

PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19

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PLACE-BASED RESILIENCE

INTRODUCTION

This paper is designed to provide real-time examples of how place-based approaches are enabling community driven resilience and response during the COVID-19 crisis.

While recognising that there are many different types of place-based approaches, this report is focused on those that are collective, community-led initiatives. They have collaboration in their DNA and community agency and ownership at their heart.

It is these initiatives that are demonstrating an ability to deliver timely, targeted and demand-driven actions that support communities when and where they need it most. They provide a welcome contrast to the many relief efforts that are dogged by duplication, delays and unmet demand.

THE DNA OF PLACE-BASED APPROACHES

These community-led place-based approaches are typically long-term investments in place. They are supported by skilled teams that help to create meaningful connections and partnerships across the community, businesses, local service providers, agencies and funders. These teams recognise that there is no 'one size fits all' recipe and ensure that any action taken is the right action for the unique context of that place. They are initiatives have a proven track record in:

- fostering cross-sector collaborations that harness local resources and place community priorities at the centre;
- innovating to implement timely and targeted responses that meet the specific needs of community, especially the most vulnerable community members;
- weaving trusted relationships as an intermediary between the wider system and local communities;
- empowering the community through local participation and representation; and
- drawing upon local knowledge, community networks, and relationships to help people deal with uncertainty.

All of which is built upon a foundation of confidence and trust amongst different community networks that has taken time and effort to develop and is underpinned by appropriate social infrastructure to support collaboration.

COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESILIENCE AND RESPONSE

In a time of crisis, it is this track record and DNA that enables community-led place-based approaches to be a source of resilience. Local knowledge, trusted relationships and cross-sector collaborations become the glue that stops vulnerable people falling through cracks in the system. In a time of recovery, it is the agency and ownership of the community, with demand-driven actions and responses, that ensures communities are ready and able to thrive.

An analysis of real-time examples during the COVID-19 crisis have revealed common outcomes that four place-based approaches in different parts of the country have been able to achieve in the space of less than two months. These include;

- Supporting the local service system to stabilise and leverage existing resources;
- Preventing the most vulnerable from falling through the cracks;
- Ensuring community members are able to continue to access essential supports;
- Giving the community a voice in response and recovery; and
- Keeping people informed, connected and safe.

These outcomes have been the result of a range of decisive actions including: partnerships and collaboration; adaptation and innovation; bridging the gap between the service system and the community; advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system; and, tailoring communications to suit local contexts and resonate with local audiences (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Outcomes achieved by place-based approaches during the COVID-19 crisis

Place Based DNA	Action during COVID 19	Outcomes
Fostering cross-sector collaborations that harness local resources and place community priorities at the centre	Partnerships and collaboration	Supporting the local service system to stabilise and leverage existing resources
Innovating to implement timely and targeted responses that meet the specific needs of community, especially the most vulnerable community members	Adaptation and innovation	Preventing the most vulnerable from falling through the cracks
Weaving trusted relationships as an intermediary between the wider system and local communities	Bridging the gap between the service system and the community	Ensuring community members are able to continue to access essential supports and services
Drawing upon local knowledge, community networks, and relationships to help people deal with uncertainty	Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and resonate with local audiences	Keeping people informed, connected and safe
Empowering the community through local participation and representation	Advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system	Raising the voice of community in response and recovery planning

"WE STARTED FROM A GOOD POSITION IN BOURKE, MARANGUKA WAS WELL ESTABLISHED AND HAS ALL OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AND CAN QUICKLY PULL PEOPLE TOGETHER AND ENSURE THINGS ARE DONE. IF MARANGUKA DIDN'T EXIST, THIS (RESPONDING TO COVID-19) WOULD HAVE BEEN SO MUCH MORE DIFFICULT AND TIME-CONSUMING."

Andrew Ryder, Bourke High School Principal

RESILIENCE IN ACTION

This section expands on each of the actions and outcomes documented above, with examples drawn from five Australian initiatives:

Hands Up Mallee: a collective impact initiative based in Mildura in the Northern Mallee region of Victoria.

Logan Together: a long term, whole of community movement to create the best life opportunities for every child in Logan, Queensland

Maranguka: an Aboriginal owned and run community organisation and model of Indigenous self-governance in Bourke, New South Wales.

Warddeken Land Management: a group governed by representatives drawn from 36 clan groups of the Kuwarddewardde, West Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse Project: a whole community wrap around support with volunteers, data, collaboration, innovation and system thinking to support children every step of their trajectory, from conception to career.

The examples provided below are only some of the actions that have been taking place around Australia.

While our focus here is on place-based approaches, it is important to also note that the achievements of both Warddeken Land Management and Maranguka embody the principles of self-determination. While this can mean different things to different people, self-determination includes an ongoing process of choice that ensures that Indigenous communities are able to meet their social, cultural and economic needs and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development - based on their own values and way of life. This includes the right to make decisions on matters that affect their lives and communities. This has been an important part of their DNA and success.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATION



Cultivating effective collaborations requires meaningful attempts to work together on behalf of a shared purpose - across organisations, sectors, and networks. Setting up a collaboration requires skill, the convening of the right people, facilitation of dialogue to find a common ground, and decisions about where and how to join forces to generate impact. Above all, it requires the building of trusted relationships.

In each of the place-based approaches studied, these trusted relationships were already in place thanks to years of work and investment in understanding and working within the local context, with community members as equal participants. This included identifying and being respectful of diverse perspectives, politics and power dynamics. This web of relationships is the foundation on which initiatives are able to draw during a crisis.

In the case of COVID-19, collaborations were quickly forged that helped to support local service systems adapt and stabilise after the shock, and then to work together to leverage existing resources to cope with significant shifts in operations and demand.

HANDS UP MALLEE AND EMERGENCY FOOD RELIEF

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and Australia began to implement health measures such as social distancing and the closure of schools, the Hands Up Mallee (HUM) team asked themselves whether their current work was the most important thing their community needed right now. With the closure of businesses and many local services, as well as the loss of jobs, many people in the community had begun experiencing severe financial distress, especially migrant workers. This was manifesting itself in food scarcity for many families. HUM decided that, given their history of partnerships and coordination, to pause many of their programs and to pivot to supporting the local relief effort.

Due to their history of convening collaborations and their many trusted relationships, HUM was quickly tasked by the Mildura Rural City Council to lead the convening of more than 16 organisations to create a partnership focused on a joint approach to emergency food relief. For the first time ever, these organisations all began working together.

