

Community consultation with 2–5 year olds in Hobsons Bay



I love the beach and collecting shells, swimming in the water. I swim at the beach in summer. I love swimming so my hair can get wet. I go swimming with my Mum and Dad because I am not old enough to go by myself. (Girl, 5 years)

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Introduction

This report presents the results of a consultation with 2–5 year old children on behalf of Hobsons Bay City Council (HBCC). The information gathered through this consultation will be used to inform the Children and Young People’s Plan currently being developed by HBCC. The aim is to build a picture about perceptions of life in Hobsons Bay through the eyes of local children to allow the Council to prioritise their planning based on community expectations and needs.

The Brotherhood of St Laurence was engaged to contribute to identifying this community need. The researchers approached this task with a commitment to providing an opportunity for young children in Hobsons Bay to express their views, and influence decisions to create a child-friendly place to live, learn and play.

Project scope

This project involves consultation with 2–5 year olds in the context of broader consultation with children and young people aged 0–25 years. The consultation with parents, older children and young people has been undertaken by Hobsons Bay City Council and is outside the scope of this project. Given that consultation with 0–2 year olds would primarily be undertaken through surveys with their parents (due to the limited language capacity of these children), this aspect falls within the scope of the broader consultation already being undertaken by the Council.

Consultation questions

This consultation seeks to create a picture of the ways in which children currently experience life in Hobsons Bay, with a focus on the following questions:

1. What do Hobsons Bay children like and dislike in identified areas including education, transport, social and health care access, open space / recreation facilities, play and fun?
2. What could make Hobsons Bay children happier?
3. What do Hobsons Bay children value and wish for in their life?

Method

Sampling

Sampling was undertaken by Hobsons Bay City Council at the group level, with a group being some of the children attending an early learning and care, playgroup, family day care or occasional care facility. The sample of children's centres was selected to be as representative as possible of Hobsons Bay children from different geographic, socioeconomic and cultural groups, including those with additional needs.

Seven children's centres were invited by Hobsons Bay City Council to participate in the consultation. These centres are located across the five local government area precincts (with two centres in Precinct 5). However, the centre from Precinct 3 withdrew from the project due to their very busy schedule. This resulted in six consultation sessions being conducted with young children in centres across four of the five local government area precincts, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the children consulted at each centre

Precinct	Centre	No. children	Mean age	Gender
1. Brooklyn, Altona North	Altona North Early Childhood Centre (Yooralla)	(1st visit) 9 (2nd visit) 4	4.6 years 4.8 years	3 boys; 6 girls 2 boys; 2 girls
	Altona North Children's Centre	9	3.6 years	5 boys; 4 girls
2. Spotswood – South Kingsville and Newport West	<i>Withdrew</i>	0	n/a	n/a
3. Newport East, Williamstown and Williamstown North	The Range	9	3.4 years	2 boys; 5 girls (2 gender not identified)
4. Altona – Seaholme	Hobsons Bay Family Day Care	7	3.6 years	4 boys; 2 girls (1 gender not identified)
5. Altona Meadows, Seabrook and Laverton	Laverton Fun for Kids	3	3.7 years	1 boy; 2 girls
	Altona Meadows Occasional Care	6	3.8 years	4 boys; 2 girls
Total		47	3.9 years	21 boys; 23 girls 3 gender not identified

Forty-seven children participated in this consultation. They ranged from two to five years old, with the average age 3.87 years. The sample was quite evenly split by gender, with 23 girls and 21 boys. The gender of three children was not recorded.

Ethical considerations

The consultation methods were approved by the Brotherhood of St Laurence's Research Ethics Committee.

Each participating centre distributed to parents/carers written consent and information sheets describing the nature and purpose of the consultation, how the child's data would be used, their right to withdraw at any time and complaint procedures. Children whose parents/carers had provided written consent were also asked for their verbal consent at the commencement of the consultation. If the child's attention wandered, re-engagement was attempted and the child was again asked for their verbal consent to continue. If re-engagement was not successful, that activity ceased.

Apart from age and gender, no other identifying information was obtained.

Data collection

Drawing on consultations undertaken in other localities and input from participating early childhood educators, a mix of data collection strategies was developed. At least three researchers attended the consultation session at each participating centre. Due to the need to suit the daily routines of each centre, each session was one hour in length. Data was collected using three processes: interviews and drawings; interviews and assessing favourite and least favourite photographs; and a group discussion.

These first two processes were undertaken one-on-one with each child. The researcher took notes about the child's responses on a data collection form. This form included demographic information (name of the centre, child's age and gender), spaces to record drawing and photograph numbers, interview/group discussion questions and prompts (see Appendix).

Drawings and discussion prompts

Each child was asked to draw a favourite place that they like to go to in their local area. Each centre provided the drawing materials. While completing the drawing, the child was asked a number of questions about it, including:

- What are you drawing? Where is this? What do you like about this place?
- What do you like doing outside your home? Where do you do this?
- What makes this so good?
- Are there people with you or are you by yourself?
- What are your favourite places?
- What might make this place even better?

The researcher took notes of the child's responses to the questions, numbered the drawing (matched to their data collection sheet number) and took a photograph of the drawing.

Note: Three of the researchers trialled this process with five young children who attend a Brotherhood of St Laurence playgroup. This trial was intended to help refine the process and questions, and train the researchers.

Photographs and discussion prompts

This activity was intended to assess what Hobsons Bay children like and dislike in identified areas including education, transport, social and health care access, open space / recreation facilities, play and fun, and what could make them happier. Eighteen laminated A5 size photographs of activities were used as prompts.

The photographs were numbered to aid data recording and were hung on a wall at each centre. Each child was invited to put a 'smiley face' sticker on photographs of their two favourite things to do. The researcher asked the child about the photographs where they put a 'smiley face' sticker. The questions included:

- Have you done this before?
- Why do you like this activity?
- What do you like about this activity?
- Where do you do this in your neighbourhood? Who do you do this with? How do you go there?

The child was also asked to put a sad face sticker on a photograph of their least favourite place or thing to do—if something in the photographs made them feel scared, bored or sad. Questions about the photograph that the child placed the sad face sticker on included:

- What things make you feel sad/scared/bored?
- Where do you do this? Who do you do this with?
- Why don't you like doing this?
- What is good about this activity? What is not so good about it?
- What would make this a better activity?

The researchers recorded the numbers of the photographs that the child attached the smiley and sad face stickers to, and recorded the child's responses to the questions.

Group discussion

A discussion with small groups of children was facilitated to find out what Hobsons Bay children value and 'wish for', and what could make them happier. Due to the small number of children participating in each location, a single group discussion was held in each centre. One researcher facilitated each discussion and the remaining researchers unobtrusively took notes. The discussion was facilitated around the following questions:

- What things are really important to you?
- If you had a magic wand and you could make things appear that would make you happy, what would they be?
- If you had one wish, what would it be?

As each child spoke they were handed a 'magic' wand to help them 'make their wish' (and to keep the children engaged in the process) and to ensure all the children had an opportunity to express their views.

Data analysis

The data from each collection method was analysed separately to identify themes among the children's responses.

Drawings: The data for each child was entered into a spreadsheet and subjected to thematic analysis based on the areas identified by Council—education, transport, social and health care access, open space/recreation facilities, play and fun. Within each theme, the number of drawings and the number of comments were collated to present an indicator of how much the children like that activity and/or place. Themes were also compared across age, gender and location to assess similarities and differences.

Photographs: Two types of data were analysed: (1) the number of times and comments where children rated each activity depicted as their favourite or least favourite; and (2) the number of times and comments where each activity was mentioned (during the interviews) by children other than those who rated the activity. Responses in each thematic category were compared across age, gender and location to assess similarities and differences.

Group discussion: Data for each centre was entered into a spreadsheet and subjected to thematic analysis. Responses in each thematic category were compared across the average age, gender mix and location of each centre to assess similarities and differences.

