

A photograph of two women and a child at an outdoor cultural event. The woman in the foreground has long braids and is wearing a blue floral top, smiling. Behind her is another woman in a grey sweater. In the bottom right, a young girl is looking down. They are standing near a table with colorful decorations and a woven basket. A white text box is overlaid on the left side of the image.

# **TOGETHER IN WILLMOT** **EVALUATION REPORT**

**Prepared for United Way &  
Jesuit Social Services**

2 November 2020

**Clear Horizon**

## Disclaimer

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## Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the Darug people, the Traditional Custodians of the Darug Nation on which our shared work is happening and pay our respects to Elders, past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the unique cultural and spiritual relationship held by the Darug people to the land and waters of this Nation.

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# Executive Summary and Statement of Achievement

## About the Evaluation Report

The evaluation report presents the findings of a review of the **Together in Willmot** collaboration, covering activities since it began in 2016 to April 2020. **In focus** is the effectiveness, impact, sustainability, and lessons of the initiative.

Together in Willmot is a collective partnership made up of local service providers, community members, government agencies, and businesses in Willmot NSW. Their **broad goal** is: All children in Willmot start school well, with an equal opportunity to learn, be healthy and participate in quality community life. The partners use a place-based collective approach to work together towards this goal and to address the systemic barriers that are holding community-level issues in place.

The driving questions for the co-evaluation by partners were about evaluating the effectiveness and impact of the collaboration's ways of working to date, for the purpose of accountability, understanding, learning and improvement, knowledge generation and as a means to celebrate achievements.

The evaluation report was commissioned by The Hive (United Way Australia) and Jesuit Social Services and was led by Clear Horizon in close partnership with Together in Willmot using a co-evaluation approach. The report is written for the members of the Together in Willmot collaboration, partnering organisations and funders, and some of the stories, case studies and findings may also be of interest to the broader community. Included at the end of this summary is a letter from the Willmot collective.

### *The co-evaluation approach*

'Co-evaluation' refers to the shared and participatory process the evaluation partners undertook, where the questions and plan were co-designed and was grounded in the experience of the cohort at the centre of the work. Most of the primary research was undertaken by local partners, and Clear Horizon provided capability building and support during the process. Shared sense-making processes were done to interpret the collected data and stories from different perspectives. Clear Horizon led the independent review and analysis of the material and developed the final findings.

## Together in Willmot's focus areas and ways of working

Between 2016 and 2020, Together in Willmot has been focusing on the following areas:

- Quality community spaces, activities and support
- Community engagement and connection
- Child and family wellbeing
- Early childhood and school education
- Employment and economic opportunities.



Across the work Together in Willmot has prioritised building a wide range of partnerships, community connection and engagement, designing and delivering programs and activities (and linking up efforts across an extensive number of projects), and working towards influencing policy and systems change. An organic governance structure was developed and is in the process of being formalised.

## Statement of Achievement

### Changes Together in Willmot has contributed to

There is clear evidence that Together in Willmot has contributed to change across 3 levels:

1. Improving the enabling conditions for longer-term change through their collective approach
2. Systems level changes, such as changes in mindset, practice, resource flows, power and relationships
3. Early instances of change for kids, families and the community in Willmot.

These changes resulting from the collaboration were evidenced across projects and focus areas. Some of the significance changes happening include more cohesive engagement and support for families around early childhood learning, upgraded physical spaces like the Willmot playground, community capacity building, and promoting social connection and relationships through regular programs such as school holiday program, Tuesday Breakfast and Coffee Van. (See boxes below and Most Significant Change story at the end of this summary.)

Systems level changes included: some alignment of services; shifts in practice and mindsets/ mental models; sharing of resource; and supporting opportunities for building the capacity of collective. Successful advocacy efforts included with local and state government relationships and a contribution to building the broader place-based movement in Australia through support of ChangeFest 2019.

#### WILLMOT PLAYGROUND UPGRADE

In 2017, the Willmot playground was flagged for an upgrade by Blacktown City Council. Before the upgrade it was not considered a safe or welcoming area. Around that time, Together in Willmot held a Community Forum to get insight into community issues and approx.70 people attended including representation from the local Council. After hearing the issues, the Council did further consultation and Together in Willmot lobbied and worked with Council to secure more resources – so the upgrade would meet community needs. Council allocated more funding and were able to build the new playground, seniors' exercise stations and a full basketball court. The playground upgrade created safe and recreational space for children, families, youth, and residents. The design was influenced by community input and aspirations, and the collaboration's advocacy improved the final outcomes achieved.

#### 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.



## Effectiveness

Together in Willmott has been effective as the partners are working differently and the activities and programs are leading to changes (that align with their theory of change). While the changes are still relatively small scale, this is reasonable given the long term and ambitious nature of the initiative. The extent of effectiveness varies across different aspects of the work. Overall, the collaboration partners participating in the co-evaluation rated their work effective and progressing well on the whole.

The collaboration has been most effective is improving physical spaces, convening activities for routine social connection and developing supportive relationships across organisations to support kids and families in early education.

The co-evaluation also identified areas for improvement for the collaboration moving forward. For example, there was mixed feedback about the extent of inclusiveness of community engagement, which included positive feedback as well as calls for more inclusion of community voice and avenues for community co-leadership. There was good feedback from several First Nations participants involved, however applying 'First Nations First' was widely agreed to be an area for continued improvement.

## Sustainability

The commitment, belief and solid understanding of the work by service providers and involved residents are key strengths for the collaboration' and long-term sustainability. There was a degree of confidence in the short-term resilience of the collaboration. A key theme raised was the perceived vulnerability of Together in Willmott in the longer term, and the need to diversify and formally embed structures that support the work to be by more than 'a small few'.

## Key learnings

There were numerous lessons surfaced, and they reveal the deep and hands on experiential knowledge of place-based work in the Willmott context held by both community and service provider members of the collective. The lessons include insights about the long-term nature of the work and the personal and professional demands, that are both rewarding and exhausting. The importance of organisational buy-in was emphasised by service providers, so that it is not just relational between them as individuals, as well as ensuring they have legitimate capacity to contribute to the work.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, the key recommendations for the next phase of collaborative work are:

1. Develop a **shared communications and engagement strategy** – to scale and diversify the reach of external engagement, and improve information sharing internally.
2. Review **governance arrangements**- with a view to clarify and create formal channels for co-leadership with community, including First Nations co-leadership opportunities.
3. Continued **improvement of practices and working together** – “Ramp it up. Ramp ourselves up. Upskill. Bring diversity of skill.”
4. Develop a shared plan for **understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning** – for regular and shared reflection, evaluation and learning to help to adapt and improve.
5. Refresh the **action plan and priorities** for next 12 months – for clarity and to prioritise any response to feedback such as increasing focus on youth and teenager cohorts.



## Most Significant Change Story

This is one of 13 Most Significant Change stories collected during the research and is included as a rich account of change from the personal perspective of a local resident feeling heard and empowered as a result of Together in Willmot activities and efforts.

### Feeling Heard and Empowered

*I am a single mum with three children who has lived in Willmot for 4 years. When I first moved into Willmot, [I felt] isolated, powerless and depressed until I started volunteering with The Hive. It literally opened up a whole new world. I also work at The Hive and I continue to volunteer in my community, because I am passionate about giving back. My journey within this collective began with a Community Conversation with a staff member, who invited me to volunteer on a Community Clean Up Day. Shortly after that, an employment opportunity at The Hive suited my skill set and I was fortunate enough to get a job there. Because I live and work here, I have two personal investments in this collaboration. The first one is my kids, because my children are growing up here. And regarding working in Willmot, I am always on the ground, so residents feel comfortable to come to me because I am here, and I have earned people's trust. Living and working in Willmot does come with its challenges as the work never ends, but it's good because I am always here when residents need my help.*

*In the last couple of years, I have noticed many changes in Willmot. There is less crime. People feel more connected. Whereas before, people never left their house, now they are out more. There is also an increase in males coming out as well and because there are more things for kids to do, more children are out and about. Relationships are building with the teens too, which means they are less likely to destroy the place.*

*One of the most significant changes for me is the infrastructure; which brings about community connectedness. The playground upgrade, and Hub upgrade has brought more people in to the fold. Before the change, Willmot wasn't very welcoming. The Hub was a dump. The hills in the park were a hot spot for hoons. And the Reserve looked like a tip.*

*I think the change happened by residents sharing their ideas and workers listening to them, like at the forum and [Together in Willmot] meetings. It was important that workers came in and didn't dictate the change. They listened to residents. Community Conversations were also important. They are not just another survey. Workers were on the ground and cared and really wanted to hear what residents think. We saw smaller things starting to happen which built trust and when the park was done up, trust was sealed.*

*People now feel like they are being heard. They feel empowered. And more kids are going to preschool. There are more opportunities for people to volunteer, upskill and find employment. There is a culture of empowering people to find their strengths. I found my strength and today I am an influential member of the Willmot community.*

*This collaboration is a growing piece for me. I'm realising my potential whereas before I didn't think I had any. For this reason, Together in Willmot has increased my self-esteem. People encourage me, empower me, workers listen to me and allow me to contribute. I now have a place in my community, whereas before I was lost.*



## Letter from the Willmot Collective

This evaluation has enabled us to take a moment to pause and reflect, while we celebrate and appreciate the journey we have been on with the community of Willmot. The Together in Willmot collaboration was established in 2016 to cultivate a culture where residents and services work closely together. We accepted an invitation to work in Willmot with a long-term commitment to system change. Rather than simple program development, our strategy is focussed on partnership with local people and the development of a local voice. Millions of dollars have been spent on improving the social service system in Mt Druitt, but for many years, residents feel that there has been no significant change in their community. One in three children start school developmentally disadvantaged and unemployment and crime rates remain much higher than state averages. We have embarked on this work with the awareness that something needs to be different- 'business as usual' will not bring about the change that the community of Willmot is seeking.

It has been a privilege to walk alongside the Willmot community as we seek to listen, understand, and respond to what we hear and genuinely engage in community life. Our commitment from the beginning of this initiative was to leave our egos and our logos at the door and keep the community at the centre of all that we do. This has required us to not only work collaboratively, but with a strong relational and intentional approach. This is in contrast to the usual ways of working that would separate community members from services and services from each other, and in competition with each other. We work to find another way; to create an inclusive culture and we have recognized that no one person, one solution or one organization is the answer.

Working collectively has increased our capacity and ensured our accountability to respond to community aspirations, ideas, and concerns by sharing resources, data, staff and supplies. For example, the Willmot Holiday Club is attended by a dozen organisations, with some facilitating activities, and others helping with the general running of the day. The feedback we have heard is that most residents would not be able to identify one organisation that "runs" the Holiday club, but that this and many other programs belong to everyone, including the community. As a collective, we need to regularly reflect on how we align our organisational agendas, trust that the right people are in the room, manage the tension between resident aspirations and the collaborations ability to deliver them and ensure that everyone's voice is heard. The collaboration is learning by doing; by acknowledging and correcting failures and continually improving upon what is already working well. There have been incredibly important learnings for us, as we have contributed to, and reflected on this evaluation.

Improving the enabling conditions for long term change through the collective approach is at the centrepiece of our work together. We advocate for systems-level change, particularly in instances of change for children, families, and community. As we seek to respond to what it means to have improved the enabling conditions for long-term change in Willmot, we are aware that this report does not signal the end, but the beginning of the journey for us and we have only started to see the possibilities. We acknowledge that this work will require funding sources that understand permanent change and as we look at what is next for us, we recognise that we require long-term, committed funding. Real lasting change takes time and although we can identify quick wins, the real challenge comes with improving outcomes for children to start school well. We move forward at the speed of trust with the awareness that "what got us here, won't get us there".

Sincerely,  
The Willmot Collective

\*\*\*\*\*

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose, scope and overview of the evaluation report

This report presents the findings of the co-evaluation of the Together in Willmot collaboration.<sup>1</sup> It covers from 2016, when Together in Willmot began, to March 2020.

The purpose of the co-evaluation was to review the collaboration's ways of working, and assess the effectiveness and impact of Together in Willmot's suburb-based approach to facilitating change for children, families and community in Willmot. The co-evaluation was done for the purposes of:

- Accountability – to community, each other, and funders.
- Understanding – where the collaboration's efforts are at and tracking this over time.
- Improvement – for evidence-informed decision making and strategic action.
- Knowledge generation – about what works in Willmot and systems change approaches.
- Broader learning and sharing – of relevance to other communities and change makers.



The report was commissioned by The Hive (United Way Australia) and Jesuit Social Services and was conducted by Clear Horizon in close partnership with Together in Willmot. The co-evaluation partners have collected data and stories that evidence the many changes that the collective work is contributing to and have been involved in a process of shared sense-making. Clear Horizon has independently led the analysis process to determine the final findings included in this report.

The report is structured as follows: **Section 1** provides an introduction, **Section 2** summarises the approach and methodology for the 'co-evaluation', **Section 3 and 4** present the key findings, and **Section 5** includes recommendations based on the findings.

## 1.2 Audience

The primary audience of this report are the members of the Together in Willmot collective, as well as the broader organisations and funders of services involved. The secondary audience are Willmot community members and other communities interested in collaborative, place-based work.

## 1.3 Together in Willmot

Willmot is a suburb of Mt Druitt, on the traditional land of the Darug people, north west of Sydney NSW.

Together in Willmot is a collaboration that began with The Hive (collective impact initiative). The Hive began its work in Mount Druitt in 2015, calling all service providers who were interested to work collectively for the benefit of service users and residents of the suburbs within the 2770 postcode. The aim was to improve outcomes for communities by facilitating coordination and collaboration amongst local service providers, community members, government agencies, and businesses. Together in

<sup>1</sup> The evaluation design was co-developed with the Together in Willmot team and members of The Hive and Jesuit Social Services and has utilised a participatory approach that we refer to as "co-evaluation". Evaluation involves the systematic collection of relevant, credible and useful information for making decisions and taking strategic actions.