A central food hub was quickly established at the Ethnic Community Council offices. Schools that had previously partnered with HUM on a breakfast program for vulnerable students volunteered to pool some of their resources for distribution alongside council purchased basic food staples. Knowing that many families would not be comfortable in putting their hand up and asking for help, food was then distributed to neighbourhood houses and other trusted conduits to ensure families would get the food they need. Mildura Rural City Council and Hands Up Mallee worked closely with the local Ethnic Communities Council to ensure any international students or undocumented migrants who needed food were able to access the service without fear.

HUM also began inviting service providers to share data about local community demand and

capacity, so that services that were overburdened could share their load with less busy providers.

In cases where families needed help but wouldn't identify themselves to the intake team or present to an Emergency Food Relief provider due to stigma and shame, schools began to partner with welfare providers in dropping off food to vulnerable families. For many service providers, this is the first time they've worked with a third party such as a school and represents a radical new way of working. School wellbeing officers began doing contactless deliveries, and then calling the families to follow-up to see if they have received the pack, but also as a conversation starter to check in on welfare. This has become a way for schools to also maintain connections with children at risk of becoming disengaged from school.

When other schools outside the local government area began asking for help in providing food to distressed families, HUM was able to draw upon goodwill and social capital to coordinate with services that could meet their needs as well, despite being outside their 'jurisdiction'. New partners are still signing up to join the initiative, with different organisations with trusted pathways to different vulnerable families stepping up to the plate.

GREATER SHEPPARTON LIGHTHOUSE

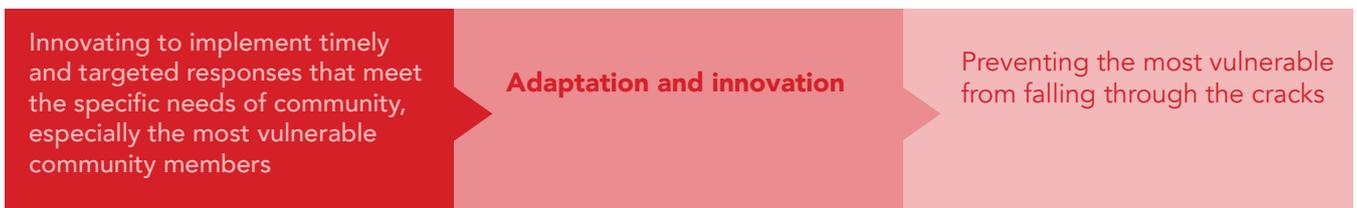
In March 2020, at the commencement of the first Victorian COVID-19 restrictions, Lighthouse called a meeting of about a dozen local community organisations to work together and co-ordinate efforts. This morphed into the community arm of the Greater Shepparton Response involving the Committee for Greater Shepparton, Greater Shepparton City Council, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and a range of other organisations.

Since March the committee has met almost weekly to discuss the needs of various cohorts, identify and minimise risk, share ideas, resources and volunteers, and use connections to secure resources, advocate and raise issues of concern, prepare and disseminate locally appropriate messaging and disseminate resources and information. The Greater Shepparton Community Response has been able to provide detailed

local knowledge of needs and resourcing to Council's pandemic team as well as have input into the Department of Health and Human Services local response. This has been informed by the more than 300 community conversations that Lighthouse has undertaken since covid-19 began, exploring the context and needs of young people and families. Rumbalara has also been engaging with the Indigenous community while the Ethnic Council has been talking to community leaders to determine the various cultural and ethnic groups' needs and issues and Neighbourhood Schools committee has learnt about the vulnerabilities experienced by families.

One of the first things the Greater Shepparton Response identified was the need to make services as safe as possible for both staff and the community. Through a partner organisation Infection Control Training was sourced and delivered creating an opportunity for early learning and strengthening practice before anything else was available. Early research was commissioned on the availability of masks, sanitisers and flu vaccines for the Greater Shepparton community which informed the groups understanding and ability to make decisions quickly.

ADAPTATION AND INNOVATION



The ability to adapt and innovate is a critical capability. It is one that makes possible the delivery of timely and targeted responses that meet the specific needs of community, especially the most vulnerable community members. While many services were able to adapt and respond to the disruption and demand triggered by COVID-19, there were cases in every community where vulnerable people were at risk of falling through the cracks. Many services weren't able to cater to them, or didn't even know that they were in need.

To be able to adapt and innovate requires a deep understanding of the lived experience of local people. It means spending time in their context, hearing their stories, understanding their perspective and, building authentic relationships. It might be gaining a sense that 'things are not working' or hearing people are voicing complaints about individual elements, policies or services. This knowledge of community comes from time and experience engaging in community conversations that generate insights into what is working well and what changes are needed. In this context, the place-based initiatives featured were firstly able to discover that people were being left without critical supports.

To be able to adapt and innovate also requires the flexibility to pivot when a new need is identified. Place-based initiatives have been able to go above and beyond 'business as usual' and to modify their approach within the matter of days to fill critical gaps.

WARDDEKEN LAND MANAGEMENT AND CRITICAL TRAVEL AND SUPPLIES

The arrival of COVID-19 in Australia posed a serious risk for families in West Arnhem Land. Within a short period of time, all West Arnhem communities became closed to all non-essential travel. Visitor permits were revoked by the Northern Land Council. Only approved essential workers were allowed to travel to and between the remote communities and/ or homelands for which they are approved and had obtained a permit. Within the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, rangers began to hold regular meetings to monitor any departures or arrivals to the region.

The Kabulwarnamyo community relies on food delivered by plane every month. At the commencement of the closures, all freight was being halted. It was therefore unclear whether or not food delivery would continue to be feasible and possible. As a first response, the team at the community's school - the Nawarddeken Academy - organised a large shipment of dry food that could sustain the community for a least one extra month should it be required.

The announcement of the closure of West Arnhem communities came with only several days' notice. There were numerous community members who faced being stranded in Darwin and nearby towns. The Nawarddeken Academy team therefore also organised a charter flight to get these members home with less than 48 hours to spare. As a school, organising travel is not business as usual, but getting people home was important to the community so therefore it was important to the school. Since the closure, the team has also been liaising with the Gunbalanya Emergency Response Group to enable permits for additional community members to return on medical grounds.