Themes across all data sources were then identified and organised around the three consultation questions:

1. What do Hobsons Bay children like and dislike in identified areas including education, transport, social and health care access, open space/recreation facilities, play and fun?
2. What could make Hobsons Bay children happier?
3. What do Hobsons Bay children value and wish for their life?

Limitations

Several limitations were identified during the consultation:

- The very young age of some children impacted on the types of information that could be collected from them. Firstly, many of the younger children (2–3 years) were unable to identify any photographs of things they did *not* like doing. Data in this report regarding the things that children do *not* like should be considered to reflect the children aged 4–5 years.
- Children were able to describe how they travelled to different places or activities, but not why this travel method was used. Some of the older children observed that the place was 'close' to or 'a long way' from their home. In the absence of other data about location, the findings and recommendations about access issues are not specific.
- Children's engagement in the consultation varied according to the type of early learning service they attend. The children who were regularly attending long day care were easier and more ready to engage in the consultation activities than those who were attending occasional care. The children's engagement in the activities also depended on the educators' level of support and participation in the consultation process.
- The very short time frame to conduct the consultation also did not allow the researchers to build a relationship with each child and thereby gain a richer range of responses. In future consultations, this limitation could be avoided by engaging the educators with whom the children already have a relationship to undertake the consultation processes.

- Two children (one with mutism and one with autism) were excluded from the consultation because of the lack of a sign interpreter and the researchers' lack of experience in working with children with autism spectrum disorder.
- A large number of photographs was necessary to represent all of Council's identified areas (education, transport, social and health care access, open space/recreation facilities, play and fun). This range may have affected the children's capacity to decide which photographs they liked.

Findings

The findings from each consultation method are presented separately in the following sections. The discussion will bring these findings together within the three consultation questions.

Drawings

Each child was asked to draw a favourite place that they like to go to in their local area. In some centres children preferred painting rather than drawing. While completing the drawing, each child was asked questions to prompt discussion about the drawing. This activity was completed by all 47 participants. Some children drew or listed more than one place that they like going to.

Analysis of the drawings identified the following themes: (1) nature, open spaces and recreational areas, (2) social and entertainment, (3) education and (4) transport and access.

Nature, open spaces and recreational areas

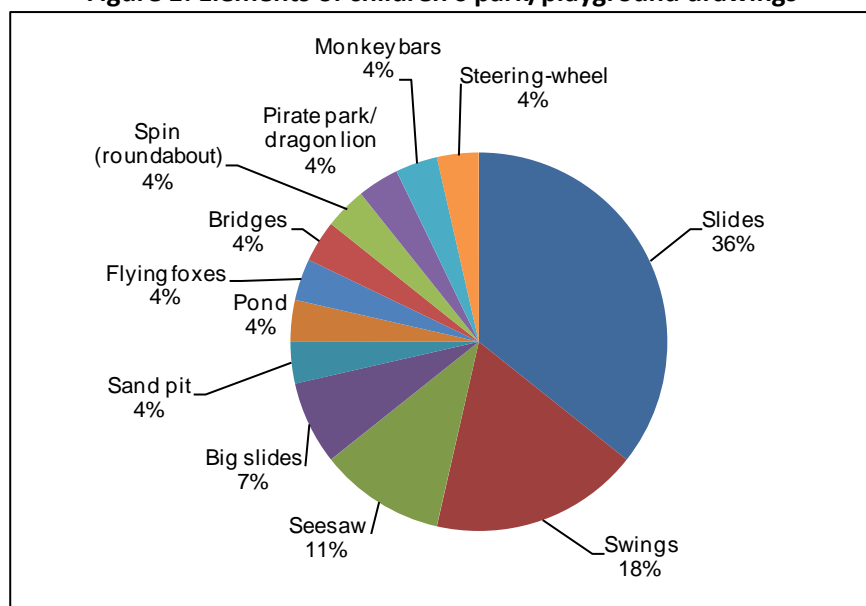
Through their drawings and description of their drawings, children were able to provide specific elements of their favourite outdoors and recreational places they like going to. These include playgrounds/parks, nature, swimming pools, and beaches and general outdoors.

Playground and parks

Overall, parks and playgrounds were a central feature of children's drawings. Twenty-two children (nearly half of the sample) drew or talked about parks and playgrounds as a favourite place to go.

When asked why they liked to go to the playground/park, many of the children mentioned particular types of playground equipment. Play equipment frequently identified included slides (by 10 children), swings (5) and seesaws (3). The key elements that children drew or talked about for playgrounds are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Elements of children's park/playground drawings



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 due to rounding

In addition to the equipment, three children stated that they like going to the park/playground because of the way these places make them feel. For example two of them noted:

I like to play in the sandpit, slides and swings. I feel cheerful. (Girl, 4 years)

I feel good on the swing because it goes up and down. (Girl, 4 years)

This explanation was only expressed by girls.



Me and my brother at the park. Me on the monkey bars. I love going to the park. My favourite is the monkey bars and the slide. I love rainbows. I climb up the pole. (Girl, 5 years)



At the park, a big long slide. I like big long slides. (Boy, 3 years)

In general, the parks and playgrounds drawn or discussed by children were located near their homes. However, three children identified parks and playgrounds further away from home and noted that their access to those parks was limited as their parents had to drive them there.

Eighteen of the 22 children who drew playgrounds or parks also talked about who accompanied them. As expected, children visited these places mostly with one or both parents (see Table 2).

Table 2: People who accompanied the child to the park/playground

Relationship	No. of mentions
Mum	4
Dad	3
Mum and dad	5
Brother/sister	4
Friends	2
Total	18

Most children consulted were satisfied with their favourite parks and playgrounds. Nevertheless, nine children thought that their local playgrounds or parks could be improved, and suggested improvements. These suggestions concerned playground equipment, accessibility, aesthetics and scope for imagination.

Equipment

Seesaw and pogo balls would make it [the playground] even better. (Boy, 3 years)

I would like more swings in this park. (Girl, 5 years)

Even better would be Trampoline World. (Boy, 4 years)

Accessibility

A bicycle trail would make it [the playground] better. (Girl, 4 years)

It will be good to have a footpath that we can walk on. (Boy, 4 years)

Aesthetics

If they grow some flowers it would make the park more beautiful. (Girl, 4 years)

Imagination

Lollipops and Lollipop Land would make the park and the playground even better. (Girl, 5 years)

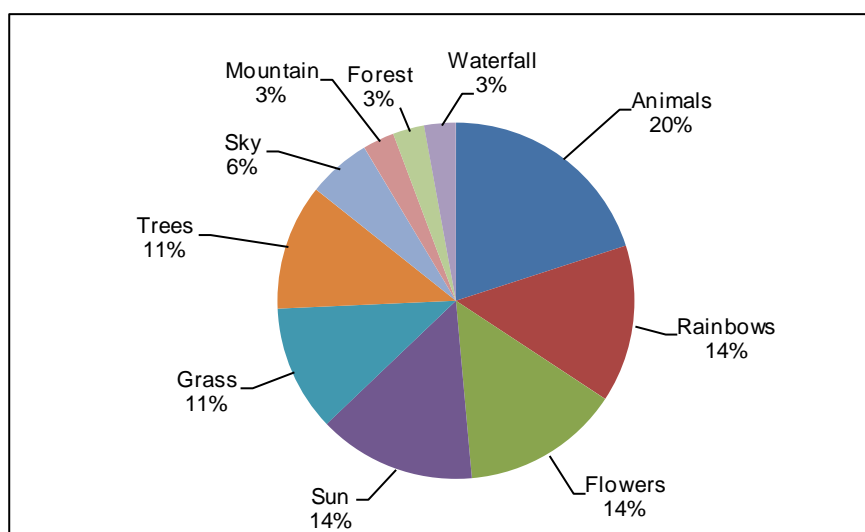


I like playing in the park with my brother on the swing and slide. I like flowers. (Girl, 5 years)

Nature and animals

Thirty-eight per cent (n = 18) of children drew or discussed nature-related places that they like to go to. Eleven of these children referred to places with rainbows, flowers, sun and grass (see Figure 2). As could be expected from children aged 2–5, most natural elements highlighted in their drawings related to aesthetics, colour and brightness.

