

Community Voice: Suburb Level Theory of Change

Overview and Purpose

UTS City campus is proud to be a part of the local community we are situated in. We recognise that local residents are experts on what's needed for our shared neighbourhood to thrive and seek to create positive change by working with and for community members.

Social justice is core to UTS's purpose. We believe universities have a responsibility to contribute to the community through research, education and practice.

The 100 Voices Project captures our local communities' vision for an increased sense of belonging in a thriving community and pathways to achieve that vision.

This project worked across Glebe, Haymarket, Pyrmont and Ultimo, highlighting community voices, experiences, and strengths. It captures community – in their own words – at its best, enabling factors for success and potential gaps that may exist.

The Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion has supported local residents to create a suburb-level vision of the future, drawing on our knowledge of what works locally and globally.

This resulting theory of change is intended as a tool to advocate for community priorities, actions, and resources. It is based on the understanding that change is complex and requires interconnected actions driven by community strengths, perspectives, and ideas.

Process

The theory of change emerged from conversations and sensemaking with the community, guided by Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative, asset-based approach to problem-solving. Assets are identified by looking at the best of what already exists. This approach uncovers and uses them as a foundation to envision possibilities for the future.

Approximately 100 community members shared their stories as part of the community voice workshop, ranging from 18-95 years old. Of those who identified the community they were connected to, 38 nominated Ultimo, 17 Glebe, 15 Pyrmont and 3 Haymarket.

We sought the insights of local residents from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. We supported them to attend by providing interpreters and nannies to make participation possible for those who would otherwise be unable to access the workshops.

Participants were asked to share a story of when being part of the community made them feel fulfilled, safe, and well. Through conversation, participants then identified assets for these moments – including personal strengths, the contributions of others, and systemic enablers.

Community members were also asked to imagine a future where such stories of strength were the norm and consider what needs changing to reach this optimistic future vision. These insights informed the theory of change.

Team members from the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion developed an initial draft of the theory of change, which was then provided to the community. During this phase, community members were asked to interrogate the model, identify what was missing and review the theory's language. Through this process, community members were able to provide insights into shaping theory of the theory of change.

Structure

This theory of change captures a community vision for an increased sense of belonging in a thriving community.

It is based on the understanding that change is not linear but complex and requires interconnected actions driven by community strengths, perspectives, and ideas. This interconnectedness is represented through the arrows in the theory of change visualisation.

Three things underpin the theory and are essential to achieving the community vision:

- a. Having community services, governments, and organisations responsive to community needs
- b. Community voice can inform decision-making, programming, and advocacy, and
- c. Increased levels of safety in place.

“Community voices (people who live and work) need to be heard more. Consultation processes are becoming more ticker box systems.”

“Talk with members of the community, they are the ones that know their environment.”

Outcomes

Community members identified two key outcomes for the theory of change and the pre-conditions required to meet those outcomes.

Outcome 1: People are empowered to participate in or contribute to their local community

For people to feel that they are empowered to participate in or contribute to their local community, the following must be met:

- 1.1 Increased financial means to participate
- 1.2 Public and private spaces are inclusive and accessible
- 1.3 Increased levels of wellness
- 1.4 Increased skills and knowledge needed to participate effectively

Pre-conditions:

For public and private spaces to be inclusive and accessible (1.2), adequate and accessible public transport must be in place (1.2.1).

Increased levels of wellness (1.3) are achieved through the following areas:

- 1.3.1 The natural environment is sustainable and flourishing
- 1.3.2 Affordable and liveable housing
- 1.3.3 Access to education and employment
- 1.3.4 Access to health, social, and welfare rights services

For the natural environment to be sustainable and flourishing (1.3.1), increased attitudes and behaviours in support of sustainability (1.3.1.1) and increased levels of education about the lands on which we live (1.3.1.1.1) are needed.

Glebe is made up of a strong connection of social housing.

Public spaces, like the foreshore walk, are really important. We need to make sure there is enough of a foreshore, people can stop along the way and engage.

Public transportation facilitates more accessibility of the area and easier accessibility to those who don't know the area.

I felt most alive when I first came to Sydney and it was pre-lockdown. When the housing got together to share resources and food and groceries.

The community centre is where people gather, spend time and do activities. It is not only a physical space where people meet and do leisure activities, it is also something that connects people together.

Sustainability is really key – we live in a throw away culture.

Outcome 2: The community is diverse and inclusive

This outcome is informed by people being empowered to participate to contribute to their local community (1). For the community to be diverse and inclusive, the community also need increased skills to participate effectively (1.4) and relevant opportunities to engage (1.4.1).

“There is an energy in Glebe. What I love about it is its diversity...”

“The sense of community and inclusion is what we all aspire. The community centre is a good place where we can enjoy ourselves.”

Five priority areas for immediate action

Community members identified five priority areas for immediate action:

1. Using public and private spaces effectively to connect people
2. Ensuring community voice informs decision making
3. influencing attitudes and behaviours to create a sustainable and thriving environment
4. Ensuring affordable and adequate housing, and
5. Improving public transport.

We continue to partner and work with communities to uncover further insights about these areas and support social impact and action. Future work will also uncover what success looks like in relation to these outcomes and create indicators for success. Through this, we can better evaluate social change in the local community.

SUBURB LEVEL THEORY OF CHANGE