Willmot is a collaboration that came from this broader work in 2016. (See separate document '2019 Willmot Community Profile' for suburb data and statistics; and this [short video](#) overviewing of the work.)

Together in Willmot is a collective made up of local service providers, community members, government agencies, and businesses. The collaboration involves a core group services, including The Hive (United Way Australia), Jesuit Social Services, BaptistCare HopeStreet, Willmot Public School, Child, Salvation Army, and Connect Child and Family Services as well as Willmot community members. Other services are also involved in the work, including Fusion Youth, Story Factory, Blacktown City Council, and many more (see Section 3.1 and Annex 1).

### Shared goal of Together in Willmot

**All children in Willmot start school well, with an equal opportunity to learn, be healthy and participate in quality community life.**



The overarching shared goal of Together in Willmot is to provide the necessary support to families so that children aged 0-5 years old start school well (see Annex 2 for the Theory of Change). Aligned with Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) domains, this means being loved and safe, having material basics, being healthy, learning, participating and supportive systems and environments. Over the years of the collaboration, it has maintained a strong focus on providing early childhood supports and has expanded to provide holistic support to families based on an understanding that this will ensure more sustainable outcomes for children.

The work is driven by community needs, concerns and aspirations identified through an extensive community consultation process in 2017, involving hundreds of conversations (see box to right), as well as ongoing formal and informal conversations.

To support the desired social change, the collaboration aims to enhance community cohesion, build the capacity of Willmot residents to advocate and drive change, as well as to remove the barriers that exist so that families and other community members can participate in society and take up opportunities.

*The residents of Willmot want to feel safe and live in a community that is clean, but they're concerned that kids have nothing to do, disengaged youth bully people and that no sense of community are getting in the way of achieving those aspirations. As people talk about those concerns, they talk specifically about drug and alcohol abuse, a lack of services, the look and feel of Willmot e.g. graffiti, rubbish etc. Residents believe we need to focus on a greater Police presence, Council cleaning up the area and more things for kids to do and if Council, The School, The Police and Elders played a part in those actions, residents would be more likely to trust the effort.*

*Created in February 2017 as a result of 18 months of community conversations with residents undertaken by The Hive*



## 2 Summary of the co-evaluation approach

### 2.1 Key Evaluation and Learning Questions

The key evaluation and learning questions (KEQs) encompass the ‘big’ questions we aimed to answer. The KEQs sit within the focus areas of change, effectiveness, lessons, and principles/ ways of working.

#### What we wanted to know about

The areas of interest for the inquiry and report focus on Together in Willmot’s:

- Principles and ways of working
- Changes for children, families and community
- Changes in the ‘systems’ and in conditions for longer term changes in Willmot
- Effectiveness
- Key learnings

The key evaluation questions addressed in this report include:

- **What has Together in Willmot been working on and how is the collective working together?**
  - Activities and engagement
  - Extent are Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together to strengthen local community
  - Governance and leadership
- **What changes are Together in Willmot contributing to?**
  - Improving the conditions for longer term change
  - Early signs of impact for children, young people, adults, and families in Willmot
- **How effective has Together in Willmot been during this period?**
- **What are key learnings about Together in Willmot?**
  - About their approach and how they work together
  - About progress and results so far
  - About their sustainability



### 2.2 Co-evaluation Methodology

#### Approach and our planning

The design and plan for answering these key questions was co-developed by the Together in Willmot team, with significant input from members of The Hive and Jesuit Social Services, and Clear Horizon.

The approach drew on the knowledge of people with deep understanding of the project, the people involved, and its dynamic layers. It involved taking a 360 degree look around the activities and partners involved and included a diverse range of perspectives. Local partners played a very active role in data collection and sense-making.

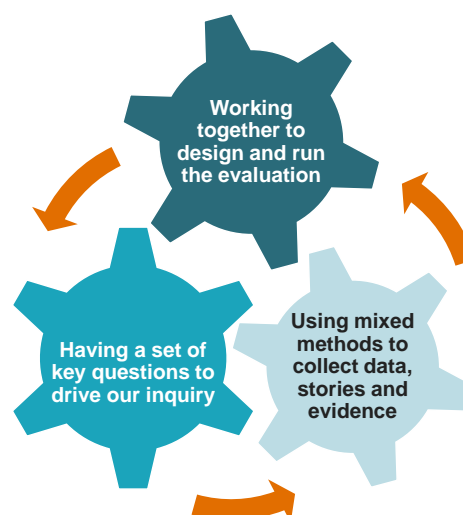
**We have referred to this participatory and holistic approach as “co-evaluation”.**



## Doing the research together

The data collection methods aimed to bring together data, stories, and evidence to address the key evaluation questions. Mixed methods were used including surveys, interviews, the Most Significant Change technique, focus groups, progress mapping, and document reviews. As part of the process Together in Willmot members completed training in 'Most Significant Change' story collection and conducted substantial primary and secondary research.

We used a theory-based approach, evaluating progress against Together in Willmot's theory of change and used tools including Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) and the Ripple Mapping Tool.<sup>2</sup>



Data and stories were collected between August 2018 and May 2020. A total of 37 people contributed their views, with several participating in numerous data collection activities. Participants included 19 workers from various services and 18 residents (note: some staff are also residents of Willmot). The research includes voices of First Nations partners and participants.

**Table 1 Summary of data collection methods and research participants**

Method	Number of participants	Who collected?
<b>Semi structured interviews</b>	17	Together in Willmot
	19	Clear Horizon
<u>Most Significant Change stories</u>	13	Together in Willmot
<b>Focus group</b>	1 focus group with 10 participants	Clear Horizon
<b>Ripple Mapping Tool</b>	1 focus group with 9 participants	Together in Willmot
<u>Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT)</u>	15	Together in Willmot
<b>Document review</b>	26	Clear Horizon

## Shared sense making

Two workshops were held in April and May 2020 to facilitate shared sense-making of the findings and to co-create recommendations. The online workshops (during the COVID-19 restrictions) involved substantial effort by all partners and participants to make the experience accessible, user-friendly, and participatory. The 'What we heard; what do you think?' workshops were held with members of Together in Willmot and residents. There were 23 participants at the first workshop and 14 participants at the second.



Clear Horizon has led the overall analysis and has independently produced the final findings.

<sup>2</sup> The Ripple Mapping Tool is a progress mapping rubric for collective impact, with a focus on First Nations.

## 2.3 Challenges of evaluating Together in Willmot's place-based approach

Place-based approaches are complex and have characteristics that make them more challenging to evaluate than standard, less complex initiatives. Some of the challenges include:

- Place-based approaches tend to have numerous stakeholders, projects and timeframes.
- The focus on the activities and outcomes may change over time, making it harder to compare results at the end to baseline data.
- With so many factors at play, it can be difficult to attribute outcomes to the place-based approach.
- Initiatives can focus on many levels of change, including changes for children and families as well as systemic changes that address the conditions that can hold problems in place.
- Expert knowledge and high-level data may be at odds with local knowledge and what's seen on the ground.

To address these challenges we have kept consistent with the recommended approach included in the Place-based Evaluation Framework (Dart, 2018) that sets out steps and minimum requirements to evaluating place-based approaches.<sup>3</sup> As summarised in the previous section, we have used a participatory approach that included the voices of diverse stakeholders, used a theory-based approach and focused on outcomes where the collaboration's contribution has been evidenced.

## 2.4 Limitations

Together in Willmot involves many stakeholders, change-makers, and diverse cohorts of potential beneficiaries. While stakeholder engagement and participation in the research aimed to represent a mix of organisations, roles and multi-cultural perspectives, the outreach data collection was limited compared to the scope and scale of the overall initiative (which involves many distinct projects and cohorts). The data collection has relied mainly on qualitative data collection, supplemented by quantitative data provided by Together in Willmot. Context and suburb data (publicly available population level data) has been reviewed as part of this co-evaluation however has not been included in this report, as contribution analysis to causally trace any suburb level trends with the collaboration's work was out of scope, and Together in Willmot have a snapshot of context data already included in their 2019 Willmot Community Profile.

During the time of the final leg of data collection and the shared sense-making process, COVID-19 responses and restrictions meant that some partners and participants had competing pressures and constraints on their participation in the research. While we all worked well to adapt and keep connected during this time, the face-to-face opportunities for reflection during the analysis phase needed to be modified from the original plan.



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<sup>3</sup> Dart, J. 2018. *Place-based Evaluation Framework: A national guide for evaluation of place-based approaches*, report, Commissioned by the Queensland Government Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS) and the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS).

### 3 Key Findings: Ways of working and impact

This is the first of two sections that present the key findings from the co-evaluation. See Section 4 also.

#### Summary of findings about Together in Willmot ways of working and impact

##### Key activities, focus areas and ways of working

Together in Willmot has had the following focus areas:

- Quality community spaces, activities and support
- Community engagement and connection
- Child and family wellbeing
- Early childhood and school education
- Employment and economic opportunities.

Across the work Together in Willmot has prioritised building a wide range of partnerships, community connection and engagement, designing and delivering programs and activities (and linking up efforts across an extensive number of projects), and working towards influencing policy and systems change. An organic governance structure was developed and is in the process of being formalised.

Through implementing their model of collaboration Together in Willmot has contributed to building the enabling conditions for longer term change via the emergent and strengthening collective approach and way of working together across the organisations and with residents.

While across the work there were several areas identified for ongoing improvement, overall the collaboration members were positive and invested in the work, and the way of working. There was mixed feedback about the extent of inclusiveness of community engagement, which included positive feedback as well as calls for greater inclusion of community voice and avenues for more community co-leadership. There was good feedback from several First Nations participants involved, however applying 'First Nations First' was widely agreed to be an area for continued improvement.

##### Changes that Together in Willmot has contributed to

Outcomes were seen across projects and focus areas, with notable changes resulting from the cross-partner collaboration to support engagement with families around early childhood learning, improving physical spaces like the Willmot playground, and facilitating social connection through regular programs such as school holiday program, Tuesday Breakfast and Coffee Van.

Systems level changes included: some alignment of services; shifts in practice and mindsets/ mental models; sharing of resource; and supporting opportunities for building the capacity of collective. Successful advocacy efforts included with local and state government lobbying that has led to outcomes such as increasing access to early childhood learning, and securing of investment.

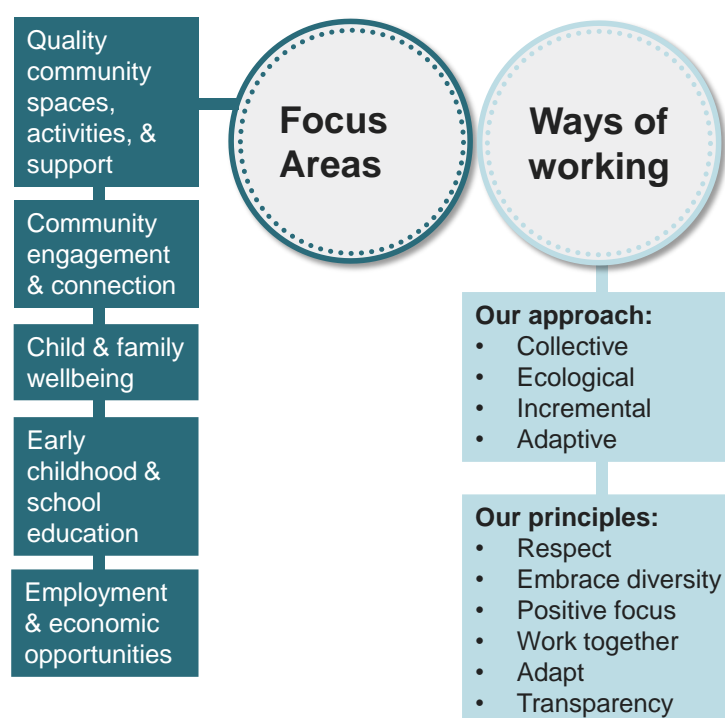
Aligned with the theory of change, and as is reasonable to expect for this phase, Together in Willmot is seeing some early instances of impact for kids, families and in community. The data and stories evidenced changes for some participants, including feeling safer and a greater sense of community, an experience of improved community connection and engagement, and there were many examples of capacity and capability development for community and professional leaders. Some small gains were made in opening up employment and opportunities for volunteers to participate. There was evidence of improved linkages between partners that support pre-school enrolment, attendance and school attendance, and anecdotal evidence for instances of improved social behaviour for some children/ program participants.

### 3.1 Focus areas, key activities and ways of working

This section provides a broad overview of Together in Willmot's focus areas and activities, as well as the ways of working and how they are building the enabling conditions for change.

#### Focus areas and ways of working

The research highlighted where efforts have been focused, and the ways Together in Willmot have been working together. These aligned with the strategies and approach that the collaboration set out to implement, and are summarised visually below.



Across the work, Together in Willmot has prioritised:

- Building a wide range of partnerships
- Developing a transparent and supportive governance structure
- Undertaking inclusive community connection and engagement
- Designing, delivering and linking up programs and activities
- Strategic learning
- Advocacy, influencing policy and a systems change approach

Each is described briefly below, covering the key themes supported by quotes.





## Partnerships and working collaboratively

Together in Willmot contains wide-ranging partnerships – including a core group of ‘hands on’ collaborative partners and a wider network – working towards the broader goal. The collaboration consists of core partners, and a wider range of organisational partners (service providers), community groups, education representatives and residents (see Figure 1 and Annex 1).

