



Creating Safe & Inclusive Public Spaces for Women

Monash Gender Equity Walk

Key Findings

Thursday 25th February 2021



Women's Health East acknowledges the support of the Victorian Government.

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Introduction

Public spaces play a significant role in community life. They provide a space for people to foster social connections, engage in sport and physical activity and access green spaces. Being able to occupy public space can positively impact on social, mental and physical health.

There is, however, inequality in who can access and use these spaces safely. Women's experiences and perceptions of public spaces differs to men and it is important to take these differences into account when planning and designing spaces for the community.

The evidence shows that women are more likely than men to feel unsafe in public spaces and can also feel as though a space is not designed with them in mind. This is particularly true for women who experience other intersecting forms of marginalisation, such as those who identify as LGBTIQ, women from migrant backgrounds, older women, Aboriginal women and women with a disability.

Based on this evidence, Women's Health East saw an opportunity to pilot a project which elevated the voices and expertise of local women to create safe and inclusive public spaces – Gender Equity Walks.

Process - How it worked

Funding

Women's Health East successfully applied for funding from the State Government Gender Equality Capacity Building Micro Grants Program to implement a pilot a gender equity walk with both Monash City Council and Maroondah City Council.

Determining a site

In consultation with Monash City Council, two sites were identified to execute the walk: Batesford Community Hub Reserve in Chadstone, and Holmesglen Reserve in Ashwood, which also houses the Harlequin Rugby Club.

These locations were chosen as they are two significant sites in proximity to public transport, public housing, community services and recreation facilities in the Ashwood and Chadstone area.

Engagement and participants

The Monash Gender Equity walk was held in person on Thursday 25th February 2021. Walk participants were predominantly women. A small number of young men from the local TAFE also attended, however it was made clear that facilitators wanted to primarily hear women's voices, which was well respected.

Eighteen people participated in the Batesford Hub Walk, made up of three Women's Health East staff, three Council staff, one neighbourhood house staff member (also a local resident), one

worker from the Batesford Community Hub who is also a member of the public tenant's group, one student, two teachers (including one male teacher) and nine students (including two male students).

Seven people attended the Holmesglen Reserve walk, made up of two Women's Health East staff, one Council officer, two neighbourhood house workers and two workers from Housing First.

The average age of those who responded to a post walk evaluation was 46 years. Six of the seven respondents were working, one identified as a senior and one as a young person.

Aim

The aim of the walk was to elevate and utilise the lived experience of local women to inform a gendered approach to urban planning. All the women who attended were from the Monash area and familiar with the area walked.

Method

The walk was held from 10:30am – 12:30pm (including discussion and lunch).

The Monash Gender Equity Walk involved two groups, each walking a different space – Batesford Hub Reserve in Chadstone, and Holmesglen Reserve in Ashwood. Each group met at their site to execute the walk, and both groups then came together over lunch to discuss their findings.

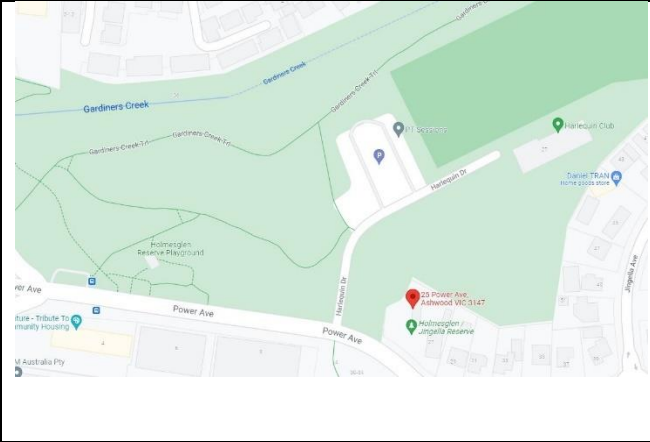
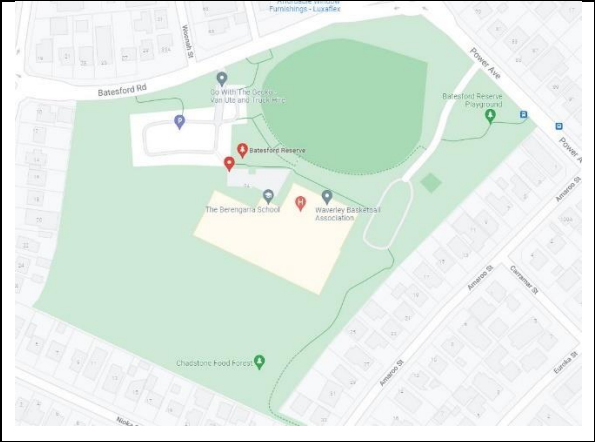
The women were walked through these public spaces and were asked to identify:

1. What is your opinion of this area (good or bad) and why?
2. Would/do you come here during the day?
3. Would/do you come here during the night?
4. How can we make this place safer/more friendly/more inclusive?

