

# What families say about their lives in Bendigo.



## In-depth interviews with 18 families

### Family Ages

- Children are aged between 0–8 years
- Main carer is aged between 20–38 years

### Cultural Identity

- 1 family identifies as Aboriginal
- 1 family identifies as Karen
- 1 family identifies as Malay
- 1 Family identifies as Filipino

### Accommodation

- 6 families live in their own home
- 10 families live in a rental property
- 1 family live in a share house
- 1 family live in a caravan

### Pathway to the project

- Baptcare Parent Child Mother Goose
- Shine Bright Playgroups
- Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters (HIPPY)

## Emerging Themes

Bendigo families are experiencing need across the social strata. Support services traditionally targeting low income communities are increasingly being sought by 'working and middle class' families who do not qualify for Service Australia support such as a Centrelink healthcare card.

All of the families expressed anxiety about finding and retaining secure housing, food affordability and having access to good mental, physical and allied healthcare.

### Safety & Participation

Limited places for feelings of safety including home not being/feeling a safe space for some. Areas in Bendigo or events they would/wouldn't access or participate in.

### Housing Challenges

Rental cost and availability, homelessness, quality of home and surrounding neighbourhood fears.

### Food Insecurity

Cost of food is limiting options of healthy or fresh food.

### Access to Services

Knowing what is available, how to access and having confidence or not feeling embarrassed to access; requiring a healthcare card; being declined service.

### Neurodiversity, Mental & Physical Health

Understanding what is available, barriers to access; cost of health care;

experts not available; travel to Melbourne or telehealth often required; clinicians not understanding community or culture family is from/part of.

### Connection to Community/Culture

Some strong and positive, some not feeling connected at all; family and/or friends connectedness; playgroup and Mother Goose provided connections to peers and services; reliance on groups for connection outside of self/child.



## Participation:

Do you feel able to participate in activities or places in Bendigo?

- **Families value free or low-cost places to go with their children.** Many mentioned the Splash Park, Discovery Centre, Library, Bunnings, Parks including camping or fishing at the lake.
- **Families value play space with secure fencing and toilets.**
- **Community safety was a concern** at many of these locations.
- **Families are actively seeking events and activities that take into account the sensory needs of neurodiverse community.**

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- I avoid taking kids into town because parking is so expensive.
- We go to places that have toilets.
- We only go to free places.
- We come to playgroup that's about it.
- The splash park is great.
- When they do things down at Rosalind Park we try to take part of it like the tulip picking.
- We don't go anywhere.
- I'm mostly just relaxed with my kids in my garden and at home.
- Being out can be noisy and overstimulating for the kids and it's too hard really.



## Family:

Can you tell me about your family?

- **Interviewees family circumstances vary greatly.** Some enjoy close family relationships; others are more isolated by choice and/or necessity.

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- Another kind of family is some of the playgroup mums.
- I'm really connected to my extended family.
- My dad is no good so I don't see him and he can't see my kids.
- My friends are my family.



## Having a voice in community:

Do you feel like you have a voice in your community?

Responses suggest families do not believe they have a strong voice in the community.

- **For many, C4C supported groups are the only safe place** they could identify where they know their voice will be heard.
- **Social media and online communication were a significant way for participants to feel heard but also raised anxiety.** A number expressed preference for remaining anonymous when online.

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- (I prefer to express myself) online and anonymously because some people are just trolls.
- I don't trust people straight up so I need to know they are going to be safe with what I tell them.
- I don't have many opinions.
- Playgroup workers are bloody great. Like they came to us (at playgroup) and were like, oh, do you have any suggestions of what you would like to do for the rest of the term?
- I don't know if I just haven't reached the right places, but no, I don't feel like I've got a voice in the community of little kids at the moment.



## Connection to Culture: What does culture mean to you?

Cultural diversity is increasing in Bendigo, although a majority of interviewees identified as having white Anglo Saxon background, described by one participant as 'a contemporary Australian cultural vibe'.

