



### LIVING STREETS PROJECT

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Liverpool Region is situated in the south-west of Sydney. It stretches over 30 kilometres between Georges and Nepean Rivers with a total population of approximately 74,000. The area has a rich indigenous and multicultural history, with a large number of Liverpool residents coming from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Liverpool has the highest refugee intake in the western Sydney region and the council recently announced Liverpool as a Refugee Welcome Zone.

Living Streets is a Place-Making Project that has been using community and cultural development processes within certain areas of Liverpool CBD. As a cultural planning practice, the project looked at the southern CBD area of the City, at Speed Street, Nagle Street, Mill Road and River Park Drive. This neighbourhood at the time of the project had a population of 3,960. From this figure, 2,343 residents were born overseas, with 2,209 or 55% born in non-English speaking backgrounds. The area was well known for crime, drug use, drug dealing and rubbish disposal. In the mid nineties it was used by newly arrived migrants and refugees as a launching pad in terms of settling into a new community. Regardless of all its problems it has always been friendly, with a great energy created by residents who stand on their doorsteps and talk to each other. However, the area at the time was so unsafe that it made the new migrants and refugees even more isolated from the wider community and was labelled with stereotypes.

Safety and amenity issues were major concerns for families who lived in the area. In 1997, the Living Streets Project received funding from Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme to create a project with the residents in the neighbourhood. The project worked with schools, community and government agencies to develop an understanding of the cultural and social needs of the residents. Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre and Liverpool City Council's Community Planning team worked in collaboration on surveys, art projects with local schools and some door knocking at resident's homes as a local consultation strategy.

An unused piece of council land next door to a Community Centre and Disability Centre was identified and transferred to the project. In consultation with the residents it was decided that they wanted a park and a community garden. A team of urban designers and planners worked with the Project Coordinator. The plan informed different council departments about the social and cultural needs of the residents.

The aim of Living Streets Project is to use community and cultural development strategies within specific streets of Liverpool to create a sense of place that promotes liveability, safety and amenity. Placemaking, or sense of place, is about making opportunities for the community's imagination and ideas to inform a public space. It examines the spaces we live in and the way we utilize space. It looks at lifestyle and the way people connect, reject or identify with the environment they live in. Place making is about improving an urban environment so people feel safer and happier. It looks at what can be done to make neighbourhoods liveable for communities. In this regard it's about residents understanding their community and being able to direct change. Living Streets a place making program that seeks to improve the liveability of the southern CBD residential area by consulting and working with the people who live there.

#### Objectives of the Living Streets Project

- to develop opportunities for members of the community to participate in community cultural development projects
- to work with residents to highlight and take action about the issues that affect their everyday activities
- to direct the project to NESB and at risk communities
- to challenge the negative image of the area
- to improve access to cultural or recreational facilities that the local community can use.
- to develop communication networks within the community and between the community and outside agencies (including Council)
- to develop a project framework that could be sustained beyond the project period and that is transferable to other communities

By 2001, a beautiful and colourful park full of mosaic seating and pathways that reflected the multicultural nature of the neighbourhood was developed in the area. A community garden was built for residents who live in apartments. A performance was created with young people for the launch of the project.

During the project development, community members were involved in all aspects of decision making and helped with building

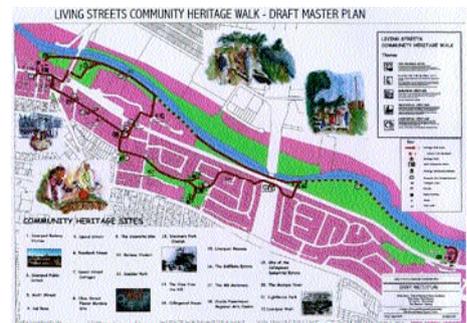


the community garden. A qualified horticulturist who was a graduate of the University of Kabul became involved in the project and helped the community members with building the garden plots. Design, Parks and Recreation, Community Planning and Community Facilities departments of Liverpool Council were involved in this process.

Residents started coming out of their homes a lot more and the park became a focal point for the residents and visitors. A video and booklet was developed to promote the project, and the study of neighbourhood brought out a lot more information about the aboriginal, European and multicultural heritage of the area. A document called the Living Streets Heritage Walk was developed and approved by council during this time suggesting a walk from Liverpool Railway Station, to Casula Powerhouse, looking at heritage sites within the area.

Through this project:

- crime in the area was halved
- residents who are mostly newly arrived migrants and refugees felt a stronger sense of self worth
- residents took pride and ownership of their neighbourhood
- a youth centre started functioning in an unused building in Speed Street
- residents started coming out of their apartments more often
- residents took charge of the 16 garden plots created for their use
- there was strong trust and friendship built between the cultural workers and the residents



Based on this project model, Living Streets has been able to obtain numerous grants from different funding sources to continue to work with residents on other projects. Since 2001

- a master plan of the Georges River area which has involved massive community consultations in informing the plan has been developed.
- more community gardens are being built in the neighbourhood (Lighthouse Park) funded through NSW Planning (DUAP)
- a basketball half-court funded through the Department of Sports and Recreation is being built for young people at the Gasworks site Young people of the area have worked with local artist to create designs for a seating area of the basketball court.
- a public art program has engaged artists to create Heritage Sculptures placed at significant sites within the Living Streets precinct, funded through Federation Community Grants (Department Communications, Information, Technology and the Arts)

In its current development, the project has extended its partnerships with the Liverpool Uniting Church and obtained funding from the CCDB of the Australia Council to create a flower garden to welcome refugees to Liverpool. The project is called the 'Living Garden' and engages artists to work with residents and refugee communities to create a community space for public use.

The Project has extended partnerships with Liverpool Public School on a Place Making Project called the 'Childhood Memories of Migration'. This project will tell the stories of migration by children focussing on arrivals and departures. Poetry, painting and ceramics will be used to enhance the landscape of that area owned by Department of Education and Training opposite the Railway Station, funded through NSW Ministry for the Arts/Western Sydney Local Government Arts Incentive Funds (\$20,000). Council has supported the project by allocating funds towards landscaping of the project area.

The project has also obtained two-year funding to work in Warwick Farm area, a suburb of Liverpool with a high population of refugee and migrants divided by the Hume Highway, age gaps, cultural gaps, drugs, safety and amenity issues. It is working in partnership with a range of local and regional organisations and have already gained the support of two major schools in the area, the Neighbourhood Centre, health organisations, University of Western Sydney (UWS), Liverpool, CCD NSW, Department of Housing, and Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre.

The project is funded through Western Sydney Area Assistance Scheme for \$63,750 in its first year and \$73,750 in its second. It is at the first stage of development and is working in partnership with Liverpool Health Service, local schools and the Neighbourhood Centre on numerous community cultural development projects. The final outcome of these practices will be to create community spaces. Case studies of all recent projects will be available in the near future.

#### Conclusion:

The essential ingredients for the success of Living Streets model of community cultural development practice has not only been based on policies but also through some unusual principles perceived by the community not as the norm in a local government environment. These include:

- connecting with communities on levels which are understood and respected by community members

- building trust with communities by listening to them rather than imposing council's ideas
- incorporating the community's ideas into planning processes
- putting in place sustainable processes that have helped communities to be independent
- having dedication and passion and a belief that we are here not for ourselves but for serving the community



*Monir Rowshan is a visual artist with extensive experience in ceramics and mosaics. She has worked in the field of community cultural development, multicultural art and public art in the last 14 years. Based at Liverpool City Council, she is currently coordinating the 'Living Streets Project', which deals with complex issues of community partnerships, community building and creativity within the context of place making.*

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