



# Families at the Centre research project Insights into child care and early education: Fitzroy



Social Policy Research Centre

# SPRC

Social Policy Research Centre

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Bridget Jenkins

with (in alphabetical order) Elizabeth Adamson, Megan Blaxland,  
Deborah Brennan, Christiane Purcal, Jennifer Skattebol

## Thank you

We are very grateful to the families who gave their time to talk to us and share their stories, and to the organisations and people who helped us get in touch with families for this research.

## Social Policy Research Centre

Level 2, John Goodsell Building

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

UNSW Australia

Sydney 2052 Australia

t +61 (2) 9385 7800

f +61 (2) 9385 7838

e [sprc@unsw.edu.au](mailto:sprc@unsw.edu.au)

w [www.sprc.unsw.edu.au](http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au)

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## What is this about?

This report is about families in Fitzroy (Victoria) with young children aged up to 5 years. We were interested in what kind of education and care services these families want for their children, how they like the services they are getting, or why they are not using these services. We wanted to find out how to make services work in the best way possible.

Therefore we conducted a research project in six neighbourhoods around Australia, including Fitzroy. We talked to families about their early education and care services: the services that they use or not, whether they like their situation, where they find information, whether they get any payments from government, what good care and education means to them and what would help them with getting the care or education they want.

This booklet says what we found out in Fitzroy.

## Who did the research?

We are from the Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. The researchers are Deborah Brennan, Jennifer Skattebol, Fiona Williams, Christiane Purcal, Elizabeth Adamson, Megan Blaxland, Bridget Jenkins, Trish Hill and Saul Flaxman. We did the research together with several early childhood education and care organisations: Early Childhood Australia, Gowrie Queensland, Gowrie New South Wales, Gowrie South Australia, Mission Australia and Brotherhood of St Laurence. These organisations and the Australian Research Council (ARC Linkage Project 100200297) paid for the research.

## Why was the research done?

We wanted to find out what kinds of services families need so we can tell governments and service providers about it. Each family with young children is different. Some may want early education or care services, some not, some may want services for a few hours each week, others for several days. For some it may be difficult to find the right services or to get government child care payments.

We were particularly interested in families on a lower income, as it may be harder for them to pay for the services they want.

## Where was the research done?

The research was conducted in 6 neighbourhoods in different parts of Australia: Fitzroy in Victoria, Marrickville in NSW, Orange in NSW, Caboolture in Queensland, Dandenong in Victoria and Elizabeth Grove in South Australia. Some of these neighbourhoods were in the inner city, some in the outer suburbs, and some in the country. We wanted to find out what care and education services people in different kinds of neighbourhoods wanted.

## How was the research done?

In each neighbourhood we talked to around 20 families about the care and education of their young children. We talked to the mothers and fathers, grandparents and aunts. People volunteered to take part in our research, and we gave them \$50 for their costs and to say thank you. We spoke with them for about one hour each. Their information remains confidential - that is, we will not tell anyone who said what.

We met people at various places in the neighbourhood and through early childhood and family services, at playgroups, libraries and neighbourhood centres. We also talked to early childhood workers and service providers in the neighbourhoods.

We talked to 25 families in Fitzroy in November 2012.

## What does this booklet say?

This booklet details what we found out in Fitzroy. It starts with some information about the suburb, the kinds of people who live there, and the care and education services available in Fitzroy. It then describes what kinds of families we spoke to in Fitzroy and, most importantly, what they told us.

## How can I find out more about the research?

You can find out more about our research by contacting:

Bridget Jenkins  
Social Policy Research Centre  
University of New South Wales  
Sydney NSW 2052  
Ph: (02) 9385 2174  
Email: [b.jenkins@unsw.edu.au](mailto:b.jenkins@unsw.edu.au)

