Connected Communities
Engagement Summary



Executive Summary

Connected Communities is a Central Coast Council project funded through the NSW Social Cohesion Grants for Local Government.

For Connected Communities, social cohesion was understood as people feeling welcome, safe, included and connected, with a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate in community life. The survey translated this into everyday experiences, exploring belonging, welcome, safety, participation and connection to better understand community strengths, gaps and priorities across the Central Coast. As part of this work, Council invited community members to share their experiences.

Community members could provide their feedback between 18 February to Sunday 10 May 2026 by:

- completing a short survey
- placing a pin on an interactive map
- writing to Council via email or post

The feedback received reveals an important snapshot of how people experience life on the Central Coast today, while also identifying areas where greater focus, additional support, investment, or change may be needed.

Key themes from the engagement include:

- A strong sense of belonging exists, but this could be strengthened
- Feeling safe, respected and welcome is essential to community connection
- Everyday places and activities are where communities feel most connected
- Communities want greater cultural representation in local events and activities
- Young people and families need more accessible ways to connect, participate and shape decisions

How you connected

- **331** survey responses
- **108** pins were placed on the map
- **2** workshops attended by **44** people
- Targeted stakeholder email delivered to **137** community groups with a registered interest in community and wellbeing
- Your Voice Our Coast had **2,422** views
- Facebook – **10,315** people were reached, generating **71** reactions
- Instagram – **985** people were reached, generating **32** reactions
- LinkedIn – **637** people were reached, generating **104** reactions
- eNews - Delivered to approx. **20,300**
- Meta paid - Reach of **7566**
- Coast Connect print - Delivered to **62,000+** readers

What we did

For Connected Communities, social cohesion was understood as people feeling connected, welcome, included and safe, with a sense of belonging and opportunities to participate in community life. The Connected Communities Survey translated this broad concept into everyday experiences, providing a practical way to understand social cohesion across the Central Coast.

The survey explored:

- **Belonging and welcome** – whether people feel included, connected and proud of where they live.
- **Participation** – whether people feel comfortable accessing local activities, events and services.
- **Safety and trust** – people's experiences and perceptions of safety and connection within their community.
- **Places and connection** – where people go and the relationships, activities and places that help them feel connected.
- **Connection to the Central Coast** – including whether people intend to remain living in the region.

To make participation accessible and capture both lived experience and place-based insights, community members could:

- complete a short survey, available in 16 community languages
- use an interactive map to identify places where they feel connected, welcome and included
- provide written feedback directly to Council by email or post.

Together, these measures provided a baseline for understanding community connection, identifying strengths and gaps, and informing priorities for future social cohesion work.

What we heard

Online Survey

Respondents to the online survey were asked to provide feedback around feeling welcomed, having a sense of belonging and a sense of pride on the Central Coast. To better understand how experiences differ across the community, results have been broken down and compared based on how respondents identified. This helps show where experiences are shared and where some groups may have different experiences. For the purposes of this analysis, Culturally and/or linguistically diverse (CALD) and Non-English-speaking background have been grouped together. The survey results are presented below.

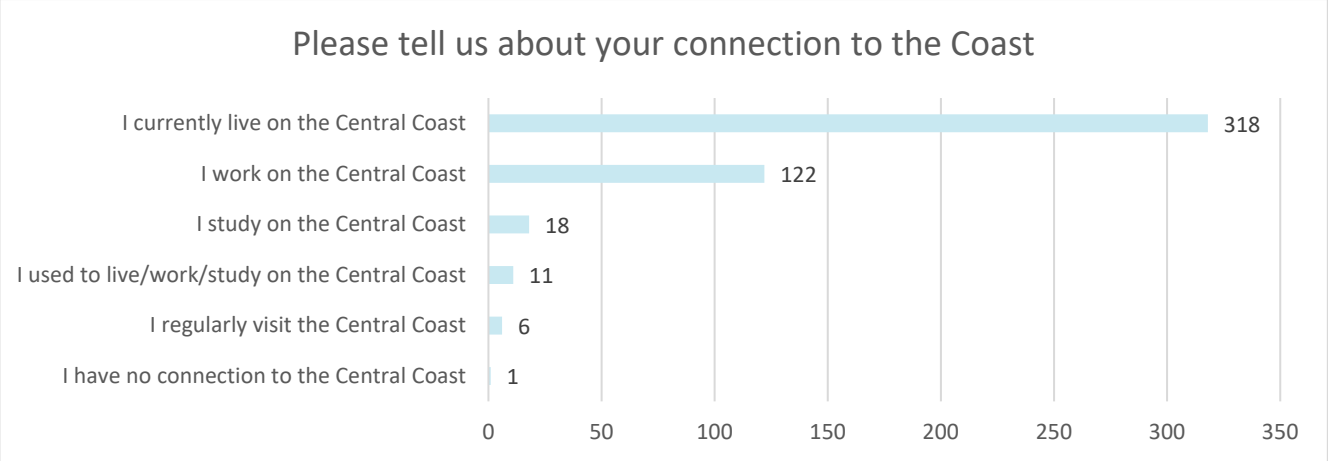


*Figure 1: Respondent connection to the Central Coast, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026, 330 responses. *Note: multiple choices allowed*

