Bush Tracks and Backyards: Intergenerational Changes and Challenges for Children Claiming Play Spaces

Master of Research Thesis Proposal

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18501588
Image 1: Looking over the Berowra Valley National Park from Quarter Sessions Road
Acknowledgements

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The author hereby wishes to acknowledge the Elders past, present and future of the Dharug People, who are the Traditional Owners of the land on which this research has been undertaken. Thank you for guiding all who have played on this land before us, and those who will come after.

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For May, Jack and Sue.
Statement of Authentication

This is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises only the original work of the candidate and is the result of their own research endeavour towards the Masters of Research.

ii. This thesis has not been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

iii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text and in the reference list to all other material cited from other authors.

iv. Strict ethical procedures were adhered to throughout the process of conducting the field work and developing the written thesis.

Signed. Date. 17/07/17
Image 2: Sydney Blue Gum, Eucalyptus Saligna
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Abstract

Play is among the most fundamental behaviours human beings engage in (Pellegrini, 2009). Through play, children obtain lifelong physical, cognitive and social skills. However, recent shifts in social attitudes have resulted in a generation of children for whom play, notably that which is conducted independently of direct parental supervision has drastically declined (O’Brien, Jones, Sloan and Rustin, 2000). This study has drawn upon the research of Kinoshita (2009); and Skår and Krogh (2009), and reflects upon past studies of intergenerational play. This study is an Australian-based case study of the changing patterns of children’s capacity to play independently within their communities through investigating how contextual changes and parental attitudes have shaped children's play experiences, and how lived play experiences of children in the current generation compares and contrasts to previous generations. Based in Westleigh, New South Wales, this study is focused on the changes in play experienced by children during the past four decades. The unique nature of this site provides insights into the factors impacting independent play in the broader Australian context.
Image 4 Bridge over Zig Zag Creek
Chapter 1: The Study

Introduction

This project is an Australian-based ethnographic study, examining how children are engaging with play environments, especially beyond the home. This study will focus on the independent and environmental free play opportunities taken up by children between the ages of nine and twelve. This study seeks to understand the impact changing parental attitudes in Australia towards children’s independent mobility and play have on their lived experiences within their community, and the role these attitudes and perceptions have on the boundaries parents then place on children’s independent mobility (Rudner and Malone, 2011). This research builds on the previous intergenerational play studies by Isami Kinoshita (2011), and Margrete Skår and Erling Krogh (2009), and references Karen Malone’s methodological approaches (2011) in order to examine historical and current trends in children’s mobility and play experiences. Additionally, it will reflect on the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities framework (Driskell, 2002; Malone, 2006; Malone 2011) to determine how the interpretation of children’s rights to play have changed through time, and how respect for play is being expressed within this community.

By engaging children living within the community through child-focused research methodologies it is believed a more accurate and authentic understanding of the socio-cultural factors which are shaping suburban experiences of childhood will be achieved. By utilising a multifaceted research approach, this study seeks to examine multiple perspectives surrounding how independent play is viewed and valued within this community. As a retrospective, longitudinal assessment of how these views have changed, it is hoped that the resulting findings will be crucial for understanding and then shaping possibilities for more child-positive practices both within the local community and beyond.

There can be little doubt that the overall experience of childhood has dramatically shifted. Massive sociological shifts, such as resulted from 9/11 (Reed, 2015) cultural changes (Malone, 2007), and the rise of the Virtual world have all contributed to a fundamental shift in how children experience childhood. For many children today, particularly in Westernised societies, this has resulted in a drastic shift in how
children’s interactions are shaped, experienced and learned from. However, in Westleigh, NSW, these changes have, to an extent, been mitigated. Whilst subject to a number of the same cultural factors which have seen childhood reshaped, the unique nature of this suburb has facilitated a preservation of many of the values of childhood which are frequently expounded by adults as key to their own positive childhood memories.

In this study, the changes which have been experienced by the residents of Westleigh are explored, the how and why of changes in children’s ability to play and interact independently of their families in middle childhood is explored, and the systematic inequities and interactions which characterise this suburb are examined.

**Context of Study**

Situated approximately 21km north-west from the Sydney CBD, Westleigh is a vibrant, close knit community comprising 4481 residents, the majority (69.6%) of whom were born in Australia (Australia Bureau of Statistics, 2016). According to the 2011 Census (ABS, 2016), the focus community is comparatively stable compared to surrounding statistical areas, with approximately 74.6% of inhabitants residing in the area for more than five years.

The first inhabitants, the Dharug people, were actively using the lands in and around Westleigh for thousands of years before the arrival of the first fleet, as evidenced by the impressive rock carvings at the northern point of the suburb (Hornsby Shire Council, 2017)\(^1\). Following the arrival of the Europeans, the area first fell under the title of Patrick Duffy in 1830, for whom the main road, Duffy Avenue, out of the suburb was named. Orchards, horses and mining soon dominated the lands usage, lasting well into the twentieth century. It was not until the late 1960s that the area was opened up for suburban development to cope with the rapidly growing population of Northern Sydney. (Pollen, 1990).

\(^{1}\) Image one was taken 50m north of these carvings. The valley depicted follows local water flows north to the Hawkesbury River.
In terms of local infrastructure, the Westleigh Village provides a number of small shops which cater to everyday shopping, a local petrol station, and the 589 bus route. The little park, Ruddock Park and Oakleigh Oval offer dedicated play spaces, with Ruddock Park the most commonly used recreation space for the suburb. To the east of the suburb is the former Sydney Water Reservation, or “The Res”, which whilst still not officially opened to the public after its acquisition by Hornsby Council in 2015 (Brewster, 2016), is frequently accessed for bushwalking, biking and play.

Extensive further amenities are available to residents in the surrounding suburbs, accessible on the 587 bus service, which typically runs on an hourly basis through the suburb, and on to Hornsby, the regional centre. Similar to Horsley, Dapto (the focus of Malone’s study in 2011), geographical boundaries substantially impact on the area’s cohesion. Whilst there are a number of quiet streets connecting into the southern end of the suburb from neighbouring Thornleigh, the area is almost exclusively accessed by Duffy Avenue, which is then bisected by Quarter Sessions road, which runs north to south along the entirety of the suburb. The surrounding bushland of the Berowra Valley Regional National Park, Old Man’s Valley and Zig-Zag creek serve to separate the neighbourhood from the surrounding suburbs, thus providing a distinct population focus for this study.

The community itself displays a strong sense of unity, with the Westleigh Progress Association, which lobbies the Hornsby Shire Council for the improvement of facilities and infrastructure available to local residents (Westleigh Progress Association, 2017); Thornleigh Thunder, the local sporting team which has its home grounds at Ruddock Park and Oakleigh Oval, and for which the firm majority of locals play or support in a variety of capacities (Thornleigh Thunder FC, 2017); and Thornleigh West Public School, where the majority of local children attend, social events and extracurricular activities are run. Owing to the bushland setting, there is

2 Image 4 depicts the bridge over Zig Zag Creek, which acts as the southernmost foot access point to the suburb.

3 Image 16 shows the extensive banners which decorate Oakleigh Oval, the homeground for both Softball and Baseball.
additionally a highly active and involved Rural Fire Brigade branch, which not only engages in frequent fire hazard reduction operations, also seeks to engage with the community through participation at local fetes, community training, open days and, notably, The Christmas Santa Run (Westleigh RFS, 2014).

When meeting and talking to the residents of Westleigh, a deep, abiding love of their suburb, their strong sense of community, lifelong ties and interdependence were immediately apparent. These factors provided an excellent case study site for this project.

**Aims of the Study**

This study aims to create an in-depth understanding of how play is changing in Westleigh. By exploring the experiences of residents through time, the sociological factors which are impacting upon play should become apparent. By utilising Westleigh as a study site, it is presumed that the environmental stability will help to reduce the impact of such factors upon parenting attitudes and the overall experiences of children currently growing up in Westleigh, and, as such, assist in explaining how societal changes beyond the suburb are impacting on play in areas of high urban renewal.

**Research Questions and Purpose**

The key purpose of this study is to understand the play-based interactions with and within the suburb of Westleigh, and how it impacts upon the experiences of childhood for the children and their families who are living, or have lived in Westleigh. Owing to the unique social and geographic setting of Westleigh, examining how play has changed within the neighbourhood provides a window through which how broader social changes have unfolded in communities without the continuity this site provides.

As demonstrated by Kinoshita’s examination of the neighbourhood of Taishido district in Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, Japan (2009), changes within a child’s ecosystem, in the case of Tokyo, particularly as a result of rapid urbanization through the latter half of the twentieth century, there is a notable impact upon how children are able to
interact with their environment and community. Similar trends have been noted by Kytta (2004), However, in Westleigh, the built environment has remained relatively stable since the initial, rapid transformation of the site from rural to suburban in the late 1960s, with the key changes coming from the establishment of Settler’s Green in the mid-1980s, and a gradual process of urban renewal seeing some houses replaced with contemporary dwellings, or extended to suit the needs of current residents (Rowland, 2008). As such, this site-specific case study offers the opportunity to explore how socio-cultural changes have impacted on children’s experiences of play, and more broadly, on the experiences of families in general.

This research builds on the previous intergenerational play studies by Isami Kinoshita (2011), and Margrete Skår and Erling Krogh (2009), and references Malone’s methodological approaches (2011) in order to examine historical and current trends in children’s mobility and play experiences. Additionally, it will reflect on the UNICEF Child Friendly Cities framework (Driskell, 2002; Malone, 2006; Malone 2011) to determine how the interpretation of children’s rights to play have changed through time, and how respect for play is being expressed within this community.

The key question therefore this study has sought to answer has been:

1. How has play changed through time in Westleigh?

And secondary questions:

2. How has the location and engagement with varied play spaces changed through time?

3. Have parents’ attitudes towards facilitating or allowing independent, unstructured play and movement changed?

Using these questions to frame the study, the research explores through a deep, comprehensive portrait of how play has evolved alongside the changing physical and social environs of the suburb. how experiences of childhood in Westleigh have changed,
Image 5: Autumn colours, near Corang Rd
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The literature around play and independent movement is broad and varied. Discussed in fields as broad as Geography and Social Ecology, understanding the contextual groundings on which the earliest stages of human development occur has long been a key pursuit of academia. The contributions of these varied fields has led to a rich, vibrant discussion around the nature of childhood, and how cultures choose to contextualise, react and reshape their interactions with their youngest members. Understanding how these varied fields interact is an ongoing, key challenge for anyone seeking to explore the nature of children’s experiences of childhood. In a setting such as Westleigh in particular, the unique socio-spatial context lead to an extensive depth of investigation, particularly through the varied lenses provided by the current discourses.

Role of Play

Play is amongst the most fundamental of all animals behaviours, observed in a broad and diverse range of species. According to Burghardt (2014); “play is the repeated seemingly non-functional behaviour differing from more adaptive versions structurally, contextually or developmental and initiated when the animal (or human) is a relaxed, unstimulated or low-stress setting.”. Whilst this specific definition encompasses a broad conceptual framework within which play can be examined, as Pellegrini (2009) notes, there are nearly as many definitions for play as there are researchers who find themselves invested in the topic. For children, play provides the unparalleled opportunity to engage with new concepts and scenarios, to learn, develop and refine skills and create their own sense of identity. In short, without play, the human experience would be severely compromised.

In the twenty-first century, however, childhood and the experience of play has begun to shift (Malone, 2007). From the loss of viable play spaces (Kinoshita, 1985, 2009), to legal changes and time restrictions, opportunities to engage in independent, previous studies such as Bell, Thompson and Travou (2003) have demonstrated a
strong cultural shift in many western communities, which have seen opportunities to engage in unstructured play becoming increasing rare. For children today in western society the experiences of play which were available to previous generations appear to be stunted through these factors, and solutions are becoming more difficult in contemporary society as the complexity of cities environments increases (Bartlett, Hart, Satterthwaite, de la Barra, & Missair, 1999).

From an ecological perspective of human development, such as the one posited by historically influential play theorist Bronfrenbrenner (2001, 2009), the interplay between social, environmental, political and cultural factors significantly impact upon the patterns of growth and social adaptation for the individual. In contrast to other models, the ecological theory seeks to account for the interplay beyond the immediate home and familial environment when examining the factors which lead towards what are considered the most favourable of outcomes for the individual. As posited by Winnicott (1960, 1971) positive, highly engaging interactions with an individual’s physical and social spheres of influence as such are key to promoting competent well-regulated development for children. In the later iterations of this theoretical framework, the internal perceptions a child develops of themselves are further emphasised, suggesting a highly reactive feedback process for children’s holistic development (Rosa and Tudge, 2013;).

As such, when examining Schoeppe et. al (2015)’s review of the previous decade of studies on children’s independent mobility in Australian, which revealed that children’s independent mobility levels had declined significantly between the years of 1991-2012, the implications from an ecological perspective are significant. With independent mobility being a key indicator of a child’s ability to engage with and participate within their community, it raises major questions over how contemporary experiences of childhood are impacting on children achieving their full potential.

