



GROWING OUR WAYS OF WORKING TOGETHER

Hands Up Mallee Reflection Report 2023-2024



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We acknowledge the Latji Latji as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the Country on which we are. We also acknowledge their near neighbours, the Barkindji.

We pay our respects to the Elders past, present, and emerging and to the ancient connection they hold with their Country.

We acknowledge there are also other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who live, work in and contribute to the cultural heritage of the Mildura region.

About Hands up Mallee

Established in 2015, Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a place-based collective impact initiative in the Mildura LGA in the far northwest of Victoria. A group of local leaders began the HUM initiative when they recognised that we needed to work together differently to address social, health and well-being equity issues in our community.

Hands Up Mallee works in partnership with the community, local service providers, agencies and all three levels of government. The initiative takes a place-based approach to solutions for local issues centring on community voice and combining this with local data and current research to develop collective action for a better community for children, young people and their families. Hands Up Mallee is committed to continuous learning and improvement concerning its work to achieve positive social outcomes for the Mildura community.

Contents

Introduction	5
Our Action Plan 2024 and The Progress We Made.....	6
Action 1: Further enable the use of collective power for purpose by embedding community decision-making in systems and processes.....	6
Action 2: Further enable inclusive community engagement	12
Action 3: Develop resources to help attract and onboard partners from various sectors	13
Action 4: Further enable measurement, evaluation and learning.....	16
Action 5: Further enable investment and policy for purpose.....	18

Introduction

Hands Up Mallee is largely funded by the Department of Social Services *Stronger Places Stronger People*. One of the funding requirements is to conduct an independently facilitated assessment of how we are growing our way of working as a collective impact initiative for place-based change.

The facilitator uses a progress mapping tool to help map the extent of our growth. This tool allows us to assess our progress in growing the following features:

1. **Systems Leadership**

How a systems approach combined with local leadership is working to improve outcomes across the community to shift disadvantage.

2. **Inclusive community engagement**

How community voices and leadership are valued and included and leading in the drive to improve outcomes.

3. **Understanding, measurement, evaluation and learning (UMEL)**

How we use data and stories to understand what is happening in the community and inform what we need to work on together. How a shared commitment to measurement, evaluation and learning together in line with the needs of our community and the learning across all Stronger Places Stronger People communities and partners is progressing.

4. **Use of collective power for community purpose**

How a genuine interest and practice to use power and authority differently is helping everyone to play their role in the community-led change agenda.

5. **Investment and policy for community purpose**

How a shared recognition and action is being taken across the system to help investment, policies, and accountabilities align with the community-led change agenda.

6. **Leading and Supporting efforts for change**

How our governance and the resourcing of the work, such as a backbone team and high leverage activities, reflects the phase of collective impact, and how partners support local leaders and the backbone team to make change aligned to the community's plan.

Our Action Plan 2024 and The Progress We Made

Action 1:

Further enable the use of collective power for purpose by embedding community decision-making in systems and processes

1. Continue to enhance the community's input into decision-making and their involvement in the design of services.
2. Establish approaches for Shared Decision-Making and Co-designing Local Solutions. Test and learn from the approaches to inform further investment in Shared Decision-Making and Local Solutions

Continue to enhance the community's input into decision-making and their involvement in the design of services.

Note this Focus Area has close links to Action 2 and Action 3

Significant growth in community's input into decision-making

During the period from late 2023 to 2024 significant advancements were made to embed community decision-making in systems and approaches to ensure collective power for purpose.

This has been evident in the advances made in:

