

Insights Paper

Together in 2770: A Collective Approach to Community Development and Mobilisation

June 2022

This paper has been developed with contributions from the Hive's Collective Partners of Together in 2770: The Hive, BaptistCare HopeStreet, Jesuit Social Services, Salvation Army Greater West, Bidwill Uniting and HIPPY



About The Hive

The Hive is a place-based initiative working toward the goal that all children in Mount Druitt start school well.



The Hive is one of Australia's most established and effective place-based collective impact initiatives

The Hive has a goal for all children in Mount Druitt to start school well, with equal opportunity to learn, be healthy and participate in quality community life.

Since 2015, The Hive has been embedded in the Mount Druitt community, helping bring community aspirations to life.

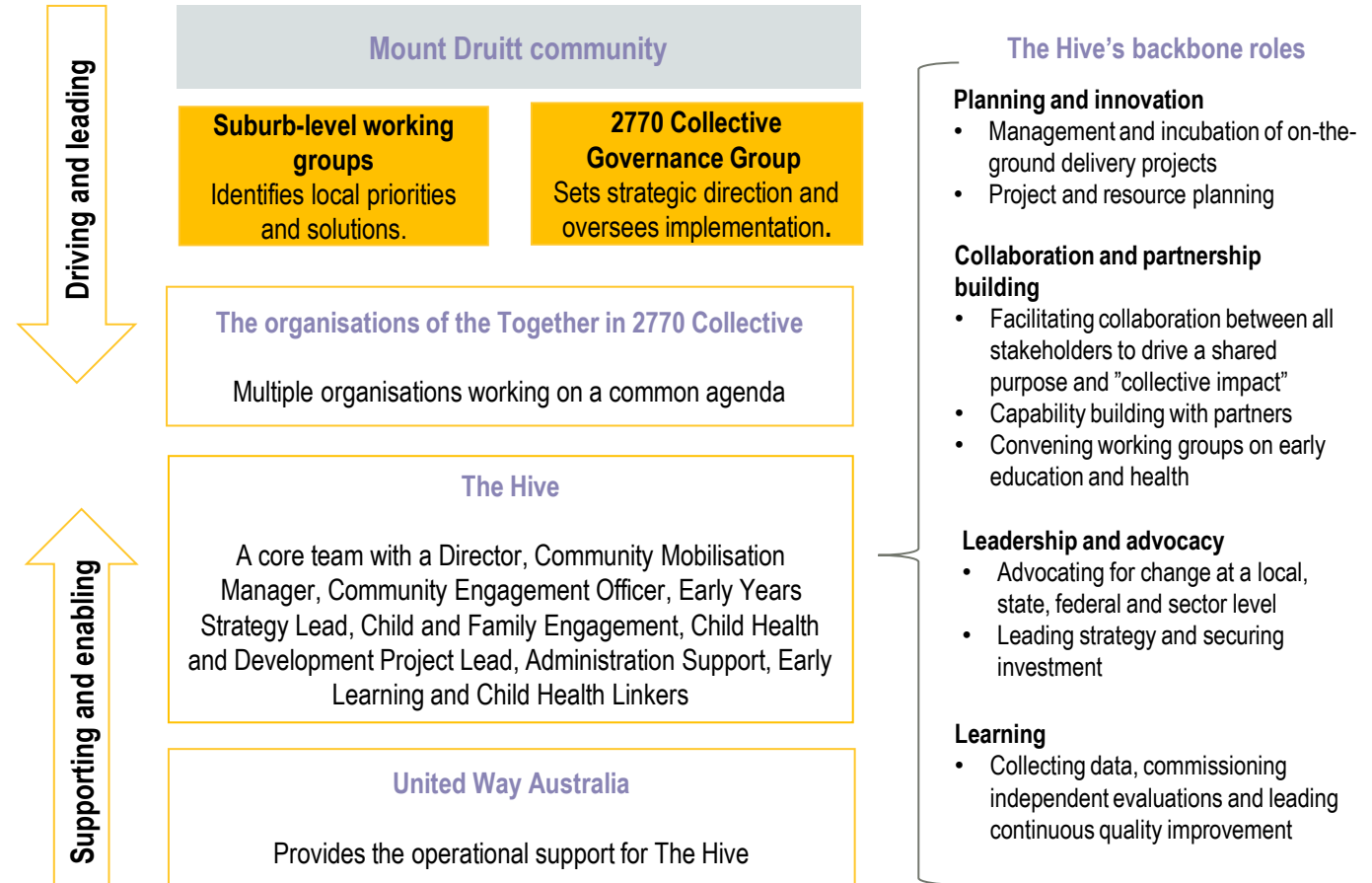
The Hive works with residents, community organisations and partners through the Together in 2770 Collective. The Collective shares a commitment to a common agenda, identifies local priorities, collaborates on innovative solutions and advocates for system-wide change.

