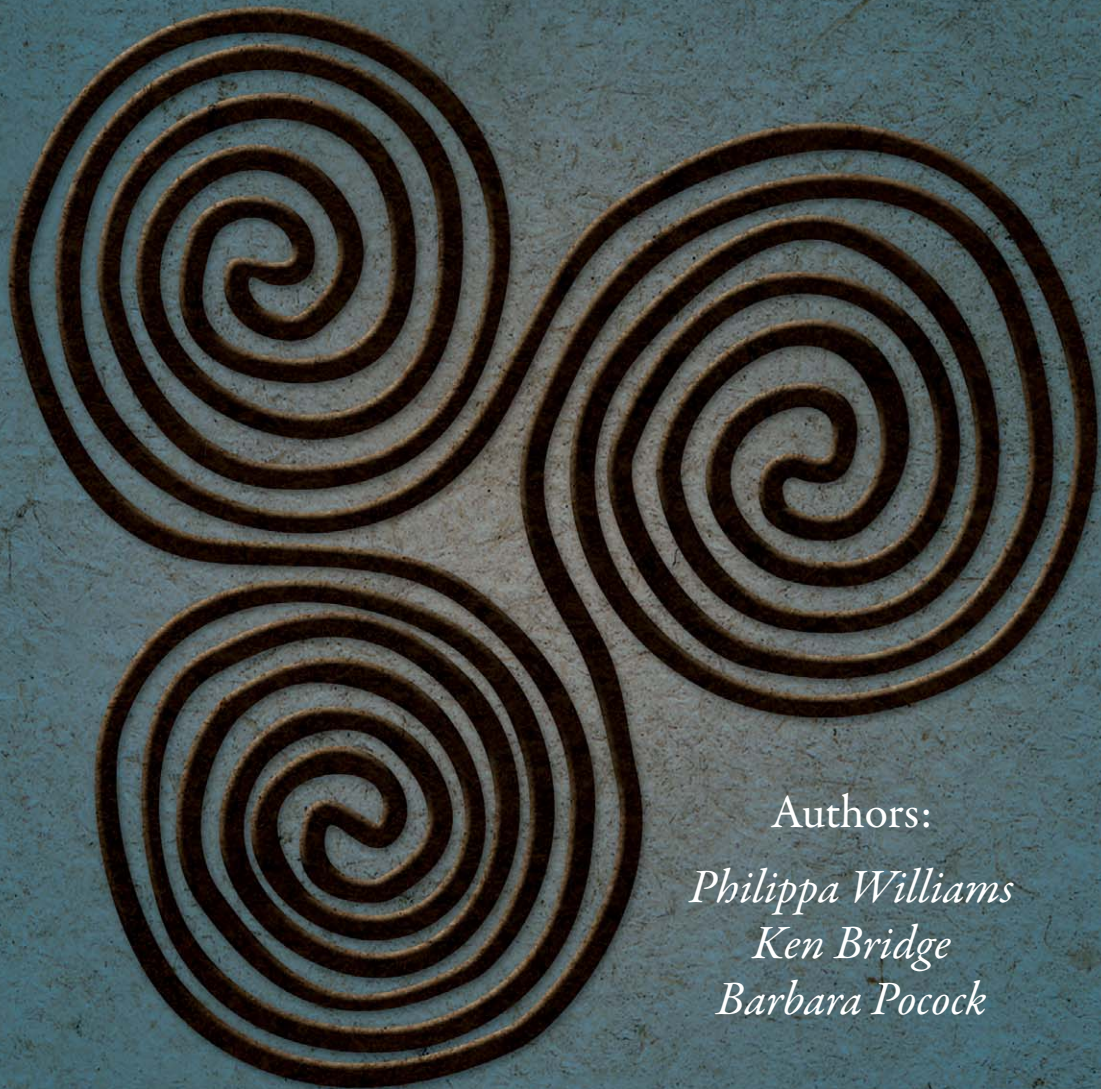


The Work, Home and Community Project 2006-2009

Mobility, Mothers and Malls:

How Home, Community, School
and Work Affect Opportunity
for Teenagers In Suburban Australia



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THE WORK, HOME, AND COMMUNITY PROJECT

Mobility Mothers & Malls:

**How home, community,
school, teenage work and
adult work affect opportunity
for teenagers in suburban
Australia**

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This Report

This is one of the reports from the Work, Home and Community research project conducted by the Centre for Work + Life, University of South Australia, between 2006 and 2009.

This report aids our understanding of how teenagers live their lives within the space and time constraints of an adult world, and in the context of changing work and household patterns in Australia. The report's findings come from focus groups with one hundred and seventy four teenagers from public and private schools servicing three master planned communities (MPCs) and adjacent suburbs in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland.

The reports arising from this project include:

1. *Linked Up Lives: Putting Together Work, Home and Community in Ten Australian Suburbs: Overview Report*: (Williams, Pocock and Bridge, 2009)
2. *Sustainable Lives in Sustainable Communities? Living and Working in Ten Australian Suburbs* (Williams, Bridge, Edwards, Vujinovic and Pocock, 2009)
 - a. *Sustainable Lives in Sustainable Communities: Supplementary report: Qualitative Findings from Eight Australian Suburbs* (Bridge and Williams, 2009) (may be available on request to Centre for Work + Life)
3. *Work, Home and community: findings from the household survey*. (Skinner, Ichii & Williams, 2009)
4. *Mobility, Mothers and Malls: How Home, Community, School, and Work Affect Opportunity for Teenagers in Suburban Australia* (Williams, Bridge and Pocock, 2009)
5. *Fitting it all together: Work, Home and Community in two Australian Master Planned Communities* (Williams and Pocock, 2009)

Reports are available on the Centre for Work + Life website

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(With the exception of Reports 2a. and 5 which may be available on request)

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Responsibility for the final text rests with the authors.

Executive summary

There have been few attempts to examine the impact of suburban living on teenagers despite the fact they comprise a significant proportion of Australia's suburban population. This study explores how suburban teenagers experience family, community, parental work and school. In particular it examines what factors facilitate or inhibit access to opportunity for teenagers. Access to opportunities for social interaction, work experience, education, physical activity and independence are developmentally important for a healthy transition through adolescence and early adulthood. Access to opportunity in the teenage years is therefore essential for individual, family and community well-being.

The aim of this study was to investigate how home, community, parental work and school interact to influence access to opportunity for teenagers living in suburban Australia.

Data was collected from 174 teenagers aged 11-18 years. Twenty two focus groups were conducted in which teenagers discussed a range of issues related to their experience and views of their home, school, community and parental work. Participants included boys and girls from both public and private schools servicing master planned communities (MPCs) and neighbouring lower socio-economic suburbs in Victoria, South Australia and Queensland. (MPCs are usually defined as geographically, and sometimes socially, bounded large scale, private housing developments that incorporate varying levels of social and physical infrastructure.)

Using 'ecological systems theory' as a framework, this study identified home, school, community, teenage work and parental work as significant domains affecting the lives of teenagers. It was also evident that demands and resources associated with amenity, mobility and adult availability across these domains interacted to affect access to opportunity for teenagers. The following summarises how amenity, mobility and adult availability affected access to opportunity for teenagers.

Home

Fewer financial resources within the family limited the level of amenity and mobility resources that home could provide for poorer teenagers. However, the impact of a poorly resourced home depended very much on teenagers' capacity to access resources outside the home. For all teenagers, compensatory resources within their local communities ameliorated disadvantage. A well resourced and easily accessible public library provided information, internet access, a quiet place to study and even entertainment and social opportunities not available in the homes of some younger teenagers. For older teenagers living in poor households, access to local part-time work provided financial resources needed to engage in social activities with friends.

Community

Teenagers in this study, regardless of age or socio-economic background, felt marginalised in their local communities. When discussing the amenity provided by their local communities, these teenagers reported feeling ignored, disrespected, and falsely judged by councils, developers, retailers and adult residents.

An absence of appropriate amenity coupled with poor public transport systems left the vast majority of these teenagers complaining of '*nothing to do*'. Where amenity did exist, it often fell short of the requirements dictated by the needs of both younger (11-14 yrs) and older (15-18 yrs) teenagers, and in many instances it was seen as tokenistic and of no real value. For many teenagers living in master planned communities, there was a perception that developers had

focused on the needs of adults and young children in the design of these areas. They felt their needs had been ignored or superficially addressed.

School

The demands and resources of school interact with those of home and community to affect teenagers' access to opportunity in a variety of ways. For many older teenagers, school competed with caring responsibilities at home, paid employment and social activities. Homework was considered excessive in senior high school and a number of participants described daily schedules that left them exhausted and with little time to interact with family or friends.

For all participants, the location of school was significant in terms of the demands and resources placed on the individual teenager, their family and their community. These teenagers recognised the advantages of attending a school that was close to home; local schools minimised the demands of travel and maximised social interaction with peers and other members of the local community.

Teenage work

A level of conflict between the demands of school, home and paid work was evident for some teenagers, who wanted to see more understanding from their teachers, bosses and parents about multiple demands and also wanted to see more convenient scheduling of these conflicting activities (i.e. more consolidation of homework into school time).

Parental work

Adults play an important role in the lives of teenagers. Parents, friends and community volunteers provide guidance, support, sanction and role modelling at a time when teenagers are making their own transition to adulthood. This study indicated that patterns of work in suburban Australia, particularly long hours of work and increased participation rates of women, are increasingly impacting on the availability of adults in the homes and communities of teenagers.

For many teenagers, the working time of their parents did not correspond to their own time schedules. This incompatibility of schedules resulted in reduced access to activities and friends and a perception they were 'missing out'. As well as affecting mobility, long working hours, inflexible working conditions and work related stress resulted in a lack of adult support for a number of participants. Some spoke about never having assistance with homework, or being unable to participate in activities with their parents. For others, the absence of one or both parents because of work had a negative effect on relationships within their home.

The impact of adult work extends beyond the family. Work interferes with the development of intergenerational social networks to the extent that it keeps teenagers and adults separate; it inhibits the sharing of time and space. This is particularly the case when the workplace is geographically separated from the community, and when adult work schedules are not coordinated with teenage schedules.

