

NORTHERN TERRITORY

my Territory Connections



Summary results for the Alice Springs & Central Region

May 2023



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CHARLES
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About

This publication presents results from a large survey of Northern Territory residents conducted between November 2021 and June 2022.

The *my Territory Connections* survey was open to all Territory residents aged 18 years and older, and over 3,000 people participated.

The aim of the survey was to understand how Territorians are connected through their social networks, community participation and attachment to the place they live. Results will be used to help governments, service providers, community organisations and businesses make decisions about what is making life in the Territory better for residents and identifying who might be missing out.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and not all respondents answered every question. Percentages used in this report are based on the number of responses to specific questions. Because the sample was not random, conclusion can only be made about the population who responded, however the large sample size provides confidence around the main results. Readers should be cautious about their interpretation of small differences between subgroups of respondents.

While the survey was available in English only and designed for individual respondents to complete online, some respondents were assisted to complete the survey and paper copies of the questionnaire were also made available.

The data collection process was conducted during a period of travel restrictions and planned visits to remote communities to encourage survey participation using local facilitators was not possible.

The research team promoted the survey through local media and at various locations across the Territory. They also used networks through the university, NT and local governments, and community organisations.

Promotion of the survey was also assisted by the cooperation of local elected representatives.

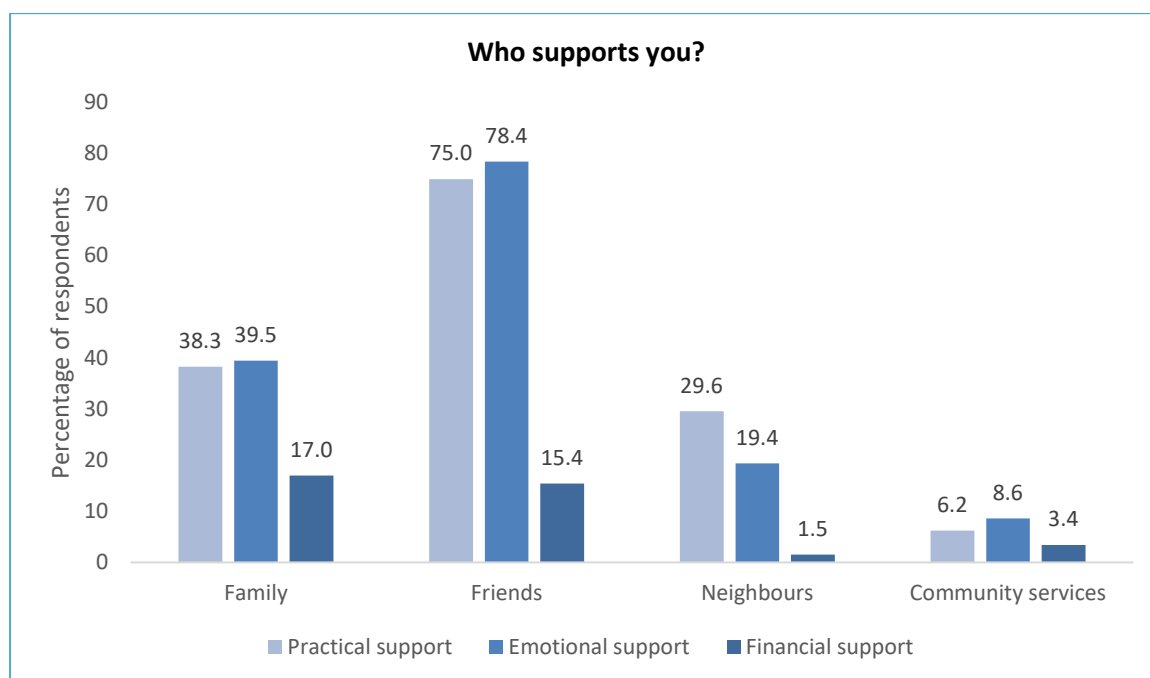
Thank you to all Territory residents who took the time to provide information on their experiences and opinions as part of this research.

Further information about the *my Territory Connections* survey can be found on the project website: myterritoryconnections.cdu.edu.au.

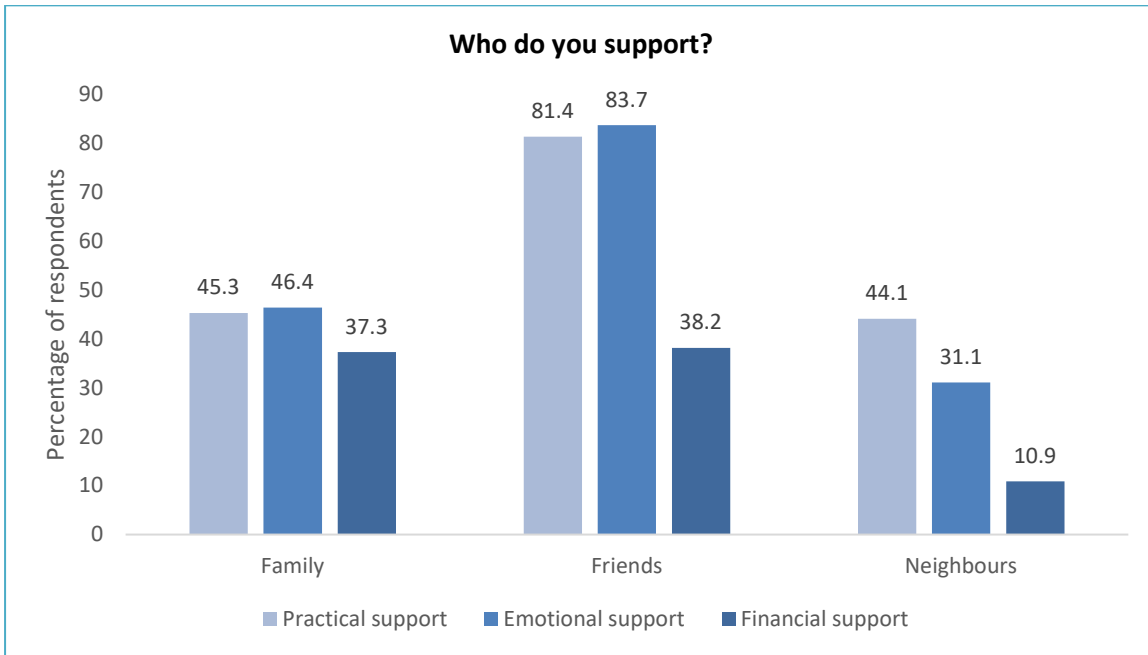
The *My Territory Connections* survey asked questions about people’s wellbeing and their connections to other people, to the place where they live, and to the Territory as a whole. This report on the responses from people living in the Alice Springs and Central region unpacks this sense of connection by looking at people’s social networks, how they get on with others, the functioning of their neighbourhood, how they engage and participate in community activities and their connection with a Territory identity. It concludes by looking at how respondents from Alice Springs and Central (referred to as Alice Springs hereafter) felt they were doing overall.