The Hive staff live and work in and around the Mount Druitt community and are committed to long-term change. The Hive is part of United Way Australia (UWA).

Mount Druitt includes twelve diverse suburbs in Greater Western Sydney. Most Mount Druitt suburbs are among the most disadvantaged suburbs in Australia.

The Collective work intensively in four suburbs – Bidwill, Lethbridge Park, Tregear and Willmot.

We have a community-driven governance framework that enables a focus on community priorities while leveraging the experience and resources of key partners.

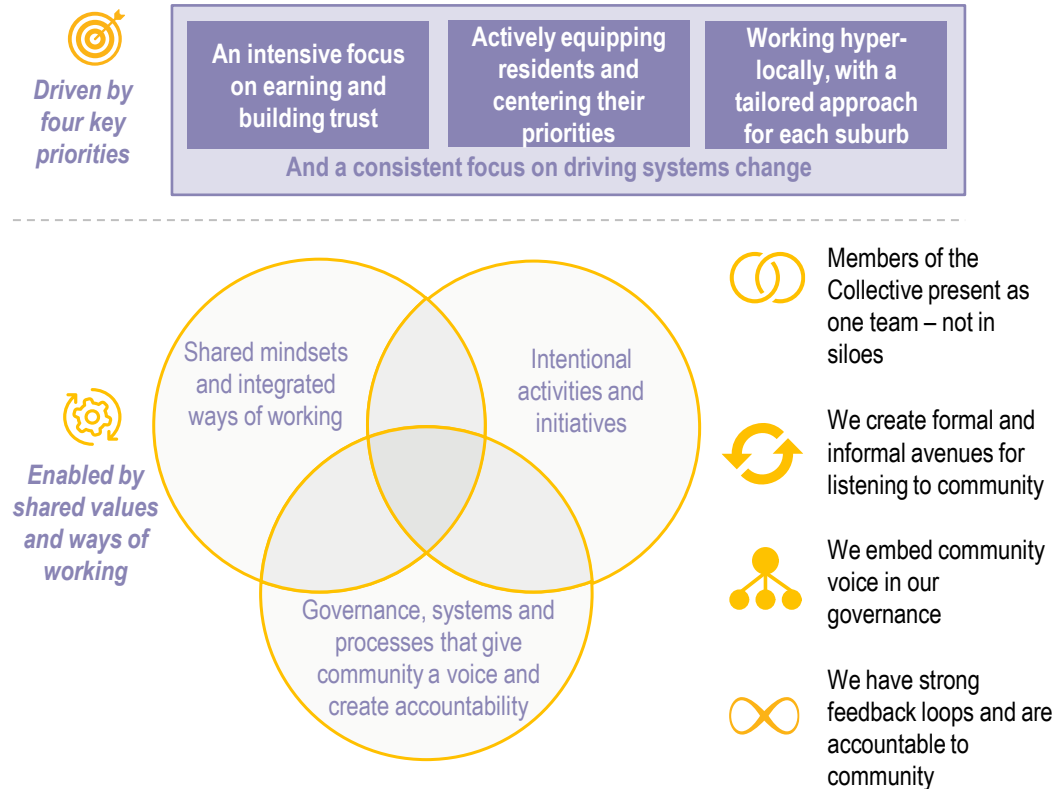


Together in 2770's Collective approach to community development

Our approach to community development is driven by clear priorities, enabled by shared ways of working and focused on creating the conditions for community-led change.

Our approach

Together in 2770 takes a shared approach to community development. The Hive plays a backbone role to support this approach. The approach is...



Working towards clear goals



Why we focus on community development

Problems with the current service system are well known and entrenched:

- A fragmented and poorly coordinated system
- A program focus instead of a client focus
- Services that fail to consider a client's family circumstances
- A traditional welfare approach that focuses on crisis support and stabilisation
- A focus on solving problems, rather than anticipating and preventing them*

But we know community are the most powerful agents of change

- Community members are experts in their own lives, they are not 'the problem'
- Local knowledge is needed to bring change and design effective solutions
- Building local capacity and mobilising community is necessary for sustainability
- Building capacity creates opportunities and pathways

These issues further entrench disadvantage.

A community development approach aims to instead create a cycle of empowerment.

Embedding and sustaining our approach

There are critical changes to the way services are commissioned, funded and delivered that would help embed and sustain an effective community development approach:

Ensuring adequate time for community development in -

- Timeframes for grant applications so community has a voice
- Expectations for roll-out, so time for relationship/trust development is built in

Valuing and better leveraging the local knowledge and relationships held by place-based initiatives – particularly to support local adaptation of program design

Outcomes set by community and flexibility to deliver what's needed to achieve them

Rationale for a community development approach

Current approaches to communities experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are failing to break cycles of intergenerational disadvantage. We take a community development approach to build cycles of empowerment instead.