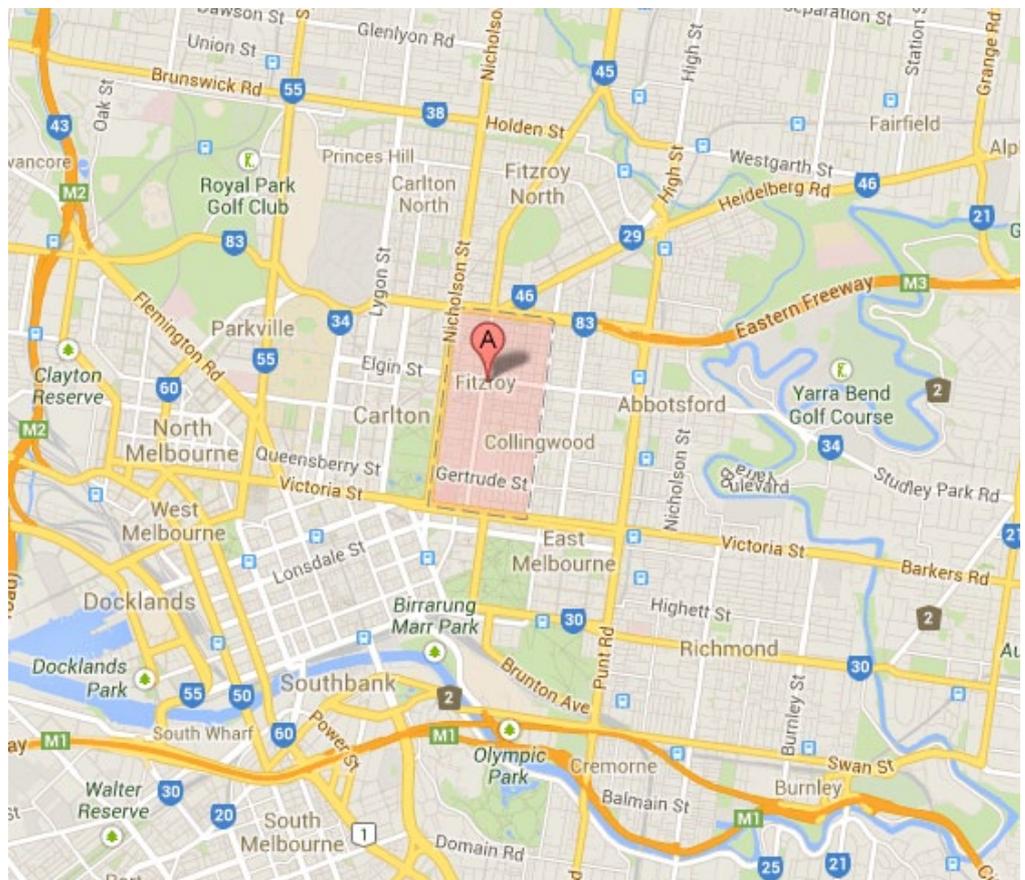
You are welcome to distribute this brochure to other people. An electronic copy is available at: [www.sprc.unsw.edu.au](http://www.sprc.unsw.edu.au).

## About Fitzroy

### Where it is and how it developed

Fitzroy is an inner city suburb of Melbourne, located approximately 2 kilometres from the Melbourne CBD.

### MAP 1: FITZROY IN RELATION TO MELBOURNE



Prior to European settlement the Yarra area, which includes Fitzroy, was inhabited by the Wurundjeri-willam people of the Kulin Nation.