Flexible working schedules and the ability to work from home are workplace resources designed to address these problems. But they are more likely to be available to professional workers and so benefit teenagers from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Flexibility can also be a double edged sword, with some participants complaining that while their parents were physically available in the home, they were still not accessible due to the demands of their work.

Conclusions

Teenagers in suburban Australia are living their lives within the constraints of adult space and time. The demands and resources available to them within their homes and local communities are largely the product of decisions made by adults, for adults.

Teenagers from homes with fewer amenity and mobility resources rely on adequate community resources to gain access to opportunity. And yet, communities with a large proportion of disadvantaged households often lack good amenity and mobility resources.

While teenagers from better resourced homes are less reliant on community resources, it is clear that the provision of resources through the home comes at a cost. Mothers in particular seem to be making sacrifices in relation to work and career in order to be available to their children; teenagers and their families are forgoing social connection within their communities of residence; and residential communities and public schools are losing more and more well resourced families from the social milieu, which erodes social capital.

Implications for policy and action

This research suggests that specific actions by governments (at all levels), employers, planners, service providers, schools, parents and teenagers can result in better outcomes for teenagers in our communities. Action should focus on increasing resources available in the homes and residential communities of teenagers, particularly teenagers from lower socioeconomic areas, and reducing demands on teenagers and their parents that are associated with adult work and transport infrastructure in particular.

Introduction

Australian society has undergone considerable change in household structures, working patterns and community relations over the past few decades. While there has been considerable attention paid to the implications of these changes for the labour market, working parents, and for young children (HREOC, 2005), much less attention has focussed upon the experiences of teenagers. However, teenagers are unlikely to be immune from the effects of increasing rates of participation of women (especially mothers) in paid work; longer hours of work (especially amongst fathers), increasing intensification of work (Allan, O'Donnell and Peetz, 1999) and growth in dual earner and sole earner/parent households. In the ten years to 2007, the proportion of couple families with children aged under 15 where both parents were employed increased from 55.6 to 59.9 per cent. In the same period, the proportion of one-parent families with children aged under 15 where the parent was employed increased from 42.1 per cent to 55.1 per cent (ABS Cat No 4102.0, 2008, p 28).

Teenagers themselves – especially those in full-time education - are increasingly holding down paid work and this also is likely to be affecting their lives. Labour force participation rates for full-time students aged 15-20 reached 44 per cent in 2007, up from 29 per cent in 1986 (Flatau et al. 2008). Most of these are working part-time while at school or in post-school education.

Characteristics of work (parental and teenage), home, school and community combine to affect teenagers access to opportunity; opportunity for social interaction, work experience, education, physical activity and independent agency.

The literature concerned with opportunity for teenagers, is focussed primarily on transitional activities; those that foster the development of healthy and effective social, educational and vocational functioning into adulthood. Although there is an acknowledgement that development through adolescence is the result of an interaction between the many domains within which teenagers live their lives (Perry et al. 1993), research in this area tends to limit its focus to those domains within which teenagers are directly engaged, namely the family, neighbourhood and school (Jencks & Mayer, 1989; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Consequently there is a healthy literature documenting the characteristics of neighbourhood and school that affect adolescent outcomes, particularly in terms of education and employment (for examples see Halpern-Felsher et al. 1997; Bowen et al. 2002; Leventhal et al. 2001; Entwisle et al. 2005). Less is understood about how the spatial and temporal characteristics of multiple domains, such as home, community, school and adult work interact to affect opportunity for teenagers.

How we are configuring our lives both spatially and temporally is the focus of much discussion in Australia and internationally. Spatially, there has been a suburbanisation of populations in both developed and developing countries. As pressure increases on the residential capacity of cities, new housing developments are built which influence in numerous ways the lives of those who live in and around them. The location of new housing developments, their proximity to work and the degree of physical and social infrastructure, impacts significantly on teenagers. The spatial characteristics of their residential environment determines, in part, where they go to school and what they do when they are not at school, how they move around and the extent to which they engage with their family, friends, community and wider society (Williams & Pocock, 2007).

Findings from studies focussed on housing or neighbourhood type and adolescent outcomes indicate that poorer neighbourhoods and rental housing have a negative impact on the health and well-being of adolescents (Ellaway & Macintyre, 1998; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Evans et al. 2001). These negative effects are reduced, however, in neighbourhoods with adequate physical and social resources, particularly dense intergenerational social networks

(Putnam, 2000; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Sampson et al. 1999). There is also evidence that the negative effects of disadvantaged neighbourhoods may decline as teenagers become more independent and avail themselves of opportunities outside the home, from peers, school and community (Cairney, 2005).

Temporally, the focus has been largely on the interaction between adult/parental work and other aspects of life. Temporally, the focus has been largely on the interaction between work and other aspects of life. The past few decades has seen increases in the participation of women, especially mothers, in paid work and overall increases in total employment participation rates in many industrialised countries like Australia. These have significant consequences for the resources available to households and communities, and the demands placed upon them. Accompanying this change, are significant shifts in household shape, with dual earner and sole parent households increasingly common as the male breadwinner/female carer household declines (Giullari & Lewis 2005; Pocock 2003). These shifts affect many countries (OECD 2007). A significant body of research has examined aspects of working time for various groups of people, but most research has focussed on the interaction between work and family. The ability to access working conditions that help reconcile working time with time needed for other activities has been shown to have a positive effect on the health and well-being of workers and their children (Glass & Estes 1997; Presser 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004). Jobs that lack stability perpetuate unsociable working hours and fail to implement policies that make it easier for workers to combine work with other aspects of life, rob time from children and communities (Williams et al 2008). They also contribute to work related stress and negatively affect the physical, social and mental health of the worker, their partner and their children in myriad ways (Presser 2000; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000; Strazdins et al. 2004).

Despite the importance of the lives of teenagers in all of this research (as well as the public and political debates that surround issues of work and housing), very little research has focussed on the views and experiences of teenagers. Where it has, long hours and work related stress have been shown to affect the quality of relationships between parents and their children and to negatively affect the emotional well-being of children and teenagers (Galinsky 1999; Wierda-Boer & Ronka 2004; Pocock 2006).

Of course, research concerned with housing and research concerned with work are not independent, but far less attention has been given to the two in combination. While there has been some analysis of the spatial and temporal linkages between work, home and community in the UK (see for example Ward et al. 2007; McDowell et al. 2006), there has been very little in the Australian context. Where they exist, studies in this area suggest that the spatial characteristics of housing and work cannot be considered independently (O'Connor & Healy 2002). Access to employment and commuting are two obvious issues related to work and location of home (Williams et al. 2008). Other issues that have both a spatial and temporal component include access to goods and services, access to education and care, access to sport and recreation and access to community, not only for workers but also for their teenage children (Williams et al. 2008). Not surprisingly, existing studies suggest that these vary by socio-economic status (Ward et al. 2007).

The study reported here addresses significant gaps in our understanding of how teenagers live their lives by keeping home, community, school and adult work in equal focus. It acknowledges that each of these contexts has the potential to provide resources and exert demands which will influence how a child experiences the world they live in and how they transition through their teenage years into adulthood. In this paper we argue that teenagers are living their lives within the temporal and spatial limitations of an adult world. By this we mean the degree to which the spatial and temporal characteristics of home, community and adult

work are, on the whole, designed around adult activity. The spatial and temporal characteristics of adult work are the most salient aspects of this discussion, and they interact with each microsystem in various ways, but the 'adult world' in this paper is not limited to considerations of work; it also considers the design and function of suburban communities and transport systems which cater, by and large, to adult activities including work, recreation and social interaction.

Theoretical Framework: Ecological systems theory and the demands-resources model

This paper uses ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner 1979) to locate teenagers within the interdependent domains of family, school, community, work and the wider society. Ecological systems theory encourages a holistic examination of the lives of teenagers by acknowledging the influence of multiple ecological systems and the relationships between them. These ecological systems are conceived in the following way: the microsystem refers to the child's immediate setting – for example their home, their local community and their school. The mesosystem refers to the interrelationships among a set of microsystems which are relevant to the child's development at a given time – for example the interrelations between home, school and local community. The exosystem refers to domains that the child is not directly part of but which influence the child's development – for example, parents' work environments. Finally, the macrosystem refers to larger societal structures such as culture and norms, macroinstitutions such as government, legal and economic structures, the education system and public policy. Within these ecological systems sits the child/teenager, and their access to opportunity is a function of the interaction of these systems and their independent effects.

A demand-resource model will also be used to identify what characteristics of home, community, work and school contribute to the way teenagers experience their lives. Demand-resource models consider the degree to which structural, social and psychological characteristics of a particular domain place demands (both physical and mental) on an individual or group, as well as the extent to which they create resources (structural or psychological) for an individual or group (Demerouti et al. 2001).

A demand-resource model has recently been discussed in relation to work, family and community fit (Voydanoff 2005; 2008). Building on previous research demonstrating that the demands and resources associated with work directly affect an individual's role performance in the family domain and vice versa (Greenhouse & Parasuraman 1999; Hass 1999; Edwards & Rothbard 2000), Voydanoff explores ways in which community demands and resources may influence relationships between work and family. In doing so she distinguishes between two types of demands and resources: 'within-domain' and 'boundary-spanning'. 'Within-domain' demands and resources are characteristics in one domain that may impact on another domain (for example, long hours at work limit time available to teenager/child). 'Boundary-spanning' demands and resources on the other hand are inherently part of more than one domain even though they may originate in one (for example, working at home ensures parent availability to teenager/child).

It is useful to conceptualise home, work and community as interrelated domains characterised by demands and resources that combine in complex ways to either facilitate or inhibit work-family fit. However, to date the focus is consistently on adults and there has been no explicit consideration of teenagers in these discussions. It is not adequate to assume that the needs of parents and teenagers are the same. Certainly they are interrelated, but we are doing teenagers a disservice if we neglect their experience and point of view. Further, better understandings of

their perspectives may help improve policy and planning responses that attempt to meet the needs of teenagers and increase their well-being.