# PARTNERSHIPS TOGETHER IN WILLMOT

### Collaborators

Jesuit Social Services  
BaptistCare HopeStreet  
United Way Australia (The Hive)  
Willmot Public School  
Connect Child & Family Services  
Salvation Army  
Willmot Residents

### Wider Collaborators

Department of Communities and Justice, Fusion Western Sydney, Youth Off The Streets, Bidwill Uniting, Our Lady of Consolation, Willmot Community Group, Lead, Sydney Story Factory, The Smith Family, Kids Early Learning Willmot, Willmot Shops, Mission Australia, Western Sydney Community Legal Service, Australian Drug Foundation, Holos Consulting, Centrelink, Western Sydney University, Blacktown City Council, Royal Botanic Gardens, Blacktown Area Community Centres Inc., Catholic Care, Nutty Knitters, Lend Lease, NSW Health, Springwood Baptist Church, Shalvey High School, IAG, Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation, Holy Family Parish

### Supporters

Afford Employment, Filipino Chaplaincy, Chatswood Parish, Tongan Church, Takelauan Church, Barnados Australia, Always Kingdom Church, Loyaloa Senior High School, Australian Catholic University, St Columbia High School, Natural Home Solutions, Long Life Plumbing, Nettleton Tribe, Aboriginal Centre of Excellence, Our Lady of the Way, North Sydney, Catherine McAuley Girls High School, Marist Brothers Secondary College Westmead, St Aloysius College Milsons Point, St Ignatius College Riverview, Gilroy College Castle Hill

**Figure 1 Partnerships in Together in Willmot**

### Blurring the lines

One of the themes identified was how organisations and individuals are working together for shared outcomes across conventional organisational/service boundaries and this has led to a ‘blurring of the lines’. Partners are working together to link up referrals, individual organisations not being focused on taking credit for work, pooling resources, avoiding strong solo branding, presenting a collective front, and being part of the community. This has led to several benefits, including ‘warm’ referrals between services, reducing the need for people to tell their story many times over, and giving people many avenues to access support in ways that best suit them. These quotes describe this theme further.

*"We blur the lines between organisations so that the residents and families come into focus."* – Service worker

*"I think blurring the lines between organisations is a principle that we tend to talk about a lot. So this ... reduces the stigma and the ‘them and us’ kind of aspect of working... it’s an intentional act that I think is a key principle."* – Service worker

Community members spoke about how this has made them feel included, treated equally and respected (see case study in Annex 4). However, not having clear lines between services has, on occasion, meant that residents felt confused about who they’ve talked to and who is providing help, and at times like they have been “passed around a bit” and could potentially fall through the cracks and not receive support. Confidentiality was also mentioned as a potential issue when lines are blurred.

## Collaboration Health

The Collaboration Health Assessment Tool (CHAT) is an online self-assessment tool that allows collaborations to get a snapshot of the health of the collaboration based on the perceptions of members of the collective. It was completed by 15 members of the Together in Willmot collective for the co-evaluation. CHAT focuses on eight key dimensions of collaboration: shared goal, shared resources, shared authority, shared accountability, whole system engagement, communications flows, building adaptive capability, and holding/authorising environment.

Significantly, one of the highest ratings was that people surveyed reported that they feel that working in the collaboration is worthwhile. Even the aspects ranking at the lower end of spectrum were still over 3 out of 6 (50%) i.e. none were critically low. Areas ranked highest by participants were:

- Community needs to inform the collaboration's responses.
- Partners understand why collaboration is required to address the problem.
- The collaboration has a clearly defined problem that it seeks to address.
- There is a regular practice of reflection for continuous learning.
- Within the collaboration there is the required skills and expertise to achieve goals.
- Their organisation feels that participating in the collaboration is worthwhile.

Participants ranked the collaboration as above average in all areas; however, the areas they ranked themselves as lowest were:

- The collaboration has a system in place to measure progress towards shared goals.
- The collaboration has a system in place to evaluate how well our collaboration is performing.
- The collaboration has an external communication strategy to help achieve its goals.
- Communication among partners is effective (promotes understanding, cooperation, and transfer of information).
- This collaboration has designed a safe environment in which disagreements and conflicts between members can be discussed.
- We can access the data we need.



## Governance and leadership

The governance structure for the collaboration has developed organically and is in the process of being formalised. Improving the governance is seen by members as “a crucial piece of work for the health of the collective and really for the sustainability of the collective”. Combined, the partnerships approach, governance structure and core leaders create the ‘container for change’ for the initiative.

While there are no clearly defined roles within the group, some core members said that they “all know who to go to and who's leading in different directions”. Regarding decision making, there are no formal processes, but a general understanding that decisions are discussed and agreed upon together.

We heard that while this generally works well, some inefficiencies are noted and it's a known area with plans for review. While the governance structure has evolved to respond to the needs of this first phase of collaboration, there was feedback from several collaboration members that the governance arrangement is "not well defined or articulated" and needed ways to ensure residents' voice is driving decisions. The following quotes offer further insight:

*"There's that circle of networks that's very hard to tap in unless you're part of it. ...sometimes I get the impression that if you don't belong in that circle you've got no chance of even being heard."* – Community member

*"...that's another big challenge when it comes to governance as well. Even like ensuring the resident voice is not just in like hearing their voice but them shaping the decisions and shaping how we allocate funds and allocate time and the agenda."* – Service worker

While there was agreement that community voice should inform decision making, there were different views on what this would look like.<sup>4</sup> Some participants said that diversifying the core group of organisations leading the collective through the governance structure would help to bring in more resources and reduce any power imbalances that come from having a small group of leaders.

### **Inclusive community connection, engagement and participation**

Many strengths were identified about the communications and community engagement of the collaboration. It is also noted as an ongoing area for improvement (as is the case for all movement building initiatives), and there are opportunities to deepen, diversify and scale engagement and participation moving forward. The key themes arising were that the collaboration is keen to make co-leadership more inclusive for First Nations Peoples, listen and be guided by community aspirations, and improve processes so that power dynamics are addressed and all feel empowered to participate.

### **Communications**

Communications happen in formal and informal ways, between partners and with and between community and broader stakeholders. Many research participants stated that communicates internally and externally are done well, however there were also several issues.

Areas identified as working well included debriefing collective activities, consistent sharing of Together in Willmot meeting minutes, and providing opportunities for people to feed into meetings when they are unable to attend. There were many instances of positive feedback on the communications efforts, including this comment from a community member: "I reckon they're spot on with keeping the community informed and offering services here and there."

A few participants raised the following issues. First, there are times when not all stakeholders receive all relevant information, as much of the communication happens informally. Second, some members of the collective said that there have been occasions where there was not clear communication within the group about what individual services were working on, which resulted in doubling-up of activity (however it was acknowledged that these issues were easily resolved).

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<sup>4</sup> For example, there were suggestions of a community leadership group that sits above the Together in Willmot group but also concerns that this might create an unnecessary power imbalance within the community that is not currently there.

## ***Inclusion of community voice, listening and supporting community leadership***

Overwhelmingly, there is a commitment by the members of the collaboration to be inclusive of diverse and authentic community voices and input. This includes putting the community at the centre of the work and being guided by community, as well as having community be involved in decision-making. The following quotes provide examples.

*"Engage the whole of community – for them to lead change, make sure their voice is at the centre of community."* – Service worker

*"Our key values would be that the voice of the community is at the centre of our work and that the work that we do is guided by them, not by our agendas. I think that's really central to what we hope to - the way that we hope to work. In doing that, also making sure that we are building capacity in the community, not coming in and running things ourselves."* – Service worker

There are many ways, both formally and informally, that community voice has been collected to date to inform collective work, including through Community Conversations, community forums, meetings and during activities and programs. Following through with practical things in response to what they community have said is needed (e.g. creating the School Holiday Program, having clean-up days, influencing the new playground being built) is considered to be a way to gain the community's trust and demonstrating that input has been heard.

We heard mixed feedback from community on how well community engagement is being experienced. For example, one community member stated that they felt they were asked for input but they were not seeing that taken on board and 'they still end up going their own way'. Several participants stated that this is an area that is evolving, and that people are starting to share their views more as they are seeing the services starting to listen and "the barriers" starting to break down.

The positive feedback indicated that for other community members they are feeling included, listened to, and that they are seeing a change in service responses. These quotes give some examples.

*"Local services do well, they do listen. They now have - they have the forum every year... They've asked the community what they want and the community's voiced their opinion. They've reacted and responded in regards to those and things are moving forward in a positive way... The community is much better off for it and the way of life within the community is a lot better off because of it."* - Community member

*"[The services] do listen to what we have to say... anything that I've brought up, you take it on board. We will talk about things. You always include us. [Interviewee gives an example of how the workers responded to their activity ideas] – you did it straightaway. There wasn't a problem."* – Community member

While there was good feedback from several First Nations participants, this was an area that most participants identified as an area for continued improvement (for engagement and co-leadership). Many participants noted that only part of the Willmot community is engaged by the collective, limiting the perspectives heard by them. This is an identified area for improvement and a refresh of the engagement approach has been planned to try to overcome this and will be implemented post-COVID19.



## First Nations inclusion

### Working together with First Nations Peoples – A statement from the collective

Working in a community with a high Aboriginal population and high disadvantage has challenged most of us to better understand our roles, our privilege, and our position as workers.

At the corner of Richmond Rd and Rooty Hill Rd in neighbouring Marsden Park, is the heritage listed site of “The Blacktown Native Institution.” Young Aboriginal and Maori children were removed and placed there. The site represents a place of organised displacement and cultural genocide. In 2018 an art project was placed on this site “Ngara – Ngurangwa Byallara” (Listen, hear, think – The place speaks). This artwork is a reminder for us to pause and reflect on our practice.

We are aware that our work in Willmot exists on a long continuum of interventions and responses to First Nations Peoples. Like so many before us, some non-indigenous members of the collective have approached the work with their own assumptions, privileges, practices and the colonizing history deeply imbedded in their own listening and thinking. The collective is learning but we acknowledge a need for more intentionality in decolonising our practices and increasing our self-awareness around cultural differences, privilege, unconscious bias and assumptions. This intentionality coupled with being fiercely place based where our actions and consequences are visible for all to see – we hope will lead to further accountability

We see the importance of being trustworthy. Recently discussions around a more self-reflective posture of trustworthiness has emerged. We acknowledge that the onus is on the collective to be and demonstrate trustworthiness. Several years of engagement does not equalise 200 years of eroded trust.

“Non-Indigenous people must strive to be trustworthy (and enter into constructs for enforcing this), but not expect to be trusted in return. This acknowledges our colonizing past and present, as well as the riskiness of trust across colonizing power differences.” (Land, Clare. decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles (p. 132). Zed Books)

As we create the conditions for collaboration, we strive for better ways of working alongside First Nations Peoples. We will continue a culture of collaboration that blurs the lines, reducing the “them and us” and the insidious but subtle “othering” that occurs with such demarcation lines. We acknowledge that our shapes of organising need to consider First Nations Peoples by increasing our adaptive and flexible ways of working, continually reflecting on what is working for First Nations Peoples and the wider community, not necessarily what is practical or efficient for organisations.

#### Being here (self- reflection)

- We actively address colonial assumptions, practices, bias and complicity in continuing injustice.
- Being on the ground – consistent, present and radically relational.
- Learning the posture methods and approaches that develop trust.

#### Being trustworthy (accountability)

- Being available, flexible and developing a track record. Relationships that are transparent.
- Following through, implementing feedback, and communicating openly.
- Engagement prioritising over programs.
- Transparent practices.

#### Being together (solidarity)

- Working together, acknowledging and addressing power differentials.
- Local leadership by First Nations Peoples.
- Being adaptive and flexible.
- Creating decentralised flexible working group relationships that accommodate community members (even if these groups are less practical for workers).
- Resisting fragmentation and displacement.

## What is working well

The findings indicated that Together in Willmot values acknowledging and improving the way it works with First Nations Peoples. Some service workers also articulated that putting First Nations Peoples at the forefront of the collective's efforts are crucial to working effectively, which has a strong Aboriginal community. One service worker called it a "core priority for us as individuals and as organisations", while another said "acknowledging the traditional owners of the land and working with them and listening to them is valued and important if we are truly going to work in this community."

From the stories collected, there was consistent feedback from local Aboriginal people that the activities run through the Hub and the collective work have provided capacity building opportunities and positive role models for their community. These two quotes from Aboriginal Elders highlight this.

*"A lot of our women have developed their skills, confidence and mindset thanks to the Hub... We also needed positive role modelling of people that our children need to see, especially for our boys and young men. The men that are at the Hub are good, positive men who are good role models, who are respectful of women, not abusive, and are hardworking and humorous."*

*"There are a lot of women from Willmot itself that are being involved and giving themselves somewhere to go and having self-worth... It's not just a hub it's a gathering place... There have been Aboriginal families in Willmot for a long time. I believe it's changing and kids aren't getting in trouble like they used to because they have that place to go and hang out."*

## Collaboration with First Nations organisations

The data and stories collected demonstrated emerging collaboration between Together in Willmot and First Nation organisations in the community. While individual organisations may work more deeply with First Nations organisations and Elders, this was not always perceived to be part of the collective work. The most noted collaboration was with Baabayn, although one comment indicated that this collaboration is not highly visible: "I definitely can see the collaboration with Baabayn and I kind of feel like I get little bits of that through conversation... it feels a bit mysterious, it's a bit nebulous, a bit unknown". Another staff member mentioned that of the groups relevant to the collective's work "I think we are doing what we can", while others were of a differing opinion, saying that there's a long way to go and that "there are other services out there we're keen to collaborate with 100%", mentioning Marrin Weejali, the AMS, Yatarban and other community members.

