

RECONNECT IN DEER PARK

A COVID Recovery Community
Engagement Project



Acknowledgement

commUnity+ proudly acknowledges the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung and Bunurong people as the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and provide services. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. commUnity+ acknowledges this land was never ceded; that it always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

Report produced August 2022.

Author: Tracey Oliver

The Reconnect Project was undertaken by Tracey Oliver, Community Development Specialist and Consultant on behalf of commUnity+. The Reconnect project was undertaken across March - July 2022.

This project was made possible by the financial support of Brimbank City Council.

We thank them for their ongoing commitment to Community Engagement and Development in Deer Park.

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The Reconnect Project

The Reconnect Project is a COVID-recovery Community Engagement project that supported the community of Deer Park to reconnect with each other and discover, or rediscover, neighbourhood house offerings and community assets.

The chief aim of the project was the engagement and recruitment of community members to take part in the design and implementation of co-produced community activity.

Further aims were to:

- Expand the reach and audience of commUnity + neighbourhood house
- Contribute to the broader understanding of the diverse needs of our diverse community, and

- Provide the opportunity to shape and lead community-driven activity
- The Project aimed to inform future community, person-centred engagement, and service delivery design for commUnity+ where elders, adults, young people, and children can contribute and value other's contributions to community life.

"I love coming here. It's where my friends are and we have a lovely time."

Workshop participant

commUnity+

Comm Unity Plus Services Ltd, is a multidisciplinary community services provider located in Melbourne's western suburbs, delivering a range of prevention and early intervention programs focused on informing and engaging with the community, including:

- Adult and Community Education
- Legal Services (Brimbank Melton Community Legal Centre)
- Neighbourhood House
- Children's Contact Services.

All commUnity+ services aim to build social capital, support social inclusion, develop community and grow the agency of people living in Melbourne's western suburbs.

The Neighbourhood House

The commUnity+ Neighbourhood House Program offers a range of activities and programs, most are offered free to the community.

The Neighbourhood House welcomes people from all backgrounds and ages.

It is committed to supporting connections and providing opportunities to participate through:

- Health, wellbeing, recreational and physical activity programs
- Facilitated and peer led social support groups
- Creative projects, as well as arts and craft programs.
- Events and community celebrations
- Community Development
- Providing community support.

Sector Principles

Neighbourhood Houses are underpinned by a number of sector principles which revolve around a unique community development approach.

Community development empowers communities to identify and address their own needs and aspirations. It then utilises existing strengths and assets to ensure the community is an integral part of the solution.

The principles for the Neighbourhood House sector are:

Community ownership

Community participation

Empowerment

Access and equity

Lifelong learning

Inclusion

Networking

Advocacy

Self-help

Social action

Neighbourhood House Community Development Model

Neighbourhood Houses are underpinned by a number of sector principles which revolve around a unique community development approach.

Community development empowers communities to identify and address their own needs and aspirations. It then utilises existing strengths and assets to ensure the community is an integral part of the solution.

The principles for the Neighbourhood House sector are:

Involving the community and encouraging participation and inclusion, and valuing diversity and difference at all levels of neighbourhood house operation.

Identifying community needs and aspirations.

Determining appropriate community programs, activities, and services in response to those needs, ensuring that diversity and difference are valued.

Partnering with community organisations, businesses, government, and philanthropic organisations to secure appropriate funding and support.

Delivering quality programs, activities, and services.

Evaluating the effectiveness of all aspects of neighbourhood house operations, including programs, practice, and governance.



COVID-19

Like all programs delivered by commUnity+, and all Neighbourhood Houses across Victoria, COVID-19 saw the Neighbourhood House endure uncertainty, rolling closures and heavy restrictions on capacity even when open.

The reality of increased hardship across social, economic, employment and health dimensions were recognised by the Neighbourhood House who re-imagined community engagement through online programming and pivoting to new ways of working to engage and support community members.

Neighbourhood Houses were, and continue to be, recognised as an 'essential service' and were, at the forefront of community support and relief throughout the pandemic.

The learnings from this experience were that people are eager for connections and place-based centres such as neighbourhood houses and to have the opportunity to influence how they participate.

The key priorities for the commUnity+ Neighbourhood House 2021-2022 were developed with this in mind.

Key Priorities for the Neighbourhood House in 2021-22

- Increasing and diversifying programming.
- Ongoing commitment to providing equitable opportunities and access to programs, events, and activities.
- Focus on creating culturally safe and welcoming programs, places, and activities.
- Providing community members opportunities to lead, shape and co-create initiatives, activities, events, and programs.
- Creating and developing mutually beneficial partnerships.
- Building cross-organisational connections and pathways between participants, students, and clients of all commUnity+ programs and services, to promote participation in – and opportunities to contribute to – community life.

“Before COVID, isolation was a big part of my life. During COVID it got worse for everyone and then I decided I had to do something. And since I did and came here, the isolation has gone.”

Workshop participant

“I would be lost without the neighborhood house. I feel so welcome here and it is my only place to meet people and socialise.”

Program participant

Deer Park

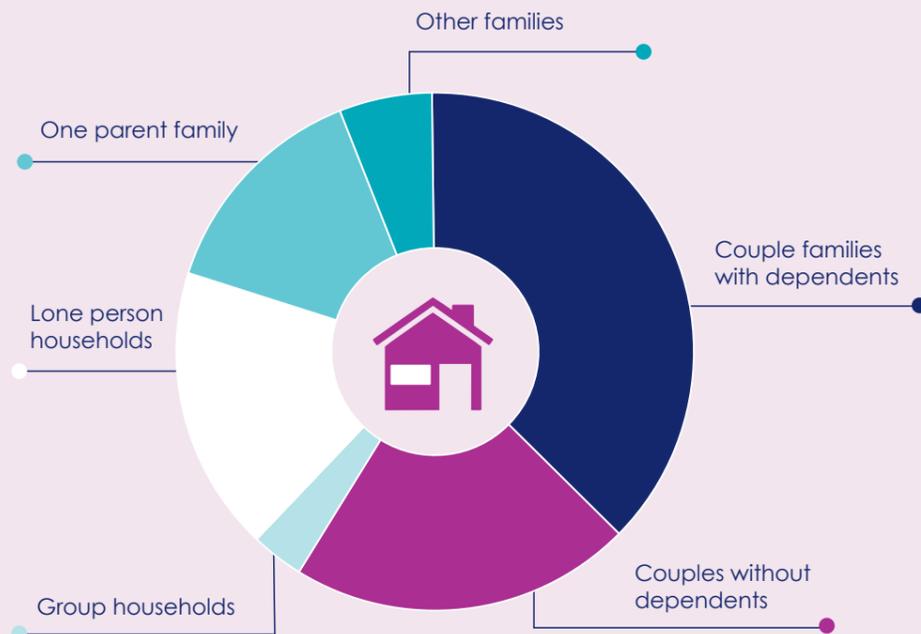
Deer Park is a suburb in Melbourne, 17kms west of the Central Business District and in the local government area of Brimbank. According to the 2021 Census, Deer Park has a population of 19,693.