Building social networks

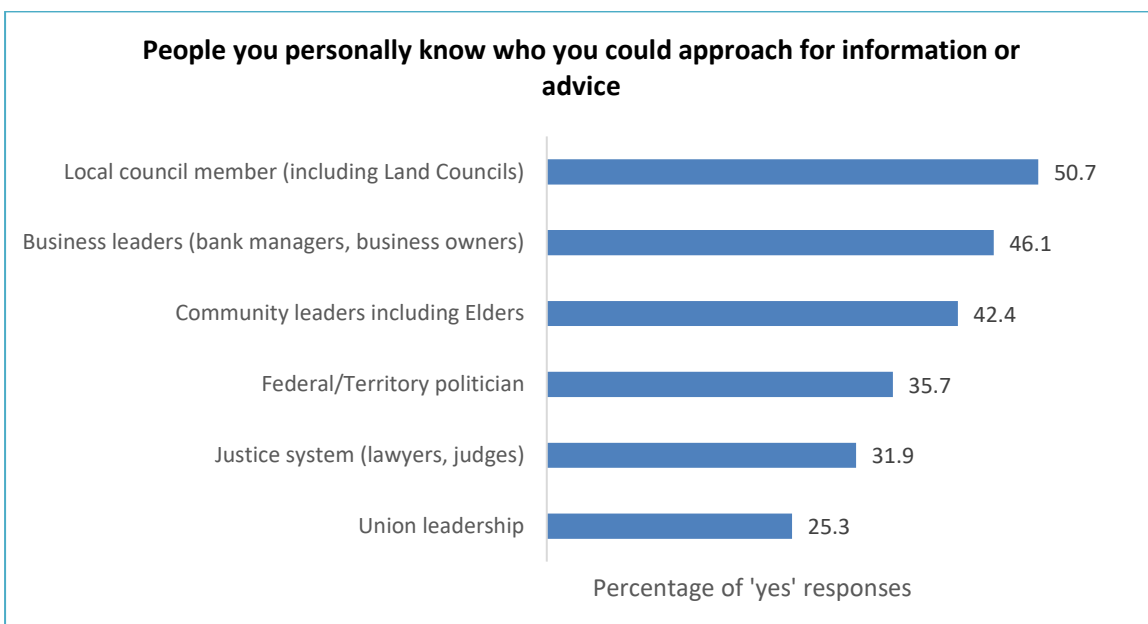
Consisting of family, friends, and neighbours, local social structures link people to support networks and help build resilient communities. Respondents from Alice Springs appeared to have strong support systems in place that connected them to family (who lived in the Territory but outside their household) and Territory friends and neighbours. Friends were a particularly important source of practical and emotional support, even more so than their family members who lived outside their household. However as expected, family were still the main source of financial support. Fewer respondents relied on their neighbours for support, while for a small proportion, community services were a significant part of their support network.



Alice Springs respondents reciprocated this care by also providing support to friends, family, and neighbours who lived in the Territory. Again, friends figured highly, however similar levels of financial support were given to both their family members (who lived outside their household) and friends, while much lower levels were given to their neighbours.



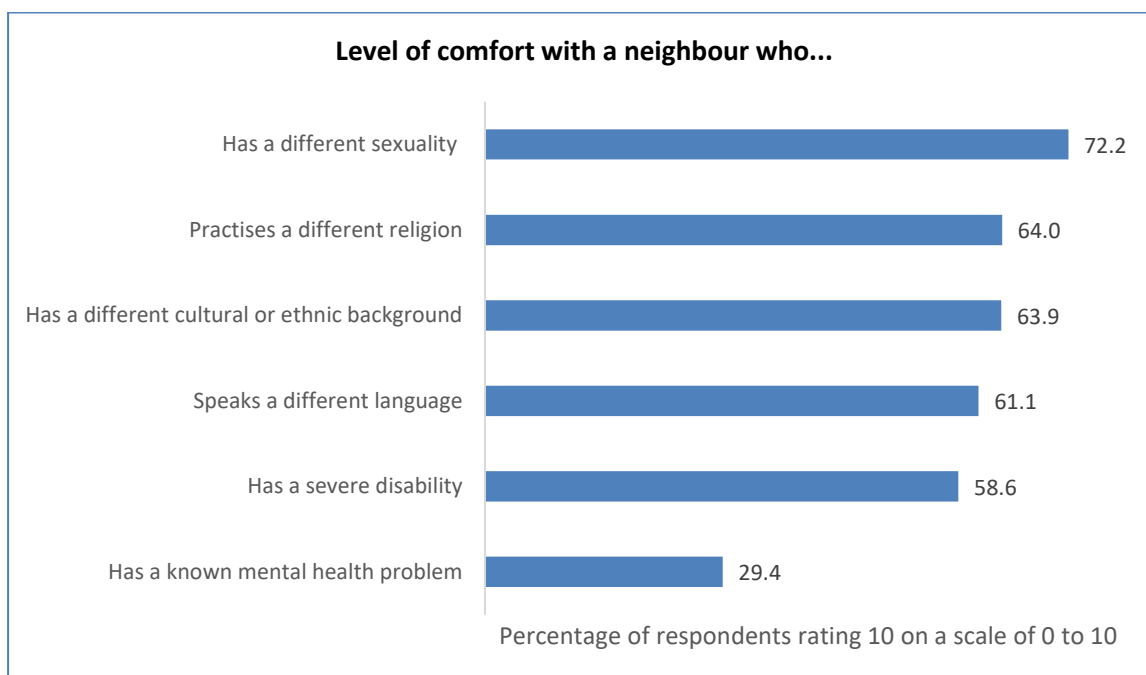
Networks which connect Territory residents with people in positions of authority and influence can assist in getting something done. The survey asked whether respondents personally knew somebody in specific organisations or institutions who they would feel comfortable to approach for information or advice. Just over a fifth of Alice Springs respondents were not connected to these networks of influence (21%). Of those who were, the most common connection was with a local council member (51%), followed by business leaders (such as bank managers or business owners) (46%). This compared with 42 percent personally knowing a community leader (including Elders) whom they could approach for advice or information and around 36 percent personally knowing a Federal/Territory politician.



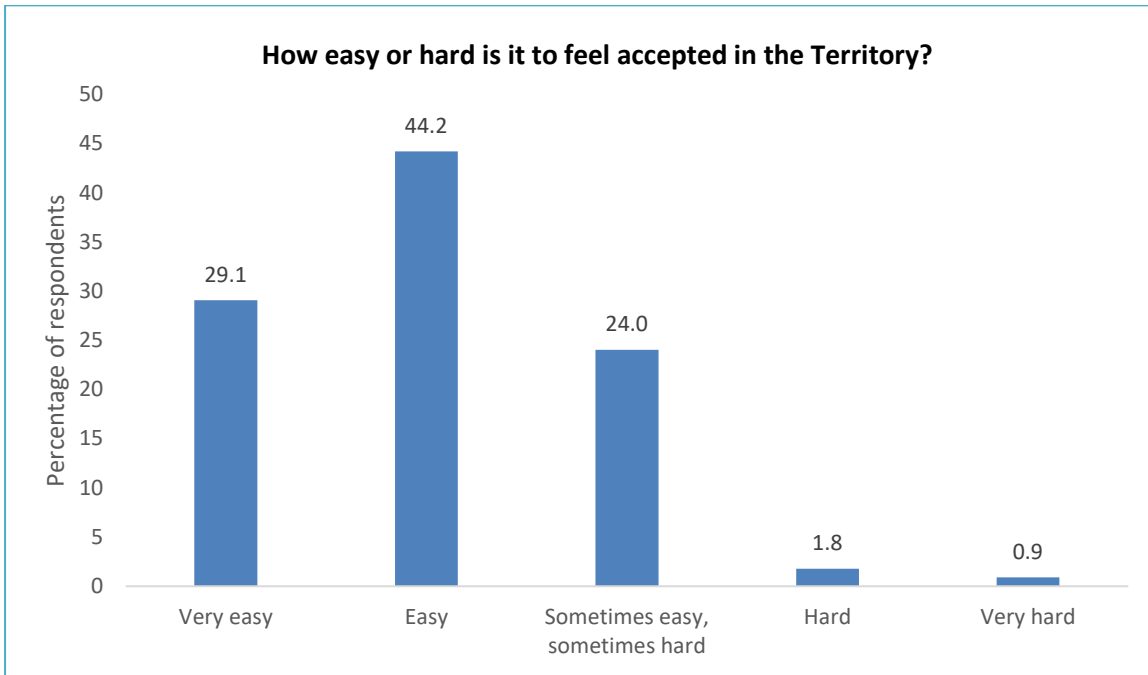
Getting on with others

Community cohesion is created through embracing population differences, sharing common values, and building trusting relationships. Therefore, getting on with others is important for enabling communities to flourish.

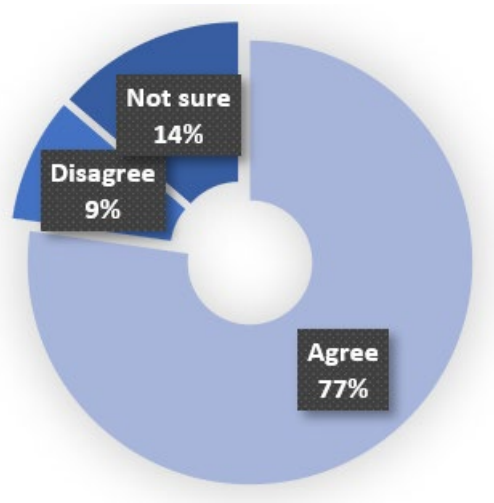
To assess people's acceptance of diversity in their community, survey respondents were asked how comfortable they would feel (on a scale of 0 to 10) in circumstances where a neighbour had certain population diversity characteristics. Close to three-quarters of Alice Springs respondents were completely comfortable with their neighbour having a different sexuality (72%), while over six in 10 were completely comfortable with a neighbour practicing a different religion or who was from a different cultural or ethnic background (both 64%). Slightly fewer were completely comfortable with a neighbour speaking a different language (61%) or having a severe disability (59%). However, substantially fewer were completely comfortable having a neighbour with a known mental health problem (29%).