Further studies appear to reinforce this trend. Comparative to earlier generations, there are serious trends towards limiting the areas where children are able to engage in independent, unstructured play without oversight or interference from their adult guardians (Malone, 2007). Not only are the majority of children having their free time filled with scheduled, formal activities such as sports, music lessons and academic tutoring; when they do find themselves with unscheduled time, well into
the latter years of childhood the spaces they are permitted to spend these reprieves in are frequently limited to their own homes and immediate surroundings. Public spaces such as parks, reserves, streets and wild spaces are predominantly only accessible with the strict supervision of a guardian, if that access is granted at all. This lack of usage is, as a consequence, seeing spaces reduced, removed or repurposed away from child-centred amenities, thus further perpetuating the cycle of isolating children from their surroundings and communities.

As Valentine and McKendrick (1997) have noted, parental beliefs about their neighbourhood’s safety are amongst the predominant determining factors of children’s independent access to play spaces (Backett- Milburn and Harden 2004; Dias and Whitaker, 2013; Datar, Nicosia, and Shier, 2013; Holt, Lee, Millar and Spence, 2015) Whilst numerous causes have been attributed to this perceptual shift (Malone, 2007), these perceptions of extreme risk are often incongruous with the reality of the environment. These trends have furthermore demonstrated a tendency towards perpetuation through societal and governmental shifts (George, Schulte, 2015), which has resulted in a strong discord between dominant protectionist policies and so called ‘free-range’ parenting methodologies. This is further corroborated by Carver, Timpero and Crawford (2007), who additionally noted the complexity of factors, especially societal, impacting on parental decisions to facilitate independent play for their children, and a strong causal link between these perceptions of safety and how children are permitted to function beyond parental supervision. Backett-Milburn and Harden (2004) in particular examined the everyday negotiations around risk, safety and danger within families in a Scottish study, and noted the ‘dynamic, fluid and contingent nature of risk construction and reconstruction’. A Vichealth study in 2010 Nothing but fear itself – explored parents’ decision making processes regarding their child’s perceived safety in the environment. Significantly, it identified that 38% of parents agreed there was a high risk a child will be ‘abducted by a stranger’ if they move to and from places without supervision. A further 73% of respondents stated that their belief of ‘stranger danger’ presented the most significant barrier to their child’s physical activity in their community.

Whilst parents appear to be endeavouring to reduce the impact this play restriction has on their children’s motor and social skills through enrolment in a broad variety
of activities, such as organised, competitive sports (Hilgers, 2006), sometimes to extremes (Broinowski 2015); there is still strong evidence to support the need of children to engage in unstructured, independent play without parental intervention (Lillard, Lerner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith, and Palmquist, 2013; Bartanen and Littlefield, 2015). Lythcott-Haims, Lahey, and Kamenetz (2015) further warn of the longitudinal psychological impacts resonating into adolescence and adulthood, with higher rates of depression reported amongst participants whose independent movement was curtailed during childhood.

Risotto and Tonucci (2002) further demonstrated that a lack of interaction with a child’s environment results in lower immediate ability to function and navigate autonomously from their parents, decreased cognitive reasoning, and a reduced sense of confidence when interacting with their community. Whilst parental accompaniment did allow children to gain some contextual environmental knowledge, this was strongly shaped by an adult perspective and agenda, and did not account for children’s interests or needs from their environment.

When examining play retrospectively from a young adult’s perspective, Skar and Krogh (2009), determined that there appears to be an apparent shift in the value and modality of play which children are having the opportunity to engage in. It is suggested that some of the richness afforded by independent play is lost under the surveillance culture which is pervading contemporary children’s lives.

Unlike previous generations, a number of social frameworks to support independent play and movement have been eroded, and in some cases eradicated, both on a social level and a legislative level. Under NSW legislation, parental obligations of supervision have been extended well into middle childhood (Department of Education, 2017), sometimes with severe consequences for children’s independent play (Arlington, Stevenson, 2012).

In light of these factors reducing the engagement of children with independent play and their environment, understanding the full extent of this change comparative to previous generations will be key to rectifying the current trends, reengaging children with their communities and environment, and ensuring that they are able to gain the experiential knowledge to be fully engaged, responsible members of their communities.
Social Changes

Childhood, as a socially constructed phenomenon, is not a new concept (Buckingham, 2013). However, questions over the nature and value placed on childhood, and at times its very existence (Aries, 1962) have been key thematic ideas for researchers for many years. Understanding the changes from historical views of childhood and more contemporary models of childhood, and how the conceptual frameworks have functioned have been essential to ensuring that children’s rights, especially to engage in play are visibly debated and actualised in contemporary societies (Driskell, 2002; Gill 2007; 2011).

As Bronfrenbrenner (2007) notes, children growing up in western society does not occur within a vacuum, and is, by contrast, heavily influenced by the social, environmental and historical context the individual experiences throughout the course of their life. Winnicott (1974) historically also explored the idea of the transition between the family and the neighbourhood as a container a holding environment where children through play explored their sense of being and becoming a social, cultural and ecological being. “The holding environment” writes Cosco and Moore (2002, p. 55) “of the neighbourhood can be a nurturing space for expanding creativity and establishing a sense of belonging. It contains the products of the collective imagination – in other words, culture”. The richer and more diverse the neighbourhood play space as a holding space, the more potential there is for the child to explore and develop their own social, cultural and environmental identity (Cosco and Moore, 2002; Malone 2004; Hordyk et. al. 2014). Drawing on the theories of play espoused by Winnicott, Hordyk et. al (2014, p. 16) when studying the role of nature as a site for care in the lives of newly arrived refugees stated: “Children approach nature, not as an inanimate object, but as a dynamic relationship with whom they develop a direct attachment and within whose hold and containment they relate to self and others”.

This is particularly true during middle childhood (Garcia-Coll and Szalacha, 2007), where contextualisation of identity is highly dependent on the experienced sociocultural framework surrounding the individual. Additionally, the influence of historical paradigm shifts, such as 9/11 (Murphy, Woodhull, Post, Murphy-Post, Teeple and Anderson, 2006) contribute to altering the psychological, physical,
cultural and political landscape that both children and adults must navigate when determining the boundaries within which children are able to play and develop into self-sufficient members of society.

As The Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (2011) have demonstrated through their National Safe Schools Framework, an increased emphasis on safety and security has taken precedence over policies which provide opportunities for children to engage in experiential learning with any kind of associated risk, as demonstrated with informal learning environments. This policy decisions remove opportunities with informal educational settings for children to learn their limits, build trust and social cohesion within their social networks, and overly restrict the decision-making capabilities of these children.

Comparative to earlier generations, there are serious trends towards limiting the areas where children are able to engage in independent, unstructured play without oversight or interference from their adult guardians (Malone, 2007). Not only are the majority of children having their free time filled with scheduled, formal activities such as sports, music lessons and academic tutoring; when they do find themselves with unscheduled time, well into the latter years of childhood the spaces they are permitted to spend these reprieves in are frequently limited to their own homes and immediate surroundings. As Schoeppe et. al. (2015) determined, the twenty years to 2012 saw a drastic decline in independent mobility, a key indicator of access to independent play, throughout Australian society. Public spaces such as parks, reserves, streets and wild spaces are predominantly only accessible with the strict supervision of a guardian, if that access is granted at all. This lack of usage is, as a consequence, seeing spaces reduced, removed or repurposed away from child-centred amenities, thus further perpetuating the cycle of isolating children from their surroundings and communities.

Recent generations, however, have seen a shift in the modes of play that children are able to engage in, and a strong restriction comparative to previous generations (Malone, 2007; Louv 2008). Protectivist philosophies in childrearing, pressures on parents to conform to the current cultural paradigms and genuinely held fears for their children’s welfare have led to a strong curtailing of the freedoms which children are permitted. Even during supervised play (Tranter and Malone, 2002), adults
appear to demonstrate a strong reluctance to allow children to fully engage with their environment, citing maintenance, safety, conformity and obedience as justification for enforcing restrictions in excess of those placed upon previous generations. Rudner (2012, p. 3) in her recent research with parents stated: “Parental anxiety about what might happen if children go out by themselves, and the impacts on parents if something bad happens, is one of the most significant factors that impact on CIM”.

However, whilst societal changes have been one of the major factors in reducing the freedoms children are afforded to engage in play, changes in the environment itself are further limiting the spaces children are able to access. Kinoshita’s intergenerational study to changes in play in Tokyo, Japan observed the role of rapid urbanisation in restricting play inhabitants for children (2011). However, in contrast to Western societal responses, as Kitamura, Uji, Chen, Murakami and Goto (2014) note, in Japanese families there is a consistent, intergenerational modality to parenting decisions, and resulting perceptions of childhood freedoms, as such, have not been liable to the same erosions as those in most western nations. Michael Moore (2016), observed that Finnish schools had an almost contrary approach towards children to those in the United States and Australia. With formal tuition hours drastically lower than anywhere else, Finland consistently ranks amongst the top performing nations for educational achievement on the planet, and independent play is considered an integral piece of their experience of childhood. The philosophical approach expressed by Finnish Minister for Education Krista Kiuru championed the rights of children to be children, “They should have more time to be kids-to be youngsters, to enjoy their lives.”

One of the key influences on children’s autonomy is a perception of risk. As Carver, Timperio and Crawford (2007) note, a perception of risk discerned by a parent or guardian is among the largest indicators of the level of independent movement a child will be permitted to engage in. In neighbourhoods where parents conceptualisation of risk factors such as strangers, traffic and physical risks is higher, so too is the level of restriction placed upon children, as well as the age to which such limits are imposed. Morrongiolo and Dawber (1999) further note the role the child’s gender plays in facilitating behaviours which may be perceived as risky. Even
amongst toddlers and early learners, Morrongiello and Dawber observed that gender biases were already apparent in the manner parents coached their children through physically challenging tasks. Longitudinally, this results in greater aversion to risk taking behaviours.

Malone (2007) notes, the roles children take in childhood have altered drastically during recent years. Compared to previous generations, who were given at least some leeway in terms of finding their own amusement, overall the independence afforded to children during their parents’ upbringing is, for many children today, an abstract, unknown concept. Busy scheduling, a fear of criminal intent towards children in spite of drastically reducing crime rates and a sense of disconnect from the communities which previously afforded some measure of safety for unsupervised children have all lead to an overall serious decline in the freedoms which children have been afforded, especially in regards to their free, unsupervised play.

In terms of emergent independence, the interconnection between these sociological shifts and the spaces which children are able to access is profound. In Valentine and McKendrick (1997), the role of parents’ sense of security in affording children access to play spaces is noted as a key factor in determining the functional relationship children are permitted to have with the environment surrounding them. Veitch, Bagley, Ball and Salmon (2005) further determined that it is more the parental perception of safety within a space which facilitates these relationships. Social perceptions of risk taking behaviours, both on the part of parents and children further constrain the viable space available for children to play within. These social boundaries manifest in derisive commentary on the part of other parents within the community, and thus further reinforce restrictions based on perceived risk. This is further exacerbated by Morrongiello and Dawber (1999), whose study into risk taking behaviours in early childhood found that parents’ perception of risk had a significant impact, through their verbal and non-verbal cues, on the confidence of their children to undertake more risky, potentially rewarding behaviours within their study. Additional differences were noted in regards to the children’s gender, posing an even greater perception of excessive risk in female participants over male children within the study. This has been supported by Rudner’s research (2012, p 48) where she stated:
Risk as a dynamic relationship recognises that children’s intent to use their environments successfully, and parents’ ability to help children successfully use their environments occurs within a stream of action and is contingent on a variety of factors. These factors include what the environment offers, children’s experiences, capabilities and desired uses, valuing of tradeoffs, and how these factors change over time as children grow and develop.

Matthews, Limb and Taylor (in Holloway, Valentine, 2004) also posit that this perception of risk assists in perpetuating a cycle of exclusion for youth from many public spaces. Whilst younger children are restricted due to a perception of danger, older children are also ostracised from utilising spaces which society has deemed to be under the auspices of the adult sphere, and are, instead, painted as a source of social discord and possible anarchy. The authors in this case raise highly valid questions on the reasoning behind restricting the spaces, and thus the opportunities afforded to children and youths to engage in play and meaningful social interactions on their own terms. As a result of these societal pressures, the authors note a substantive, but not universal withdrawal of young people from the public environment, and into indoors environments, which are likely to provide fewer opportunities for children to engage in physically and mentally demanding activities. As a result, these children are restricted from connection to ‘lived spaces’, within which many social practices are developed, practised and refined. When children are able to congregate, and collaborate, their own perceptions of risk within an environment were greatly reduced, with many environments which children alone perceived as unsafe becoming safer with the increased usage by a similar cohort. However, it was also noted that these environments were often perceived as less than optimal by their users, yet among the few spaces left where children are able to exist independently of their guardians without reproach from other members of the broader community. Aziz and Said (2012), in their systematic review, further correlated these perceptions of risk and constraint amongst parents and caregivers, and for children themselves. As an alternative, Morris, Williams and Fleuriot (2004) posit that technological advances may assist children in reclaiming a right to these spaces, in part by reducing the perceived risks their guardians believe come with such access. However, these assurances do not restore a right of access, especially in light of greater societal pressures.
The consequences of such aversive behaviours are profound. As George and Schult (2015) observe, the sociological ramifications are extreme. From a culture where children were able to participate, move freely throughout the course of their day between both structured and unstructured pursuits, to a culture where prosecution for permitting children those very freedoms, the lack of trust placed in children impacts physically, cognitively and socially. The unrealistic idea that, upon reaching adolescence, children will suddenly acquire these skills without the foundations built upon through the independent play which, for so many versions of childhood has been a keystone in how children function and integrate into their societies is a highly dangerous one, and one which needs to be swiftly rectified.

