Designing Compassionate Spaces
Forum Report - 19 March 2019

Compassionate cities incorporate design qualities that inspire and invites their residents to support their own and others well-being.

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Humans are social beings who need each other – we have survived as a species because we developed the social cohesion necessary for our mental and emotional health.

Compassionate Ballarat organised this forum to discuss the intentional creation of nurturing and connected spaces that hold those suffering mental distress. This issue is especially important in the city of Ballarat which, per head of population has the highest rate of suicide in Victoria.

Most government spending on suicide prevention goes into one-on-one counselling services. Compassionate Ballarat wanted to bring attention to the role social infrastructure can also play in having people feel supported.

The social life we experience doesn’t exist in a vacuum, there’s a context for it which can be supported or undermined by the places we design. Therefore, the discussion in this forum considered how we design compassionate spaces for those touched by suicide – because in Ballarat those numbers are high.

2. FORUM BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In social design terms cultivating compassion and prosocial motivations are important because they are associated with improved well-being, physical health, stress management and the development of more ethical, social environments.

The noted neuropsychologist Daniel Siegel reminds us that we are not homo sapiens – the ones who are aware – we are homo sapien, sapiens – the ones who are aware and know they are aware. This heightened awareness allows us to be both open to the wonder of the amazing experience of being alive – but can also bring us much distress as we ruminate and overthink on the sufferings that come into our lives at various times.

Social infrastructure is important because when it gets degraded it has been found that people reduce the time they spend in public settings and hunker down in their own houses, and their social networks weaken – crime rises – older and sick people grow isolated - distrust rises and civil participation wanes.

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1 Social infrastructure are foundational services and structures that support the quality of life of a nation, region, city or neighbourhood. This includes any infrastructure that goes beyond basic economic functions to make a community an appealing place to live, e.g. Public Space – adapting spaces for enjoying nature, sports, recreation, family, social activities and personal reflection. In other words, what is going on in the space; Sharing Information - Access to information including services such as internet and libraries and the connections occurring within facilities; Sports & Recreation - Venues for sports and recreation such as a skate park; Arts & Culture - Aspects of a community that have artistic or cultural value such as historic buildings and the connection and networking they are facilitating.
In reflecting on the ways in which our external environment impacts on our internal mindset, the town planner Jenny Donovan states: *the way our cities are designed, managed and occupied embed messages in them that influences what we do and what we want to do. This matters. It impacts the trajectory of people’s lives.*

In particular, this forum coincided with the 3,000kl walk across Victoria by Donna Bowman, whose husband a former policeman, died by suicide in March 2018. Donna walked into Ballarat on 19 March 2019, and the forum was held to raise awareness of the impact suicide has on those left behind.

**2.1 KEY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Compassionate Ballarat thanks all forum participants for sharing their insights and ideas. The full list of social infrastructure recommendations is in Section 13. This compassionate design forum and previous Compassionate Ballarat forums have started to identify where suffering shows up in this city. The key recommendations acknowledge these points of suffering and include:

- Link all existing compassion related outreach services so that they can share information, resources, and build networks – for more efficient and targeted delivery of those services;
- Set up a wellness centre for the whole community – that connects people in a space that makes them feel safe and is accessible;
- Provide ease of access to green spaces during people’s daily routines;
- Literally ‘grow’ new ways of being in nature;
- Develop quiet and reflective spaces in uncommon areas, including the cemetery gardens;
- Develop and make safer use of all the lane ways in CBD;
- Establish a civic square where people can gather and connect;
- Set up adventure games for children that are not digital based;
- Create innovative social infrastructure opportunities for people of all ages to feel supported, and part of something bigger than themselves.

**2.2 CITY OF BALLARAT INITIATIVES**

In terms of the social infrastructure work already underway, it was acknowledged that the City of Ballarat is engaging in community design through its current policies. These initiatives recognise that harnessing the city’s cultural and creative expression supports an improved quality of life for all residents.

Current initiatives include:

- *Today, Tomorrow, Together: The Ballarat Strategy* - outlines the long-term plan for a greener, more vibrant and connected Ballarat;
• UNESCO’s Heritage Urban Landscapes – acknowledges that managing historic urban landscapes is holistic and integrates the goals of urban heritage conservation with those of social and economic development and local community values;

• Creative City Strategy – seeks to develop Ballarat as an economy and a community powered by STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics).

