

Fun in the Park

2022 pilot evaluation



**HANDS UP
MALLEE**

A connected community where families matter and children thrive

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.

This pilot and its evaluation was made possible by the words, insights and support of our partners and community members.

Hands Up Mallee recognises the generosity and in-kind support of all partners, including community members who share their time and insights working together with Hands Up Mallee to create change.

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Introduction

About the Fun in the Park pilot

Hands Up Mallee and partners delivered The Fun in the Park pilot between March and May 2022. Hands Up Mallee identified an opportunity for this pilot based on the success and learnings from the local COVID-19 Active Outreach vaccination and testing program undertaken in late 2021. *(For more about the COVID-19 Active Outreach program read the [COVID-19 Active Outreach Testing and Vaccination Evaluation and Learning Report](#) or watch [Working Together, we can do it](#), video interviews with key partners in the outreach program).*

The Fun in the Park pilot involved running a series of free, family and child-friendly events in neighbourhood parks in Mildura. The pilot aimed to reach local children and families living close to three small community parks, Buxton Sobee Park, Hornsey Park and Flamingo Park. All parks included in the Fun in the Park Pilot had been highly successful locations for earlier COVID-19 Active Outreach program events and were selected because of the learnings from that program. In addition to those learnings, trial parks were chosen as:

- Nearby residents experience a number of barriers to accessing services and activities for their children. With high proportions of residents in the selected neighbourhoods residing in public housing.
- Most free events for children and families are held in major, well serviced parks which are at a distance to the selected neighbourhoods making these events difficult or costly to attend.

Hands Up Mallee delivered the pilot in collaboration with local services, including Sunraysia Community Health Services, Sunraysia Arts and Learning, and Mallee District Aboriginal Services. In addition to partnering on pilot collaboration and delivery, Mildura Rural City Council funded the Fun in the Park pilot. The Mildura Lions Club supported the Fun in the Park pilot by coordinating the free Barbeque at events. Along with connecting and coordinating the pilot partnership and delivery of Fun in the Park pilot events, Hands Up Mallee provided systems and strategic planning and coordination of Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning.

The events involved various activities, including music, craft, sport, and free barbeque. Goals for the pilot included; increasing access to social and recreational activities for children and families, strengthening community connections, and supporting service providers to experience and build confidence in engaging with the community in different ways.

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 wellbeing equity issues in our community.

HUM 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.

HUM is committed to continuous learning and improvement concerning its work to achieve positive social outcomes for the Mildura community.

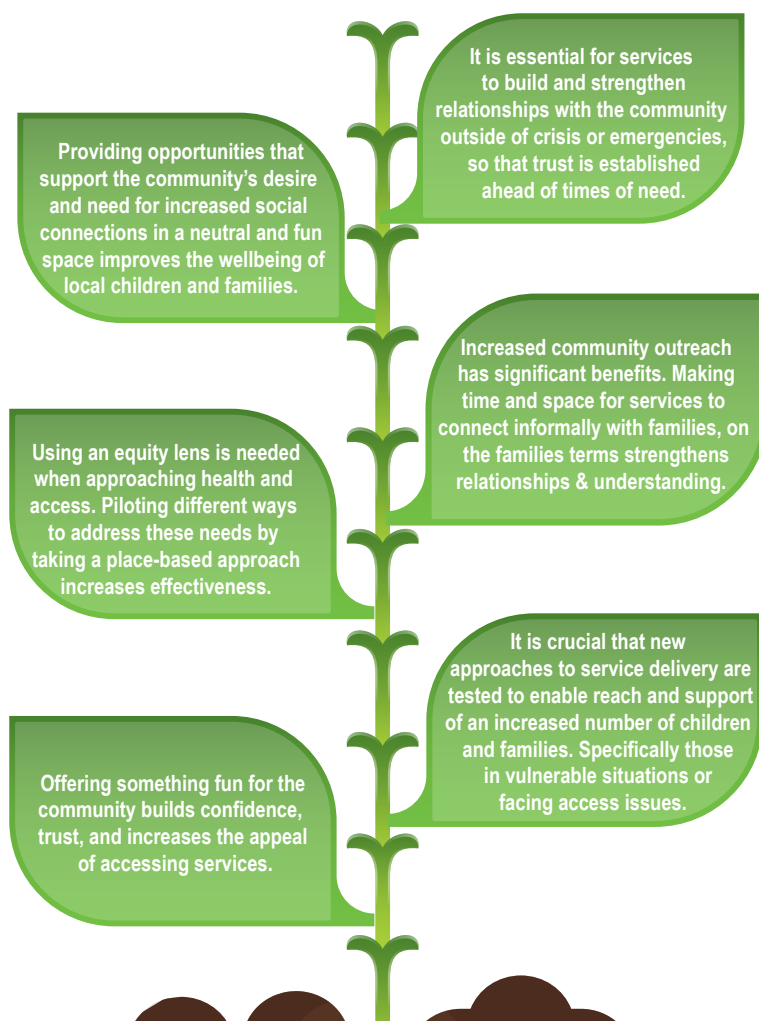
Background

Active Outreach vaccination and testing program

In late 2021, local services and community partners collaborated to plan and run a series of targeted Active Outreach Clinics for COVID-19 testing and vaccination. This COVID-19 collaboration grew from calls from the community to do things differently to address health inequity by actively reducing barriers, such as access, cultural safety and informational barriers that many members of the Mildura LGA were facing when trying to access vaccination.