With the creating of the biosecurity zone, West Arnhem land has remained COVID-19 free. This has enabled the Academy to remain open. However, to prepare for potential social distancing in the future, the Academy has also created learning packs for each student that includes a backpack with two weeks' worth of school activities as well as books and supplies. The printing of resources and provision of school supplies required an order to be placed in Darwin and the supplies delivered on the food plane. Enough packs were made that they can also be distributed to two neighbouring communities for their students. An additional three laptops were also ordered for the small school. These laptops have been preloaded with content as internet access is highly limited in the community.

LOGAN TOGETHER AND THE DIGITAL LEARNING DIVIDE

With the arrival of COVID-19, it quickly became apparent to the Logan Together team that there were urgent needs to be met in the community and that new partnerships and responses would

be required.

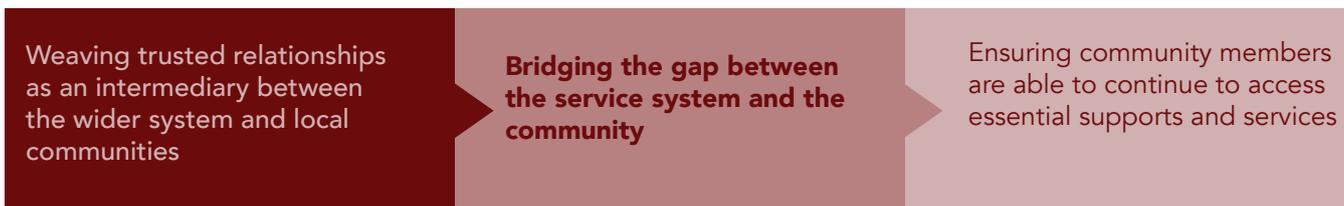
In particular, with the advent of school closures and online learning, the digital divide between vulnerable families and the lack of equal learning opportunities became glaringly apparent. To address this critical gap, Logan Together forged a new partnership with an electronic waste recycling social enterprise, Substation33, to urgently refurbish laptops for students. In less than a month, 350 laptops were distributed to families. Ongoing donations of computers, screens, keyboards and cables are being sought to increase the number of laptops available.

It also became apparent that not every family had the resources to engage their children in learning and play in interactive ways when they weren't online. So, Logan Together also partnered with a specialist physical activity organisation to develop learning and activity packs that would enable children to be active at home. 1000 packs have now been delivered locally.

Lastly, local conversations revealed a high degree of concern and confusion about how COVID-19 was affecting the community and what it meant for locals. There was an abundance of information online, but the proliferation of messages was difficult for people to filter and communication was only one-way in direction. There were no trusted online places that local people could visit to share their own experiences and exchange stories and knowledge. Within five days, the Logan Together team created a virtual platform called Stronger Together Logan that is a curated information exchange and message board with exclusive local content. The goal was to 1) to create a single place for trusted information in a time of communication overload and 2) create an interactive space where local residents could maintain their connections with others.

Within weeks, the website had more than 1000 users per day accessing and sharing content, empowering locals to help each other and help themselves.

BRIDGING THE GAP



In addition to drawing upon community knowledge of needs and gaps, as described above, it is just as critical to determine who community members would trust to take action and then having the connections to make those links. This is about weaving trusted relationships as an intermediary between the wider system and local communities in a way that puts the community priorities first.

Becoming a trusted intermediary requires first creating the enabling conditions for different parties to work together in new ways. This willingness can be built by working with specific stakeholders from across select parts of the community, government and industry to create shared understandings and new connections. It requires joint work to identify ways to share resources or reform services and partnerships to better match community priorities. And it is typically underpinned by working with service providers to ensure they value the contribution of community members as equal partners. This is supported by mutual learning and accountability, where community members and service providers regularly check-in on progress.

MARANGUKA AS A HUB AND TRUSTED INTERMEDIARY

During the COVID-19 crisis, place-based initiatives have harnessed their intermediary role to bridge the gap between the service system and the community to ensure community members are able to continue to access essential supports. An example is Maranguka, a key link between community members and service providers in Bourke, NSW. Maranguka is a trusted intermediary not just because they provide an effective link between services. They are trusted because they are made up of and part of the community. As an Aboriginal owned and run community organisation, Maranguka is uniquely positioned to understand and respond to the needs of community and to serve the community agenda.

Their role as a trusted intermediary was quickly recognised by the Local Emergency Management Committee who realised that to communicate with the Bourke Aboriginal community, they needed to have Maranguka at the table. The team has since been advising and connecting with the Committee on a regular basis. And in the same way that occurred pre-COVID-19, the Maranguka team has been able to continue with daily meetings with frontline government services, the police and non-government agencies. These meetings enable a coordinated review of the support requirements of children at-risk and in relation to domestic violence incidents. These daily check-ins form a critical part of the wrap around support strategy of Maranguka.

While many other services in the area shut their doors during the 'lock down', the Maranguka Hub has been able to keep its doors open during the crisis. The Hub has remained a refuge for those fleeing homelessness or domestic violence and a trusted port of call for help and support. Given that many services are restricted from face-to-face contact, the team has increased their own visits to families identified as vulnerable and are providing transport services where required. They've stepped in to the role of the delivery of meals, food hampers and essential items on behalf of local services. They are helping eligible community members by filling out registrations for the NSW Aboriginal Land Council Community Support Food Relief packages of food and hygiene items. They have been contacting

vulnerable Elders to make sure they have the support they need. In addition, the team has been helping other support services get in contact with people who are not answering emails or phone calls. They have created a database of contact details for hard to reach students, and have helped the local school stay in touch through connections, visits and delivering learning packs on behalf of the school.

"I HAVE NOTICED A REAL DIFFERENCE COMPARED WITH WHEN WE'VE FACED DIFFICULT HEALTH ISSUES IN THE PAST. AT A TIME WHEN WE WERE TACKLING ALCOHOL RESTRICTIONS THERE WAS A LOT OF PUSHBACK, RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION. PEOPLE LOST SIGHT OF THE GOAL OF REDUCING HARM. NOW THERE'S A CLEARER FOCUS ON PROMOTING HEALTHIER CHOICES AND HARM MINIMISATION FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES IN BOURKE."

Alistair Ferguson, Founder and Executive Director Maranguka

TAILORING COMMUNICATIONS



A key role of place-based initiatives is to purposefully engage diverse perspectives from across the community. This includes deep listening and fostering dialogue on difficult and complex topics. It also includes continuous communication and outreach. Open and frequent communication is tightly linked to effective, trust-based relationships. These factors are also closely linked to building the capability of community members to understand and work with complexity and uncertainty in constructive ways. This complexity might relate to social systems, local politics, or even government decision making. It can also relate to crisis situations such as a pandemic.