So what does this mean for children today? As Malone (2007) notes, regardless of what parents may wish, children’s lives are becoming increasingly regulated. As such, the childhood children today are experiencing is shifting drastically away from that of their parents. Whilst some of these shifts towards a more digitally centred, supervised paradigm reflect the realities of the world children will come to inhabit (Mitra, 2009), the lived, real world experiences which are key to ensuring children physically, mentally and socially are able to function within their societies (Berk, 2008). Whilst childhood is a dynamic, socially responsive phenomenon, it is essential to understand the consequences of its current shifts on the ability of today’s children to become independent, capable adults. Malone et. al. (2014) state in their recent report “Over the past decade, there has been a growing consensus that children’s active play opportunities are declining, particularly in modern industrialized contexts” and that “children’s declining physical activity levels in a variety of community contexts is a significant public health concern” (p. 5).

**Forms of Play**

Even before the contemporary discourse surrounding play, notably commencing with Huizinga (ed. 2014), the discussion around the classification and observation of various modalities of play has been raging fiercely. Evidence of a deep need to understand the functional aspects of play can be traced back as far as Ancient Greece, and across disciplines as broad and biology and psychology. According to Malone et. al. (2014), “effective play opportunities can: promote the development of friendships; allow children to take risks, have adventures and misadventures; facilitate contact
with nature and the environment; and allow children to experience a range of emotions” (p. 4).

This framework, initially posited by Caillois (1961), provides a key pedagogical tool for understanding the functions, forms and forces of play. Expanding on the initial, pre-second World War work of Huizinga, Caillois’ seeks to further understand the systemic underpinnings of play, the functional aspects which separate playful activity from that of work, even when two individuals may be engaged in the same task. His questioning of the enjoyment involved provides a clear delineation of the line between “playful” and “work-full” activities. In this space between work and rest, humans are able to find a unique sense of wonder, something which, despite society’s best efforts, does not completely disappear with the passage into adulthood, however, does become more neglected the further the individual advances through the typical stages of life (Woodyer, 2012).

For children today, however, the range of playful activities frequently suffers from a bias with organised play and structured games and activities dominating their schedules (Malone, 2007). Whilst this veritable smorgasboard of options offered up to children to fill their afternoons, fulfil the social requirements placed upon their parents, and amuse their young attendees, all too frequently the processes involved in such activities cease to be “Play”, and instead become “Work.” With many of the structured ‘play’ activities involving organised sports, this abrupt, dissonant transition from playing to work is of particular note due to its impacts, both immediate and longitudinal, and repercussions for the other players involved. Beilock and Carr (2001) note that, particularly in highly competitive sport settings, this transition from playing to working is a major indicator of choking under the pressure, a disrupted relationship with the play scenario, and, for the head fakes which are generally one of the key reasons children are into organised sports (Pausch, 2009), a lost opportunity to gain and refine the social, cognitive and emotional lessons which come from such scenarios.

Whilst free play does involve a sense of risk, however, the boundary between work and play is far broader than that between ludic play and work. In free play, the risks of experimentation are drastically minimised, however, almost counter-intuitively, the rewards for engaging in reasonable risk-taking behaviours are maximised.
(Pellegrini, 2009). In these play scenarios, the roles which children assume have a flexibility which belies the importance of the task children are engaged in.

As Adiv (2015) notes, one of the key influences of the types of play which children engage in is the spaces that are available to facilitate behaviours. Parks, for instance, can through their choice of provided equipment drastically change the play scenarios available to its users. Prescriptive equipment, which leaves little room for imaginative expansion, has specific functional attributes, or has a codified purpose within the space will, by their very nature reduce or remove the opportunities to engage in free imaginative play. By the same token, a play space with an abundance of natural resources which children can interact with readily opens up the path to deep, engaging free play (Hume, Salmon & Ball, 2004; Veitch, Bagley, Ball & Salmon, 2005; Lillard, Learner, Hopkins, Dore, Smith & Palmquist (2013).

*Image 6: The Bush Near Duneba Drive*
The Environment as ‘Play’ Place

In Westleigh, the environment is a key presence. Surrounded by bush, and connected to the surrounding suburbs predominantly only through Duffy Avenue, how the surrounding geological and ecological systems interact are key determinants in play and life in general for the residents of this suburb. Owing to the complexity of both the geological and ecological systems surrounding the suburb, the setting of this suburb lends a truly unique perspective to those who live there (Chapin, Matson and Vitousek (2012). From a geological perspective, Westleigh is perched on a ridge line protruding into Old Man’s Valley. Evidence of the volcanic processes which helped to shape the land are still evident in the rock strata today, and provided some of the initial incentives for Colonists to begin expansion into the area, with quarries established both to the north and south of where Westleigh currently sits. Currently, the area between Westleigh and Hornsby, whilst under redevelopment at the former Quarry site, is also a major point of interest for the Australian Geological Society, who are headquartered in the adjacent suburb, with the Diatreme left from the Maar Volcano which, during the Jurassic period, was responsible for the majority of geological formations within the area proving contentious in the face of further urbanisation of the area, and remedial works currently being undertaken by the council in conjunction with the NSW State Government (Gladstone, 2017). Compared to other suburbs in the Sydney Metropolitan region, this setting also reduces the intensity of meteorological events which originate over the Cumberland Plain, as the Ridge line of the Hornsby Plateau functions as a natural buffer. By contrast, however, these geological formations impact negatively during fire weather, and whilst there has yet to be a major fire event impacting the area (Although the 1997 bush fires which came through the Lane Cove National Park on the other side of Pennant Hills Road did pose a major risk to the area, which luckily did not eventuate during that event). As Smith and Smith (2008) note, the ecological setting of Westleigh is highly diverse, unique, and specialised. Whilst the Sydney region boasts

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4 The autumn colours as shown in image 5 are notably influenced by the meteorological patterns of the area. When this photograph was taken in 2017, the change in deciduous trees was notably later than in other years.
a biodiversity higher than that of the entire United Kingdom, Westleigh in particular is home to some of the last stands of Blue Gum Diatreme Forest\(^5\), which is recognised as critically endangered, and subject to protection and conservation efforts in order to preserve it. This setting also provides habitats for a broad variety of fauna. Of particular note is the prevalence of more dangerous animals such as red belly black snakes, and a wide variety of poisonous spiders. However, the presence of human development itself has altered and transformed how the ecosystem interacts, as noted by Clements (1983), and Buchannan and Humphreys (1980).

In such a dramatic environmental setting, as McLoughlin (1997) notes, the interactions between the natural environment and the anthropocentric is in a constant state of flux. Matthews (1992) explains that, particularly for children the interactions that they have with their environment are a key force in forming their sense of identity and self. Some of the earliest relationships children from beyond their immediate familial groups are with their environment, and the importance of children in establishing their place within these frames of reference is a predominant indicator of ongoing security in place. When communities work to foster these relationships, the overall experience of childhood for the children involved is greatly enhanced, their ability to move within and interact with their environment is improved, and, longitudinally, their ability to move beyond the familiar and cope is enshrined into their personal conceptual framework.

There is much that children can learn from their environment, as Reynolds (2009) explains. When children are facilitated on how to interact and learn from the natural environment around them, and, as is the case in Westleigh in particular, are able to interact with the relics of first nation people who have previously inhabited the land, the visceral nature of the learning undertaken ensures that the experiences stay with their children more so than those which are recounted or removed from the immediate reality experienced. Malone (2016, p. 3) writing on her own study of children in a suburban site in Sydney states “places shape children and children

\(^5\) As photographed in image 2, which depicts one of the many Sydney Blue Gums which populate the area.
shape places” and that “the experience of place cannot be separated from the person who lives in it” (Raittila 2012, p. 272). Building on a raft of literature that supports the view that place based play encourages children’s environmental learning (Kytta 2006, Chawla, 2007) Malone (2016, p. 5) states: “research on children’s place encounters has shown that regardless of specific cultural nuances, the type, quality, and diversity of the place within which a child lives has a direct effect on the child’s life experiences”. Malone also noted: “research has shown that local neighborhoods and villages, outside or within a city environment, are important places for children to develop their emerging ecological selves” (p. 6) and that these life experiences can have significant impact on their sense of their an ecological identity as they become adults (Chawla 2007).

Uzzell (1999) has also argued, in relation to children and their village or neighbourhood environment, that it is helpful to consider the idea of territoriality when describing children’s place encounters. Territoriality, according to Malone (2016, p. 5) relates to the ways children with other ‘nonhuman’ elements encounter an environment, “how they organize themselves in relation to place, and how they come to give meaning through attachment to a place”. There has been strong association in the literature that coming to be attached to a place, knowing it well and how the social dynamics of a place is used, managed and ordered socially and ecologically provides security and can mean a mere ‘place to play’ can become a safe space for children to be alone or with others. Scannell and Gifford (2014, p. 26) have written: “places to which one is attached are often a safe haven where one can retreat from threats, engage in problem-solving, and gain emotional relief.”
Image 7: Pirate Adventure Play Equipment, Ruddock Park
Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

Despite its relatively short history, the residents of this suburb have demonstrated a strong sense of identity, belonging and community which is unique, particularly within the contemporary Australian context. In order to accurately portray the experiences of belonging within this unique setting, key factors included ensuring the voice of the residents both past and present, an in-depth understanding of both the historical and contemporary forces which have shaped the neighbourhood and the challenges which extend to their future needed to be considered. Therefore, when deciding upon a methodological approach for examining the community of Westleigh, it was apparent a qualitative approach would be the most useful to understand the rich depth of this community.

Methodology

This research study is designed from a subjective epistemology where knowledge is viewed as something interpreted by individuals (Tuck and McKenzie 2014). It comes from a post positivist, qualitative research paradigm, where the researcher and the research participants engage in making sense of the world through an exchange of their experiences and encounters. To be consistent with this paradigm an interpretive/ethnographic place-based methodology is a logical fit.

Utilising a place-based methodological approach, as suggested by Tuck and McKenzie (2014), this ethnographic study will focus on children aged 9-12 years living in, playing and understanding their world in Westleigh, NSW, Australia over two generations. Echoing previous studies by Isami Kinoshita (2011) of generational changes in play for children living in Taishido District, Tokyo, Japan; and Margrete Skår & Erling Krogh’s retrospective investigation of Brumunddalen, Norway (2009), this study seeks to use a variety of collaborative research practices to understand how play is changing within an Australian Suburban context. Through this qualitative research paradigm, it is expected that the longitudinal impacts of societal shifts in attitudes, and the resulting impacts on childhood autonomy will be exposed. This
The study will be a collaborative research design with children viewed as participants and co-researchers rather than objects or subjects of the study. As Danby and Farrell (2004) note, child centric research of or about children (in contrast to research with children) often results in inauthentic, disingenuous perceptions of children and their roles within their communities.

However, when children are partners in research, and are perceived as genuine contributors, resulting findings are more genuine, and children are empowered as competent, full members of their community and society. By partnering with the community, it is expected that the resulting findings will more genuinely reflect the changes, challenges, needs and rights of children within their community, and furthermore strongly encourage governmental bodies to act more fully in the interests of our youngest citizens (Malone and Hartung 2010). While this was an aspiration of the researcher going into the study, it was found that engaging with children in an informal setting like a neighbourhood was more difficult than expected and therefore their role in the research was less active than had been hoped for. This issue of representation is discussed further in the section on ethical consideration.

**Research Design**

Between the initial proposal for this study and its implementation, a number of changes have occurred to the research design. However, owing to the already rich and insightful observations of the interviewees, these additional data sets were determined to be superfluous to the requirements of the study.

Participants were divided into four separate groups: Current Parents (CP), Current Children (CC), Historical Parents (HP), and Historical Children (HC). Overwhelmingly, Current Parents and Historical Children comprised the majority of the respondents. No Current Children chose to participate in the project, however, it is hoped that future continuations of this study may be able to overcome this imbalance. The initial point of access for most participants were the online social networks “Thornleigh, Westleigh and Normanhurst Parents”, And “You Know You Grew Up in Hornsby When...”.
After approval was granted from the Ethics committee, calls for participants were placed in a number of local Facebook groups, advertisements placed in the local shopping centres, and a recruitment ad was run in the Thornleigh West Public School newsletter. Whilst there were a few initial successes through more formal requests, the majority of participants agreed when informally asked. During a number of the interviews, it was noted that formality in such a tight knit community may have initially acted as a deterrent. Word of mouth amongst social groups also acted as a vector for recruitment.

It would be difficult not to note the role of the communal ties of Westleigh in this study. Whilst many of the respondents were recruited through an online website, a number were recommended by their friends, and agreed to participate alongside or following other members in their community. These ties were evident throughout the interviews, with mutual acquaintances consistently coming up throughout the process. The impact of these ties on the over efficacy of the study is incalculable.