Although known by many other names and providing varying services across the years, commUnity+ (as it is now known) has had a significant community presence in Deer Park since the late 1970's. Beginning as a grassroots local resident's action group based at the Brimbank Shopping Centre.

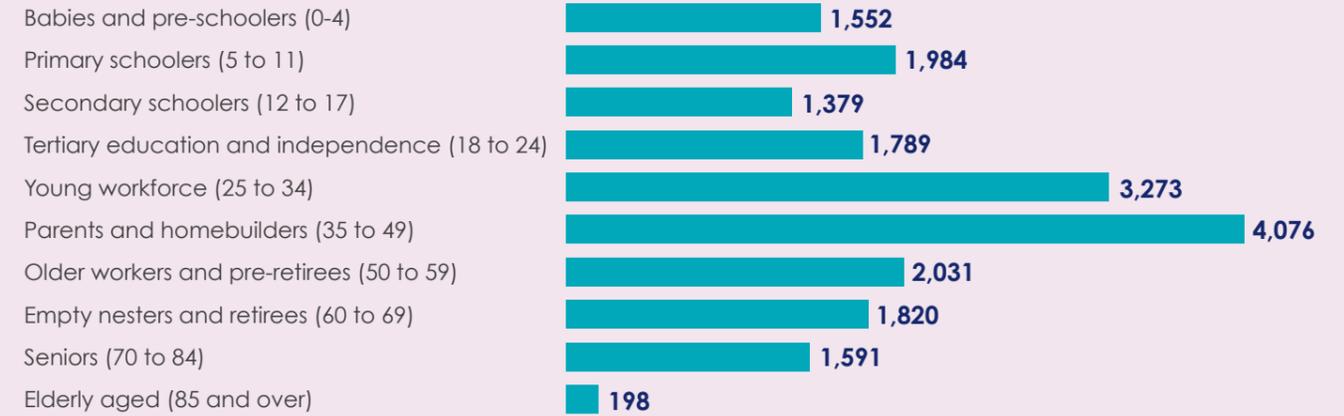
Gender



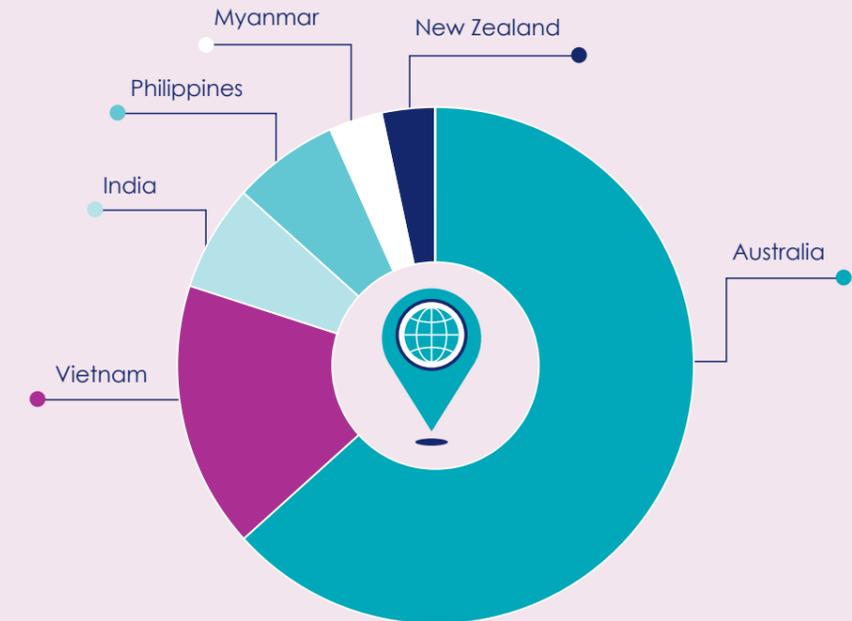
Household Types 2022



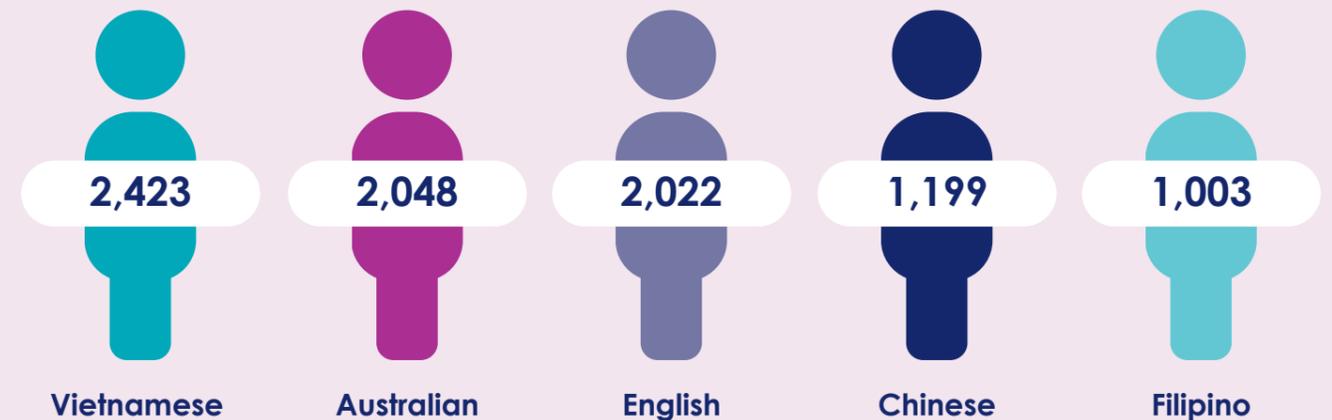
Age Group (years)