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and resonate with local audiences is a skill. The place-based initiatives studied had communication processes that included multiple channels and styles of communication for different networks within the community. These communication skills and channels were deployed to keep people informed, connected and safe.

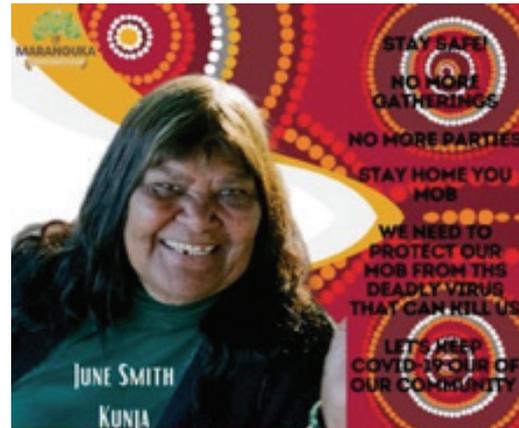
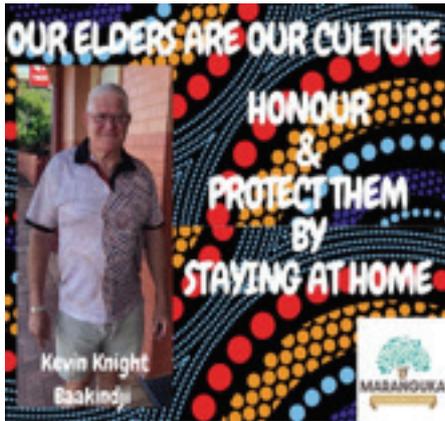
WARDDEKEN LAND MANAGEMENT – FROM ROCK ART TO HEALTH MESSAGING

The Kabulwarnamyo community in West Arnhem Land has only two phones, almost no mobile phone reception, and limited internet access. For most residents, English is not their first language. Meanwhile, COVID-19 poses a serious risk for remote communities where there are existing high rates of chronic disease. There are also risks to the cohort of Elders who are the holders of vast amounts of cultural and environmental knowledge. Getting the right health messaging out was paramount. To this end, the Karrkad-Kanjdi Trust was able to negotiate the redeployment of a linguist who had been working on documenting rock art in the area to creating COVID-19 health messages in the local language. These messages are now also being made available on the Northern Territory government COVID-19 website.



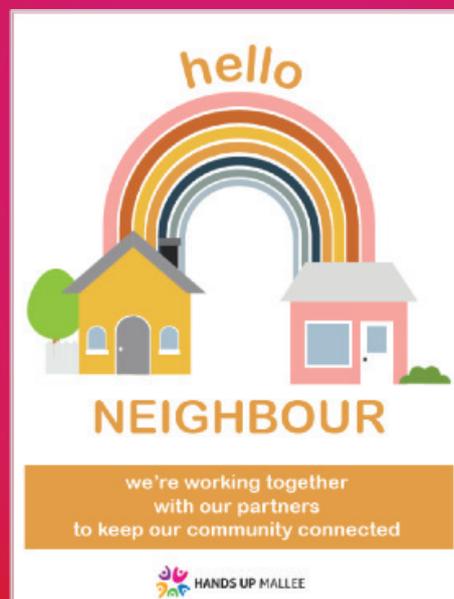
MARANGUKA – ELDERS ON FACEBOOK

As one of its communication channels, Maranguka has a Facebook presence with a strong local following. When the risk of COVID-19 to the community first became apparent, Maranguka took the health messaging from Federal and State Government authorities and repurposed it in ways that would have meaning for local community members. They created posters that include photos of respected Elders and family members and simple messages that reinforced a sense of community and togetherness. After posting online, some of the images received more than 25,000 views on Facebook – a huge success given small local population. The team also printed posters for displaying in shop windows and other locations around town.

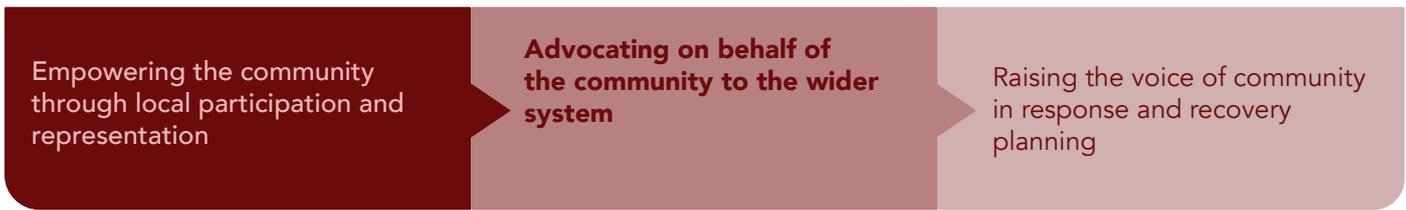


HANDS UP MALLEE – LOCAL NUMBER, LOCAL SUPPORT

In Mildura, simple 'Hello neighbour' cards were produced by Hands Up Mallee to go out with every food parcel from the central hub. The cards provide a pathway to referrals and all sorts of local support. Importantly, it features a single local phone number, which was included to make it less intimidating or confusing for people to pick up the phone than dialling a national 1800 number to ask for help.



ADVOCATING ON BEHALF OF COMMUNITY



As trusted intermediaries with deep local knowledge, place-based initiatives are uniquely positioned to ensure the voice of local community is heard in the wider system. They have the networks to act as champions and advocates, engaging with government, funders and other partners on issues that matter to the community.

In the move from response to recovery from COVID-19, place-based initiatives across Australia are raising the voice of their communities through advocacy and influence. Some examples include:

- **Logan Together** – who have begun convening a group of specialists from across government, business, academia, civil society and community to explore the opportunities that COVID-19 might present for recovery, reconstruction and social development from a place-based perspective. They are also in the process of developing a Logan Social Recovery Plan.
- **Hands Up Mallee** – who are in the process of surveying youth in the community (with a survey designed by youth) to find out how COVID-19 has affected them and what their concerns and needs are.
- **Maranguka** – who are keeping young people informed and providing opportunity for concerns to be addressed through regular contact with youth workers who continue to be active and available in the community. They are also ensuring the concerns of young people are passed on to government and non-government agencies in the area.
- **Warddeken Land Management** – who, with the Karrkad-Kanjdi Trust, are communicating with philanthropic funders on the needs of the community during COVID-19 around the increased importance of flexible and dependable funding during this period to ensure the community remains safe and that there is still an ability to conduct land and fire management operations during this time.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RECOVERY

The pandemic has highlighted the interconnected nature of the many systems affecting local communities and shown just how complex and unpredictable the world can be. The good news is that what emerged in a time of crisis can be a source of strength in a time of recovery. COVID-19 has shown that it is possible for communities and governments to work differently together. In this time of crisis, the traditional boundaries that we used to understand the world didn't apply. Long standing siloes were broken and cross-sectoral barriers crossed. Unprecedented collaboration occurred across industries, service providers and levels of government. Old approaches were quickly replaced by adaptations and innovations – all driven by necessity.