Problems with the current service system are well known and entrenched

A 2016 government enquiry confirmed numerous structural issues with the way communities and families are supported. It identified:

- **A fragmented and poorly coordinated system**, where specific service sectors largely focus on issues or groups of vulnerable people without a whole of system view
- **A program focus instead of a client focus**, where the onus is on people to make sense of services, navigate from door to door and 'fit' a program to qualify for support
- **Services which fail to consider the family circumstances of clients**, in particular the existence and experience of children
- **A traditional welfare approach** that focuses on crisis support and stabilisation, rather than building capability
- **A focus on solving problems after they occur** rather than anticipating and intervening to prevent them arising.*

In spite of many efforts at reform in recent years, these issues remain entrenched.



These issues further entrench disadvantage

Our engagement with Mount Druitt's community confirms that families feel handed around between increasingly siloed services and lost in a system that is fragmented and uncoordinated. The system is oriented around the needs and priorities of agencies rather than people.

People experience distress and trauma as a result of their interactions with service systems – which demonstrate deficit views and a lack of cultural safety from alienating bureaucratic processes and languages.

As a result, people feel disempowered by services and don't get the support they need at the time they need it, leading to cycles of disadvantages being further entrenched.



A community development approach aims to create a cycle of empowerment

A community development approach works from the assumption that:

- Our community has strengths that are under-recognised and under-utilised
- Community members experts in their own lives – they have agency in solving problems, and are not the problem that needs to be fixed
- Local knowledge is needed to design effective solutions
- Local action is needed to bring about and sustain real change
- Building capacity creates opportunities and pathways for people to create better futures for themselves and their community

We draw on established, evidence-based community development methodologies to:

- Identify and orient our work around local priorities
- Create opportunities to unlock and build community members' strengths and capabilities
- Mobilise community around common priorities
- Create formal and informal support networks that are responsive to people's priorities and needs
- Respect inclusion and collaboration with First Nations peoples

Our ongoing learning about community development with First Nations people

First Nations families and workers are central to Together in 2770's community development approach.

Through being in-place and "blurring the distinctions" between services and First Nations Peoples, relationships of accountability have been cultivated and have reconfigured the way services are developed and delivered.

We see "blurring the distinctions" as an essential element for services and workers to being seen as trustworthy – helping to create the conditions for collaboration with First Nations Peoples. Our place-based approach and increasingly agile and adaptive ways of working continue to resist fragmentation and allow for greater representation and participation in community development.

Principles that guide our ongoing learning



Being here

- (For non-First Nations workers) actively addressing colonial assumptions, history, practices, bias and complicity in continuing injustice.
- Aligning with First Nations aspirations
- Being on the ground – consistent, present, flexible and radically relational.
- Listening and learning and adapting accordingly.
- Resisting fragmentation and displacement



Being trustworthy

- Commitment to long-term engagement.
- Relationships that are transparent and consistent - following through, implementing feedback
- Engagement prioritised over programs.
- Transparent, person-centred practices that prioritise self-determination.



Being together


- Working together, acknowledging and addressing power differentials.
- Community mobilising co-facilitated with First Nations Peoples.
- Decentralised and flexible ways of working that prioritise First Nations Peoples
- Blurring the distinctions between services and First Nations.
- Solidarity around continuing concerns and injustices.

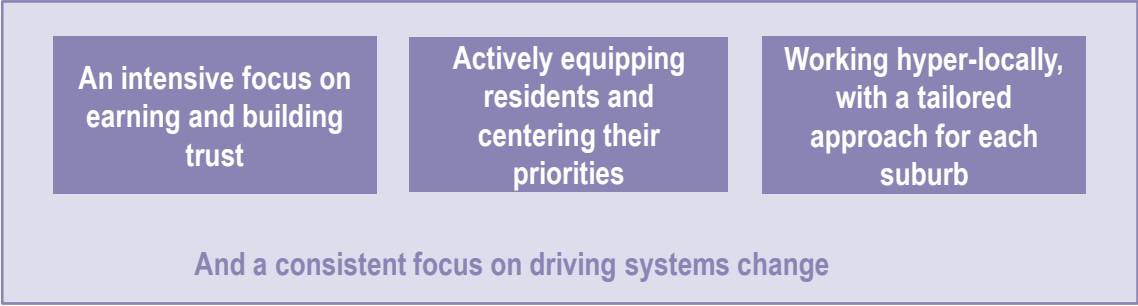
The Hive's approach to community development




Together in 2770's Collective approach to community development


The Hive plays a coordinating role in Together in 2770's Collective approach to community development. This approach is grounded in shared values, based on evidence and reflect our aspiration. We are on a journey, which means we don't already get it right. But we are consistently reflecting and learning.