Country of Birth



Ancestry

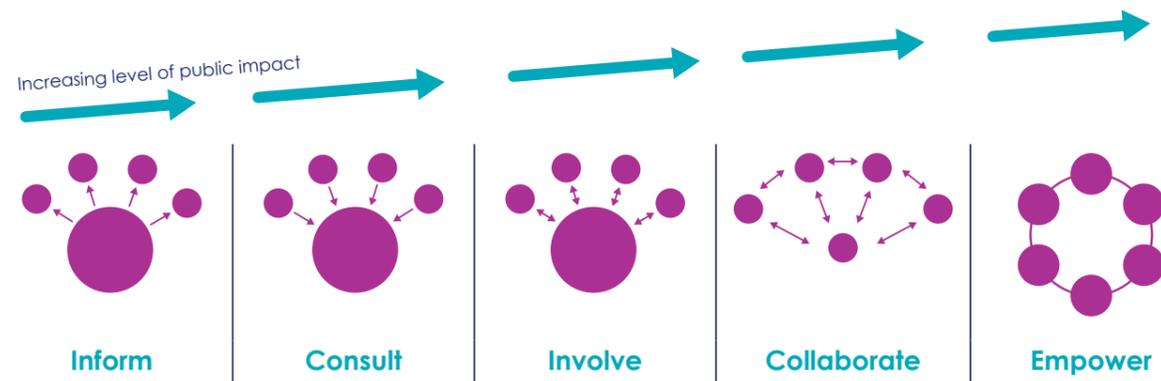


All data sourced from 2021 Census, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Project Methodology

This project methodology was shaped by the IAP2 Spectrum (International Association of Public Participation) and the belief that the community should have the opportunity to be involved in decision making processes that impact their lives.

IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation



The IAP2 Spectrum of 'Collaborate' was the underpinning level of influence that drove the project with the public participation goal:

To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.

And the promise to the public:

We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.

In this instance, the project provided community members with opportunity to shape and lead activity whilst supporting commUnity+ to better understand and cater for the needs and aspirations of the diverse community of Deer Park.

Community members were given an opportunity to decide how they participated in the project, acknowledging that their short-term participation will have long term impacts on their relationship with commUnity+, their neighbourhood and one another.

Local stakeholders were also engaged depending on their role in the community, their aspirations, values, identified links to the project and interest in participating.

Community Engagement

The Project began with commUnity+ participants, as the local experts, and grew as others engaged through word of mouth and assertive community engagement.

Additional aims were to build genuine interest in the project to support further participation, and to gather information from the interactions with community members to allow for a diversity of voice and opinion.

The initial aim was to inform the community of the project and the process to engage. This required various levels of activation depending upon whether people were already connected and active in their community or not.

"I came here for a community lunch my neighbor told me about and now come for the exercise classes and the knitting group. I really look forward to coming."
Program participant

Key Reconnect Engagement Strategies

The key Reconnect engagement strategies utilised were:

- Community Survey
- Pop-Up Community Activations
- Community Visioning Workshop.

Community Survey

The survey was both paper based and available online, accessed through a QR code. An incentive (enter a draw to win one of 3 \$50 Visa Gift Card) was offered to encourage participation.

Hard copies were distributed to current commUnity+ Deer Park site users (including current house users and Education program students), at all community pop-ups and through return boxes at The Hunt Club and Deer Park Library.

Overall, 202 hard copy surveys were distributed with a return rate of 46% (94 completed and submitted).

Posters and pull up banners featuring the QR code were distributed in the community and online promotion included: Facebook paid promotion, and non-paid promotion through both commUnity+ and our Neighbourhood House Facebook pages.

The survey was designed to:

- Inform the community of the Reconnect in Deer Park Project.
- Make connections with people not associated with commUnity+.
- Strengthen relationships with those already active at commUnity+.
- Gather information and opinions to hear the voices of community.
- Generate support to participate in a co-design workshop and ongoing program implementation.



Pop-Up Activations

Pop-Up Community Engagement initiatives were hosted at the following sites:

- Ballarat Road Shopping Strip
- Deer Park Seniors
- Hunt Club
- Cairnlea Community Centre
- Deer Park Guides
- Deer Park Club
- Deer Park Cricket Club
- Bunnings Caroline Springs
- Deer Park Library.

This approach added value to the project by generating valuable informal discussion with community members.

It introduced commUnity+ to the public, which was unknown to most. It meant reaching people who may not normally engage with more formal approaches.

It made engagement with commUnity+ more appealing as people could put a face to the project and share their ideas and thoughts about Deer Park through informal conversation.

This approach also led to program partnerships with organisations that resulted in direct benefits for the community.

“I come here for lots of things. It's my go-to place”.
Program Participant

Community Visioning Workshop

The community visioning workshop was developed using Codesign to:

- Ensure people were aware and informed about the project and ready to participate.
- Identify challenges in the community and explore the opportunities to address them.
- Develop relationships and opportunities to work together.
- Explore and shape future action.
- Discover current community capacity for further engagement and action.

The workshop was underpinned by the principles that acknowledge:

- Participant rights to be involved in decision making that affects them.
- Their role is central to the outcome.
- Their input will influence future decision making.

Central to the workshop were the questions;

'What would you like to see happen in Deer Park?' and 'How do we get started on this action?'

Through a range of interactive activities, a number of ideas were generated, that fell largely into the following themes:

- Events
- Advocacy
- Physical
- Programs.

A total of 29 projects, activities and concepts were generated. Through a voting processes, further exploration, and group activity these contributions were synthesised into the 4 most popular key ideas.