Describing teenage lives

By describing the lives of the teenagers who participated in this study we are, by definition, describing lives in transition. Puberty marks the transition from childhood to adolescence and with it comes rapid physical changes, significant emotional and cognitive maturation, sexual awareness and a heightened sensitivity to peer relations (Newman & Newman 1999). How well a teenager transitions through adolescence into adulthood is influenced by the way they interact with their environment and the degree to which the different domains of their life, such as home, community, parental work and school, combine to create opportunities for the development of physical, emotional and social competencies (Bronfenbrenner 1979). Access to good education and recreation resources, vocational experiences, positive social networks and adult role models during the teenage years increases the likelihood that a teenager will attain the physical, emotional and cognitive skills needed to become a productive and healthy adult (Fuligni & Hardway 2004).

The transitional nature of young people's lives cannot be understated. It informs our understanding of why teenagers do what they do, how they do it and with whom. It helps us understand the differential meanings of important themes in teenagers' lives and how they might be influenced by family and home, work and school, community and societal factors. Understanding experience as important to the way young people transition into adolescence, late adolescence and adulthood is an implicit assumption of the following examination of teenagers' lives.

Study Aims

This study investigates how home, community, parental work and school interact to influence access to opportunity for teenagers living in suburban Australia. In particular it explores what teenagers need from home, community and parental work, as well as the resources and demands associated with having these needs met.

Study Methods

Participants and recruitment

This study is part of a larger project called *The Work, Housing, Services and Community Project*, which is concerned with how men, women and children fit work, home and community together (see <http://www.unisa.edu.au/hawkeinstitute/cwl/research.asp> for detail).

One hundred and seventy four boys and girls aged between 11 and 18 years took part in this study. Of these, 81 were boys (47%) and 93 were girls (53%), 116 were aged between 11 and 14 years (67%) and 58 were aged between 15 and 18 years (33%). Participants were recruited from both state (64%) and private (36%) schools servicing three master planned communities and three neighbouring traditional suburbs in South Australia, Victoria and Queensland. State and private school students were represented in both younger (11 and 14 years) and older (15 and 18 years) age groups. Among teenagers attending schools within the master planned communities (state and private) there was a greater proportion whose parents were employed in professional or management positions than there were among teenagers attending state schools located in neighbouring traditional suburbs. Ethics approval was given by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of South Australia as well as the education

department in each participating state. Before participating, teenagers and their parents or guardian were provided with information about the study and signed a consent form.

Data collection

Data was collected via twenty two focus groups of between three and twenty participants (the mean number of participants per group was eight, with three groups having in excess of ten and one group having less than five). Nine focus groups were comprised of girls only, eight of boys only and five were a mix of boys and girls.

A schedule of focus group questions was developed based on the aims of the study (Appendix 1). In particular, questions focussed on teenagers' views and experience of the households they lived in, their parents' work and the people and places available to them in their local residential community, school and surrounding areas. The focus group schedule acted as a guide only so that each discussion could focus on issues that were of particular interest to the teenagers involved. This resulted in deep discussion of all areas of interest to the study across the 22 focus groups, although not all areas were discussed in depth in all groups. Every group explored what teenagers needed from home, community, school and parental work, as well as the resources and demands associated with having these needs met.

Data analysis

Qualitative analysis was carried out using verbatim transcripts of focus groups, notes taken during focus groups and notes made immediately following focus groups. Most groups were attended by two researchers, one facilitating and one note taking.

Transcripts were divided between two investigators and subjected to thematic coding. Investigators then met to discuss thematic coding and collective decisions were made about salient themes and possible relationships between them. The data was then subjected to higher level analysis which aimed to develop an understanding of the meanings and processes surrounding the issues discussed.

Findings and discussion

My Dad, he works early in the mornings and then he comes home late so then we have to look after my brother. We don't get to do anything in the afternoon. Then we have to make dinner and everything. We have to organise ourselves, we basically run the house. I have to do all the washing and stuff, it is hard to try and fit your homework in and then he comes home all stressed out. (Girl, 12 years old, high SES, Qld)

The findings of this study indicate that the capacity of teenagers to access opportunities for things such as social interaction, vocational experience, education, physical activity and independent agency depends on their ability to reconcile the demands and resources that characterise the various domains within which they live. Home, school, community and parental work interact in ways that either enable or restrict access to opportunity. If access to opportunity is enabled, social networks may be forged and maintained; vocational experience may be acquired; educational horizons may be widened; health and well-being may be maximised and appropriate levels of independence may be fostered. If access to opportunity is restricted, the opposite may be true and the journey through the teenage years may be characterised by social isolation, educational malaise, compromised health and well-being and inappropriate levels of independence (too much or too little).

Using ecological systems theory as a framework, this analysis identifies home, school, community and parental work as significant domains that shape the lives of teenagers. This analysis also indicates that it is through amenity, mobility and adult availability that these domains interact and affect access to opportunity for teenagers. Figure 1 presents a model of these findings which are further discussed below.

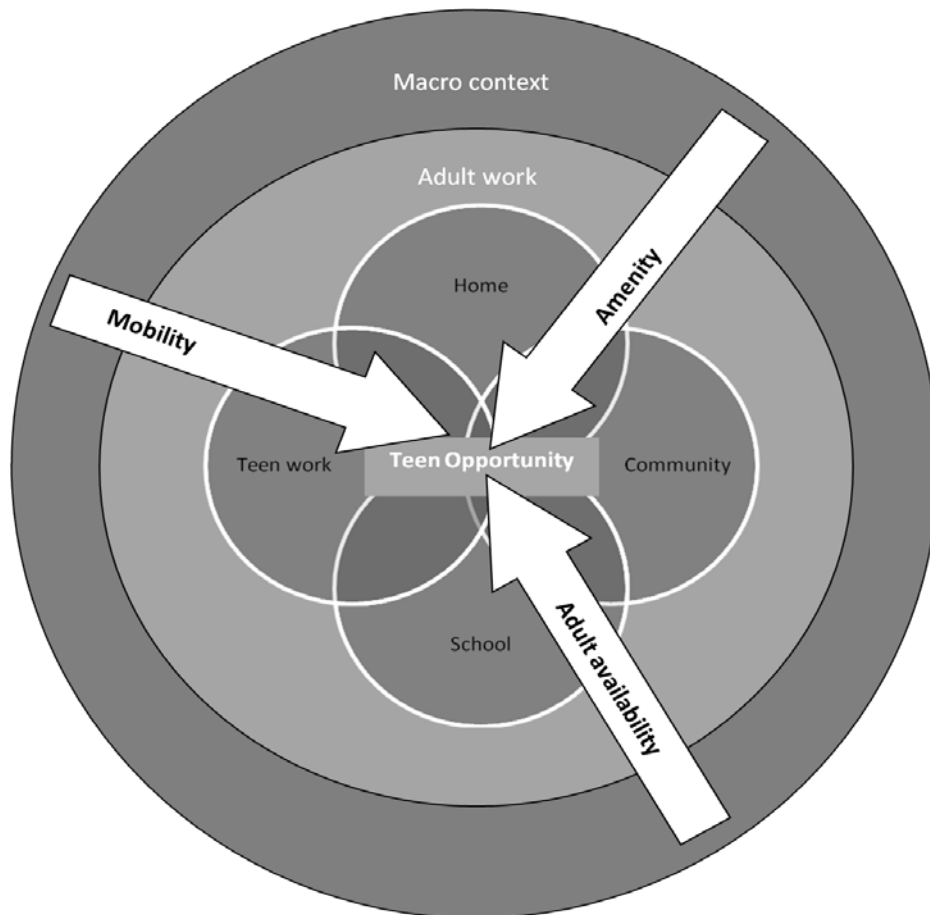


Figure 1: The ecological nature of opportunity for teenagers in suburban Australia

Opportunity is a function of amenity, mobility and adult availability

Opportunity is defined as ‘a situation or condition favourable for attainment of a goal’ (dictionary.com). In this sense, teenagers spoke about opportunity being important to them across a number of areas in their lives. They wanted the opportunity to interact with their peers, their family and with others in their local community and beyond; to have fun; to engage in educational or vocational activities outside school; to engage in paid work for income and experience; to participate in sport and other physical activity and to become independent.

Opportunity was dependent on access to appropriate amenity within and around the local communities of these teenagers. When we refer to amenity we are referring to a useful or pleasant facility or service, one which accommodates a need or desire of a particular group within a residential community. Opportunity to socially interact with peers was facilitated by access to meeting places and social activities. Opportunity for fun and recreation was facilitated by access to natural and purpose built areas such as bushland or recreation centres. Opportunity for extra-curricular educational experiences was facilitated by access to places offering specialised information and experiences such as libraries and museums. Opportunity for sport required access to sporting grounds and clubs. Opportunity for independence was facilitated by access to safe environments and transitional activities such as independent travel and paid employment.

Poor access to amenity was seen as an antecedent to antisocial behaviour amongst teenage peers:

I think it would be good if we had more community activities and stuff around where we live. Because then you would get people who do graffiti and all that kind of stuff off the streets because they would be interested in going to concerts and stuff like that. (Girl, 13 years old, med SES, Qld)

Amenity can therefore be seen as a resource and lack of amenity a demand for the teenager and their community. However, considering opportunity simply in terms of amenity is not straightforward. At the simplest level, certain amenities must exist within a teenager’s environment in order for some opportunities to be available. Businesses must exist, for instance, if a teenager is to access employment, and sporting clubs and playing fields must exist for teenagers to participate in organised sport. But if access to amenity is problematic, its value will be diminished for teenagers.

Although a number of things can restrict access to amenity for teenagers, issues of mobility were by far the largest concern for those who participated in this study. The level of mobility demands, and the degree to which teenagers were resourced to move around their environments had a significant impact on their capacity to access amenity and therefore opportunities within and outside their local communities. In a society that is built around the car (with roads dominating the landscape, homes and workplaces separated by unwalkable distances), teenagers are disadvantaged because they cannot drive. Access to opportunity therefore depends on the co-location of the child and appropriate amenity or access to reliable and safe forms of transport. For so many of these participants, safe and reliable public transport was not available at the times they wanted nor to the places they wanted to go.

