

# in the picture

## Belonging and connection in country towns

EASY READ REPORT – 2014



**This book talks about how we did our project and what we found out in our research.**

## What was the project about?

We wanted to do a research project. We had some questions that we did not know the answer to.

We wanted to find out about what helps young people with cognitive disability to feel like they matter and they are important.

So, we asked young people:

- What helps you to feel like you belong in your town?  
and
- What helps you feel like you are connected to other people?  
and
- What makes it hard to feel like you belong?

These questions were way too hard for people to answer without some help!

We had to find a good way to help people work out what 'belonging' and 'connection' meant.



*Enjoying the ride.* By Monique ▶

## Who was in the project?

30 young people were in this project. They were photo researchers. They were our partners in the project. They did an amazing job.

They came from three country towns in NSW, Queensland and Victoria.

The photo researchers worked with researchers from Southern Cross Uni, who came and visited them in their towns.

Also, 26 other young people did a survey that we sent out on the internet.

## What did we do?

First, we did **mapping**.

Everyone talked in private about their own life and made maps like this one.

They talked about the people and the places that mattered to them.



Then, we did **workshops** about belonging and connection.

We talked about what people thought this might mean.

It was not easy to understand!



We also talked about the next part of the research and how we would do it.

People used some activity guides to help think about what photos to take.



## Photo research

Then, all the photo researchers took lots of photos of people and places that mattered to them. **733 PHOTOS!**



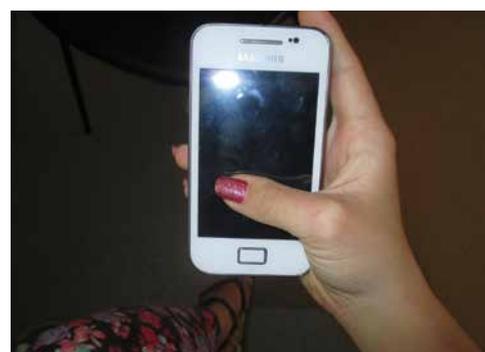
*Jamming.* By Luke ▲



*At soccer, best buddies and mates.*  
By Jarred

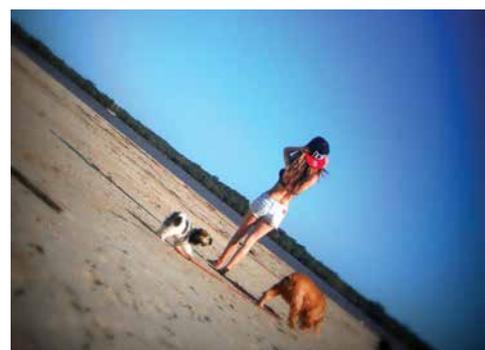


*Happy to help.* By Hayley ▲



*A way to keep in touch.* By Monique

*Chillin' with the dog at the beach.* By Stacey ►



## Telling your story about belonging

We got together again and everyone had a private talk about their photos and why they were important to them.

Each person picked the photos that mattered the most to them.

Researchers call this analysis.



They made a collage. Everyone came up with some words that told a good story about them. Some people needed some help with this.

## Exhibitions

The photos that people chose were shown in public places in each of the towns. A LOT of people came to see these! The exhibitions were a lot of fun.



## What did we find out?

Back at the uni, we looked at all the photos and the maps. We listened to all of the interviews. We also looked at the surveys people sent back.

The rest of this book talks about what we found out from thinking about what everyone told us.

## So, what IS belonging and connection?

Young people told us a lot in their workshop and their photos about what it means to feel like you belong and like you are connected. Here is what they said.

### When you feel like you belong, you feel:

- Comfortable
- Safe
- People are glad to have you there
- People can see all the things you can do
- Like it's your place
- Like you fit in
- People think you're a good person
- You would be missed if you weren't there

### When you feel connected to other people, you feel:

- Supported, and that you give support to others too
- That other people really know you
- Like you understand other people and they understand you

## Places in my life

Some places were important for helping people to feel like they belong.

There were three really important places for most people who were in this research. These were

- ★ home
- ★ the internet
- ★ disability services



▲ *Look, Google Earth! By Adam*

Other places that mattered were

- school and TAFE
- work
- public places (like skate parks)
- fun places (like the movies)
- shops
- sport
- special places  
(birthday parties, balls, holidays)



▲ *Movies are my favourite thing. By Penny*

## People in my life

People were **REALLY** important to all the researchers.

