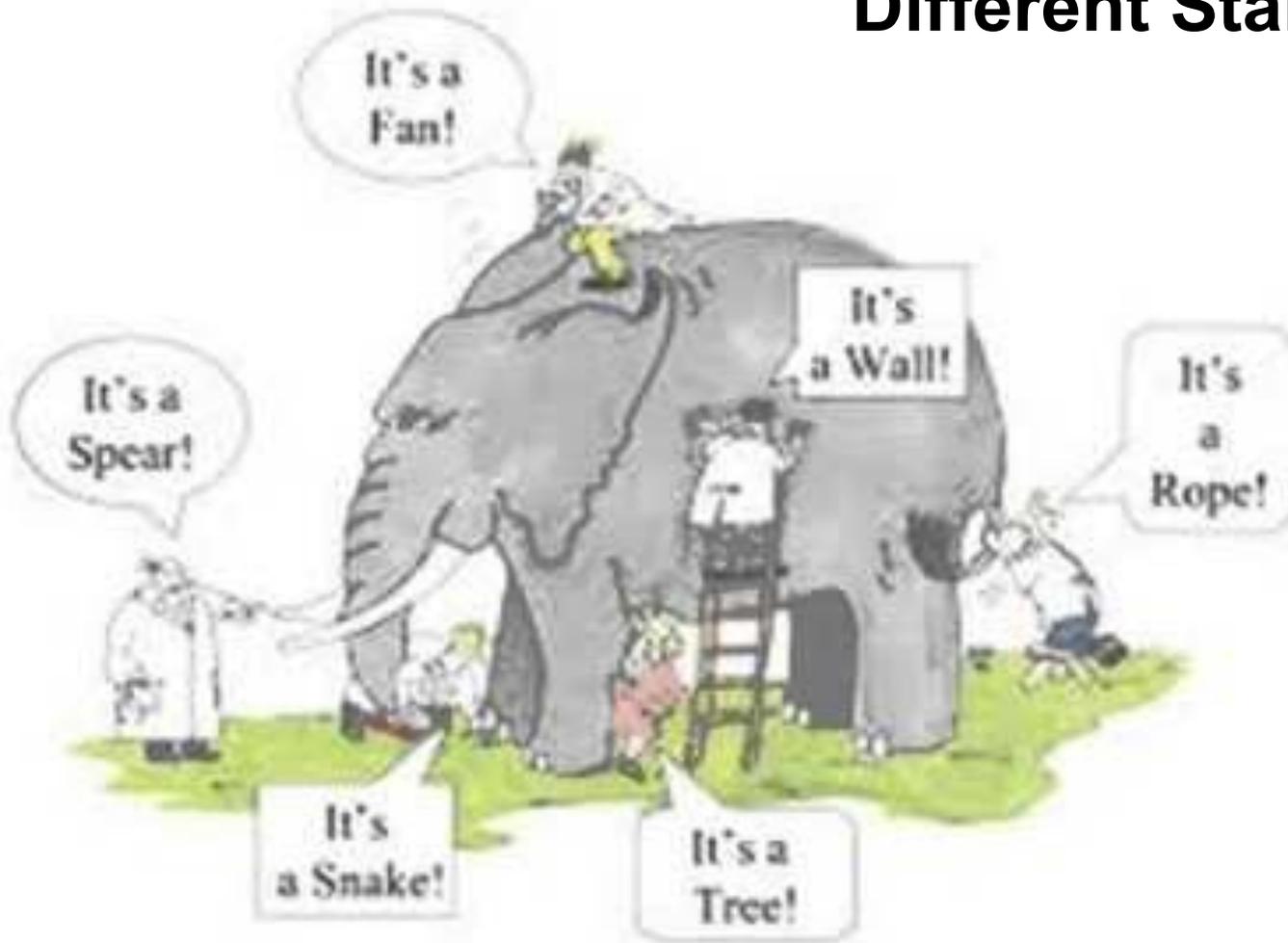
Childhood is not merely a (transitional) stage of life, but a *social status*.

Qvortrup, 1987

‘...children’s lives and experiences are, in addition to being gendered, classed, raced, and so on, also – and first of all – generationed.’

Alanen, 2009

Different Standpoints



Experience is shaped by Power and Knowledge

Social position and power order individual's lives

Knowledge is socially situated

The less powerful experience a different reality as a consequence of their social positioning

Those who experience less power are aware of different issues as a result of their social position

(Contemporary) Feminist Standpoint Theory:

Avoiding essentialist universalism

There is no single women's (or child's) standpoint

It is valuable to understand how generational ordering shapes children's knowledge and experiences of the communities in which they live and identify common priorities – not to homogenise children's lives.

The intersection of generational and other social positions leads to multiple standpoints – as well as (potentially) a common standpoint.



Children, Communities and Social Capital in Australia

What would make community strengthening and social inclusion policies and programs genuinely child-responsive and child-inclusive?