These new ways of working should not be lost in recovery. They should be consolidated upon. As we face a massive task of recovery, the need to transform communities and disrupt entrenched cycles of disadvantage will only grow in importance. Business as usual will only see deep structural disadvantage perpetuated. The 'new normal' should not be the same as before. As the examples in this report show, place based approaches have provided unique ways of working differently together in the support of vulnerable people and families. This has been critical during the crisis but will remain so in recovery and beyond as a pathway to ensuring that current and future generations live healthy and fulfilling lives. To unleash the potential of place-based approaches, the systems that govern regional development and social change need to transform. This requires:

1. Commitment to self-determination and local decision making - As the case studies of Warddeken Land Management and Maranguka exemplify, an approach underpinned by the principles of self-determination can deliver improved social, cultural and economic outcomes and long-term generational change. There needs to be a stronger commitment to creating the space for Aboriginal communities to make decisions on the matters that affect their lives and communities. This involves creating new relationships between government, civil society, academia and business and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. Ensuring community involvement at all stages of decision making – It is by creating conditions for people closer to the ground to make decisions that community driven agency and ownership moves from rhetoric to reality. This needs to include planning, design, implementation and evaluation. The imposition of top-down solutions will never be as effective as enabling diverse communities to drive the agenda in their own unique contexts.
3. Enlarging the decision-making table and adding more seats - Communities should already be at the table as COVID-19 recovery is planned. While it is commendable that current emergency management frameworks have a strong focus on locally appropriate responses, there are still many perspectives that are not represented at local decision-making tables. And there are many processes that do not reflect this focus. A seat at the table means more than consultation. It means decision making authority.
4. Creating the policies, systems and structures that allow for community driven agency and ownership - New structures are needed to embed community-led resilience and responses that draw upon local insights and integrated approaches. This should extend beyond times of crisis. Options might include 'community cabinets' that mimic the National Cabinet, where community and local, state and national government and non-government representatives meet to work through overlapping policies to deliver clarity and coherence at a local level. It could also include stronger support for local 'backbone' organisations that weave connections and collaborations across diverse and siloed social systems.
5. Building the social infrastructure that allows community, government, business and industry to collaborate and create better futures locally - Social infrastructure is not just about services or facilities. It includes human 'assets'. This means the networks, relationships, trust, local knowledge and community processes that contribute to the development of social capital and the creation of thriving, inclusive communities. The maintenance and growth of this social infrastructure requires investment and support just as much as any physical asset. The task here is to invest in the spaces and forums for these capacities and connections to emerge and the resources to foster innovation when and where it arises.
6. Investing in community leadership development - Prioritising community knowledge, strengths and leadership requires an investment in community leadership development. Australia needs leaders with the ability to forge relationships across diverse networks, to generate a shared agenda for change, and engage and empower others to participate. The challenge is finding ways to support new leadership to emerge outside old hierarchies, and in supporting the emerging generation of young leaders who are ready to step up.

AUSTRALIA'S RECOVERY DOESN'T HINGE ONLY ON INVESTMENTS IN NEW BRIDGES OR ROADS. IT REQUIRES INVESTING IN THE AGENCY AND OWNERSHIP OF COMMUNITIES THAT WILL SEE THEM ONCE AGAIN READY AND ABLE TO THRIVE.

APPENDIX 1 – CASE STUDIES

PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19 HANDS UP MALLEE (HUM) CASE STUDY

Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a social impact initiative based in Mildura in the Northern Mallee region of Victoria, Australia. HUM was established to bring local leaders and community together to address social issues and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and their families.

HUM has a history of responding to issues locally with actions and investments that will have the most meaningful impact. Decisions are always made in consultation with those who best understand the needs and challenges of individuals, families and the community. Actions are then tailored to these specific needs and underlying causes.

Informed by community priorities, HUM currently has a 'preventative focus' and specifically works with 0-25 years in the community to ensure everyone has the best start in life and that the voice of young people is reflected in decision making.

Supporting the system through partnerships and coordination

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared and Australia began to implement health measures such as social distancing and the closure of schools, the HUM team asked themselves whether their current work was the most important thing their community needed right now. With the closure of businesses and many local services, as well as the loss of jobs, many people in the community had begun experiencing severe financial distress. This was manifesting itself in food scarcity for many families. HUM decided that, given their history of partnerships and coordination, to pause many programs and to pivot to supporting the local relief effort.

HUM was quickly tasked by the Local Council to ***lead the convening of more than 16 organisations to create a partnership focused on emergency food relief.*** For the first time ever, these organisations began working together.



Adapting and innovating to fill critical gaps

A central food hub was established at the Ethnic Community Council offices. Schools that had previously partnered with HUM on a breakfast program for vulnerable students began to pool this food for distribution via the hub. Knowing that many families would not be comfortable in putting their hand up and asking for help, food was then distributed to neighbourhood houses and other trusted conduits to ensure families could get the food they need. A special neighbourhood hour, run by volunteers, was set up for those who were fearful of coming to the attention of government, such as undocumented migrant workers. This meant food could be obtained discretely and without paperwork for families. HUM also began inviting *service providers to begin to share data about local community demand and capacity, so that services that were*



overburdened could share their load with less busy providers.

Helping create and maintain connections to services and support

In cases where families need help but won't identify themselves to the intake team or present to an Emergency Food Relief provider due to stigma and shame, *Schools began to partner with welfare providers in dropping off food to vulnerable families.* For many service providers, this is the first time they've worked with a third party such as a school and represents a radical new way of working. School wellbeing officers began doing contactless deliveries, and then calling the families to follow-up to see if they have received the pack, but also as a conversation starter to check in on welfare. This has also become a way for schools to maintain connections with children at risk of becoming disengaged from school.