2.3 FORUM SPEAKERS

• Assistant Superintendent Trevor Cornwill - Ballarat Police
• Donna Bowman - Those Left Behind
• Dr Lynne Reeder - Adjunct Research Fellow, School of Health and Life Sciences, Federation University Australia; Member, Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group
• Ben Kelly - Director, Acute Operations, Ballarat Health Services; Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group (Chair)
• Dr Mary Hollick - Adjunct Research Fellow, Federation Business School; Member, Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group
• Denise White – Member, Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group
• Superintendent Jenny Wilson, Divisional Command for Western Region Division, Victoria Police; Member Compassionate Ballarat Steering Group.

3. DONNA’S STORY

My husband, Anthony Bowman was an ex Police Officer with the Victorian Police. On 18 March 2018, I found him hanging in a tree on our property. Unfortunately, because we were so far away from an ambulance or emergency services, I was asked to cut him out of the tree. He had displayed no symptoms of depression or PTSD to myself, family members, friends or his Doctors. Tony left behind, myself (his wife), four children and their partners, wives and husbands, three grandchildren, two more due this year, a sister, a brother and many other family members. He also left behind many friends and ex-colleagues who attended the home that day. Donna’s aim is to walk 3000kms around Victoria to draw attention to those people left behind after such tragic circumstances. Along the way I will be talking to groups of people, including the Police Officers to try to bring awareness to the life-long damage suicide causes to those left behind. The funds are to be given to the Victoria Police Psychology Unit. They have been instrumental in keeping me alive over the past 5 months.
4. CHARTER FOR COMPASSION

Compassionate Ballarat is both part of the Australian Charter for Compassion, and the Global Charter for Compassion movements. The global Charter was established in 2008 is both a document and a worldwide movement. The document was crafted by a group of leading inspirational thinkers and was based on the fundamental principles of universal justice. As a movement the Global Charter provides an umbrella for people to engage in collaborative partnerships worldwide. Its mission is to bring to life the principles articulated in the Charter for Compassion through concrete, practical action in a range of sectors, including health, business, education, community, social justice, inter-faith, and environment. One of the Charters’ foremost programs is its compassionate cities program and to date over 430 compassionate cities have been established around the world. Compassionate cities support the physical, mental, emotional and social wellbeing of residents.

www.charterforcompassion.org    www.charterforcompassion.com.au

5. COMPASSIONATE BALLARAT

Through the work of Compassionate Ballarat (CB), the City is in the process of becoming part of a growing global Charter for Compassion movement - the Charter is active in over 50 countries and over 430 cities.

In Ballarat a high-level Steering Group has been developed to oversee this process, working at both a community events level and at a strategic policy level. Several of the members of the CB Steering Group spoke at this forum.

The aims of compassionate Ballarat are to raise awareness of the evidence base of compassion for application across Ballarat by:

- Enabling and resourcing people in Ballarat to see, notice and take compassionate action;
- Engaging the city’s leaders in applying and evaluating the application of compassion science throughout their organisations;
• Contributing to the global charter outcomes by piloting and testing international compassionate city measures;
• Providing a framework and resources for residents wanting to participate in creating Compassionate Ballarat;
• Distributing and giving prominence to that participation to inspire others to be involved;
• Creating a continuous feedback cycle for the City Council to participate and make a significant contribution to the global work of the Charter for Compassion.

6. MENTAL HEALTH CONSIDERATIONS
Good mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness-it is a state of mental health that allows one to flourish and fully enjoy life.

But in 2018 Mission Australia’s Youth Survey found that four in ten Victorian young people identified mental health as the top issue in Australia, followed by alcohol and drugs, and equity and discrimination. In 2019 the Victorian Government established a Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System – the first of its kind in Australia. At the forum it was acknowledged that Ballarat’s history of child sexual abuse was a significant factor in the city’s high suicide levels.