## First Nations First

Throughout the data collected, there was a consistent theme that the members of the collective were trying to take a "First Nations first" approach, while acknowledging that there is a significant amount of work to be done. One member of the collective said: "First Nations first is something that we've been really trying to prioritise in all of the work that we're doing". This reflected the sentiment of many from the collaboration, that while progress has been made, it was still a significant area to improve. Comments included that it is "a continual agenda item of how to do better", and, "I think the collective is really trying... to overcome our own privilege and our own mindsets that are counterproductive to creating cultural safety... But I just feel like we're still a long way."

The feedback indicated that First Nations co-leadership is not yet elevated at the forefront of the collective and several service providers acknowledged the need to divest their own power so that "First Nations residents and [communities] can step into and rise into more leadership". One staff member

commented that despite the strong Aboriginal community in the area, “in real terms, the power and the strength and the primacy of First Nations voice in the collective, I think, is not that strong”.

### **Being heard**

There is some indication that First Nations voice is being heard and valued, although it is difficult to be conclusive from small amount of opinions collected, particularly from First Nations Peoples themselves. In the Ripple Mapping exercise, there were mixed opinions about whether “the collective listens to First Nations Peoples and does things differently if they aren’t working”, with responses suggesting that this is beginning to happen. One Aboriginal community member interviewed commented: “when you do go to their meetings, you are included because they put things up on the board and then they ask you, they give you sticky notes, that’s how you get included because you know you’re getting heard. You get to write these things down; you get to have your say...I remember going to one of the meetings and always being asked to be included”.

However, there were also comments from other Aboriginal people that felt the consultations were inconsistent and they do not always feel culturally safe to speak up. Regarding being heard, one worker said: “some local Aboriginal don’t feel it. So if they don’t feel it, whether we are doing it or not, maybe it needs to be done better.” Another staff member suggested the need to “create more structures for us to be able to listen clearly and then let them [know] - so the community should know that we’ve listened and integrated that listening into our work.” This suggests listening to First Nations Peoples needs to become more consistent and embedded, and that feedback loops need closing. Continuing to improve cultural safety was also seen as an important part of being able to hear from Aboriginal people in the community.

### **Programs and activities**

As shown in Together in Willmot’s Theory of Change (Annex 2), the activities and programs run by the collective are delivered as part of the plan to achieve higher-level change. Through the interviews and stories, we heard community members and service workers talk about most of the programs listed in the Theory of Change and that these activities are bringing people together (See Section 3.2 and Annex 4). The school holiday program was given as an example of a program that was set up and delivered collaboratively in response to a request from the community, where the process of doing so helped the group refine how to work together effectively. The following quote elaborates:

*“I think the school holiday program was really important in flexing our collective muscle. It’s where we listened to a request from the community. ...We pooled our resources and we produced something together...that added value to us because it helped us work out how we work together collectively, and I feel like it showed us – it gave us a good model of how to work together. – Staff, from wider partnerships within collaboration*

The Hub, while not a program, was also cited as a collective work: “All of us contribute to the operation of it, how it’s managed and how it’s staffed. So that’s a collective project.” Participants reported the dramatic change that has happened in growing the Hub, which went from being an empty space to being regularly frequented and creating more access to social workers, and professional support.

Another example of cross-organisation collaboration can be seen in the Early Years efforts, led by The Hive and linked with Together in Willmot (see example in Section 3.2). One of several projects, the Early Learning Linker includes working with families to overcome the often-complex barriers to accessing childcare. This includes subsidising childcare bonds, helping families obtain documents required by the centre (i.e. Birth Certificates), negotiating on behalf of families when children might be excluded due to non-payment (which includes providing financial assistance or financial guarantee), and providing information to families about childcare options and subsidies they may be eligible for. The linker role

partners with other services, specifically place-based caseworkers from Baptistcare HopeStreet, to offer responsive and flexible support where families are experiencing complex circumstances broader to the barriers associated with access to childcare. Working collaboratively alongside families provides a coordinated approach to support and helps to strengthen the condition for change and build capacity for individuals and families to pursue their goals.

Between the collaborative partners, activities include, but are not limited to:

- Tuesday breakfast
- Kids Days
- Kids Kits
- Before-and after-school care
- School holiday program
- Clean-up days
- Community Conversations
- Volunteering, traineeships, and employment opportunities
- Youth activities
- Adopt-A-Park
- Suburb Welcome Kits
- Casework
- Coffee events/afternoon
- Weekend engagement
- Knitting group
- Movie nights
- Preschool enrolment support
- NAIDOC festival
- Music Festivals
- Willmot Community Kitchen
- CUBS (check-ups before school health screening project)
- Various community events, e.g. Christmas festival
- Food Hampers
- ChangeFest
- Systemic advocacy
- Healthy Food Project
- Community Dinners
- Community Forums

**Feedback for future activities included:** \*\* There was a call that more activities for youth and teenagers is needed, as well as courses and programs to help with career pathways for Aboriginal teenagers (held in Willmot at local venues). \*\* Call to invest in genuine, meaningful, and ongoing engagement activities and more than one-off events like NAIDOC or Icarus.



## Strategic learning

Several members of the collective expressed they put a priority on continuously learning, improving and adapting the way the group works together. The core collaboration members demonstrated a strong commitment to and delivery of strategic learning during the course of the co-evaluation, and it was evidenced in the interviews. There is evidence that reflection and an active learning stance is part of the Together in Willmot culture. Once cited example is debriefing after collective activities and implementing changes to improve on delivery is part of the way of working together. The following quote explains:



*"We debrief most things we do, if not all. Through that process of debriefing we ask: 'What worked well? What should we do differently? What should we continue? What should we celebrate?' As we ponder those four concepts, we often come out with ways to improve or change our delivery. So yeah, everything is constantly fluid and it's an ongoing process of learning." – Service worker*

Collective training and capacity building were also a key theme with cultural awareness, child protection, and trauma-informed practices cited as examples of training completed together.

## Influencing policy and systems change

Systems change is about advancing equity by shifting the conditions that hold a problem in place. It supports the work towards the shared agenda and needs all partners to be prepared to see how their own ways of thinking and acting must change as well.

The collective works towards achieving sustainable, systems level change in Willmot. This includes systemic advocacy, such as lobbying and advocating to local and state government (see box below for an example), building relationships with key agencies, changing the way services approach their work, and through broader movement building activities, like hosting ChangeFest 2019. It was acknowledged by collaborators as an important and necessary part of their work, as shown in this quote:

*"We have leaders amongst us whose role it is to advocate and lobby system makers for any key gaps in the service system or indeed the physical infrastructure or even the curriculums that have been adopted in either programs or school." – Service worker*

## 3.2 Changes at the 'systems level' that the collaboration has contributed to

### Key changes in systems and services

Some of the systems-level outcomes that the collaboration has contributed to include: shifts in the practice of service providers and service referrals processes; changes in how resources are being shared and deployed between organisations, and attracting investment; advocacy and policy changes such as via the work with Blacktown City Council on the playground, Adopt-A-Park, pre-school bonds and access, and advocacy with state government. People reported experiencing and observing changed mindsets and some shifts in power were also recorded.

The following sections provide more detail about the systemic changes starting to happen.

### Changes from aligning services, joining up and creating access

Staff from various services spoke about benefits of having a collective, joined up approach for both their own service delivery and for the community. Changes for providers included increased access to potential clients, being able to make warm referrals for clients to relevant services and having a better offering for community through combined resources. The following quote shows some of the benefits.

*"It's being able to grow our service, it's being able to build relationships within the community, contacts at the school, supporting families... Those outcomes are extremely positive because without those contacts, I possibly wouldn't have had anybody around to support the families. I would have to source those other stakeholders out of area." – Service worker*

Increased support for children and families was identified as a key area that the collective way of working has had an impact on. Community members spoke about being able to attend the Hub or certain activities to receive support, attend activities and participate in their community.

*"The most significant change I have witnessed is the support that families receive. The people at the Hub are there for local residents who need support and guidance with dealing with family related matters."* – Community member

Community activities run by the collective have provided an informal way for services to connect with parents, and the combined work and resources of various services has assisted with preparing children to start school and inform planning. The collaboration was also able to work together to provide support around families to onboard them into school, as this quote describes:

*"There was so much work that took place to identify the kids in the community that were starting school this year and trying to get those kids serviced in terms of health, check-ups and the like ...all the things that people need when they come to school for the very first time that often our families don't have. Often we're in the dark... there was a really strong program in place to identify those families and work with families to help them come on board in kindergarten this year."* – Service worker

## Changes in practices and service response

The research showed a clear shift from a programmatic focus to place-based and integrated strategies between organisations. This included programs being run as a strategic way to better engage community members, services working out how to collectively respond to what they are hearing from the community (e.g. creating the School Holiday Program) and services working to achieve community aims broader than their organisational or programmatic outcomes. This has been enabled by internal advocacy within some organisations to be able to work in a different way than the organisation's traditional approach.

Service providers self-reported that they are seeing changes in how they approach and deliver their service and are trying to improve how they listen and respond to community. This includes how planning and decision-making is done, and the practice of taking a systems approach to inform service design and delivery to improve alignment and reduce doubling up. The following quote provides an example:

*"[A service] came up with an idea externally about how they could work in Willmot, and then they approached the school and told the school that they were going to do it. We all actually approached the [service] and talked to them about how we thought it could work, and they changed their model of how they were going to work in Willmot after a series of long conversations with all of us, with the collective, about how it would be effective, how they would get the best outcome, sharing what we'd learnt about the families that we worked with, and how it could contribute as part of a whole rather than be something that was plonked in to a community."* – Service worker

## Resource Flows

Many service workers interviewed spoke about how working together has changed resource flows in Willmot. This includes organisations pooling resources (such as staff, funding, and asset use) to achieve collective goals as well as attracting in new partners to work in the area. The flow of information and data between services and to and from the community is another change cited that contributed to improved engagement and connection activities like the Together in Willmot working group, community forums, and informal conversations while attending community activities. This quote shows the power of information sharing and building on the collective work:

*"Part of that policy work has actually brought some pretty amazing NGOs onto the scene. ... instead of them coming in with, okay, this is a disadvantaged area and this is what we need to do, we actually tell them this is what needs to happen... So I think the collective is very strong in helping those bigger organisations to be able to resource what we would like to do in that area as well. So we're definitely steering the ship in terms of what services work and work collectively in the area and therefore more strongly for community as well." – Service worker*

## Advocacy

There are many examples of effective advocacy work by Together in Willmot. This included advocacy to: Blacktown City Council on issues such as lowering the fees for preschool bonds which were preventing some families from accessing early education (see box below), and successfully lobbying Council to commit extra resources to the playground upgrade (see Annex 5); and state government regarding

### Early wins for Early Years

**The Early Years projects** in Willmot, facilitated by The Hive Backbone team, draws on research by the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) and community input. It is part of the broader 2770 postcode work to improve early childhood learning outcomes for kids, and within Willmot it is supported by Together in Willmot. The work strategically aligns with the 20 Result Areas identified for children pre-birth to 5 years of age identified in the ARACY research which includes a focus on: social support and connections; quality of preschool; participation in preschool; and health screening. The Early Years efforts in Willmot are aiming to provide family support using a collective approach.

Linked with and supporting this work, the **Willmot Early Years Working Group** formed as local learnings warranted advocacy at a council level to remove systemic barriers to accessing the only Early Education Centre in the suburb. Barriers to ECEC for families can include expense of the bond, eligibility criteria for childcare subsidy, the anxiety of health of the carer, access to information about subsidy and enrolments, or lack of documentation such as birth certificates.

The group sits alongside and reports to Together in Willmot on more focused Early Years projects. Early wins have included negotiating a small trial for lowered fees for preschool bonds which are preventing some families from accessing early education. The collaboration has also supported community engagement in Willmot and this has been a means to build authentic relationships with families that can lead to gentle conversations around Early Education and the hopes of parents for their children. Through this engagement, families are supported to enrol in and access ECEC. In Willmot, engagement is done through many avenues and over 130 children and families have been engaged through events such the Willmot Kids Club, and Kids Day (led by Together in Willmot).

The Early Years efforts in Willmot has contributed to linking up ECEC, the school, and service providers to be working together to improve how support is provided to families. It has led to a few trials being done, including a case worker with a focus on families with children 0-5 being piloted in Willmot, in partnership with BaptistCare Hopestreet. Partner commitment to the work is strong, and the local school has participated in capacity building opportunities for Kindergarten teachers to strengthen links with ECEC (sharing of knowledge and skills between the school and ECEC). While there is not enough data available to confirm outcomes for children and family health as a result to families securing ECEC placements that Early Years effort is contributing to, there is anecdotal observations that service providers are seeing the collective approach lead to more touch points and wrap around support for families that have entered into ECEC through the collective approach.

health check-ups for children led to the Check-ups Before School (CUBS) program being implemented in Willmot (with NSW Health, Housing and Justice).

## Power relations and dynamics

This is a domain that received mixed feedback. The feedback suggested that some shifts in power dynamics have been achieved as part of the collective work, particularly between service providers and some community members. Some community members reported feeling supported and encouraged to participate in collaborative work and in decision making, and were feeling empowered in their involvement (see Section 3.3). For others however the experience is that the power dynamics and status quo remains largely unchallenged and that they still get 'shut down' or that their input is overridden.

More broadly, there was positive feedback on some of the approaches to power dynamics being implemented, including community capacity building and engaging children and young people, First Nations Peoples, and other residents who previously may not have felt heard. Addressing the power imbalances between adults and youth when doing engagement, particularly with teenagers, was identified as an area that would be good to improve. Overall, this is an area for continued improvement.

## Mental models

The most significant stories and feedback collected included many examples of people self-reporting changes in their own attitudes and beliefs as well as observations of changes in others. This included some shifts in 'open mindedness' about Willmot residents and community (by services and community), as well as shifting attitudes to services (by community), as well as shifts for service providers about how the work needs to be undertaken together. The following quote gives an example.