The people who mattered the most were

- ★ Family
- ★ Friends
- ★ Disability support workers



*My family, my mum and dad. ►  
We help each other. By Jarred.*

Other people who were important too were

- Boy and girlfriends
- Other service providers (like teachers, doctors)
- Bosses and co-workers at work
- Other people they knew around town



*Loved and special. By Jasmin ►*

## Being me

Photo researchers had a few important things to say about **themselves** too.

It mattered to a lot of people to show that being a person with disability was only a little bit of who they were. They had lots of different skills and interests which were more important to them.

Some of these things were

- being good at things
- being creative (good at art or music)
- being a man or a woman (or a girl or boy)
- having strong links to your culture (for Aboriginal people)
- becoming an adult
- being a person with disability



▲ *Singing the love.* By Zac

◀ *Cool Bundjalung man.*  
By Luke

## Living in a country town

People thought that living in a country town was good and bad.

### Why was it good?

- 😊 You can feel like you know lots of people, and they know you
- 😊 You know your way around your town
- 😊 It's easy to get around your town because it's not big
- 😊 Living out in the bush and near nature is great for some people

### Why was it bad?

- 😞 Not much to do for fun
- 😞 Public transport is pretty bad, so you have to ask someone to drive you places
- 😞 People know your private business sometimes
- 😞 It's harder to get a job, or move out of home



▲ *I like where I live because it's open.* By Katie

## What helps?

Some things help young people to feel like they belong and they are connected. These things are:

- 😊 **Feeling safe and comfortable.** When you feel relaxed with places and people.
- 😊 **Being respected.** When people treat you like you are important.
- 😊 **Being valued.** When people see that you have skills, good ideas and interests.
- 😊 **Being known.** When people who are important in your life (like support workers) take time to really get to know you and understand you.
- 😊 **Having fun.** When things are not boring!
- 😊 **Having support in transition times.** Knowing people as you move from school to the next stage in your life.



*I feel happy and relaxed when I play my guitar at home. By Ellyse*

## What makes it hard?

There are quite a few things that make it hard for people to feel like they belong and they're connected. Some of these are:

- ☹️ **Not having enough to do**
- ☹️ Feeling like **you don't fit in**
- ☹️ Feeling like **people don't respect you**
- ☹️ **Problems with friends or in your family**
- ☹️ Feeling **lonely**
- ☹️ **Feeling really sad** (and other people don't help you with it)
- ☹️ **Feeling unsafe**
- ☹️ Being **hurt** by other people (and other people not helping you)
- ☹️ Feeling like **no-one really knows you** or understands you



Unwanted support. By Jums

## What do we need to do to make things better?

We learnt some really important things from doing research together.

Some of the big things we have learnt from this research are:

- We need to make sure **we see young people as people first.**

Their disability is just one part of them.

- **Friends and family are really important to people.**

Young people give a lot to their families, friends and workers, as well as being cared for by other people.

- Some support workers did a really good job.

They respected people, and they got to know them and understand them.

They showed this by helping people to share the things they could do, and to feel good about what they did.

**We need to make sure that more support workers learn how to be like this.**



▲ *Me & Jess running amok.*  
By Megan



▲ *Sam loves a Coke.* By John

- **Having control over choices really matters.**

Making big decisions about who supports you or about your future are extra important.

This can help young people to feel safe, or to have bigger goals in life.

- It's great to have a comfy place to hang out with people that you like.

It's important that young people get to do their own thing as well and not everything happens in a group.

**We need to make sure that young people have the chance to do both kinds of things.**

- Lots of people said they were lonely.

Most young people didn't get organised help to make friends, or to keep friends.

**They could use some help here to be happier and less lonely.**

- Quite a lot of people had sad or bad things happen to them.

It was hard for them to get over these things, because they did not have a lot of help with this.

**We need to make sure they get this help.**



▲ *Mum's garden.* By Matt



▲ *Dove belongs.* By Cookie

## Young people having a say

We also learned some really important things about young people with cognitive disability being involved in research.