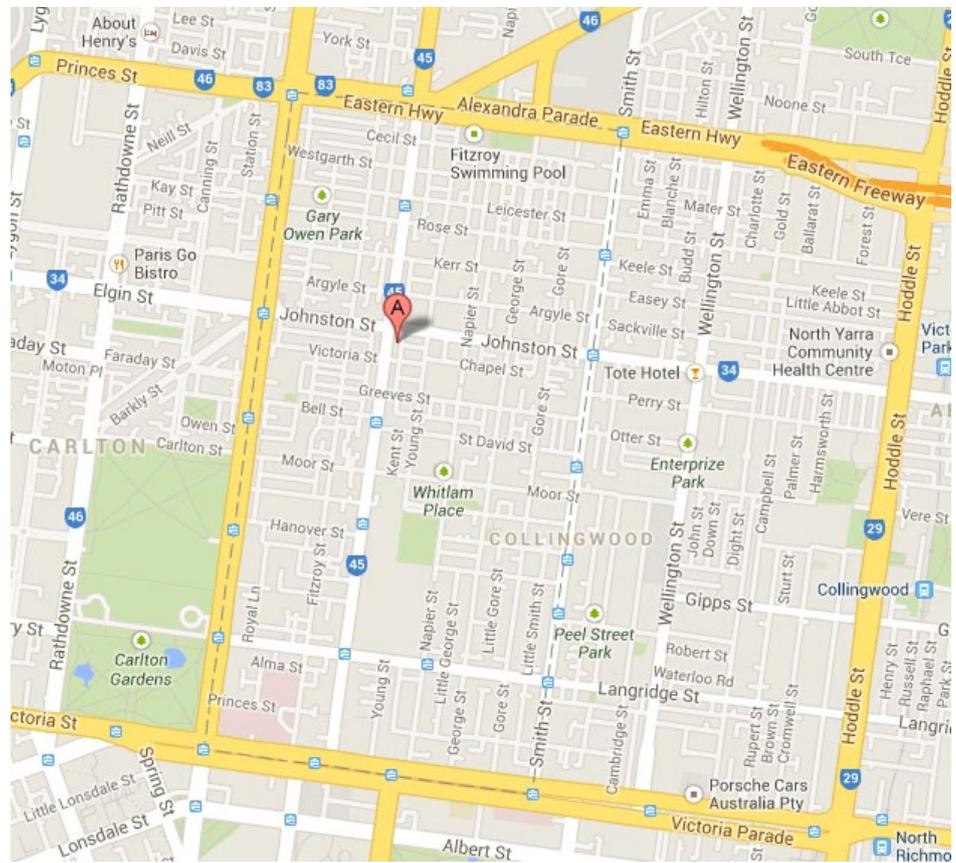
Fitzroy was established in 1839 and became a municipality in 1858. Surrounded by a number of factories and industrial sites in neighbouring suburbs, the area has a strong working class history, and throughout the 19th and first half of the 20th century several religious and philanthropic organisations were established. Historically, Fitzroy has been a highly multicultural suburb, and a centre for Aboriginal organisations.

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Since the 1950s, Fitzroy has undergone waves of urban renewal. Fitzroy today has a trendy feel and boasts lots of coffee shops, restaurants and bars, especially around Brunswick and Smith Streets.

A notable feature of Fitzroy is the Atherton Gardens public housing estate. The estate consists of four high rise tower blocks, located in the centre of Fitzroy between Brunswick and Napier streets. Atherton Gardens is home to more than 2,000 residents, including many refugees from Vietnam, Sudan and East Africa.

## MAP 2: FITZROY STREET MAP



## The people of Fitzroy

In 2011, the population of Fitzroy was 9,430. This represents a 6 per cent growth from Fitzroy's population of 8,825 in 2006.

Fitzroy is a multicultural suburb. Just a little over half (55 per cent) of Fitzroy residents were born in Australia. Other major countries of birth include the United Kingdom (5 per cent), Vietnam (4 per cent), New Zealand (4 per cent), and China (4 per cent). Though the majority of residents (62 per cent) speak English at home, there is a strong representation of languages other than English, including Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Italian and Greek. Less than 1 per cent of the population of Fitzroy identified as Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander in 2011.

Compared to other suburbs in Melbourne, as well as Australia more generally, Fitzroy has high levels of housing mobility. In 2011, more than one-quarter of residents (2,489, or 26 per cent) had moved in the last year, and more than half (4,798, or 51 per cent) had moved in the past five years. The high housing mobility in Fitzroy may partly reflect the high proportion of public housing in the suburb, as well as its proximity to the University of Melbourne.

Most of the dwellings in Fitzroy are classified as semi-detached terraces, or as flats, units or apartments. Most are rented, with an average weekly rent of \$350.

In 2011, there were 829 families with at least one child aged 15 years and under living in Fitzroy. Of these, a little over 40 per cent (346) were sole parent families. This figure is considerably higher than the national average of 25 per cent of sole-parent families but is not unusual for the area. The Census shows similar a proportion in neighbouring suburbs like Carlton, Collingwood and East Melbourne.

A total of 4,876 Fitzroy residents were employed in 2011. Of these, 3,404 (65 per cent) were working full time and 1,455 (28 per cent) were employed part-time. A further 390 residents identified as unemployed. The employment rate in Fitzroy is slightly lower than that of the city of Yarra. However, in 2011 a lot of the adult residents of Fitzroy were attending an educational institution. A total 1,330 (14 per cent) of residents over the age of 18 were attending a TAFE, university, or other educational institution.

Fitzroy is serviced by both trams and buses. Census data shows that the majority of residents walked or took the tram to work in 2011. Many residents work in the Melbourne CBD, and the proximity of Fitzroy to the CBD means that the average daily commute is relatively short.