 **Our distinctive approach to community development is driven by four key priorities**
These priorities come from experience and evidence and guide all our decisions about what we do and how we work



 **Our approach is enabled by shared values and ways of working**
There are three key enablers that create the processes and norms that ensure we embed our community development priorities in all aspects of our day-to-day work



 **Embedded reflection and learning**
We are always learning and adapting, guided by our accountability to community

 **And we consistently work towards engaging, equipping and mobilising community**
Our community is strong, capable and aspirational – our role is to help create the conditions that allow them to lead the change they want to see in their lives and in their community



Our community development priorities

Our approach

In practice

Enabling & sustaining

We prioritise building trust, giving community a voice, and focussing our work in the places people live – with a consistent focus on shifting systems.

An intensive focus on earning and building trust

Actively equipping residents and centering their priorities

Working hyper-locally, with a tailored approach for each suburb

Framed by a consistent focus on driving systems change

Without the trust of the community, we cannot achieve anything. We prioritise learning, building and growing trust in every interaction with community.

Prioritising trust means that we work with the understanding of 'mutuality' – we are not 'us' and 'them'. It means we are aware of power dynamics. And it is through relationship we work authentically towards self-determination.

We know community are the experts. Its our role and responsibility to help create the conditions for their strengths and aspirations to be realised.

We centre the perspective and priorities of residents in community – orienting our work around what matters locally. We actively equip and enable residents to have their say and contribute to or lead the change they aspire to.

We work across the whole 2770 postcode but recognise the huge diversity in community characteristics, dynamics, needs and priorities suburb-by-suburb.

We work hyper-locally, focusing intensively on specific suburbs, and locating ourselves in the streets, parks, shops and schools where families spend their time.

Across all our work, we focus on identifying, working around and resolving systemic barriers

We work towards systems that are responsive to local issues, that work holistically with the whole-person and the whole-family, and that provide the kind of timely, effective and appropriate support that equips people and communities to thrive

These priorities are embedded in the core statement of principles all Together in 2770 Collective members sign up to

The Collective are relationship-based

- We build trust and relationship first and acknowledge the value and dignity of the individual
- We prioritise people over the organisational outcomes
- We connect, introduce and link people to one another through relationships.

The Collective are community-led and strengths-based.

- We listen to community
- We do not approach community as “problems to be solved” but we understand community members have their own passions and strengths

The Collective are place-based

- We work 'locally' and have presence on the ground
- We acknowledge that the geography of where people live matters
- We commit to ensuring the decision makers are as geographically close to those affected by the decisions being made as possible.

Enablers of our community development approach

Our key enablers are *shared mindsets* that guide how we all ‘show up’ in and with community; the *systems and processes* that ensure community development is core business, and our *intentionality* about initiatives that grow engagement, connection and trust.

Shared mindsets drive how we work with each other, within the collective, and how we work with community

All Collective members share a core set of beliefs and values and hold common mindsets of the value and purpose of community development.

This is a key enabler of collaboration at all levels of the Collective and it shapes how every member of the Collective ‘shows up’ in and for community.

Shared mindsets in practice
p. 10



We create opportunities for relationship-building and strengthen local connections.

We design initiatives that bring community together, create opportunities for listening, and proactively take hold of opportunities to run events, advocate or make connections that are responsive to local priorities. We take a positive ‘yes, how can we make it happen’ mindset to ideas from community.

These activities and initiatives are ways to build trust and confidence in the service system, and create the kind of ‘soft entry’ point that are a gateway to greater engagement.

Intentional actions and activities in practice
p. 12

We created governance structures and routine processes that make community development part of our ‘business as usual’, not an optional extra

Being responsive to community, and focusing on growing community capacity and mobilisation, is a fundamentally different way of working. We have needed to build new governance structures to both strategically drive the work and hold ourselves and each other accountable.

We have built a range of formal and informal processes and structures that build community development and community voice into our routine ways of working – so that it is central to what we do and how we work, not a standalone initiative.

Systems and processes in practice
p. 11

Our goals for community development

Our community development approach spans engagement, capacity building and mobilisation – with a consistent focus on equipping residents to be confident, skilled and empowered advocates for change.

The focus of all our community development work is growing the voice, capacity and leadership of residents, and the readiness of systems and services to be responsive to the priorities of community. Although engagement with residents is core to our work, we go beyond just engaging and aim to:

- Actively create the conditions that unlock and grow the confidence, capacity and potential of residents – including their ability to identify problems and contribute to designing solutions
- Equip the community as advocates for change – building community cohesion, strengthening local networks, and building confidence that change is possible

Community engagement

Community engagement is the process in which the Hive actively collaborates with partners to deliver services based on understanding the needs of the Mount Druitt community.

We don't presume to know what the community needs – we ask them. We go to families rather than asking them to come to us and we're consistently present in community, in the places and with the people the community trust, so we hear about what matters most.