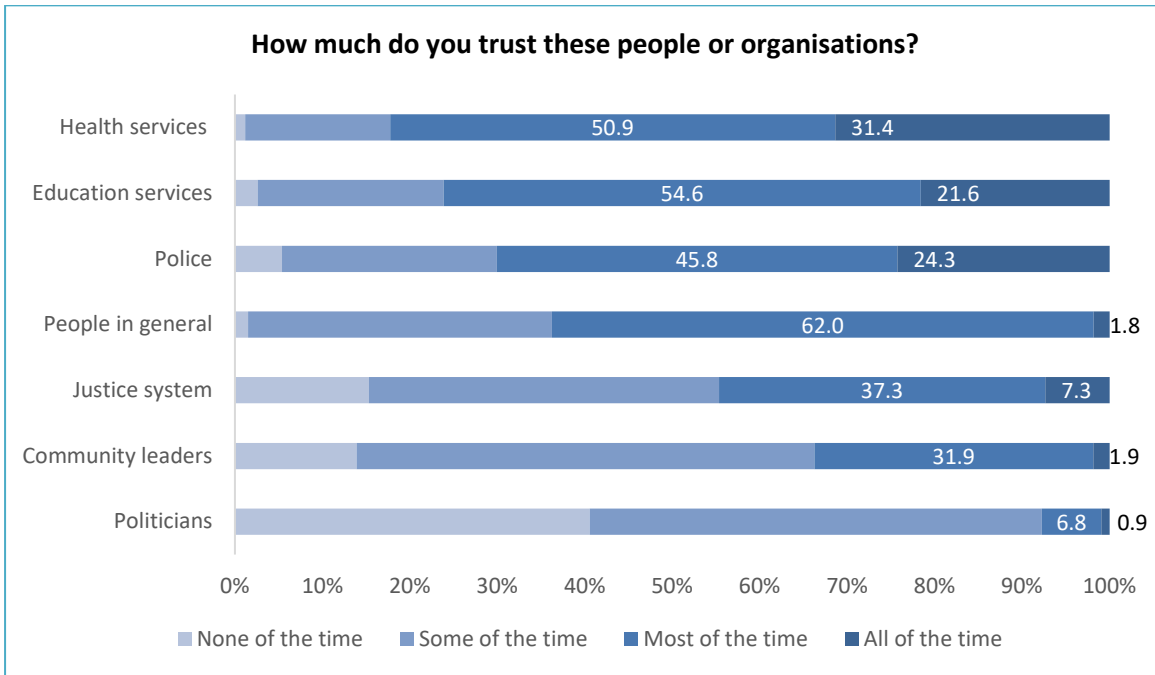
Feeling welcome in a community influences people's sense of being accepted for who they are. This issue was investigated by asking survey respondents how easy or hard it was for them to feel accepted in the Territory. Nearly three quarters of Alice Springs respondents felt it was easy or very easy (73%), while a small number found it hard or very hard (2.7%). The reasons respondents nominated for not feeling accepted were most likely to include the way they dressed or their appearance, their language or accent, or their skin colour.



Slightly more than 30 percent of the Territory’s population identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. We asked question to gauge support for reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. A high proportion of Alice Springs respondents agreed reconciliation actions were important to them (77%), however 9% disagreed and another 14% were unsure.



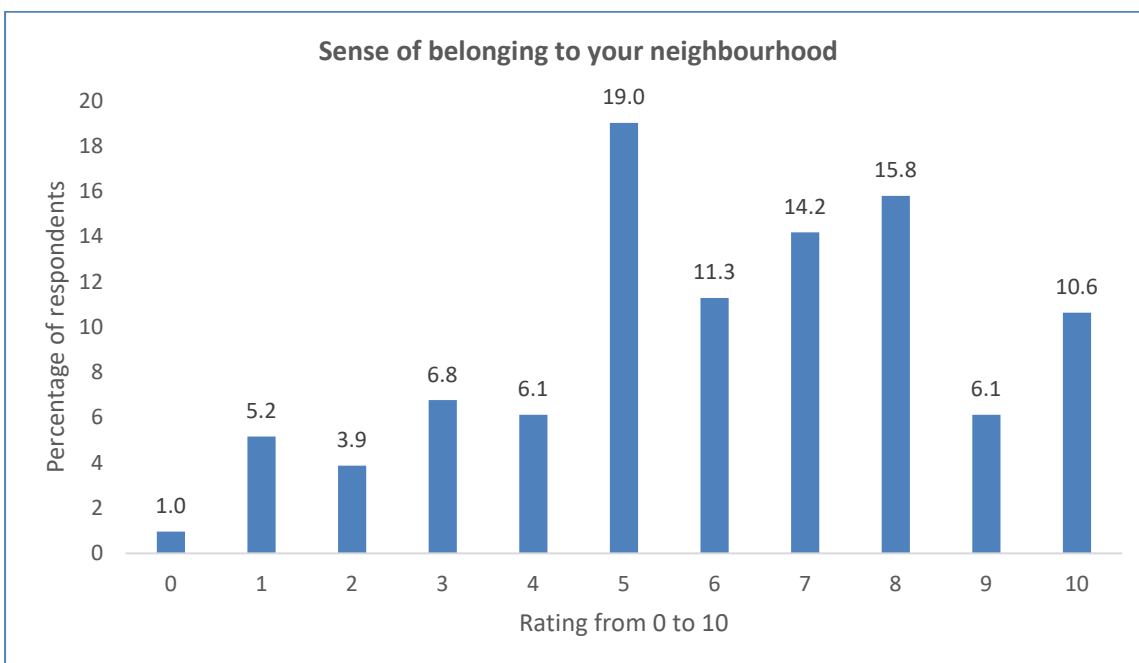
Survey respondents in Alice Springs were generally trusting of other people with 64 percent saying that they trusted others most or all of the time. While a majority of Alice Springs respondents also trusted health services (doctors / nurses, hospitals, health clinics), the police and education services (early childhood, schools, university) most or all of the time, fewer trusted the justice system (lawyers, courts) and community leaders to the same extent (45% and 34% respectively). Politicians were the least trust occupation or role (92% trusting them some or none of the time).



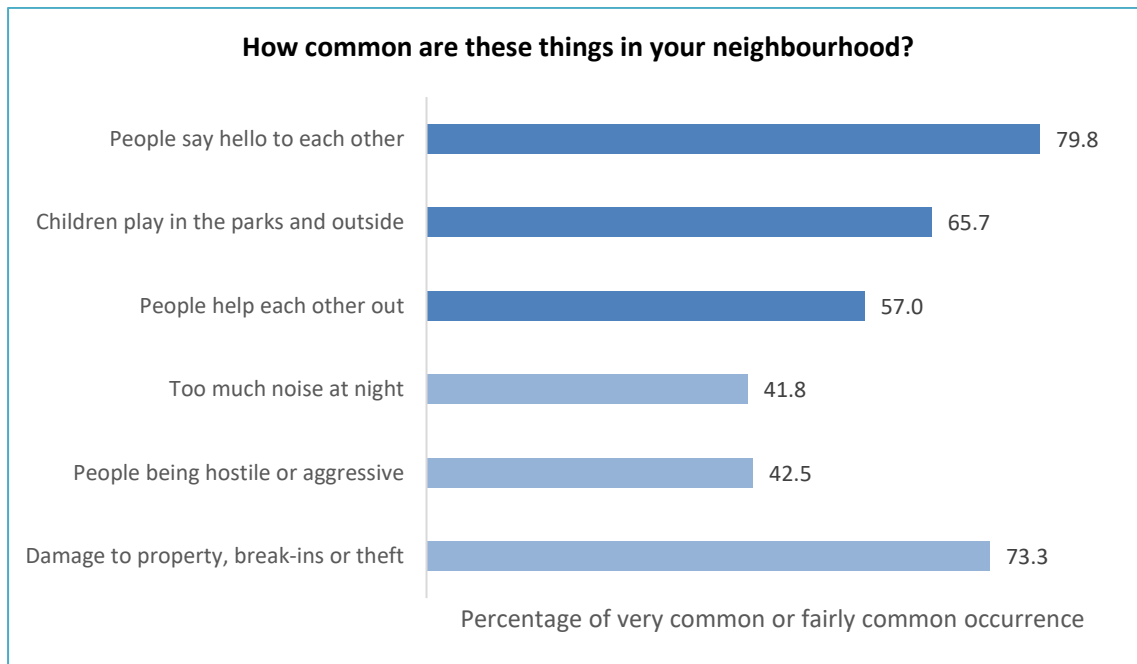
Living in Alice Springs

When introducing questions about neighbours and neighbourhoods, the survey allowed a broad definition to cover the range of different living circumstances across the Territory. Your neighbourhood could be ‘the building you live in, your street, suburb or your entire town or rural community’.