1. Community Market
2. Improve public transport
3. Music hour/Demo Club/ Skill Share
4. Ownership of public space.

By the end of the workshop, for each idea, there were developed key actions and people to lead these actions.

(For full report, see Appendix 3. Workshop report).

Discovery

Reconnect Asset Map

An asset map was developed using information from the community who participated in Reconnect Project engagement activities.

The map captures all the assets identified by community members who participated in the survey.

It is recommended that the map be developed further to include other significant places, as well as community events and programs and become an important community resource.

The community also contributed their ideas on what is missing in Deer Park, which have been collated into the themes of:

- Physical
- Advocacy
- Programs
- Activities.

A total of 43 responses were collected with the following the most reported:

What's Missing in Deer Park

THEME	ITEM	NUMBER
PHYSICAL	Swimming pool	27
	Cinema	12
	Children's park	8
ADVOCACY	Tram line	8
	Community Funding increase	5
	Pedestrian crossing at Seniors Centre	4
PROGRAMS	Free driving lessons	4
	Walking group	3
	Kids classes and activities	2
ACTIVITIES	Street and Music / Dance Festivals	10
	Events and entertainment	6
	Food trucks	4

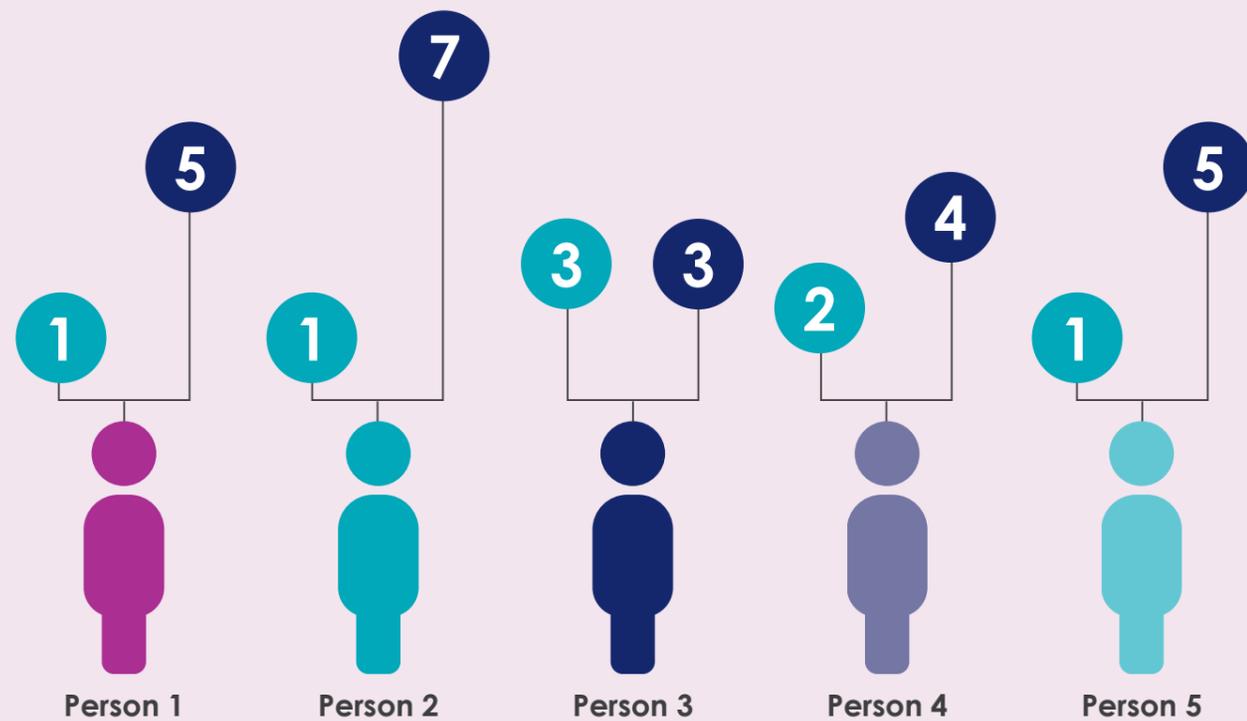
Current Neighbourhood House Participants

From the three community engagement strategies of the Reconnect Project it was very evident that people who attend the neighbourhood house really enjoy and benefit from doing so.

There was a consensus that the neighbourhood house provided a 'third place' experience for people; this being a welcoming, affordable, accessible, local place that people feel they belong to.

The third place is described as the place that people feel connected to other than their home (first place) or work/school (second place).

The Neighbourhood house participants were able to identify the reason(s) for attending and acknowledge that they gained more benefits from attending than they initially anticipated. This is identified in a sample below:



■ Number of reasons for attending
 ■ Number of additional benefits gained from attending

The graphic overleaf demonstrates that person 1 attended for 1 reason and gained 5 extra benefits. For example, they attended the neighbourhood house for a social group but also:

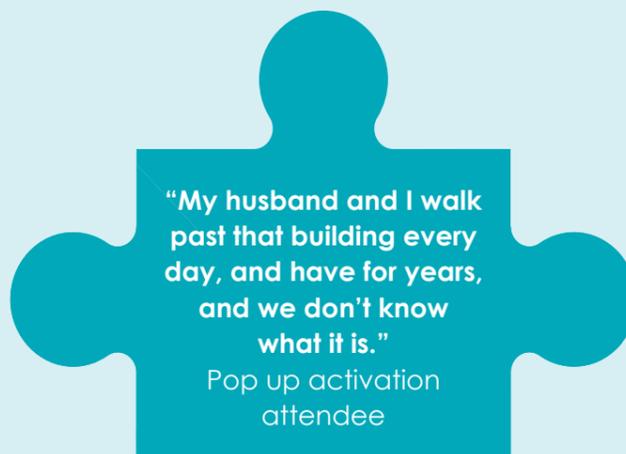
- Improved their personal wellbeing and confidence
- Spent time with other people
- Helped their community
- Developed a new interest or activity and
- Improved their independence.

For the full report, see Appendix 2 Survey Results.