Figure 2: Nature elements included in children’s drawings



Note: Percentages add to less than 100 due to rounding

Seven children drew or talked about animals. Analysis of these drawings identified four main categories of animals: wild/zoo animals such as crocodiles, giraffes, lions, zebras and tigers; imaginary animals such as dragons and dinosaurs; pets such as dogs and snakes; and farm animals.



A rainbow and the sky. The bird sitting on the tree is looking at the rainbow. I like to go to the park. When I play with my friend I feel happy. (Girl, 5 years)



I like the zoo. I like tigers and penguins. I go with Mum, Dad and my brother. We drive there. (Girl, 2 years)



I like the forest, apple trees, dragons, tigers and deers. I go with my Daddy and Mum for a holiday and camp in the bush. We make a camp fire, set up the tent and pat the animals. Lemon trees and a bath tub are missing from there. (Girl, 5 years)

Other recreational areas

Twenty-eight per cent ($n = 13$) of the children drew or talked about recreational areas such as beaches or swimming pools. Possible explanations for the high popularity of playgrounds and nature (85%) and the lower popularity (28%) of other recreational areas such as beaches and pools are safety and accessibility. It is likely that some of the young (2–5 years) children do not feel confident, and/or their parents did not feel safe, with their children around water. Accessibility could be a factor, given the distance to swimming pools or beaches.

We go in the car to the beach. It's too far to walk. I get too tired. (Girl, 5 years)

Beaches

Fifteen per cent of children ($n = 7$) drew or referred to the beach as their favourite place. When asked why they like going to the beach, children provided a variety of reasons including liking water, sand, shells, playing sport at the beach, exploring and fishing:

I like the beach. I go with Mummy to swim. I like the sky and water. (Boy, 5 years)

I like kicking a beach ball at the beach. (Boy, 4 years)

I like going to the beach and playing in the sand and building sandcastles. (Girl, 5 years)

My favourite place is at the beach rock pools. (Girl, 2 years)

Swimming pools

Thirteen per cent of children ($n = 6$) drew or referred to swimming pools as their favourite place. Children said they like pools because they enjoy swimming lessons, the size of the pool, playing in the water, the equipment and treats associated with going to the pool:

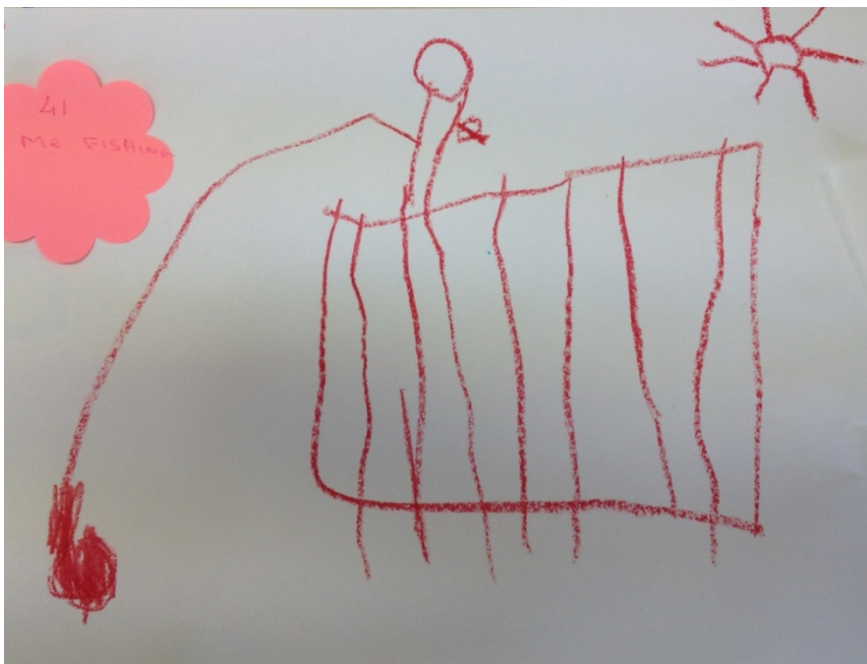
I like swimming lessons with my sister. This helps us swim. (Girl, 5 years)

I like the big one [pool]. I like the baby pool, giraffes in the baby pool. I don't fall down. You can lie down on the seats beside the pool [...] There is a baby pool for [friend]. (Girl, 4.5 years)

Swimming pool—big one and a little one and a spa [...] I use the steps to get in and out. I like splashing. Have a milkshake and ice-cream [after]. (Girl, 4 years)



I love the beach and collecting shells, swimming in the water. I swim at the beach in summer. I love swimming so my hair can get wet. I go swimming with my Mum and Dad because I am not old enough to go by myself. (Girl, 5 years)



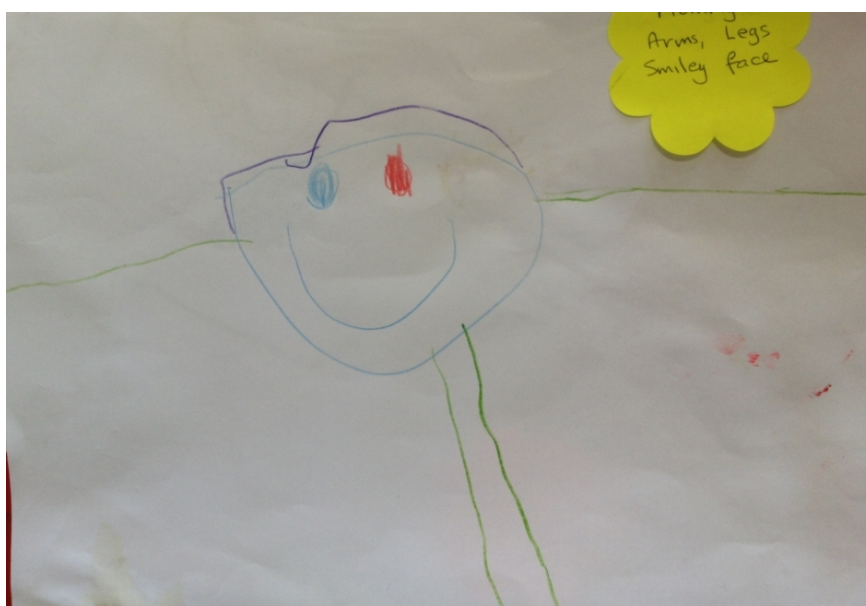
I like fishing with Dad at the beach or the bridge. I like fishes and there is no place near my house to fish. (Boy, 5 years)

Social, entertainment and commercial spaces

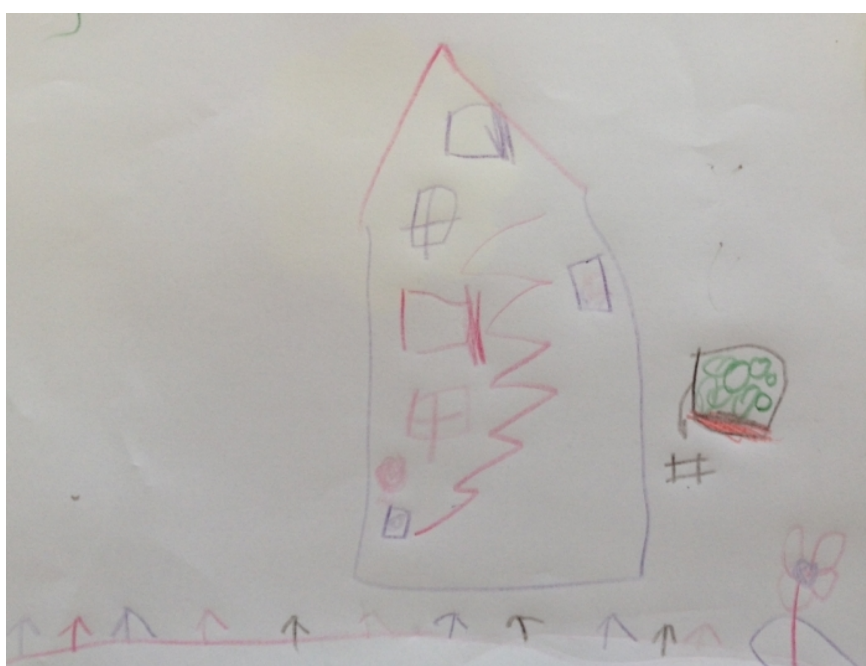
In addition to outdoor and recreational places, analysis of children’s drawings and their related comments identified themes such as family and friends; entertainment; and commercial spaces.