When other schools outside the local government area began asking for help in providing food to distressed families, HUM was able to coordinate services to meet their needs as well, despite being outside their 'jurisdiction'.

New partners are constantly signing up to join the initiative, with different organisations with trusted pathways to vulnerable families stepping in to the ring. For example, organisations such as the Clontarf Foundation, a not-for-profit organisation that assists in the education and employment of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, has begun to assist in delivering the food parcels.

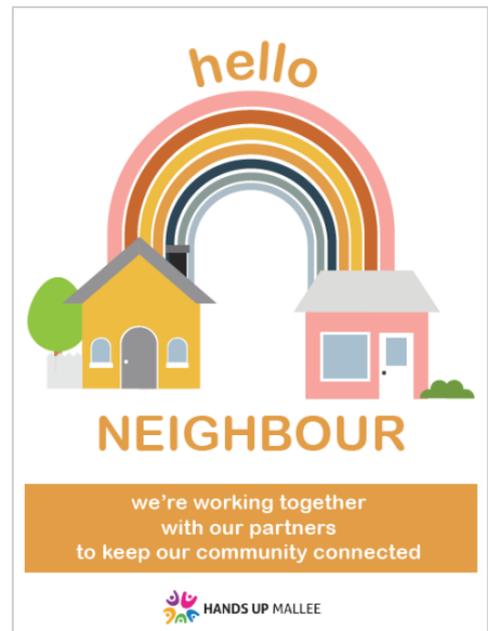
In addition to food relief, HUM observed that many face-to-face based local services were being suspended. They began to work with important maternal and child health providers to **support them in moving their programs online**. They even coordinated the shift to online music classes that pair elderly residents in aged care with families with young children, to learn music together. Music student interns began running these sessions.

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and audiences

'Hello neighbour' cards were produced by HUM to go out with food parcels, providing a gateway to referrals and all sorts of local support. Importantly a single local phone number was included to make it less intimidating or confusing for people to pick up the phone and ask for help.

Advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system

HUM is in the process of surveying youth in the community (with a survey designed by youth) to find out how COVID-19 has affected them and what their concerns and needs are.



PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19 LOGAN TOGETHER CASE STUDY

Logan Together is a long term, whole of community movement to create the best life opportunities for every child in Logan. Logan Together reflects a diverse group of people from every part of the community who share a passion for their kids' future. The Logan Together initiative taps into this diverse community and what's needed to make it thrive has required a genuine collaboration between community, industry and government who all have the same goal in mind – a bright future for children.



Logan Together works on a range of projects and many partner projects as well. This includes initiatives such as: ensuring a smoother transition for children going from kindergarten to preparatory school; forging a strong network of diverse community service providers to ensure resources get to the community members who need them; and a stronger parent project that raises parents' awareness of the key things their child needs.

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Supporting the system through partnerships and coordination

With the arrival of COVID-19, it quickly became apparent that there were urgent needs to be met in the community and that new partnerships and responses would be required. To find out how local service providers were responding, and to offer their support, Logan Together created an Action Group that maintains weekly contact with over 50 service providers in the area.

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and audiences

With the move to social isolation and online working, Logan Together saw the need to maintain the connections and momentum that had been occurring across many local initiatives. There were also few online places that local people could visit to share their own experiences and exchange stories and knowledge. Within 5 days, Logan Together created a virtual platform called Stronger Together Logan that is a curated information exchange and message board with exclusive local content. Within weeks, the website had more than 1000 users per day accessing and sharing content, empowering locals to help each other and help themselves.

Helping create and maintain connections to services and support

To keep local services and support functioning, prevent people falling through the cracks and maintain critical connections, Logan Together has also sourced numerous vans to begin mobile outreach and neighbourhood visits.

Adapting and innovating to fill critical gaps

With the advent of school closures and online learning, the digital divide between vulnerable families and the lack of equal learning opportunities became glaringly apparent. Logan Together forged a new partnership with an electronic waste recycling social enterprise, Substation33, to urgently refurbish laptops for students.

350 laptops have now been made available and the donations of further computers, screens, keyboards and cables is continuing.

Logan Together also partnered with a specialist physical activity organisation to develop learning and activity packs that would enable children to be active at home. 1000 packs have now been delivered locally.

While providing PPE and hand sanitiser are not the normal remit of Logan Together, when the local hospitals began running out, Logan Together staff began contacting beauticians to source face masks and enrolled a local scientist in the production of hand sanitiser. The sourced critical PPE to enable frontline services for at-risk First Nations communities to continue. This is all in addition to coordinating distribution of food parcels, maintaining 'business as usual' services, and effectively keeping the doors open to the community.



Advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system

Logan Together is coordinating interested parties on the needs of place-based approaches in the COVID-19 recovery. They are also in the process of developing a Local Social Recovery Plan.

“COVID-19 has highlighted that there is a clear divide to access free state education for families that don't have a computer and access to the internet in the home. This has been unsettling and has caused extra stresses for children and their families in Logan.”

Angela TuiSamoa – Community Connector, Logan Together

PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19 MARANGUKA CASE STUDY

Maranguka is an Aboriginal owned and run community organisation. It began in 2013 when Maranguka teamed with Just Reinvest NSW to develop a Justice Reinvestment 'proof of concept' in Bourke, a remote town located in north-west New South Wales, Australia. Maranguka Justice Reinvestment is a place based, data-driven approach to improve public safety and reduce criminal justice spending.

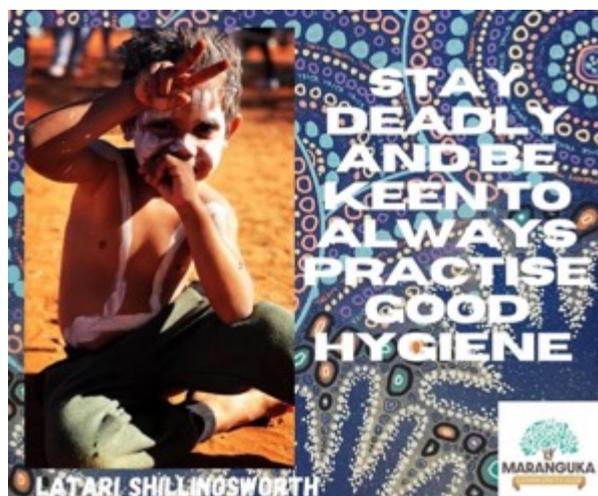


Maranguka, meaning 'caring for others' in Ngemba language, is a model of Indigenous self-governance. Maranguka has a locally based multi-disciplinary team that works in partnership with relevant government and non-government agencies, local schools and local police, to act as a hub for both individuals and service providers. It is a gateway to essential services and supports as well as a means of empowering community members to drive their own agenda. Through Maranguka, the community has a strong focus on safe families; connected communities; youth and justice reinvestment, and women's and men's action groups.