108 Children from 6 communities across 3 States

63 Girls

45 Boys

Children aged between 8 and 12 years

34 Adults

Teachers, School Councillors, School Chaplins, Principals, Local Librarian, NGO workers, Community Activist, State and Local Government officials

DEFINING COMMUNITY

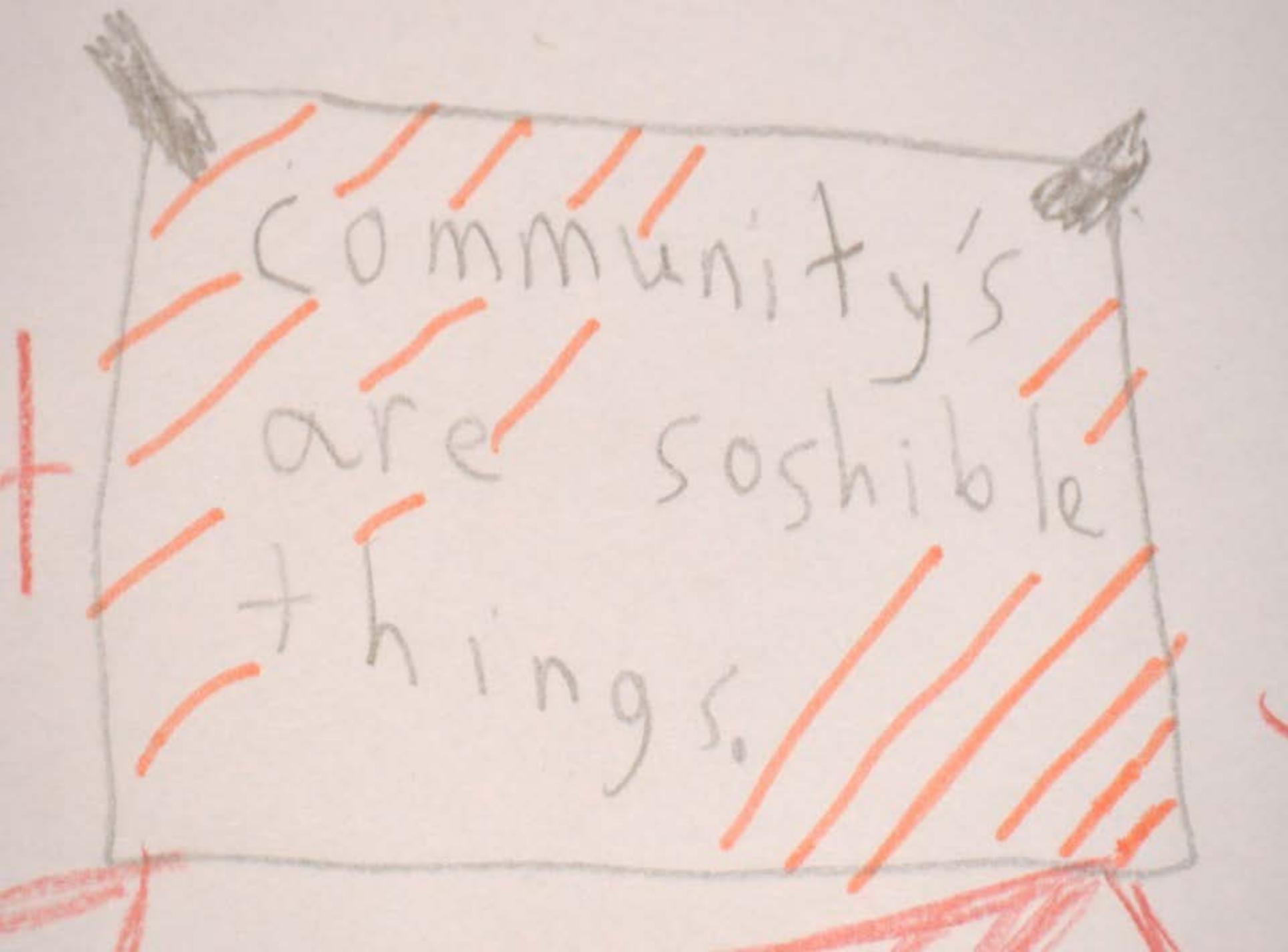
Community is a social space within which people are personally connected and known to one another.

Within this social space, people provide friendship and support to one another and work towards common goals.

Respect and kindness are very important.

In times of severe difficulty or crisis, communities need to be supported by helping professionals, such as police and ambulance services.

The people who make up a community can be diverse.



Community's
are soshible
+ things.