Family and friends

Images of family and friends were the most frequent element of children’s drawings and comments. Almost three-quarters of the children involved in the consultation referred to their parents/carer, siblings, relatives or friends. Based on these results, children clearly perceive their family and friends as highly important, not only because they rely on their parents to access facilities and services, but also because they value time spent with them playing games and having fun.



My mummy arms, legs and smiley face (Girl, 5 years)

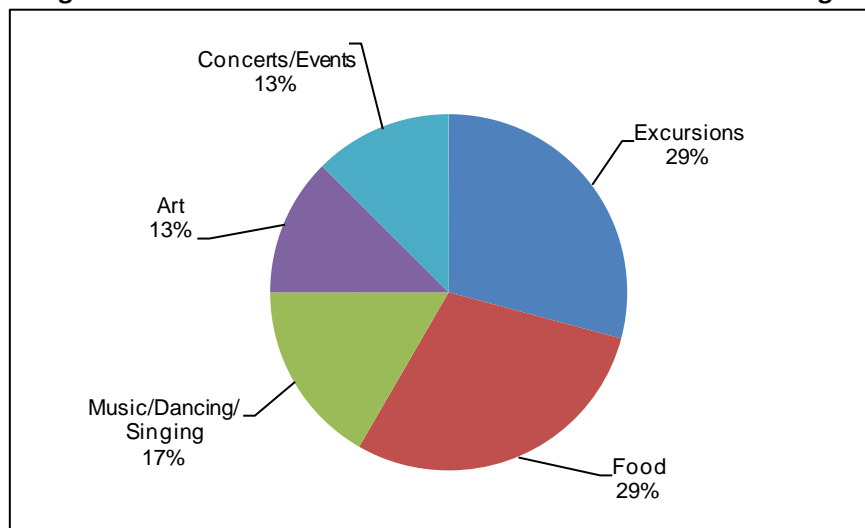


My auntie’s house has a trampoline, a garden and stairs to climb. I play there with my cousins. (Girl, 5 years)

Entertainment

Data from the children’s drawings showed that entertainment rated high among their interests, with 24 children referring to it. Entertainment topics that were most frequently referred to were food (by 7 children), visits and excursions (7) and music and dancing (4). The entertainment elements that children drew or talked about are summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Entertainment elements identified in children’s drawings



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 due to rounding

Food

The types of food that children referred to most frequently were sweets (including lollipops), ice-cream, cookies, cakes and fruit:

Have a milkshake and ice-cream. Blueberry is my sister's favourite. I like vanilla and banana and chocolate. My favourite ice-cream is strawberry. (Girl, 4 years)

Having lots of cookies at the cafe. (Boy, 4 years)

Excursions

The excursions most frequently drawn or discussed by children were visits to fire stations, Science Works and museums:

I am drawing a spaceship in Science Works. I went to Science Works with friends and my Dad and Mum. I really really like this place. (Boy, 4 years)

The museum is my favourite place. (Boy, 4 years)

I like fire stations when the fire engine comes out with the lights on. (Girl, 4 years)



Fire engine at the fire station. I went to visit the fire station with Mum. (Boy, 3 years)

Music, dancing and singing

Among the four children who talked about music, dancing or singing, two described their love of singing, one liked songs (like 'Old MacDonald') and the fourth reported liking parties and discos.

Commercial spaces

Commercial spaces such as shopping centres/markets and restaurants were referred to by six children. Among these children, two referred to play centres:

I like Tumbles play centre—birthday parties there. They have a jumping castle. (Boy, 5 years)

I like Cosco. It's a shop. It's a play centre in the shop. (Boy, 5 years)

Three others referred to markets and shops:

My Dad takes me to the market. I feel good and happy when my Dad buys a car for me. (Boy, 5 years)

My favourite place is the food shop and toy shop. (Boy, 3 years)

And one child referred to restaurant in a sporting club:

I go to the bowling club for dinner with Dad, Mum and my brother. (Girl, 5 years)

Education

In total, education or some aspect of education was referred to by nine children. We divided this theme into two sub themes: kindergarten and school; and reading/library.

Kindergarten and school

Kindergarten or schools were referred to five times. Children who talked about kinder or schools provided several reasons to explain why they like it, including the activities and their aspirations for future learning:

My favourite place is the kinder. I love the blocks to build the tower. That makes this place the best. (Girl, 4 years)

I go to school once a week. I like colouring, singing 'Old MacDonald' and stories. (Girl, 5 years)

When I am six I'm going to my brother and sister's school. I like to go there. I really want to go to school with my brother and sister when I'm six. It's cool. There are lots more things to do. Big kids do better things than me. (Boy, 5 years)

Reading/library

Reading books and visiting the library were referred to four times. When asked what they liked about reading and/or libraries, children commented:

Reading books on the grass on a sunny day with a rainbow. (Girl, 5 years)

I like the library—I look at books. I like pirate books. (Boy, 3 years)

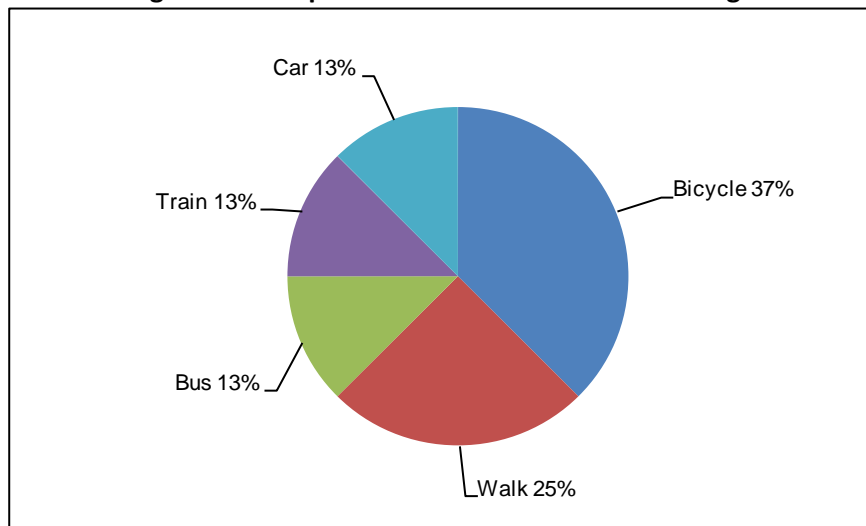
I like ... and read books at the library. (Boy, 4 years)

Transport

Transport was another theme of children's drawings. Transport was drawn or mentioned 16 times (by 34% of children). We subdivided this theme into two sub-themes, namely sustainable modes of transport (bikes, walk, bus and train) and private vehicles (e.g. cars).

