

HUMAN

CONNECTIONS
IN LATROBE

Definitions, Case Studies
and Frameworks

Desktop Research Report





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Families,
Fairness
and Housing



The Human Connections in Latrobe project is a collaborative campaign between agencies operating within the Latrobe Health Innovation Zone and takes a place-based approach in order to identify opportunities to increase social connections and community participation across Latrobe.

The Latrobe Health Advocate, Latrobe Health Assembly, Latrobe City Council, Latrobe Valley Authority and Department of Families, Fairness and Housing have partnered to work together and independently on various initiatives with the shared aim of improving community connections, social participation and mental wellbeing outcomes.

This report was authored by Holly Perriam from the Latrobe Valley Authority, on behalf of the Human Connections in Latrobe project partners.



The Human Connections Project Partners respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal people as the Original Custodians of the land we walk on today – the land of the Braiakaulung people of the Gunaikurnai nation and pass on respect to their Elders past and present, future and emerging.

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INTRODUCTION

The Human Connections in Latrobe campaign was identified in the Latrobe Health Advocate's 2019-20 Statement of Intent as a Community Priority Campaign. The Advocate stated that:

'Building on the work done in the 2018-19 mental health project/ campaign, this campaign will have a dedicated focus on social isolation and loneliness in Latrobe. The campaign will take a place-based approach to identify opportunities to increase social / human connections across Latrobe.

The Advocate will build on relationships established with local community groups in smaller towns as well as the large towns where there are existing Neighbourhood Houses and identify the breadth of programs that have an impact on preventing and/or limiting social isolation within their communities.

The Advocate will bring together engagement outcomes and research to inform and influence key stakeholders to take action to address social isolation in Latrobe' (Latrobe Health Advocate, 2019)

Progress stalled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In September 2020 the campaign was re-activated, and the following partners were invited to collaborate, Latrobe Health Assembly, Latrobe City Council, The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and the Latrobe Valley Authority.

The group began by:

1. Identifying their common purpose and defining their shared goals
2. Gaining a shared understanding of how the project would align to each of the partners strategic directions
3. Identifying how the group would work together, contribute, and define the roles each organisation would play

The group then workshopped questions that could be asked of the community to 'better understand the context and opportunities for human connection in Latrobe'.

The engagement would begin with two broad questions::

1. What does a community connection look like?
2. What does good social connections look like to you?

It was identified that a scan of existing theories of social connection and local and international initiatives would help complement direct community engagement and help to identify potential opportunities for activities.

This research will look at definitions of social connection and interchangeable terms, consistent themes in the literature, case studies of social connection and some examples framework by which the campaign may assess its impact.

DEFINITIONS

Creating a singular definition of social connection is challenging due to its relationship to other terms and theories in which is embedded, implied or substituted. Listed below are four terms that can be used interchangeably or impact our understanding of social connections, i.e. one cannot be considered without other. With social capital in particular definitions can change as schools of thought do, how it is defined in sociology will be different in economics.

Social Capital

The term 'social capital' has its origins in mid-late 20th Century sociology where three main theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Robert Putnam and James Coleman used it to support theories on class (Bourdieu), social norms and social networks (Putnam) and economics (Coleman). Each theorist had developed a different concept of social capital. Bourdieu identified three dimensions of capital: economic, cultural and social and were based on power structures of class, Siisiainen in his evaluation of Bourdieu and Putnam states 'Bourdieu's concept of social capital puts the emphasis on conflicts and the power function (social relations that increase the ability of an actor to advance his/her interests)'. (Siisiainen, 2000). In contrast Putnam sees collective activity, like voting and volunteering as contributing to successful society and economy. Putnam's theory also has three elements: moral obligations and norms, social values (like trust) and social networks. Coleman takes an economic approach in his 1988 article 'Social Capital in the creation of Human Capital'. Again, like his fellow theorists Coleman discusses three forms of social capital: obligations and expectations, information channels and social norms. Coleman describes social capital as a function that comprises of social structures and actors within these social structures (Coleman, 1988).