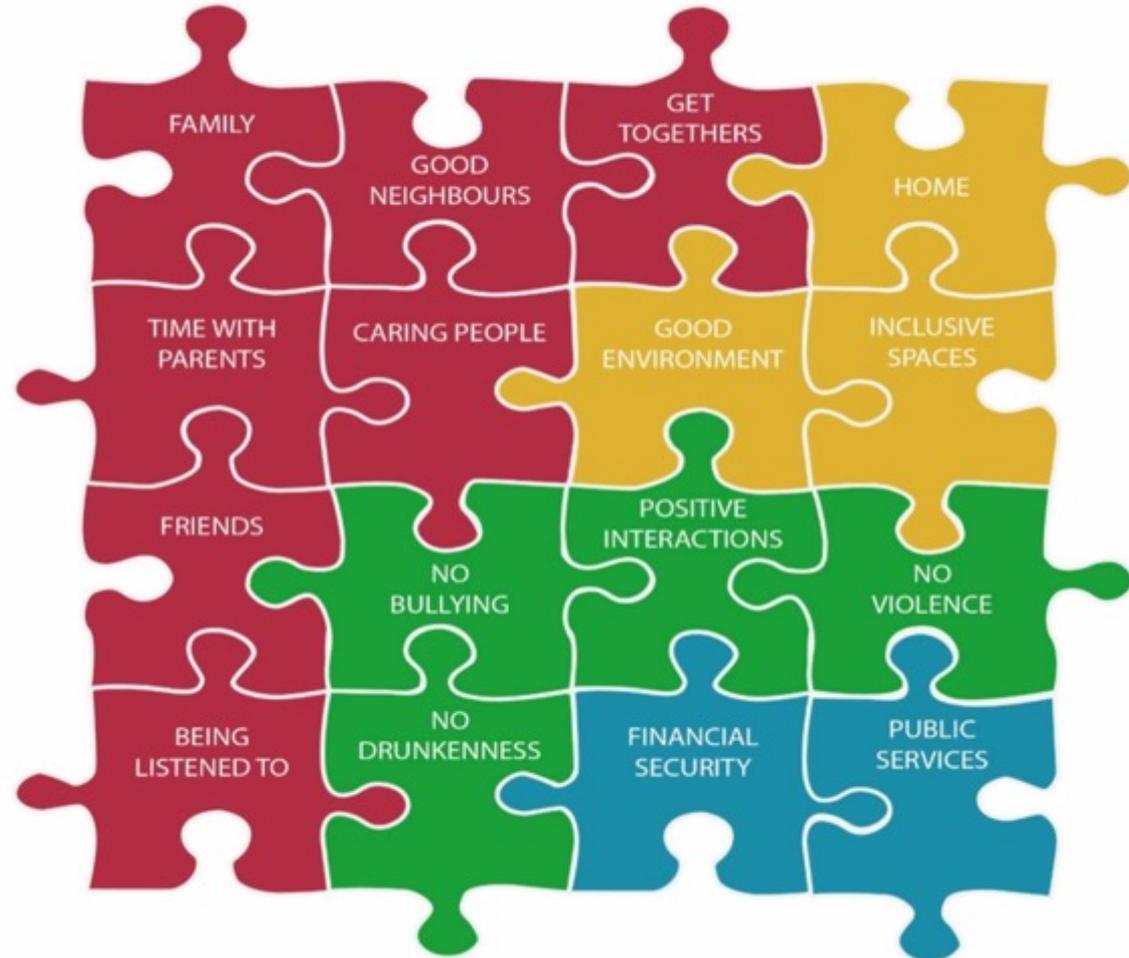


A community is like a puzzle, you need to have all the bits to make it work.

M, girl, aged 9



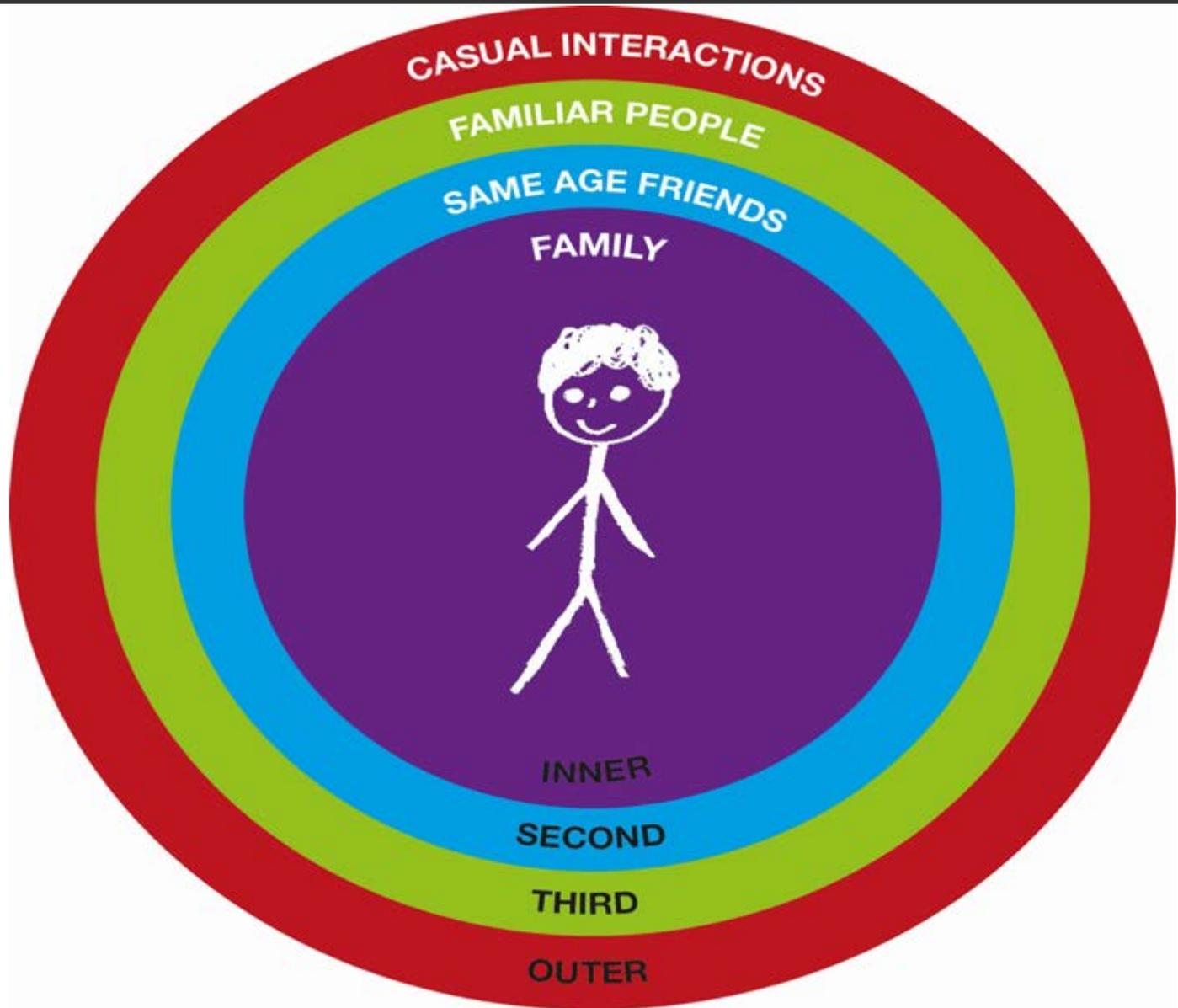
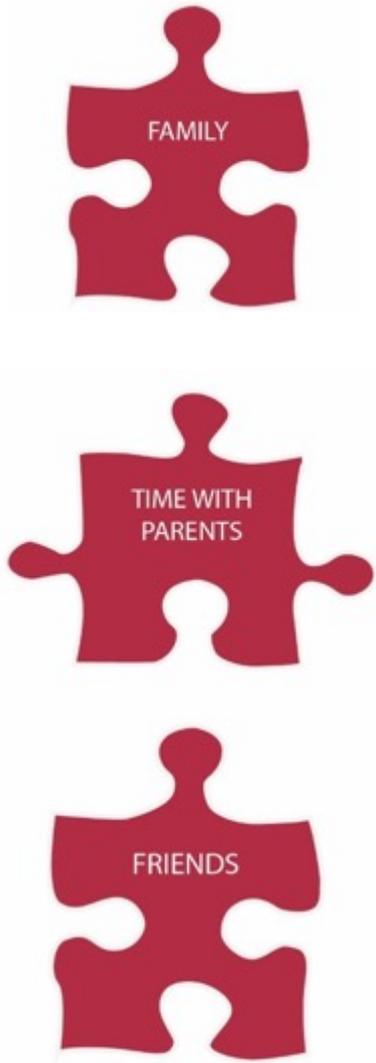
- Relationships
- Physical Places
- Safety
- Resources