Sustainable modes of transport were more often referred to than private vehicles. As shown in Figure 4, more than three-quarters of these children mentioned using bicycles (37%), walking (25%), going on the bus (13%) or going on the train (13%). In contrast only 13% of the children mentioned using private vehicles. Some children referred to more than one mode of transport.

Figure 4: Transport elements in children's drawings



Note: Percentages add to more than 100 due to rounding



I ride my bike to the park with Daddy and my brother. (Girl, 5 years)











Photographs













Children were asked to look at the photographs and place 'smiley face' stickers on the photographs of two of their favourite things to do. This activity was completed by 40 children, with another seven (six boys and one girl; average age of 3.5 years) of the children not completing the activity. Although 'non-completion' was due in most cases to the child wanting to go back and play with their friends, the researchers considered that these children had withdrawn their consent for this activity.






Children were also asked to place a 'sad face' sticker on a photograph of one thing they don't like to do. As previously reported, a number of children were unable to identify an activity that they dislike. Twenty-nine children (61% of the consultation sample) described things they don't like to do, and 25 children (53% of the consultation sample) selected a photograph of an activity they don't like. Eleven children who chose images of activities they like to do, did not identify an activity that they dislike.











Table 3 summarises the responses to the photos. Columns 2 and 3 show the number of children who selected an activity as one of their favourites or as their least favourite. Column 4 presents the characteristics and some comments of these children, and mentions other children who liked or disliked the activity but did not assign it a sticker

Table 3: Favourite and least favourite activities

Photograph topic			Description
Swimming or going to the pool	12	5	<p> Seven girls and five boys with an average age of 4.1 years rated swimming as one of their favourite things to do. Many children described why they like swimming as 'I like water' or 'I like bubbles'.</p> <p> Three boys and two girls with an average age of 4.2 years rated swimming as an activity they dislike. One boy found swimming scary because the water is too deep. Other children were quite nuanced in their reasoning. One girl associated the photograph with swimming lessons, which she doesn't like because '... I can swim already'. A boy reported that he does not like being splashed, and that 'I like swimming by myself'. Another boy said: 'Swimming is boring, as I only like the beaches'.</p>
Riding a bike	12	1	<p> Seven girls and four boys with an average age of 3 years rated riding a bike as a favourite activity. Nine of these children talked about riding bikes with their family. Two children liked riding fast. Some children talked about where they ride their bikes: to the park (3 children), to the beach (2), shopping, in the house, down the street and on paths ('I don't like bike tracks').</p> <p> One girl aged 4 years rated riding a bike as her least favourite activity because she is currently unable to do it: 'It will be better when I am a big girl'. One boy aged 5 years mentioned that he doesn't like cycling.</p>
Playing at the playground	11	2	<p> Five boys, four girls and two children (whose gender was not recorded) with an average age of 3.4 years rated playing at the playground as a favourite activity. Most children liked going to the park or playground because of favourite pieces of equipment, such as tunnel slides, swinging bridges, swings, monkey bars and sand pits. A further three children (two boys aged 3 and 4 years and one girl aged 5 years) mentioned that they like going to the playground.</p> <p> Two girls aged 3.5 and 4.5 years did not like the playground because one preferred a playground different from that shown in the photo and the other because she wanted her mum to be there.</p>
Going to the beach	8	0	<p> Seven girls and one boy with an average age of 4.7 years rated going to the beach as one of their favourite things to do. One girl and one boy, each aged 4 years, mentioned the beach as somewhere they like to go. Most children talked about going to the beach with their family and activities they like to do at the beach: swimming, making sandcastles and fishing.</p> <p> No children reported disliking going to the beach.</p>

Photograph topic			Description
Catching a bus	4	1	<p> Three boys and one girl with an average age of 3.4 years rated catching a bus as one of their favourite activities. These children provided a variety of reasons that they liked the bus. One boy aged 4 talked about catching a bus with his mum to kinder in Altona North.</p> <p> One boy aged 4 years nominated catching the bus as his least favourite activity: 'I am scared of big buses with their loud horns. It could be better if the horn wasn't so loud'. One girl aged 5 years mentioned that 'The bus makes me feel just a little bit bored'.</p>
Fishing	3	3	<p> Two girls aged 5 years and one boy aged 4 years rated fishing as a favourite activity. All of these children were from centres located in Altona North and talked about fishing as an activity they do with family members. One boy aged 4 years mentioned fishing among a range of activities he likes to do at the beach.</p> <p> Two boys aged 3 and 5 years and one girl aged 2 years rated fishing as their least favourite activity: 'I haven't been, but you just sit there'. One girl age 4 years mentioned that she doesn't like fishing because it is 'scary'.</p>
Shopping/ supermarket	2	3	<p> Two boys, each aged 4 years, rated going shopping as one of their favourite activities because one likes to get food and the other likes to play in the playground with his dad when they go shopping. One girl aged 4 years mentioned that she likes to ride her bike to the supermarket (among other places) with her family (also referred to under Riding a bike).</p> <p> Three girls with an average age of 4.8 years rated shopping as one of their least favourite things to do. Lollies or ice-cream would make shopping more enjoyable for two of these girls. One other girl, aged 5 years, mentioned that she doesn't like going to the shops.</p>
Using the computer	2	2	<p> One girl aged 5 and one boy aged 3 rated using the computer as one of their favourite activities. These children use the computer at home.</p> <p> Two girls aged 5 years rated using the computer as their least favourite activity.</p> <p>  One of these girls, aged 5 years, identified using the computer as both her favourite and her least favourite activity: 'It makes me sad because I can't use the computer. It's good fun. I think it is'.</p>

Photograph topic			Description
Going to kindergarten/ child care/ learning	2	1	<p> One boy aged 3 years and one girl aged 3.5 years rated going to kindergarten as a favourite thing to do. Two boys aged 3.5 and 4 years mentioned that they like going to kinder. Three of these four children talked about specific things they like to do at kindergarten: painting, play dough, swings and toys.</p> <p> One girl age 3.5 years rated this photograph as her least favourite activity because 'I don't like me in the photo', although the photograph was not of her.</p>
Painting or doing art	1	0	<p> One boy age 3.5 years rated 'painting at kinder' as one of his favourite things to do.</p> <p> No children rated painting or art as an activity they dislike.</p>
Reading a book	1	0	<p> One girl aged 4 years nominated reading as one of her favourite activities. Two other girls aged 4 and 5 years mentioned reading as an activity they like to do. All of these girls described their mums reading to them.</p> <p> One girl aged 4 years mentioned that she didn't like the library because there are too many books and too many people. She thought the library would be nicer if there were more pictures hanging on the walls.</p>
Dancing	0	2	<p> No children rated dancing as one of their favourite activities. One girl aged 2 mentioned 'I like dancing with Mummy at home'.</p> <p> One girl aged 4 years and one boy aged 3.5 years rated dancing as their least favourite activity because it is noisy and Mum is not there, respectively. Even though dancing was a least favourite activity, one of these children enjoys the social aspect: 'I like that we do it together'.</p>
Going to a restaurant	0	2	<p> No children rated going to a restaurant as a favourite thing to do. One girl aged 4 years mentioned that she likes to ride her bike to a coffee shop (among other places) with her family.</p> <p> One boy aged 4 years and one girl aged 5 years rated going to a restaurant as one of their least favourite things to do because they do not like the food.</p>
Catching a train/ going to the train station	0	1	<p> No children rated catching a train as one of their favourite things to do. However, two boys mentioned that they like the train station (age 4 years) or catching a train (age 3 years).</p> <p> One girl aged 4 years rated going to the train station as her least favourite thing to do: 'It's dark and scary. I don't like the noise of the train. Put some lights and make the place better'.</p>

Photograph topic			Description
Going to the doctor's surgery	0	1	 No children rated going to the doctor's as a favourite or least favourite activity.  One girl aged 4 thought this picture was of the library. Her comments are included under Reading a book.
Gardening	0	1	 No children rated gardening as one of their favourite activities.  One girl aged 5 years identified gardening as her least favourite activity 'because of the yucky snails'.
Playing music	0	0	 No children rated music as a favourite activity.  No children rated music as a least favourite activity.
Playing sport	0	0	 No children rated sport as one of their favourite activities. Two boys aged 3.5 and 4 years mentioned liking soccer or football.  No children rated sport as their least favourite activity. One girl aged 5 years mentioned that she doesn't like soccer 'because it is boring'.