Community Knowledge of commUnity+ is Limited

Whilst conducting the community engagement strategies of the Reconnect Project it became increasingly evident that people were unaware of commUnity+ and what it did.

When encouraged with visual prompts some people knew of the Ballarat Road building but not what happened in it. People were not encouraged by the appearance of the building and surrounds and reported no desire to investigate further.



Popular Request for More Community Activity in Deer Park

A recurring theme across all aspects of the community engagement strategy was that Deer Park needs or would benefit from more community activity. This was further identified as the following:

- Community Market
- Music Festival
- Street Parties
- Clean Up Australia event
- Food trucks
- Longest lunches
- Picnic along Kororoit Creek.

Also highlighted, as a recurring theme, was the popular idea that young people should have activities in their own neighbourhood.

Recommendations

1

Raise profile of NH and commUnity+– so people know what commUnity+ is. Improve signage and create a welcoming exterior to ensure people feel welcome to walk in the door.

2

Conduct a further workshop to expand and enact on the existing ideas provided in workshop 1.

3

Seek funding for the 4 project ideas and empower community members to participate through membership of an ongoing working group/s.

4

Capitalise on current interest generated by Reconnect by engaging community members with commUnity+ Neighbourhood House for short term problem solving or longer-term advisory group.

5

Review the projects and ideas that were not in the top 4 and workshop internally the capacity of the NH to realise these.

6

Maintain and invest in connections and relationships made through this project.

7

Document the experience of participants on the ongoing working group as a promotional tool and further recruitment opportunity.

8

Create a Deer Park Connected community providers group to build on collaboration opportunities and/or act as an advisory or reference group.

9

Conduct a community led assessment of the commUnity NH Program, the building, and the feel of the place. E.g., do I see myself belonging here, is it welcoming and safe?

10

Revisit the Reconnect Project community asset map as a further activity of the Reconnect Project.

References

ANHLC 2003, *The Neighbourhood House and Learning Centre Sector Framework*, Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres, March 2003.

ABS, 2021, *Census Product Release Guide*, accessed June 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/census>

IAP2, 2019, *IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum – IAP2 Australasia*, accessed June 2022, <https://iap2.org.au/resources/spectrum>

NHVIC, 2019, *Connecting a Diverse Victoria*, Neighbourhood Houses Victoria, Melbourne, 2019.

Victorian State Government, *2016 Neighbourhood House Coordination Program Guidelines 2016-2019 and sector information*, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, 2016.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey



Let's RE-CONNECT in Deer Park

Join us in discovering Deer Park and its wonders.

We want to bring everyone together to celebrate and appreciate our unique neighbourhood.

Scan the QR code to complete the survey.



commUnity
Neighbourhood
House Program



So, this is where we begin. We want to hear from you.

Your responses play a vital role in helping to uncover the heart of Deer Park and build connections.

For each unique survey response, you can be entered into the commUnity+ prize draw to win one of three \$50 gift cards.

1. What is your age?

- 18-24 25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64 65+

2. Which of the following represent you? Tick all that apply.

- Female Male Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
 Refugee Migrant Have a disability
 Live alone Other _____

3. Do you participate in commUnity+ programs? If yes, why do you come to commUnity+ Deer Park? Tick all that apply.

- English class Social group Exercise/health class
 Support group Use another service Volunteering/ placement
 Event Advice/help Job training/ job support

4. Besides your program, what other benefits do you get from attending?

Tick all that apply.

- Improve my job skills Improve my English skills Improve my personal wellbeing/ confidence
 Improve my health Spend time with other people Meet new people/ make friends
 Help my community Develop a new interest or activity Improve my independence
 Other _____

5. What are your 5 favourite places in Deer Park?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

6. What do you think is missing in Deer Park?

7. Would you be interested in working with other community members to build connections and create new activities and opportunities in Deer Park?

- Yes No

If yes, please provide your name, email or phone number.

Name: _____
Email: _____
Mobile: _____

If you'd like to enter the draw to win one of 3 x \$50

Name: _____
Email: _____
Mobile: _____

If you have any questions or would like to discuss this further, please contact Tracey Oliver at neighbourhood@comm-unityplus.org.au

Appendix 2: Survey Results

Let's RE-CONNECT in Deer Park

Anyone with this link can view a summary of responses

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/AnalysisPage.aspx?AnalyzerToken=tSQ>

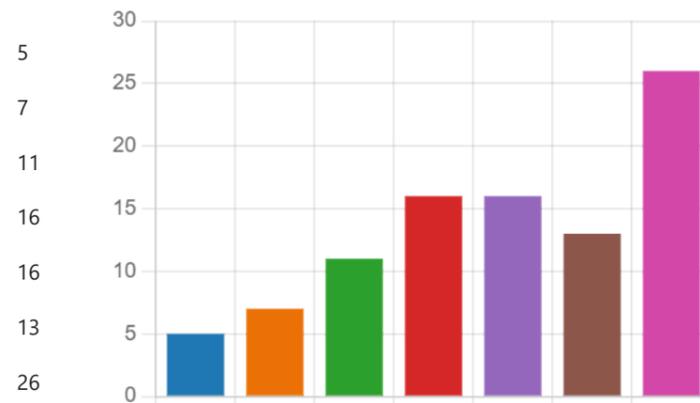
Copy



This link is ready for you to paste.

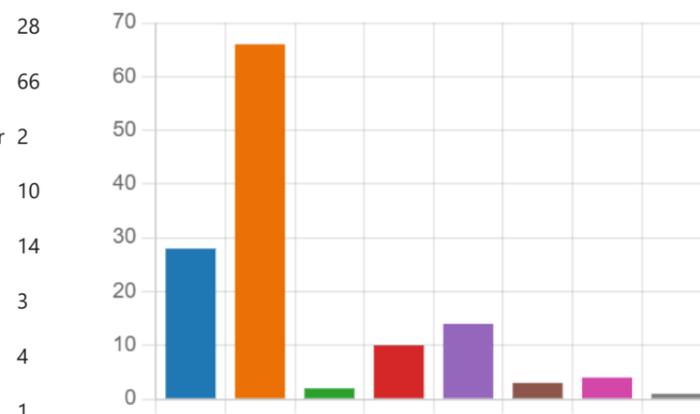
1. What is your age?