Relationships

The basis,
the very heart,
of community



Recognising the
centrality of family for
children

...and for how children
conceptualise community

but

Avoiding the 'familisation' of children

Whereby children are only socially visible as part of their
family and children's own social networks are neglected



J: I look after my brother and sister all the time. There is no-one else. I don't get time to do stuff for myself. I just look after them. Mum's out a lot and my brother, he's sick.

Sharon: Do you like looking after your little brother and sister?

J: Well, no, I don't like it. But I love them, so I do it because I love them.

J, girl, aged 11



I'd just like to be a child and to play a bit myself
– just sometimes.

J, girl, aged 11



POSITIVE SUPPORTIVE INTER- GENERATIONAL RELATIONSHIP MATTERED A GREAT DEAL TO CHILDREN

BUT WERE NOT COMMON!





CASUAL INTERACTIONS WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE NOT FAMILIAR OFTEN SHAPED CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF THEIR COMMUNITY

Some bus drivers are nice, and smile and say 'hi'. Then there are the bus drivers that think they can talk to us however they want, just because we're young. But they don't do anything to the adults or the teenagers.

J, boy, aged 12



GOOD NEIGHBOURS:

- ARE NOT MEAN
- SHARE FOOD
- SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER
- ARE FRIENDLY
- INCLUDE CHILDREN
- GET-TOGETHER FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS





Nancy lives here [two houses away]. She's old and she's really nice. She makes us these great muffins. And mum and me and my sisters watch out for her.

L, girl, 11 years

It is important to help. Like when there is not enough food and you need some food – your neighbours can help and give you some food. Our neighbour does that when we need it and it is good.

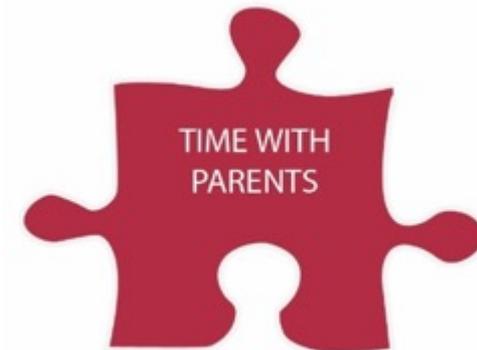
M, boy, 8 years

RELATIONSHIPS NEED TIME



Pressure on
children's time

Pressure on
parents' time





On the weekends I like to play with mummy and daddy and my little brother. But I only have Sundays – and then I'm just so tired. Maybe when I'm grown-up I'll have a bit more time to rest and play

J, girl, aged 8

In the better off sites, children's lives were intensely busy

	MON	TUES	WED	THURS	FRI	SAT
<i>Before school</i>		Music		Music		
<i>During the day</i>	School	School	School	School	School	Swimming
<i>After school</i>	After school care	After school care	Dance class	Additional tutoring	After school care	Ballet
	Language class	Singing lessons				
	Sometimes homework, which might be done at after school care					

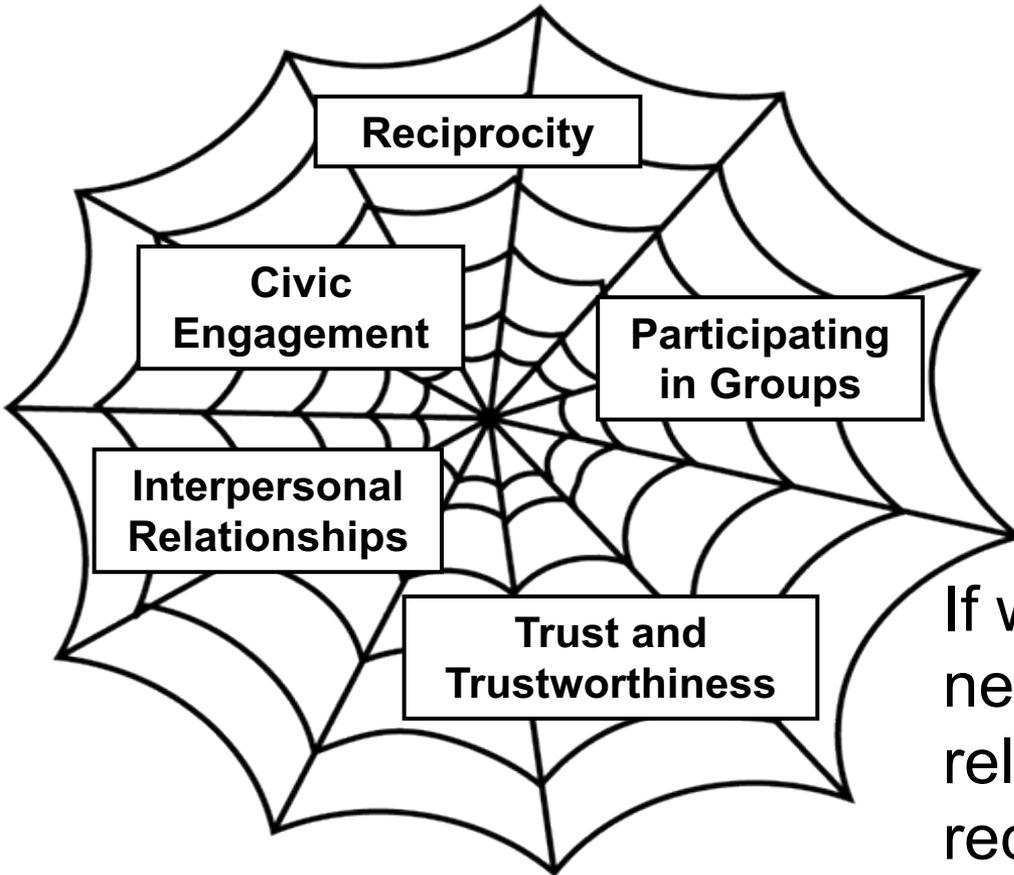
Across all sites a significant number of children considered homework to prevent them from engaging in their communities