Notes were taken by Women's Health East and Council staff throughout the walks.

Key Findings and Recommendations

After introductions, and some background to the work currently being done in this space, each group walked their area. Area maps of those sites walked are outlined below.

| Holmesglen Reserve | Batesford Community Hub Reserve |
|--|---|
|  |  |
| Key features discussed | Key features discussed |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Harlequin Rugby Club• Walking path connecting to playground• Playground area | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Chadstone Food Forest walk• Hub entrance and carpark• Sports oval• Playground area• Back oval |

The key findings and feedback from women on each area walked are outlined below. Recommendations for improvement are made and potential benefits identified based on the feedback.

Holmesglen Reserve Walk, Ashwood

Harlequin Rugby Club



- Participants noted that while the density of shrubbery and trees contributed to a pleasant physical environment, it contributed to feelings of not being safe, as it reduced passive surveillance opportunity from the road.
- The empty spaces around the club were noted by all to be seemingly dangerous and dark, unsupervised, and hidden from view. *“Feels threatening”*.
- At night-time it was noted that people used the toilets at the Rugby Club as there are none located in the reserve.
- The area around the club was clinical and not aesthetically pleasing. Participants noted that activating public spaces make them feel more welcoming and appealing, thus encouraging greater use of the space and a creating a safe environment.
- The pavilion and club area has no club promotion. The oval fence was identified as a potential for promotional signage – this not only brightens up the space but contributes to a sense of a community space which is being utilised.
- The stairs and steps near the club made it inaccessible to people with prams, walking aides or wheelchairs; additionally, the distance from the carpark may make it difficult to access.
- Surface accessibility is lacking – gravel and uneven surfaces, with grass further along. This can be an accessibility barrier for people with walking aides, wheelchairs or prams.
- There was a noted absence of seating, shade or play areas for people using the club space while watching a game.
- No public toilets and few water bubblers/taps limit the usability of the space.
- Graffiti in the area made it feel less safe.

People noted that population density affects feelings of safety – the East seemingly has fewer people out walking in the evenings than more densely populated inner-city suburbs in the North and West for example, and this affects feelings of personal safety and security.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|---|-----------------------------------|
| Review lighting near club | Increased perceptions of safety |
| Consider activation of space – e.g. oval fence for promotion of club and local business | Contributes to sense of community |

| | |
|---|--|
| Additional accessible parking | Ensures safety of and accessibility for older people, people with a disability, and carers of young children |
| Ensure surfaces are disability and accessibility friendly and compliant | Ensures safety of and accessibility for older people, people with a disability, and carers of young children |
| Implement additional seating and shaded areas for spectators | Increased usability of space |
| Consider implementing bubblers and water taps | Increased usability of space |
| Graffiti management put in place | Increased perceptions of safety |
| Consider ways to make the space more visually appealing – e.g. small shrubbery, artwork | Increased sense of community Increased perceptions of safety |

Connecting walking path

The path which connects the lower carpark to the playground



- There was an abundance of vegetation around the walking path, which made the area feel unsafe (ie possible hiding places).
- Public signs in the park area were not accessible: it was noted that there was no Braille for sight-impaired people, signs were printed only in English despite the prevalence of people from non-English speaking backgrounds in the area.
- All illustrations or 'stick figures' were men. Participants noted that it would be beneficial to mix up the signage figures to promote equality in responsibility and roles ie. Women being active; men pushing the pram.
- The track was wide, which was positive for pram use, but it was identified that the surface might not be accessible for people with wheelchairs or walking aides.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|------------------------------|--|
| Cut back shrubbery and trees | Increased passive surveillance Increased perceptions of safety Ensures vegetation does not hide potential perpetrators |

| | |
|---|--|
| Provide accessible signage (e.g. Braille, language other than English) | Increased sense of community Increased usability of space |
| Increase diversity of signage illustrations | Promotes gender equity and diversity Increased sense of community A way to be more inclusive and welcoming |
| Ensure surfaces are disability and accessibility friendly and compliant | Ensures safety of and accessibility for older people and people with a disability |