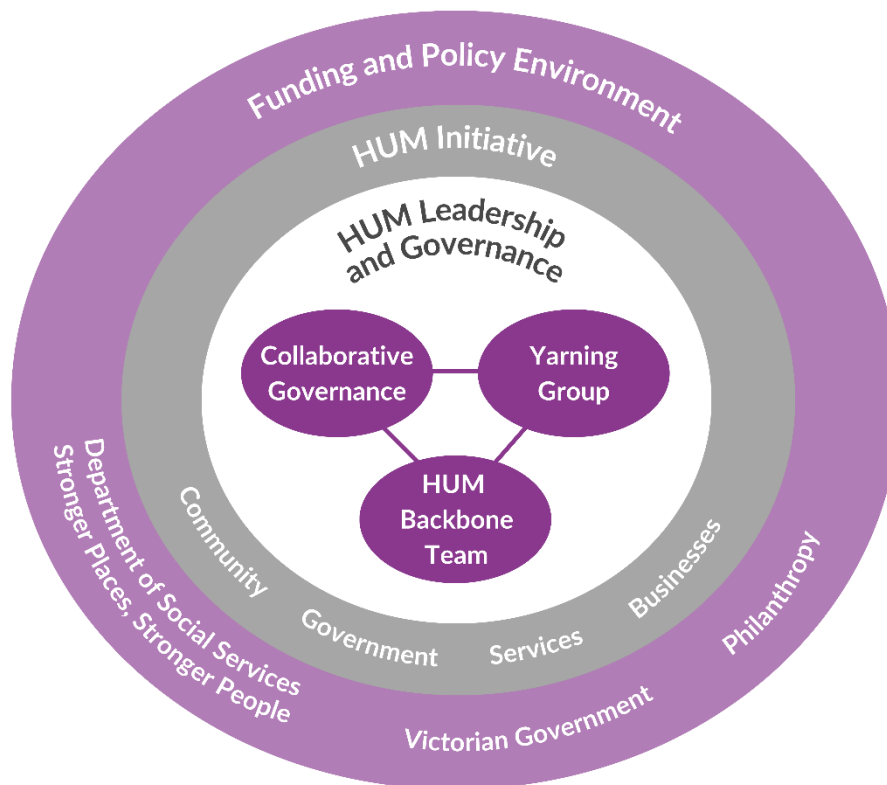
- Collaborative Governance Group function, authorisation of local solutions and advocacy
- Yarning Group leadership, advisory, decision making and cultural learning
- Centring community voice in co-design projects including: the Family and Child Hub, Red Cliffs Integrated Early Years Hub, Free Pool Pilots, and the Red Cliffs Basketball Court, Red Cliffs Connected Events, and the Cinema Pilot Project

Refined Leadership Structure to Enhance Community Input

During late 2023 to early 2025 the Leadership and Governance structure for Hands Up Mallee become more defined. Hands Up Mallee is now fully implementing the

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new structure, which firmly places the community at the centre of decision-making to shift power to the community.



Building the foundations for a fit for purpose Collaborative Governance Group

Changing the Governance structure over 2022 -2024 has been critical to ensuring the Hands Up Mallee initiative and its partnerships are accountable to the community and that the Community Aspiration directs its actions.

In order to develop the Governance Charter, it has been important that time and facilitation support has been provided for the members of the Governance Group to:

- Understand the nature of their work
- Deepen relationships as community leaders
- Develop their purpose statement
- Identify their values, principles and cultural commitments
- Create a decision-making framework to ensure thinking from diverse perspectives

The regenerative framework below aided the members to generate their thinking towards the development of the Governance Charter and establish strong foundations for the new structure:

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- **Being:** Creating a set of 'Being' statements: How to truly listen, to be heard, and what we need to access within ourselves to create this state and statements around to 'be' together in this group.
- **Will:** Tapping into our Will to create our values and principles.
- **Function:** Setting our flow through meeting agendas and timelines: How we want to meet and what is important about the timing, the environment, and how we make decisions together.

The Governance structure is for up to ten members. It is led by two co-chairs, one of which is Aboriginal. A further two of the remaining eight positions are identified as Aboriginal, and another is identified as Under 25 years.

Building on the success of the first round, the second round of recruitment in 2024 used the Yarning Circle model, this time led by three existing Collaborative Governance Group members with support of an external facilitator. Improvements to the Expression of Interest document were made to be more visually engaging and the language simplified. Members also unpacked how they communicated what they were looking for in potential members to create a balanced group.

The Governance Group Charter has been progressively added to over the last 12 months as topics have arisen during meetings. It covers the Governance Group's culture, roles, procedures, policies and strategy.

Recently the Collaborative Governance Group has had significant input into the focus and processes used for the first Local Solutions Public Tender for NextGen Community Connect.

Yarning Group: leadership, advisory, decision making and achievements

During late 2023 to 2024 the Yarning Group, which is made up of Aboriginal leaders across our region, refined its membership and recruitment processes and firmed up its leadership and advisory approaches through the development of a draft Charter. In doing so it enabled community input and decision-making for:

- A two day 'On Country' Cultural Learning experience in October 2023 at Wentworth and Lake Mungo
- The hosting of Changefest 2024 in April.