I want to do more things after school, and in the community but we can't because of homework.

M, girl, aged 10

There's so much homework and I just get so tired.

B, girl, aged 10



If we understand social capital as networks, connectedness and relationships of mutual reciprocity, the structuring of children's lives may be damaging to their engagement with their community and undermine the development of social capital.

Children and Labour Market Policy

The resource children valued across all communities was time with parents.

It was also the resource that children described as being in limited supply



When Daddy gets home, he is really tired. He just wants to sit, maybe watch TV. But he's too tired for anything else.

A, girl, 8 years

My Dad always works. He had two jobs – one's with petrol at night and he builds in the morning. He doesn't build at night because you can't see what you are doing and he hurt his head really badly when he was working at night...now he works at the petrol joint. He has to order the petrol.

G, boy, 10 years

Parents often acted as a conduit for children's engagement with their communities.

I don't really know much about my community because my parents, they don't like being part of the community, they don't like being involved with it. And I feel like that's a let-down with me because I want to be part of the community and know people.

B, girl, 10 years

Parents' Work
Commitments

Parents Working
Hours

Parental Injury or
Illness

**NOT SIMPLY ABOUT INDIVIDUAL
PARENT BEHAVIOURS AND CHOICES**

**ALSO RESULT FROM
STRUCTURAL FACTORS –
ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL**

Parents' Work Commitments

Across all
communities

Dads working
long hours or
shift work

Mums combining
paid work and
household work

Parents' Work Commitments

Across all
communities

Dads working
long hours or
shift work

Mums combining
paid work and
household work

Parents' preference for socialising with adults

Primarily (but not only) in
disadvantaged communities

Parents going to the
club/pub; drinking alcohol;
playing pokies



I think sometimes parents should not go out and not leave their kids at home. They could stay at home. I think parents could spend time with kids just playing. Everyone could pick their favourite game and then everyone could play it. And that wouldn't cost as much as going out or stuff like pokies.

H, boy, aged 9

They [parents] are too busy. They are too busy watching the 'Bold and the Beautiful'.

K, girl, aged 10

My parents don't even listen to me and my sister. We literally have to talk to each other about our problems. Like...hello!"

M, girl, aged 10

Generation

Karl Mannheim, 1923

New participants in the cultural process are emerging

Whilst former participants in that process are continually disappearing

Members of any one generation can participate only in a temporally limited section of the historical process

It is therefore necessary continually to transmit the accumulated cultural heritage

The transition from generation to generation is a continuous process



Safety

Essential to children's
perception and
experience of community





Children valued places they knew to be safe

Children valued having people they knew they could trust

Children were not asked directly about alcohol

BUT



Excessive use of alcohol in public spaces and drunken violence emerged as the most significant theme in making children feel unsafe

The way alcohol is used in public spaces by adults undermines children's sense of safety, well-being and inclusion



Think before you drink
or you will be heart
broken



No drinking alcohol
because it is not
good for your body.

~~They~~
Adults can harm other
people.



Stop Drinking!!

It is Safer for kids!

Drinking makes you silly!

Scarier





- H: You know, adults can be pretty funny when they are drunk. Falling over and that...
- S: No, they are not funny. They just go spastic. Just spastic! And it's not funny, it's scary. They just go spastic, man. It's not funny at all.



‘You have to understand that they might not want to hurt you. They might care for you and not want to hurt you at all. But when they are drunk they will.’

A (girl, 9 years)

‘Because when they [adults] are drunk, they don’t care what’s going to happen. They should think about it, because they drink around, like, little kids.’

Children's assessments of safety were:

- Highly localised
 - Children differentiated between places and streets within their local area
- Were based on both personal experience and accounts from others
- Often heavily influenced by understandings of media, movies, stories, 'urban myths
- Very significantly determined by their interactions with the people around them
- Not always the same at their parents'

Physical Places

Important to children's
experience of and
connection with
community





No litter

No dog poo

No graffiti

Play equipment in good
repair

Footpaths



Where children felt welcome
and safe

Where children have control
over who they play with

Where child-adult relations
are positive and supportive

Children's Rooms at Clubs were generally described in negative terms

Boring

Children have no control over who they play with or how long they are left

Designed for young children

Reinforce a divide between adults and children – make it clear that children are not welcome in adult spaces



Many children said that there are limited places for children of their age

There's not much for those in their middle age. Kids of our age. There's lots of stuff for little kids, like the little kiddie rides at the playground; and stuff for teenagers to do. But there's not nothing for us in our middle age.