Social Connection

The following are definitions that have been drawn from organisations that have developed framework or methodology for measuring social connection or promote social connection as a health measure.

Swinburne's Social Innovation Research Institute uses the following, 'Social Connection can be typically understood as face-to face contact through friends, family, neighbours, and can also take shape through personal emotional attachments maintained via phone or online' (Swinburne University of Technology: Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute, 2018). NESTA provides a broader definition 'Social connections can be any meaningful contact with another' (NESTA, 2021).

The Better Health Channel website run by the Victorian Government does not explicitly define social connections but on its Strong Relationships, Strong Health page it describes three types of connections you can have; intimate connections – with people who love and care for you, such as family and friends, relational connections – with people who you see regularly and share an interest with, such as workmates or those who serve your morning coffee, collective connections – with people who share a group membership or an affiliation with you, such as people who vote like you do, or people who have the same faith (Department of Health, 2020).

Loneliness

Loneliness is one the experiences that people have when their personal and social situation are not meeting their individual needs. Loneliness has a major impact on an individual's health and wellbeing in modern society. Dr Michelle Lim who is both board member and scientific chair of Ending Loneliness Together is a Director of the Social and Wellbeing (SHAW) Laboratory at Swinburne. Her work to produce evidence on the effects of loneliness are extensive and she is a key driver of the Ending Loneliness Together initiative. The initiative uses the following definitions on their website 'Loneliness is a feeling of distress people experience when their social relations are not the way they would like.' (Ending Loneliness Together, 2020) and 'Loneliness is defined as an aversive and subjective feeling of social isolation that arises when an individual perceives that the quality or quantity of social relationships that they have is less than what they desire'. (Ending Loneliness Together, 2020)

The UK Government's 2018 strategy to address loneliness in the community, 'A Connected Society – a strategy for tackling loneliness' states that 'Loneliness is a personal experience and can mean different things to different people....a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want' (HM Government: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018)

CASE STUDIES

Ending Loneliness Together

Ending Loneliness Together is a national network of organisations that operate in Australia. The network, comprising of Swinburne University, State Schools Relief, Uniting Care Australia, The University of Western Australian, Way Ahead, Whiddon and Relationships Australia, is supported by a board and a scientific advisory committee. The network aims to decrease loneliness in Australia by half by the year 2030 and 'to bring people, community and government together to make connection and belonging a priority — and create effective solutions to combat chronic loneliness' (Ending Loneliness Together, 2020). The network has created a series of workshops and programs which they deliver to workplaces and services to help reduce loneliness. (Ending Loneliness Together, 2020)

One Good Street

One Good Street is an initiative run by the Flemington/Kensington Rotary Club, Bolton Clarke, Good Karma Effect with support of a grant from the Victorian Government's Pick My Project Fund. The initiative supports a number of programs including Good Streets, Library of Care Things and Ride to End Loneliness. Each program aims to reduce loneliness and increase connection of older members of the community, "a sense of connectedness to local communities, and of belonging to others, is an important antidote to loneliness for many older people". (One Good Street, 2018)

In With Forward

In With Forward is a social design organisation that operates from Canada using a model of social mission and long term partnerships to make change in social service organisations. They use a Theory of Change model in their work to shift behaviours in leadership, system players, managers, staff, end users and community. In 2020 In With Forward launched their 'Connector Role' as a response to COVID-19 pandemic. The project, which is still in early stages of development aims to 'rethink how we operate as communities'. Early design has established the following principles for the project:

Outward: *The Connector Role connects street-involved adults out to community rather than back to services.*

Reciprocal: *The Connector Role engages people as equals.*

Dual level: *The Connector Role operates at two or more scales (eg. individual, community, institutional, systemic, etc.)*

Connective: *The Connector Role furthers at least one of six types of connection (connection to body & self, culture, the sacred, ground/land, the human project, and family, friends, and community)*

Organic: *The Connector Role feels organic, grounded, empowering; not clinical*

In With Forward have yet to decide what the connector role will look like. (In With Forward, 2014)

FRAMEWORKS

As far back as 2004 Australia has been looking for ways to measure our social capital. In this year The Australian Bureau of Statistics released 'Measuring Social Capital: An Australian Framework and Indicators'. The aim was to help inform policy makers to improve individual wellbeing and economic prosperity. Below are some more recent examples taken from local, state and international organisations working to support social connection and community and individual wellbeing.