*"You can see that people's minds are changing, whereas before people said, 'no I'm happy the way I am, why should I get involved?' People used to have that attitude and mentality ... but now people are getting more involved and people are accepting more. There's not as much criticism about the Hub or the work they're doing, or not doing. There's more acceptance that it takes time, and it takes persistence." – Community member*

Another observed shift for some individuals was an increase in a care ethic for the people and places that the collaboration has been working to establish and improve, such as the Hub, parks and the reserve. While these examples included represent individual instances rather than community-level shifts, they are significant in the context of the work being done.





### 3.3 Changes for children, families and community

This section presents findings on the key changes for children, families and community members. Below is a summary box. Then, findings for each change domain are described.

#### Key changes for children, families and community

There are early instances of change starting to happen for kids, families and community members as a result of the collaboration. The types of changes and extent of changes are within what we would see as reasonable for this phase of the collaboration. Note, it is too early to see 'whole of community' level changes (in population level statistics for kids and families). See Annex 2 for a description of how change is expected to happen.

Key changes for children, families and community identified through the research included:

- Feeling safe and sense of community
- Community connection & engagement (kids, families)
- Capacity, empowerment, leading change
- Education, wellbeing, and behaviour
- Opening up of employment and opportunities to participate
- Shifts in the narrative and how things are feeling.

#### Feeling safe and sense of community

There were anecdotal claims of reduced crime rates, graffiti, minor offenses, and violence since the collaboration started, however there was no available quantitative data to substantiate this or Together in Willmot's contribution. The stories collected made various links between the activities of the collaboration and with them feeling safer out in the community in Willmot. Multiple people interviewed cited the Hub, the programs, and the park as contributing to positive changes in mindsets, activity and engagement. Several research participants also reported they have experienced an increased sense of community (by both community members and service workers). The following quotes provide two examples.

*"When [my grandkids] first came to me, I couldn't let them go to the park, I couldn't let them do anything because they were getting picked on and bullied and god knows what else. But now it's actually a lot safer to let them go to the smaller park because I know that they're not going to be bullied, they're not going to be picked on."* – Community member

*"The real turning point for me was the first Clean Up day, when Lend Lease came out to the Hub and did the place up. People saw the change in one day. Residents got down and dirty with the workers and everyone was treated equally. By bringing the community together, we have increased a sense of community spirit."* – Member of Willmot Community Group

#### Community connection & engagement

Increased engagement and connection of children, families and other residents came up frequently in the interviews and stories. The development of spaces and places that encourage connection, such as the Hub and the playground, were seen as enablers for this (See Annex 5). The programs and activities run by the collective, such as Tuesday Breakfast and the School Holiday Program, were also cited as fostering connection, wellbeing and inclusion (See Annex 4). People spoke about new friendships and connections being formed by community members, with people they would not normally interact with, when attending events.

Multiple participants observed an increase in engagement and attendance at programs over the past four years that Together in Willmot has been working together. The following quotes provide insight how this has helped some people overcome social isolation.

*"It has helped me to come out more, helped me to interact with others, instead of hiding. All the events have made me more social, get to know people more and find out what the community has to offer."* – Community member

*"We ran a supported playgroup there years ago and it was really hard to get people to come, but now it just feels different. People feel connected to each other. They feel like it's a welcoming culture there that they can just walk in and someone will know them, or someone will chat to them. Really, I think it's changed in a big way from that, how Willmot used to be. When I worked running programs there, and there was this real wariness and suspicion, now it's just much warmer and friendlier."* – Service worker



### Capacity, empowerment, leading change

Throughout the data collected there were stories of individuals building capacity, gaining confidence, self esteem and capability. For some this was due to volunteering or paid employment with services associated with Together in Willmot, and for others it was through the activities and support provided by the collective, such as attending courses and events or being assisted by the case worker.

*"By working in Willmot I built up confidence. It got me out of a bad family situation and gave me something else to focus on other than the family situation."* – Community member/ service worker

*"A lot of our women have developed their skills, confidence and mindset thanks to the Hub."* – Community member

This has led to an increased sense of empowerment and agency for some parents and other residents.

*"I'm realising my potential whereas before I didn't think I had any. For this reason, Together in Willmot has increased my self-esteem. People encourage me, empower me, workers listen to me and allow me to contribute. I now have a place in my community, whereas before I was lost.... There is a culture of empowering people to find their strengths. I found my strength and today, I am influential member of the Willmot community."* – Community member

*"the individual families that we're working with, because we're working in quite a different way to other case work agencies, are responding in the sense of creating more capacity in the families...Families are actually getting their driver's license, wanting jobs, being proactive with their kids' education..."* – Service worker

Other examples of agency that were being observed included some residents caring more for the local environment, for example participating in community clean-up efforts, and developing respect for 'place'.

### Education, wellbeing, and behaviour

Multiple people interviewed spoke about a significant improvement in children attending preschool, which was seen as being due, in part, to support provided by members of the collective to help families overcome the barriers to access and attend preschool. This included support with fees, advocacy, providing information to increase families' understanding of the benefits of attending preschool, and help with enrolment processes, such as getting birth certificates.

*"We've also advocated with some success to the local preschool. We've increased the amounts of enrolments in preschool... they've gone up significantly since 2016. When this first started, kids would rock up to school on the first day of term or even halfway through the year and enrol. Now, kids are enrolling in school in the months leading up to the end of the year that they're going to enrol for. So, that's a measurable outcome that we've seen. Another measurable outcome is the amount of children that've been placed in preschool in Willmot."* – Service worker

*"It would have been so easy for us just to say this is too hard, this is taking too much time, too much focus away from what our core business is, which is being here at school with our kids. But if we had not had committed to the time and the work necessary to develop what we now have, in terms of our relationships with our colleagues on the ground here and our community members, then we wouldn't be where we are now in terms of community engagement that we have with our families, the success we've had with particular families who just would not engage with our school at all in building those trusting relationships, and the knowledge we have of our kindergarten kids coming through now."*

Several examples of children and young people improving their behaviour were cited, where there were observations of improved social relationships (and that engagement with early childcare and education services have played a role to support this). A staff member and a volunteer involved in the School Holiday Program each noted that children are communicating in a more socially appropriate manner and are able to line up and take turns.

*"I noticed there was a difference in the children, too. The children were more well-behaved, I thought, in January. Over the years, they've got better... Politeness, and they get to know you. They're polite, and you know certain things about them."* – Volunteer

An improvement in the behaviour of teenagers was also noted by multiple participants, with the activities being run by the collective and young people having people to talk to seen as reasons for this. The quote below provides a powerful statement from a teenager that highlights numerous changes for them.

*"Everything's changed since four years ago. Everything. It's not as bad as it used to be. Especially in the community and that. But [The Hub] has changed heaps too. The kids used to run amok and now the kids have somewhere to go. The teenagers, there's somewhere for them to go and someone to talk to when they need something."*

*Before never used to really be anybody who cared, because it was like Willmot, it's Willmot, but now it's better because there's everybody. There's more community people who try and help out with other people. [You guys have] helped with my volunteering and that and a lot of other stuff with my family and that, which is pretty good. A lot of people are getting a lot more help from the services and that, like with the food hampers."* – Teenager



## Opening up of employment and opportunities to participate

The creation of employment opportunities, volunteer work and traineeships were seen as a strategic direction for the collective, with an acknowledgement that there is more work to be done in this area. People interviewed who had taken up these opportunities spoke about feeling empowered, included, engaged in their community, and feeling heard.

*“The changeover of the Hub has given it more sense of community, it’s more inclusive. Opportunities have been created, within that, gainful employment and opportunity for voluntary work including people with mental disabilities, like myself, and even people with mobility issues have the opportunity to volunteer.” – Community member*

*“People feel more connected. There are more opportunities for people to volunteer, upskill and find employment. People now feel like they are being heard.” – Community member*

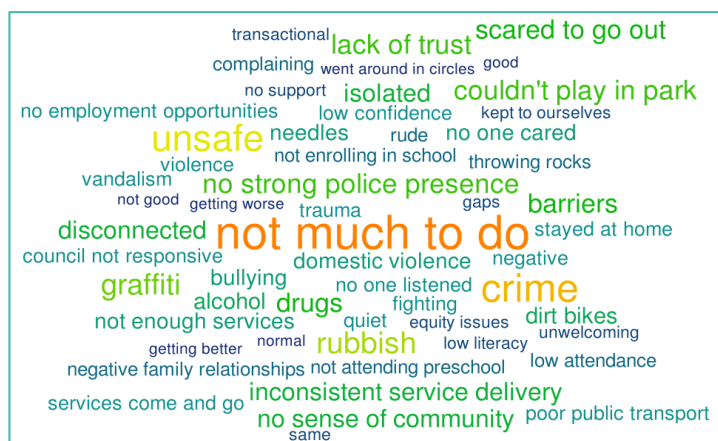
## Shifts in the narrative and how things are feeling

From the data and narratives collected (from mixed sources) about what things *felt* like at the start of the Together in Willmot journey and now, we created two theme-based pictures. The following word clouds represent the opinions of both residents and service workers (from the research sample) discussed during their reflections of then and now. The larger the word/ phrase, the more frequently it was said. While it is not representative of whole of community views, nor does it verify any causal links to the collective work, it does show that the narrative of how things are feeling has shifted.

### What Willmot was feeling like (before the collective work)



### What Willmot is feeling like now





## 4 Key Findings: Effectiveness, sustainability and learning

### Summary of findings

#### Effectiveness

Together in Willmot have been effective in creating instances of change within Willmot for targeted groups, through the delivery of their programs and activities (including their efforts to support systemic changes). The scale of the impact is still small, however this aligns with what is reasonable to expect at this phase. The collaboration has been most effective in improving physical spaces, convening activities for routine social connection and developing supportive relationships across organisations to support kids and families in early education. Collaboration members agreed that the work has been effective. The extent of effectiveness varies across different aspects of the work, and there are many known areas for improvement in the future, i.e community engagement.

The approach to collaboration and way of working, and building trust and relationships between community and service providers have been a key enabler for the outcomes achieved. Efforts will need to be continually scaled and deepened to create broader impact in the next phase.

#### Sustainability

The commitment, belief and solid understanding of the work by service providers and involved residents are key strengths for the collaboration' and long-term sustainability. There was a degree of confidence in the short-term resilience of the collaboration. A key theme raised was the perceived vulnerability of Together in Willmot in the longer term, and the need to diversify and formally embed structures that support the work to be by more than 'a small few'.

#### Key learnings

There were numerous lessons surfaced, and they reveal the deep and hands on experiential knowledge of place-based work in the Willmot context held by both community and service provider members of the collective. They include insights about the long term nature of the work and the personal and professional demands, that are both rewarding and exhausting. The importance of organisational buy-in was emphasised by service providers, so that it is not just relational between them as individuals, as well as ensuring they have legitimate capacity to contribute to the work.

### 4.1 Effectiveness

There is clear evidence that the collective activities and systems change efforts of Together in Willmot have been effective in contributing to intermediate and systems-level outcomes (that are phase appropriate) as aligned with the theory of change. Together in Willmot have made progress by building the foundations and some enabling conditions for longer-term change and achieved early instances of change for smaller cohorts of children and community. The case studies in Annex 4, 5 and 6 provide rich examples of the collaboration effectively contributing to change. The changes evidenced are in line with what is reasonable to expect for this phase (as informed by several models for evaluating place-based approaches and progress mapping used during this co-evaluation, including Dart, 2018).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> When considering effectiveness and progress, it is important to remember that systems change efforts have different dimensions and complexities to programmatic approaches. The shared goal of Together in Willmot is a long-term ambition, and effectiveness will be phase-relevant. Population-level changes are not expected at this stage.

When asked in the shared sense-making process how the members in the collective perceived Together in Willmot's effectiveness, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Participants all agreed that the initiative was tracking well, with just under half of the participants rating effectiveness in the highest selection level offered ("nailing it"). Within the parts of the work, there were different areas that people identified that could be more effective, such as inclusion of and co-leadership with First Nations Peoples.

### Areas of most effectiveness

Through data and story collection and the sense-making process participants cited the following areas as being most effective at achieving outcomes:

- **The approach and way of working:** the collaborative model of working together (see quote below) and building the enabling conditions for longer-term change.
- **Regular activities and events:** such as Tuesday Breakfast, School Holiday Program, movie nights (seniors and young people) and community events that bring people together and contribute to changes such as reduced social isolation and access to support (see Annex 4).
- **Community engagement:** including Community Conversations, respect of residents engaged, being holistic, inclusive, culturally diverse, and community members and partners working together.
- **Tactical projects:** such as the Willmot playground upgrade (see Annex 5).
- **Linked-up support and services:** provided through Hub, school and Hive – as well as the opportunity to participate in activities run out of these (see quote below).
- **Networking and building relationships:** across organisations and with and within community.