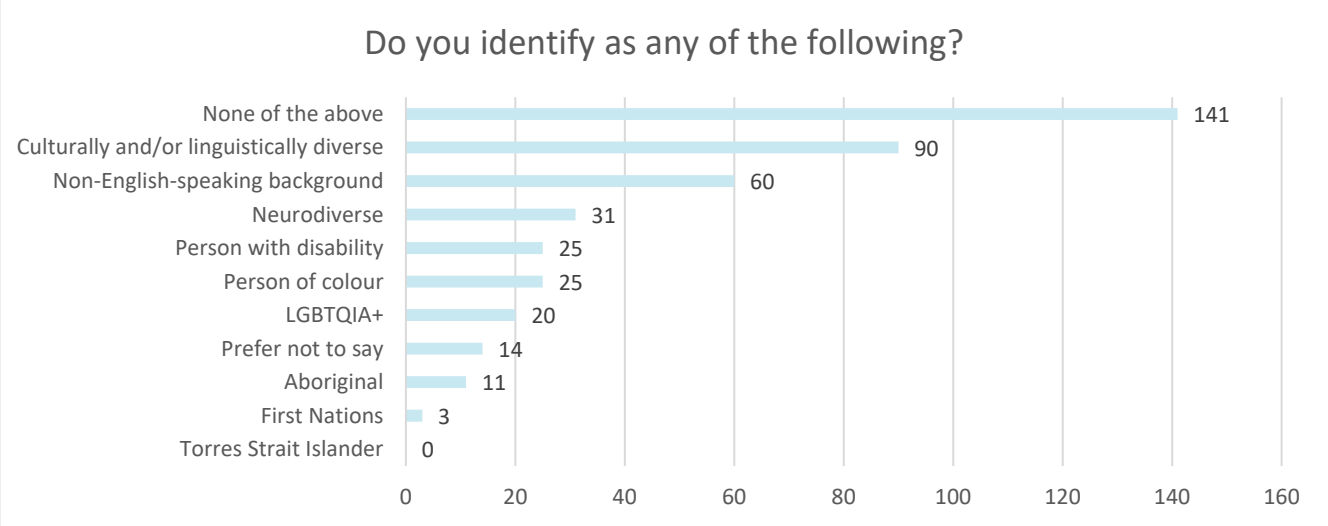


*Figure 2: How respondents identify, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026, 318 responses *Note: multiple choices allowed*

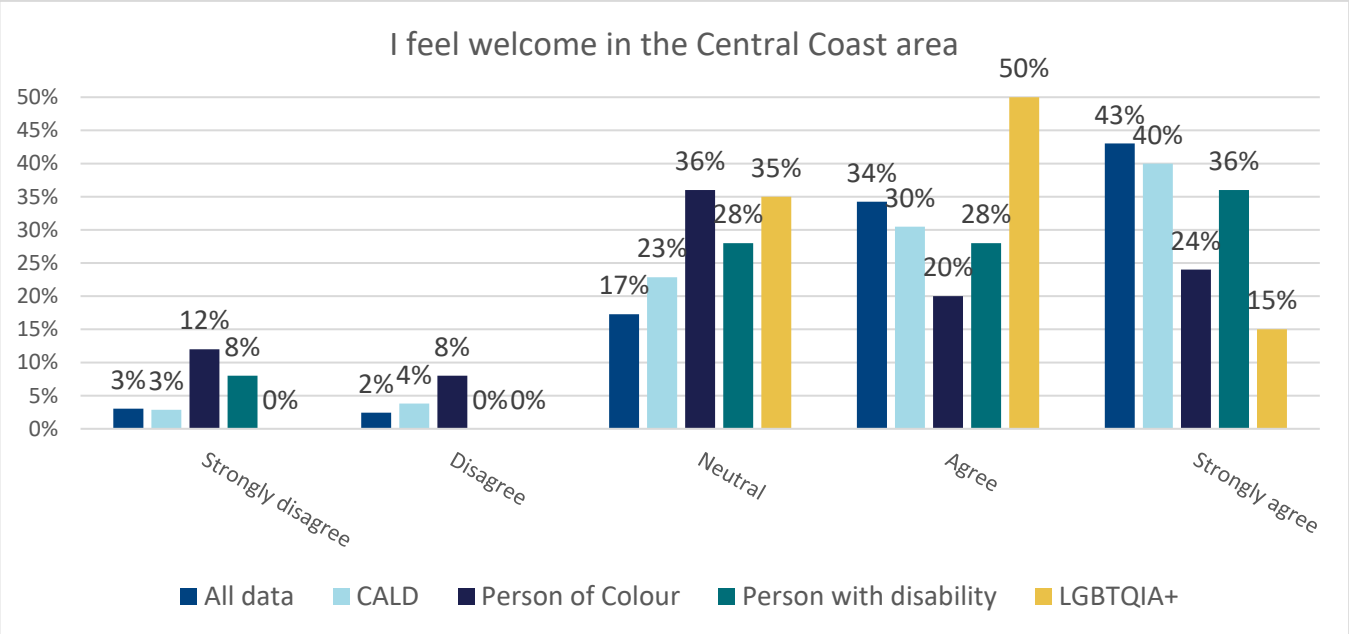


Figure 3: Respondent's agreement to feeling welcome in the Central Coast area, All data n= 330 CALD n=105 Person of Colour n=25, Person with disability n=25, LGBTQIA+ n=20, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026.

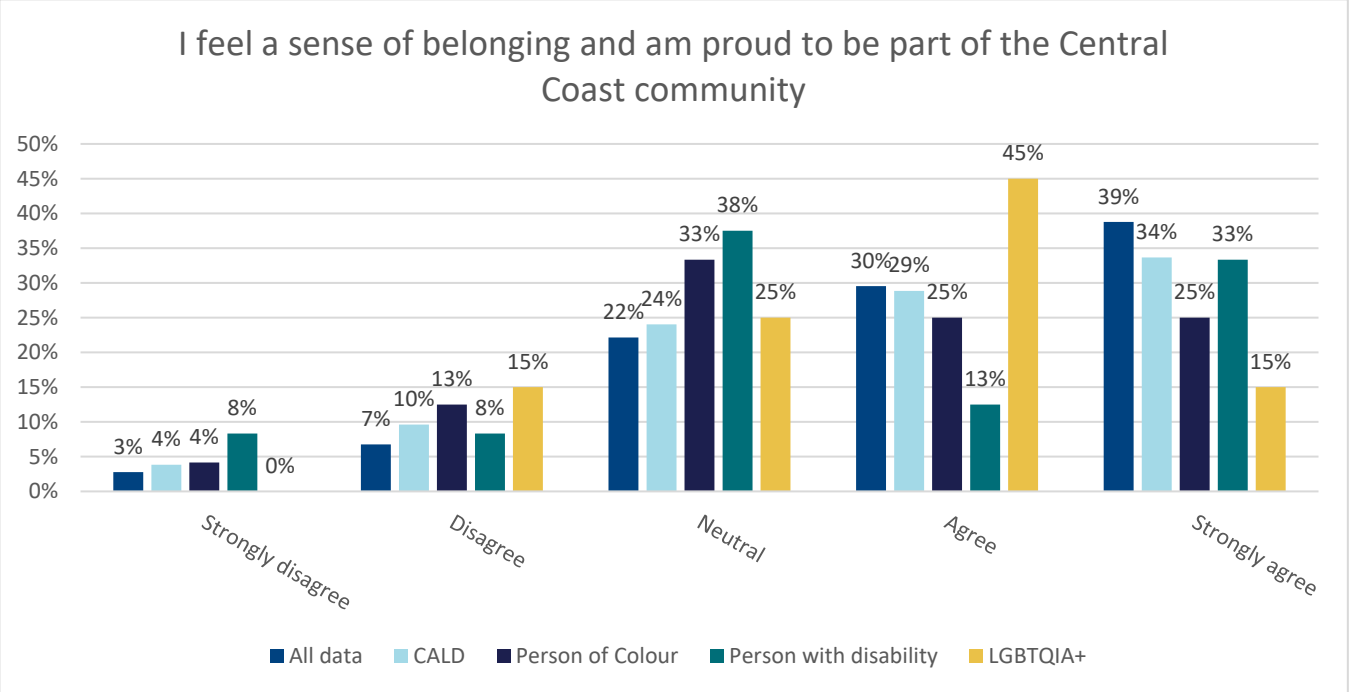


Figure 4: Respondent's agreement with feeling a sense of belonging and pride to be a part of the Central Coast Community, All data n= 325 CALD n=104 Person of Colour n=24, Person with disability n=24, LGBTQIA+ n=20, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026.