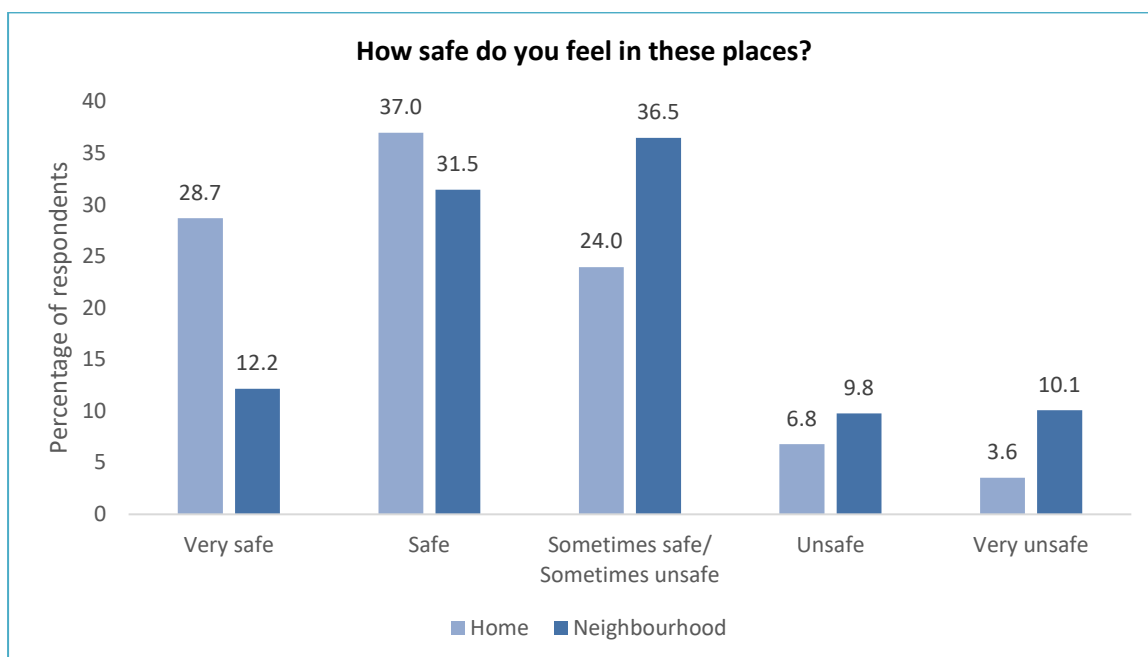
Survey respondents were asked to rate their sense of belonging to the place where they lived on a scale from 0 (no sense of belonging) to 10 (very strong sense). Although the most common response was 5 (rated by 19%), nearly 60% of Alice Springs respondents rated their feelings of belonging at 6 or more out of 10.



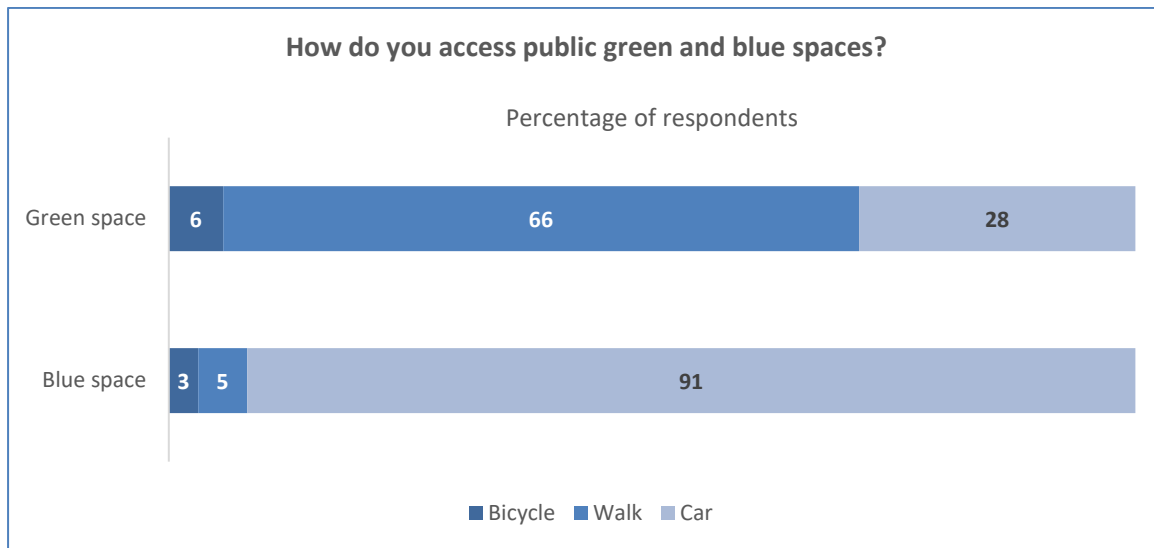
Most Alice Springs respondents found their neighbourhoods friendly (80%) but fewer felt it was common for neighbours to help each other out (57%). They also felt their neighbourhoods had some issues. Nearly three-quarters said property crime was very or fairly common (73%), while around 4 in ten said it was common to hear too much noise at night (42%) or experience people being hostile or aggressive (43%).



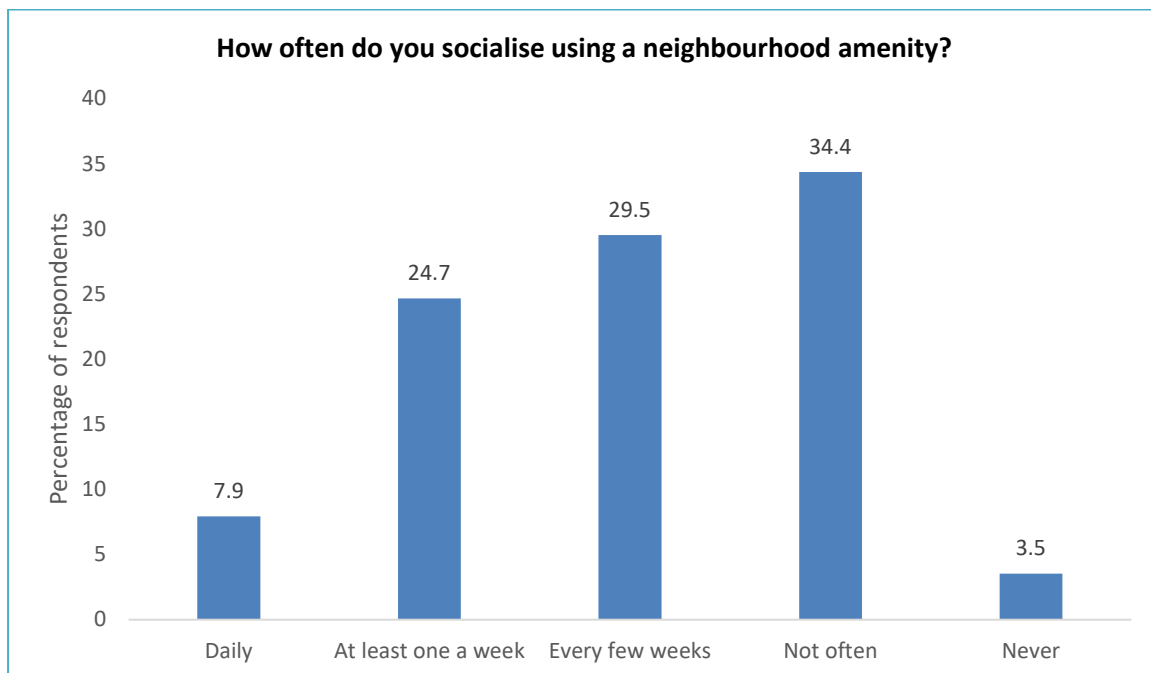
About two-thirds of Alice Springs respondents felt safe or very safe in their homes, while less than half had the same feelings of safety in their neighbourhood (44%). Although about 10 percent felt unsafe or very unsafe in their home, 20 percent felt unsafe or very safe in their neighbourhood, and another third percent felt sometimes unsafe (37%).