The Yarning Group planned and guided a Cultural Learning experience on Country, for members of the HUM Backbone Team and Collaborative Governance Group. The purpose of the Cultural Learning event was to deepen cultural understanding as well as strengthen connections across the HUM initiative.

The Yarning Group and other key Aboriginal leaders from the community invested deeply in Changefest 2024. They were motivated by the learnings from Changefest 2023, held in Tasmania, and by their strong desire to welcome and support the Elders from previous Changefest events to be brought together, be Welcomed onto Country, and to be culturally supported during the Changefest event. They also wished to ensure that the Changefest Message Stick be appropriately transferred to the next host community.

Some key benefits that were achieved from their investment in Changefest 2024 included

- Strengthened connections with Elders from other place-based initiatives
- Strengthened partnership with Connected Beginnings
- Increased awareness in the local community about HUM

Centring community voice in co-design projects to improve services

Hands Up Mallee has a strong commitment to implementing a co-design approach to ensure it authentically engages with the Aboriginal people and the wider diversity of the community as a key enabler for its way of working.

In 2023-2024 the key co-design projects undertaken with community and partner organisations included the:

- Family and Child Hub
- Red Cliffs Integrated Early Years Hub
- Free Pool Pilots at Red Cliffs and Merbein
- Red Cliffs Basketball Court
- Deakin Cinema Early Pilot Project
- Red Cliffs Connected events

The Family and Child Hub and Red Cliffs Integrated Early Years Hub co-design projects focussed on engaging families to co-design with Early Years Services to ensure that the places were welcoming for families and could provide more holistic services to better meet the needs of families and their children.

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The Free Pool Pilots engaged young people to co-design activation events to help promote that the pools were free over the summer holidays for young people under the age of 18.

In response to an identified need by youth, the Red Cliffs Basketball Court project engaged youth in having a say about the location of a new outdoor basketball court and co-designing the way they wanted the space to be activated and used by local youth.

City Heart Traders and partner ‘Walk-Throughs’ and the Deakin Cinema Pilot Project

In response to concerns identified by the local community and the City Heart traders about how some youths were behaving in Mildura precinct, Hands Up Mallee initiated and coordinated a series of ‘Walk Throughs in the City Heart in partnership with Victoria Police and staff from services and Mildura Rural City Council. The approach to the Walk-Throughs was informed by local young people and other community members, including Elders. This pilot work helped to identify the needs and interests of youth gathering in public spaces, to build positive relationships with them, and to help connect them to positive youth activities.

An early response to these findings was the Deakin Cinema Pilot Project which engaged youth in the co-design of a ‘youth only’ event in partnership with Wallis Deakin Cinema, Victoria Police and City Heart Traders. Its purposes were to better identify participation barriers, youth needs and interests, create leadership opportunities and strengthen collaborative relationships between youth, Victoria Police and City Heart Traders.

Other Co-design Projects

Efforts to strengthen partnerships with Local Government, Victoria Police and Services continue to evolve through the free pool’s pilots, the Red Cliffs basketball court project, and HomeBase Hoops.

The Red Cliffs Connected families and HUM liaised with the Aboriginal community to successfully deliver the first NAIDOC event for Red Cliffs community.

Establish approaches for Shared Decision-Making and Co-designing Local Solutions. Test and learn from the approaches to inform further investment in Shared Decision-Making and Local Solutions.

Co-designing Local Solutions approach

In 2024, Hands Up Mallee received the first allocation of Local Solutions funding which is an enhancement of Stronger Places Stronger People funding announced in the 2023 budget for six of the ten sites as part of the Targeting Entrenched Disadvantage Commonwealth Government approach. Its purpose is to promote and fund innovative local solutions to local issues in order to disrupt social disadvantage.

Considerable time and thought have been invested by the Collaborative Governance group and HUM Backbone to identify how Local Solutions applicants can be supported to:

- Align their approaches with Hands Up Mallee's Journey of Change and Key Evaluation Questions,
- Be encouraged to partner with other organisations to strengthen the Collective Impact approach.

At the time of preparing this report tenders have been called for NextGen Community Connect for local solutions to strengthen preventative approaches for young people 10-18 years at risk of contact with the justice system.