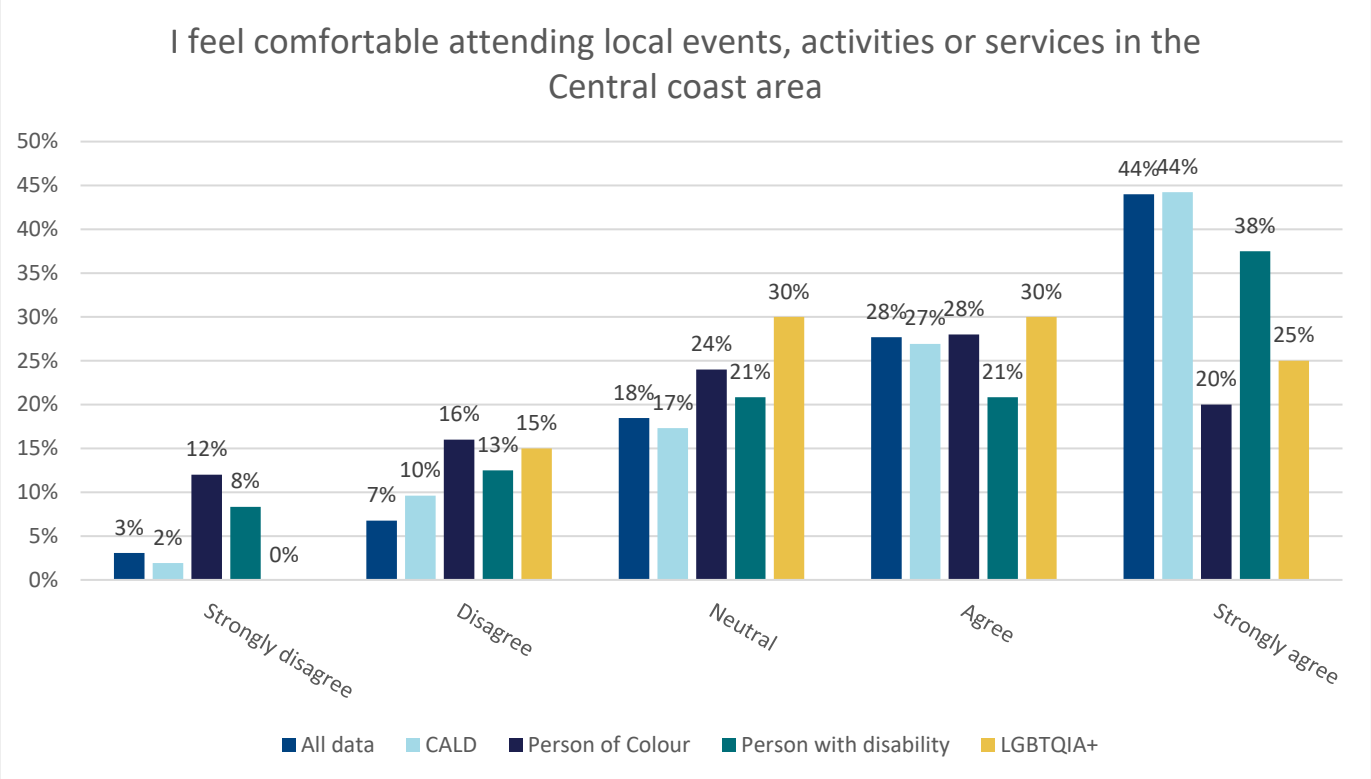


Figure 5: Respondent's agreement towards feeling comfortable attending events, activities or services on the Central Coast, All data n= 325 CALD n=104 Person of Colour n=25, Person with disability n=24, LGBTQIA+ n=20, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026.