The website (www.bushtracksandbackyards.weebly.com) was established to host the information forms, and to appraise potential participants of the purpose of the study. From this website, potential recruits were directed to complete a recruitment through Survey Gizmo. The purpose of this survey was twofold: first, to screen appropriate candidates for the study and filter those who were appropriate into their respective categories, and secondly as a source of additional background data about the participants.

**Interviews**

For those who were able to participate in the study, a mutually agreeable time was agreed upon, and location. The Cafe n’ More at Westleigh, and Java Lava Pennant Hills served as the venue for the majority of the interviews, though a number occurred in the homes of participants throughout Westleigh and the greater Sydney Region at their request. Interviews were dually recorded on both the researcher’s iPhone, and on an additional iPad to account for any technical disruptions. The software Recordium, and the Built-In Voice Recorder were utilised in this case.

A printed map from Google Maps was presented to the participants, who were asked to notate the areas that parents prescribed for independent play and movement, the
area which children actually used, areas of interest or irregular interaction, and areas which were unappealing for children to interact with.

A brief paper survey targeted to each group was then filled in by participants, covering reasoning, movement and perceptions of the neighbourhood. The interviewer provided further guidance as requested by the participants. Frequently, interviewees provided additional information verbally, which was captured by the recordings.

In the semi-structured interview, all participants were questioned about their perceptions of their interactions with the space and people of their community, and perceived reasoning behind permitting or restricting independent play and movement. Current parents were additionally questioned on whether they grew up “locally”. A copy of the interview protocols is provided in the appendices.

**Mapping**

During the interview process, participants were asked to notate a map of the suburb taken from Google Maps (Google, 2017). This, and their comments during the interviews provided key insights into how children’s interactions with the neighbourhood change both from family to family, and through time. The maps were then copied into Photoshop, where the layers of where children were allowed to go were added into a composite map. Each participant’s response was given its own layer. Firstly, the composite of all ranges was exported, and then each separate layer. These separate images were then imported into Make The Cut (Make the Cut, LLC, 2015), which allowed for the ranges of play to be cut from transparencies and physically layered to demonstrate how children’s interactions with their environment have changed.

**Data Collation & Analysis**

All data was collated to ensure that the integrity of the two different generational cohorts was established. Interviews were transcribed, and encoded in preparation for analysis. The analysis was conducted using an open ended thematic approach that allowed for patterns of similarities and differences to be identified, then the next stpe
was to compare key themes that were present or not with between those generated through the data and the extant literature of the field. Additional interpretive and visual analysis was also undertaken, to further understand the sociological and ecological context of the interviewee’s experiences. Of particular note was experiential patterns, perceptions of safety and community and ideas towards improving independent movement for children. The ranges of the two different generations were then relayed on the neighbourhood maps and compared to determine longitudinal changes in average roaming ranges through time.

**Ethical Considerations**

Before commencing recording, all participants were asked for their permission for their interview to be recorded. Participants were first asked to read and complete a consent form. Verbal consent was then additionally confirmed for the recordings to ensure that the data would remain uncompromised. The open nature of the interviews and the community base for the study were possibility reasons why children (mostly under the guide of parents) weren’t actively supported or interested to participate. It was noted that although children were present during parents interviews and parents felt they would speak on behalf of their children, this is less than ideal in a project that valued children’s voices. The ethics of children’s authentic participation therefore did come in to play and due to the strict short timelines for this study, the study could not be extended in order to develop a stronger rapport and build opportunities for further child participation. This would be an area to be explored in further studies in the future.
Image 8: The Dip in Quarter Sessions Road, Which Links Northern and Southern Westleigh
Chapter 4: Research Results

Introduction

Throughout the data collection process of this study, the role of the residents has been immeasurable. In initial synthesis of these results, more traditional methodological approaches to the data were applied, however, these did not truly reflect the scope and richness of the experiences this community conveyed in regards to the experiential engagement with play and being a child within this context. As such, the approach for conveying the results of this study did seek to reflect and respect how the residents of Westleigh as children and parents have engaged with, monitored and or evaluated the value of children’s independent play within the neighbourhood. The first group interviewed were the Contemporary Residents, who currently have a child or children aged between nine and twelve years of age and are presently living within Westleigh (for the purpose of this study defined as the area west of the Esplanade, and north of Goodlands Avenue). The years quoted on the following refer to the year of the child’s tenth birthday. These interviews were conducted in a variety of locations, notably the Cafe N’ More in the Westleigh Village arcade, Java Lava Pennant Hills, and in a number of private dwellings.

Similar locations were utilised for the Historical Residents, a number of whom have moved out of area, and one interview conducted through video messaging. These residents either grew up or raised their children in Westleigh, spanning from the 70s up until 2007.

All interviews were recorded in duplicate, and formed the basis of the following contextual narratives, which endeavour to convey the depth of the lives and experiences conveyed throughout the interview process. Where necessary, quotes have been edited for clarity.
Historical Generation

The Children

1980- Tim

Navigating the inner city is baffling, the terrace houses beautiful in their own right, but their neat, uniform facades stand as a far cry from the mish-mash (pastiche?) of styles of outer suburbia. The cars bunch up next to each other, barely allowing a hair to pass between each bumper as every inch of valuable space is utilised.

“The streets of Westleigh were a bit dull.” Tim says with a shrug, “You knew that nothing weird was going to come around the corner.”

After a childhood spent roaming the bush, the fondness for Westleigh remains evident, “The most fun were the bits of bush behind my house—There were creeks and rocks and caves quite high up...vines and all kinds of interesting things that came out after it rains. In another cul-de-sac, there was the entrance to the fire trail, and that fire trail led to the Quarry. It was a bit of a walk from our place, but it was something we’d do on the weekend. I used to like exploring the shops- there were all the nooks and crannies, and the garage- wasn’t supposed to go there, but it was really interesting.”

Throughout Tim’s childhood, the Reserve was still controlled by the water board, “It was a bit of a no-man’s land, really. Though the older kids I think used to sneak in there. There was also a pound- I don’t know if I’m remembering that right? Strange how memories of childhood are coloured.”

The boundaries his parents placed on his play were minimal; “Westleigh was mostly built at the same time, so all the families moved in at the same time. I think they felt secure in knowing that because Westleigh was all built around the same time, all the parents were very similar- it was a very homogenous culture”.

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6 Image 6 shows the bush near where Tim spent his childhood.
“So what made you decide to leave Westleigh?”

He pauses, hands wrapping around the mug, “By the time I was finished with my university degree, I was spending every weekend I could in town, so as soon as I landed my first job, I was out, and stayed here ever since. It’s the lure of the inner city having so much more than Westleigh- especially for a young man. If we were ever to move now, it would probably be to the blue mountains, or back to Westleigh. There are some things I wish my children could do here, but they’re having a different childhood to mine, and that’s okay. ”

1984- Gwen

“My husband grew up around here. In some ways it’s very similar to Westleigh- people don’t really leave.”

The house overlooks the water, the narrow streets a far cry from the wide boulevards of Gwen’s childhood neighbourhood. Whilst not close as close a community as Westleigh, it is easy to see why they chose to raise their children in this setting. Like her sister, her life pulled her beyond the borders that defined her childhood, yet the bonds to the friends of her youth remain strong.

“Did Anna tell you we’re having a reunion in a few months?” She asks, “We’re meeting up in Brisbane and heading on a cruise. I still consider them to be among my closest friends. Unconditional. No matter where I am in the world, I know I could call on them. To this day, the parents of the people next door are still my parents’ best friends-those kind of relationships.”

The cream bun is sugary sweet, and quickly doled out, “Birthdays used to be really special. You always knew it would be celebrated when you got home from school- we used to have a cake out of the Women’s Weekly Cake Book on our birthdays. ” “All I remember from my childhood is playing.” She recalls, returning her plate to the massive table, “We were just expected to go outside and play- my children’s

注 7: Gwen and her friends, late 1970s

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childhood is nothing like mine, because there’s no unstructured play. When I was a kid, there was no telling how the day would unfold- someone would get a new toy, or someone would want to play.”

“The cul-de-sac was our main play area. That and the bushland behind it. It was awesome-it was all natural, the quality was fantastic, and we could just...use our imagination. Mum would co-eee, and we’d have to be able to hear her to know when it was time to come home.

“We learnt so many lessons from a physics perspective- how to stop ourselves before we smashed into the wall. Two kids broke their arms on our trampoline...We’d turn everything into a slip n’ slide. We’d ride a Barbie Campervan down the hill, and we’d put a stack of cardboard boxes at the bottom, and that’s how we’d stop our fall-crashing into a pile of boxes.

“We’d peel the moss off the rocks to make carpet, and we’d spend the entire day clearing leaves in the bush, and marking out these intricate houses. It didn’t matter what time of day, there was always someone around who would come and play with you. There was none of this arranging a play date like there is today, it was just walk out into the middle of the street, and someone would come out to join you.

“There was something special about it- just being part of a group, that sense of belonging- of being part of a group.”

1986- Anna

“When I was ten, this small corner of Westleigh was my whole world.”

As a child growing up in the heyday of suburbia, Anna’s family moved into their home right in the midst of the population boom of the suburb in the mid-seventies. She was the second youngest of the kids in the street- a close knit group of six girls and three boys, spread between the families of one of the many cul-de-sacs which were purposefully scattered throughout Westleigh. As was typical in the neighbourhood during the eighties, without fences the children were able to roam freely out into the scrub behind their homes.
“The things I remember the most are playing in the bush- I remember making a bush swing, where we would jump off the ledge of a rock and swing in a tree- I can’t believe looking back now we didn’t get badly hurt!” she exclaims, “I think the bush was the most special place for us when we were growing up. The places in the bush all had names...after Star Wars. There was Yoda falls, Leia’s Log... We did tend to go down to the school and the quarry as a group. There was a waterfall and a water pond down the bush track where we liked going. I remember the Aboriginal Carvings...they were a special place.”

“If we had our parents’ permission, there were quite a few things we were able to do.” She explains further, “We could walk to the shops, up to Ruddock Park-I’m a bit of a rule stickler, so I stuck to where they said.”

“When I chose a place for my family to grow up, I wanted a suburb like Westleigh-one road in, and one road out.” Anna explains, “By the time we got a bit older, I can remember being a bit more frustrated, but there’s nothing I’d really change about my childhood.”
Image 9; Supplied, Children of the late 70s, Playing in Their Cul-De-Sac
The Parents

1986- Jackie

The image is slightly pixellated on the screen, the internet connection not quite as stable as it could be, but luckily the audio is coming through loud and clear. For thirty-nine and a half years, the Weavers called a small cul-de-sac backing onto the bush home, but now, their children well and truly grown, warmer climes have called. Handed over to new owners, the old house is being thoroughly renovated, fencing and supplies carpeting the front yard in ambitious goals to reduce the toll of forty years’ worth of children scrambling through the hallways has wrecked upon the building.

“We all moved in around the same time- Two families one weekend, the other two the next.” She notes, leaning back in her chair a thousand miles away, “In many ways we were quite lucky.”

There is a strong sense of pride in her eyes when she talks about her children, “They were all right. Not as much trouble as they could have been, and nor were the other kids. Where we were, they had the bush, and the streets and each other.”

When asked about letting her children going off unsupervised, she laughs, a deep, resonant sound, “They might think they were unsupervised, but they never were. There was always one of us keeping an eye on them, despite what they might believe to be true.”

“We were all so close. I suppose-as the girls would have told you, we were on our own-all of us. No one had any other family to call on, so we sort of became each others’ families.”

There are recollections of Christmases spent with the other families in the street, Christmas presents carefully coordinated to avoid the slightest hint of jealousy, of the mothers helping each other out, of keeping a constant, wary eye on the gaggle of children lucky enough to call their tiny pocket home. The kind of friendships many people can only dream about, and a loyalty which went beyond the boundaries of a conventional neighbourhood.
Almost in an echo of when they first arrived, the four families have slowly left, a new generation taking their place. “When we finally went, it was because our world was changing. It was time to go.”

1991- Maggie and James

For James and Maggie, whose six children were all raised in the suburb, the community that Westleigh provides has been a central part of their lives; “It’s like a peninsular into the bush, a little village. It’s a really safe area. People walking down the street when you’re working in the garden, they’ll say hi.”

“For me,” Maggie recalls, “I came to the area in 1976. My ex and I were looking for a block of lands, and a relative saw an ad from the Lands Department and they were balloting blocks, so we came up to have a look, found the one we wanted, and went to the Lands Department. The block of land we wanted went fifteen minutes before we got there, so we came back, and found our block of land. When we separated, it was the other parents-the other mums around here who got me through and invited me to their softball team.”

James nods, “For me it was value for money. Where I was before, the houses were small, and up here you could get a four bedroom with a pool for the same money. Up here everyone could have a their own space.”

Having been such an involved part of the community for so long, they have seen both the best and the worst of the neighbourhood; “I can remember this boy- he was at Penno. One day he’d missed the bus to school, and decided to cut through the bush and the quarry, and he fell off a cliff and died.”