7. THE CITY OF BALLARAT
In imagining what the design of compassionate spaces might look like in Ballarat we need to deeply connect with the historic and beautiful setting, which at least three of those attending the forum can trace back through direct family lines to the 1850’s. Prior to pastoral settlement in 1837 Aboriginal people inhabited the land in the area which was to become known as Ballarat. This word is of native origin from "Balla" and "Arat" meaning 'resting place'.
7.1 BEFORE WHITE SETTLEMENT

In imagining a compassionate Ballarat we need to engage the ‘deep time dreaming’ of our indigenous brothers and sisters; including pre-settlement landscape, open spaces, the native vegetation and fauna. In his recent book, Deep Time Dreaming, Griffiths notes that to dream of deep time - is to seek to understand the human history of a place from the fragments that have survived the vagaries of time – it is an act of wonder and a scale of thinking that propels us into a much wider perspective. This approach also asks us to respect the deep past as a living heritage and to recognise the possibilities and responsibilities it generates. It is not surprising to learn that the social upheaval and rapid development following the discovery of gold in 1851 perhaps had its greatest impact on the local indigenous population. The traditional owners of the land on which the first gold rushes took place in Victoria were the Wathaurong (in the Ballarat area) and the Djadjawurrung (in the Mount Alexander area). The gold rushes caused environmental damage on a massive scale and also brought terrible hardships to the Indigenous population in the form of alcohol, prostitution, begging and disease. But the gold rushes also provided Aboriginal people with the opportunity to participate in daily life on the diggings, and for many Indigenous people, the discovery of gold brought new economic gain and cultural exchanges.

7.2 HISTORIC BALLARAT

From August 1851 Ballarat had become a goldfield which was the catalyst for rapid immigration to the district; and the city became home to people from countries all over the world. During this time it was estimated there were around 30,000 Chinese living in Ballarat.
And the wealth from gold, made Ballarat the richest place on earth for a time. Such was the prosperity that Ballarat was often compared with cities in Europe because of the 3-chain wide grand boulevard along Sturt Street. And the Eureka Stockade uprising, resulted in ‘no taxation without representation’ - meaning that Ballarat is also recognised as the home of democracy in Australia. The appreciation of the City’s early pioneers is evident in the historic social infrastructure – including public sculpture and gardens, a designated fine art gallery, theatre, Mechanics Institute, and a physical environment of botanic gardens, and a living lake this all provides the base from which to grow its modern-day social infrastructure.

7.3 MODERN DAY BALLARAT

Ballarat is one of the most populated cities in Victoria with a population density is 290 people per square kilometer. The city is currently experiencing high levels of growth. Ballarat population is expected to reach 114,193 by the end of June of 2019 and 144,108 in 2036. The main industries people work in are 19.4% Health care and social assistance, 11.8% Education and training, 11.3% Retail trade, 8.9% Accommodation and food services, 7.5% Public administration and safety, 7.3% Manufacturing, 6.5% Professional, scientific and technical services, 6.4% Construction, 2.9% Other services.

Ballarat continues to be both a health and education hub for the wider regional communities surrounding it. Ballarat has high levels of inequality, and along with other regional cities is facing a crisis in homelessness. It is estimated that cities, including Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, will need thousands more social housing units by 2036.

Through Federation University Australia it also has high level of innovation with a number of Tech Parks across three current sites. These host 54 businesses and agencies across the ICT, Administration and Government sectors, and contributes in
excess of $300 million in annual economic activity (direct and indirect) to the wider regional economy. Linked to innovation is the City’s current focus on developing a creativity city strategy, on the basis that cultural and creative industries contribute to the livability, vibrancy and prosperity of a city.

8. THE EVIDENCE BASE OF COMPASSION

Compassion science is relatively new and multi-disciplinary. It includes the disciplines of psychology, neuroscience, evolutionary biology and management theory. The definition of compassion from these disciplines is:

- The ability to see suffering in self and others, with a resourced commitment to try to alleviate and prevent it.

In a fractured world, this new approach to the ancient value of compassion is important, there is considerable evidence now that when people are caring towards others and feel cared for by others, their physical and mental health improves.

It is important to recognise that compassion is not a soft skill – indeed Prof Paul Gilbert notes that compassion is the courage to descend into the reality of the human experience. In order for us to make that descent in a way where we are not overwhelmed requires resources; and some of those resources include our capacity for wonder and awe.