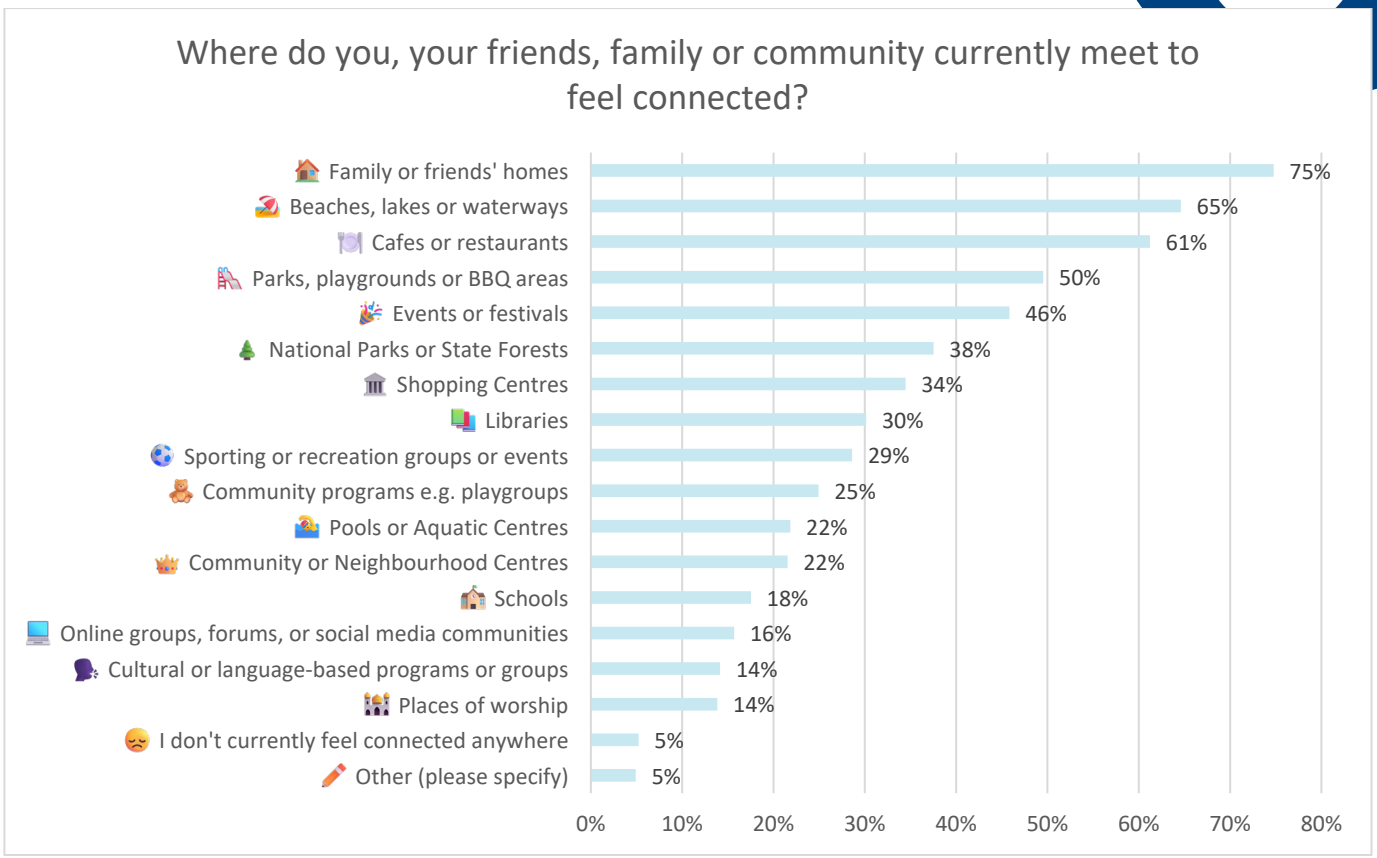


*Figure 6: Where respondents go to feel connected on the Central Coast, 325 responses, 18 February to 10 May 2026. *Note: respondents could choose multiple options*

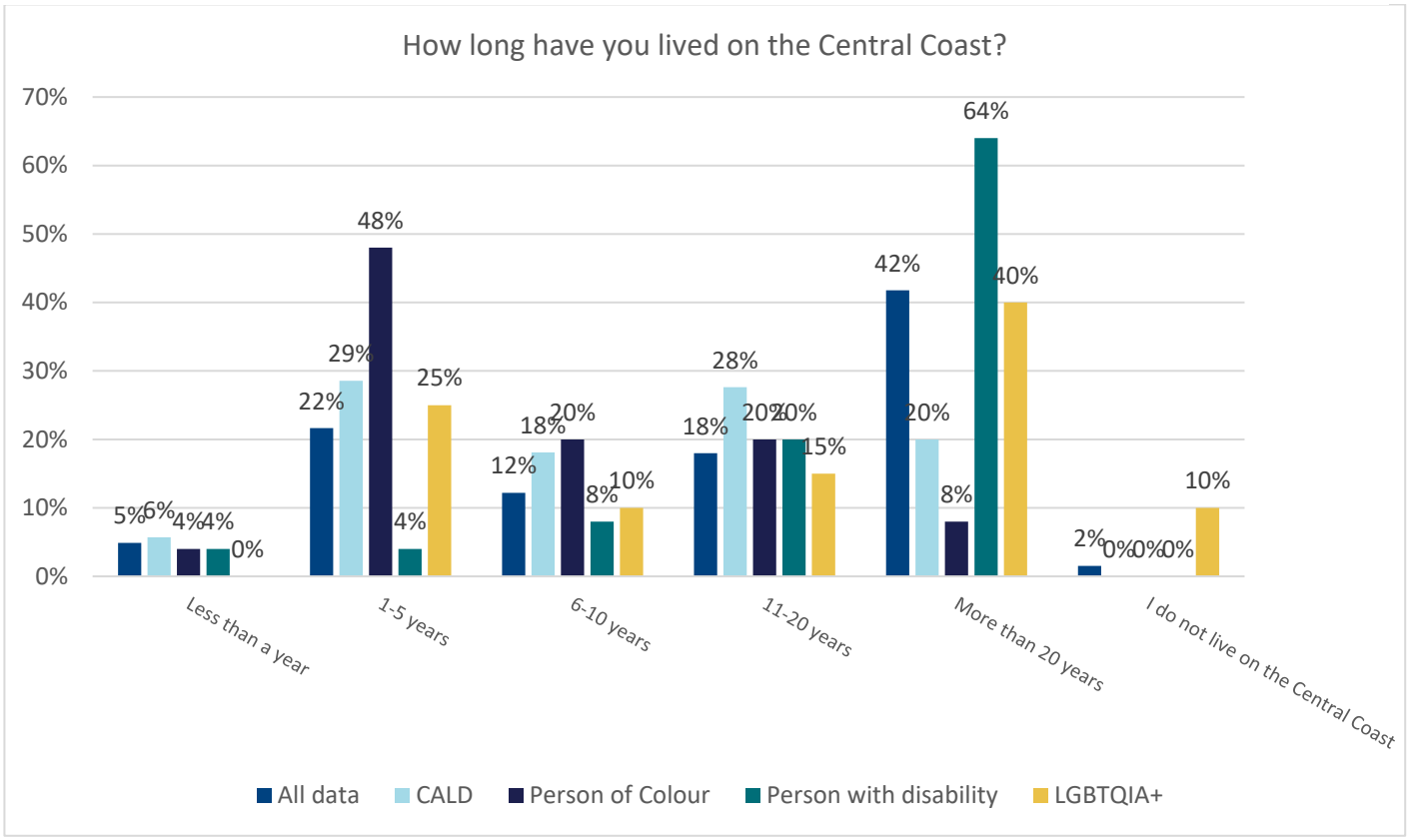


Figure 7: How long respondents have lived on the Central Coast, All data n= 328 CALD n=105 Person of Colour n=25, Person with disability n=25, LGBTQIA+ n=20, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026.