Community capacity building

Community capacity building is focused on unlocking and growing the confidence and skills of community members.

It involves an ongoing commitment to

- Creating opportunities for residents to contribute and lead – in listening forums, in community days, at events and in campaigns
- Creating spaces in which residents strengths are recognised and where they experience success
- Sharing information, evidence and insights so people are empowered with information
- Prioritising employing local workers

Community mobilisation

Community mobilisation gives community members the opportunity to be involved directly in creating and advocating for change.

This is about harnessing the power of community to identify issues, design solutions and come together to make them happen. Collective problem-solving helps grow community cohesion, builds strong local support networks and contributes to the community's confidence and optimism for the future.

Community development in practice



Shared mindsets and integrated ways of working

Our approach

In practice

Enabling & sustaining

Our focus on building trust and working seamlessly between organisations means our initiatives reach the people most in need of support, and provide the resources, services and opportunities they need



We work with each other in relational ways, guided by shared values

We build trust through everyday interaction – and by all members of the collective striving to live our shared values. We do this by:

- A statement of collaboratively developed values that articulates clearly and explicitly how we aim to 'show up' in and for community
- Members of the Collective committing to shared ways of working and accountability to each other
- Hiring staff and leaders with strong values alignment and the skill-set to work relationally



Members of the Collective present as one team - not a series of siloes

Community development is seen as everyone's role and core business for all members of the Collective. We intentionally integrate our structures by:

- Planning collaboratively
- Working in the same space
- Having shared outcomes and prioritising these outcomes over organisational agendas
- Sharing resources, skills and responsibilities
- Always making warm referrals and connecting families across the services and supports available in the community

In practice, this matters because:

Our integrated ways of working allow us to build trust and relationships with people in the community, and equip us to help them navigate the service system effectively.

Earning, building and growing trust first and foremost is the foundation of the success of the programs and initiatives offered by The Hive and members of the Collective. It means we:

- Reach people in the community who would otherwise feel unsafe engaging with services
- Discover and can work with the underlying causes of the issues experienced by individuals, families and communities – so we target our efforts where they make the biggest difference
- Reduce the distress and trauma residents experience engaging with service systems – and build their confidence and capacity to seek the support they need

We also work around the gaps, limitations and insufficiencies of the service system by working together and presenting to the community as one organisation. This means we:

- Have a 'no wrong door' approach and can always connect families to the range of services and supports that meet their needs
- Knit together a cohesive package of supports for family needs, and help them navigate the service system
- Are able to work with families over time because they trust us and come back

"We've had people in our communities say that sometimes they'd go to people about an issue, and they refer them to this Department and that service in a way that can be overwhelming.

The community gets exhausted with being passed around. We don't divide ourselves up that way. With the way we work, we assist people through the process at all points." – Team member

"No one in our team does one job. One person is not 'just a case worker' or 'just a linker'. Caseworkers make coffee, linkers help run holiday programs. We're not rigid in set tasks – we try to be present and available for community and what they need." – Team member

Community voice and accountability

Our systems and processes are informed by our community, ensuring their voice is embedded throughout all levels of governance.

Our approach

In practice

Enabling & sustaining



We embed community voice in our governance

Residents are involved in governance at multiple levels, including:

- Having residents come into our meetings and being part of our working group meetings
- Having community members who are part of our team being present in community spaces
- Ensuring there is always community representation at every decision-making table.
- Employing members of the community, so residents are our colleagues and partners



We create multiple formal and informal avenues for listening to community

We have established processes for collecting and acting on ideas, requests, and issues raised by residents.

- Formal processes include working groups in each priority suburb, community listening forums that are held regularly, and participation in governance groups
- Informal processes include a routine focus and curiosity from all Collective team members – our teams are always listening, asking and seeking input from community. These are collected through an email logging system and when there's critical mass, issues become part of The Collective's agenda.
- Prioritising seeking out and listening to First Nations perspectives



We have strong feedback loops and are accountable to community

We aim to always hold ourselves accountable to community, enabled by:

- Being routinely 'out and about' in community spaces – where residents can (and do) tell us when we've not delivered on promises
- Employing community members means there is a direct line to community expectations and needs – and we aim to create safe spaces where it can be called out if we're not getting it right

In practice, this matters because:

We know the community, the strengths that can be leveraged and the issues that are a priority

Our hard work and processes provide us with the social infrastructure to have relationships and the knowledge of the community as a whole.

This gives us the insights to know where the critical leverage points are, the investments or changes that will drive real change, and the priorities in each of the suburbs we work in.

We can ensure programs and services are well-targeted and designed effectively

Programs and services often fail to have the intended impact - they may not be a good match for the community's needs, may not be culturally safe or culturally appropriate, or might duplicate existing resources.