Of course, access to opportunity was also dependent on the availability of adults in the lives of teenagers. Teenagers need adults to be available to them in order to access amenity and other sources of opportunity. Parents who were available in terms of time and energy were a resource to teenagers; they provided company after school, support, assistance with home work and, importantly, transport. Indeed, adult availability was most saliently discussed in terms of mobility: parents were relied on to transport teenagers to places where they could

If access to amenity is problematic, the value of that amenity is diminished

Issues of mobility were by far the largest concern

Parents who were available in terms of time and energy were a resource to teenagers

then access various opportunities. Without parents to drive them, teenagers struggled to access friends, sport, work and even school in some cases.

The availability of adults outside the family was also important. Even when appropriate amenity was available, such as sporting facilities, a lack of available adults to volunteer time and energy coaching sporting teams reduced opportunities for local teenagers. Access to local adults, through organised and incidental activities, also created opportunities for the development of intergenerational social networks within communities. These social networks increased the social capital available to teenagers and their families and strengthened the social fabric of local communities.

Five domains affecting the lives of teenagers: Home, Community, School, Teenage work and Adult work

In order to intervene in the lives of teenagers to enhance access to opportunity it is essential that we understand how the microsystems of home, community, school and teenage work and the exosystem of adult work interact to create demands and resources associated with amenity, mobility and adult availability. The remainder of this paper examines these five domains in turn.

Home - microsystem

Amenity

Teenagers from all age groups and across all socio-economic backgrounds identified various forms of amenity within the home that facilitated opportunity. However, access to such amenity was not equal. Teenagers from lower socio-economic backgrounds had less access to money, a second car, the internet, and space and privacy than teenagers from higher socio-economic backgrounds.

Interestingly, rates of mobile phone ownership did not seem to differ among teenagers from high and low socio-economic backgrounds despite the financial costs associated with them. There was an age difference however, with younger teenagers, especially those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, being less likely to own a mobile phone than older teenagers. This age difference reflects a difference in independent activity and travel, with older teenagers far more likely to use public transport and participate in activities without their parents. This may also account for the apparent difference between teenagers from higher and lower socio-economic backgrounds, in that those with fewer amenity and mobility resources at home were more likely to travel independently of their parents. For these teenagers, the mobile phone was not likely to be used to contact friends: rather, it was used to ensure constant contact between parent and child thus becoming, in effect, a vehicle of supervision. In one focus group with year 7 boys and girls from a lower socio-economic background, six of the eight participants had a mobile phone. When asked why they had them the overwhelming reasons were for parental monitoring and perceived safety while travelling alone:

*I have one because I'm going to high school next year. Because I'll have to walk to school next year and go on the bus so [mum] kind of said that I have to. **So why do you think she wants you to have a phone?** So she can make sure that I'm on the bus when I'm meant to be and I can message her when I get home and that. **Okay. And do you want a phone? Are you glad you've got a phone?** Yeah, no I am but then I'm not because it's a lot of responsibility, because you have to make sure you're not spending too much. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, SA)*

***What have you got a phone for?** I don't know. My mum just bought it for me for my birthday, for high school too. **For what reasons do you think?** Safety. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, SA)*

The supervisory use of the mobile phone was also apparent among older teenagers, with many suggesting they had more freedom because of the perceived safety associated with easy contact between parent and child.

*When you've got a mobile they can just ring you and ask are you okay but if you don't have a mobile they'd be sitting at home worrying is she okay. **So there'd be a lot more anxiety on your parents' part. Do you think your parents would restrict what you do and when you do it?** Yeah. **In what ways?** Come home straight from school. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA).*

Fewer financial resources within the family limited the level of amenity that home could provide for poorer teenagers. However, the impact of poor amenity within the home depended a great deal on teenagers' capacity to access amenity outside the home. For all teenagers, compensating resources within their local communities ameliorated disadvantage. For some older teenagers, access to local part-time work provided the financial resources needed to engage in their social group:

You work because your mum doesn't have the money to fork out for the things that you want so you go get a job so that you can buy the things you like and fit in like everyone else. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA)

In a disadvantaged suburb of Melbourne a well resourced and easily accessible library provided information, internet access, a quiet place to study and even entertainment and social opportunities not available in the homes of younger teenagers. When asked what they did at the library, one girl replied:

*My brother likes to go and play on the computer and borrow DVD's ... There are more resources there. **What sorts of things?** Like the internet ... Like to borrow books if you're doing a project on the olden days ... I go with my dad sometimes he looks for books as well ... and just for fun. **Okay so it's a good place to hang out at the library?** Yep. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Vic)*

In such cases, it was not simply the existence of a library which created significant resources but the depth and nature of the facility, including the quality of the infrastructure it offered, the hours of availability and the diversity of offerings. Facilities like libraries provide vital compensatory resources where household resources, including parental time, are often lean.

Mobility

One significant difference between teenagers from lower and higher socio-economic backgrounds was their access to mobility. Having a second car in the family increased the mobility of teenagers. In this respect teenagers from homes with more financial resources were at an advantage, but adult availability within the home had the most significant influence on teenage mobility. Teenagers from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds were disadvantaged when no parent was available to provide transport in the afternoon or on weekends. This disadvantage was exacerbated when home was not co-located with school, shops and other services and activities:

*Sometimes we can't do anything because no parents are home. **And so you rely on your parents to take you to places?** Yeah because we live so far out. We can't walk anywhere. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, Vic)*

Adult availability

Adult availability within the home also influenced teenage access to guidance, support and care. Many teenagers spoke of having no assistance with homework from parents whose work hours kept them away from their children at the time of day when they would most benefit from having an adult around.

My parents work and my mum she comes home, she goes in the shops and then she comes home again to cook tea. So I barely ever get to do my homework with my mum. (Girl, 12 years old, low SES, SA)

Poorer teenagers have less access to mobility and therefore less access to opportunity

For the vast majority of these teenagers having a parent available after school and on weekends was seen in a positive light. They recognised the benefits it afforded them in terms of access to opportunity, but they also acknowledged the benefits it had for relationships within their home:

[My dad is] either working or he's sleeping. So what effect does this have on your relationship with him? Our relationship? I don't really have one. He's nice and all that. We don't really communicate. And do you think that's because he's not around? Yes. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Vic)

What teenagers want from home

These teenagers talked about wanting more time with their parents, particularly working parents. They recognised that time poverty interfered with the development of good relationships within the family and would have gladly swapped time for money even when they lived in poorer households.

I want more time to get to know (my parents) not as parents but as friends. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

The only thing I would change – my dad hardly ever gets time off. And you want to spend more time with your dad? Yes, it would be awesome. He's just knackered all the time. (Boy, 13 years old, high SES, SA)

It's not like we're missing out or anything. He gives us money most of the time when we need it and he gets me stuff for my room and puts up pictures. But we don't get in contact. We really don't speak that much. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Vic)

When he was working, he used to get heaps (of money) because he worked in a factory for oil or something. But now that's changed. Because I was younger, he wanted to spend more time with me so he quit his job. But now he's spent all his money that he got for quitting. Has that been nice for you in him being off work? Yes. What's been particularly nice? Just getting to spend time with him and trusting him I think. We've got this bond. I never lie to him. (Girl, 12 years old, low SES, Vic)

It is not surprising that fewer financial resources within the home limit amenity, mobility and adult availability resources to teenagers. But if the resulting disadvantages are amplified through restricted access to opportunity (especially through limited mobility) then disadvantage is deepened and perpetuated (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn 2000). This was clearly the case for many teenagers in our study and it was exacerbated by a lack of compensatory resources – like quality libraries and recreational facilities - within their local communities.

Teenagers want more time with their parents

Restricted access to opportunity deepens and perpetuates disadvantage

Community - microsystem

Amenity

Teenagers in this study, regardless of age or socio-economic background, felt marginalised in their local communities. When discussing the amenity provided by their local communities, these teenagers reported feeling ignored, disrespected, and falsely judged by councils, developers, retailers and adult residents:

I reckon the Council wouldn't spend money on kids. They're always spending it on factories and that, and kids might think that we get a skate park, but there is none because I think the Council [doesn't care]. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Vic)

An absence of appropriate amenity coupled with woefully inadequate public transport systems left the vast majority of these teenagers complaining of 'nothing to do':

I don't really hang around with my friends (in my community) because there's nothing to do. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Where amenity did exist, it often fell short of the requirements dictated by the needs of teenagers across age groups, and in many instances it was seen as tokenistic and of no real value to teenagers. This was particularly the case for teenagers living in master planned

communities: ironically, the provision of some facilities for young children in such communities made the absence of facilities for teenagers especially obvious. For many teenagers, there was a perception that developers had focused on the needs of adults and young children in the design of these areas with 'little tiny playgrounds' everywhere but nowhere for older children to kick a ball or hang out. Participants felt the needs of teenagers had been ignored or superficially addressed:

It feels cramped ... you can't do much, like our oval is pretty big but if you kick the ball too far it will go on the road. Everything feels like it's been drawn on a plan and then, 'yes, we have to stick that there but we can't make it too wide because that won't fit there'. (Girl, 16 years old, medium SES, QLD)

You're not allowed to swim in the [suburb's] lakes. (Boy, 13 years old, medium SES, QLD)

Where recreation areas had been built for young teenagers, they were often compromised because older teenagers (with nowhere else to go) used them to hang out. Their presence was often intimidating for younger teenagers and broken glass and litter restricted the use of the amenity during the day:

At night it is not so good, there is always big parties at the scooter park. (Girl, 13 years old, medium SES, Vic)

Older teenagers, in turn, complained about age restrictions at music venues and some "cafes" which limited their access to comfortable and appealing venues where they could just hang out with friends late at night:

Places like that are good for people our age because we want to like just cool down and chill out but we can't really have a place like that because we're not 18, we're not legal age. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Mobility

Participants were acutely aware of the contingent nature of their mobility. If busy family members were not available, they had to rely on public transport. A lack of respect for teenagers, their transitional needs and how they use their time was manifested in the restricted availability of public transport in some areas. Many complained of bus schedules that catered to the needs of adults working regular hours but disregarded the morning and afternoon travel needs of teenagers. Public transport was problematic for the majority of participants in this study: cleanliness, safety, routes, timetabling, reliability and respect from drivers and transport information officers were repeated themes across all focus groups. As one participant suggested:

Council needs to allocate money to buy more buses to be able to cater for everyone that needs to go different places. Because we can't help it if we don't have our licence yet, it's not our fault. (Girls, 16 years old, medium SES, Qld)

Even when public transport was available, issues of safety were of sufficient concern to limit access for both girls and boys participating in this study:

*I got abused on the train yesterday... there was just some man who wouldn't leave me alone. **Does that put you off public transport?** Definitely. Yes. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)*

Public transport on the weekends is once every hour and it's busy and the city is packed and the buses are dangerous...