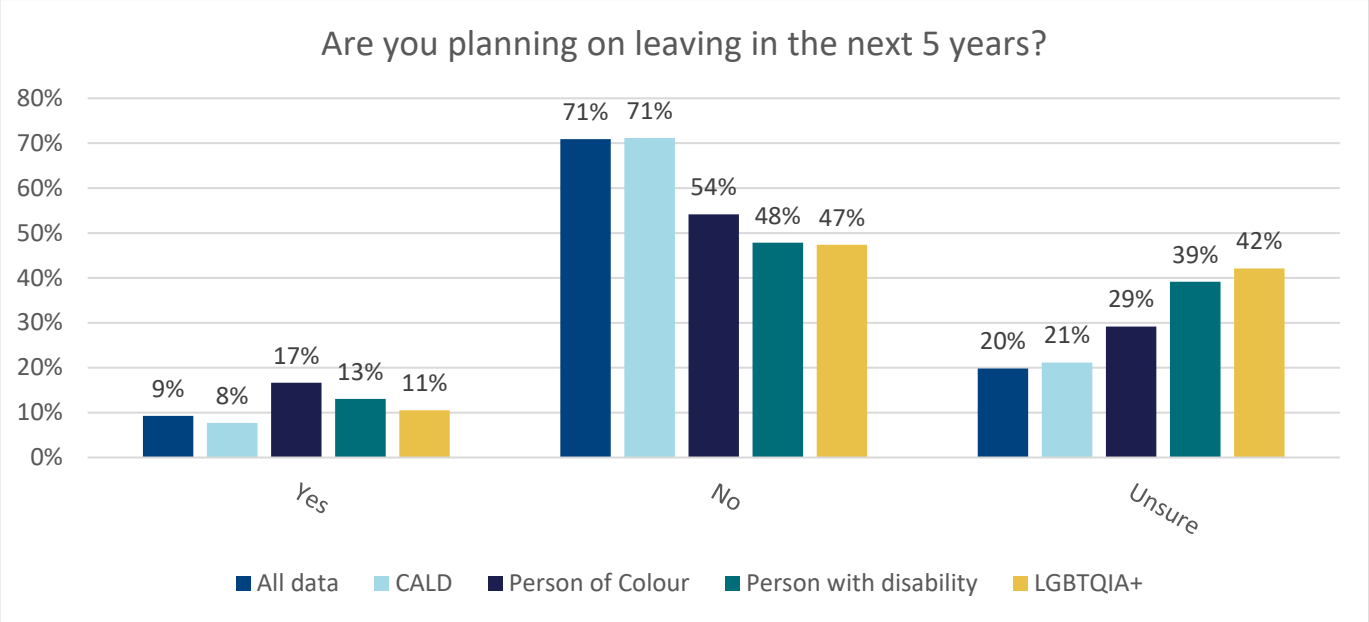


Figure 8: Respondent's plans to stay on the Central Coast in the next 5 years, All data n= 323 CALD n=104 Person of Colour n=24, Person with disability n=23, LGBTQIA+ n=19, Online survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May



*Figure 9: Why respondents are planning to leave the Central Coast, 28 responses, Online Survey Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026 *Note: Respondents could choose multiple options*

Key themes

In the online survey, respondents shared their experiences in their own words across a range of open-text questions. Their comments add more detail to the survey results, showing what helps people feel welcomed, connected and included on the Central Coast, as well as what can get in the way. Five key themes came through:



A strong sense of belonging exists, but this could be strengthened

Many people spoke about feeling deeply connected to the Central Coast through family, time spent living here, community involvement and the natural environment. At the same time, this sense of connection was not shared by everyone. Some newcomers, migrants, LGBTQIA+ people and others outside established social networks described feeling lonely, excluded, overlooked or not fully accepted. This shows that belonging is a real strength on the Coast, but also an area where more work is needed.

Example comments:

"The central coast has been a big part of my life. I will always feel connected to the people, beaches and suburbs throughout this beautiful part of Australia. My wife and I have bought our first home there 25 years ago, being a migrant, I always felt welcomed."

"I still don't feel like I have connections with people in the community, I still see a lot of people posting about feeling lonely and struggling to find community."

"It's easy for me being white, cis gendered, no disability and living heteronormatively. However, I see that my friends who don't fit into these categories really struggle to feel safe and respected"



Feeling safe, welcome and respected is essential to community connection

Respondents talked about safety in both a physical and social sense. Concerns about crime, violence or unsafe public places can stop people from taking part in community life. For others, experiences of racism, xenophobia or feeling unwelcome made them less likely to attend activities or use local spaces. Many linked a connected community with feeling safe in public, being treated with respect, and knowing their voice is heard.

Example comments:

"As a migrant, I do not feel safe, connected or welcomed living in the Central Coast. I got yelled at a lot by white Australians, including teenagers, on the street when I just went for a walk around Gosford, the Leagues Club Park and the waterfront."

"I have tried to go to community activities and facilities. I stopped because I do not feel safe and welcomed. I think the Council should set up more multicultural community events for migrants to build connections, as well as strengthen community safety."

"A close-knit community will stay strong as long as it feels safe and heard by the local authorities."



Everyday places and activities are where communities feel most connected

Several respondents said connection often happens in everyday places, not just through major events. Beaches, parks, libraries, community centres, cafés, markets, creative activities and recreation spaces give people regular chances to meet others,

take part and see familiar faces. These local places matter because they support both organised activities and casual, everyday interactions.

Example comments:

"Nature is central to who we are, our favourite spaces are outdoors, on the beaches and lakes of the Coast, where community feels most alive and connected."

"We love the ocean baths at the entrance, and often meet people at the various wonderful events the coast holds such as the markets etc. even if we don't plan to see people we often bump into friends"



Communities want greater cultural representation in local events and activities

Respondents wanted to see multicultural and First Nations cultures more clearly reflected in local events, performances, food, arts, languages and places of celebration. Some CALD residents felt that existing family and community events did not always reflect the diversity of the Coast. Culturally specific groups, celebrations and festivals were seen as important ways to build confidence, connection and understanding between communities.

Example comments:

"The Central Coast is still incredibly white and mono-cultural in events etc. It would be amazing to have more celebrations of the multi-culturalism on the Coast. For example, my partner just became a citizen and there were people represented there from 20+ countries - we need to see this in our events and things to do."

"Many of us feel totally excluded. Whenever there is a nice meant to be family event there is never any ethnic performers or multicultural shows"



Young people and families need more accessible ways to connect, participate and shape decisions

Families valued places such as playgroups, libraries, playgrounds and affordable community events. However, opening hours, transport, cost and uneven access can make it harder for people to take part. Respondents also felt young people need more local spaces, activities and opportunities to connect, beyond bars and clubs.