E, girl, aged 11



Most children wanted to use playgrounds

But they wanted play equipment that is exciting, challenging and adventurous.

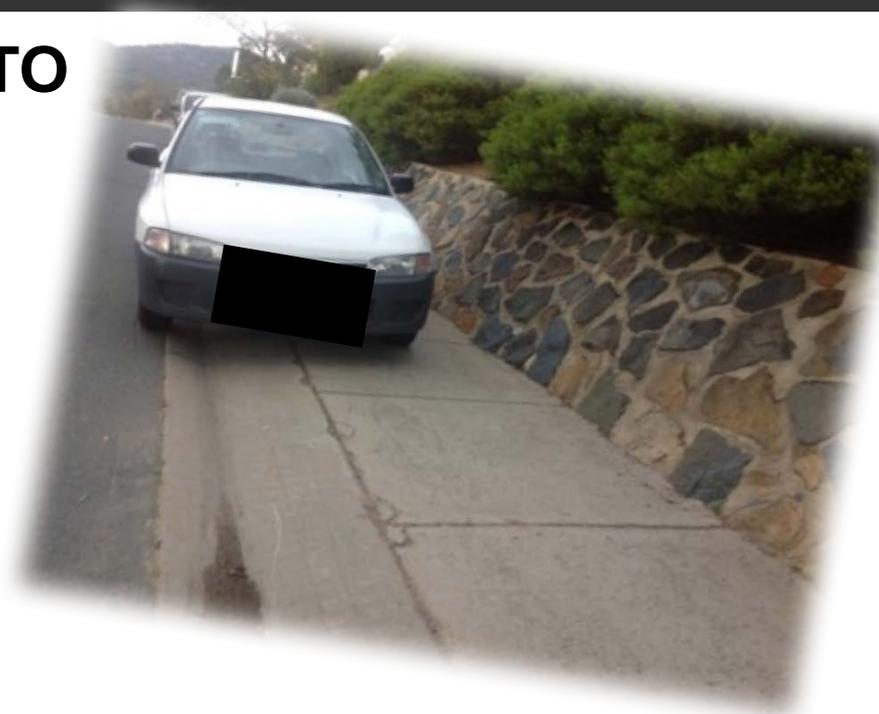
Massive outdoor trampolines would be awesome!