On the train there's nothing to stop someone coming in and sitting next to you and anything can happen, Like if you're by yourself and a big group comes up to you, what are you going to do? (Boys, 17-18 years old, high SES, Vic)

Adult availability

The availability of adults in the local community compensated for poor public transport and a lack of mobility resources in the home. Extended family, friends' parents and sporting coaches could often be relied on to provide transport for a teenager with poor mobility resources thus giving them access to social, vocational and recreational opportunities.

The availability of adults in the local community encouraged positive social connection for teenagers and their

Available adults also increased the likelihood that a teenager would form intergenerational social networks within their local community. Intergenerational social networks are those vertical networks that exist between teenagers and adults of varying ages, both within and between families. These networks encourage the development of positive social connections for teenagers and their families. They provide opportunities for support and sanction, and they encourage socially appropriate behaviour in teenagers due to the high levels of trust that can develop between teenagers and adults who share a social network (Sampson, et al., 1999). With a network of available parents, teenagers are able to access opportunities for social interaction with their peers and with adults in their local communities.

If you sleep over at someone's house ... and the mum doesn't really like you or trust you, then you won't feel comfortable. Is it important that your friends parents trust you? Yes. Why? It would affect your relationship with your friend. And are you trustworthy? Would you do something that you knew she didn't want you to do? No. Okay, what about a parent that you didn't feel comfortable with? Yes. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Vic)

The following conversation with a group of older teenage boys highlights the supportive role friends' parents can play if teenagers and adults are able to spend time together:

Are your friend's parents important to you?

Male1: Yeah.

Male2: They're kind of like aunties and uncles.

Male3: Yes, I call my friends and if their parents pick up I'll talk to them. I talk to them more than to my friends.

Male2: Like most of my friends' parents are good. Like you go to a mate's house and sometimes I like sitting down with their parents and having a convo with them you know. Like most times they're good to talk to. You feel that you can trust them and they're someone older that has experience.

Male1: And it's someone else. You're not always talking to your parents. It's someone else's opinion and someone else's view on life.

Male4: You've got those parents that can relate to you. Like they know how it actually was to be our age because they were like us.

Male2: Yes.

Do you get enough of that sort of time with friends' parents?

Male2: When you go to their house.

Male1: Which is hard when like we said you don't have enough time for going out and socialising. (Boys, 17-18 years old, High SES, Vic)

What teenagers want from community

Participants were asked what they wanted from councils or developers. In general their responses indicated a strong desire to have a 'place' in their communities, both physically and figuratively. They wanted places to hang out with friends that were comfortable and offered a variety of things to do, and they wanted to feel safe and respected in their communities.

Teenagers spoke about wanting things that were specifically designed for them as well as having access to things that would benefit the wider community (such as recreational and cultural amenities). Examples of things that might be specifically designed for teenagers include underage night clubs (or specific nights for under 18s), teen movie nights and teen recreation centres:

They should build like a studio thing where kids can go and relax. I play the guitar, but I can't play it in my house because they always go 'shut up'. So you kind of need a lounge away from home. (Girl, 12 years old, low SES, Vic)

Teenagers want to have a 'place' in their community

I reckon we should have more stuff for younger people to do. Like we should have maybe like a community centre or like a Police Youth Citizens Club or something around here, like there's one in [another suburb] but that's like ages away. Like it's got gyms and stuff like that there and basketball courts and stuff and they have dances, like groove and all that there sometimes. Like they should have that around here because a lot of times there's just people doing not good stuff, like breaking the law and stuff around here so they should have something like that around here to pass the time. (Girl, 16 years old, med SES, QLD)

Community activities, where you can just like hang out with your friends on weekends and stuff without it costing heaps of money. (Girl 13 years old, Med SES, QLD)

Maybe you could have like a movie night where just people like in an age group could just go there and maybe it might just be \$2, but it's just the same as going to a cinema. Or they could just start up having movie nights for schools kids. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, SA)

As the previous quote indicates, when local amenities do exist, affordability will determine whether teenagers can actually access them:

I reckon they should have like more kind of free stuff. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, SA)

Everything is so expensive around here lately. Like the movies are like \$10 for us now. (Girl 13 years old, Medium SES, QLD)

Public transport is also a key factor in teenage access to amenity, and problems with public transport have been documented elsewhere in this report. It was suggested in a number of focus groups that a teen bus exist in suburban areas to transport teenagers around their local and surrounding suburbs. Such a service would not only provide targeted transport for teenagers, it would be safer than regular public transport (an issue raised by many participants) and engender feelings of respect and belonging in teenagers:

If there was a kid's bus it would be much easier because you wouldn't be worried. (Girl, 12 years old, low SES, Vic)

The safety of public transport was a significant issue for many participants, particularly those from poorer households who had to rely most heavily on public transport. Buses and trains were considered unsafe at night, and even taxis were considered unsafe by some:

Night time is hard. Even taxis are dangerous. (Girl, 16 years old, Low SES, SA)

Safety was also an issue more generally for participants. Many felt unsafe walking around in the evening due to a lack of lighting and a number of groups spoke about traffic safety as a key concern in their neighbourhoods. Unsafe neighbourhoods encourage parent imposed or self imposed restrictions on the movements of teenagers which reduces access to recreation, socialisation, part-time work and independence. These teenagers wanted to live in safer areas:

If this was a safer area... then things would be so much easier to get to. If it was just much safer then parents wouldn't worry so much. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

As well as targeted amenities, these teenagers wanted wild and unplanned spaces to explore and reinvent.

We have like heaps of dirt tracks that we make ourselves, we find our own way, and we just like clean it out a little bit, and ride through. (Boy, 13 years old, low SES, QLD)

Teenagers are developmentally primed to explore and experiment and in the absence of appropriate places and spaces, they will 'have fun' 'muck around' and do 'stupid things' in the only places available to them – the streets and shopping areas designed for the adults in their communities. These participants acknowledge that the 'stupid' behaviour of some leads to stereotypes that result in the mistrust or exclusion of all teenagers from the public spaces of their communities:

When I'm in a group and we're in a shop and just mucking around and stuff – or even if we're not doing stuff, just looking around, they'll make us get out in case we do stuff. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, Vic)

A teen bus could provide transport for suburban teenagers

Teenagers want their communities to be safe

There was a lot of discussion about shopping malls in these focus groups – almost all of these teenagers expressed a desire for bigger and better shopping malls. When asked what a shopping mall provided them, they inevitably reported ‘a place to hang out with friends’ that had cheap food and a variety of shops to look in (but not necessarily buy from). When stripped down to its basics, a mall provides teenagers with a safe, free, sheltered place to ‘hang out’ with friends in an unstructured way.

It should be of considerable concern that suburban teenagers consider the mall an ideal space, amongst the most desired of their available options. Even after identifying experiences of exclusion and disrespect at their local mall, many of these teenagers still desired more of the same. In suburbanising the lives and experiences of teenagers, community planners are contributing to an adolescent malaise characterised by feelings of exclusion and neglect and resulting in isolation, boredom and the ‘consumerisation’ of teenage life. The consequences of this form and place of social life for teenagers are largely unexplored but may well help explain increasing labour market participation amongst teenagers as well as their early integration into a ‘work-spend’ cycle (Schor 2004; Pocock 2006) affecting their longer term health and welfare.

Adults play an important role in the lives of teenagers. Parents, friends and community volunteers provide guidance, support, sanction and role modelling at a time when teenagers are making their own transition to adulthood. Unfortunately many teenagers have limited opportunity to interact in their residential communities due to busy schedules that include school, heavy homework loads, paid work and sibling care. Increasing rates of private schooling are also removing teenagers from their communities.

School - microsystem

The demands and resources associated with school interact with those of home and community to affect teenagers’ access to opportunity in a variety of ways. For many older teenagers school competed with caring responsibilities at home, paid employment and social activities.

I’d like to work more hours but I can’t. You’re already up to 25 hours per week, how do you fit in school work as well? Afterwards. Don’t even go there man. Just go home, three hours sleep, wake up, bang, you’re ready, you’re gone... It’s hard because sometimes I have to stay home and look after my little brothers after school as well. (Boy, 18 years old, low SES, SA)

Like teachers and parents don’t understand ... we go to school for how many hours a day and then they expect us to come home and then study when we’re exhausted from school. We’ve been studying all day, doing work all day and the last thing we want to do is go home and do homework. I’d prefer to have a little bit of a longer school day and then have no homework. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

One group of older teenage boys said that they were advised by their teachers to maintain a commitment to sport during year 11 and 12, and a number of them admitted that sport kept them sane. The value of maintaining an interest in sport during the stressful years of senior high school cannot be understated for many of the boys who participated in this study. The following statements from one focus group are indicative:

If I didn’t have sport I’d go insane.

You’re free when you’re at sport, like you can do what you want.

You’re with friends and you just do what you enjoy most in life.