Favourite activities

Activities that the largest numbers of children rated as one of their favourites were swimming (12 children), riding a bike (12) and playing at the playground or park (11). Other preferred activities were going to the beach (8 children), catching a bus (4) and fishing (3). Many of popular activities take place out of doors. Indeed, some children mentioned other outdoor things that were not included in the photographs: sunshine, fresh air and playing outside.

Many of the things these children like to do were outside their homes and in the broader community. Most of the favourite activities (n = 35) were undertaken with their families—parents, siblings and grandparents. Some children identified an activity as their favourite because they do it with their dad. Four children talked about doing their favourite activities with their friends.

The transport most frequently mentioned as the method to get to favourite activities was riding bikes (by 9 children). Going by car and catching a bus were mentioned once each, while walking was not mentioned at all. There are many reasons that riding a bike received more mentions, including the novelty of riding a bike and the inclusion of a photograph of a family riding bikes in the consultation process.

Least favourite activities

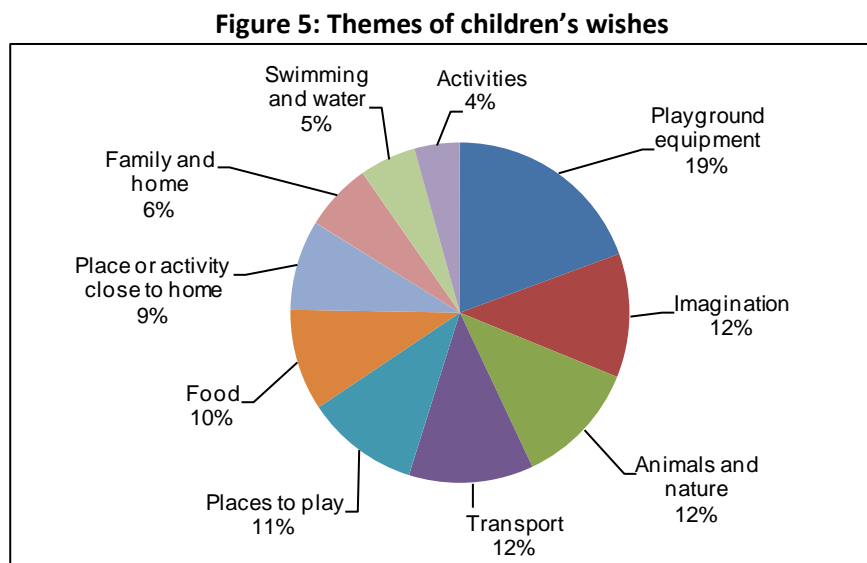
Least favourite activities that were most commonly identified were swimming (5 children), fishing (3) and shopping (3). Other activities that were rated as least favourite included dancing, using the computer, playing at the playground and going to a restaurant, each receiving two 'votes'. The most common reasons for rating activities as least favourite were that the activity is perceived as boring (8 responses), scary (7) or noisy (3).

Some children talked about least favourite things that were not included in the photographs. These things could be related to:

- emotion/self-focus: when they are scared, hurt, bored, patient or waiting
- imagination: monsters and jumping trees
- safety: 'I don't like going out on the big road. Cars make people die.'

Group discussion

In each centre, children were gathered into a group and took turns to hold a 'magic' wand and describe wishes that would make them happy. The results are summarised in Figure 5, and then each theme is explored.



Imagination

When asked what they wish for in the future, the very young children either were unable to project forward or projected their imagination into a fantastical landscape, such as 'a wizard', 'Humpty Dumpty', 'Transformerland on Cyberland next to my house', 'a fish and chip house' and 'everything to be made of chocolate chips'. Most children's wishes tended to be focused on the present.

Animals and nature

The most common wish, made by 11 children, was for various types of animals. Specifically mentioned were cows, lizards, dinosaurs, elephants, monkeys, birds, dogs, a 'little pony', chickens and snakes. These animals were to be located on a farm or in a garden (4 wishes), as pets (2) or in the zoo (2).

Other nature-based wishes included a rainbow in the sky, a waterfall, 'lots of vegetables in the garden' and 'grass in my street'.

Places to play

Another common wish was for places to play, primarily parks or playgrounds (10 wishes). The proximity of these parks to home is important to children, with parks 'next to my house' or 'near my house' wished for or mentioned by four children. One child suggested that a 'cafe next to the playground will help parents get their kids to the playground'.

Playground equipment

Children described the equipment they would like in these parks:

- **Slides:** Six children wished for slides, including slippery slides and water slides. One group envisaged 'a big slide that goes underground and has stairs to go up' and another wished for a 'slippery slide, waterfall and a castle with a princess'.
- **Cubby and tree houses:** Five children wished for parks with tree houses and/or cubby houses. Tree houses were mentioned slightly more (by 4 children) than cubby houses (2). Tree houses were sometimes paired with other features such as slides, rope swings and cubby houses.
- **Swings:** Three children wished for swings, one of them for a rope swing.
- **Seesaws:** Two children wished for seesaws.
- **Trampolines:** Two children wished for trampolines.
- **Climbing:** In addition to the four children who wished for tree houses, two children wished for the 'big pirate ship at Anglesea' and climbing frames.

Activities

Many of the children's wishes involved activities, including some physical activities. 'Footy' was the only organised sport that was mentioned—and interestingly only by one group. Most children talked about play-based physical activities rather than organised sport. These included swimming, dancing, riding bikes and scooters, and as previously discussed, playing in the park or playground.

Swimming and water

One group of children from Precinct 3 identified many wishes about swimming in pools and at the beach. As with the parks and playgrounds, the children talked about the pool's proximity to their house. Children in two other groups wished for a waterslide or a waterfall.

Transport

Transport was discussed in two contexts: wishing to own transport (6 wishes) and ways to get to 'wished for' places or activities (4 wishes). Vehicles that children wished to own include a 'real monster truck', a 'real dirt bike', a helicopter and a plane, a motorbike, cars, trains and trucks. There was no indication that the children wished for these toys as a way of compensating for a lack of actual transport.

Children's preferred transport methods included riding bikes (mentioned twice) and going by car (when the venue is 'not close to my house'). One child wanted a 'park next to my house and no road, a dirt-bike track', suggesting the desire for a more adventurous way to travel around.

Food

Children from three groups had wishes involving food. Two groups talked about healthy foods: fruit, water and growing vegetables. Another group made a big list of less healthy foods, including chocolate, ice-cream, chicken and chips, pizza and McDonalds. This group also expanded this list into imaginative wishes: a fish and chips house and that everything be made of chocolate chips.

Family, home and proximity

Many of the children's wishes were for their own immediate future. However, one boy aged 4 wished to 'buy this car for my mum with big wheels'.

A number of children in all centres talked about who they wished to play with and where, mentioning parents, members of the extended family and friends.

As previously mentioned the proximity of places to home was mentioned often—by eight children.



Discussion and recommendations

This section brings together the findings of the consultation to answer the questions:

- What do Hobsons Bay children value and wish for in their life?
- What do Hobsons Bay children like and dislike?
- What could make Hobsons Bay children happier?

What do Hobsons Bay children value and wish for in their life?

Based on the results of this consultation, Hobsons Bay's young children (age 2–5 years) value undertaking activities and going places:

- with family and friends
- in the outdoors and being active
- among animals and nature
- that use their imagination
- that offer a sense of adventure
- that help them learn and develop skills
- that are close to home.