“Although we warned them off the quarry, we weren’t overly concerned about safety- kids either caught the bus or walked.” Maggie agrees, “The kids would often go out on a bushwalk, just grab a group of friends and go. They made their own fun- went to friends’ houses, to the park, rode their bikes.”

8 Image 3 taken on Quarter Sessions Road, area predominantly part of this land release.
James nods, “there’s plenty of amenities- ball parks, playgrounds.”

“We basically knew where they were. There was always a big group of them. If a kid did something wrong, it would come back to their parents very quickly.”

“There were always plenty of kids around-it was idyllic.”

Having been heavily involved with Thornleigh sports teams for as long as they’ve been in the area, both extremely proud of the local team; “if anybody’s going to play sport in the Westleigh area, they’re going to play for Thornleigh Thunder.”

“All of our kids grew up playing soccer, then soccer and baseball.” Maggie says fondly, “We’ve got lifelong friends from our kids playing sport.”

James pauses, noting, “Some kids can’t handle it, and some parents can’t handle it. The kids from school are the same kids you see later for practise, and for some families it’s just too much, and they end up going out of area for school or sport, just to be away from it.”

“Everybody knows everything about everybody.” Maggie summarises, “But our grandkids, some of them live out of area, and they still make the trek back here to play for Thornleigh Thunder. Their mum is still heavily involved in the club even though she’s moved away.”

“One of the other kids moved back in, because where she was didn’t have the same feel as here, and she wanted that for her children growing up. I know, though, that my two grandkids are far more supervised than they were.”

2007-Catherine

“We lived in a cul-de-sac, and bike wheels went spinning up and down.” Catherine chuckles as she pours the tea. A rare moment of calm in a hectic schedule, the steaming pot is most gratefully appreciated. Their street, like many in the southern end of the suburb has just begun to see many of the elderly residents moving on, and new, younger families moving in. With her two children now young adults, the change from when she was raising her own children is stark, “When they were young, they were youngest in the street. Now they’re the eldest, as we’ve had a turnover in the area.”
“I’d take them to Ruddock—it wasn’t anywhere near as well equipped back then. My daughter used to get eaten by mosquitoes, and at the park—because she’s just so fair—she’d get sunburnt. The shade coverage back then was non-existent.”

We were so busy that there just wasn’t the time in the day to do much more.” For Catherine, between working part time, and a continuously packed schedule, the time available to play was precious; “Any days at home, we’d have a routine of visiting family members, things which needed to be done, that by the end of the day there just wasn’t much time left.”

“I didn’t let them out until they asked to go out. It started out being negotiated clearly—a pre-organised affair. Mostly they went over to the oval, or around the block walking the dog.”

“What I found to be the best things when they were out playing? Opportunities to climb, and discovering things—little bugs, little insects. Pretend play—the tended to be noisier outside. Looking back, I probably would have spent more time actively playing at the park together. I think being taken to a park or being outside just for the sake of being wasn’t really part of my childhood, so it didn’t come naturally to me.”

Contemporary Generation

The Parents

2014-2018 - Amy

The valley is particularly misty this morning. Like so many of the houses in Westleigh, this one is designed to take full advantage of the dramatic views onto the National Park, down the steep cliffs and onto the Blue Gum stands.

“We used to live down the other end.” Amy notes, hands wrapping around a much needed cup of tea, “It’s a different lifestyle up here though.”

The birds which land on the balcony seem to taunt the dog, a brilliantly friendly creature, who eagerly scrambles at the glass to fend them off. Beyond the fence is a hundred foot vertical drop to the valley floor below.
“It’s a different kind of play here.” She begins, “We don’t have grass here, so it’s a very different type of play. If we did, it would be nothing but ball sports. But here, they have to use their imagination.”

The yard outside is a testament to her children’s play. The leaf litter has been thrown into turmoil by the path of all the children gleefully racing through, toys peeking out from where they’ve been left by distracted hands, called away to the next activity. The trampoline dominates the yard, the bright blue safety bumpers almost glowing in the dreary morning.

Beside the garage are the bikes.

You can hop on your bike and be at someone else’s house in ten minutes. And that’s what you want- I’ll arrive home to four bikes in the driveway, and know there’s a household full of kids." Amy says, “He's had HUGE stacks, and prior to us giving him his mobile phone, he has been patched up or picked up off the side of the road by a friend every single time. The very first time, it wasn't a case 'oh we should limit what he's doing, but 'aren't we lucky to live in a community where someone knew that it was him, rushed up to him, took him to their place, patched him up and called us to let us know.'"

The northern end of the suburb, opened up after much of the first wave of suburbia, has a surprisingly different feel to the older part of the neighbourhood; "The closer you are to the school, the less likely you are to get the bus. It's a really safe way for them to be independent. There's no other different bus they can get on, so it's a really safe way for them to experience independence." 9

9 Quarter Sessions Road (Image 8) links the more isolated northern part of Westleigh to the rest of the suburb.
Image 10: Backyard Blanket Hotel, Westleigh
Whilst the bus may provide an excellent tool for providing the children of Westleigh the chance to take their first independent steps into the world, it is clear that the community also plays a vital role in how children are included in this community.

“We know most of our neighbours- some are a bit older, we still say hi. There are a few other families whose kids are around the same age as ours. It’s good. We’re also still close to families down where we used to live. I sometimes think my son gets frustrated that we’re that much further from where all his friends live.” She pauses, "I’ve never been stuck in Westleigh and not had someone to call."

2016- Lauren

Already she’s been volunteering down at the school, one of the main commanders of the army of parent volunteers keeping everything running smoothly in the face of the chaos caused by the population boom. Despite being up since the crack of dawn, Lauren’s smile is cheerful as she sit down at the table.

The coffee here is good, and the village is quiet for the time of day, “He doesn’t really go out to play, to be honest. He probably just goes around the street.” She begins, “He shows no desire to go any further. Not for lack of trying,-my husband grew up here, and he knows the best places to go, but they’re not that interested. My kids are very much homebodies, they don’t really see the need I think to go out. If we didn’t have the backyard, they might need to. It’s not through not encouraging, but we’ve got the backyard and friends in the street.”

Quickly she takes a sip from her steaming mug, “It certainly surprised me how many parents grow up here, go away for or after uni, and then come back to raise their families. It does say a lot about the neighbourhood, that so many parents want to come back. When we were looking to move, we had quite a large search area which my husband kept narrowing and narrowing, until he finally said ‘I just want Westleigh’.

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10 Backyard play in Westleigh remains an important ingredient of childhood, as the blanket hotel in Image 10 demonstrates
Since moving into the area, she has become almost a bulwark of the community, “I’ve got a good relationship with a lot of the parents- I could leave the kids with them, or we could go down to the park together. And there are some really good close friends as well- kids’ parents who over time have become really important friends in their own right. I think a lot more parents know me through all the volunteering I do down at the school than I know personally.”

When asked about what have been the most important things to result from her children going out to play, she grins, “Meeting friends and finding things in nature-finding cicada shells, or seeing dragonflies and lizards-the nice ones. Luckily all nice ones, at least in our back yard. Ruddock Park’s okay-there’s enough there for the older kids and the younger kids. It seems to happen more in this neighbourhood from year six, when they all go down to Ruddock Park together, and it’s the place to be!”

She pauses, “In some ways I think it would be nicer if they were a bit more outdoorsy, but we’re not, so it would be going a bit against nature. It would be nice if they wanted to go out and ride their bikes more, but they don’t and that’s okay.”

2016- Christina

Like many other parents, Christina grew up in Westleigh, and is now raising her family in the area; "Pretty much we were out all day. Our parent’s didn’t know where we were every minute. Maybe that’s the way it was..?"

The generational changes between her and her daughter’s childhoods are stark; "Then we didn't have five things a week- we came home and played. They don't have the time today. When I was a kid, there were seven of us kids in our street- I don’t suppose our parents knew where we were every second. But I feel the need to know where she is- even if she’s just going across the street to the neighbours. There is a group of kids she can go out and play with, but there’s not as many kids around today...I’m okay with her being out with others, but not by herself.”

Sitting across the table, she pauses, weighing up the differences the decades have made to the childhood her daughter is experiencing, “There’s a lot more stuff reported.” She notes, "If a child gets approached, you'll know about it. There are a
number of local Facebook groups, and the information gets disseminated between them very quickly. Culturally it's changed...It's a bit more mixed, not that I think it makes much of a difference, but you notice it."

She shrugs, "But as they start transitioning in high school, you have to start letting them go."

2016- Ally

“Wait, you knew Steve?! I used to swap sandwiches with him! He would come to school with the most beautiful salad sandwiches, but my dad would make me horrible peanut butter, butter and peanut butter sandwiches.”

Like a remarkably large number of the parents in Westleigh, Ally grew up in the suburb. Moving away, the pull of the lifestyle, and a need for her own children to have the same chances for childhood that she had brought her back. Chances that rarely exist beyond the end of Duffy Avenue.

"There were six people who were at the school when I was there, and now they're all back- one of the teachers at Thornleigh West when I went there is still there...Luckily, I didn't have her, but my sister did." She chuckles, “My sister thinks about coming back- if we can find her the right house.”

Growing up, Ally’s family lived at the northern end of Quarter Sessions Road, where her parents still are today "The kids play a bit around my parent’s house. Once you go down the dip, it’s that bit more isolated. We also tend to get much...larger wildlife down this end. The first weekend we were into our house, there was a massive goanna in our backyard. The worst thing we had at mum and dad’s in thirty five years were a few carpet snakes, and a few dead red belly blacks on the doorstep courtesy of the cat.”

“We’re in a dead-end cul-de-sac, but we’re close to the main roads, so we’re a bit wary about that.” She explains, “They mostly stick around the house. But we live in a lovely area with very lovely people. I do wish we had more access to the bush- where I grew up, we faced directly onto the bush. We do go up and down the old convict steps near the quarry a few times a week, with the dogs which really wears them out.
I don’t like Ruddock Park so much in summer- there’s no shade cloth, so the slides get too hot to use.”

The strong sense of pride Ally has in the area is evident; “Most people know each other in Westleigh, though not many people know about it. It’s a nice, quiet, safe place to be. It’s a very unique place to be.”

2017-Marie

"Do they go beyond this area? Of course they do. They're boys!" Marie says with a bright grin, casting a fond glance over to her youngest son, who has joined the interview in his high chair. Whilst not yet old enough to be playing on his own, his elder brothers are paving the way for him. He joyfully nods along to the conversation, before grabbing another chip from the plate, “The boys do want to go into The Res, but me and my husband aren’t quite ready for that. Maybe in a few months, but we need to work ourselves up to that.”

Moving from their previous neighbourhood into Westleigh has been a blessing, “if something happens, I’ll get a text message saying ‘hey, this happened this morning.’, and there’s no judgement whatsoever. Where we lived before, we had quite a bit of judgement, but here it’s a case of ‘How can we help?’ Our old school, your child sneezed? Everyone knew and everyone had an opinion. The school here is amazing. What they’ve done with my kids is awesome. We’re also really lucky with our neighbours. Our neighbour on one side, her kids are a bit older, so we get yelled at if we don’t use her pool!”

“I like Westleigh because unless you live here, or are visiting, there’s no need to go here, which means there aren’t as many cars, as many people. It’s just so community minded. When I busted my ankle, everyone was willing to help, and I had to say ‘nah, I’m really okay!’. But, by the same token, we’re not in each other’s faces either.” She smiles, “The parks, the big back yard...The freedom we had! That’s what we had, and
what we wanted for our kids. And we found our place - a big backyard which backs onto the bush.11 We were so lucky. We won't move for a very long time”

2018- Melissa

“I hate leeches.” Melissa admits, “We’ve done this bushwalk and it’s been fantastic... and covered in leeches.”

Down close to the school, the streets are wide and shady. The blue gums here have been allowed to grow to towering heights, birds jumping throughout, and raucously calling out late in the day. This area was amongst the earliest parts of the suburb to be developed, and still many of the elderly residents whose families were brought up in this corner of the neighbourhood remain in their homes; “We have some quite elderly neighbours. We don’t have as many children in our street, and they go to different schools, and whilst we’ll stop and say hello, we’re not that close, and we don’t really get much chance to interact. Luckily, in the bigger neighbourhood, we have quite a few school friends, and my daughter is able to go and visit them on their bikes. We’re trying to give her more opportunities to be independent, as she’s now in high school and needing to manage the transit.”

Having grown up further towards the city, Melissa and her husband stumbled by chance into the neighbourhood, “We literally followed the train line. We knew what we wanted, and then we found where we are now. We didn’t have a million to blow on a house, and all the places around here were for sale instead of auction. Where we’d been was a very competitive market, and by the time we arrived here we were fed up with it. I certainly wouldn’t go back to the Inner West now...All that concrete.”

“We’ve recently started allowing our eldest out more as she was getting ready to move to high school, so she can begin to develop her independence- I don’t want my kids to feel it’s not safe here, because it is incredibly safe.” She begins, “I feel a lot more comfortable letting them out here over where we used to live. If there were

11 For examples of the forms bush play takes in the area, see Image 11.
more kids in the street who we knew and they could go out with, it might happen more often. Now, though, a lot of our play is structured - cricket practice, sports days...We used to spend a lot more time at Ruddock Park - it's got toilets, it's got play equipment, they can ride their bikes-it's a versatile space.