- Reference made to importance of respecting cultural diversity and a desire to learn more about First Nations culture.

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- When we go home to Philippines everyone in my village look after each other so I want my daughter to learn that.
- We're just accepting and, you know, we teach our kids ... that everyone is human and doesn't matter where you are from.
- There's ...so many cultures and ...we've got to accept them. You know, there is a lot of racist people, but ...we've just got to accept our community and that's it.



## Connection: Do you feel connected to people, places or groups?

- This topic highlights the disparity of connection experienced by Bendigo families. If it takes a village to raise a child, interviews revealed those who do and those who do not report having this support.
- In addition, face to face connection is prized, but online connection is playing a key role for busy families and those experiencing social anxiety

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- I have a big group of friends and we are all busy working mums. We make time to get together every few months but mostly talk online (Messenger).
- I don't have anyone I could call on if say I needed to borrow \$5 or get some help.
- I have started having a friend hang out with me when I do jobs because I can't do them otherwise. She just talks to me while I'm doing stuff and it gets done.
- I don't talk to people online. Honestly, I'm so over technology. We've come so far with it, but I've seen what it does to my 8-year-old and my partner, who's a gamer.



## Safety: Does life feel safe for you and your family?

- Interviewees identified very specific locations where they do not feel safe, perceiving dangerous hotspots.
- Some expressed feeling disenfranchised by the perceived risk in certain locations.
- While their children may be very keen to go, families felt unsafe and expressed no point in voicing concern – it's a known issue and is not likely to change.

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- We hardly go to the Mall but the kids like the play area there. It doesn't feel safe and there is always something happening that I need to keep the kids away from.
- Going to the Discovery Centre ... approaching from the Marketplace side (is OK). If we were approaching from the other side, it wouldn't feel safe.
- There was a burnt-out car at the Splash park and cops there too. It's so good, but you have to check for syringes and heaps of ferals go there.

## Services: What success or challenges do you face accessing services?

- Access to public paediatric and allied health – especially without NDIS plan – is near impossible.
- Where access does occur, participants believe it was contingent of warm referrals.
- Walk-in MCH is highly valued.
- A walk in hub style service is a priority.
- Accessing services post a crisis can be challenging.
- MCH referrals to medical specialists/GP were not helpful, with cost and wait lists a significant barrier to access.
- Parents may prioritise health care for their child

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- It would be awesome to have people like Occupational Therapists come to group sessions so we could get advice.
- Allied health is just impossible. We feel trapped – we need help but can't access private allied health because we haven't got funding and public is too busy.
- It would help if services knew that I'm masking my constant level of anxiety and that if I say I need help with something it means I really need it. I can look like I'm ok but I want them to listen to my words not just look at the overall picture because it doesn't mean there isn't something happening underneath the facade.
- One worker made all the difference she said I'm advocating for this mother and our lives are better because of her.

## Finance: Are you able to afford what you need for your family?

- Interviewees are stressed about how to afford quality food and feel ashamed about accessing food share. "I had to get over it or the kids aren't going to eat".
- Lack of a Healthcare Card can be a significant barrier to accessing services.

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- I haven't really reached out much, but ... when I did go to a charity, they were like, 'Do you have a healthcare card?' And ... it just felt like they ... looked down on me.
- Because me and my partner are on no concession we don't get anything.
- They kind of look at you and go well do you actually need help? My partner earns money but after we pay the rent there isn't anything left.
- We're moving to a caravan park because we can't afford the rent where we are.

## The Miracle Question: My biggest wish for living as a family in Bendigo is ...

Interviewees highlighted a wish for safe and affordable housing coupled with local and accessible service hubs providing wraparound support (not just crisis support).

### SAMPLE QUOTES

- We want a safe place to live, food, clothes, all those things.
- Being financially stable. Having food in the fridge all the time.
- Do things (to stop) that horrible cycle when you grow up in an in an echo chamber of poverty or violence or drugs, and you feel like that is your path and you don't know if or how to escape it.
- Mental health services that are effective and not just crisis driven.