Survey respondents were asked about their use of public parks, ovals, playgrounds, or gardens (green spaces) and public pools, waterparks, or man-made lakes/lagoons (blue spaces). One in five Alice Springs respondents did not use public green spaces while two in five did not use public blue spaces. Respondents generally walked to green spaces (66%) but used a car to get to blues spaces (91%).



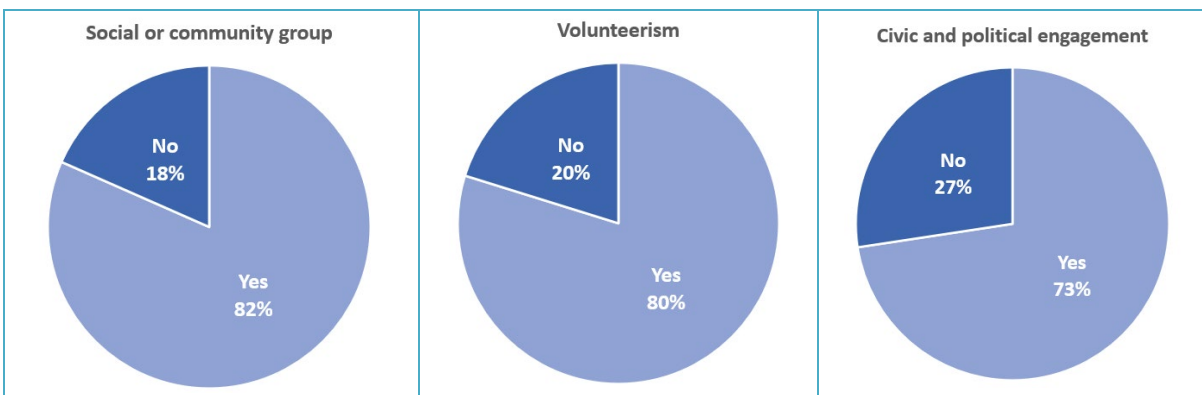
Two out of three survey respondents agreed there were places to socialise in their neighbourhood such as parks, playgrounds, BBQ areas or cafes. Of the people who knew about these amenities, more than a third did not use them often or ever to socialise (38%).



Engaging with community

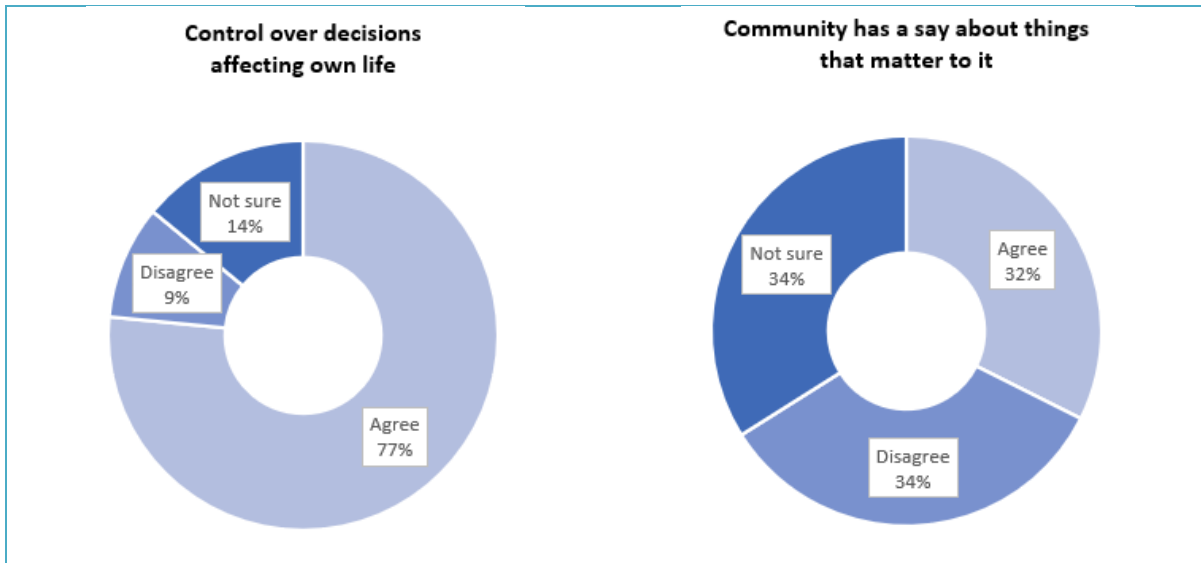
When people participate in community groups and engage with civic issues, the whole community benefits. These activities provide opportunities to support the community through shared action, while group associations build trust.

In the previous 12 months, nearly three out of four Alice Springs respondents had engaged in civic or political activities such as attending a community meeting, signing a petition, or acting on behalf of other people or about specific issues (73%). A higher proportion belonged to at least one organised social or community group (82%), the most common being focused on sport, recreation, or a special interest. A similar proportion (80%) had volunteered their time and skills formally or informally to support an organisation or community group, or provided care for someone who was not a friend or family member. These activities could be in-person, by telephone, or online.



Additionally, three quarters of Alice Springs respondents felt that they could participate in cultural ceremonies, celebrations, or religious events when they wanted to.

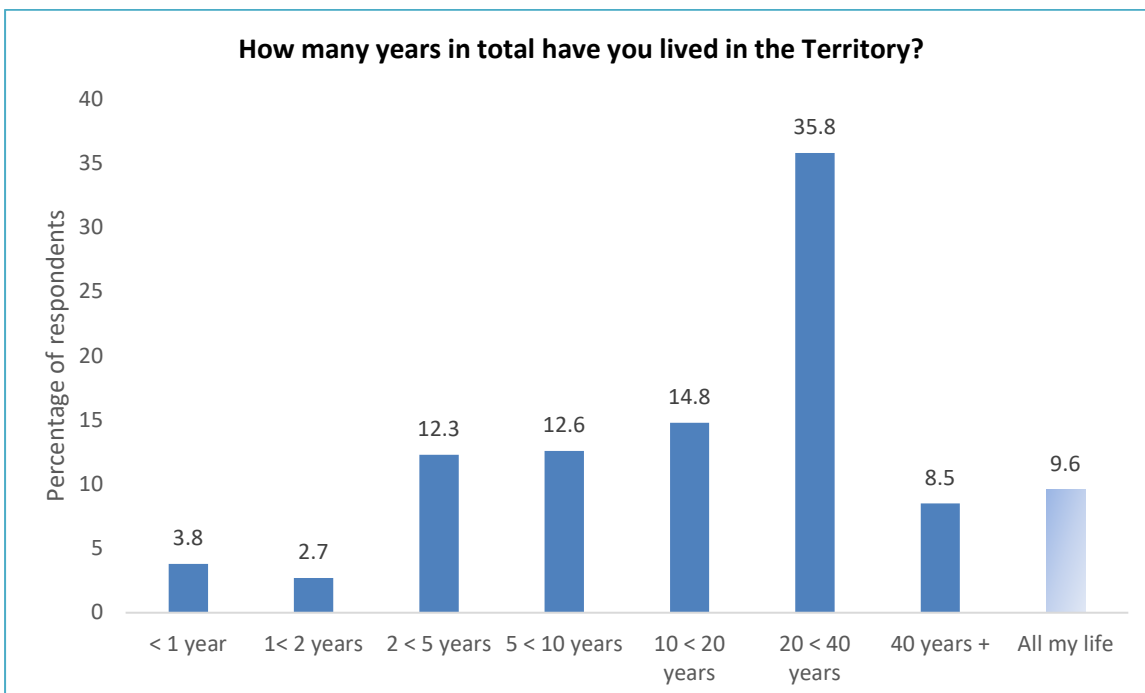
While survey respondents in Alice Springs mainly felt that they had control over decisions which affected their own lives (77%), they were less certain that their community had the same opportunity to have a real say on important issues. Fairly equal proportions agreed with (32%), disagreed with (34%) or were unsure (34%) whether their community has a say about things that matter to it.