“You are constantly evaluating your decisions and circumstances- am I making the right decisions?”

**2017- Settler’s Green Group**

The air is still buzzing with electricity.

Underfoot, the ground squelches, almost drowned under the weight of the water which had almost poured from the sky barely minutes earlier, managing to disperse at least some of the summer heat, leaves already browned by the scorching summer heat shredded by the ferocity of the storm cell which has raced over the ridgeline. Another line of cells gather on the horizon, and already the ominous rumbles which promise another battering are reverberating through the overly humid air. Months later, there will be talk of the storms being declared a natural disaster for their ferocity. For now, however, there is a small reprieve from the deluge the dangerous supercells which relentlessly march across the sky.

The paths in Settlers’ Green are neat, paved affairs, with the narrow paths flanked by wonderfully manicured garden beds and smartly presented homes. They stand, rather different from the character-filled dwellings which sprung up like weeds when the suburb was opened up in the 1960s and early 70s, and a far cry from the trio of horses which once called the land home.

The door opens.

“Sorry we’re not outside, but our plans have changed a bit...” Kath stands in the doorway, an easy, bright smile on her face even as she glances up to the weather overhead which has driven the assembled party indoors.

The group inside is chatting with the ease of old friends, comfortably ensconced on the lounges in the front room. The coffee table is laden with dips and nibblies, and
glasses are filled with an easiness that speaks of the familiarity of the movement. This group are remarkably welcoming, kind in their ready acceptance of a new face.

The accents are broad, as the formalities of paperwork are dealt with, and quick to answer each other’s queries. “So d’you mean” “Nah, this is about Jeannie. When answering these, think about her.”

Even as their parents work out their children’s range, scribbling onto the Google printouts, the giggling sound of the kids up stairs drifts down the stairs, punctuated by the sound of feet scrambling from one room to the other.

“Somehow we never get to dinner on Friday night...” Kath muses, handing around one of the trays, which are quickly raided by the grateful group.

*What do you think is the best thing to happen to your kids when they’ve been out playing?*

The answer is almost instantaneous: “Friendships. Friendships and independence. They play outside on their own, without needing constant supervision.”

“Yeah, sometimes they’ll have to make a decision-Like if a car’s coming.” Jess agrees, head nodding vigorously as she leans forward.

Gene smiles in affirmation, “Sometimes she’ll go out on her bike and come back with three kids with her. I just think it’s brilliant”

*What do you think about the type and quality of play your kids are getting to engage in?*

There’s a pause as the parents consider. “Well, we’ve got our boys, and they’re sports mad. It’s certainly helped them with sports at school. There’s a real thing about kids from Settler’s Green at school that they’re really good at sport, because they’ve had to play with kids-older kids, younger kids-since they were little.”

There’s a crash from the kitchen.

“-And they break things...” a chuckle runs through the group, and James hastily leaves to help with the cleanup, gesturing everyone else back to their seats.
“Well it’s like the pool- she’ll go down and there’s such a mix of kids- older kids, younger kids-I can’t help but think this is not normal.” Gene notes, leaning forward from his perch on the lounge.

“It wouldn’t be if you were living out on Duffy Avenue?” Leigh points out. A long term resident, the family recently relocated out into the Hills, however, much of their life is still entwined within the community, and most Fridays find them back in the neighbourhood.

“I wouldn’t let her out on there, but I’m fine with her being on her own in here.” James says, ducking back into the room.

“Well, this is seventy three houses in Westleigh.” Kath points out, “That’s a pretty big chunk of the neighbourhood.”

Leigh glances down at her watch, “Oh, time to get Sam to whichever class it is she has this week!” she says with a grimace. The others quickly offer reassuring glances, as she ducks out of the conversation.

“See? Even when they leave the neighbourhood, they have to come back for the friendships.” Kath points out with a grin.

Gene adds “And the clubs- you’ve got cricket, soccer, netball, football, baseball.”

“-It’s community!” Jess agrees.

“And it’s all part of the same social structure at school.”

_So do you think the quality of facilities and places you have to play is important?_

“Definitely. Especially as they get older.” Kath responds immediately, “Especially with our boys. We have a rule that they need to be doing something when they head out. It’s just our thing, but they’re the ones most likely to be doing something if we didn’t have that rule. Not that we’ve had to enforce it, but it’s still a rule.”

“Its not a rat run- sure, Duffy gets busy in the morning, but there’s no through traffic, and that makes a big difference.” Gene notes.

_What are your relationships like with your neighbours?_
“Well, some of them are a bit suspicious…” Gene jokingly replies, accepting the eye rolls sent his way.

"They actually refer to each other as family." Kath replies firmly, “You can bet that right throughout Westleigh, right now there are gatherings just like this happening. My friend who I mentioned when we were chatting, the only reason she isn’t here now is that she had another gathering just like this one she was going to. Otherwise I’m sure she’d be right here with us.”

"You've got neighbours to get you out of there" Jess agrees, “If something happens, there’s people you can call on.”

"It's the best childhood you can have, growing up here." Gene affirms.
Image 11: Branch Construction in bushland, Western Crescent
Growing up in the Westleigh

When asked what the best thing that has happened while children were out playing, the key concept expressed both by parents and children was the importance of children being able to play outdoors, and the resultant life skills and interactions which resulted from their experiences. The concept of friendship was similarly important, particularly amongst the former children from the suburb.

Responses to questions about feeling safe focused heavily on the interconnections of the area, and the lack of cars in comparison to other suburbs. Parents in particular noted the ability to rely on the neighbourhood as a whole to maintain the safety of their children, whilst the historical children noted how the suburb’s relative isolation made it safe for them to go out and play, far more so than if they had lived elsewhere.

When asked what the older residents would change for the children growing up in Westleigh today many said upgrades to the facilities, notably for netball and basketball at Ruddock Park. A number also commented on the perceived speed of the cars travelling through the neighbourhood. Consistently, parents wished to offer their children more opportunities to play. For a number, this involved more engagement with bikes and riding, others believed that more opportunities to be outside were something they were concerned about.

A number noted the challenges of navigating both the physical and the virtual worlds, and expressed a desire for a safer environment to bring their children up in. Key themes identified by participants as to what influenced their decision to let children go out and play included the various ages residing within the immediate area, with those who had a higher concentration of older residents instead of similarly aged children reporting less support in case something went wrong, and as a result, a reduced range. Parents also noted that children’s interests and personalities were a key factor in how they interacted with the external environment. Providing skills to assist in the transition to high school was also a major consideration, and understanding how to avoid and handle trouble. When asked how do they think childhood has changed, they said time was the major factor. Both time for parents to be able to interact with their children and facilitate free play, and unscheduled time available for play were noted as key changes in experiences.
The respondents spoke often of the importance of the bonds they shared with their neighbours. Friendships developed within the neighbourhood were decidedly long-term, far surpassing the tenure within Westleigh of the parties involved. For children, this includes the transition to high school, which, instead of seeing relationships strained by the variety of schools which children from the area attend for their secondary education, are strengthened by the experience of being a kid from Westleigh. Many noted that even neighbours who are not on a close-knit basis are still willing to help out, interact and watch out for other residents within the area.

When asked what they thought about the type and quality of places your children play in, the families in Westleigh, opinions on the quality of the facilities available to play in are broad and varied. Whilst many find Ruddock Park to be an excellent play resource, others are frustrated by the lack of shade, and its position within the neighbourhood. The proposed development of The Res (Old Sydney Water site), has been mentioned as a change coming to the area. The Little Park was noted as an excellent secondary park to Ruddock, however, the lack of amenities provided was a key concern. The play equipment currently in place at The Little Park was considered good. The natural environment surrounding the suburb were also noted. Whilst not all families chose to engage with the bush, those who did found the variety of walking tracks, caves and other natural features to be a major asset to their experiences within the neighbourhood.

Overall, most residents noted that due to the quiet nature of the suburb, play was greatly enhanced over what could be expected from other neighbourhoods. Once again, the close-knit nature of the community as a further boon to facilitating children’s play. When asked what they enjoyed the most about growing up in Westleigh the key response was the bush, it was a pivotal part their experiences of childhood. Whilst more of the current parents noted the parks, the historical children mentioned them more to note that they were a secondary point of engagement for their generation. Recounts instead focused on play in the street, and in the bush, and how the quiet nature of the suburb allowed then additional element of freedom which they suspected would not have happened elsewhere.
When asked more generally what do you like about the neighbourhood, the historical children, current residents’ positive attributes focused on a broader range of features of the suburb. The quiet nature and strong sense of community were major assets, as was the distance to the city and the facilities provided closer to home. The school was mentioned as a communal focal point and source for connection for many of the residents within Westleigh, and the bush and the role it plays in the lives of many residents also was notable feature. A number of parents noted that their children were able to walk to the shops independently, which was not something they expected would be possible elsewhere. So what did they think about how children were able to play? Comparisons between previous generations as being better were surprisingly low for this question. Whilst it was noted that the freedom experienced by children was not as high as in the 70s and 80s, there were, however, positive expression towards children’s engagement with riding their bikes, playing freely on the streets, and engaging with the bush for free play.

Mapping Play

Background to The Mapping Process

As part of the interview process, participants were asked to notate a map of the suburb with features of importance to play, including independent range, area utilised, places of importance and areas where children were discouraged from going. Whilst the verbal feedback from the mapping processes has, in part, been utilised within the interview narratives above, the maps themselves have proven intriguing artefacts in terms of understanding the play behaviours which have occurred in Westleigh. Of particular importance was the independent roaming ranges as reported by the participants, which have been amalgamated into their respective groups, then composited. These have further been transcribed into the physical silhouettes presented. These were cut into heavy weight tracing paper, and chronologically overlayed, allowing areas of more frequent play to be more readily seen, and obscuring the areas which were not utilised.
Image 12: Composite of Historical Roaming Ranges. Base map Google, 2017
**Historical Generation Mapping**

Historically, the children of Westleigh were utilising substantial areas of the suburb, with ranges predominantly settled on people’s homes and surrounding streets which appeared to provide more than adequate play spaces to the residents. Ruddock Park was utilised, however, as noted in the interviews, due to the lacking facilities, not as frequently as for contemporary residents. The extent of the historical children’s roaming ranges as represented in image 12, also varied, with some parents allowing the majority of the suburb to be accessed, and others facilitating play predominantly within their immediate surroundings. Notably, a number of respondents include substantial areas of bushland as part of their play landscape, reflecting slightly more reported interaction with the natural landscape than contemporary residents, however, owing to the differing sizes of participant groups, it is possible that an extended cohort would not exhibit such a marked trend.

**Contemporary Generation Mapping**

Notably, as can be seen in image 13, for contemporary residents, Ruddock Park is prominently present in children’s ranges. Interaction along Duffy Avenue is also notably restricted, reflecting concerns expressed in the interviews about increased traffic flow along the road, and increased awareness of the risks associated with heavy traffic. These two changes appear to reflect the environmental changes respondents noted in the interviews.

For some respondents, there is a tendency towards fragmentation of play spaces, with spaces, for example, immediately around the home, and immediately around the parks being accessible for children, but not the connecting street spaces which would allow children to move easily between spaces. By contrast, other children were able to access ranges well in excess of their predecessors. Bush access was not recorded as substantially as their historical counterparts, and not as deeply into the National Park as reported historically. However, where these spaces are being utilised, it has been noted as an important, highly appreciated resource for those families, and one which others note they would prefer to have greater access to than currently available.
Generational comparisons

Whilst the sizes of ranges varied greatly overall, with the members of both the historical and contemporary residents being restricted and enabled to access substantial play spaces. Overall, there is a significant continuation of access to play spaces within this community with an extended habitual range of both generations across the breadth and depth of the community. Image 14 represents the layered mapping of roaming ranges of historical and contemporary children and illustrates that both groups utilised green spaces close to the neighbourhood with the only main difference being the historical children tending to go deeper in the green reserve then the contemporary children who have stayed closer to the urban edges. The increased amenities at Ruddock Park have seen the space become more prominent in children’s play ranges, although spaces beyond the park continue to be enjoyed by children. The positioning of dwellings, and closeness to available amenities was also a notable feature in how children were interacting with their environment, with those living further away from the school understandably accessing a greater proportion of the suburb than those whose commutes were lessened. Parents’ responses tended to prioritise their children’s play and mobility needs moreso than their own ideologies, and these priorities reflected with maps showing surprisingly substantial ranges in comparison to parents’ survey responses.
Image 16: Banners at Oakleigh Oval
Chapter Five: Inter-Generational Play

Introduction

When reflecting back upon the thematic questions posited at the beginning of this study, a number of surprising trends emerged. Play in Westleigh has remained an important, relevant part of the childhood experienced by its residence, and the community as a whole encourages a promising attitude which strongly reflects this belief. In a number of facets, this echoes Winnicott’s (1961) presumption of the community as an extension of the immediate family environment, or a holding space in which children are able to safely and freely play.