The following sections explore what children like and dislike in regard to each of these dimensions, and include recommendations for future action based on what the children said could make them happier, and the evidence base for creating a 'child friendly' community.

What do Hobsons Bay children like and dislike, and what could make them happier?

The young children who were consulted like many places and activities in and around Hobsons Bay. Not surprisingly, their favourite places and activities centre on play.

Family and friends

Children clearly valued activities and places that can be shared with others. Most children described their favourite activities and places in terms of who they do it with or go there with. This was most frequently their families, particularly their parents. Research has shown that secure relationships with nurturing adults can help children regulate their emotions, protect them from stress and provide a secure base from which they can explore the world (Benevolent Society, 2013).

Also importantly, there is evidence to suggest that playing and sharing leisure time with children offers an ideal opportunity for parents to engage fully with their children and to see the world through their children's eyes. Evidence also suggests that parent–child play facilitates the sharing of values, increases communication, allows for teaching moments and assists in problem solving (Milteer, Ginsburg, et al., 2012). Playtime provides opportunities for the parent and child to confront and resolve individual differences, as well as family concerns. According to Ginsburg (2007), shared activity time is important for the whole family because the activities can help family members develop strong bonds that can last a lifetime. Furthermore, the same author asserts that families who are able to spend quality play time together are more cooperative and supportive and have better communication (Ginsburg, 2007). However, time and financial constraints can prevent many families spending quality time with their children.

Interestingly, very few children reported doing their favourite activities or going to their favourite places with friends. This may reflect the fact that the sample children spend time at kindergartens,

playgroups or early learning and care centres, and therefore particularly value the time they spend with their families. Nonetheless, the importance of social play with children from the same and different age groups should also be noted. Social play allows children to learn about sharing and understanding others' emotions and intentions (Brown, 2009 cited in Goldstein, 2012). Additionally, mixed-age play can provide children with opportunities for learning and development that they would not acquire through playing with their own age group.

Many children recognised the importance of places being appropriate for more than one generation. They suggested that adult features be introduced to children's places (for example, that playgrounds have cafes for parents) and children's features be introduced to adult places (for example, that shops have playground equipment). The importance of features such as playground equipment to entertain children has long been recognised in a variety of commercial places, from doctor's surgeries to fast food restaurants. However, the need to make children's spaces playful and interesting to parents and grandparents as well as the children has only recently been recognised (CABE Space, 2008). A number of municipalities in Australia and overseas are considering how to introduce adult-friendly features into children's spaces through mechanisms such as intergenerational playgrounds which are appropriate for people of all ages and abilities (for example, a new development in Thornton, New South Wales).

Recommendations

- Ensure services and spaces support family interaction, enhancing families' abilities to have an active role in their children's lives.
- When designing community activities and events consider free or low-cost local activities and events that children and parents/carers can do together, which can help develop parent/carer–child relationships.
- Provide information about child and family friendly local events, activities, businesses, places and other play opportunities through Hobsons Bay City Council social or other electronic media. For example, this could be added to the existing *Hobsons Bay Community Directory*.
- Plan spaces and activities that encourage social play among children of the same and different ages. For example, facilitate activities during local events that include diverse age groups working together.
- Consider mechanisms to introduce adult features into children's places and children's features into adult places, in locations such as parks and playgrounds, shops and activity centres (e.g. tables with board games built into them).

Outdoor and active play

The children's responses about their favourite and least favourite activities indicate that outdoor activities and active play were the top priorities of most children. This result is in accordance with other studies that have found that most children identify outdoor play as their favourite activity (Sweeney Research, 2012).

This is also a positive finding given that recent studies drawing on a range of research areas (e.g. neuroscience), have shown strong and consistent relationships between children's play and their cognitive and emotional development (Bornstein, 2006; Whitebread, 2012). Research has also demonstrated that play is essential to children's development because it contributes to their physical, social and emotional wellbeing and ultimately has a positive impact on their academic achievement (Whitebread, 2012).

Given the importance of play for children’s socio-emotional and physical development and wellbeing, there is a need to provide them with diverse play-based activities. For example, Play England argues that to be successful, a play space needs to:

- offer movement and physical activity through a range of play experiences
- stimulate the five senses, including hearing and smell
- provide good places for social interactions where children can choose whether and when to play alone or with others
- allows children to manipulate natural and fabricated materials, use tools and access lots of different objects
- offer children challenge, where they can test their capabilities and develop their skills (Shackell, Butler, Doyle & Ball, 2008, p. 15).

Recommendations

- Consider providing opportunities for outdoor and active play as a top priority, in line with the vision statement outlined in the Play Space Strategy 2013–2023.

Hobsons Bay City Council is committed to providing a diverse range of accessible, attractive, challenging and well maintained play spaces offering experiences to residents and visitors of all ages and abilities within a sustainable natural setting (Play Space Strategy 2013–2023, Executive Summary Report, p. 2)

- When renovating or constructing parks and playgrounds consider developing flexible play spaces to challenge, stimulate and engage the five senses of children when playing alone or with others. For example, the five senses can be engaged by planting a garden with plants of different colours, smells and tastes (edible plants such as herbs), using different (including natural) materials for children to explore, and using different tools to produce various sounds.
- Ensure the design of public places applies the (CEPTED) principles of crime prevention through environmental design, as well as and a gender lens for the decisions regarding key elements such as lighting, wide footpaths, change facilities, activation of space, and accessible car parking.

Nature and animals

In addition to play, the children’s responses to questions about their favourite places to go indicate that they value nature, open spaces and animals. This is another positive finding given the growing intrusion of technology and digitalisation into children’s everyday lives. Children can significantly benefit from interaction with nature, which provides the opportunity for exploration, unstructured imaginative play and hands-on experiences that enhance their cognitive, motor and social development. According to Louv (2005), the benefits of children’s exposure to nature can include better physical health, increased creativity, reduced stress, more concern for other living things and a greater awareness of the natural environment.

Recommendations

- Enhance existing natural environments to increase access and/or safety, to allow children to explore and play. This could include play equipment, seating, shade, toilets, drinking water and natural barriers (e.g. of plants) established to make waterways safe. These elements should be implemented through the Play Space Strategy 2013–2023, and the Environmentally Sustainable Design Guidelines.

- Introduce natural elements into existing play spaces. These could include natural materials with different textures, water play areas and vegetation that encourages birds and other wildlife to inhabit the area.
- Design safe pathways between local centres, residential areas and parks so that children are encouraged to walk (or ride a bicycle) with their carers and explore nature on a small scale during these everyday trips (encountering snails etc).
- Ensure children are consulted within the planning and implementation of all environmental strategies such as the Open Place Strategy, Parks Strategy, Local Laws, and the Foreshore Strategy and Visions.

Imagination

Many children in this consultation described fantastical places that they ‘wish for’, like fish and chip houses, dragons and wizards. Some also described playgrounds like the pirate playground at Anglesea that allows them to both climb and use their imagination. Two children identified imaginary things that they do not like: monsters and jumping trees. Imaginative play is very important to children’s creative and social development (Whitebread, 2012).

Research into urban design and spaces for children to play has found that prescribing play spaces and activities can limit children’s ability to use their imagination (CABE Space, 2008). When children have worked with landscape architects in projects such as Child Friendly by Design, they have conceptualised elements such as secret tracks, water play areas, natural materials with different textures to climb on and open grassed space for ball games, flying kites etc (Healthy Cities Illawarra, 2010). These flexible spaces allow the children to decide how they will use the elements and establish their own games and rules.

Recommendations

- Create flexible play spaces that children can use for a variety of types of play. For example, include items that can be rearranged in different ways during play or construct a plain structure that can be imagined and interpreted differently by boys and girls, and by different age groups.
- Ensure the Council Gender Equity Statement includes boys and girls
- Ensure the Council Engagement Strategy includes active involvement of children throughout the process of designing and implementing spaces to



Figure 6: Playground design that encourages imaginative and social play

ensure that the spaces reflect their own wants and needs. This should be in accordance with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Freedom of Opinion, and the Victorian Child Friendly Cities and Communities Charter, whose principles include.