The following quotes elaborate on several areas of strength, such as the commitment to the collaborative work and the benefits being experienced from linking up services and people across organisations:

*"There's been a bit more of an increased interaction with the Willmot Hub with the school. So you are more clear of what's happening here, what's happening there. There's more togetherness, I think." - Community member*

*"Possibly there should be services and residents who I think should be at the table but aren't. Maybe with a few different individuals and organisations there could be a higher level of commitment to the collaborative work. But overall, all the boxes are ticked in this collective impact model in Willmot. It's working well." – Service worker*

*"[what's] working well is the commitment from the central organisations. So the school, Jesuit Social Services, BaptistCare HopeStreet and The Hive have established a really strong working relationship together, and it's been going long enough, I think, that that's pretty secure." – Service worker*

*"that's the benefit of having those collective members.... it's very much a holistic approach and I can give a warm handover to a social worker.... That's what I absolutely love is we're not playing catch-up, being workers on the ground. We can actually still navigate that big picture of where we want this suburb to go with - what the community's told us through the forums and through individual conversations we've had. So that's what I love is the micro and the macro picture." – Service worker*

## Areas for continued improvement

There are several areas identified for continuing improvement, already known to the collective and being worked on:

- **Governance and decision-making:** to improve accountability, efficiency and embedding of principles through clear structures that are transparent and equitable.
- **Community engagement and involvement:** to increase co-leadership and ownership by diverse community, formal channels to input into decision-making and continued efforts to address power imbalances and dynamics between different stakeholders. This includes continued work to bring First Nations voice into the forefront and culturally safe engagement practices. There was a call from within the service worker cohort to “lift our skills and strengthen our practice” to do this work more deeply.
- **Capacity building:** to support community involvement and co-leadership. One service worker reflects: It's really remembering that we want to be building capacity in other people, in the community members and the residents to make changes rather than delivering services or activities and leading changes in the community that are fully reliant on us."
- **Communication:** to improve consistency of communications internally and externally and systematising ways of sharing information between core partners; scale out communications about events and activities to broaden reach (including hard-to-reach cohorts); improve engagement with kids and youth ('put yourself at their level').
- **Access to technology:** for residents via the Hub and at services.
- **Consistency for community conversations and consultations:** to improve rigour and consistency for how they are collected and documented.
- **Building resilience:** for sustainability. This includes addressing the vulnerability that exists for the collaboration due to the heavy reliance on a small circle of key relationships and individuals.

## 4.2 Sustainability

As systems change takes many years to achieve, long-term sustainability for the collective is essential. There were both strengths and barriers identified by participants when they reflected on the long-term sustainability of the collaboration.

One of the key strengths identified for the sustainability of Together in Willmot included the passionate belief in the approach held by core members, widespread buy-in to the purpose of the collective work, and a strong commitment from the central collaborating organisations to the community. Several people interviewed cited recent experiences, such as the months without a Director at The Hive, as evidence that the collaboration shows resilience in the short term to continue despite changes and challenges. During this time, other staff effectively stepped up to take on leadership roles, working groups carried on meeting and sharing information, and the collective programs and activities continued. The following quote is from a worker at the core of the collective describing this further:

*"Over the last two months, even though there's been no Director at The Hive, I think everyone has just stepped in and stepped up as to what needs to happen and we've made sure that things are not getting missed. That's through maintaining strong connections and understanding of the work we want to do - what we're driving there. So in terms of key people leaving, I mean, I look at different people and I think you would have the next person stepping up. So I don't think if someone was to leave that the work would dissipate and disappear, because I think we just believe too passionately in it." – Service worker*

In the longer term however, some partners had concerns for collaboration's resilience and sustainability, and identified several barriers they believe exist. In the following quotes participants describe how Together in Willmot is held together by a few key players and that this makes it vulnerable:

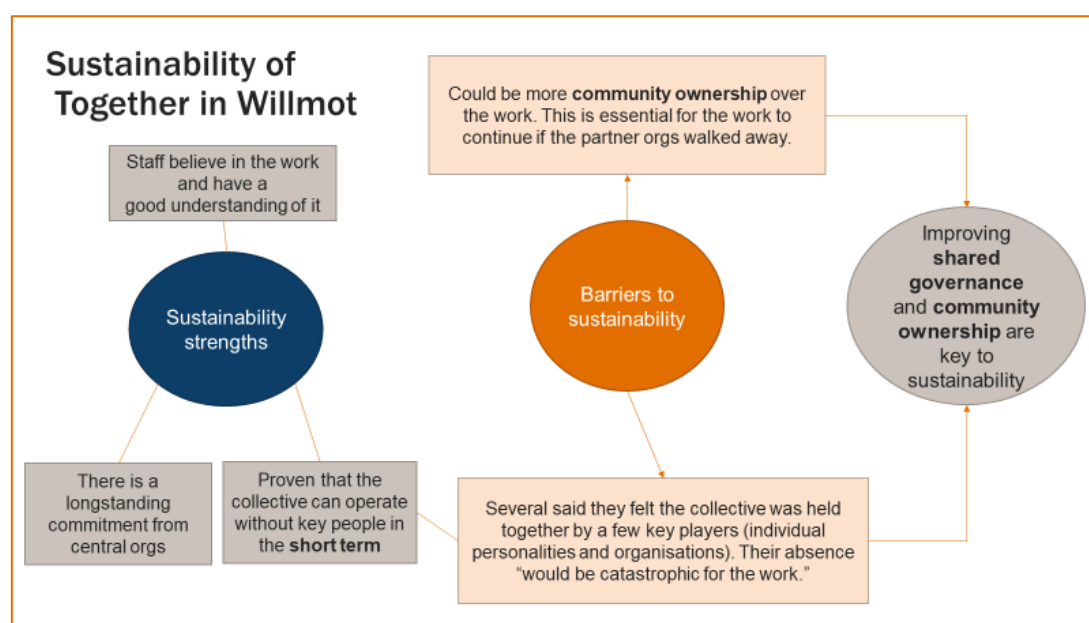
*"We are together but the vulnerability is that it's held together by also only really a couple of key players within the wider collective as well. So - and without those particular people or a couple of different organisations being able - we'd probably crawl back to our own organisations and the community would not be - there wouldn't be any focus on the community." – Service worker*

*"I just sense a vulnerability around the collective and I think that can be overcome and we can weather that storm and we can come out more authentic and more connected and better for it. But I do also think that - and again it comes back to that power thing - if one organisation were to topple over, or even one or two key staff were to topple over, it would be catastrophic for the work... we're not resilient in that sense." – Service worker*

Another key barrier raised by several interviewees was that there is currently not a high degree of community ownership of the work. Improving channels for community voice to influence decision-making and having a stronger focus on building community capacity to advocate for themselves and create change were raised as areas for the collective to focus more on.

*"We'd like to move toward more community organising principles where the community gets the wins. Some of the advocacy that we've done in the policy change has been leveraging the power we have and the influence that we have to the connections to council so we can go back to the community and say we've got this win but it wasn't actually the community who did it, it was us. ... what would happen if we weren't around? What would we leave behind in regard to resources? If we're doing all of that kind of ourselves, then we're not leaving the community with the resources they need to advocate for issues in the community." – Service worker*

To address, people suggested that improving and formalising governance structures, which is a process that has already been initiated, would be "a crucial piece of work for the sustainability of the collective", as well as bringing in more organisations into the core of the collective to reduce vulnerability and add to its diversity.



**Figure 2 Visual summary of issues identified about Together in Willmot sustainability**



## 4.3 Key Learnings

### Summary of key learnings

The key lessons from this phase are as follows:

- Listening to the community and having them guide our work is essential, and this is not business as usual and we will need to share power to make this happen.
- Being genuinely community-centred and community-led is deeper work and can be challenging.
- Being a part of the collective means that you need to be open and vulnerable with other organisations and "let them see you and see past the website or the flyer or the pretty program that you're known for."
- A learning stance is important for our approach: we try things, reflect, and change as needed. Be adaptable and "approach the work with open hearts, open minds and with the stance of wanting to learn."
- Place-based work means that you need to tailor the work - you can't just roll out a standard program with a few tweaks, 'and plonk it on community', you need to come in with a different mindset and a new approach.
- Being passionate and committed isn't enough, you need "strong organisational buy-in" and commitment to able to give what is needed (or be willing to break a few rules!)
- The ideal is to blur the lines between organisations so that the community comes into focus. This way of working has many positives but also brings some challenges for organisations and community.
- Long-term commitment, persistence and consistency enable relationships and trust to develop with residents. This is an enabler of long-term work, systems change work with community.
- "Be willing to embrace the complexity and be committed for the long haul."
- Working collaboratively is hard work and is resource intensive. You give a lot personally and it can be both rewarding and exhausting.
- Collective work might not be part of your organisation's core business but the results you and the community get from it make it worth it.



## 5 Recommendations

### Summary of recommendations

Based on the findings, the key recommendations for the next phase of collaborative work are:

1. Develop a **shared communications and engagement strategy** – to scale and diversify the reach of external engagement, and improve information sharing internally.
2. Review **governance arrangements**– with a view to clarify and create formal channels for co-leadership with community, including First Nations co-leadership opportunities.
3. Continued **improvement of practices and working together** – “Ramp it up. Ramp ourselves up. Upskill. Bring diversity of skill.”
4. Develop a shared plan for **understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning** – for regular and shared reflection, evaluation and learning to help to adapt and improve.
5. Refresh the **action plan and priorities** for next 12 months – for clarity and to prioritise any response to feedback such as increasing focus on youth and teenager cohorts.

The following recommendations are based on the findings and draw on the ideas provided by the collaboration during the co-evaluation. It is recommended that Together in Willmot:

#### 1. Develop a shared communications and engagement strategy

A ‘lite’ communications and engagement strategy for Together in Willmot to direct the internal and external engagement efforts over the next 12-18 months to achieve short term goals. Think about the strengths of the partners within the collaboration (best harnessed for communications and engagement) and build on the vast experiential knowledge of what works and what doesn’t in the Willmot context and community. The communications and engagement strategy may include:

- Steps for broadening and deepening outreach and scaling up engagement.
- Promotion strategies for specific projects, activities, and events.
- Tailored campaigns or approaches for different audiences/community/networks you want to reach. For example, plans for reaching a greater diversity of community members, to embed the First Nations First principle in comms and engagement, and to improve on approaches with youth and teenagers.
- Messaging that will help communicate how the collective can support and work with residents.
- Ensuring feedback loops with partners and to community so that there is transparency and accountability to community, and to demonstrate that consultations and community voice are informing decision-making.
- Agreed formal channels for internal communications and information sharing between collaborators.

## 2. Review governance arrangements

Together in Willmot is planning a governance review and refresh, and this is an important next step that can put in place structures that will support sustainability. The following is recommended:

- Improve structure and clarity of governance arrangements.
- Maintain some built-in flexibility and keep fit for purpose.
- Expand and diversify the leadership group (formal and informal).
- Invest in capacity building support to ensure uptake of leadership opportunities and assistance to overcome any barriers for sustained participation.
- Ensure there are pathways (including formal channels) for citizens to participate, and diverse representation, as well as mechanisms for ensuring that this input shapes strategic decisions.
- Address power dynamics and/or imbalances and be culturally safe for participation of diverse leaders, including First Nations leaders (e.g. where and how meetings are done, who chairs, etc.).
- Using governance as a mechanism for accountability to community, including accountability to First Nations communities.
- Once refreshed, new arrangements need to be clear and communicated to all key stakeholders.

## 3. Continued improvement of practices and working together

We heard many inspired messages from the group about improving how the work is done, including:

- “Ramp it up. Ramp ourselves up. Upskill. Bring diversity of skill.”
- Look to elevate community leadership and ownership over the work
- Embed **“First Nations first”** in everyday practices.
- Continue to work on and invest in building the collective culture (e.g. being true to the values)
- Improve our “hive” mentality (‘bees within the hive’) and our ways of working. “The whole community can move when we learn from the individuals.”
- Advocate to our organisations to maintain and/or increase buy-in (“more support for Together in Willmot means more freedom to contribute to collective”)

## 4. Develop a shared plan understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning

A ‘lite’ plan for how data, stories and evidence is used for understanding (context, systems), measurement (of progress and results), evaluation, and strategic learning over the next 12-18 months, including:

- Identify any priority areas for research, community conversations and/or analysis for understanding areas important for the work (e.g. “map out services, overlaps and gaps to ensure people don’t slip through the cracks and to be able to communicate this out.”).
- Review and refresh the theory of change as needed.
- Set out ways to reflect on the work regularly, i.e. every 3 months and have a mechanism to feed in community voice/feedback on how the collaboration is performing and changes happening (this could include doing some story collection using Most Significant Change and interviews).
- Get together annually to do a ‘year in review’ - celebrate wins, share learnings and set priorities for the year ahead.
- Create a system for progress measurement towards shared goals. This can be chunked out e.g. define ‘what success looks like’ for 12 months ahead of time (in different domains of the work), so you have something to measure against and reflect on.
- Identify and monitor a few indicators for intermediate outcomes.
- Continue reflection and share lessons between organisations and partners.

## 5. Refresh the action plan and priorities for next 12 months

Continue to bring in what you are hearing from community conversations, and what you are learning via evaluation and reflection, to inform your annual action plans. There are a few areas of feedback arising from the co-evaluation to consider for the next refresh process, including embedding First Nations First and the call for greater engagement, and activities and programs for teenagers.



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## Annex 1: Members of Together in Willmot collective

This list below shows the members of the Together in Willmot collective, with ‘Collaborators’ considered to be deeply engaged in the collective work at the core of decision making, and ‘Wider Collaborators’ and ‘Supporters’ involved in a wide range of ways. Membership changes over time and this may not include all current organisations involved.