## Child care and early education in Fitzroy

There is a different mix of services in each state. Victoria's early education and care sector is focused on local planning and service delivery. Approximately half of long day care centres were privately managed in Victoria in 2010-11, while one-third were community managed. In 2011, 35 per cent of Victorian children aged 0 to 5 years were attending Australian Government approved child care, which could include long day care, family day care, occasional care and vacation care.

By contrast with long day care centres, kindergartens in Victoria are largely community managed: three-quarters are community managed and a further 20 per cent are government managed. Kindergartens may also operate as part of a private school or formal child care centre. Though Victoria still has relatively robust community involvement in kindergarten, in the last ten years there has been a gradual shift towards multi-licence operators and larger corporate providers. Kindergarten is available for children aged 3-5, and Victorian children are eligible for a year of funded kindergarten if they are four by April 30 of that year. The median cost of kindergarten was \$17 per week in 2008, lower than the national average of \$25. Compared to other states, Victoria has a large amount of enrolment of children in kindergarten.

We can find out about the child care and education services families in Fitzroy use by looking at the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) 2011, which surveys children in their first year of school. Teachers reported that 98 per cent of children experienced some form of regular non-parental early childhood education and/or care in the year before school. The main types were kindergarten (96.9 per cent), grandparent care (7.4 per cent) and long day care (5.6 per cent). Some children used more than one type of care.

In Fitzroy, there are a number of child care and early education services. In 2012 these included the Acacia Fitzroy crèche, the Napier Street Child and Family Resource Centre, the Atherton Gardens Kindergarten, and the John Street Community Early Childhood Co-Operative. There are also a number of playgroups operating in the Fitzroy area. In 2013, the City of Yarra opened the Connie Benn Centre. An integrated service, which offers a variety of services for children and their families, the centre will replace the Napier Street Child and Family Resource Centre. Long day care and early learning services commenced from January 2014 and occasional care services are expected to start in February 2014.

Below is a map of the child care and early education services in Fitzroy and surrounding suburbs as of 2012 when this research was conducted.



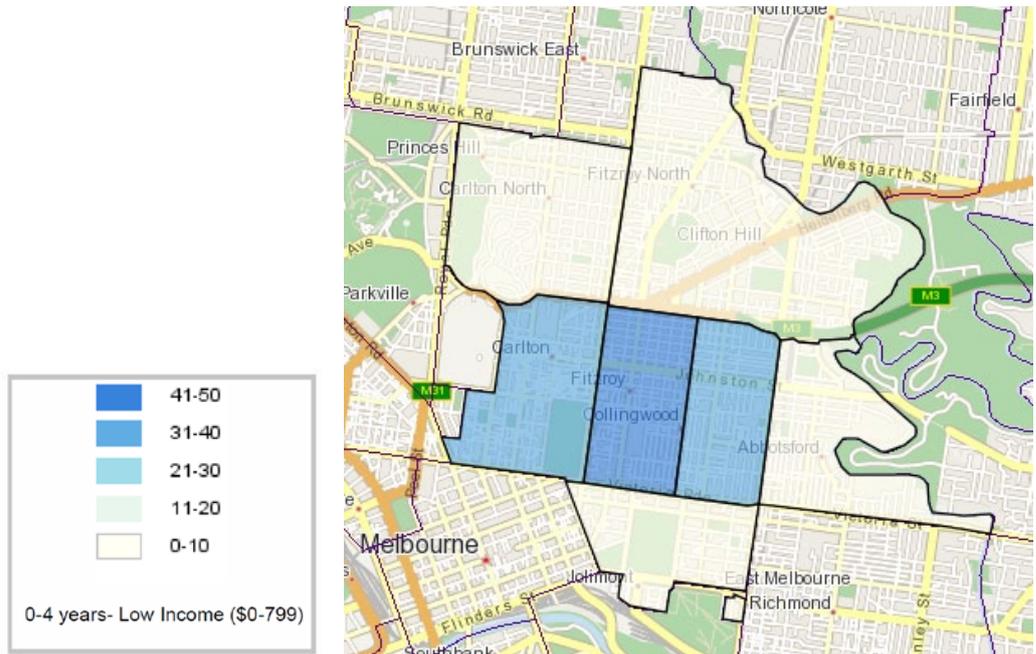
### About families with young children in Fitzroy