- Under 18
- 18-24
- 25-34
- 35-44
- 45-54
- 55-64
- 65+



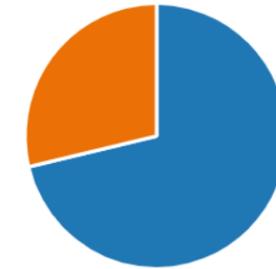
2. Which of the following represent you? Tick all that apply.

- Male
- Female
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- Refugee
- Migrant
- Have a disability
- Live alone
- Other



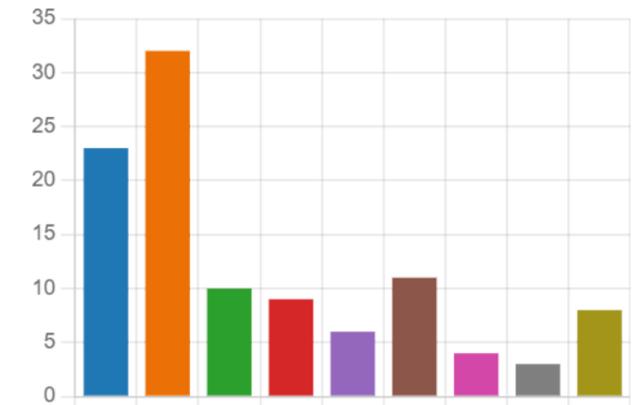
3. Are you a commUnity+ Participant?

- Yes 67
- No 27



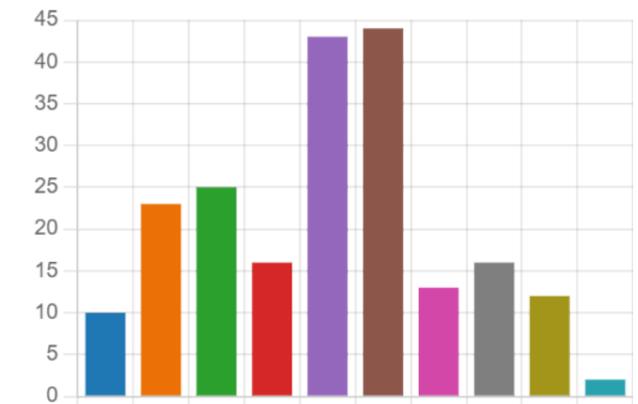
4. Why do you come to commUnity+ Deer Park ? (Tick all that apply)

- English Class 23
- Social Group 32
- Exercise/Health Class 10
- Support Group 9
- Advice/Help 6
- Event 11
- Volunteering/Placement 4
- Job Training/Job Support 3
- Use another service 8



5. Besides your program, what other benefits do you get from attending?

- Improve my job skills 10
- Improve my English skills 23
- Improve my personal wellbeing/... 25
- Improve my health 16
- Spend time with other people 43
- Meet new people/Make friends 44
- Help my community 13
- Develop a new interest or activity 16
- Improve my independence 12
- Other 2



Appendix 3: Workshop Report

6. What are your 5 favourite places in Deer Park?

94
Responses

Latest Responses
 "1. Swimming Pool 2. Skate Park 3. Shell with no tekis(?) 4. ...
 "1 Salvos 2 Brotherhood 3 Bunnings"
 "1. Brimbank Shopping Centre 2. Brimbank Library 3. Close F..."

7. What do you think is missing in Deer Park?

94
Responses

Latest Responses
 "1. Skate Park 2. Handicapped Shops 3. Burger Shops 4. Movi...
 "The Community Centre doesn't stand out"
 "1. Big W Shopping Centre 2. Harvey Norman Shopping Cent..."

8. Would you be interested in working with other community members to build connections and create new activities and opportunities in Deer Park?

