

## Evidence to Action Note

### March 2025

# Where we belong

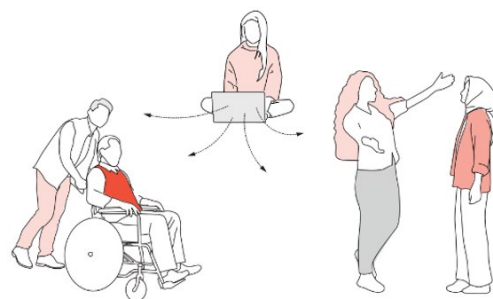
## Creating inclusive and accessible communities

### Snapshot

- Through a dynamic, community-driven research collaboration, the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion partnered with Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo communities to explore how inclusive, accessible spaces can foster connection and belonging.
- A Story of Change was developed, providing a rich vision of what's needed in the community.
- The research found that creating inclusive and accessible communities requires investment in public spaces, strategies to reduce social isolation, improved housing security, better public transport and walkability, and increased community participation in decision-making.
- By amplifying community voices and real-world evidence, this project offers policy and practice recommendations to tackle loneliness and foster a stronger, more connected community where everyone can thrive.

### Introduction

What makes a community feel like home? Is it the spaces where we gather, the connections we form, or the sense of safety and belonging? This research explored how communities across Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo can become more inclusive and accessible, ensuring that everyone – regardless of background or circumstance – feels valued and connected. By amplifying community voices and prioritising lived experiences, the project sheds light on practical solutions that can shape stronger, more vibrant neighbourhoods.



## **Why are inclusive and accessible spaces important?**

Inclusive and accessible spaces create communities where everyone feels welcome and connected. When spaces are designed with inclusivity and accessibility in mind, they allow people of all ages, backgrounds, and abilities to participate in social life. Parks, community centres, and well-designed streets encourage interaction, reducing loneliness and strengthening social bonds. These spaces also make everyday activities – shopping, attending events, or simply meeting friends – more inclusive, ensuring no one is left out due to physical barriers or financial constraints.

These spaces also contribute to individual and collective wellbeing; they support mental and physical health by encouraging movement, rest, and social engagement. They promote the local economy by making businesses, services, and events more available to everyone, including those with mobility challenges or language barriers. Investing in accessible and welcoming spaces is not just about infrastructure – it's about building communities where everyone can contribute, connect, and thrive.

## **What did community say?**

In the interviews and workshops we conducted with community, participants expressed a strong desire for inclusive and accessible spaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and connection – see the Story of Change in Figure 1. They emphasised the importance of shared values like kindness, equity, diversity, and inclusion, ensuring that all voices are heard and valued. They believed that these values not only shape the conditions necessary for transformation but also guide the actions and relationships that make inclusive, accessible and connected communities a reality.

To support meaningful change, the community highlighted key conditions such as safety, trust, mental health and wellbeing support, and affordable and liveable housing. These conditions are not just about belonging – they're the building blocks of inclusive communities where everyone can contribute. Without them, people face obstacles to engagement, and true inclusion isn't possible.

They also identified several changes that are needed to foster a sense of belonging and connection in their community. These changes are articulated in the Story of Change as outcome statements. Some of the outcomes highlight the importance of being able to access high-quality spaces that meet diverse needs, others speak to the psychological, emotional, and social factors related to being in spaces with other people. Together, they tell a story about what's needed to create spaces that bring people together – across generations, cultures and life experiences.

## **How was the research conducted?**

This research employed a participatory and strengths-based approach to amplify community voice. Interviews and workshops were conducted to explore experiences and perspectives on inclusive and accessible spaces. The team conducted a thematic analysis of the data and validated key themes with a community partners group. These insights were then refined through sensemaking workshops, where participants co-created the Story of Change to outline priorities and pathways for building an inclusive and accessible community.

# Where we belong: Creating accessible and inclusive communities in Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont and Ultimo