Hazelwood Health Study – Wellness Barometer

The Hazelwood Health Study was commissioned by the Department of Health in 2014 in response to the Hazelwood mine fire that burned for 6 weeks in late Summer, early Autumn and covered the Morwell region in smoke. The Study set out to track the long-term health impacts from the fire on the Morwell community. The study which is now in Phase Two is looking at community wellbeing and is aiming for the following research to be delivered in 2021:

- Continue to assess perceptions of the community's wellbeing and recovery after the mine fire, taking into account subsequent events and initiatives;
- Develop a community wellbeing barometer to identify factors indicative of community wellbeing relevant to this community at a particular point in time;
- Examine the relationship between individual wellbeing and community wellbeing (in conjunction with the Psychological Impacts Stream). (Hazelwood Health Study, 2016)

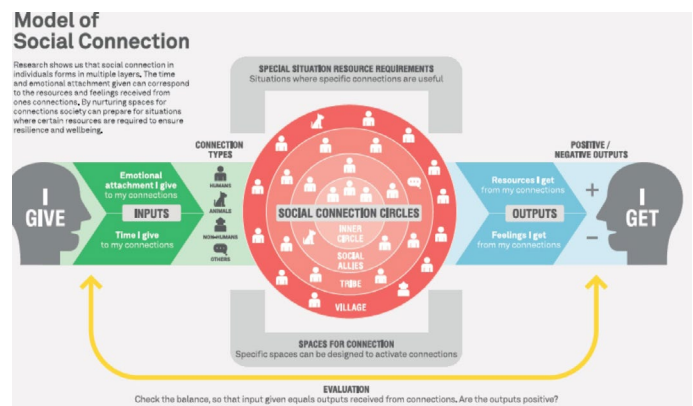
As part of the development of the Wellness Barometer the team have been conducting desktop research into Community Wellbeing and also looking at indicators and measures at a state, national and international level. The team's research has uncovered the following themes in the literature; trust, subjective wellbeing, quality of life, and urban physical environment as well as looking at overseas examples of wellbeing measurement. (McRae, 2020)

Swinburne University, Swinburne Social Innovation Research institute: Healthy

Jane Farmer and her team at the Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute have developed a 'Healthy Social Connections' model. This model is based on Robin Dunbar,

an anthropologist who studied the social brain. Dunbar's research found that the human brain can only resource a limited number of relationships or connections. Farmer describes social connection as being face-to face contact and/or emotional attachments made on the phone or internet. (Swinburne University of Technology: Swinburne Social Innovation Research Institute, 2018). These connections can be with humans, animals, non-humans and others. They type of connections can be mapped in a 'social connection circle' which again is based on Robin Dunbar's social brain theory of layered relationships. The layers range from the Inner Circle of approx. 5 connections usually human, the we invest the most resources in, time and/or emotional attachment out to the Village which could consist to up to 150 people. We are most likely to seek and receive support from our inner circle but can get varying levels from all layers of connections. Farmer explains that these relationships can change over time and often can be point in time and depend on what resources we seek from these relationships at any given time.

Figure 1 The Healthy Social Connections Model



FRAMEWORKS

Swinburne University, Swinburne Social Innovation Research institute: Healthy (continued)

This team has then applied this model in a partnership project with four Local Government Area's (LGA's) funded by the Australian Red Cross. This project has released summary findings which relay the objectives of the project, the research activities undertaken and a framework of Practice for Community Social Connection (see Figure 2). The aim of the project is to test a place based approach towards reducing social isolation, investigate how places and spaces encourage connections and their role in the community, gather community experiences and make recommendations (at the time of writing the full report with recommendation has not been released).