● Yes 42
 ● No 52

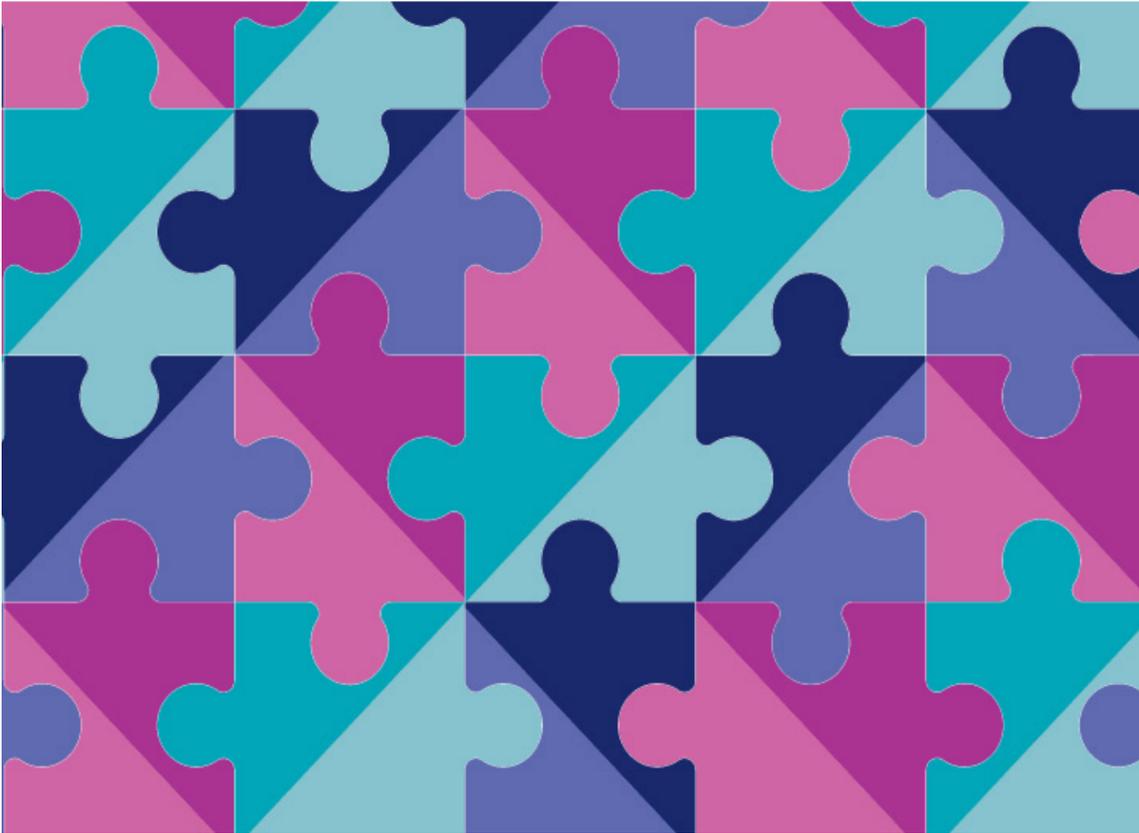


9. If yes, please provide your name, email or phone number.

42
Responses

10. If you'd like to enter the draw to win one of 3 x \$50 gift cards, please enter your name and contact number or email address below:

73
Responses



RE-CONNECT in Deer Park Workshop Report

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The Project

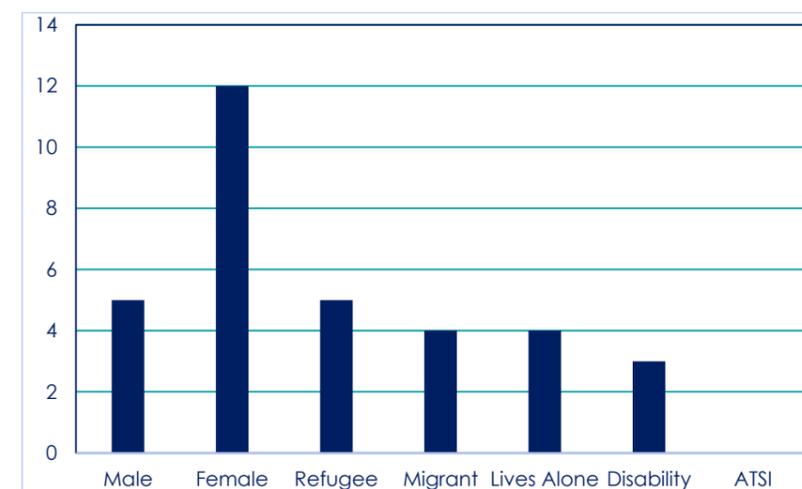
The Re-Connect in Deer Park Project is a “post” COVID-19 Community Engagement project that supports and encourages community to reconnect with each other, discover/rediscover the neighbourhood house and to recruit community to take part in the design and implementation of coproduced community activity.

One key factor of the project is to conduct workshops with community members and organisations who had indicated their interest via a project survey.

The workshops were developed to build relationships and to further uncover responses to the survey questions about what people considered their favourite places in Deer Park and what they felt was missing in Deer Park.

Workshop participants

The workshop ran with 18 participants. The participants represented the following demographics:



All participants who took part in the workshop were either self-identified from the survey (20%) or were invited via face-to-face conversations, phone calls or emails (80%)

48 survey participants initially indicated they would like to attend a workshop, though due to a number of issues, were unable to. 10% of this number eventually took up the opportunity.

The Workshops

The Re-Connect in Deer Park Workshop was conducted on Thursday 30 June 2022.

The Program was developed using the IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum level of *Collaboration*. The IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum was developed to assist with the selection of the level of participation that defines the community's role in any engagement project.

INCREASING IMPACT UPON THE DECISION 

INFORM	CONSULT	INVOLVE	COLLABORATE	EMPOWER
To provide the public with balanced and objective information to assist them in understanding the problem, alternatives, opportunities and/or solutions.	To obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives and/or decisions	To work directly with the public throughout the process to ensure that public concerns and aspirations are consistently understood and considered	To partner with the public in each aspect of the decision including the development of alternatives and the identification of the preferred solution.	To place final decision making in the hands of the public.
We will keep you informed	We will keep you informed, listen to and acknowledge concerns and aspirations, and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision	We will work with you to ensure that your concerns and aspirations are directly reflected in the alternatives developed and provide feedback on how public input influenced the decision.	We will look to you for advice and innovation in formulating solutions and incorporate your advice and recommendations into the decisions to the maximum extent possible.	We will implement what you decide

Using the Collaboration level, the Re-Connect In Deer Park Project made an agreement with participants that:

- acknowledges their right to be involved in the decision making.
- their role is central to the outcome and
- their input will influence future decision making

The Workshop used the following interactive activities to gather data from the participants

Activity 1: What would you like to see happen in Deer Park?

The following ideas were identified by the group and are now placed into themes.

Table 1. Events that you would like to see as a part of the Deer Park calendar



Table 2: An issue that you have identified and would like to work toward addressing