Shared Decision-Making approaches

There have been some discussions about Shared Decision-Making with Department of Social Services, however progress to develop processes and protocols has been slow, so little advancement has been made on the ground so far.

In the meantime, Hands Up Mallee has continued its practice to support local shared decision making through authentic engagement with Aboriginal people and the diversity of the wider community. This can be seen in the co-design work, the work with the City Heart Traders and Service partners, and in the engagement with the Yarning Group and Collaborative Governance Group.

Requirements for further growth in Action Area 1

- Continue to strengthen and evolve Hands Up Mallee Governance and Leadership to further embed community input into decision-making processes and systems.

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- Continue to centre community voice in co-designed projects to enhance community's input into decision-making and encourage and support their involvement in the design of services
- Learn from and strengthen approaches to Local Solutions funding for further rounds
- Advance the thinking and processes for Shared Decision-Making

Action Two:

Further enable inclusive community engagement

Continue to strengthen HUM's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their emerging leaders, and communities by embedding the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in all parts of the collaborative.

In the period from late 2023 to 2024, there was a broad acknowledgement that Aboriginal community members need to feel safe and able to engage in respectful two-way conversations for change to take place. Ways of building trust and safety include how governance works and how Hands Up Mallee commits to cultural learning and invites Aboriginal community members to shape and be part of collective governance.

This has led to the structuring of Hands Up Mallee's Leadership and Governance groups, strengthening the relationships between them and deeper learning together to support change, much of which is described under Action One.

A core group continued to come together monthly in a more formal arrangement for the Yarning Group in late 2023 to 2024. Membership is open to 8-10 community members who are offered an honorarium payment for their involvement. They have refined processes for electing new members and providing induction support. The Aboriginal Social Impact Lead coordinates the Yarning Group, supported by The Hands Up Mallee Executive Officer and other Backbone team members as needed.

Following the overwhelming success of the On Country Cultural Learning event in 2024, the Yarning Group is currently planning another event for early 2025 to further deepen cultural understanding and to potentially scale this out to include representatives from partner organisations.

Hands Up Mallee has continued to ensure that there is strong Aboriginal representation in its co-design projects with community and partner organisations to ensure their perspectives and expertise are helping to shape the changes required.

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Requirements for further growth in Action 2

- Further cultural learning will be undertaken with the Yarning, Governance and Backbone teams in 2025, and identify the potential to include representatives from partner organisations
- Continue to ensure strong Aboriginal representation in existing and future projects with community and partner organisations

Action 3.

Develop resources to help attract and onboard partners from various sectors.

1. Develop other communication resources that explain HUM and its ways of working to help attract and onboard new partners from various sectors that make up the community, for example around things like movement building and attracting the corporate sector.
2. HUM Governance members to meet with, and present to, local boards to help them understand the value of HUM, identify opportunities for alignment, and encourage them to become involved in collaborative approaches and efforts.
3. Develop partnership agreements with government, services and businesses that support a collective impact approach.

In 2023-24, Hands Up Mallee's efforts to communicate about its way of working and to attract and on board new partners have included:

- Major upgrade to HUM Website and supporting communications (currently in progress)
- Mid-Term external Evaluation Report and Case Studies
- Hosting Changefest 2024
- Data dashboard development
- Design and focus of Local Solutions approach

Significant Growth in Action 3

Develop other communication resources that explain HUM and its ways of working to help attract and onboard new partners from various sectors that

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make up the community, for example around things like movement building and attracting the corporate sector.

Website Upgrade and Data Dashboard development

Hands Up Mallee is currently updating its website and supporting communication resources to better explain HUM, its way of working, its change focus and achievements in order to help attract and onboard new partners from various sectors. It is anticipated that this will go live early 2025.

In 2024 significant enhancements to the data dashboard were made, many of which were enabled through the support from DSS which allowed the release of certain data streams to Seer Analytics.

Mid-Term external Evaluation Report and Case Studies

In 2024, Hands Up Mallee commissioned Clear Horizon to undertake an external Mid-Term Evaluation of HUM informed by its Journey of Change and Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework.