Example comments:

"Many families would love to be more involved in the libraries but for working families- the libraries close half day Saturday and all day Sundays. I would spend Sundays at the libraries with my children if they were opened. It would also give our teens a space to read."

"Need more events and spaces to cater to the growing modern young population."

Social map

Interactive social map

Respondents were asked to place a pin on the map of the location where they felt most connected. The most pinned geographical location was Wyong (14%) followed by Gosford (10%) and Tuggerah (10%).

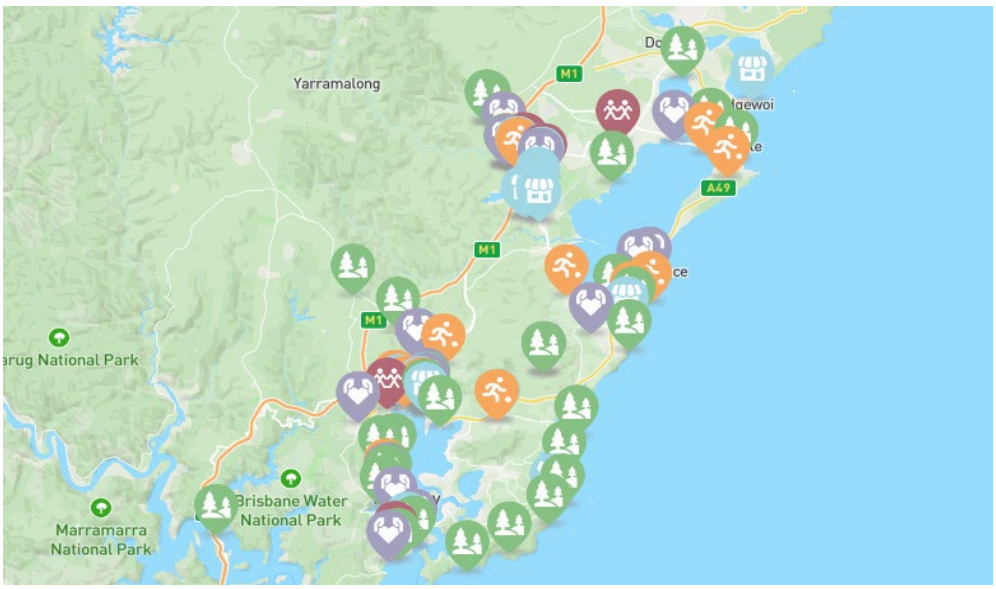


*Figure 9: Location of pinpoints, 108 pins in total, online interactive social map on Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026. *Note: Selection of multiple pins allowed*

Social map categories

Respondents were asked to place a pin on the map of the location where they felt most connected. Of the 108 respondents who put a pin on the map, the most common category was nature and outdoor spaces (38 pins), followed by restaurants, cafes and shopping centres (25 pins).

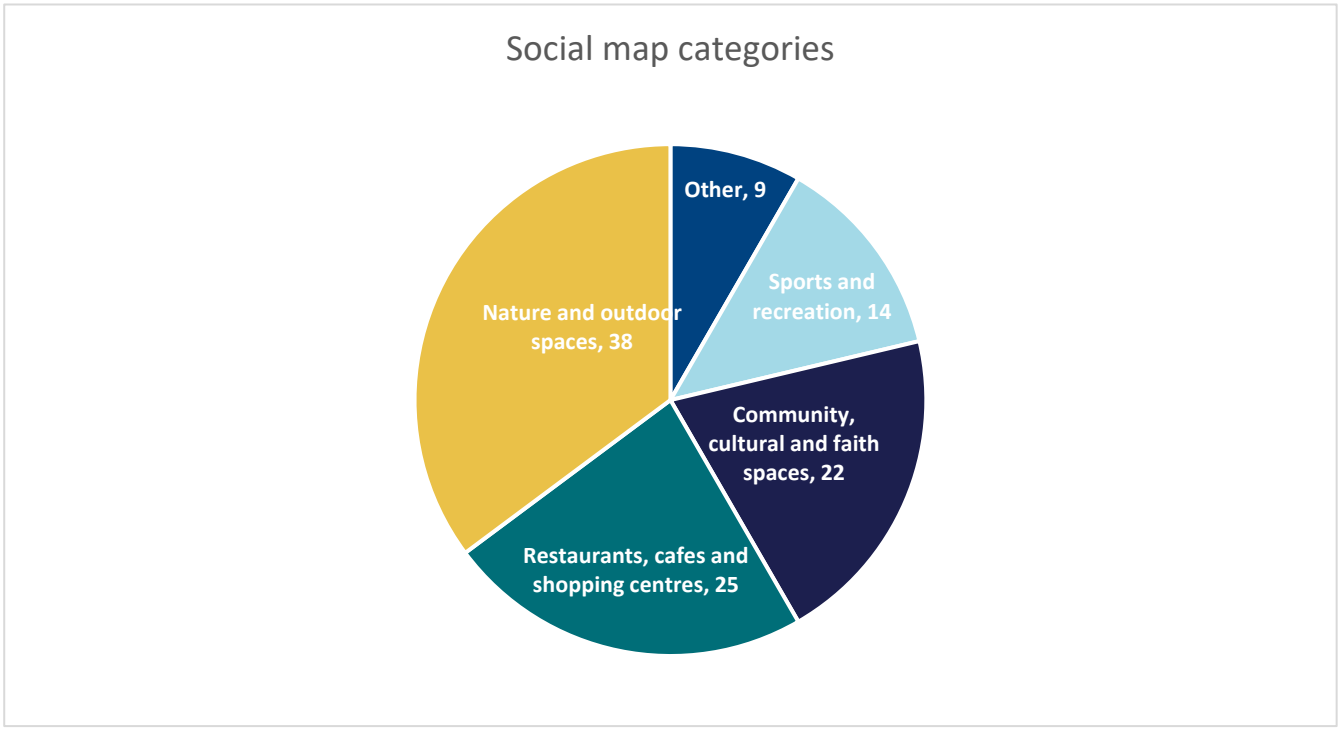


*Figure 10: Number of pins for each social map category, online interactive map on Your Voice Our Coast, 18 February to 10 May 2026, 108 pins. *Note: Selection of multiple pins allowed*

Social map respondents raised multiple reasons why they feel connected, example comments received under each theme are summarised below with examples.