Our knowledge of the community, of local dynamics and cultural differences, means we're well-equipped to ensure programs and services are the right fit – and designed to have impact.

We are accountable –we hear what's not working and can adapt

Our feedback loops set us up to be adaptable and shift our approach when it's not working. This leads to more efficient and effective service delivery – creates accountability and helps build trust in the service system.

"The community aren't just recipients of what we do, but they're part of our team. We have people on our team with lived experience who bring the richness of local knowledge. Their life would be directly affected if our work fails. It's an extra level of responsibility." – Team member

CASE STUDY

Employment Advocacy

Mt Druitt community members consistently raised challenges securing employment as a key issue, particularly through the 'Together in Willmot Employment Sub-group'. As a result, BaptistCare created an 'Employment Pathways Coordinator' role who works alongside community and builds relationships with organisations who can collaborate on community-led solutions. These include:

- Working with My Skills RTO to offer relevant, place-based training in Willmot (such as Supply Chains Operations Certificate II), with a plan to support training opportunities and advocacy around digital literacy and evaluation
- Working with Lendlease Skilling & Employment to support Employment Pathways participants with creating/updating resumes, cover letters, and practicing interview skills
- Working with Jesuit Social Services around place-based training in Willmot and an employment pathway to Woolworths Emerton.

The Coordinator has also elevated community voices and priorities around childcare, transport and digital inclusion in discussion papers, advocacy efforts and local employment networks.

Person-centred and local actions and initiatives

Our actions and activities are intentionally designed to provide a safe space and best meet community needs.

Our person-centred and local actions and activities better meet community needs



We are place-based

We develop and implement a sense of place and connection to place by:

- Working "locally" and having presence on the ground
- We adapt our approaches to the specific places we are in
- We acknowledge that the geography of where people live matters
- We work within the ecosystem of the suburb



We are holistic

- We recognise and acknowledge the "whole" person and respond to their aspirations and needs with that awareness
- We are able to work holistically because we are relational and collaborate with others
- We understand that for a child to start school well, we need to work with their family, their community, with young people, adults, and older people.

In practice, this matters because:

We have place-based programs that have low barriers to entry, providing a safe space to the community and opportunities for engagement and fun

We strive to bring the community together in informal spaces and to create opportunities for connection and relationship-building in environments that communities feel safe in e.g. at the park, community centre, and/or outside the school gates. Our events and programs are low stress and accessible, making it easy and engaging for communities to enter and participate in. We ensure that we are available to the community by being conveniently located to where they live, work, and socialise. This also extends to the simple things – from the language we use, warm introductions and referrals, to the way we present ourselves.

"Community members come up to us all the time and that's a relationship we have worked hard to build where they're comfortable to do that. For me, it's about holding what I've heard. If 10 people say the same thing, I hold that. When there's a critical mass, I can act to support them to do something."
– Team member

We're able to design activities that are accessible and relevant to community needs.

Listening is in the culture of what we do – we take the time to listen mindfully and cultivate relationships. This helps us design activities that work for them such as holiday-programs, community days, and place-based management. For example:

- **Providing upskilling opportunities.** A community member came to us and said they would like to learn some creative skills. We got artists to come in and provide workshops for community members. Some people in the community were eventually able to sell their work in markets and run their own small business.
- **Tailored support for individuals.** We helped someone who received support for employment and are now volunteering at a store getting training and working part-time. Her partner, who was able to see that she received support reached out and asked whether they could get support too. We figured out what his specific needs were, then supported him to access a variety of services e.g. get a birth certificate, pay off fines, receive training, and start the journey to employment.

CASE STUDY

Carols in Lethbridge Park

An early observation from the Together in Lethbridge Park (TILP) working group was the lack of community-wide events. The community sought more connection and civic spirit and cited festivals in other suburbs as examples. Without a similar external communal recreational space, TILP worked with a Residents' group to hold Community Carols at the local Salvation Army premises.

The planning committee actively sought feedback from the community during the planning process. Local residents participated enthusiastically through craft activities for children, preparing gift bags and catering. Attendance was high and many community members cite the event as a positive example of living in Lethbridge Park.

Case study: Together in Wilmot

Our approach

In practice

Enabling & sustaining

Together in Willmot is an example of the Collective's intensive focus on particular suburbs. We put our community development approach into practice through sustained partnerships within the suburb, regular community conversations and local activities.

Together in Willmot is a collective partnership made up of community members, local service providers, government agencies, and businesses in Willmot.

These include collaborators, wider collaborators, and supporters.