I cannot live without my sport. If I didn’t have sport I would be the worst student in the world. (Boys, 16 - 18 years old, high SES, Vic)

We should be concerned that teenagers consider the suburban mall an ideal space

Organised sport also facilitated the development of social networks for teenagers. These social networks were often intergenerational and provided resources beyond access to physical activity and time out from school:

I do kickboxing and I'm the youngest. I'm 16 and I'm the youngest in our gym. Everyone else is like 21, 22, 23 so it's also good because I can sit down and talk to them. Like I feel comfortable just walking in whenever and I know that I'll be at home. It's a good environment there because I know that I'm comfortable there. (Boy, 16 years old, high SES, Vic)

Despite the benefits of participating in organised sport or other organised recreational activities in senior high school, teenagers across focus groups indicated that it was difficult to find the time to combine recreation with a heavy homework load. Very often it was the homework (and presumably academic outcomes) that suffered:

They don't allow for your recreational needs so they can say we'll give you this amount of homework and if you don't do it and say well I didn't get time to, bad luck for you, you get punished. (Boy, 16 years old, high SES, Vic)

Mobility

For all participants, the location of school was significant in terms of the demands and resources placed on the individual teenager, their family and their community. These teenagers recognised the advantages of attending a school that was close to home: local schools minimised the demands of travel and maximised social interaction with peers and other members of the local community. Unfortunately, poor public transport undermined some of the benefits of going to school locally, with some participants reporting overcrowded and unreliable services:

Like in the morning and in the afternoon buses are really full. Like I used to catch a different bus to get to school and I was always at least 15 minutes late ... just because there were tonnes of people on it. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, Qld)

Attendance at local public schools was also undermined by perceived behavioural and drug problems, as one young teenage girl attending a private school noted:

My mum sent me here because she was worried about the scumminess of [our local high school]. (Girl, 13 years old, high SES, Vic)

The perceptions of this girl and her family reflect those of families throughout suburban Australia and are fuelling an exodus from public high schools. But the demands associated with attending a private school that is not located near home are substantial. Many of the teenagers attending private schools described inordinate demands associated with this choice, above and beyond the cost of school fees and uniforms. When asked why both their parents worked, one girl attending a private school replied “[We] go to a private school”. This got a laugh from the whole group and there was general agreement that their parents were busy working in order to educate them. Some families have decided that the benefits of private schooling must outweigh some of the costs incurred when both parents are working significant hours; costs that have been articulated by these participants in terms of reduced time and energy to address their needs after school and on weekends.

Travel costs (measured in time, money and the environment) are another significant demand of private schooling. Many privately schooled participants did not live near their school or school friends. Many travelled more than half an hour each way, and the majority were transported to school in a private vehicle, usually by their mother. Those who could and did rely on public transport (which was not available to all) could spend several hours travelling each day, time that might otherwise be spent doing homework or socialising with family or friends.

Older teenagers found it difficult to combine recreation with a heavy homework load

The location of school was significant in terms of the demands and resources placed on teenagers, their families and communities

For many participants attending private schooling outside their local area, the opportunity to develop diverse local social networks was reduced. It was common for teenagers attending private schools to report a lack of local friendships:

I don't really have anyone around my area that I know. (Boy, 14 years old, private school, SA)

Because I live far from [where the school is], most of my friends live in [other places] so it makes it hard on weekends ... I can't really go out and play with them because I don't really know anyone. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, Vic)

Amenity and adult availability

For those who are not socially embedded in their local community there are flow on consequences for their family and the community itself. Children act as social bridges for their family (Williams and Pocock, 2007): that is, their relationships with other children lead to relationships between parents, and between parents and other community members like teachers, coaches and so on. If children or teenagers are taken out of a community (through attendance at a school elsewhere) the opportunity for the family to become socially embedded is reduced. When this is the case, the teenager and their family are less likely to benefit from the social resources available in the community. The community, in turn, is diminished because of the absence of better resourced residents from community life (Fischer & Kmec 2004). When asked what they wanted in their community, one young teenage girl attending a private school replied *'I'd like my local high school to be better'*. When asked if they would prefer to attend a 'good' local public school over their current private school, a number of participants said they would.

Clearly the resources needed to support private schooling extend beyond direct financial costs. Once again, mothers are key to the mobility of their children. Their availability for school drop-off and pick-up, well into their children's late teens, restricts their own opportunity for time, work and/or career. There is an irony in the fact that many families are paying for their daughters to have increased educational and therefore vocational opportunities, while at the same time modelling stereotypes of women as primary carers and supporters of their husbands' careers.

What teenagers want from school

These teenagers wanted access to good quality local public schools. Some attending public schools in poorer areas wanted better security at school, more green spaces, more play time and access to sporting equipment during lunch times. Others spoke of wanting better and safer access routes to schools.

Well where I live there's like lots of bad stuff happens in the schools. Like it's really bad... I was going to go to one of the alright schools but it's still really bad... Where we live there's like this big land and we always, in the community here, we keep saying like can we build a nice school here because it's really big land... because there's lots of primary schools everywhere but no high schools. (Girl, 13 year, High SES, Vic)

Teenagers in senior high school wanted their schools to acknowledge and respect their multiple obligations (including care and part-time work) when setting homework and when responding to students who had not had time to do their homework. Amongst a couple of groups there was general agreement that a longer school day would be preferable to homework:

I'd prefer to have a little bit of a longer school day and then have no homework. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

I'd rather spend an extra hour at school and finish at say 4:30. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

The spill-over from school to other parts of their lives is a considerable problem for the majority of older teenagers in this study and they would appreciate more flexible school policy and practice for the same reasons adults appreciate flexible work policy and practice.

For those not socially embedded in their local community there are flow on affects for their family and the community itself

Teenagers want local access to good quality public schools

I want school to be school and I don't want to take any school home. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

For all participants, the location of school was significant in terms of the demands and resources placed on the individual teenager, their family and their community. These teenagers recognised the advantages of attending a school that was close to home: local schools minimised the demands of travel and maximised social interaction with peers and other members of the local community. For many older participants school competed with caring responsibilities at home, paid employment and social activities. Homework was considered excessive in senior high school and a number of participants described daily schedules that left them exhausted and with little time to interact with family or friends.

Working schedules of parents exacerbated the lack of connection experienced by these teenagers. Having a parent available before and after school clearly reduced the demands associated with school, particularly in terms of transport and assistance with homework. However, this study indicates that patterns of work in suburban Australia are increasingly impacting on the availability of adults before and after school. This shortage of adults has implications for the wellbeing of teenagers as well as their families and their communities (Putnam 2000; Sampson et al. 1999; Wierda-Boer & Ronka 2004). The following two sections explore the role of work: first by examining the work that teenagers engage in, then examining the impact of adult work on teenagers' lives.

Teenage work - microsystem

Teenagers increasingly hold down jobs of their own. Many do so while in full-time education. The incomes they generate by this means complement resources in their households, and in low socio-economic households in particular they help compensate for limited household resources. But teenage jobs also create demands particularly for the time and energy of both teenagers and those they rely on for mobility.

Teenagers who work need employment options as well as safe, accessible and timely transport. Many teenagers are very positive about the resources and agency they gain through paid work. Others point to the demands that work creates, especially where work schedules are inflexible or too demanding.

Managing multiple demands was particularly difficult for participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds. For these teenagers paid employment in particular interfered with their ability to manage school work. While teenagers from wealthier families were able to give up paid employment to concentrate on school in their final year, those from poorer families did not feel they had this choice: having a paid job gave them financial resources not otherwise available in the home. These financial resources then gave them access to opportunity. For some it was the opportunity to socialise freely and be independent. For others it included opportunities available through school but restricted to those who could afford to pay for them:

***What would you spend your money on?** I don't want to spend my money. I keep saying I'm going to save this week and the formal pops up and I've got to get a dress now and get my shoes, got to get my nails done. I've got to get new work shoes and then after that it's like school excursions. It's everything. All this stuff pops up, that's why I can't save. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA)*

Older teenagers from both low and high socio-economic backgrounds experienced considerable difficulty reconciling their homework load with obligations and activities outside school, particularly paid work. They complained that teachers did not consider the demands of their lives outside school:

At the start of the year I was working 18 hours a week and I'd work after school and stuff and I have to walk to work and I have to walk home. So by the time I got home I couldn't be stuffed and I just ditched my stuff to the side

Teenagers want less homework so they have time for other things

Teenagers from wealthier families were able to give up paid work to concentrate on school in year 12. Those from poorer families did not feel they had this choice

and slept and I'd come to school and I'd feel so tired I wouldn't even bother doing my work. **If you weren't feeling tired would you have done the work?** Yeah. I would have done the work it's just I was too tired and I felt like I didn't even have a life. I was just either at school or at work and I'm always surrounded by people telling me what to do and it just drives you crazy. **So who's telling you what to do?** There's teachers and stuff that are always on your case about doing work and then you've got your boss that's saying oh you need to do this, you need to do this. And then on the weekend your aunties ask you if you would baby-sit for them, it's like come on. It never ends. **Do you think that the adults in your life, so teachers, parents, employers, do you think they understand that you've got other commitments?** No. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA)

What teenagers want from teenage work

Older teenagers want easy access to part-time work opportunities in their residential community. Part-time work provides opportunities for vocational experience and some degree of financial independence, which facilitates social interaction for many teenagers. Financial independence also facilitates participation in the social and economic life of the communities these teenagers live in.

Despite the stated benefits of part-time work for older teenagers, many struggled to combine paid work and school home work. These teenagers wanted their teachers and employers to acknowledge and accommodate their multiple obligations so they were not forced to choose between financial independence and academic success.

A level of conflict between the demands of school, home and paid work was evident for some teenagers, who wanted to see more understanding from their teachers, bosses and parents about multiple demands and also wanted to see more convenient scheduling of these conflicting activities (ie more consolidation of homework into school time).

Adult work - exosystem

Adult work played a significant role in the lives of these teenagers because of its influence on the availability of adults in their lives as well as the stress that adult work sometimes brought into the household. Where adults work, the hours they work and the conditions under which they work affected the time they were able to physically spend in their homes and local communities. For many teenagers, the working time of their parents did not correspond to their own time schedules. This incompatibility of schedules resulted in reduced access to activities and friends and a perception they were missing out.