Changes in Play

*How has play changed through time in Westleigh?*

When examining the data resulting from this study, a surprising trend has emerged. Although there has been some change in how and where children are able to play, the extent of the change has not been as drastic or universal as suggested by broader societal and global trends. Instead, factors such as available support network, demographics of the immediate surrounding area, need for children to travel further to and from school, family habits, and time available to engage in play were far more important to how independent play, and play in general is engaged in within Westleigh.

Malone (2007) noted that access to independent play has been in distinct decline since the latter part of the twentieth century. This has been reflected by numerous studies, notably, Kinoshita (2009), Guldberg (2009), and Vanderbeck (2007). Whilst, as Potter (2003) notes, part of this can be attributed to tighter regulation and social standards required for children, the trend towards tighter controls of the types of play children are able to engage in, and the spaces which they are able to utilise to facilitate this play extends beyond many cultural boarders. As Sandseter and Sando (2016) determined, the current focus on children’s safety as a priority over engagement with play frequently supersedes cultural conventions. Particularly for
children in urban settings (Bourke, 2014), the adult world’s encroachment on their ability to play independently has increased dramatically in contemporary society, leaving many child populations with little to no access to independent, free play. As Murphy, Woodhall, Post, Murphy Post, Teeple, and Anderson (2006) note, 9/11 fundamentally changed the values system of an entire generation. In the aftermath of the attacks, an emphasis on safety and security unparalleled by previous generations was observed among their research participants. For this generation as a whole, this fundamental shift in the nature of childhood, from a time of carefree exploration, to a time impinged by the worries of the adult world, offers a key insight into how children’s interactions both with play and the world beyond their immediate surroundings have changed. Whilst previous generations, such as examined in Reed (2015), was subject to similar mongering during the Cold War, the fundamental shift in how such conflicts are played out has resulted in deepening the reactions experienced by society as a whole.

The results of this cultural shift can be seen in the nature of policies proposed both at a regional and national level. In particular, opportunities to engage in calculated risks in formal learning environments have been drastically reduced under current legislative framework (Ministerial Council on education early childhood development and youth affairs 2011). Arlington and Stevenson (2012) further note incidences of police prosecuting parents for facilitating independent play for their children, a trend which continued with George and Schulte (2015). The role of policy in shaping how children are able to interact with their environments and community is one of the major influences in the perception of children within their community (Aziz & Said, 2012).

For girls in particular, these cultural shifts can be more damaging (Allender, Cowburn, & Foster, 2006), owing to the already substantial barriers for engaging in physical activity. Pellegrini and Smith (2008) note that the barriers for children to engage in active play are already excessively high, but, as examined by Watson, Elliott, and Mehta (2015), girls are confronted by mandated inappropriate attire for play, reinforced stereotypes, and a strong gender bias towards encouraging boys to engage more freely in physical play during break periods from formal education.
This social impact on long-standing cultural ideologies is particularly concerning when considering the nature of the shift. From the earliest levels of educational training (Berk, 2008), the importance of play is emphasised. The strongest memories that people often carry from their childhood, after the loss of family members and the gaining of new ones, tend to be linked to play, and Sandberg (2003) further notes that one’s sense of identity is strongly linked to the interrelation between play and the spaces in which it occurs, with the consequences of that play lasting well into adulthood. As Lukowski, Wiebe, Haight, DeBoer, Nelson, & Bauer,(2005) explain, the mimicry which forms the earliest examples of play most humans engage in are essential for establishing the neural pathways which support memory and sense of self.

However, efforts to rectify this shift away from independent play, such as through Dapto Dreaming (Malone, 2013); and other projects such as Derr, Chawla, Mintzer, Cushing & Van Vliet, (2013); Derr (2015); and Blanchet-Cohen & Torres (2015), have demonstrated that reversing trends away from restricting independent play are possible when scaffolded by the community. The support of both the residents and legislators to facilitate such changes are major factors in restoring and maintaining play. This communal facilitation of play is consistently noted across the interviews, both through the social cohesion expressed by numerous parents, and through their emphasis on play-building improvements to the suburb when asked about changes which would benefit the experiences of childhood for the children living in the suburb today.

For Westleigh, these supports have been continuous throughout the history of the suburb. Organisations such as the Westleigh Progress Association, established as a local advocacy group in 1972 (Westleigh Progress Association, 2017); the Westleigh Rural Fire Service (2014), Thornleigh Thunder (2017) and, more recently, the online support networks such as the Thornleigh, Westleigh and Normanhurst Parents Group all contribute to a social climate where independent play for children is still a viable option. Perhaps the most important of the trends to emerge from this study has been the role that the support network within the community has on how children are able to engage in free play. As Carver, Timpiero, and Crawford (2007) note, the perception of safety within a neighbourhood is one of the primary indicators of how children are able to interact with their environment beyond their
front gate, and for many of those interviewed, these social networks were identified as one of the primary reasons they considered Westleigh to be a safe environment.

Information from the informal background surveys further support this concept, with parents closer to the local and national averages at the time of their child’s birth more likely to report lower perceptions of risk, and higher incidences of allowing their children the opportunity to play beyond the home. This suggests, additionally, that providing further options for parents to foster and maintain local relationships throughout their children’s childhood are important for ensuring the ability of children to play independently.

Within the interviews, this perception of safety was frequently manifested in the relationships that members of the community had, predominantly with those living within the immediate area surrounding their abode, but also throughout the suburb in general. In terms of the immediate relationships, those who reported having neighbours of a similar life stage were more likely to enable their children to play beyond the home, noting that there was a reciprocal nature to their relationships with other parents which provided an extra level of security to parents over those whose neighbours were older or younger. Whilst these relationships were often amicable, they did not provide the same access to independent play as reported by those whose neighbours were at a similar stage in their lives. This is reflective of Weller & Bruegel (2009), who note that children whose social capital, or ability to engage with the local neighbourhood, is high are more inclined to engagement with their community. For those without common ground upon which to establish that social capital, interactions beyond the home are not as rigorously enforced, reducing the sense of place for the individual, and restricting the development of a sense of communal identity. In the case of Westleigh, were social interactions are actively promoted, encouraged and enforced by both the environment and the residents, this results in atypically high levels of confidence for both parents and children in engaging in independent, free play and movement. The strength of these connections also drastically reduced the impact of stereotypical gender ideologies around engaging with independent play.

Whilst gender was not explicitly sought, gender was presented predominantly in the context of pronouns by parents. Play restriction differences resulting mainly were
noted in the form of an additional carefulness in ensuring male children were able to release any perceived excess energy. Both male and female children were reported to be riding bikes, scooters, walking in the bush and commuting to and from key locations independently. Further studies may encounter mild gender differences, however they are not something that parents are actively considering in Westleigh. This further contrasts to the broader social trend, as noted by Jones (1999); Mascaro, Rentscher, Hackett, Mehl, & Rilling (2017); Crawford (1995); and of particular note, Morrongiello & Dawber (1999); wherein major differences resulting from gender were evident in children well under the age of five. For children in Westleigh, this reduction in gender bias is a major asset in ensuring continued access to play.

For many parents, having people within the area where their children are going to play was a key point in determining the extent they were able to independently interact with their environment. Notably during the mapping process, participants frequently explicitly mentioned locations where friends lived, and often used these locations as points of references for determining the boundaries set for independent play and mobility. Additionally, parents who noted strong communal ties, mentioning friends either implicitly or explicitly, were more likely to permit their children to range further and engage with a greater area than those whose support networks were not likely to be able to step in if something should go wrong.

Geographies of Play

How has the location and engagement with varied play spaces changed through time?

In contrast to the original assumption that informed this study, whilst the time spent utilizing the play spaced within Westleigh have declined, the engagement with play spaces across Westleigh has, in a number of points, increased through time. Children readily engaged with a wide variety of play spaces, including local roads, parks and the bush. Parental support for the engagement with these spaces was surprisingly high. The variety of spaces available for children to engage in over the time period examined by this study has also seen a number of improvements, and increases. The most notable of these changes has been the resumption of The Res by Hornsby Council (Brewster, 2015), which has seen the community engage with the site for bike riding, bushwalking, and engaging with nature. Whilst not yet officially opened
up to the public, the site is still proving to be an important feature in the developing play of Westleigh. In the years ahead, as the site properly develops, the range and scope of facilities available for play in Westleigh could increase exponentially. Currently plans include proper netball courts, further sporting facilities to supplement those at Ruddock Park and Oakleigh Oval, which further enhance the ability of children in the area to engage in independent play activities.

In terms of the existing infrastructure, numerous upgrades have occurred through time. Whilst historically parents have recognised that the facilities at Ruddock Park are slightly lacking, particularly in regard to shade coverage and amenities, concerted efforts by the Westleigh progress Association, and local parents have seen the path upgraded to include proper equipment, more shade as trees have matured, and improvement of sporting facilities available to all residents. Further petitioning is currently underway to improve shape coverage at Ruddock Park, toilet facilities at the little park, and to improve the overall safety of the neighbourhood.

Owing to the smaller sample size of the historical children, longitudinal changes in engagement with the bush are more difficult to discern. Many families reported utilising the numerous bush tracks that throughout Westleigh, allowing their children to explore the bush, and frequently engage in nature. Among the historical children, this engagement was universal, yet for children today the level of engagement with the bush was predominantly subject to how close they resided to it. Whilst the number of families did make active efforts to engage with the bush when not close by, it was more common for families who backed onto the National Park to actively seek out these play spaces.

This was reflected in the mapping conducting within this study. Informed by Kinoshita’s (1985, 2011) practises in charting play ranges, the maps created for the purpose of this study reflected many of the social changes noted within the interviews. By contrast, however, unlike in Tokyo, the lack of rapid urban expansion

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12 See Image 7 for Play equipment at Ruddock Park, c.2017.
13 Image 17 depicts the current setup at the Little Park. In addition to the adventure playground and soft fall, there is a picnic bench which appears to be frequently utilised by residents.
has seen access to play spaces largely retained, and, as in the case of Ruddock Park, improved to increase utilisation and interaction.

As Jones (1999) and others explain (Chawla 2006, Malone 2016), interactions with the natural environment are key opportunities for children to learn and develop ecologically and socially. Olmstead (2012) notes that the impact of the natural environment on imaginative play leads to far more engaged, in-depth, and complex scenarios than that experienced in controlled or built environments. Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Guhn, Zumbo, and Hertzman (2014) also note place for the children in middle childhood is a predominant shaper of personal identity and sense of belonging. When children are able to actively interact with and participate within their environment, their sense of self is further supported and nurtured. Long-term, this strong sense of identity is key for supporting social and emotional intelligence into adulthood, particularly when faced with the challenges of adolescence. Wilcox and Nalmark (1991) further explain that the experiences of children playing and interacting with their environment are a key issue for the rights of the child. The right to develop and be considered part of their community is a core value towards enshrining children as fully participating members of their community.

For Sanson, Carlsen, & Newitt, (2012), children are noted as being key partners in shaping the characteristics of a neighbourhood, with those where the children are most actively engaged within and in shaping their communities showing the highest outcomes for residents. This sense of belonging, as Stonehouse and Gonzalez-Mena (2004) explain, is a major factor in ensuring children remain engaged with both their learning and their community. Frost, Wortham, and Reifel,(2008) note that there is a direct link between play and learning outcomes. By supporting play, the families in Westleigh have been able to enhance the experiences of childhood, and likely learning outcomes for their children. This communal investment into play is significant in contrast to trends throughout the rest of society. A culture of encouraging children to go out and play has been proven to be an important part of life in Westleigh.

During the interviews, having opportunities to go out and play was one of the major positive aspects that parents noted about living in Westleigh. The resulting friendships, challenges, physical activity, and imaginative engagement with their
environment were regarded as extremely positive experiences. Many parents noted a desire to increase the time and opportunities which children had to engage with independent play, and, for a number of those who were limited in their ability to engage due to the immediate supports around their dwellings, to have the amenities and social supports in place to allow for such play to happen more frequently.

Parents also discussed having more time to engage with their children, and the environment of Westleigh themselves. Time constraints, such as those caused by work, busy schedules and schooling commitments were identified as barriers towards increasing this engagement, although these activities were still mostly regarded as positive or neutral arrangements. Whilst many parents would like more hours in the day, or a time machine to better utilize those currently available, the overall consensus was that there was an acute awareness of how time was dedicated in contemporary life, and that time dedicated towards both play and family, independently and as a familial unit was a core value irrespective of how constrained it may be.

The temporal constraints placed on families is thematically echoed throughout the literature. Daly (1996) notes the pressure that juggling the balance between familial commitments provides is frequently a source of strife for families, whose scheduling challenges lead to major conflicts within the familial unit. Similarly, Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean & Hofferth (2001) examined the increased role of having both parents, especially fathers engaging with play, and its impact on time and quality of play available for children to engage with. In comparison to previous generations, the general social trend, particularly in Westernized cultures, has been shifting towards both parents becoming equally involved with their children’s upbringing. Although not all interviews respondents were achieving a balanced parenting load, involvement by all parenting parties remained a key characteristic for children in the neighbourhood. For a number of fathers, this resulted in the supporting of their children’s organized sports, participation in bush walking, and manifested itself in a deep, abiding care and concern for their children’s wellbeing. This sentiment was echoed in a number of the interviews, both historically and contemporarily. By having both parents involved, opportunities for children to engage with play, and overall familial cohesion were increased.
It was also noted by a number of families that the communal cohesion also acted to reduce the impacts of familial discord, ensuring that children remained engaged and part of their neighbourhood.