- Young people are the experts about their lives.
- People talked about a lot of different things.  
Some things were fun to talk about, but some were hard (like feeling lonely or sad).
- People with high support needs were involved all the way through, and were able to have their say using photos.  
They could show us what was important to them, even though they couldn't talk to us.
- People had fun doing the project, but some people had trouble fitting it into their busy lives.
- We needed to have really good communication to make it work.



▲ *Chillin with Jasmin.* By Sarah

## What next?

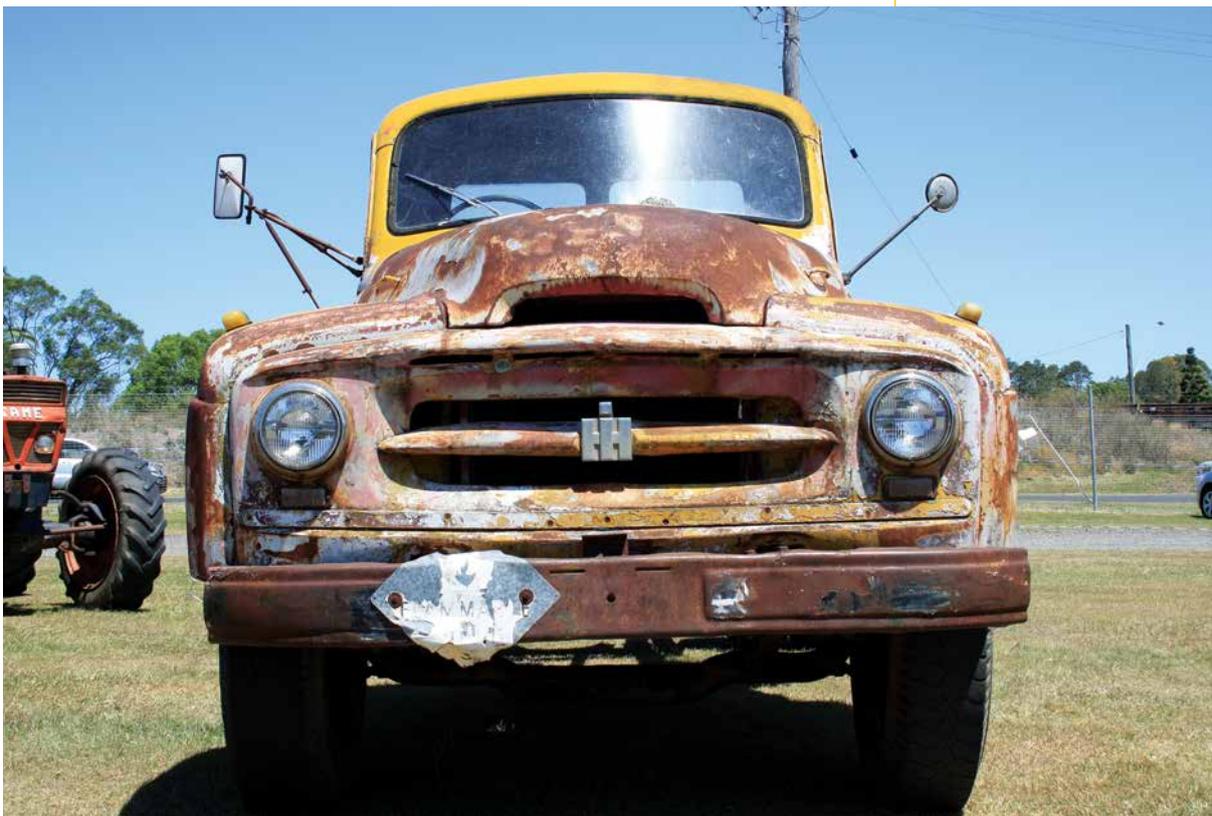
You can see some of the photos on a website that is part of the project:  
**[www.belonging.net.au](http://www.belonging.net.au)**

There is a long report there too, which will give you a lot more information about this project.

If you would like to talk to us about the research, we would love to hear from you. Here are the contact details for Sally Robinson, the lead researcher:

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Email [sally.robinson@scu.edu.au](mailto:sally.robinson@scu.edu.au)



*I am fascinated by the history of things. By Possum*

This report was written by Sally Robinson.  
Thanks to the young people who gave great advice about the words and pictures.

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