They capacities are vital in coming into our compassionate selves, since coming into a sense of wonder and curiosity stimulates our need to better understand the world in which we live. Researchers define wonder as the feeling we get in the presence of something larger than ourselves - to challenge our usual way of seeing the world.

And in early Ballarat a sense of wonder could easily have been inspired by the generosity of the city’s pioneers, who not only made money in the gold rush, but were willing to give back in the form of philanthropic donations.

In the 1850’s it must have been amazing to walk through the recently arrived white Italian marble statutes that were scattered throughout the city’s main boulevards and Botanic Gardens.

Charles Francis Summers & Professor Benzoni, C.1887. Flight from Pompeii
9. COMPASSIONATE CITIES

As mentioned previously the compassionate cities program is one of the Charters foremost programs and the outcomes from this forum will be shared through the Australian and Global Charter city networks.

Compassionate cities support the wellbeing of residents by:

- Offering opportunities to form bonds across their diversity;
- Facilitating formal and informal networks;
- Creating safe spaces for fun-filled and nurturing social activities;
- Enabling residents to see the suffering occurring in their communities, and inspire them to take action to alleviate it;
- Celebrating the individuals and groups who take action at their own risk to respond to the discomfort they see; and
- Resourcing and providing the compassion skills needed to support residents in being able to connect with others without feeling overwhelmed themselves.²

10. SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMPASSIONATE DESIGN

Compassionate design applies to both physical and social infrastructure and in his recently released book ‘Palaces for the People’ Eric Kleinberg describes social infrastructure as ‘..the glue that connects and binds us together in our communities’.

Social infrastructure helps shape our interactions and when it is robust, it can foster all kinds of social interactions, helps build relationships, and turns community from a vague, fuzzy concept into a lived experience.

When social infrastructure is degraded and neglected, it makes it far more likely that city residents will grow isolated and be left to fend for themselves. The social life we experience doesn’t exist in a vacuum; there’s a context for it and it can be supported or undermined by the places we design.

Kleinberg argues that renewing our commitment to this infrastructure is essential in rebuilding a more cohesive, civil, and forward-looking society, and that our social glue has come undone, with the high level of polarization and divisiveness we are currently experiencing. It is timely now then to think more seriously about what compassionate design looks like. We also know that some places have the power to bring us together through social bonding such as schools, libraries, sport and pet parks.

Kleinberg concludes that the social systems we build in coming years will tell future generations who we are and how we see the world today. Therefore, we need to build places that promote active lifestyles and frequent interactions in the public realm by asking:

² Collated from Designing Compassionate Cities, Jenny Donovan
• What conditions in the places we inhabit make it more likely that people will develop strong or supportive relationships - and what conditions make it more likely that people will grow isolated and alone?

11. DESIGNING COMPASSIONATE SPACES

Taking all this into consideration Jenny Donovan in her book: Designing the Compassionate City, concludes that a city is nurturing when it:

1. Makes it easy for people to get to all places they need to go to in ways that are intrinsically beneficial to their well-being and do not diminish other people’s well-being;
2. Offers a wide range of relevant opportunities that support diverse, appropriate, and appealing experiences;
3. Allows residents to interact with nature;
4. Responds to peoples changing needs, either over time where the needs of the users change, or concurrently where different users seek to use that space for different purposes;
5. Provides people with ample, low risk opportunities to form a bond with each other and their surroundings;
6. Occupants feel assured they are being well looked after and can conclude that their investment of emotional capital in the area is shared and justified;
7. Has developed a rich network of formal and informal networks and people have been able to forge connections with each other and with the place;
8. Offers children and adults opportunities to have fun, either as an end in itself or as an added bonus to doing needs-fulfilling things;
9. Clearly communities to the residents the well-being and creative options and experiences available to them;
10. Surroundings reflect well on residents and there is little that invites others to negatively stereotype them;
11. Shares stories and facilitates people to connect with other people and the place they share.  

3 Image from White Night – Pitcha Makin Fellas
12. CURRENT EXAMPLES

The following provides existing examples of social infrastructure and compassionate design both internationally and locally.