Overall, play in Westleigh may be more time constrained, but what is occurring in that time is reflecting similar levels of engagement to those who previously lived within the suburb. The community itself is a key factor in driving this trend, and the supports provided reflect into the familial sphere to enhance the opportunities and experiences of play within the family unit.

Parents Attitudes

*Have parents’ attitudes towards facilitating or allowing independent, unstructured play and movement changed?*

Whilst overall, there has remained a relatively consistent positive social trend towards facilitating independent play throughout the period of the study, throughout the interviews there was an increased awareness of the concept of safety for children. Whereas for the Historical Parents and Children, safety appeared to be almost an abstract concept. The very setting and makeup of the suburb has previously proven enough to reduce such concerns. However, for current parents, safety is a much more concrete concern. Whilst trust within the community is substantial, there are concerns about the pace of changes experienced within the neighbourhood. While these changes in attitude are reflective of the social changes experienced beyond the boundaries of the suburb, the way in which they have been negotiated is in stark contrast to what has occurred in the wider Australian context.

Trust within the community is substantial, however, as the initial residents of Westleigh have matured and many have been succeeded by younger families, the overall demographic makeup of the suburb has altered. In areas where this turnover has been reported as more substantial, and demographically the pocket remains relatively homogenous, the supports for independent play have remained higher. Whilst older residents remain highly valued, with strong links to their immediate neighbours and the wider community, their presence is not as strong a catalyst for independent play as that of similarly-aged families. Interviewee’s responses suggest that this is resultant from the higher levels of mutualism in regards to supervision, organizing and maintaining relationships which occur when children are able to
establish spatially and emotionally close relationships with those of a similar peer group.

Ideology surrounding the concept of an “ideal” childhood is nothing new. From Aries’ (1961) reconceptualisation of childhood as a social construct instead of merely a biological truth, there has been a hierarchical preference in frameworks of how children should experience childhood. Much of this contextualization is depicted through the mass media, played out continuously on a veritable smorgasbord of television shows (Gray, Geraghty, & Ralph, 2016), and increasingly through a veritable avalanche of niche books, magazines, and digital resources. The evolution of this ideology has led to contemporary childhood being revered as a spectacle, (Katz 2008), open to the comment and ridicule of the masses, a situation which has only been exacerbated by the rise of social media, from early choices, as discussed in Doub, Small, & Birch (2016), through to the restrictive collective pressures on virtual play as examined by Willett, (2015). As Porter and Ispa (2013) note, the influx of information contemporary parents are subjected to can be overwhelming, and often littered with misinformation. With over sixty percent of parents accessing information through various channels, the challenges this places on parents when considering parenting decisions is daunting (Porter and Ispa, 2013)

However, rather than passively allowing play to decline, the communal supports of Westleigh are instead ensuring that children remain able to go out and play, and that parents remain confident in allowing their children to engage in independent movement beyond the home. The realities of living in Westleigh, particularly in regards to attending High School also contribute towards a more moderate approach to children’s mobility, in ensuring children are equipped with the skills to negotiate the transition to high school the associated transport challenges which come from the geographical features of the suburb which make it such an amenable place for children to grow up.

**Final conclusions**

In conclusion, this study reflects the key importance of factors beyond the greater societal discourse around play, and the key role that the immediate community, environment, and personal needs play in determining how children are able to
interact with their surroundings. It should not be a bygone conclusion that contemporary play spaces for children are decreasing, nor that children are automatically being excluded from public spaces as pervasively as anecdotal discourse would bemoan.

As Westleigh demonstrates, the importance of factors such as social cohesion, supportive environmental structures, and positive communal attitudes have a far greater impact on how children are able to play and interact with their environment and how they are sustained and nurtured over generations can change the social and ecological opportunities provided within a neighbourhood.

Echoing the findings of Malone and Rudner (2011, 2016), this study confirms that the greater societal trends, contrary to what has previously been presumed, is not the predominant indicator of children’s interactions with play. Instead, it is essential to recognise that every single childhood is unique, and that the immediate surroundings of childhood - the physical environment, the social network and communal values which act as the primary facilitators of children’s independent mobility and free play. By supporting communities to facilitate these essential behaviours, actively encouraging independent play, designing child-friendly spaces and fostering positive behaviours and attitudes which support children in their pursuit of independent play, the encounters of play for children in Westleigh have continued to be enculturated through intergenerational engagement.

The methodology of this study through the documenting of rich data using stories and mapping in one neighbourhoods across generations helps to identify the diverse nuances of play encounters as unique to a specific space. This study adds to an international call (Malone & Rudner, 2016) in the area of research on children’s independent mobility and child’s neighbourhood play that looks to extend research beyond universal quantitative data sets that simplify the complexities and fine gran differences in children’s everyday lives, therefore overlooking the potential to highlight positive characteristics within their diverse geographies of play. This study of neighbourhood play at Westleigh over a number of generations illustrates the importance of deep rich analysis of children’s everyday lives and the importance of moving beyond reductionist models that categorise and decontextualize children’s experiences.
Image 17: The Little Park, Westleigh
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Attachments

Attachment 1 Participant Information Form
Attachment 2 Consent form
Attachment 3 Recruitment Sample Survey
Attachment 4 Sample Interview Protocol
Participant Information Sheet – Adults, Parents/Caregivers

Project Title: Bush Tracks and Backyards: Intergenerational Challenges and Changes in Claiming Play Spaces.

Project Summary: This project is examining how play in Westleigh has changed through time.

What is the project about? This project, conducted over the Christmas break of 2017 is examining how playing and growing up in Westleigh has changed through time. Through photographs and interviews with residents past and present, we hope to discover the changes and the common experiences for children and their parents when growing up in this remarkable suburb.

How is this study being completed? This research study is being conducted by for UWS expert researchers from the Centre for Educational Research (CER) School of Education.

How much of time will I/we need to give? What will I/we be asked to do? This primary research project comprises two key activities:

1. Photography. All participants currently residing in Westleigh will be provided with a disposable film camera. As you go about your normal week, we ask that you photograph any playful moments of interest. At the end of the week, the researcher will collect them to develop.

2. Interview. Within the interview, (Which we will conduct at a time and location to suit you) there are three different tasks to participate in:

   i. Mapping
      For this activity, you will be asked to annotate a printed out map of the suburb with the areas play happens within your family (do you walk to the park? Do you walk down to the bush?). We will also ask you to point out your current abode. This will not be identified in the final report.

   ii. Photograph debrief.
      We will ask you to go through the photographs you take during the week, and tell us about the situations surrounding each photo.

   iii. Semi-structured discussion
      At this point we wish to hear about your experiences and opinions about how play happens in Westleigh. What makes you happy? Frustrated? Worried? Excited?

If you are unable or unwilling to participate in the face to face interview, alternatively you can participate through the extended online survey. These answers will also contribute to this project.

What specific benefits will I/we receive for participating?
You will be contributing to a greater understanding of how play is changing across Australia. This understanding will likely impact on governmental planning, funding and legislation.

**Will the study involve any discomfort? If so, what will you do to rectify it.**
At this point, we do not foresee any discomfort arising for any participants during the course of this study. If, however, you do feel uncomfortable there are a number of options for you. You may wish to speak to the researcher about your concerns. Please see the contact details at the bottom of this form. If your concerns are around the conduct of the researcher, you should contact the ethics committee at the university. These details are also available.

**How do you intend on publishing the results? Will anyone else know the results and how will the results be disseminated?**
All aspects of this study, including results will be confidential, and only the researcher will have access to information regarding participants. The results of this study will compromise a key part of a research paper. Findings will also be used to inform presentations to conferences and journals. A non-academic report will be sent to all participants outlining our findings with a link to the full academic text.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**
Participation is voluntary, and you can choose to withdraw at any time. Any data we have collected from you will not be included in the final report, and will be eliminated from all sources.

**Can I tell other people about the study?**
**Yes!** If they live in Westleigh especially, we would love for you to tell others about our study. We hope to create as comprehensive a picture as possible, so the more people we have involved, the more in-depth our results will be.

**What if I require further information?**
Please contact either Caitlin Williams or her supervisor Karen Malone should you wish to discuss the research further before deciding whether or not to participate.

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Karen Malone  
Professor Education,  
Centre for Educational Research,  
Western Sydney University  
0407352864  
k.malone@westernsydney.edu.au

**What if I have a complaint?**
If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax + 61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.
Attachment 2 Consent form

ADULT CONSENT FORM

Name:_______________________________________
Age:_____________  Gender:_____________________
Current Address:______________________________________

________________________________________________

Previous Address (if not currently living in Westleigh):

________________________________________________

________________________________________________

Contact Phone Number: __________________________

Email Address: ________________________________

I prefer to be contacted by: Email_    Phone_   SMS_  Mail_

I, ________________________ have read the participants information sheet and hereby give my consent to participate in the Bush Tracks and Backyards research project:
I hereby consent to: (Please tick the options which suit you)

___A face-to-face interview and associated activities for myself and my child at a time and location which suits both us and the researcher.

___A face-to-face interview and associated activities for myself at a time and location which suits me.

___For the photos I take to be used in the final publications of results.

___Be contacted to participate in future research projects based on the outcomes of this study.

Signed:_______________________ Date:________
If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Office of Research Services on Tel +61 2 4736 0229 Fax + 61 2 4736 0013 or email humanethics@westernsydney.edu.au.
Attachment 3 Recruitment Sample Survey

Date______ LOC________ CODE__________

My child/ren’s 10th birthday is in___________________________ (Year)

1. How long have you lived in the neighbourhood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than a year</th>
<th>One to four years</th>
<th>Five to ten years</th>
<th>Ten to twenty years</th>
<th>More than 20 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

2. Does your child travel to and/or from school independently?
Yes____, travelling independently since _______ years old    No ____

3. To get to and from school, your children mostly...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Walks by self or with a friend</th>
<th>Walks with an adult</th>
<th>Takes the bus</th>
<th>Rides a bike or scooter</th>
<th>Are driven by parent or guardian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

And the journey takes...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Less than 5 minutes</th>
<th>5-10 minutes</th>
<th>10-20 minutes</th>
<th>20-30 minutes</th>
<th>More than half an hour</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

4. When you choose to pick up or drop off your children at school, what are your reasons?

- □ 1. Opportunity to spend time with my child
- □ 2. Opportunity for exercise or to get out of house
- □ 3. Concern about traffic danger
- □ 4. Child unreliable or too young
- □ 5. Danger from adults
- □ 6. Fear of bullying by other children
- □ 7. Opportunity to meet people (teachers, other parents etc)
- □ 8. On the way to an activity for you or the child (e.g. shopping, visiting a relative, after school club etc)
- □ 9. School too far away
- □ 10. Other, please write in:

5. How often do your children play outside the home without a parent supervising?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Most of the time</th>
<th>Some of the time</th>
<th>Very occasionally</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

6. How safe do you feel letting your children play in the neighbourhood?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Completely safe</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Both/neither</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Completely unsafe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
## Attachment 4 Sample Interview Protocol

Participant Code_________________

Date_________________ Time_________________

Location__________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Script</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Equipment</th>
<th>Notes</th>
<th>complete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>START RECORDING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>Firstly, thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. Just for the record, would you mind having a quick read through this information form and signing this consent form? I'll read out this bit, and if you're okay with it, can you say “I agree”?</td>
<td>4min</td>
<td>Check form pack</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mapping “I've also got the iPad if you need a reference”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area “allowed” to play in</td>
<td>Map</td>
<td>Green</td>
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<td>Actually used</td>
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<td>Where do you find the best places to play?</td>
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<td>Orange</td>
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<td>not enjoy going?</td>
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<td>Red</td>
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<td>Other points of interest?</td>
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<td>“We’ll come back to this as we talk”</td>
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<td>Interview</td>
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<td>Reconfirm consent</td>
<td>If it’s okay, we’ll move onto the next part of the interview?</td>
<td>Check</td>
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<td>recorders</td>
<td>Notes</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I have a few questions here-If it's okay I'll read them out for you to answer? Or, if you'd prefer you're welcome to read them through</td>
<td>Question</td>
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<td>Question</td>
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<td>1. How long</td>
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<td>2. How Often</td>
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<td>3. How Safe</td>
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<td>4. What is the best thing that has happened to your children when they've been out playing?</td>
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<td>5. What do you think about the type and quality of places they go to play?</td>
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<td>6. Can you tell me about why you let/don’t let your kids out to play on their own?</td>
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<td>7. Can you tell me about your relationships with the other parents in the neighbourhood?</td>
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<td>8. What would you like change about your kids’ childhood if you could?</td>
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<td>EXTRA ONE ONLY</td>
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<td>Did you grow up locally?</td>
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<td>Wrap up</td>
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<td>Thank you</td>
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<td>Reconfirm details</td>
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Time Finished:___________________

RECORDING 1__________________ RECORDING 2_______________________

EXTRA NOTES