Collaborators (deeply engaged)	How they contribute
<b>Jesuit Social Services</b>	Strategic development, fundraising, Provision of facility, building maintenance, community development, program delivery, leadership
<b>BaptistCare HopeStreet</b>	Social worker, coffee van, community development, activity support, leadership, strategic development.
<b>United Way Australia (the Hive)</b>	Backbone facilitation, data collection, strategic support, activity support, leadership
<b>Willmot Public School</b>	Leadership support, activity support
<b>Connect Child and Family Services</b>	Service delivery, policy development, strategic input
<b>Salvation Army</b>	Service delivery, policy development, strategic input
<b>Willmot Community members</b>	Consultative role, local context, activity support

Wider Collaborators	How they contribute
<b>Department of Communities and Justice</b>	Funding support, Strategic input, advocacy
<b>Fusion Western Sydney</b>	Youth Programs, Parenting Education
<b>Youth Off the Streets</b>	Youth programs
<b>Families and Community Services</b>	Supervised access, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology and Behaviour programs
<b>Bidwill Uniting</b>	Engagement, Service delivery, strategic input
<b>Australian Drug Foundation</b>	Youth Collective
<b>Holos Consulting</b>	Strategic input
<b>Willmot Community Group</b>	Event Co-design, resident feedback
<b>Lead</b>	Training, Community engagement
<b>Sydney Story Factory</b>	Program delivery, strategic input
<b>The Smith family</b>	Strategic input, Subgroup leadership
<b>Kids Early Learning Willmot</b>	Consultative partnership
<b>Willmot Shops</b>	Community engagement
<b>Western Sydney University</b>	Placements, program partnerships

<b>IAG</b>	Financial Support
<b>Centrelink</b>	Employment services
<b>Australian Catholic University</b>	Student Placements
<b>Mission Australia</b>	Service delivery
<b>Our Lady of Consolation OLOC</b>	Seniors exercise classes and Seniors information sessions
<b>Blacktown City Council</b>	Service delivery, strategic support, financial assistance
<b>Royal Botanical Gardens</b>	Plants, Aboriginal cultural support
<b>Shalvey High School</b>	Engagement
<b>Nutty Knitters</b>	Service delivery
<b>Holy Family Parish</b>	Church Service, building support
<b>BACC (Blacktown Area Community Centres Inc)</b>	Paint the Town Read/ service delivery
<b>Lend Lease</b>	Garden Upgrades
<b>Catholic Care</b>	African Homework Club
<b>Springwood Baptist Church</b>	Internship
<b>NSW Health</b>	Funding, Program delivery
<b>Baabayan Aboriginal Corporation</b>	Event Co-design, Community engagement

## Supporters

## How they contribute

<b>Afford Employment</b>	Employment Services
<b>St Columbia High School</b>	Literacy Support
<b>Natural Home Solutions</b>	Maintenance Support
<b>Long Life Plumbing</b>	Maintenance Support
<b>Nettleton Tribe</b>	Architectural support
<b>Our Lady of the Way North Sydney</b>	Financial support
<b>Aboriginal Centre of Excellence (Kimberwalli)</b>	Event support
<b>St Aloysius' College Milsons Point</b>	Event/ community engagement support and building maintenance
<b>St Ignatius' College Riverview</b>	Event/ community engagement support and building maintenance
<b>Gilroy College Castle Hill</b>	Event/ community engagement support and building maintenance
<b>Australian Catholic University</b>	Students
<b>Catherine McAuley Girls High School</b>	Event/ community engagement support and building maintenance

<b>Filipino Chaplaincy Chatswood Parish</b>	Pop-Up Café
<b>Tongan Church</b>	Church Service
<b>Takelauan Church</b>	Church Service
<b>Marist Brothers Secondary College Westmead</b>	Event/ community engagement support and building maintenance
<b>Barnados Australia</b>	Partnerships
<b>Always Kingdom Church</b>	Church Service
<b>Loyola Senior High School</b>	Maintenance support

## Annex 2: Together in Willmot Theory of Change and background

### How we expect change to happen and setting expectations for what is reasonable change in this period.

As background to introducing Together in Willmot's theory of change, it can be helpful to think about how we expect change to happen. Underpinning Together in Willmot's theory of change, overleaf, are three main levels of change. This includes the population level changes for people in Willmot (green level below), a range of systemic changes that will help the system to work better for people and service delivery (blue levels below), and changes in the enabling conditions for change (yellow level).

These three levels of change tend to happen over very different timeframes, with population level changes often taking more than 10 years to eventuate. For this reason, it is important to understand the changes that happen along the way to achieving the population level changes. Low-level changes include setting up governance and getting clear on purpose. Mid-level changes focus on systems change and include things like changes in policies, practices and power relationships that are holding the problems in place.

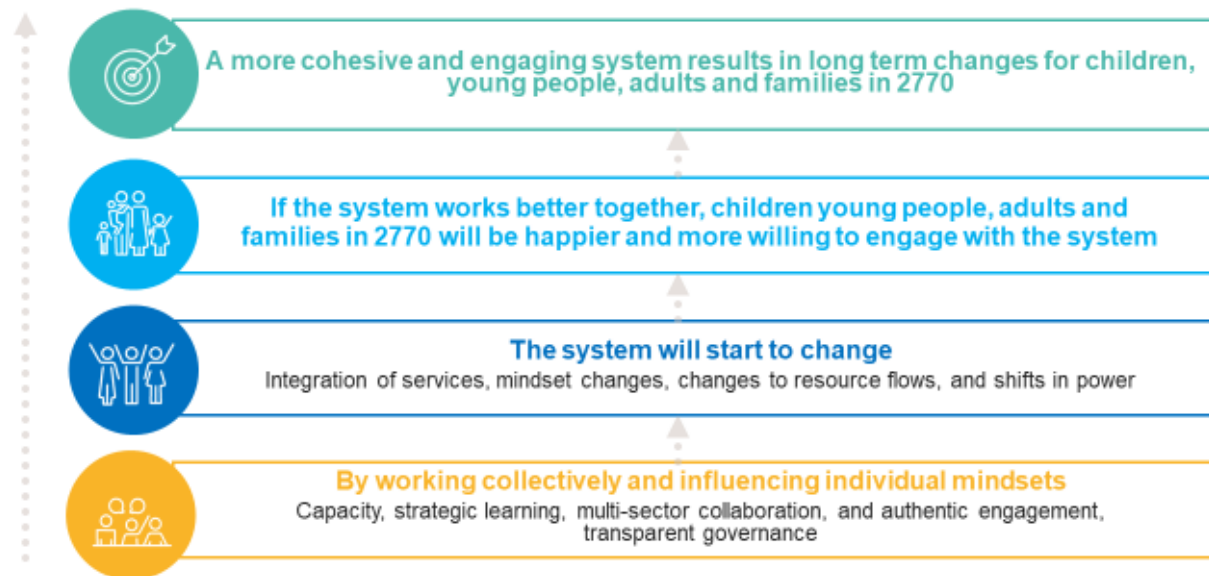


Figure 3 Generic levels of change for long-term place-based and systems change initiatives



## Together in Willmot's Theory of Change

Below is the theory of change that shows activities at the bottom of the model, stepping up to the broad goal of the initiative.

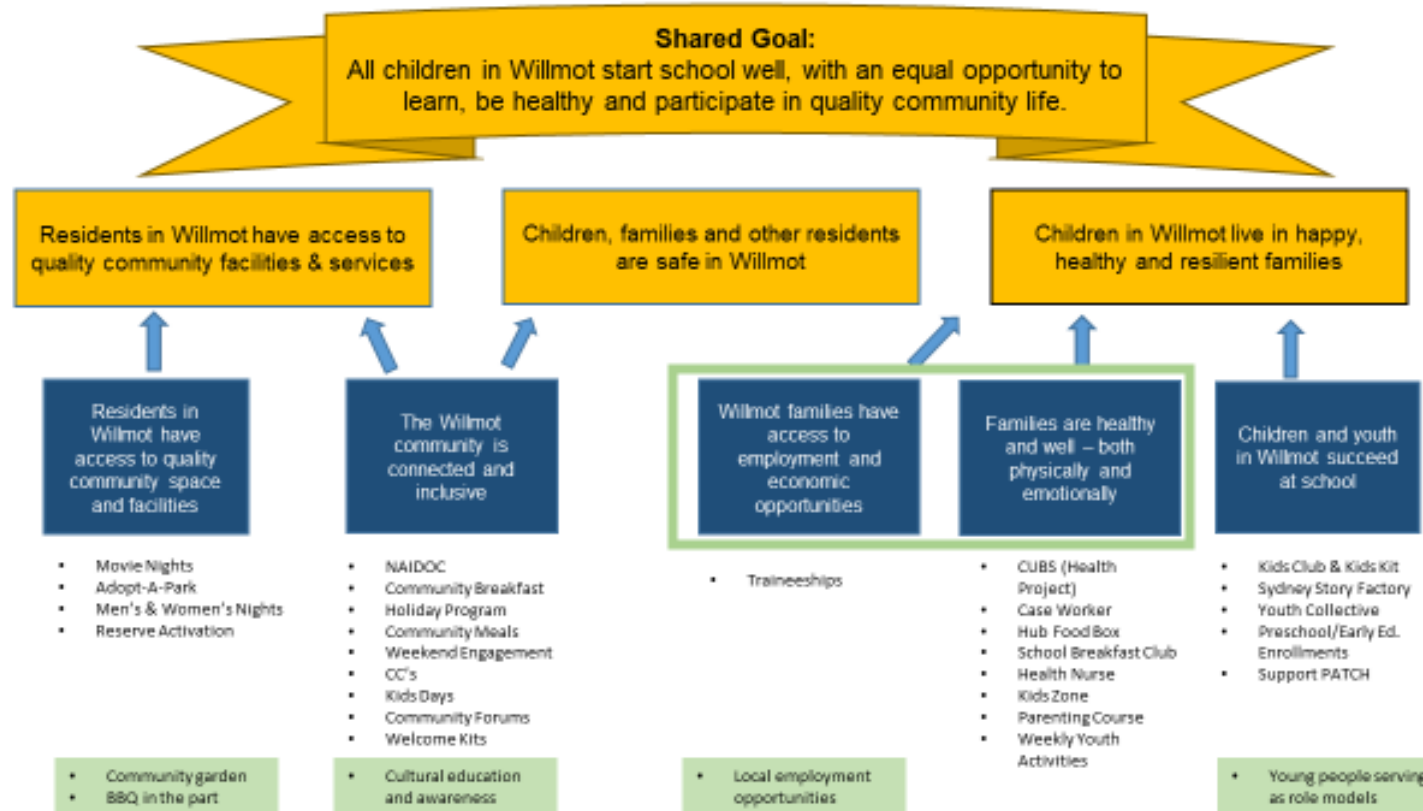
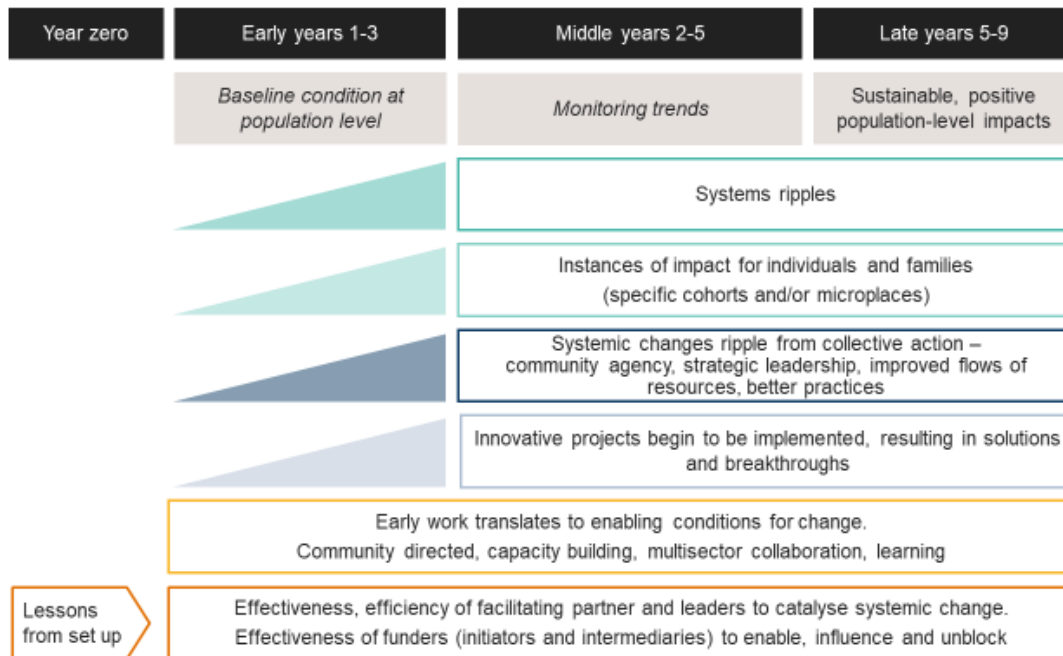


Figure 4 Together in Willmot's theory of change (draft July 2019)

## Setting expectations based on the phase of a place-based approach

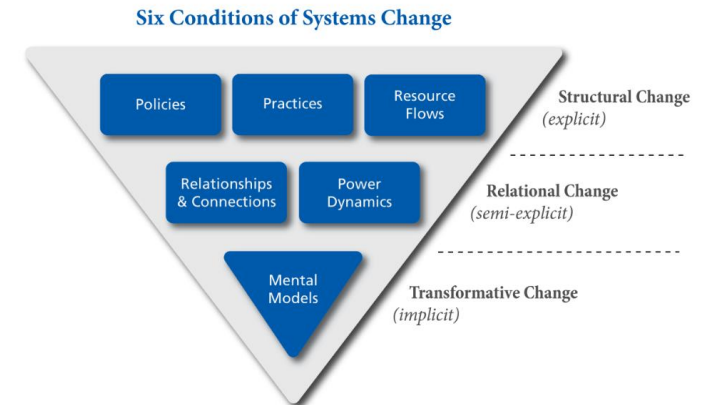
The figure below is taken from the Place-based Evaluation Framework (Dart, 2018) and shows a generic theory of change for a place-based initiative and the change we'd expect to see at different levels across different periods of time. While it is a generic model, it is included here to help visualise that different levels in the theory of change become more likely over time.