12.1 INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES
The following examples come from the USA, UK, Ireland and Canada

UNITED STATES
Shutting down a freeway to stop a suicide - amazingly this US city shut down all these laneways to support one person who was considering jumping from the bridge onto the freeway. The police put out a call to truck drivers in the vicinity who responded immediately by parking under the bridge. The police who organised this compassionate response said “Most of the time, people just want to be heard and validated.” This image is a wonderful example of how social infrastructure can be visually displayed in a city.

The Little Free Pantry pilot project began in May 2016. The Little Free Pantry (LFP) offers a place around which neighbors might coalesce to meet neighborhood needs, whether for food or for fun. We count on each other to create something bigger than ourselves. The LFP is small, so it cannot stock the quantity and variety other food pantries can. Generally, canned vegetables and proteins, personal care items, and paper goods go fast. Child-friendly non-perishables, crayons, and inexpensive party favor items have also gone quickly.
UNITED KINGDOM
Notes on a Bridge
A teenager from Sunderland, England decided to do her part to save lives, and by tying notes to Sunderland’s Wearmouth Bridge, a known suicide spot in her city. She has taped up forty of these uplifting notes – which say things like ‘you are valued’ and ‘know that you will be missed’. She has a truly empathetic nature and her notes have reportedly saved six lives already, proving that sometimes the simplest acts can impact people’s lives to make a difference.

IRELAND
Homeless as City Tour Guides
In Dublin the homeless are being given the opportunity to work as city guides for payment and for social engagement. The tours launched March 2019, and come at a time of booming tourism in Dublin. The guides will get fifty percent of the ticket sales with the rest ploughed back into running the project. Director Austin Campbell said he helped set up the scheme after becoming frustrated at the lack of opportunities for homeless people. "We want to humanise the issue," he said. "This gives them a chance to earn money and tell the real story of homelessness behind the statistics."
CANADA
Musical Bus Stop
A team of Montreal designers whose goal is to bring magic to everyday events, has placed an interactive installation of musical swings alongside a Montréal city street — next to a bus stop. A fresh look at the idea of cooperation, the swings play a tune when pedestrians move in unison rather than independently. The result is a giant instrument made of 21 musical swings; each swing in motion triggers different notes, all the swings together compose a piece, the sounds of which emerge only from cooperation.

I want to live in a listening culture where people make time to attend to each other as a gift  - Hugh Mackay
12.2 BALLARAT BASED EXAMPLES

FREE FOOD LANEWAY AND THE HIDDEN ORCHARDS

Studies show that being in nature positively affects health - and community gardens do more than provide shade – they foster interactions within and across generations resulting in less isolation as Free Food Laneways and the community gardens demonstrate. The Hidden Orchard harvests fruit from backyards or public areas and shares it amongst the pickers and local charities. The charities distribute the fruit free to people within the community or use it in meal programs.

BALLARAT SOUP BUS

Volunteers working from the new soup bus offer a hot meal, friendly face and supplies to those in need on a Monday and Tuesday night in Sebastopol. The number of people accessing the service in Sebastopol had increased in recent months. “Sebastopol is an area where people can’t always afford to get into central location. This gives an opportunity to those that have no means of getting into town,” he said.

DELTA SOCIETY THERAPY DOGS

The Delta Society Therapy Dogs program operates at the Ballarat Regional Integrated Cancer Centre. The Delta Dogs visit the cancer centre each week, with a dog and its handler spending several hours visiting patients in the atrium, Wellness Centre and Chemotherapy Day Unit. The Delta Dogs visits were designed to help patients relax and reduce their anxiety.
TITANIC BANDSTAND MEMORIAL

An enduring example of our social infrastructure is the music memorial held each year since 1915 to honour the entire band of the Titanic who were lost in the ships sinking. In 1912 the bandsman’s attending Ballarat’s South Street competitions decided that a fitting tribute would be a bandstand, and by 1915 that bandstand had been built and opened. Each year a commemoration is held to both remember the Titanic band, and a musician who has passed away in the previous year. This year the musician that was honored was the muezzin of the Al Noor mosque in New Zealand, Doctor Abdas Samad, who was among the 50 people murdered by a gunman in March 2019. Muezzin is a call to prayer, presented with joy and dedication to the community, as is all music. In 2019 the Titanic Memorial Band commemorated the 107th anniversary of the ocean liner’s demise, by inviting Muhammed Iqbal Qaseem of the Ballarat Mosque to a call to prayer. The Titanic Memorial Band also played Nearer My God To Thee, which was performed by Titanic’s band as the ship began to sink, in an effort to calm and assuage those passengers trapped on board.