Respect and dignity for children to express their individual opinions, participate in and contribute to decisions about their communities and their wellbeing.

Adventure and risk taking

The favourite activities and places identified by many children involved some element of ‘adventure’ such as the movement of swings and slides, riding a bike fast, climbing and exploring. Evidence suggests that modern, urbanised life styles often result in children being oversupervised and overscheduled, with a decreasing amount of play time with their peers or parents. This lifestyle not

only negatively influences children's play experience but is also likely to have an adverse effect on their independent skills, resourcefulness and self-regulation (Lester & Russell, 2010; Whitebread, 2012).

According to Albert Einstein, 'play is the highest form of research'. Concerns about safety and a growing culture of risk-averse parenting can prevent children from engaging in 'risky' outdoor play that is important for their development. Engagement in some risk-based activities, especially in outdoor activities, has been found to provide children with opportunities to learn new skills, try new behaviour and test the limits of physical, intellectual and social development (Little & Wyver, 2008).

Recommendations

- Alongside risk management of children's play spaces, recognise the benefits that allowing children the freedom to explore can provide to their development. This should be included within the Play Space Strategy.
- Play spaces need to be perceived by children as adventurous and by parents as safe: a balance is needed. Play spaces need to align with the principles of universal design and children and parents should be actively involved in planning play spaces.

Education and learning

A number of children talked about formal learning environments such as kindergarten and school as their favourite place or the place where they did their favourite activities such as singing, reading and playing. However, many other children identified less formal learning environments, such as playgrounds (as previously discussed), the zoo, libraries, fire stations, Science Works and museums as their favourite places. Education and learning is obviously important to young children, who learn skills and knowledge through every activity and natural and built environment that they encounter.

Recommendations

- Include informal learning opportunities in the design of playgrounds and other public spaces.
- Improve access to commercial operations (e.g. Science Works, libraries, arts centres, sport and recreation facilities) where children learn informally. This could be through providing transport linkages and affordable cost of entry for existing facilities, and considering walkability when planning new facilities.

Closeness to home

Children frequently talked about the proximity to home of their favourite activities and places. This seems to have two different types of implications: the accessibility of outdoor play space and the type of transport children use to get to the place or activity.

Accessibility of space

Children talked about playing at home and in playgrounds and parks rather than playing in their street or neighbourhood. This finding is in line with other studies that show that children's play is becoming more structured and prescribed in specific places (CABE Space, 2008; Sweeney Research, 2012).

Advocates for urban parkland argue that 'play does not just take place in designated play spaces, but in the whole environment that a child occupies' (CABE Space, 2008, p. 3). It is obviously not practical to build a park or playground on every neighbourhood block. However, concepts such as FootParks (Wright, 2010) and contemporary urban street design promote principles to prioritise people above cars and to allow streets to become social hubs. Features can include hopscotch and other games,

community gardens, swings, seating and increased vegetation to provide wildlife food and carbon capture on the footpaths (Wright, 2010).

These design elements are argued to increase:

- the amount of time children engage in active outdoor play
- available play space (given the decreasing size of backyards)
- neighbourhood safety, with more ‘eyes and ears’ on the street
- social capital with opportunities to build trust within the community (Wright, 2010).

Transport

Proximity of destinations has been found to be the biggest predictor of walking (Burton, et al., 2009). When the children felt an activity or place was far away from home they tended to use phrases like ‘we have to drive there’. This suggests that going by car is *not* their preferred mode of transport; and it also fits with bike riding being one of the most popular activities identified by the children.

The importance of active travel methods is well understood in regard to children’s (and adults’) physical health in terms of both increased physical activity and reduced environmental impacts. However, evidence is also emerging that children who use active travel methods to get to school have a more connected and detailed understanding of their neighbourhoods compared to children who travel in the back seat of a car, as shown in Figure 7 (VicHealth, 2011).

Children and adults who use active travel methods are also more likely to interact socially with the people in their neighbourhoods. This in turn leads to greater trust, social capital and connection within communities.

Active travel has been shown to significantly increase where there are street design measures which lower traffic volumes, foster neighbourhood connectivity and slow traffic down, as well as bike and foot paths, safe places to cross the road and public transport to key destinations (Burton, et al., 2009; Wood, et al., 2010).

Some children reported liking buses and trains. However, some other children found these public transport methods ‘scary’ due to their being noisy, crowded or dark.

Recommendations

- Ensure that play opportunities/spaces are locally accessible, and within a 500-metre radius of all households as outlined in the Play Space Strategy 2013–2023.
- Hobsons Bay City Council should aim to ensure a continuous accessible path of travel is available to all play spaces and key activity centres.
- Ensure that Council street lighting program meets the needs of the community, especially women and children.

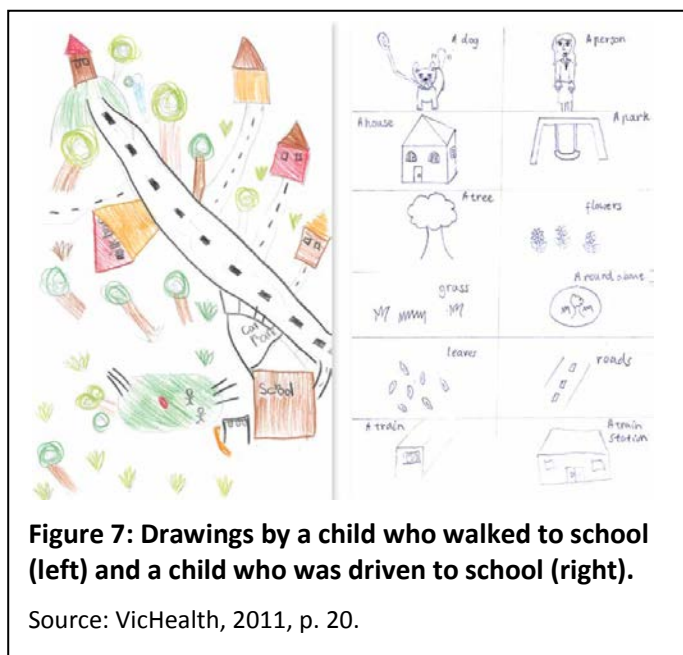


Figure 7: Drawings by a child who walked to school (left) and a child who was driven to school (right).

Source: VicHealth, 2011, p. 20.

- Ensure that parks and playgrounds are accessible via bike paths, footpaths, accessible car parks (including space for prams), pedestrian crossings and options to reduce the amount and/or speed of traffic. Accessibility should align with universal design principles.
- Advocate for improved public transport to be provided to key activity locations for children and their families.
- Advocate for increased accessibility for people of all ages and abilities for all public transport services, and conformity with principles of universal design.
- Ensure developments within the municipality enhance community connections and walkability via the use of principles such as safety by design.
- Ensure activity centres incorporate intergenerational design elements enabling use by all ages.

This direct consultation gathered some useful insights about what young children in Hobsons Bay enjoy or value. The responses, when combined with material from other children, parents and teachers will assist the creation of an appropriate plan for children and young people in the municipality.

Photographs

Invite child to look at the photos on the wall/table and put a smiley face on their two favourites and a sad face on their least favourite photograph.

Prompts:

- Have you done this before?
- Why do you like this activity?
- What do you like about this activity?
- Where do you do this in your neighbourhood? Who do you do this with?



Photo no. _____

Prompts:

- What things make you feel sad/scared/bored?
- Where do you do this? Who do you do this with?
- Why don't you like doing this?
- What is good about this activity? What is not so good about it?
- What would make this a better activity?



Photo no. _____

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