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and audiences

Maranguka is a key gateway, both for community members and for service providers. Maranguka was identified by the Local Emergency Management Committee as the key communication pathway to the Bourke Aboriginal community and have been invited to all key NSW Health meetings.

To make the most of their strong Facebook presence, Maranguka has also developed tailored communications to reinforce key COVID-19 messages from both the Federal and State Government. These feature wording that is familiar and meaningful to locals accompanied by



photos of respected elders and family members. Some of these images have received more than 25000 views on Facebook.

Supporting the system through partnerships and coordination

In the same way that occurred pre-COVID-19, the Maranguka team has been able to continue to daily meetings (online) with police, government support services and NGO agencies to review support requirements of children at-risk and in relation to domestic violence incidents. These daily check-ins form a critical part of the wrap around support strategy of Maranguka.

“I have noticed a real difference compared with when we’ve faced difficult health issues in the past. At a time when we were tackling alcohol restrictions there was a lot of pushback, racism and discrimination. People lost sight of the goal of reducing harm. Now there’s a clearer focus on promoting healthier choices and harm minimisation for children, young people and families in Bourke.”

Alistair Ferguson, Founder and Executive Director Maranguka

Helping create and maintain connections to services and support

The Maranguka Hub has stayed open despite the disruption, and unlike many other services in the area that have shut their doors during government-imposed restrictions. It has remained a refuge for those fleeing homelessness or domestic violence and a trust port of call for help and support.

The team has also been contacting vulnerable Elders ensuring they have the information they need and also visiting families identified as vulnerable. And they have been supporting services get in contact with people who are not answering emails or phone calls

Adapting and innovating to fill critical gaps

The Maranguka team has been willing to step outside their normal roles during the COVID-19 crisis. Given that many services are restricted from face-to-face contact, the team has increased their own visits and transport services. This includes the delivery of meals, food hampers and essential items. It also includes transporting community members to the local pharmacy and other locations if needed.

Maranguka has also engaged community members eligible for the NSW Aboriginal Land Council Community Support Food Relief packages of food and hygiene items by assisting with completion of application registration.

The Maranguka team has also stepped outside their role to deliver workshops for the local school and assist with maintaining contact with students, particularly those in year 9 and 10. They have created a database of contact details for hard to reach students and have helped the local school

stay in touch through connections and visits. They were also able to survey and provide the names of students who require laptops for learning.

Advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system

Maranguka is keeping young people informed and providing opportunity for concerns to be addressed through regular contact with youth workers who continue to be active and available in the community. They are also ensuring the concerns of young people are passed on to government and non-government agencies in the area.

PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19 WARDDEKEN LAND MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY

For thousands of generations Nawarddeken clan groups have lived on and cared for their ancestral estates in the stone country, the Kuwarddewardde, of Arnhem Land, NT. After the arrival of balanda (non- Indigenous people) Nawarddeken left their land until, by the late 1960s, it was largely de-populated. Over the next 30 years the Kuwarddewardde experienced growing numbers of feral animals and large wildfires, which threatened biodiversity and cultural sites.



From the 1970s well-known artist Bardayal 'Lofty' Nadjamerrek AO, began a movement back to homeland communities in the Kuwarddewardde.

The Warddeken Land Management group (established 2007), governed by representatives drawn from 36 clan groups of the Kuwarddewardde, is now responsible for the governance and strategic direction of these communities. Warddeken's goal is to sustain long-term self-determination of Nawarddeken to live, work and learn on country, while managing their land and practising culture.

Kabulwarnamyo outstation is now the headquarters for the Warddeken Rangers, an Indigenous ranger team managing 1.4 million hectares of country of global conservation and cultural significance.

With the help of the Karrkad-Kanjidji Trust, the community of Kabulwarnamyo established the Nawarddeken Academy, a unique bi-cultural, bi-curriculum school where specific curriculum is developed in partnership with community Elders and taught in tandem with the Australian Curriculum. The Kabulwarnamyo community has joint ownership of Nawarddeken Academy, and actively oversees the direction of the school and participates in the education of its children on a daily basis. What began as a one-teacher classroom under a tarp, with minimal resources has grown in to a school that can cater for over 20 students with two permanent teachers, five casual Indigenous teaching assistants, an Executive Officer and an early learning program that caters for zero to five-year-olds. The Academy is focused on empowering young people to be strong and confident; preserving Nawarddeken languages and culture through bilingual and bicultural experiential learning; and promoting intergenerational education. The school enables Indigenous ranger jobs to be created and retained because children are able to be educated at home, on Country.

Adapting and innovating to fill critical gaps

The arrival of COVID-19 in Australia posed a serious risk for families in West Arnhem Land. Within a short period of time, all West Arnhem communities became closed to all non-essential travel. Visitor permits were revoked by the Northern Land Council only approved essential workers were allowed to travel to and between the remote communities and/ or homelands for which they are

approved and had obtained a permit. Within the Warddeken Indigenous Protected Area, rangers hold regular meetings to monitor any departures or arrivals to the region.

The Kabulwarnamyo community relies on food delivered by plane every month. At the commencement of the closures, all freight was being halted. It was therefore unclear whether or not food delivery would continue to be feasible and possible. As a first response, the Nawarddeken Academy team **organised a large shipment of dry food that could sustain the community for a least one extra month should it be required.**

The announcement of the closure of West Arnhem communities came with only several days' notice. There were numerous community members who faced being stranded in Darwin and nearby towns. The Nawarddeken Academy team therefore **organised a charter flight to get these members home with less than 48 hours to spare.**

Supporting the system through partnerships and coordination

Since the closure, the team has been liaising with the Gunbalanya Emergency Response Group to enable permits for additional community members to return on medical grounds.



Helping create and maintain connections to services and support

With the creating of the biosecurity zone, West Arnhem land has remained COVID-19 free. This has enabled the Academy to remain open. However, in preparation for social distancing in the future, the Academy **created learning packs for each student that includes a backpack with 2 weeks' worth of school activities as well as books and supplies.** The printing of resources and provision of school supplies required an order to be placed in Darwin and the supplies delivered on the food plane. Enough packs were made that they can also be distributed to two neighbouring communities to have on hand for their students. An additional 3 laptops were also

ordered for the school. These laptops have been preloaded with content as internet access is highly limited in the community.