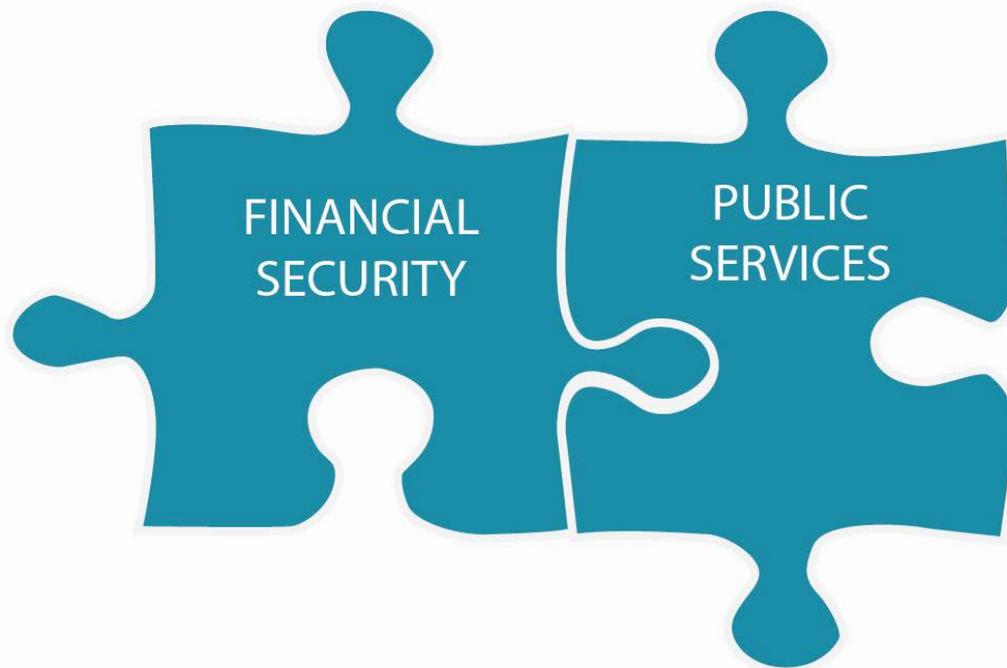
K, boy, aged 12

Generally there were more outdoor spaces open to boys than girls



FOOTPATHS ARE IMPORTANT TO CHILDREN'S MOBILITY



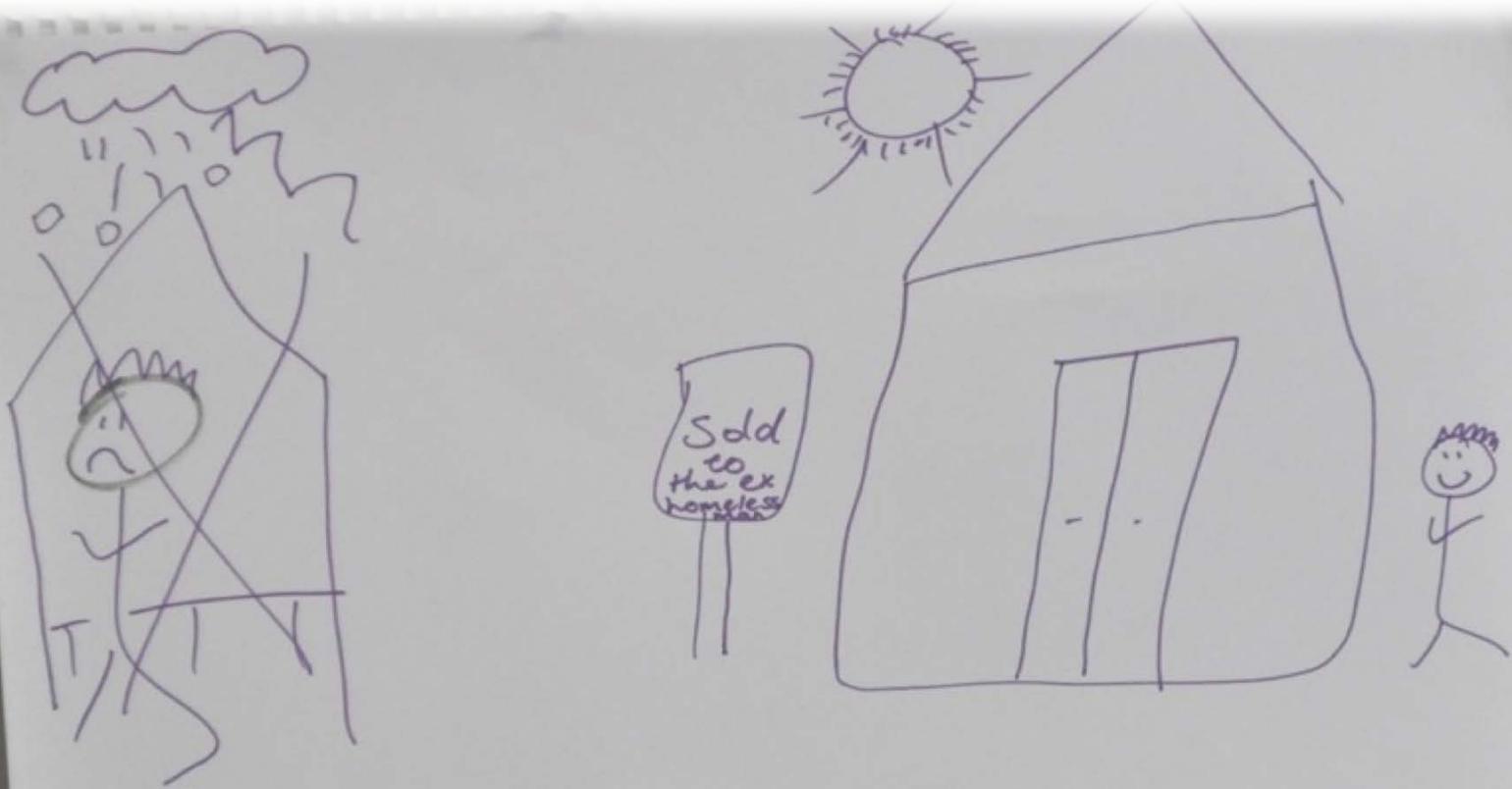


Resources
Contribute to,
and often
shape,
experience of
community



Both family finances and public resources matter greatly to children's experience of community.





No more homeless! They should have a home. ^aweekly supply of food.

The financial position of their families was one factor influencing the amount and quality of time children spend with their families.



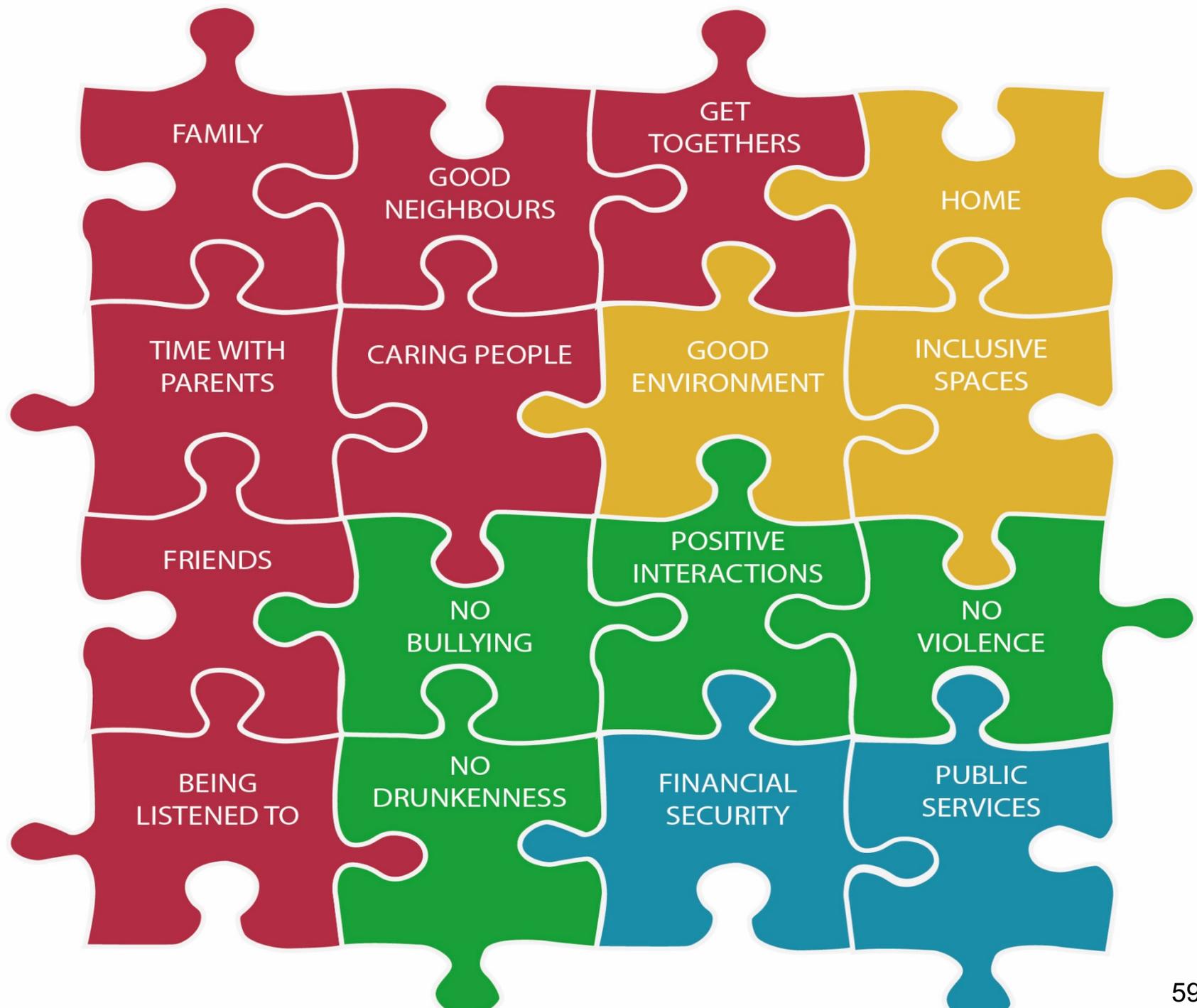
The financial position of their families shaped the ways in which they engaged – or did not engage – in community activities, both within and outside school.