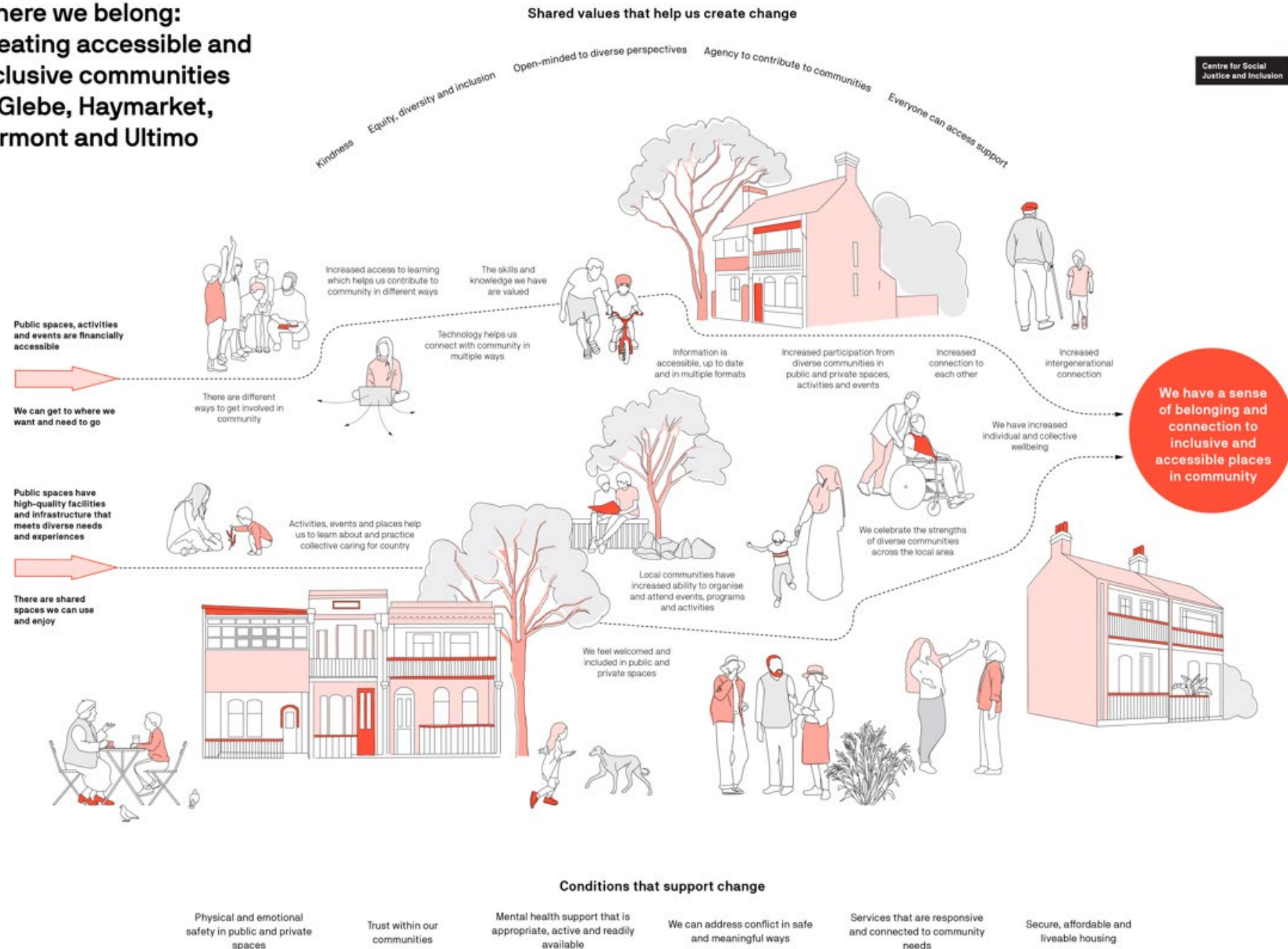


Figure 1. Inclusive and Accessible Spaces – Story of Change

## What does this mean for policy and practice?

Community members identified the structural and social factors that enable belonging and connection. They highlighted key barriers to connection – financial accessibility, transport limitations, safety – as well as the importance of recognising communities' strengths, valuing diversity, and facilitating skill-building and information sharing. These findings provide a roadmap for policy change and practical guidance to ensure solutions align with the community's real needs and aspirations. Key recommendations include:

Advocating for policy change	Informing local programs and initiatives
Increased funding for free and low-cost community spaces and events to remove financial barriers to participation.	Expanding strengths-based initiatives that enable community leadership and leverage existing social networks.
Embedding social infrastructure in urban planning, ensuring parks, libraries, and community centres are central to development.	Developing free public events, that include culturally diverse activities and encourage participation and representation.
Enhancing mobility through improved public transport and safer pedestrian infrastructure.	Enhancing outreach, using multi-platform strategies (e.g., print, online, radio) to improve access to information.
Embedding co-design in policy development so community voices shape policy.	Fostering intergenerational and cross-cultural engagement to strengthen community ties.
Expanded funding for affordable and social housing to provide stable foundations for community engagement.	Embedding mental health support by integrating support groups and community-driven resilience programs into local services.
Sustained funding for place-based and grassroots organisations that play a crucial role in fostering connection and wellbeing.	Ensuring physical and digital accessibility by making all programs and public spaces fully accessible to people of all abilities.

## What's next?

This research provides a foundation for further action. Community members have already developed a series of project ideas based on their priorities. Moving forward, it is essential to:

- Advocate for the adoption of these findings by local councils and policymakers.
- Secure funding to implement community-driven initiatives.
- Continue fostering collaboration between universities, local government, and community organisations.

By acting on these recommendations we can create communities where everyone, regardless of background or circumstances, feel like they belong and has the opportunity to thrive.

### Where can I find the research?

Loomis, A, Grinpukel, N, Muller, A, Morgan, H, Shaw, J, Blair, K, Aitken, L, (2025) [Where we belong: Creating Inclusive and Accessible Communities Across Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont, and Ultimo](#), Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion, University of Technology Sydney.