Together in Willmot contributes to The Hive Collective objectives of ensuring all children start school well by:

Building a wide range of partnerships

Community conversations aimed at connection and engagement

Designing and delivering programs, events, and activities initiated and/or run by the community

These activities enable Together in Willmot to engage community, build capacity and mobilise residents, while working towards influencing policy and systems change

Through these activities, there is clear evidence that Together in Willmot has contributed to impact across 3 levels:

Short-term impact

Improving the enabling conditions for longer-term change

Early instances of change for kids, families and the community in Willmot

Examples include:

- Community capacity building e.g volunteering, paid employment with services associated with Together in Willmot, attending courses and events or being assisted by the case worker.
- Promoting social connections and relationships and providing opportunities for informal feedback and engagement via a Tuesday Breakfast, Coffee Van and regular school holiday programs for the community.
- A clear shift in services from a programmatic focus to place-based and integrated strategies between organisations.
- A shared advocacy agenda grounded in community priorities – including access to early learning and allied health services

Long term impact

System level changes e.g. changes in mindset, practice, resource flows, power and relationships

Examples include:

- Increased engagement and connection of children, families and other residents e.g. residents caring more for the local environment and developing respect for "place".
- More support for early learning and children's development e.g. upgraded physical spaces like the Willmot playground.

Wilmot Community members

Community members play a consultative role and help provide local context and activity support

Wider collaborators and supporters

Wider collaborators and supporters are involved in a wide range of ways from funding support, strategic input, running programs, to advocacy

Collaborators

Collaborators are services who are deeply engaged in the collective work and are at the core of decision-making
Examples: Jesuit Social Services, BaptistCare Hope Street, United Way Australia

Organisations and individuals work collectively towards shared outcomes across conventional organisational or agency boundaries.

Together in Wilmot activities offer opportunities for community engagement and connectedness.

Case study: Upgrade of Willmot Playground

In 2017, the Willmot playground was flagged for an upgrade by Blacktown City Council. Before the upgrade, the playground was not considered a safe or welcoming area. There was rubbish, drug use, alcohol and fighting, and no strong police presence.

Through the Together in Willmot collective, The Hive and partner organisations held a community forum to hear the community's priorities for the playground.

Approximately 70 people attended, including representatives from the Council.

Together in Willmot lobbied and worked with the Council to secure more resources, so the upgrade would meet community needs.

Following these consultations, the Council decided to allocate twice as much funding and was able to build a new playground, seniors' exercise stations and a basketball court.

The playground upgrade created a safe recreational space for children, families, youth and residents. The design was influenced by community input and aspirations, and Together in Willmot's advocacy improved the final outcomes achieved.

Case study: Growing Community Connections

The collective runs various activities and programs such as the school holiday program, Coffee van and Tuesday Breakfast, and other events at the Hubs such as movie nights.

The events bring people together and offer positive things to do in Willmot. It also offers access to services.

Over the last 4 years, services have seen an increase in attendance. Community members and service providers reported outcomes such as increased community connection, new friendships, building a sense of community and countering social isolation.

Together in Willmot as a collective, rather than any individual organisation, has been responsible for these changes. It is considered by members of the collective that these activities would either not happen, or would not be as successful in achieving outcomes, without the collaborative approach to delivery.

"Now the park just looks really nice and where kids can go and enjoy themselves and families can enjoy themselves... you can sit there... and watch the kids have fun and feel safe" - Community Member

In the last couple of years, I have noticed many changes in Willmot. People feel more connected. Whereas before, people never left their house, now they are out more. One of the most significant changes for me is the infrastructure; which brings about community connectedness. – Community Member

Embedding and sustaining our approach



Key insights

Our Collective has been operating since 2015 and we have significant insights into the enablers and barriers to driving more effective community development

There are core foundations that enable our approach to community development

Our approach to community development involves a fundamentally different way of working in place and with community. Our experience has highlighted key 'ingredients' that are necessary to do this work

A place-based governance structure that enables the Collective to work as one team

Flexibility to be responsive to local needs and priorities, and emerging opportunities / issues

Adequate time to cultivate relationships and opportunities to earn, build and grow the community's trust

People who are highly skilled at relationship building

Resourcing, enabling and prioritising the inclusion of community voice at every level

Working at scale within a community so you can grow a critical mass of engagement

... but we are often working against the tide

The way our systems currently operate – and the way the programs and initiatives are commissioned, funded and delivered – consistently throw up barriers to this way of working.

Funders don't always 'pay what it takes' - investment focuses on program delivery and doesn't create enough space or resourcing for collaboration, relationship building and supporting/training staff – particularly local staff with lived experience.