The purpose of the evaluation was to validate and codify the role of the HUM backbone team and the HUM initiative in delivering place-based change using a collective impact approach. The evaluation report has:

- Identified the strengths and challenges that impact on the ability of HUM initiative to contribute to place-based change.
- Investigated the extent to which the HUM backbone team and HUM initiative have employed the enablers for change in the overarching Journey of Change applying a community-led approach, and how these have contributed to place-based change in the Mildura LGA.
- Provided a light contribution analysis to demonstrate the value of HUM's way of working as well as how change happens (how small initial changes provide leverage for larger change).
- Provided three case studies that demonstrate the importance of the Backbone team and its independent way of working and the role of government and philanthropy partners in creating place-based change
- Demonstrated how the case studies further highlight the changes in systems leadership that have happened both locally and beyond because of HUM's work

Currently HUM is investing in a communications strategy to bring the findings to the attention of various stakeholders.

Design and focus of Local Solutions approach

The design and focus of the Local Solutions approach and offering through a Public Tender has been viewed as an important opportunity to attract and engage with potential new partners.

HUM Governance members to meet with, and present to, local boards to help them understand the value of HUM, identify opportunities for alignment, and encourage them to become involved in collaborative approaches and efforts.

Before HUM Governance members can meet with, and present to, local boards to help them understand the value of HUM, identify opportunities for alignment, and encourage them to become involved in collaborative approaches and efforts, it has been important that the Collaborative Governance Group develop its Charter. Therefore, during this Action Plan period, priority has been given to this in preparation for more outward facing leadership ahead. As the Collaborative Governance Group members have become clearer, and more confident about their roles and functions, they have become active in presenting more broadly to various audiences and to Changefest 2024 audiences. In parallel to this, HUM has been updating its website and developing supporting communications which will support the advocacy work of the Governance Group

Develop partnership agreements with government, services and businesses that support a collective impact approach.

Hands Up Mallee has undertaken the following partnership agreements in 2023-2024: -

- One-year DSS Grant Agreement and Local Solutions Agreement
- Agreement with Collaboration for Impact and Connected Beginnings to host Changefest2024

Hands Up Mallee, in partnership with other *Stronger Places Stronger People* funded communities has been working collaboratively as the Stronger Places Alliance (SPA) to raise common needs and issues with Federal Government and to share collective learnings about this way of working.

Formalised Shared Decision-Making agreements with DSS have not yet been achieved. Similarly, sign-off on Grant Agreements between communities and DSS for 2025-2029 is yet to be reached. Delays have the potential to significantly impact on factors such as staff retention, and the commitment of localised partnership agreements with HUM place based, community-led projects and Local Solutions.

Joint Commonwealth and State and Territory Government support is a key defining element of the Stronger Places, Stronger People approach. Since the Victorian State government dissolved the place-based partnerships unit in the Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions (DJSIR) in 2023, Hands Up Mallee has not had a strong link in to government. DJSIR has agreed to roll existing funding forward for HUM for the next two years, but at this point has not committed new funding. There is much to do to develop and adopt more comprehensive and formalised Partnership Agreement with State government, and to secure future funding from the state.

Requirements for further growth in Action 3

- Use the opportunities that the website upgrade and Mid-Term Evaluation Report, and provide to promote HUM's way of working and achievement to attract new partners and broaden community interest.
- In preparation for a four-year Grant Agreement with DSS develop a Strategic Plan 2025-2029
- Identify ways to strengthen relationships with the Victorian State Government to identify opportunities to adopt a comprehensive and formalised Partnership Agreement to advance the work of HUM

Action 4.

Further enable Measurement, Evaluation and Learning

1. Progress data sharing by working with *Stronger Places, Stronger People* at the initiative level to gain improved access to relevant population data.
2. Identify opportunities to share locally collected data and develop data sharing agreements to support these.
3. Liaise with the Aboriginal Voices Yarning Group and other representatives to develop an Indigenous Data Sovereignty Framework to complement HUM's existing Ethics, Privacy and Safety Framework. Engage appropriate consultancy service(s) to facilitate this work.

4. Strengthen the ways that HUM can demonstrate value to the community, partners, and investors. For example, through external evaluation and sharing internal evaluation and reporting practices with partners and community.

Significant Growth in Action 4

Progress data sharing by working with *Stronger Places, Stronger People* at the initiative level to gain improved access to relevant population data.