In 2011, there were 501 children aged 0-4 living in Fitzroy. These children represented approximately 5 per cent of the population of Fitzroy in 2011. Here are some of the other things the Census tells us about children aged 0-4 in Fitzroy:

- 274 have one or both parents born overseas
- 153 live in low income families, which earn under \$800 a week
- 113 live with a single parent
- 426 live in one-family households
- 13 live in multi-family households
- 169 live in houses that their family owns (either fully or with a mortgage)
- 248 live in families who are renting
- 188 live in a house or semi-detached terrace
- 301 live in a flat, unit or apartment

Map 4 shows that Fitzroy has a higher proportion of families with young children who live on a low income (less than \$800 per week) than the surrounding suburbs.

## MAP 4: PERCENTAGE OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN AGED 0-4, FITZROY AND SURROUNDING SUBURBS



## About the families who talked to us

In Fitzroy, 25 families spoke to us about child care and early education for their children. We met people through different early childhood and family support services in Fitzroy: the Brotherhood of St. Laurence, Acacia Fitzroy Crèche, the maternal child health nurse, and Atherton Gardens kindergarten. Fifteen parents spoke to us in one-on-one interviews, and a further 10 spoke to us as part of focus groups of two or more parents.

Twenty-two parents filled out a demographic survey after the interview. Their information is below. Some parents declined to answer certain questions and these appear as 'unknown' in the table.

Their gender	21 women	1 man
Their age	21-25:	1 person
	26-30:	2 people
	31-35:	7 people
	36-40:	8 people
	41-45:	3 people
	Unkown:	1 person
Where they were born	Australia:	5 people
	Vietnam:	5 people
	Ethiopia:	4 people
	Sudan:	2 people
	Somali:	2 people
	China:	1 person
	Iran:	1 person
	Tanzania:	1 person
Hong Kong:	1 person	
Whether they live with a partner	12 do, 10 don't	
How many children they have	1 child:	9 people
	2 children:	5 people
	3 children:	3 people
	4 children:	3 people
	5 children:	1 person
How old the children are	Ages range from 0 to 14	
The highest level of education	Uni:	2 people
	TAFE/vocational:	10 people
	High school:	10 people
	Not completed high school:	5 people

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The languages they speak at home	3 people speak only English at home 19 people speak other languages	
Whether they are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders	No one was of ATSI background	
What their current work is	At home:	11 people
	In paid employment:	2 people
	Self employed:	2 people
	Student:	5 people
	Unemployed:	2 people
What their net income is	\$200-\$399 per week:	9 people
	\$400-\$599 per week:	4 people
	\$600-\$799 per week:	2 people
	\$800-\$999 per week:	1 person
	\$1000-\$1199 per week:	2 people
	\$1400 or more:	1 person
	Unknown:	3 people
Their type of housing	Owns outright:	1 person
	Has a mortgage:	1 person
	Private rental:	2 people
	Public housing:	18 people

## What the families told us

Each family is different. They have different stories, different lives, different opinions, different experiences with the child care and early education they use, and different ideas about what they would like. We don't have the space here to report everything the 25 families in Fitzroy told us. Therefore we briefly describe some of the topics relating to child care and early education that they talked about, important concerns they mentioned and where they felt things were going well. Some of the topics are explained with a quote from one of the people we talked about. We have left the quotes anonymous so that people cannot be identified.

### Lots of families use child care

Most of the parents we spoke to in Fitzroy were using some form of child care or early education. Sometimes there was a mix, with children attending different types of care on different days of the week. Most children attended child care or kindergarten part-time. Full-time use of child care was rare.

**"We go to a couple of playgroups, and then he also goes to kindergarten."**

### Lots of parents are studying

A high number of the parents we spoke to in this research were using child care because they were studying. Some of the parents who had come from overseas were enrolled in English language courses. Other parents were completing courses at TAFE or university. In most cases, parents were not attending classes full-time but were balancing studying and caring for their children.

**"Because I go to school three times a week...I bring her here."**

### Family day care is popular

Family day care – when a child is looked after in a home setting rather than at a formal centre – was a relatively popular choice for the parents of Fitzroy compared to the parents of the other neighbourhoods we visited. Family day care was thought to hold many advantages over alternative forms of child care. For example, family day care was a more affordable option for many parents. For others, the flexibility of family day care hours was an important consideration. Parents who came from overseas also tended to favour carers from the same cultural background, seeing this as a good way of keeping their children connected and engaged with their cultural heritage.