Timeframes and expectations are often unreasonable – aspirations for 'co-design' or community voice that don't allow us to work at the community's pace or provide enough time for relationship-building up-front

Programs and initiatives are not tailored to local needs or contexts – a lack of flexibility means they often aren't delivered in the right ways, in the right places, or with the right partnerships for them to be truly effective

Siloed and inflexible funding – we don't always have the flexibility to use our judgement, expertise and local knowledge to use our funding where we know it will have the biggest impact

There are critical changes to the way services are commissioned, funded and delivered that would help embed and sustain an effective community development approach



Commissioning programs in ways that enable and grow community development and mobilisation



Recognising, valuing and actively leveraging the knowledge and relationships held by place-based initiatives like The Hive and partners

Embedding and sustaining our work

Small changes to the way that programs and initiatives are commissioned can create the appropriate time, space and resourcing for effective community development

The way programs and initiatives are commissioned often gets in the way of effective community development and mobilisation. Effective commissioning looks like:



Building in time for community contribution in grant applications

The amount of time available to write grant applications is usually insufficient to meaningfully consult or co-design with community – it takes more than a fortnight to reach out to community members, find a time that works for them, educate them about the context/objectives, and get their input. ‘Co-design’ has become a buzz word and often an expectation from government / philanthropic grants, but tight timeframes ensure it remains tokenistic.



Creating time and capacity for local adaptation

Program design is often set from the outset, with little local consultation or customisation. This makes it harder to:

- Locate the program in the places and spaces that are most accessible / trusted by community – for example, many programs are located in central Mount Druitt, which is a 40 minute bus ride away for many families
- Take local cultural contexts into account. For example, recognising that different family structures and expectations will shape community engagement and uptake.



Paying what it takes

Research shows that there is under-investment in the core of organisations, including in people, capability and infrastructure, which negatively impacts the effectiveness and impact of programs.* Sufficient investments are needed to go beyond ‘delivering a service’ to ‘enabling and mobilising a community’- i.e. to do things like employ and effectively support local staff, to build community into decision-making, to create space for community leadership, to be able to grow capacity in the community.



Ensuring there is time to build relationships and trust in community in grant / delivery expectations

We are often able to start delivering new programs/initiatives immediately because we are known and trusted and make sure what we deliver is aligned with community needs. However, when there are unfamiliar initiatives, new providers and new people, it's necessary to take the time to build relationships and trust, and to reach the right people in community and for word of mouth to spread. Often funders expect delivery at scale in the first 6 months, which isn't feasible or effective.



Focusing on outcomes rather than outputs.

Program guidelines are often restrictively rigid – for example, the eligibility criteria are narrow, the scope of activities tightly prescribed, or the activities misaligned to community needs / cultural ways of working. For example, if our objective is ensuring children attend preschool, the ability to buy shoes, a lunch box and fortnight's groceries might be the thing that makes all the difference.

A focus on outcomes rather than outputs creates the flexibility to tailor the approach for each family, each community – meaning we can deliver support in ways that build trust, align with what families need, and actually improve outcomes.

Enabling and sustaining our work

One of the key opportunities provided by place-based initiatives like The Hive is the wealth of local knowledge, the established trust, the web of relationships and the network of deep collaborations between services. This is an asset that is often under-recognised and underutilised

Initiatives like the Hive deliver more than the sum of their parts. Single programs/initiatives that only tackle one part of the problem or point-in-time support isn't enough – to address entrenched and intergenerational disadvantage, you need an ecosystem in a community that collectively grows capacity not just responds to crisis.

The deep networks built by place-based initiatives like The Hive are a significant, if under-utilised, asset to governments and funders. We have:

- **A wealth of local knowledge** – we know the community's strengths, the drivers of the key issues, and the priorities for change
- **Established trust** – we have invested in building trust with the community, often in the face of decades of disempowerment, and have relationships with the people usually considered 'hard to reach'
- **A web of relationships** – we have strong and trusting relationships within all parts of the community, including knowing the formal and informal community leaders. But we also have extensive relationships with local services, which means we know what is delivered where and by who, and where all the local expertise lies.
- **A network of collaborations** – we have already knitted together collaborations between services, which creates the 'connective tissue' that fills the gaps between siloes and means families are more likely to experience connected, cohesive and targeted support.

This deep and wide network enhances the value of investments into the community because:



Programs/initiatives can be better targeted and aligned to community needs because we know the community, what's needed, and what will work.



Our programs and initiatives will be delivered by people and organisations who already have trust in the bank with community. This is particularly important for the 'hard to reach' group in the community who aren't already engaged with services.



We are able to work holistically and be responsive to the needs/priorities of the whole family. Our network of services and supports, as a whole, works across issues, age ranges, and silos – meaning families can be connected in to other services and get the help they need.

This also means we can work across the life-course of a community. Support isn't a one-off service offering, but a supporting platform there when families need it – growing and strengthen family and community cohesion over time.

Better recognising, valuing and leveraging the assets provided by place-based initiatives like The Hive could deliver:

- **More efficient and effective programs and initiatives – tailored to local needs and contexts**
- **More holistic and connected support**
- **Solutions that actually address the drivers of entrenched, intergenerational disadvantage**
- **Strengthened trust in the service system**
- **Residents who are more confident, capable and connected**