Because my mum works all the time I kind of have trouble getting places. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA)

Many teenagers, particularly those from wealthier households, described weekly schedules that left little time for socialising with friends or family. Reconciling school, homework and their own part-time employment with the activities of their siblings and the working schedules of their parents proved difficult for these teenagers. They appear over scheduled, rushed and time poor and their parents' work schedules are contributing to this:

There's just too many responsibilities. Like my parents work until about sixish and my little sister has tutoring until about 4:30 twice a week so I have to get off my bus and go get her and then I've got to make dinner for her. And then when my mum comes home with the other younger sister she prepares for them and my dad while I have dinner with my other little sister. It's just all over the place. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

We have five days of school and then people may have work or stuff to study for and therefore are not allowed to go out and see friends. There's not enough time for a social life. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Mobility

Mobility was a demand for all teenagers in this study, but the degree of demand was dependent on the availability of mobility resources within the home and the community. Some teenagers reported not being able to participate in activities due to the unavailability of parents:

Patterns of work affect availability of adults in the homes and communities of teenagers

Parental work schedules are contributing to teenagers feeling rushed and time poor

I don't do sport because my parents don't have the time to drive me around anymore. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Having at least one parent working part-time, or not at all, and with access to a car, meant that many teenagers were able to move between home and school, home and their own work, and home and friends with relative ease. However, it was clear that the demands placed on the parent responsible for their child's mobility was often very high. One 13 year old girl attending a private school in Victoria quantified this investment in terms of time: she estimated that her mother made about 25 car trips a week transporting her to and from the school and various extracurricular activities. These car trips were often in excess of half an hour because home was located some distance from school and other activities. The financial and environmental costs associated with this kind of mobility are likely to be significant.

This analysis indicates mothers at home were also a mobility resource for friends of their teenage child. The following discussion with a group of young teenage girls highlights the impact of work on the mobility of teenagers and the compensatory value of mothers who did not work outside the home:

I just usually can't do anything, Mum is never home so sometimes you might go two, three days without seeing her and [my step dad] is always too crabby to do anything for you ... you just have got to work around it, get your friends to pick you up and so on...

I just ask Mum and she is normally the drop off queen, she will do everyone, because she is always at home. (Girls, 12-14 years old, QLD state school)

Adult availability

As well as affecting mobility, long working hours, inflexible working conditions and work related stress resulted in a lack of adult support for a number of participants. Some spoke about never having assistance with homework, or being unable to participate in activities with their parents. Others went on to say that the absence of one or both parents was having a negative effect on relationships within their home:

With her working away all the time I find that I don't know my mum as well as I used to when I was younger when she was always here. (Girl, 16 years old, medium SES, QLD)

She's gone before I get up and she's really stressed all the time so I just don't talk to her. It's easier. (Girl, 16 years old, low SES, QLD)

Teenagers whose mothers did not work or worked part-time had access to various resources within the home that facilitated access to opportunities. However, many of them did not have access to their father. In wealthier families, this access was even more restricted due to the travel requirements of many professional occupations. The absence of a working father was often keenly felt by teenagers (especially boys) who had no trouble articulating their loss in terms of opportunity, for mentorship, support and social interaction

*My dad's never around so you can never do anything. He's like my best mate. He like taught me music and stuff, how to play bass and that ... he's not around anymore. **He's away for three weeks at a time, isn't he?** Yeah, and I only get to talk to him on the phone. There's no other way of contacting him; we can't play music or anything. (Boy, 13 years old, high SES, SA.)*

In these families there is clear evidence that children and women are making sacrifices that on the one hand support the family unit, but on the other, support workplaces and businesses that demand a great deal of workers' time and energy. Tired fathers, disconnected from their teenagers, are not an uncommon consequence, echoing findings from other studies about the effects of parental work on children (Galinsky 1999; Pocock 2006).

The impact of adult work extends beyond the family. Work interferes with the development of intergenerational social networks to the extent that it keeps teenagers and adults separate; it

Children and women are making sacrifices that support the workplace

The absence of parents due to work has a negative effect on family relationships

inhibits the sharing of time and space. This is particularly the case when the workplace is geographically separated from the community, and when adult work schedules are not coordinated with teenage schedules:

I love spending time with my mum except for I hardly get to see her because she works Monday through Friday and she gets home at 6.30 and by then she's tired anyway because sometimes she starts at 6 o'clock in the morning and finishes at 6 o'clock and then on the weekends I work 8.30 till 5 and then morning shift till night on Sundays. (Girl, 17 years old, low SES, SA)

My dad's a teacher so he works during the day or if its report time it's completely just don't go near me kind of thing. And my mum's a night shift worker so during the day she's asleep. I see her for like half an hour or an hour if I'm at home and then she'll be off to work. And also, like being busy yourself. Like I do so much extracurricular stuff and it's just crazy. Like the only time I manage to see my parents maybe is at church on Sunday; that's if I go. So yeah just because it's kind of crazy. Like I do have a lot of extracurricular activities. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Flexible working schedules and the ability to work from home are strategies that have evolved to address these problems. These strategies are more likely to be available to professional workers and so benefit teenagers from higher socio-economic backgrounds. Where they apply, teenagers often see them as a resource:

My mum's good because I know that she makes time for us kids. Like, she'll say to her clients or her people, you know, can I make this appointment for you next week because I've got to help my kids, you know, maybe (my brother) needs help with homework or we need to go shopping to buy new clothes or something like that. (Girl, 16 years old, high SES, SA)

However, some strategies designed to make it easier for adults to be available to their families can also be a double edged sword, with some participants complaining that while their parents were physically available in the home, they were still not accessible due to the demands of their work:

Sometimes my mum's got too much work and she brings it home ...In the holidays she usually spends time with us but she actually had too much work so we didn't get to spend time with her. (Girl, 11 years old, low SES, SA)

What teenagers want from adult work

Teenagers wanted their parents' work to fit better with their own schedules. For some it was having a parent home in the afternoon to help with household chores and homework, for others it was having them home to help with transport between their many extracurricular activities. Many wanted their parents work to take up less time and energy so that their parents could simply spend more time talking with them, thus enabling the teenager to get to know their parents as 'friends'.

(Dad) does the four o'clock in the morning to 6 o'clock so he doesn't get any sleep so he's always grumpy. If not, I'm at training and when I get home he's asleep so then we hardly talk. (Girl, 17 year, high SES, Vic)

My parents divorced and have been divorced for seven years and like with my dad, I know him and I love him and everything but I don't actually know him as some people might know their fathers as a friend. If I could have time I would want time to get to know him more as a friend. (Boy, 17 years old, high SES, Vic)

Some teenagers also spoke about wanting their parents to have more time to get to know the parents of their friends in order to facilitate their own friendships. This was especially important for teenagers whose parents restricted their socialising due to a lack of familiarity with the parents of their child's friends:

My parents like to know who [my friends] parents are and all that stuff, and they don't really have the opportunity to go and sit down and have a coffee to get to know this person. (Girl, 17 years old, high SES,)

In addition to talking about the impact of their parents' work schedules on their lives and relationships, some teenagers spoke about wanting their parents to have access to good jobs

Teenagers want their parents' work to fit better with their own schedules

(good in terms of time and money) on their side of the city so that they didn't have to travel so far. They recognised the impact of long commutes on their parents and on the amount and quality of time they got to spend with their parents. When asked what they wanted in their area one girl replied:

Better working places. So you reckon it would be good to have sort of good quality jobs close to where you live? Yeah. Why would that be a good thing? Because all the good works are like in the city. Everybody hates to work in the city because there's big traffic and stuff. Yeah because my mum really hates it. She always gets pissed off when she comes home. It's really hard to find work out of the city, really good work. (Girl, 14 years old, high SES, Vic)

Transforming the norms of work to incorporate the time schedules of teenagers, particularly in relation to school, would go some way to addressing the issues raised by these participants, as would working time arrangements that do not exhaust parents. This is particularly important in light of other research that shows a relationship between parental work-life conflict and depressive symptoms in teenagers (Wierda-Boer & Ronka 2004; Sallinen et al. 2007).

Conclusion: Teenagers living in adult space and time

The teenagers in this study were living their lives within the constraints of adult space and time. The demands and resources available to them within their homes and local communities were largely the product of decisions made by adults, for adults. At the microsystem level; that of the home, school and local community, amenity and the availability of adults, directly affected access to opportunity for teenagers. At the exosystem level, decisions parents made about work and their ability to access 'good' jobs, with flexibility and reasonable workloads, impacted most saliently on the opportunities of these teenagers. At the mesosystem level, the level at which these domains interact, local planning and funding decisions regarding resource allocation within communities, particularly amenity and mobility resources, affected opportunity for teenagers by interacting with the demands and resources associated with home.

This study indicates that teenagers from homes with fewer amenity and mobility resources relied on adequate community resources to gain access to opportunity. Teenagers from better resourced homes were less reliant on community resources, though it is clear that the provision of resources to facilitate opportunity for teenagers in these homes came at a cost. Mothers in particular seemed to be making sacrifices in relation to work and career in order to be available to their children; teenagers and their families are forgoing social connection within their communities of residence; and communities are losing more and more well resourced families from the social milieu, which erodes social capital across the community.

This study does not represent the experience of all suburban teenagers. Participants were recruited from growth areas on the outskirts of three Australian cities and their experiences are likely to reflect the particular characteristics of these areas. The majority of participants were Anglo-Celtic Australian, with more immigrant and refugee teenagers participating in the state school focus groups compared to the private school focus groups. No indigenous teenagers participated. Having said this, the experiences of these teenagers are instructive for any residential community; with amenity, mobility and adult availability resonating as salient issues across geographical areas and social demographics in this study.

This study did not focus on the macro level; that is on social, legal and economic institutions and norms. However participants alluded to a society that marginalises teenagers and so some conclusions can be drawn which implicate these macro structures. This analysis suggests ways in which societal structures could more directly address the needs of teenagers and improve access to opportunity. Understanding the lives of teenagers as contingent upon adult space and time demands that we widen our gaze when considering urban planning, workplace policy and practice, education and community funding, and transport and communications networks. Urban planning that co-locates residential areas with a variety of jobs, schools and services, labour law that encourages flexible working arrangements and helps parents fit work and home together, funding regimes that privilege public schooling and amenity in disadvantaged communities, transport provision that prioritises the needs of those with the least independent mobility – these are starting points for discussion, policy response and further research.