Social map category	What we heard	Example comments
Nature and outdoor spaces 	Community members who pinned this category on the map identified that nature and outdoor spaces fostered social connection, sense of community and a sense of peace.	*"This space connects me to my community as it is the place where residents and tourists alike come to gather, be it soaking up the sun, playing in the water, walking their dogs, exercising or riding their bikes. Those who venture here are always up for a chat, a wave or a smile, it's a place that keeps our community connected with each other in positive and friendly way."* *"We get to meet and connect with our neighbours in Toukley and it feels safe and welcoming here"* *"I feel connected to the community when I go to the Tuggerawong pathway for walks."*
Restaurants, cafes and shopping centres 	Respondents who selected this category focused on these spaces bringing a connection to friends and family. It also highlighted the importance of cultural connection through food and community.	*"Great beautiful and central place for people to gather, relax and enjoy with family and friends."* *"Great local I where you can always bump into a friend for a chat while getting a coffee"* *"There are Chinese restaurants at Westfield which makes me feel connected to my culture."*
Community, cultural and faith spaces 	Respondents who selected this category focused on these spaces being welcoming and inclusive. Respondents felt that these spaces were good at bringing people together.	*"Lifesaving clubs are wonderful communities that bring diverse people together around a common love of the beach. It's also great for promoting a healthy lifestyle and respect for the ocean, especially for kids."* *"The entrance community centre feels like a heart of connection because it brings people together in a welcoming, inclusive space. Whether it's through events, shared activities, or simply a place to meet, it creates opportunities for neighbours to get to know one another and build relationships. It fosters a sense of belonging, where people feel seen, supported, and part of something bigger than themselves."* *"A safe and welcoming space for anyone in the neighbourhood to share in community and connectedness."*

Sports and recreation 	Respondents who selected this category said that sports and recreation spaces offered opportunities for connection and meeting people. They also highlighted that these spaces allow family-friendly facilities.	*"Salsa dance classes are an amazing place to meet new people and learn about salsa dancing together"* *"Located on canton beach. Every year, every holiday, we get visitors, all wanting to know a bit about sailing, learning etc. With clubhouse & accessible beach area, it's a great place for young families to join & participant in a local club on a Great Lake & beach area"* *"Great space for casual sports and play area for kids, lawn for adults to relax"*
Other 	Respondents who selected the "other" category selected venues such as a library, a hospital, love lanes festival and the Henry Kendall Cottage and Museum. Their feedback highlighted how these spaces provide connection, activities and services.	*"Provides connection to our past and sense of belonging. Lovely people who care about history and people of today connecting with the Central Coast of yesteryear."* *"They have a community jigsaw puzzle and the staff are friendly"* *"I get care and support from the hospital".*

Targeted Community Workshop

Following feedback from the Connected Communities Survey, two targeted community workshops were delivered on 28 May 2026, with 44 people participating across the sessions. The workshops brought together community leaders, multicultural organisations, service providers, educators, government representatives and community members with lived experience to explore identified social cohesion priorities in greater depth. The core objective was to build on what we heard through the survey and identify priorities and co-design a shared community roadmap, shaped by local multicultural, migrant and refugee experiences, to strengthen social cohesion, trust and belonging across the Central Coast.



Image 1: Photo taken of community workshop, 44 attendees, 28 May 2026

The workshops began with facilitators running participants through the key themes and findings from the online survey. Participants then took part in a 'World café-style' activity. Guided by discussion questions and using an asset-based community development framework, participants discussed the strengths and assets that already exist in the community and suggested how they could be built on and strengthened.

The ideas captured through the workshops represent workshop participant perspectives on what could help strengthen social cohesion across the region. They are not intended to be a list of actions that Council, or any one organisation, is expected to deliver. Rather, they highlight opportunities that could be progressed in different ways through community leadership, partnerships, existing programs, future investment and funding opportunities. The key outcomes from the discussions are analysed below.

A strong sense of belonging exists, but this could be strengthened

Communities feel a strong sense of belonging overall, but want to be more consistently seen, valued and included in everyday experiences, with better access to information, services and opportunities to participate fully.

What we heard:

Participants emphasised that belonging means being seen, represented and having a genuine voice, alongside opportunities to connect and participate.

- Strengthen cultural awareness, allyship and practical responses to racism and 'othering'.
- Create more opportunities for young people and communities to connect across cultures.
- Increase community voice and representation in decision-making, including multicultural advisory mechanisms.
- Build on and invest in existing assets including Mosaic Multicultural Connections, Central Coast Multicultural Interagency, neighbourhood centres, libraries and multicultural services.
- Make Council and services easier to navigate, while supporting community-led activities, groups and cultural celebrations.

Existing strengths and assets that could be further supported:

- TAFE English language classes
- English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) and Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) within local school networks
- Neighbourhood centres and libraries
- Local restaurants and culturally diverse businesses
- Mosaic Multicultural Connections and Central Coast Multicultural Interagency
- Multicultural roles within government services
- Multicultural playgroups and family services.



Image 2: Storyboard captured during workshop, 44 attendees, 28 May 2026

Feeling safe, respected and welcome is essential to community connection

Communities want safe, welcoming and respectful spaces free from racism and discrimination, where everyone – regardless of culture, identity or language – feels valued and included.

What we heard:

Participants wanted a Central Coast that is more culturally safe, inclusive and welcoming, with diversity more visible and valued.

- More cultural events, education and opportunities for connection.
- Stronger anti-racism action, including upstander behaviour, education and visible messaging.
- More accessible communication through community languages, images and symbols.
- Build on existing strengths including schools, community centres, networks and community leaders.



Image 3: Storyboard captured during workshop, 44 attendees, 28 May 2026

Existing strengths and assets that could be further supported:

- Schools, particularly their connections with families and knowledge of emerging communities and language groups
- Community centres as places for connection
- Existing networks and community leaders
- Opportunities to develop or strengthen multicultural hubs.

Everyday places and activities are where communities feel most connected

Communities feel most connected in familiar, informal settings like homes, beaches and waterways, and want strengthened connection across community spaces such as programs, neighbourhood centres, parks, playgrounds and libraries.

What we heard:

Safe communities are places where people feel respected, welcomed, represented and genuinely included, with visible recognition of different cultures and communities.

- Greater visibility and representation of diverse communities through flags, signage, safe-space stickers and other forms of recognition.
- More opportunities for cultural connection, storytelling and community events that celebrate diversity.
- Stronger action against racism, hate and violence through education, upstander initiatives and organisational policies.
- Services and programs that are culturally aware, welcoming, relatable and responsive.
- Greater community involvement in Council planning, consultation and community-led initiatives.