Figure 2 A Framework of Practice for Community Social Connections



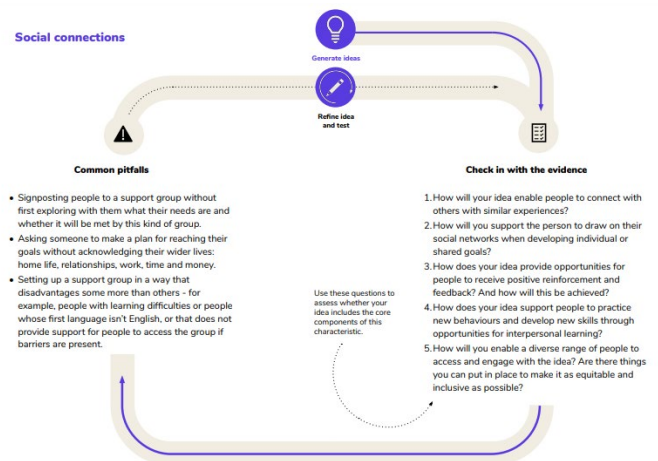
The project has used the following methodologies to inform this work, 'Typology of Social Connections', 'Identifying online places and spaces', 'Social data mapping', 'Place and Space Asset Mapping' and 'User Experience' (Karg, et al., 2021).

NESTA UK – Reimagining Help Guide: Social Connections

Nesta is the 'UK's innovation agency for social good'. The organisation has three innovation missions that is working to over a 10 year period. One tool that has been developed during this time is the 'Reimagining Help Guide' that has been developed with Nesta, Macmillan Cancer Support, the British Health Foundation and the UCL Centre for Behaviour Change. The aim is to improve how help is given across the Health and Wellbeing sector. The Reimagining Help Guide

covers eight characteristics: social connection, enabling environments, working on what matters, the right information at the right time, learning new skills, tracking change, celebrating success and managing setbacks. (NESTA, 2021) which can be used to develop delivery of care into homes and communities. The guide uses a behaviour change theory to support their characteristics. Social connection, as a characteristic can be used to increase opportunities including role modelling, increase motivation while setting boundaries and providing positive reinforcement and increase capability through interpersonal learning. The guide provides a template that organisations can use to test their ideas of help. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3 Social Connection Ideas testing



FRAMEWORKS

What Works Wellbeing: Measure your Wellbeing Impact

What Works Wellbeing is an independent centre collecting evidence to inform UK businesses, government, and community about what works to improve wellbeing. The centre works in partnership to develop trusted wellbeing measures to improve policy. The centre has created 'A Practical Guide for Charities and Social Enterprises' (What Works Wellbeing, 2014). The guide has eight sections: What is wellbeing, Introduction to wellbeing evaluation, planning your wellbeing evaluation, wellbeing measures and data, choosing wellbeing measures, gathering quantitative data, analysing and interpreting results and a wellbeing measures bank. Although this guide does not address social connections specifically it does have relationships and a sense of belonging as key factors that affect the overall wellbeing of a person.

Figure 4 Factors that affect wellbeing



- How often do you feel lonely?
- How often do you feel that you lack companionship?
- How often do you feel left out?
- How often do you feel isolated from others?

The strategy includes elements of social prescribing, information access, use spaces, access to transport, digital tools, putting the community at the forefront of planning, the use of public awareness campaigns and funding streams to support organisations to improve social connections. An examples where is the Government has already provided support to strengthen the relationships between community organisations and the community is through the Community Organisers program. This program has trained 10,000 people to support organisations to engage the community on issues they are passionate about. (HM Government: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018) The Government has promised to monitor the progress of the strategy using a cross departmental approach and has asked that every department report against how they are addressing loneliness and how they are tracking against the strategy.

A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness

In 2018, the Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport released a strategy to combat loneliness in the UK. The strategy was led by guiding principles: working in partnership, a willingness to test, iterate and learn, ensuring a truly cross cutting and cross departmental approach, focussing on key trigger points and recognising the importance of personalised approaches and local solutions. (HM Government: Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, 2018). The Department's strategy was built on evidence collected using consistent measurements and by asking the following questions:

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