FREE BOOKS TO CHILDREN

In a town where literacy levels are low, BIG W is making books more accessible to all Ballarat families by giving every child the chance to take home a classic storybook for free when they visit their local BIG W store. A new title was given away each week for 12 weeks starting Thursday 21 February 2019. The connection between access to books and the child’s future success and wellbeing is very well established. Research indicates that just 10 minutes of reading time a day can expose a young child to over 600,000 words in just one year, positively impacting childhood literacy.
13. IDEAS GENERATED FROM THE FORUM

The ideas generated from this forum have wonderful suggestions for how Ballarat can bring social infrastructure into the city -

The forum posed three questions to explore the state of social infrastructure in Ballarat and generate ideas for strengthening it:

**Q1. WHAT SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE IS ALREADY IN PLACE IN BALLARAT?**

**Services** – many of these are reflective of strong networks within and across the community and combine institutional and community generated services

1. Cycling without Age – International movement started in Copenhagen with 400 chapters around the world. Two Rickshaw bikes are provided by Nazareth House with volunteer riders taking Nazareth House aged care residents for a ride around the lake
2. Free city Wi-Fi – is it good?
3. Soup Bus for concession card holders
4. Mental health group for those impacted by climate change
5. Lifeline *Out of the Shadows* early morning walk for loved ones of those who have suicided.

**Training/Resources** – with a rich endowment of primary, secondary and tertiary education facilities in addition to two hospitals, there are many training programs supporting compassion, though the awareness of these may be low or confined to the provider.

6. Health and Wellbeing department at Fed Uni, particularly interested in the Western Bulldogs 10-week program open to males over 18 years.
7. Lifeline 4-week bereavement course for people who have lost someone to suicide. The first group are now meeting as a walking group.
8. Lifeline Ballarat suicide prevention course
9. SOS for 8yr old’s working awareness training (?)
10. Free TAFE courses; TAFE return strategies

**Tangible infrastructure** – Ballarat has rich resources in terms of tangible social infrastructure, most of which is free and/or low cost. There are facilities such as the Gallery that can be intimidating to some people, while other places are underutilised. The potential for building social infrastructure exists in opening up facilities to new audiences and broadening the purpose of other places.

11. Our City libraries
12. Endowment of parks and gardens; community gardens*
13. City ovals*
14. Recreation spaces in the cemetery
15. Community hubs
16. Men’s Sheds
17. Art Galleries
18. Architecture
19. Churches*
20. Schools
21. PLN – talk to Maria (?)
22. A plethora of community groups exist for special interests or needs*
23. Station Group – historical connection to Eureka

From participant feedback it is evident that there are many excellent services, initiatives and social infrastructure resources in Ballarat already but unsurprisingly, these are happening in isolation, drawing off the resources of individual organisations. These initiatives could be so much more powerful if knitted together. It begs the question, how can these elements be brought together; does the social infrastructure of a city need curating and is so, how should this occur? Or do residents simply need permission and the removal of barriers e.g. planning by-laws.

2. WHAT COULD LINK TOGETHER FOR SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO BE EXTENDED?
There are important and good ideas here and in a relatively small city such as ours many of these ideas are achievable. The challenge is to have joined up thinking and conversation beyond organisational KPI’s. Compassionate Ballarat can facilitate much of this.

1. Create A ONE STOP SHOP representation of EVERY service available in Ballarat in particular, to tell people what volunteer activities available, i.e. new people to town.
2. Members of the Lifeline walking group could become volunteers for the Nazzi Cycling around the Lake.
3. Playgroups and school children in nursing homes for shared story time and contact.
4. Use existing public places as places where people feel accepted.
5. Football clubs link with homeless (Ballarat’s homeless sleep on footy ovals now...)
6. Use churches, schools, bowling clubs when they are vacant
7. Connect students with people who live alone.
8. Link all community houses across the City for cross fertilisation/events
9. Link environmental design with City planners; Building Council; developers
10. Multipurpose spaces e.g. scouts’ halls = community spaces
11. Art galleries and community gathering spaces
12. 3UA
13. Book clubs meet in libraries
14. Have open conversations about suicidality within organisations – Black Dog; Beyond Blue