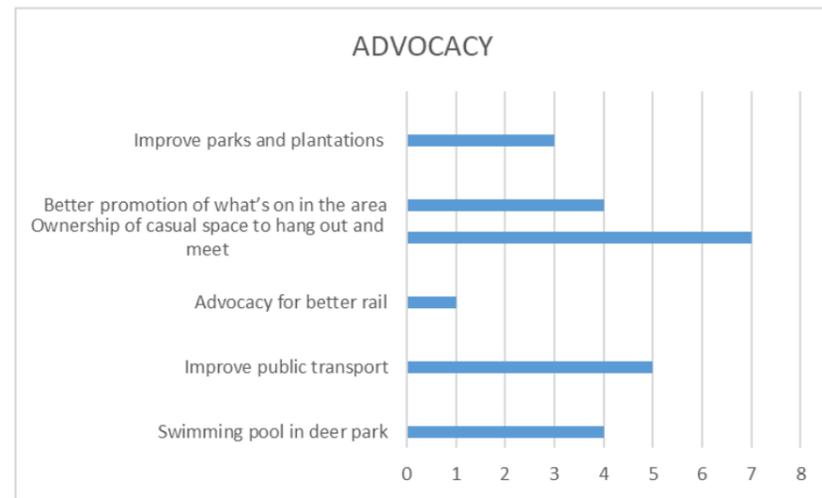


Table 3: A physical structure to improve community life

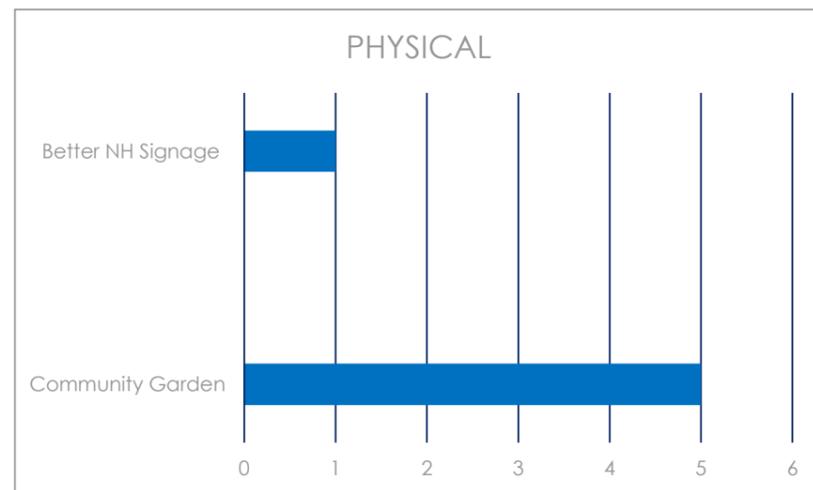
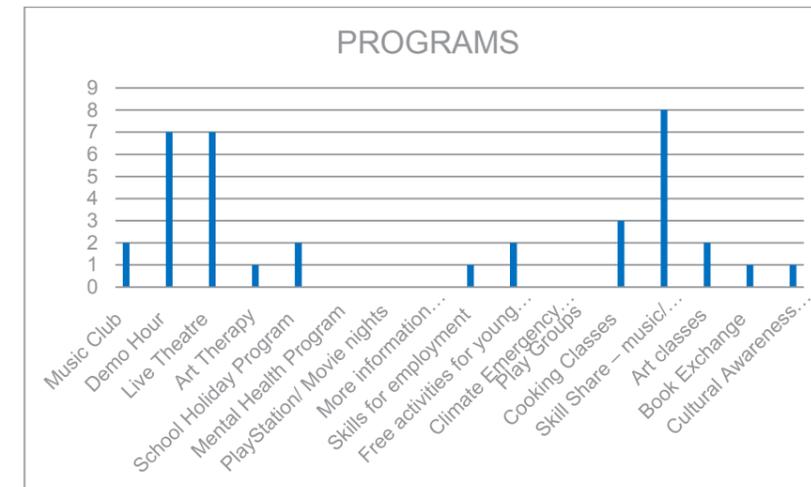


Table 4: Activities that you or others would benefit from



Activity 2: A vote for the top 4 ideas presented

The top 4 ideas that were identified by the group were:

1. Community Market (EVENT)
2. Improve public transport (ADVOCACY)
3. Music Hour/Demo Club/ Skills Share (PROGRAM)
4. Ownership of Public Space (ADVOCACY)

Activity 3: 4 ideas developed further

The participants then worked on a basic outline for their chosen projects with the understanding that these projects would influence future decision making of the Neighbourhood House Program.

Community Market – plans going forward

1. Choose a suitable venue – indoor and outdoor component.
2. Develop a calendar
3. Advertise for store holders, preference for local makers/ artists
4. Inform local businesses
5. Develop a plan for:
 1. Cost to store holders
 2. Guidelines for products
 3. Food provision

Improve public transport – plans going forward

1. Map area and population profile
2. Gather evidence EG no buses to Hospital
3. Bring people together
 - a. Collect signatures
 - b. Personal stories
4. Contact Minister for Transport
5. Gather 'Supporters'

Ownership of public space – plans going forward

1. Involve State Government and Council
2. Find a suitable venue – Sassella Park
3. Involve young people to design what they would like
4. Ensure a 'drop in' model open after hours
5. Include space for:
 - a. basketball
 - b. skateboarding
 - c. soccer goals, etc.
6. The space is 'owned' by young people
7. Include Men's Shed for intergenerational learning and relationships

Music Hour/Demo Club/ Skills Share Venue - plans going forward

1. Find a suitable venue that is:
 - a. Warm, welcoming, and accessible
 - b. Can be converted into a living room like space
 - c. Open after hours
 - d. 'Owned' and operated by the local community
2. Create a space for people to:
 - a. Share skills – music, art, cooking, singing, craft, art, storytelling etc
 - b. Feel comfortable
 - c. Be a buddy for another community member
 - d. Have a 'third' place in their life
 - e. Develop skills, confidence, and friendship
 - f. Discover opportunities
3. Create a senpai like program connecting youth & seniors (this needs a hyperlink)
4. People Centred management/collaboration

Appendix 1: Workshop Running Sheet

DATE	Thursday 30 June 2022
LOCATION	Neighbourhood Hub Room. commUnity+ 822 Ballarat Road, Deer Park
FACILITATOR	Tracey Oliver
WORKSHOP DURATION	3 Hours

1. WELCOME
2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY
3. HOUSEKEEPING and TEAM INTRODUCTIONS
4. WHY WE ARE HERE?
5. ACTIVITY – Icebreaker
6. ACTIVITY - 'Break into groups'
7. INTRODUCTION TO TODAY (process): a. The activity we are about to undertake b. Group expectations
8. INTRODUCTION TO THE NH (context): The NH at commUnity+ and discuss what the NH currently does
9. ACTIVITY - What would you like to see in deer park?
10. VIDEO – Community Centres and Neighbourhood Houses – Maribyrnong City Council
11. IDEATION – Projects, Initiatives, Events, Advocacy, Infrastructure
12. LUNCH
13. VOTING FOR PROJECTS IDEAS
14. PROJECT DEVELOPMENT
15. RE-ENERGISE ACTIVITY - "Deer Park is GREAT because..."
16. SHARING – Ideas Pitch
17. NEXT STEPS
18. QUESTIONS
19. WORKSHOP CLOSE

Appendix 2: Photos from Workshop





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