‘...well we don’t really have much money to do stuff I want to do. Sometime I ask if we can, but most of the time I don’t ask.’

J, girl aged 9

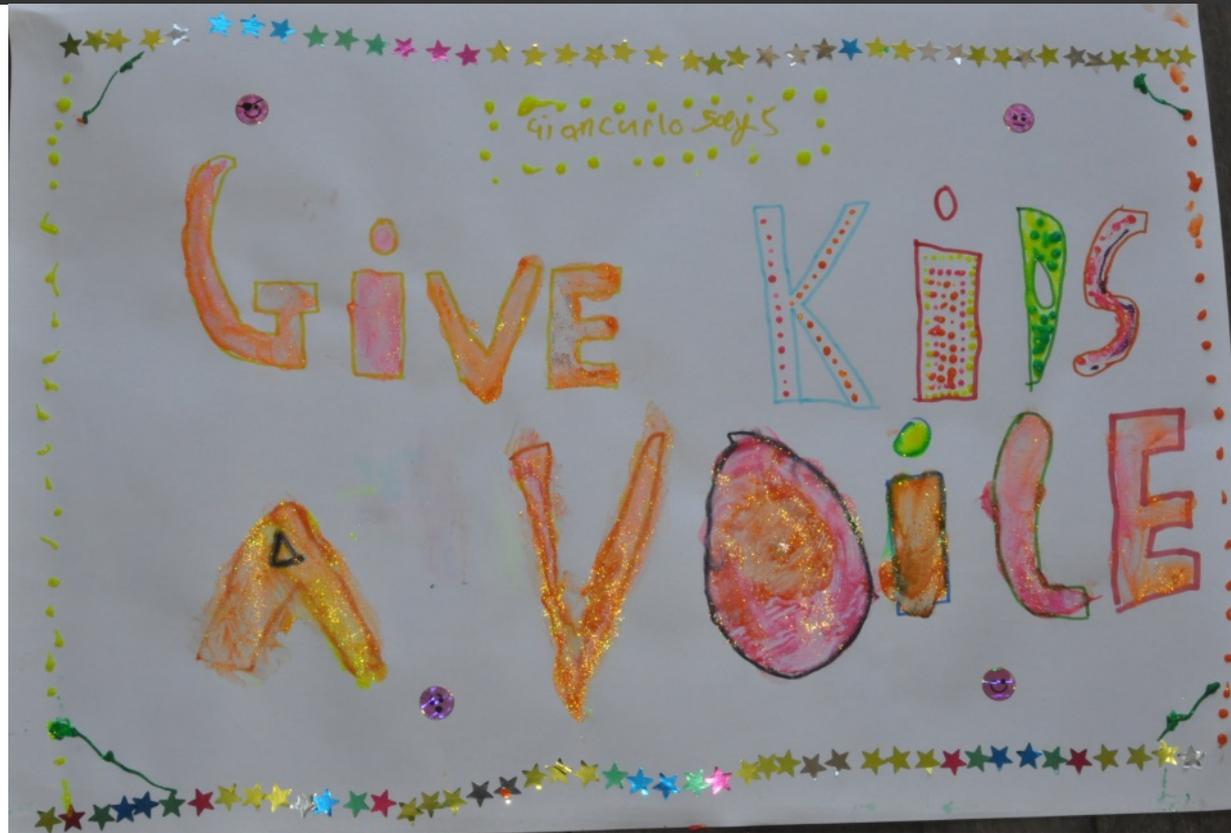
‘...well we don’t really have much money to do stuff I want to do. Sometime I ask if we can, but most of the time I don’t ask.’

J, girl aged 9



The same elements that make a community a positive and supportive place,
make school a positive, supportive place

	Relationships FRIENDS CARING TEACHERS BEING LISTENED TO
	Safety NO BULLYING TEACHERS NOT YELLING TEACHERS NOT THREATENING
	Physical Places CLEAN PLAYGROUNDS THINGS TO DO DURING BREAKS CLEAN TOILETS
	Resources PLAY EQUIPMENT GOOD GROUNDS



<http://cpc.crawford.anu.edu.au/pdf/2014/publications/Children-Communities-and-Social-Capital-Report-FINAL-Colour-March-2014.pdf>

sharon.bessell@anu.edu.au