## Water of system change

The approach to understanding and evaluating systemic changes in this co-evaluation report aligns with leading international approaches, with particular reference to the schema 'Water of system change' below.

This schema shows various domains of systemic changes across three levels: structural, relational and transformative.



See [https://www.fsg.org/publications/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change](https://www.fsg.org/publications/water_of_systems_change)

## Annex 3: Most Significant Change (MSC) Stories

There were 13 Most Significant Change stories produced during the co-evaluation, from different stakeholder voices. Three have been included in this report as a selection.

The first story below, and the one in the Executive Summary, were selected by members of Together in Willmot during the Evaluation Planning Workshop in February 2020. The story in the Executive Summary was seen as a comprehensive story showing how a person who might otherwise be seen as a 'client' became part of the collective through receiving holistic support and capacity building opportunities. The first story below offers a more external perspective, as it is not from a service provider, and includes description of tangible outcomes experienced by a whole family. The second story below presents a view of changes for the Aboriginal community in Willmot, as well as for the general community.

### Most Significant Change Story: My Children Have Become Social Butterflies

*I moved into Willmot three and half years ago and life was tough with young children with special needs. Willmot used to be a place where people did not talk to each other and were even rude to each other. Everyone felt isolated. I remember looking for support, but I just couldn't find any that could help me. The service system was just too hard, and you went around in circles. I thought I would have to do it all by myself.... until the people at the Hub came along.*

*When Willmot residents, Jesuit Social Services, The Hive, BaptistCare HopeStreet and Willmot Public School started working together, the Hub went from being an empty building to a welcoming place that is not judgemental.*

*I don't feel judged if I have a meltdown, because the people there understand my circumstances and they do not judge me. They all tried to put in place some programs and activities to connect people and if they didn't work, they would learn from their mistakes and try to improve them. This collaboration is my saviour!*

*The biggest change I see is in my kids, thanks mainly to the brilliant caseworkers. [They were] able to link [my daughter] to the right service. [My daughter] really trusts [her caseworker]. My daughter suffers from Alopecia, which causes her hair to fall out when she's stressed. Now that she has someone she trusts, who she can talk to, her hair doesn't fall out as much, so this collaboration has even had positive physical impacts on my children's well-being. My son's outbursts have reduced, and he now wants to go outside more. He isn't as sick as he used to be. All the activity at the Hub has actually calmed him down and he can now interact with the other kids. My entire family are now willing to admit we have problems and we can now seek out people who we trust and who can direct us to the right services.*

*Not long after meeting everyone who works from the Hub, I started to volunteer, to give back for everything the people at the Hub have done for me. Eventually a job came up and this local employment meant I could stay near my kids and still earn money. Whereas before nobody would talk to each other, now Willmot has become much more social. The seniors started talking to us and now all ages are combining, and perceptions are changing for the better. I can get my children out of the house now. They have learned to socialise.*

*Before, I couldn't get them out of the house for over a year; now, there are no tensions on the way out and they have become little social butterflies. The kids are actually excited to go to the Hub to meet all the people there. My partner also gets out more. He plays basketball with the local kids. He seems a lot happier. We used to feel so isolated. Now we're all about healthy mind and healthy body and doing our bit to help the community grow for the better.*

## **Most Significant Change Story: Community Feeling Lighter & More Connected**

*In the last two years, I have noticed the community coming together more to develop new friendships. The Hub has drawn and connected people with one another who wouldn't necessarily be involved in the community. The Hub has engaged a wide range of people across the neighbourhood. I have noticed that people are no longer frightened to come out of their homes and meet others.*

*The most significant change I have witnessed is the support that families receive. The people at the Hub are there for local residents who need support and guidance with dealing with family related matters. I have also seen so many local children involved in the Hub's programs, so they are not left to their own devices. Through the Hub's programs, services and events, children, young people and the adults have been positively interacting with positive people at the Hub. In this environment, people are able to make themselves available to the plentiful opportunities to develop and strengthen their ability to improve their physical, mental and emotional health, so that they can have a better a future.*

*Before the change, it was pretty negative here. There was always a focus on crime rate, drugs, alcohol. Because we are an isolated community, it tends to build up and up in this suburb, and it impacts on people in a negative way. Now, after the Hub set up, there does not seem to be a dependency on drugs as much anymore. There is always alcohol, because it's legal. The crime that comes with drugs was here for a very long time and very out there. Now, the presence of drugs and crime seems to have slowed down a bit.*

*The Hub has given people a different view in life; to make people aware of what they can achieve. When people come to the Hub they are able to experience positive emotions and thinking to help them resolve their issues. These positive feelings help people to not feel so burdened by their problems. It is an enlivening feeling to see people feel lighter because of the support they receive here. I walk away knowing that people know now they are able to receive the support they need to move forward.*



## Annex 4: Case study on growing a more connected community



Through the Community Conversations, Community Forums and other engagement activities, Together in Willmot heard from the community that there was “not much to do” in Willmot. They also heard that some people felt isolated, many people felt disconnected from community, and that some seniors did not feel safe or respected due to the behaviour of young people. In response to those issues raised, the collective has run various activities and programs to address these issues.

One example is the school holiday program that started in early 2017 by Together in Willmot. Coffee and Tuesday Breakfast are other key activities delivered collaboratively at the Hub, and also involve volunteers. The activities and programs offer regular opportunities for connection, socialising and access to support.

Services have seen an increase in numbers attending these programs: “at the programs like the breakfast on a Tuesday, you can really see a big change there in just the number of people coming. I know when they first started which was maybe three or four years ago, there was four or five people who would turn up on a Tuesday morning and now it’s like 40 to 50 people turning up”. Community members noted feeling welcome, safe and included when they attend these activities.

Members of the Together in Willmot collective consider the activities a great opportunity to engage with and hear from the community in an informal way: “breakfast has always been a great place for us to hear community need. So as far as value for that, the community breakfast has been really valuable on hearing what the community want, because it’s got a wide section of the community. It doesn’t have as many kids there, but it has parents of children there. Then the Thursday afternoon has more of a kid focus, so that’s an ability to speak to children more there.” They have also seen that the collective approach to the activities, where different services contribute something different, has meant that they are able to achieve greater engagement from the community in their individual services. For example, the coordinator of the Adopt-A-Park program said: “having that coffee cart and those other services there, in a welcoming atmosphere, really added to the success of my program.”

### Outcomes

Community members interviewed reported that these activities have facilitated new connections and friendships between community members who may not normally interact. For example, one community member stated: “the breakfast club program on a Tuesday morning has helped people get to know each other more and sit with others that they would not usually sit and talk with”. A service worker from the Together in Willmot group made a similar observation: “there are a lot of times I’ve seen families who meet and form a friendship or a nice connection through those activities, families that might not have met

before and they live quite close to one another. Then I've seen some really beautiful relationships come out of that, just families supporting families, creating a sense of community through these events".

Another community member observed: "I have noticed that the community is coming together a lot more. Especially since the breakfasts started up at Willmot. The breakfasts on Tuesdays, coffees on Thursday and school holiday activities are so good in bringing people together." And another said: "by bringing the community together, we have increased a sense of community spirit. There's just so much going on in Willmot right now!"

Some seniors volunteer on the school holiday program and find it a way to keep busy and connected with others during retirement. Involving seniors in the holiday program has been reported as a way to ease the tensions between them and young people and change negative perceptions about each other. One of the seniors commented that they have "noticed there was a difference in the children, too. The children were more well-behaved... Over the years, they've got better... They're polite, and you know certain things about them".

## Significance

The outcomes are significant because increasing residents' social capital and social inclusion is part of the process of achieving Together in Willmot's longer-term goals that 'residents in Willmot have access to quality community facilities and services', 'children, families and other residents are safe in Willmot, and 'children in Willmot live in happy, healthy and resilient families'. The outcomes resulting from collective delivery (community coming together, forming new connections and friendships, building a sense of community, and people participating in activities and volunteer work) are early wins in their progress towards the longer-term shared goal.

## Together in Willmot's contribution

There is a clear line of contribution showing that Together in Willmot, rather than any individual organisation, is responsible for the activities cited in this case study, i.e. the school holiday program, Tuesday breakfast and coffee cart. The activities were seen by the staff and community members interviewed to be key activities delivered by the collective as whole, where Together in Willmot's 'blurring the lines' approach is applied and individual organisations delivering the activities are not in focus. One worker stated: "you wouldn't really know who works for what when you're there. It's not like people have got badges on or signs up, there's nothing like that. They're just serving coffee or they're sitting down chatting to a parent or they're playing with kids". It is considered by members of the collective that these activities would not happen, or would not be as successful in achieving outcomes, without the collaborative approach to delivery.

## Annex 5: Case study on the Willmot playground upgrade



The Willmot playground is an example of how the Together in Willmot collaboration influenced systems level change to achieve outcomes for children and families in Willmot.

Before the collective work started, the Willmot Reserve Park was not considered a safe or welcoming area for many locals. Groups of young people rode their dirt bikes on mounds of dirt in the park. There was lots of rubbish and used needles, there was drug use, alcohol and fighting, and there was no strong police presence.

From the community conversations the collective conducted, they heard that people felt scared and that the lack of safe public spaces meant they would often stay home. There was a playground in Willmot Reserve, but many parents reported that they didn't let their children play there because they felt it was unsafe and that supervision was challenging.

In 2017, the playground in Willmot Reserve was flagged for an upgrade by Blacktown City Council. Usually, when council does an upgrade, they take out the existing playground and replace it. In this instance, one of the members of the collective works at the Council as the Child-Friendly Community Facilitator, and part of their role is to involve children in upgrading playgrounds.

At about the same time as the playground was due to be upgraded, Together in Willmot held a Community Forum, to get insight into community issues. Approximately 70 people attended, including community members, an Aboriginal Elder, the Deputy Mayor of Blacktown City Council, and staff from various services and agencies. The Child-Friendly Community Facilitator heard first-hand about the problems around the Willmot Reserve: "we identified that the existing playgrounds in the reserve weren't suitable locations for children to play. We also heard from the seniors. They said, we walk through this reserve every day and we don't have a place to do exercise. So that influenced our planning for the reserve".

Following the forum and hearing about these issues for seniors, Council did further community consultations with elderly residents. Seniors wanted exercise stations specifically for people of their age, leading the Council to select a new location for the playground: next to the primary school. After deciding on the new location, they engaged the children from Willmot Primary School and did co-design workshops with the children so that they could have input into the development of the playground. During these sessions, it became clear that the kids wanted the half-sized basketball court turned into a full-sized court to use for holiday programs.

The main barrier to implementing all these changes was resourcing as originally there was \$125,000 funding allocated to the new playground, which was not enough to cover the type of playground that would meet community needs. The Deputy Mayor who had come to the Community Forum and understood the issues with the reserve was able to go back to Council and advocate for more funding. In the end, Council contributed a total of \$250,000 funding, which allowed them to build the new playground, the seniors' exercise stations and the full-sized basketball court – as well as remove the mounds of dirt that were being used for dirt biking. The design and the resource flows were influenced by community input and aspirations.

## Outcomes

Building the playground and creating a more amenable space at Willmot Reserve has had a significant impact on the vibrancy of the area and children and families are regularly enjoying the playground. The process of engaging a wide variety of stakeholders, including those in positions of influence, has also led to other flow-on effects, such as creating “a direct connection to the Mayor and Council who comes out regularly and he's finding money and other resources to help the community”.

The playground upgrade has drawn more people to the area to interact, creating a more connected community. For one community member, “one of the most significant changes for me is the infrastructure, which brings about community connectedness. The playground upgrade, and Hub upgrade, has brought more people in to the fold”.

More people around not only improves the community life, but also the sense of safety. One of the service provider staff highlighted that building the playground outside the school has “had significant change in the way that the community interacts. The children play as they come out from school, and people gather, and it's what makes it safer”. With people participating in the Adopt-A-Park program, the environment has been cleaned up and dangerous litter removed. One of the volunteers said having more of a presence makes it “a bit safer just by physically being there and doing stuff”. This increased sense of safety feeds back to make the space more attractive and draw more people. As one community member said about her grandchildren, “when they first came to me, I couldn't let them go to the park...because they were getting picked on and bullied and god knows what else. But now it's actually a lot safer to let them go to the smaller park because I know that they're not going to be bullied, they're not going to be picked on”. Another one said, “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 them so it's really nice to sit there and watch the kids have fun and feel safe”.

## Significance

There are many reasons why these outcomes are significant for Willmot. The Reserve revamp has contributed to addressing social isolation, and as has meant that many people have experienced a sense of inclusiveness and connectedness through the park. One service provider points out, “if kids are isolated, they get scared, they act sometimes inappropriately or antisocially. It's a scientific fact that children who have playtime with their peers track in a more healthy way”. This case study highlights that coming together to improve public spaces can contribute to the collective's shared goal of ensuring children in Willmot are healthy and can participate in quality community life.

## Together in Willmot's contribution

The Together in Willmot played a convening role in aspects of the park upgrade process and has directly contributed to the outcomes through creating the forum for community voice to be heard, then through advocacy and working with Council to act on it. One service provider reflects: “we've been influential in the way that we've gone to council around more spaces for children. We've done that as a collective”.

The Council worker also agreed that the collective and community forums had greater influence on installing a playground than what happened in other suburbs. They elaborated that while their “role as Child-Friendly Community Facilitator allowed me to be able to lead that work... the insight into what was happening in the reserve came from the forum and then the co-design workshops with the children and the primary school”. They went on to highlight the crucial role of the collective. “The collective had an impact... everything I just spoke about was supported by the collective...[it was] the power of having a collective impact initiative that allowed that to happen at the rate, at the scale that it happened.”



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Picture: Justin Sanson (Sourced from Mt Druitt St Marys [The Standard May 30, 2017](#))

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