The trends to increasing adult and teenager participation in paid work are likely to continue upward, especially for women and mothers. Indeed, the prospect of impending labour shortages in Australia is leading governments to strongly encourage people to work more and to stay in the workforce longer as they age. In this light, the issues raised in this research for teenagers are likely to increase in significance. At present, much discussion about work and family issues concentrates upon the consequences of increased labour market participation for infants and young children. More attention to the needs of teenagers is essential. Our results

suggests that these efforts should examine the demands and resources – including amenity, mobility and adult availability – affecting teenagers across the multiple and intersecting terrains of households, workplaces, schools and communities.

Implications for policy and action

This report suggests a range of actions that can be taken by particular stakeholders to make a difference to the lives of teenagers and improve their access to opportunity. These actions are detailed below.

Parents

Parental time, money and positive temperament are positive resources for teenagers. Each reduces the demands facing teenagers growing up in suburban Australia. Teenagers in households where parents are time poor and ‘stressed out’ due to the demands of work are likely to be especially negatively affected.

However, poverty is not the only determinant here: exhausted parents in well-off households reduce the resources available to teens. Parents should not, from these accounts, underestimate the value that both younger and older teenagers of both sexes see in having an available parent: one who is actually there and able to warmly and responsively connect with them. That availability is, in many examples, simply instrumental: to drive teenagers to their various activities for example. Mothers who are the ‘drop off queens’ create highly valued resources for their teenagers. But they are more than that: they are contributing to vital social connections and enabling teenagers to act as ‘social bridges’ between their family and other parents and adults. Parents who have time for teenagers give valuable company, support, guidance and homework assistance. The increasing demands of paid work on the time of parents is likely to be reducing the scope for such support.

A range of household resources are also important to teenagers: a computer, internet access, a quiet space to study and access to transport, are all significant. In this light, government support for home computing facilities is likely to have positive effects, as are government efforts to provide good transport options for communities.

While mobile phones were seen as a resource for the majority of participants, their value within the family was particularly significant for younger teenagers who were required to travel independently due to a lack of mobility resources within the home.

Community service providers

Where the household resources are slim, community facilities are especially important. In this light, our findings suggest that the best community facilities should be provided in low socio-economic settings where their compensatory effects are likely to be especially significant. Local government resources should be allocated with this in mind, as should resources for schools, with ‘over’-investment in low socio-economic environments.

Governments (local, state and commonwealth)

All kinds of public facilities are vital to teenagers including libraries, museums, schools and sporting facilities especially in low socio-economic areas.

However, it is hard to overstate the importance of mobility to teenagers, making the provision of good transport systems essential so that teenagers can make the most of the facilities

available to them. Bus and train schedules should take account of the morning and afternoon travel needs of teenagers, providing clean, safe, regular, reliable options that are respectful of teenagers rather than assuming they are problematic. Safe neighbourhoods are also important to encourage safe movement of teenagers increasing access to recreation, socialisation, part-time work and independence. For those in government who want to see greater social inclusion of teenagers, then over-investment in low socio-economic areas, especially schools, transport and community facilities (like libraries) are especially important.

Planners

The close configuration of work, home, school and community facilities is very important to creating resources for teenagers and those who transport them.

In addition, teenagers seek age-appropriate facilities and opportunities: what suits 11-14 year olds does not always suit 15-18 year olds and there are risks in merging these users. They also seek places where risks can be taken and where uses are open-ended, facilitating safe 'mucking around'.

Opportunities for sport, clubs and facilities are vital, but the quality, diversity and availability of facilities is important. A library with appropriate books, good computers, good sitting spaces, internet, games, with pleasant space and opportunities to socialise and eat and drink, appropriate opening hours and staff who work well with teenagers is immeasurably superior to a library that is dark, poorly provisioned or lacks good computer facilities. In this light, planners should ensure that facilities provided in developments are not token (i.e. a small playing field or pool, a lake that is not swimmable).

Mall proprietors

Malls offer teenagers a range of amenities that planners might seek to replicate in a non-commercial way. The appealing characteristics appear to be an environmentally comfortable place where there are diverse opportunities and interesting sites around which to congregate and socialise. Another approach might be to graft onto malls non-commercial venues for teenagers, or to make teenage appropriate spaces within them, including teen movie nights, teen recreational facilities and under-18 social venues. Teenagers want to have a 'place' in their communities, both physically and figuratively. They wanted places to hang out with friends that are comfortable and offer a variety of activities in a safe and respectful environment.

Employers and workplaces

While there is a great deal of discussion about work and family issues in Australia, it usually focuses on the needs of families with infants or primary school-aged children. Our findings call for a corrective to this debate: it should encompass the particular needs of teenagers. This means attention to the workplace flexibility available to parents who work, as well as to the working patterns of teenagers themselves. Access to a job is important to both groups: employment creates many positive resources. But inflexible jobs are undesirable drains on the resources of both parents and teenagers in many situations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Focus group - guiding schedule

Demographics

- Name – age - gender
- Where you live
- How long you've lived there
- Who lives in household?
- Parents work - type, hours
- Other activities of parents – home duties, care, study, volunteer

Kids experience of community

- What they do (work, social, hobbies, sport)
- What they would like to do but can't
- Social connections with friends, other families and other community members

Local area – what makes it easy or hard to do the things they want

- Facilities and services – places to hang, have fun, learn
- Access - transport
- Affordability – activity and transport costs
- Attitudes – is it a good community for kids/ are they welcome/ is it sociable and friendly/ do they feel safe
- Why did parents move here

Work of parents and others – how does it affect kid's social networks, well-being and goals

- Hours of work/travel
- Flexibility of hours
- Work stress
- Availability of adults due to work

What helps work, community and home life fit together well for kid's

What could be better

- In community
- At work

Appendix 2

Planning discussion amongst year 11 girls

(Public High School located within MPC - QLD)

What is your attitude to the area in general, like what do you feel about it?

Girl 1: I find that they've put too many units in it. It's kind of... it was nice but then it destroyed it because it got an overload.

Girl 1: Yes, it could have been set out as a more family community with nice homes and family orientated homes, not units full of just students.

Girl 2: But I guess in a way that has addressed like the housing demand on the Gold Coast. But I moved out of (the MPC) because everything was so close together. We had a house that was literally like maybe a metre away from like our neighbours and we could hear them sneeze, we could hear everything. Just turn on the television and the phone rings and it was just driving us insane. Now we have a corner position like in (the adjacent suburb) and it's very... we don't hear our neighbours at all and it's very good.

Girl 1: You're not on top of each other, you're not hearing each other.

Girl 3: Yes, like I remember when (the MPC) started off, like there was (MPC village) over there which started as like a little community like a sprinkle of lakes and all that as the other projects have done. But now it's been too industrialised ... everything has been so industrialised around here, like it looks like a school has just been plonked straight in the middle of like literally an industrial area. Like there's businesses everywhere.

Like the shops are down the road, and they just look out of place because they've just been plonked in this random place of like buildings and things like that. I think they've done too much. Like it's nice but I think they've just done way too much, they've done way over... with just the whole business thing.

So like packing too much into too small a place, yes.

Girl 3: Yes, and it's like... yes, because I mean my boyfriend lives in (the MPC) and he's got quite a large house compared to other people that I know that live in (the MPC). Like he's got a back yard that is able to fit like a pool in the back yard and still not look cramped.

But my other friend just put a pool that was literally like a square in the back yard and now it feels like this, it's just like you're sitting out the back and there's like... there's a wall there you can't go that far, you know, like you can't play cricket, or anything in the back yard like Australians do.

Are you saying that you don't like the look?

Girl 3: I'm not saying that I don't like it, I just, it feels cramped. Like I don't know, I know what I'm trying to say but I can't say it very well. Like you just feel like you can't do much, like our oval is pretty big but if you kick the ball too far it will go on the road. But it's just everything feels like it's been drawn on a plan and then, yes, we have to stick that there but we can't make it too wide because that won't fit there.

Like they haven't all... I don't think they've allowed it but then it's... like if you look outside and there's the lake around down there at (the MPC) it's nice to sit around and eat lunch with your friends when you finish early or whatever. But where the industrial area is around here I think it's way too just cramped and just I don't think it's organised properly.

Okay, better planning, you're thinking?

Girl 3: Yes.

Girl 1: It would have been better if they had the units separate, then the houses, then the shops, then the business sector, because it needs to be separated here, you're all on top of each other and it's too... you don't know where to turn.

Because you're interfering with other people's, sort of like, yes, space.

Yes, okay. So you think that maybe different parts should have been like, okay, this is the family part, okay, this is the student units part, this is the business part?

Girl 1: This is where the students and this is the students' area and these are the students' units and this is Bond University, this is the shops where everyone goes, this is the business sector where everyone does their business. This is the school and this is our housing community.

Girl 3: I think that they should have put the junior school and the senior school on the same side of the lake. Like they could have separate schools because we have a lot of students that we need to cater for, but I don't think that they should have separated them that much because we should have left the school over the other side because it's like, that's where the family and the children are, where the housing sector is.

And we're sort of separated from that. Because my brother goes to the other school and like it takes literally in the afternoons, I don't get picked up till quarter past 3 sometimes and I finish at five to, so because of the traffic coming from that school over to here like...

So everyone is doing the same loop...

Girl 3: Yes, everyone is doing, because of the middle... the junior school finish earlier than us they pick them up and then do the whole thing, round robin thing and I just think they should have kept the schools together.

Girl 1: On that point, they should have made more roads, like a two lane, not the one lane for the in and out area, because it's really busy at certain peaks.

Girl 3: But then that comes back to the housing as well. Because they make the streets so small because they think they need to fit more houses on that block. Like that's what I mean about congesting things. You not only have the problem of housing congestion and business congestion, you have traffic as well.

And people don't... like I can hear my mum in the afternoon, "Oh, bloody hell, I don't want to sit in this traffic, I've got to go home and cook dinner and get like... do the washing", and whatever. You know, so...