### Culturally sensitive child care

Many of the parents we spoke to had grown up in a different country, and it was important to them that child care supported their cultural and religious practices. For example, it was important to the Islamic parents in this study that their children would not be served pork products while at child care. Parents told us that in their view centres in Fitzroy appeared to be amenable to their cultural or religious needs.

### Early education is important

Many parents stressed the importance of early education for ensuring that their children got a good start in life. For parents from overseas countries, having their children learn and advance their English-language skills was of paramount importance, especially in preparing them for school. Most parents also talked about the importance of social interaction for children in helping them get ready to attend school in the coming years.

**"I don't think she'll be ready for interaction [at school] with other kids since not having so much interaction with other kids her own age...I think that kindergarten would help her interact more."**

### Child care payments can be confusing

Though the government provides support for parents to access child care through the Child Care Rebate and the Child Care Benefit, many parents said they found these payments hard to understand. In particular, the claims process was described as lengthy and difficult. For instance, many of the parents detailed issues with getting proper information about child care payments directly from Centrelink, a process which was often described as confusing and overly bureaucratic. Information provision about payments appeared to be most effective when parents were guided through the payments and benefits system by an experienced child care provider, or by a family support worker.

### Child care can be expensive

Many of the Fitzroy parents in this study talked about the high cost of child care centres. Parents' perceptions of high costs depended very much on family income and the number of hours or days that children were in care, and ranged from \$50 a day to \$90 a day.

High child care costs were a particular concern for those parents who were not making much money at the time of the interview.

**"We were paying \$450 a week [for rent] and then child care on top was about \$500 a fortnight. So it does take quite a chunk of your money, and then you're left with nothing."**

### Child care quality is important for parents

All of the parents we spoke to stressed how important it was for them to feel comfortable leaving their children in care. Therefore, the quality of the service was very important to them. Parents weighed up many factors when judging quality of different child care options. These included: perceived health and hygiene of the centre – for example, if the centre was clean and tidy, or if the meals were nutritious and balanced; the space – if there was a backyard, for instance; and the friendliness and professionalism of staff. Additionally, many parents were highly sensitive to their children’s experiences in care. Parents wanted their children to build an emotional connection with carers, and to make friends with other children. Above all parents stressed that they wanted their children to feel happy and comfortable in care.

**“It was important to me that they respect the child’s feeling ... my concern is he is happy in here, and that’s enough for me.”**

### Lack of family support

Many of the parents we spoke to had limited family support. Most of the time this was because they came from other countries and had left their families and friends behind when they came to Australia. Other parents had family interstate or in different parts of Melbourne.

A lack of family support caused some families to feel quite isolated. They said that they had none, or very limited, child care options in an emergency or crisis.

**“We don’t have any family support, we just have us. We don’t have grandparents or uncles and aunties. So there was no one we could drop her off with.”**

### A family-friendly neighbourhood

People find Fitzroy very family friendly. There are parks, museums and lots of other activities which are useful not only for entertaining children, but also for parents to mingle and meet other people.

**“It’s a good time with all of us. Sometimes go for some Melbourne Museum [sic], or Melbourne Aquarium, or beach somewhere.”**

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## **A multicultural neighbourhood**

Fitzroy is a multicultural neighbourhood, home to both Australian-born parents and many people from overseas. Many parents commented on this with pleasure and spoke about how living in Fitzroy exposed their children to many different cultures from around the world.

## **Getting around**

There are good transport links to Melbourne city from Fitzroy. The suburb is serviced by buses and trams. Because everything is so close, most of the parents found it easy to get around Fitzroy on foot, even with young children in tow. Getting to child care or early education was not an issue for the parents in Fitzroy, mostly all the services were so close. Some people had specifically moved to the area because of its good transport.

**"Everything that I can buy is near. It's not needed, to have a car."**

## References

The information in this booklet came from the families and service providers who talked to us and:

ABS Census Community Profiles 2011,  
[http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/0](http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/communityprofile/0)

AEDI Community Profile 2012, Yarra Community, Victoria,  
<http://maps.aedi.org.au/lga/vic/27350>