The additional quarantine requirements of the West Arnhem Land biosecurity zone have meant that instead of leaving over the school holidays, the local teacher has elected to stay in community to avoid being locked out during the school term.

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and audiences

The Kabulwarnamyo community has only two phones, almost no mobile phone reception and limited internet access. For most residents, English is not their first language. Meanwhile, COVID-19 poses a serious risk for remote communities in West Arnhem Land where there are existing high rates of chronic disease. There are also risks to the cohort of elders who are the holders of vast amounts of cultural and environmental knowledge and are often the glue that hold these communities together. Getting the right health messaging out was paramount.

The Karrkad-Kanjaji Trust was able to *negotiate the redeployment of a linguist who had been working on documenting rock art in the area to creating COVID-19 health messages in the local language*. These messages are now also being made available on the Northern Territory government COVID-19 website.



“We Indigenous people are resilient. Everyone is helping each other to keep people safe. Here it is very, very healthy. Children are still being educated when other schools closed down. We are working with our fire management. We have managed and maintained our cultural heritage and people.”

Dean Yibarbuk, Chairman, Warddeken Land Management

PLACE BASED RESILIENCE: COMMUNITY DRIVEN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY IN A TIME OF COVID-19 GREATER SHEPPARTON LIGHTHOUSE CASE STUDY

Greater Shepparton Lighthouse is a collective impact, place based initiative in Shepparton in northern Victoria. Created in 2014, the initiative involves 50 local leaders in decision-making and has the support of more than 450 volunteers and 100 plus partnerships. Together they work to systematically improve wellbeing and educational outcomes for children 0-24 years in the 65,000 strong community. Projects are being undertaken in 26 discrete settings and include hubs and safe havens for teens and toddlers, literacy, school engagement, industry linking and transport initiatives. Decision-making is driven by data (Lighthouse co-funded and co- designed a platform with Seer Data & Analytics) and community consultation with the 1000 Conversations model created by Lighthouse now in widespread use.



Lighthouse's biggest success to date is creating a catalytic movement that uses existing social capital and capacity in the wider community to leverage change for children. There is evidence of cohort level improvements in engagement, literacy and criminal behaviour with many initiatives being brought to scale and in the pipeline. Lighthouse is supported by a mix of philanthropy and Victorian Government funding and extensive in-kind resources.

Supporting the system through partnerships and coordination

In March 2020, at the commencement of the first Victorian COVID-19 restrictions, Lighthouse called a meeting of about a dozen local community organisations to work together and co-ordinate efforts. This morphed into the community arm of the Greater Shepparton Response involving the Committee for Greater Shepparton, Greater Shepparton City Council, the Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative, the Ethnic Council of Shepparton and District and a range of other organisations. Since March the committee has met almost weekly to discuss the needs of various cohorts, identify and minimise risk, share ideas, resources and volunteers, and use connections to secure resources, advocate and raise issues of concern, prepare and disseminate locally appropriate messaging and disseminate resources and information.

One of the first things the Greater Shepparton Response identified was the need to make services as safe as possible for both staff and the community. Through a partner organisation Infection Control Training was sourced and delivered creating an opportunity for early learning and strengthening practice before anything else was available. Early research was commissioned on the availability of masks, sanitisers and flu vaccines for the Greater Shepparton community which informed the groups understanding and ability to make decisions quickly.

Adapting and innovating to fill critical gaps

Lighthouse was able to quickly repurpose some of its own staff who were joined by Council staff at Food Share, Life Church and Shepparton Family & Financial Services, recognising the immediate increased demand on these service in the early days of COVID.

The group were able to leverage relationships to access seconds food to top up Food Share's supply from large business in the region such as SPC, Freedom Foods and Tatura Milk.

Lighthouse and Rotary provided funds to relevant organisations to address immediate gaps in supply, while

Lighthouse supported Shepparton Family & Financial Services with grant writing, applying for an increase in council funding to support more families. They also delivered over 500 activity packs to support parents and to keep children engaged during home schooling.

Helping create and maintain connections to services and support

An example of creating and maintaining connections across generations during the pandemic is the Gen Connection project.

The Gen Connection project connects students from Greater Shepparton Secondary College to senior members of the community whom are currently socially isolated. As part of the project students phone a senior buddy within the community twice a week to connect and also gain information about their buddy's life in order to write a biography which forms part of their school curriculum assessment tasks.

The concept was developed pre-COVID drawing in the skills of Shepparton South Rotary Club member, David Earle, and Greater Shepparton Lighthouse's Industry Links team. They've found that during COVID this project has been extremely successful in lifting the mood and level of happiness of both the student and their senior mentor.

The project works with four local nursing homes and has taken on members of the community whom live alone independently. To date over 55 young people have participated in this project which is now being scaled to take on new cohorts.

"It's a project of mutual benefit, older local residents gain a new connection and students gain insights about their life which assist in addressing assessment tasks linked to the curriculum," explained the Mooroopna Assistant Principal Mrs. Utber



Aunty Pam and Muna

Tailoring communications to suit local contexts and audiences

Concerns were raised in the Greater Shepparton Community Response forum about the effects of stress and the pressure of home schooling on families. Together member organisations created a series of local radio and tv advertisements with diverse leaders from within the community to encourage families to continue their good work with online learning.

Lighthouse and other participating organisations also used their social media channels to promote and connect up local COVID related initiatives.

[Watch the TV advert here.](#)

Advocating on behalf of the community to the wider system

During COVID Lighthouse has undertaken more than 300 community conversations with young people and families to understand their situation and explore ways to support them – individually and as a whole community.

Rumbalara has also been engaging with the Indigenous community while the Ethnic Council has been talking to community leaders to determine the various cultural and ethnic groups' needs and issues. Through the Neighbourhood Schools the committee has learnt about the

vulnerabilities experienced by families and has spoken to Gps to understand how to best support their policies and procedure in offering flu injections and sourcing resources.

Lighthouse and the Committee 4 Greater Shepparton took on an advocacy role advocating for better internet connection and the supply of dongles for students and families without access while another group member, Goulburn Murray Community Leadership Program, advocated for health workers to access priority online grocery shopping.

The Greater Shepparton Community Response has been able to provide detailed local knowledge of needs and resourcing to Council's pandemic team as well as have input into the Department of Health and Human Services local response.