During late 2023 to 2024, Hands Up Mallee has continued to participate in data workshops to contribute to recommendations to *SPSP*. It has also participated in workshops on the Community Data Toolkit conducted by Treasury as part of the Targeting Entrenched Disadvantage Consultation where there is significant activity to improve the means of sharing Federal data with place-based community-led initiatives.

In partnership with ARACY HUM prepared and co-hosted 3 data workshops with Services and Government, families and the Aboriginal community in order to identify high level population indicators related to our work to track over next 20 years.

HUM has continued to develop its Data Hub [HUM Data Hub — Hands Up Mallee](#) with SEER Analytics and in 2024 there was a release of some data streams through the support of DSS to enhance this work which we were previously unable to access.

There is still much to be done to gain improved access to relevant population data at the geographical area, specificity and frequency to enable it to help shape our approaches and monitor our progress. Most of the data of interest to HUM is State level data and it remains difficult to get access to this.

Identify opportunities to share locally collected data and develop data sharing agreements to support these.

It is important that we only collect data locally when we are certain it is required, and it isn't already being collected by government and not shared. At this stage there has been insufficient readiness to collect and share local data and therefore to create data-sharing agreements.

Liaise with the Yarning Group and other representatives to develop an Indigenous Data Sovereignty Framework to complement HUM's existing Ethics, Privacy and Safety Framework. Engage appropriate consultancy service(s) to facilitate this work.

Hands Up Mallee seeks to increase its understanding of critical issues in Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Cultural Safety to evolve Hands Up Mallee's Ethics, Privacy and Safety Framework. [Microsoft Word - HUM-EthicsPrivacySafety-Framework-FINAL-231017](#)

In November 2024 Hands Up Mallee sought quotes for Cultural Safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty Principles workshops. At this stage, it is anticipated these will be conducted by June 2025.

Strengthen the ways that HUM can demonstrate value to the community, partners, and investors. For example, through external evaluation and sharing internal evaluation and reporting practices with partners and community.

In 2024 HUM commissioned a Mid-Term Evaluation Report as described under Action 3.

HUM continues to develop and share its internal evaluation reports across the initiative. It has also presented its approach to the Australian Evaluation Society Conference, to the Clear Horizon Academy and to the SPSP sites Community of Practice for Measurement Evaluation and Learning.

Requirements for further growth in Action 4

- Undertake the grounding workshops for Cultural Safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty Principles and identify the means to commence operationalising these
- Progress and formalise the high-level indicators to track over next 20 years.
- Continue to identify and champion opportunities for increasing access to data at Federal, State and local levels relevant for decision-making. Support the NHMRC application in partnership with other Victorian communities, Department of Education and Deakin University to pilot comprehensive data monitoring from birth to post school to increase the understanding of what young people in our community need

Action 5.

Further enable investment and policy for purpose

Undertake more extensive resource mapping to make aggregated funding amounts more transparent and to increase accountability to the community.

Advocate for flexible Federal and State funding arrangements for HUM partners delivering services in the Mildura LGA.

Significant Growth in Action 5

Undertake more extensive resource mapping to make aggregated funding amounts more transparent and to increase accountability to the community.

The disbanding of the Place-based unit within DJSIR in 2023 has meant the Victorian State Government has not played an active role in the Hands Up Mallee partnership during 2023-24. This has made it difficult to undertake state level resource mapping.

HUM has undertaken some local level resource mapping to better understand what is available to support youth at risk of entering the justice system. This has included mapping the organisations receiving funding to support young people, the programs they deliver and their hours of operation.

Advocate for flexible Federal and State funding arrangements for HUM partners delivering services in the Mildura LGA.

Hands Up Mallee has continued to advocate for flexible funding arrangements with Federal and State governments. As reported under Action Z we have invested a lot of time and thinking in the Local Solutions grant tender specifications.

Hands Up Mallee has undertaken some dialogue with Department of Justice and Community Safety about potential investment and repurposing towards a greater prevention focus for youth.

Requirements for further growth in Action 5

- Formalise a request to the Commonwealth for an investment map be undertaken in 2025
- Formalise a request for investment mapping at a State level for priority areas such as youth and early years.
- Continue to identify and advocate for flexible and longer-term Federal and State funding arrangements for four years for delivering services and innovative solutions in the Mildura LGA