3. VISIONARY, SKY’S THE LIMIT, IDEAS

To support distress

1. Understand what is driving high suicide rates in Ballarat and bring services together to address this – focus of shared roles rather than demarcation across organisations.
2. Health and Wellbeing department at Fed Uni, particularly interested in the Western Bulldogs 10-week program open to males over 18 years – open this up to City residents?
3. Provide beautiful, public, open space dedicated to people lost through suicide. Could have piped music and survivors of suicide telling their stories and what’s great about having been there and surviving.
4. Supportive environments for children of those who have suicided

To resolve distress

The need for action to link services and infrastructure is urgent e.g. for those suffering mental illness and/or suicidality there is call for much better links between organisations providing access, diagnosis, treatment services, housing and ongoing psycho-social support. The cost of not addressing this is being felt across the city e.g. physical and mental decline in persons affected; higher costs for acute care; public perceptions of lack of safety, damage to property and persons.

Other strong themes include the critical need for a wellness centre/safe house to provide beauty, comfort and support for the distressed. These are needed at night especially. Additionally, for everyone there is a clear need for more connection to nature – and any opportunity for greenery, beautification and soothing spaces will enable compassionate social infrastructure.

5. Full and open conversation about sexual abuse and become the best in the world in how we look after those abused.
6. Establish a community web of connection (ask Trevor Cornwill)
7. An annual conference where ALL Ballarat Compassionate services attend to share information, resources, build networks.
8. Jenny’s vision: What can we do until services and infrastructure is knitted up? Connect people in a space that makes people feel safe and special. A nice place. Already there? Art therapy in the Ballarat Gallery...the civic hall
9. Wellness centre
10. Use all the community houses
11. Groups that look at homelessness, crime, gambling - the drivers of suicide - they are not linked - still in silos. Whole of City conversation about this.
12. Mental health services – bring together
14. Start using all the buildings and laneways in the CBD
15. Use natural health and other healthcare skills to support the wellbeing of those on the front line, i.e. paramedics and police. Gold coin donation center where they can receive Reiki or massage, meditation etc like the BRICC center.
16. More social enterprises for stay at home mums, i.e. venue where mums can be paid to babysit children, so other mums can go to volunteer.
17. Homeless becoming city tour guides. Homeless volunteering in restaurants to get kitchen experience. Be a part of something. How do we identify employers willing to be part of this?
18. Offering free or cheap training to unemployed or new to town etc, who can then volunteer for emergency service staff.
19. We need a city square – with screen and public concert space (Civic Hall?)
20. Fix up Bridge Mall and attract people back again
21. Where is the Centre of Town? What is the model for Ballarat?

Create beauty and fun
1. Bring nature to people who cannot access it themselves, particularly in hospitals, aged care, palliative care i.e. full wall sized posters of nature, windows open for fresh air, piped bird song and nature sounds on CD’s,
2. More off-the-leash dog parks
3. Leaders give their people permission to be nice to each other as Christine Nixon did in VicPol.
4. Set up ping pong tables and pop up dance floors in public, open spaces
5. Run ‘know your neighbour’ block parties
6. Need marketing campaign to promote compassionate city.
14. NEXT STEPS – YOUR INPUT

- This forum was a first step in Compassionate Ballarat acknowledging the importance of social infrastructure in building community connections for improved mental health across the city of Ballarat.

- The next step is to collect other inspiring examples of where and how the people of Ballarat are forging bonds and lightening the loads that modern day life can bring.

- Please send us your examples of what this looks like – so that Compassionate Ballarat can highlight and share across the city.

- Please send both your existing examples and new ideas to compassionballarat@gmail.com

Contact us - compassionballarat@gmail.com

Follow Compassionate Ballarat - https://www.facebook.com/CompassionateBallarat
15. READING LIST


Gilbert, Paul (2018) *Living Like Crazy*, Annwyn House, UK


...social cohesion grounded in compassion and mutual respect is the key to true greatness for any society...

Hugh Mackay