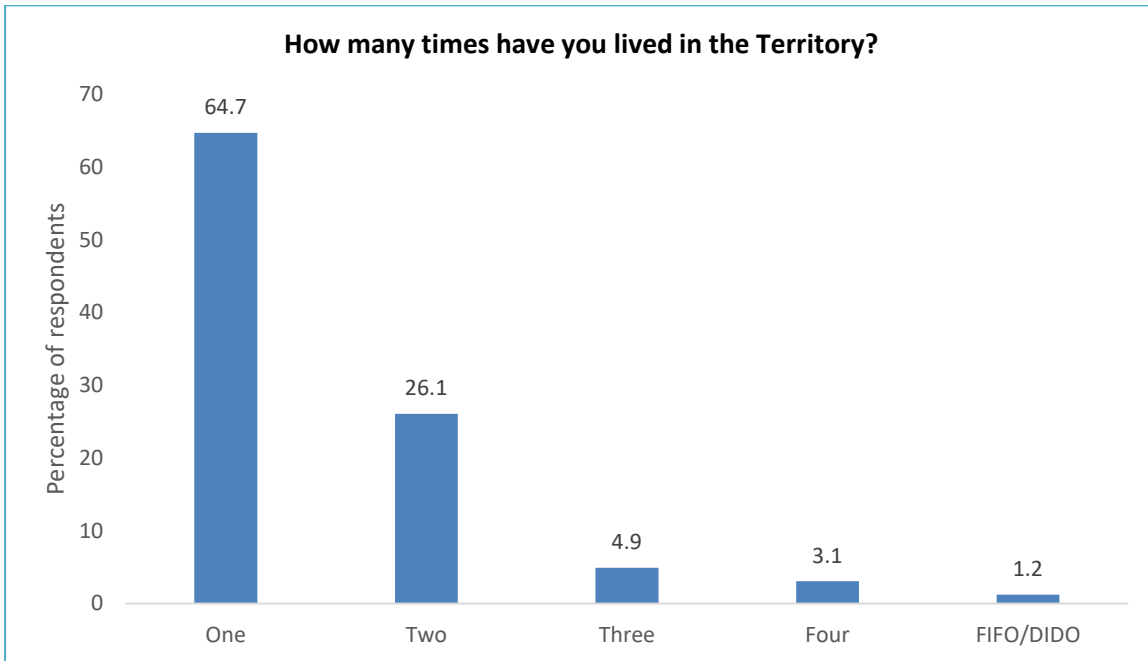


Connecting with the Territory

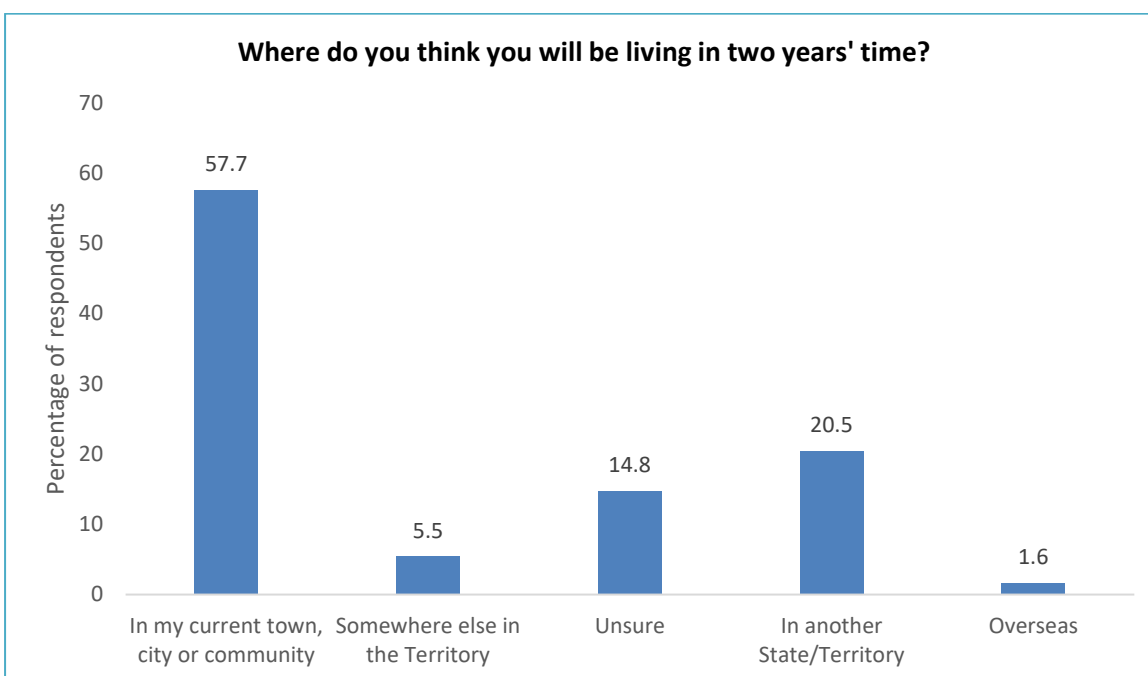
Establishing a connection to the people and place of the Territory is important for retaining and building a stable population.

Two-thirds of Alice Springs respondents had lived in the Territory for 10 years or longer, with about 10 percent living there all their lives. Another 19 percent had been resident in the Territory for less than five years. Nearly two-thirds of Alice Springs respondents had lived in the Territory one time only. Another third indicated they had lived in the Territory at least once before and returned, suggesting these respondents had built a sense of place connection, even though they had left for a period of time.



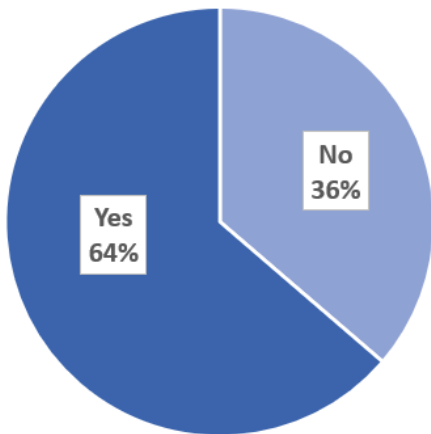


Respondents were asked about where they thought they would be living in two years' time. Almost two thirds of Alice Springs respondents planned to be living in the Territory, most remaining in Alice Springs (58%). But the majority of these 'stayers' also have a sense of connection to another place in Australia or overseas (64%) and most have all or most of their family living outside the Territory (60%). Both these factors are known migration push factors that could influence residents to leave so they can live closer to family or move back to a place they know well.