Holmesglen Reserve Playground area



The playground was generally well received: the soft flooring, bins and BBQ area were identified as positives of the space, but public parking near the playground was limited and the lack of toilets and instructions for using the BBQ were noted limitations

- The public art in the playground area felt welcoming.
- The BBQ and playground area did not have a toilet or baby change facilities, limiting the length of time that community members could use it.
- Limited parking options near the playground meant that most people would have to park in lower carpark and walk up. This is an accessibility issue for those with mobility issues.
- There was an absence of Acknowledgment of Country for Aboriginal communities. The inclusion of this would contribute to feelings of inclusivity and accessibility while acknowledging the traditional owners of the land.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|--|--|
| Provide public toilet and baby change facilities | Increased usability of the space Increased accessibility for carers of young children |
| Provide a written Acknowledgement to Country at the entrance to the playground | Increased sense of community Promotes Council's commitment to reconciliation and acknowledgement of traditional landowners. |
| Consider implementing additional parking near playground | Increased usability of the space Increased accessibility for older people, people with a disability, and carers of young children |

Batesford Community Hub Reserve, Chadstone

Batesford Hub entrance and carpark



- It would be good to have ‘smart poles’ with sensor lights and a button you can press if you need assistance or felt unsafe.
- The entry to the Hub and the car park is dark at night, with not enough quality lighting.
- Having good access to bike parking is important.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|---|---|
| Review lighting at hub entrance | Increased perceptions of safety More nighttime usage |
| Consider implementation of smart poles | Increased perceptions of safety, particularly for women and girls Increased usage of space |
| Ensure adequate bike parking is available | Increased physical activity Promotes Council’s commitment to active transport |

Sports oval



- Gravel on the ground near front oval isn't particularly accessible.
- The ramp leading to the oval is very steep – not safe to use.
- Seating is needed outside Jordan Community Centre.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|---|--|
| Ensure surfaces are disability and accessibility friendly and compliant | Increased usability of the space Increased accessibility for older people, people with a disability, and carers of young children |
| Implement additional seating | Increased usability of space |

Playground area



- Public toilets are needed.
- Great that there is a water tap.
- More seating is needed for parents and families in the play space.
- There is a brick wall next to the basketball ring – there is potential to activate this space e.g. painted for games, or decorated to add vitality to the space. Perhaps a local school could be involved in an arts project, or artwork could link back to the 'hands' sculpture at the entry of the Hub.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|---|--|
| Provide public toilet and baby change facilities | Increased usability of the space Increased accessibility for carers of young children |
| Implement additional seating | Increased usability of space |
| Activate the basketball ring brick wall through artwork | Increases perceptions of safety Good way to engage with schools and community Increased usage of the space |

Chadstone Food Forest walk and back oval



- Include plantings in public spaces that could be harvested ie basil, mint and also lavender which would be a nice sensory addition. Thoughts were this would encourage activation and community connections which would make the space more inclusive, safe and inviting for women.
- There was discussion around nature and 'foliage' being important to make people comfortable and reduce anxiety. On the flipside too much was problematic as it could be providing places for people to hide and obstruct clear lines of sight.
- Ground lighting on the path to the Forest would be good for night-time.
- The oval near the forest needs shelter, seating, tree planting around the edge.

In general, women said they wouldn't feel safe at night behind the building/back over area.

| Recommendation | Benefit |
|--|---|
| Implement a 'pick you own' garden in the space | Activates the area and increases usage of space |

| | |
|---|--|
| | Encourages community connections Contributes to a more inclusive, safe and inviting space for women |
| Consider implementing ground lighting on forest walk | Increased perceptions of safety, particularly for women and girls More nighttime usage |
| Consider implementing seating, shelter and tree planting near back oval | Increased usage of space Increased sense of community Increased perception of safety |

Next steps

1. Findings from the gender equity walk will be presented to Monash City Council relevant departments for their consideration and incorporation into existing and planned development.
2. The process and findings of the gender equity walk will be shared with relevant networks to encourage and support the implementation of gender equity walks in other local government areas of the Eastern Metropolitan Region and further afield.
3. Sharing the findings of the gender equity walk with relevant academic institutions and publications to demonstrate practical application of applying a gender lens in urban planning.