- More informal spaces and opportunities for people to connect, build friendships and support one another.
- Better promotion and sharing of information, including connecting culturally and linguistically diverse skills with community groups.
- More accessible opportunities for families to participate in community activities.

Existing strengths and assets that could be further supported:

- Schools and their strong connections with children, families and community services.
- Mothers' groups and other informal community networks.
- Programs and events that recognise and celebrate different cultures, including the 5 Lands Walk.
- Free community events that provide opportunities for participation and connection.
- Existing connections and collaboration between community services.
- Citizenship ceremonies that welcome and recognise new community members.
- Existing communication channels, with an opportunity to revisit initiatives such as a multicultural newsletter.
- Younger generations and their openness to diversity, inclusion and connection.

Communities want greater cultural representation in local events and activities

Communities want to see their cultures meaningfully reflected in local programs, events and activities with greater representation and support for initiatives that strengthen relationships and participation.

What we heard:

Participants wanted more inclusive, accessible and community-led events that celebrate the diversity of the Central Coast and create opportunities for people from different cultures to connect.



Image 4: Storyboard captured during workshop, 44 attendees, 28 May 2026

- More free or low-cost, participatory events that bring people together through food, music, dance, arts, storytelling and cultural activities.
- More localised and smaller-scale events across town centres and community spaces, making participation easier for families and communities.
- Events that are welcoming to all generations and provide opportunities for people to actively participate rather than simply attend.
- Build cultural representation into existing events and festivals, as well as developing new multicultural and cross-cultural activities.
- Engage communities and cultural leaders early, building relationships and trust over time rather than through one-off engagement.

- Use cultural events as a starting point for deeper connection, understanding and action against racism.
- Go to communities and work with them to develop activities, rather than expecting communities to come to established organisations and services.
- Strengthen cultural humility and understanding across organisations and services, recognising this as an ongoing process rather than a one-off training activity.
- Better connect community leaders, organisations, services and existing initiatives so that communities are more aware of opportunities to participate.

Existing strengths and assets that could be further supported:

- Settlement workers, teachers and other trusted people who can connect with newly arrived families and communities.
- Strong community leaders, neighbourhood centres and community organisations.
- Existing youth and inclusion initiatives, including Y4Y and the In My Shoes program.
- Existing community programs and activities, although greater awareness of what is available is needed.
- Libraries, TAFE NSW and other accessible community spaces that can support cultural gatherings and celebrations.
- Council-supported events, funding opportunities and the Events Strategy as opportunities to strengthen cultural representation.
- Existing public spaces and community facilities that provide places for people to gather, participate and connect.



Young people and families need more accessible ways to connect, participate and shape decisions

Communities feel that young people and families are a growing priority and want more meaningful, flexible opportunities to connect and participate, recognising that supporting their engagement is key to retaining younger communities in our region.

What we heard:

Meaningful participation needs to be accessible, safe, relevant and culturally responsive, with sustained opportunities rather than one-off engagement.

- Remove barriers such as language, transport, childcare and inaccessible communication.
- Create safe opportunities for in-person and online connection, cultural activities, recreation and storytelling.
- Build on existing strengths including schools, libraries, community centres, multicultural services and settlement programs.
- Invest in young people over the longer term, including youth workers, leadership opportunities and inclusive programs.

- Give children, young people and families a direct voice in designing initiatives, recognising that representation matters.

Existing strengths and assets that could be further supported:

- Adult Migrant English Program through TAFE NSW and its childcare support
- Humanitarian Settlement Program through Department of Home Affairs, Settlement Services International or Community Refugee Sponsorship Australia
- Settlement Engagement and Transition Support program run by the Department of Home Affairs
- Community centres and libraries
- Mosaic Multicultural Connections
- Multicultural Service Officers and advocacy roles
- Existing multicultural strategies and access and equity approaches
- Cultural and community events
- Inter-government networks that share insights and resources.



Image 5: Storyboard captured during workshop, 44 attendees, 28 May 2026

Participant experiences of the workshop

When asked "What was the most meaningful part of the workshop for you?", participants valued the opportunity to connect with others, share experiences and hear diverse perspectives from people and organisations across the community. The open and meaningful discussions, particularly around belonging, cultural connection, racism and discrimination, helped build understanding and a shared sense of hope for creating a safer and more welcoming community.

Participants rated the overall workshop with an average satisfaction score of 4.7 out of 5. Most respondents gave the highest possible rating, indicating strong satisfaction with the workshop. When asked how connected to the Central Coast participants felt after the workshop, 72% of participants reported feeling more connected. This includes 29% who felt 'a lot more connected', 43% who felt 'a little more connected' and only 29% felt 'about the same'. Additional suggestions included incorporating social media into cohesion strategies, ensuring information reaches relevant bodies for funding, and appreciation for the focus on key priorities.

Example feedback:

"Rich, meaningful discussions with purpose and all depicted on a visual storyboard. Loved it"

"Reading the quotes on the walls was meaningful but so heartbreaking but having so many passionate people coming together in the one place all wanting the same goal - to make our CALD community feel safe, welcome and like they belong."

"Making connections with this people was so valuable and hearing from so many different facets of the community was great. It gives me hope for the future of the Central Coast."

Council's response

This phase of engagement was undertaken early to understand community experiences, priorities and ideas to help inform the deliverables of the social cohesion grant. Feedback received has been considered by the project team alongside operational, legislative and financial factors.

With the Connected Communities grant-funded period complete, the findings provide an important foundation for future social cohesion work across the Central Coast. Continuing this work will require shared investment, partnerships and community leadership, with opportunities to build social cohesion into existing programs, strengthen local networks and assets, and pursue future funding and collaborative initiatives.

The findings provide a foundation to:

- inform future planning, advocacy and funding opportunities
- strengthen partnerships and existing community assets
- embed social cohesion principles into existing programs and activities where possible
- support community-led and cross-sector approaches to longer-term action.

What's next?

Community feedback plays a critical role in shaping Council's understanding of what is working well and where gaps exist. The insights gathered through this engagement will help inform future planning and ensure that programs and services are grounded in lived experience and community priorities. This included the delivery of a Connected Communities Workshop with a focus on migrant, refugee and multicultural experiences.

The findings from the Connected Communities Survey and Workshop will continue to guide design and delivery of Council programs, partnerships and initiatives that strengthen inclusion, belonging and social cohesion across the Central Coast.

Find out more and stay up to date at
yourvoiceourcoast.com/connected-communities
November 2026