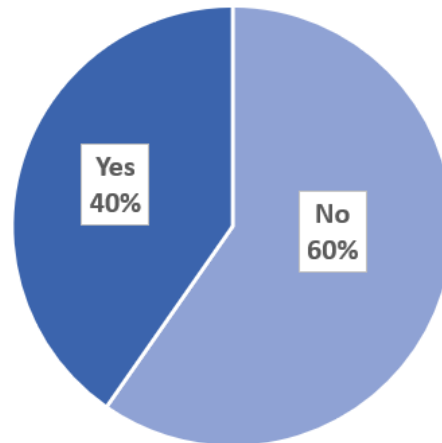


People who plan to be living in the Territory in two years' time

Sense of connection to another place

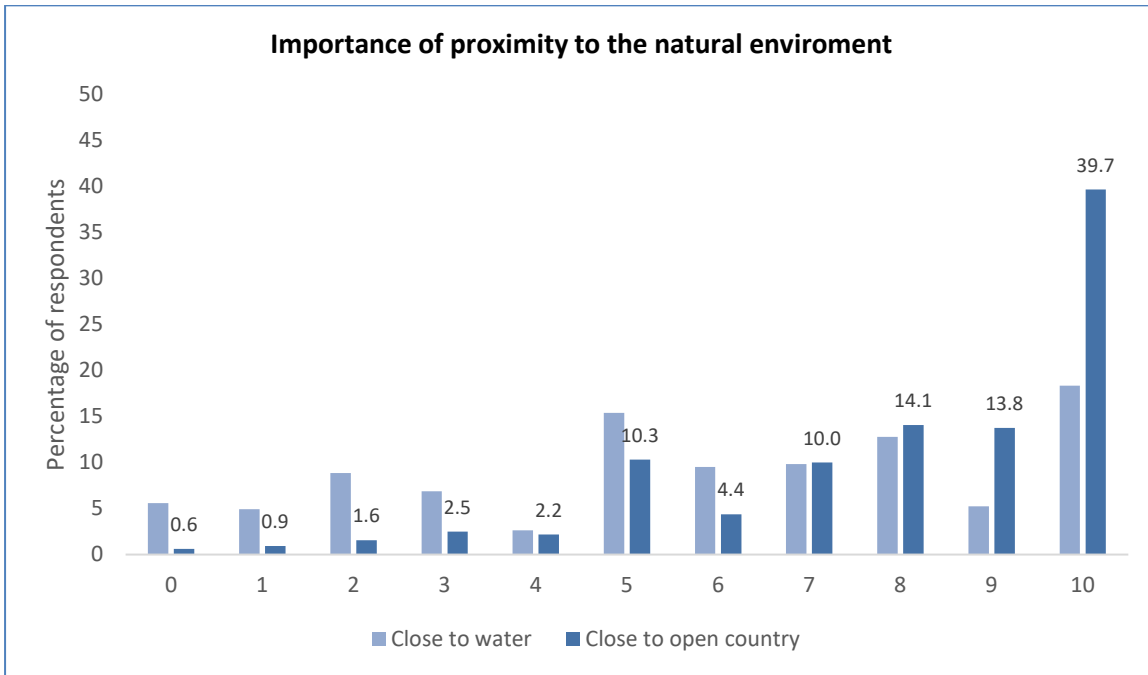


All or most family living in the Territory

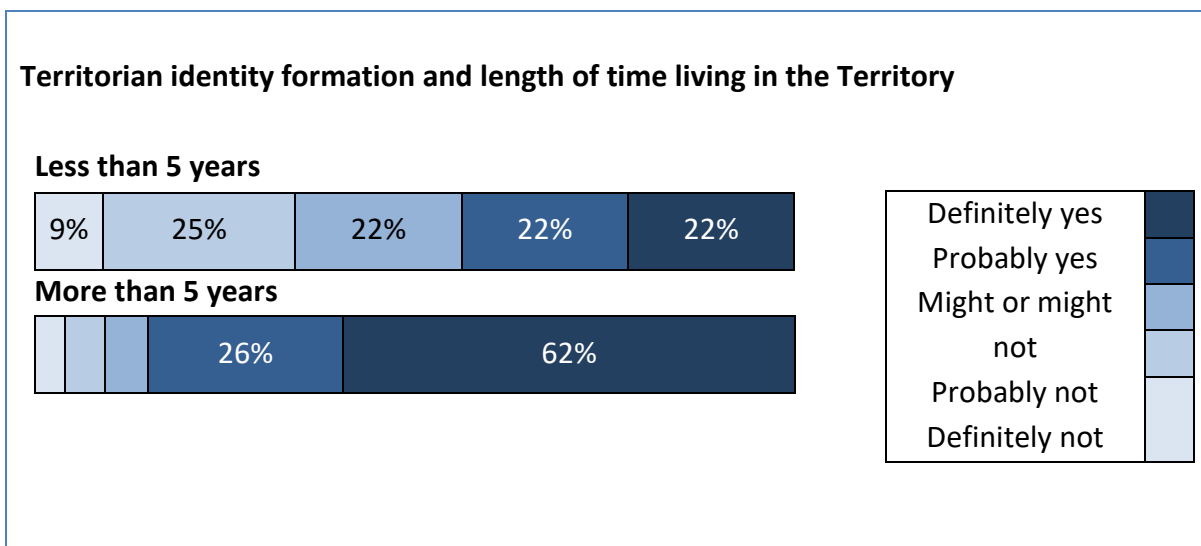


The Territory has a unique natural environment which is often a factor in drawing people here and keeping them in place. The survey asked respondents to separately rate the importance of being close to open country (such as the bush, escarpments, or the desert), and to water (such as rivers, creeks, and billabongs). Again, this rating was on a scale of 0 to 10 where 0 equaled not important and 10 equaled extremely important.

Over half of Alice Springs respondents scored the importance of being close to open country very highly (9 or 10 on a scale of 0 to 10) while proximity to water was less important. This preference for country over water is highlighted through differences in the average scores: proximity to water was 5.9 while proximity to open country was 8.0. Comments provided in response to open text questions suggest some of these positive feeling for the natural environment came from a deep connection to being on country, an appreciation of the landscape or through the experience of having lived on farming land.



Identity as a Territorian was strong for many Alice Springs respondents, with nearly eight in 10 saying they “definitely” or “probably” think of themselves as a Territorian. But this identity can take time to develop. For those who had lived in the Territory for less than 5 years only 44 percent felt able to claim a Territory identity, while after five years of residence, almost nine out of 10 Alice Springs respondents consider themselves to be Territorian.



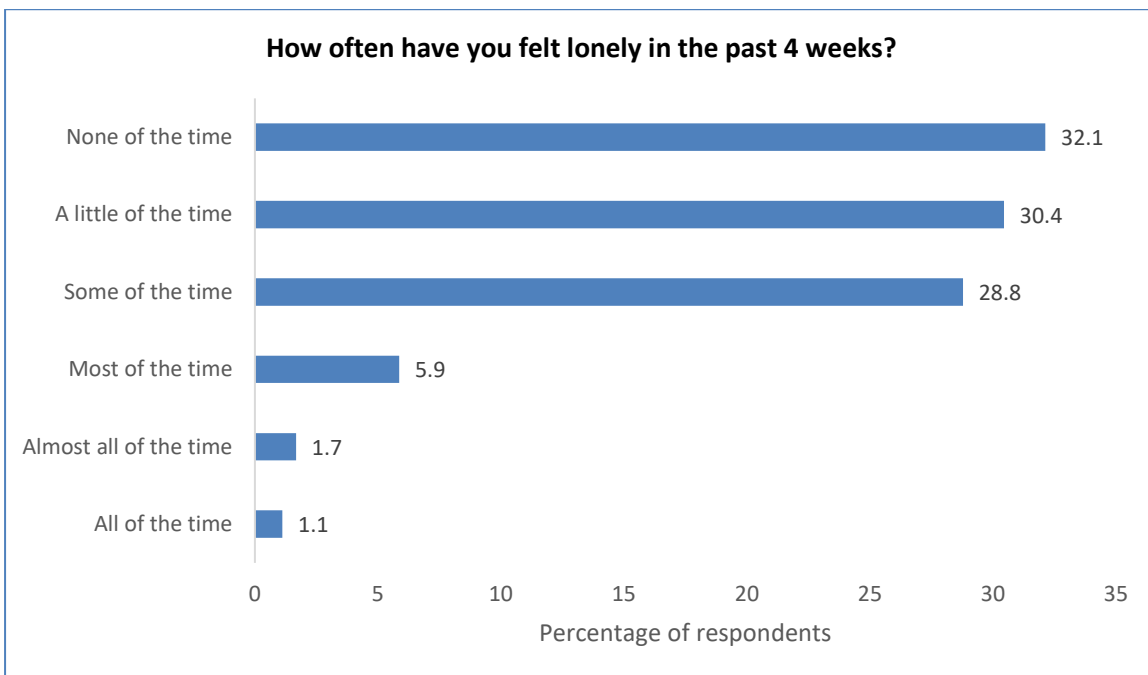
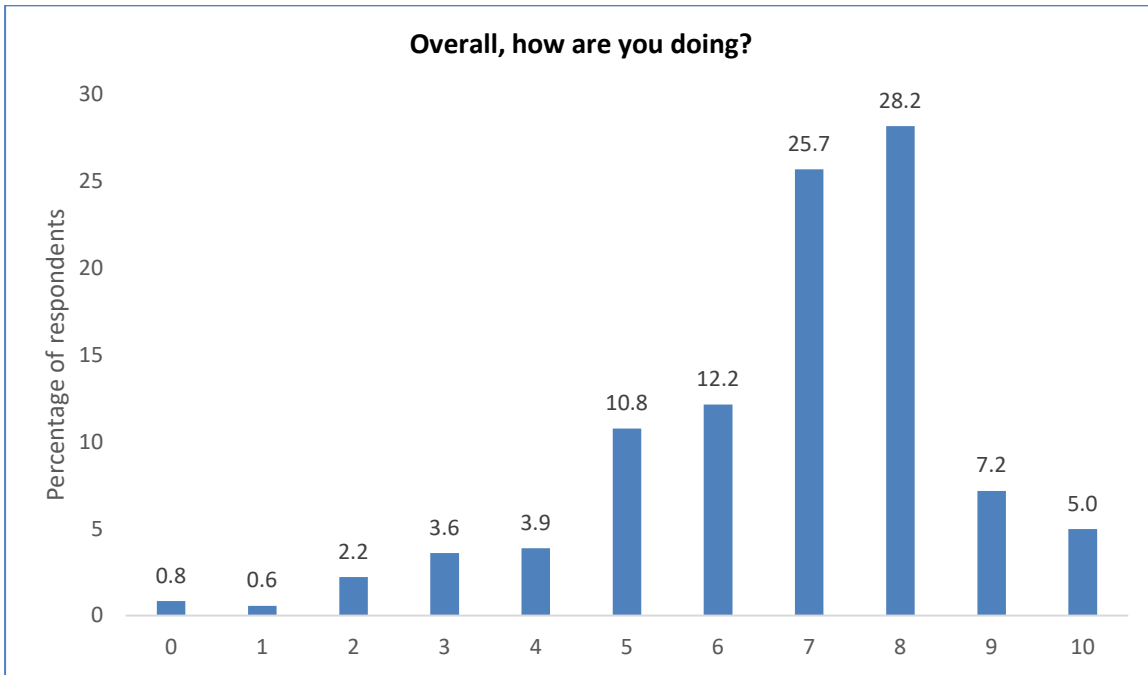
However, length of time in the Territory can also work against a person forming a Territorian identity if they feel they have not lived here ‘long enough’ in the eyes of others or were not Territory born and bred. Comments from respondents illustrate the tensions inherent in claiming identity as a Territorian.

Territorian?	Comments from survey respondents
Definitely yes	“I came for 2 years...28 years ago!!! The NT has provided me with many opportunities to expand my world and learn. Great country and natural environment, some wonderful people, plenty of work and a strong sense of 'belonging'.”
Probably yes	“I've lived in the NT longer than I have lived anywhere else and my children were born here, which gives me a sense of being a Territorian. But, there is a strong sense (in Alice Springs) that if you weren't born here, you're not a true Territorian...”
Might or might not	“Haven't been here for very long and intend to leave at some point in the next couple of years. Most of my connections here are to other people in a similar position.”
Probably not	“I come from the East Coast and keep coming and going. I feel kind of proud to be living in the Territory but feel like I'm still too much of a blow in to say I'm a Territorian.”
Definitely not	“The Territory doesn't have a clear sense of its own identity. There is always so much division between everyone and everything. There is always an 'us and them' theme playing out.”

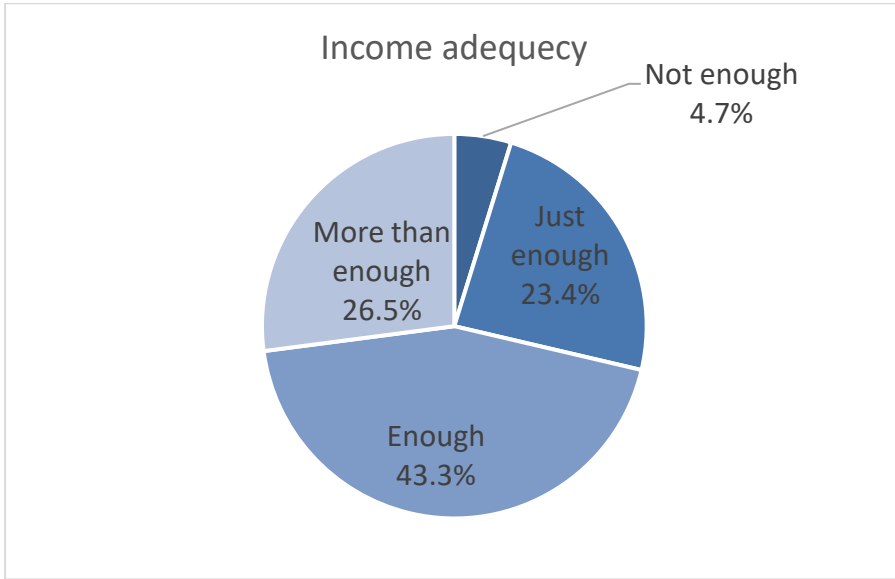
How are people doing?

General wellbeing can be affected by many things but is likely to be impacted by the connections discussed in this report because they influence the social, economic, and natural environments of individuals and the broader community.

Survey respondents were asked to rate their overall wellbeing on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 equalled 'very badly' and 10 equalled 'extremely well'. Over half of Alice Springs respondents rated themselves at 7 or 8 (54%), with the average score being 6.8. A small number rated themselves at less than 5 (11%), and when asked about experiences of loneliness, a slightly lower percentage (9%) said that they had felt lonely for the majority of the time in the past 4 weeks. Despite these small numbers, this is of some concern because loneliness has been linked with poor mental health and increased morbidity.



Additionally, in response to a question regarding life stressors in the previous year, two percent of Alice Springs respondents indicated gambling problems had affected their overall wellbeing, while seven percent indicated problems with alcohol and/or drug dependence. An adequate income still underpins many aspects of wellbeing. Survey respondents were asked whether they had enough money to cover their own and any dependent family’s basic living needs. While seven in 10 Alice Springs respondents felt they had enough or more than enough income (71%), a substantial proportion did not (28.1%).



Note: Income adequacy describes having enough income to cover basic living expenses of self and dependents

Who responded to the survey?

The results in this report are based on responses to the *my Territory Connections* survey by a total of 366 residents: 358 from Alice Springs and 8 from the Central region.

Demographic characteristics of Alice Springs survey sample		
Gender	Male	34.9%
	Female	63.5%
	Non-binary	1.6%
Age group	18-24 years	3.4%
	25-34 years	22.0%
	35-49 years	28.2%
	50-59 years	23.5%
	60+ years	22.9%
Disability status	Has disability or serious health condition	13.4%
Indigenous status	Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	8.4%
	Non-Indigenous	91.6%
Place of birth	Australia	72.4%
	Overseas	27.6%
Housing status	Owner (outright)	19.2%
	Owner (with mortgage)	48.4%
	Renter	24.5%
	Other	7.9%
Sexual identity	Straight/heterosexual	90.2%
	Sexual minority	8.6%

Almost twice as many women as men participated in the survey. The views of the 18 to 24 years age group and Aboriginal people are under-represented.

Over one in 10 respondents had a disability or serious health condition, and two thirds of these said that it limited their participation in social and community activities.

More than a quarter of the respondents were born overseas. These countries of birth included United Kingdom; New Zealand; India; Germany; United States of America; Canada; China; Indonesia; Philippines; Ireland (Republic of); Nepal; Hong Kong; Northern Ireland; South Africa; Argentina; Brazil; Colombia; France; Malaysia; Nigeria; Papua New Guinea; Samoa; South Sudan; Sri Lanka; Sweden; and Vietnam showing the significant multicultural composition of Alice Springs' population.

Two-thirds of respondents owned their homes but almost half with a mortgage. One-quarter were renting, and the remainder had a variety of other accommodation arrangements.

While the majority of Alice Springs respondents considered themselves to be heterosexual, nearly one in ten survey respondents identified themselves as from a sexual minority.

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A known hub for research expertise, leadership and impact, Northern Institute encompasses four major research themes:

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- Demography and Growth Planning
- Realist Research, Evaluation and Learning
- Regional, Economic, Education and Workforce Development
- Risk, Resilience and Sustainability.