Active Outreach Clinics were designed based on strong community engagement. Community members played a pivotal role by advising and making decisions on location, communication, people to connect and work with, times, days, and fundamental ways of working. As a result, these clinics successfully reached many community members who may not be comfortable with or able to attend universal clinics or mainstream services.

The Active Outreach Clinics highlighted opportunities for services, and needs of the community, which were used in developing the Fun in the Park pilot.



**Learnings
from Active Outreach Clinics
that grew the Fun in the Park
pilot project**

A connected community where families matter and children thrive

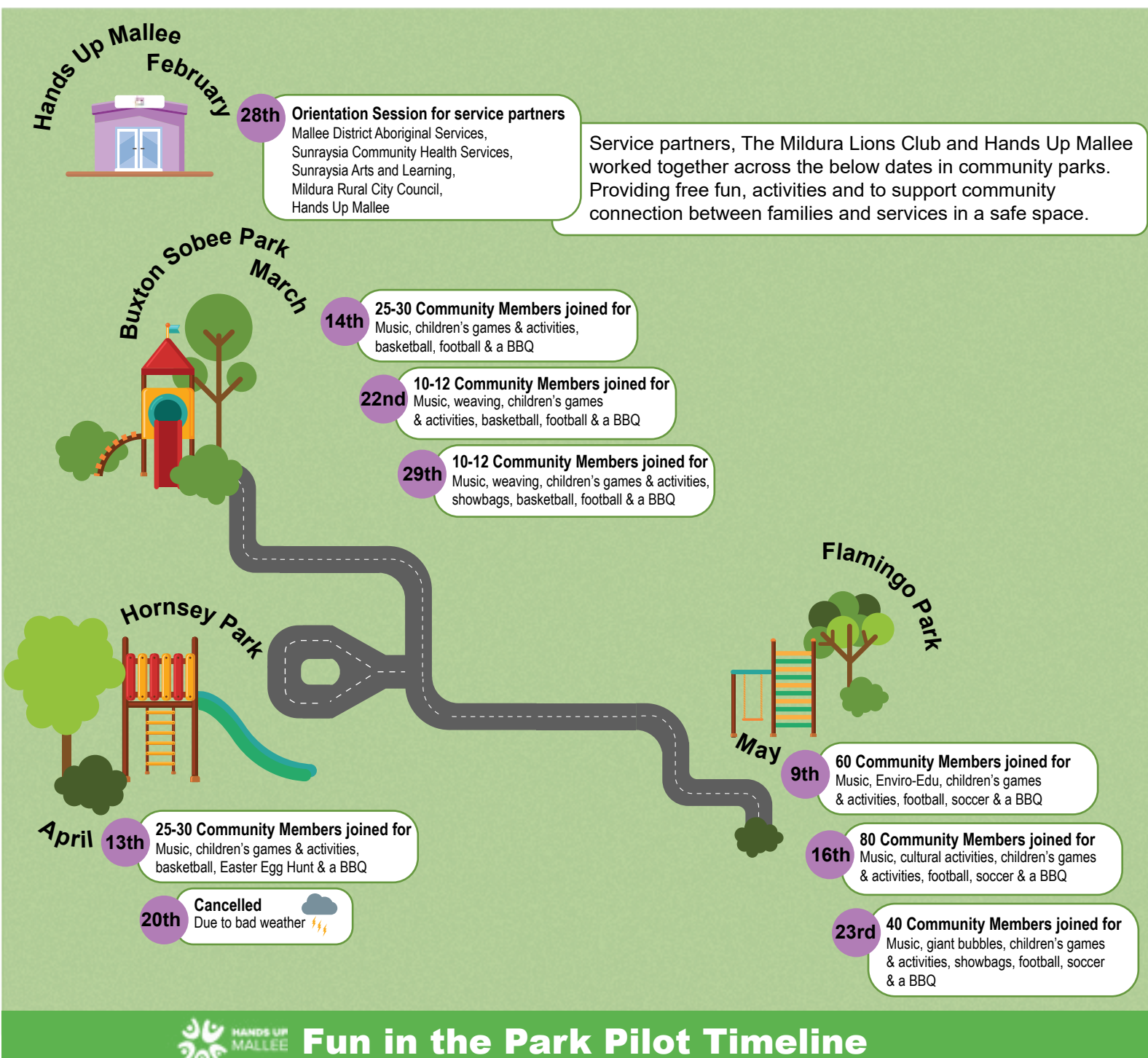


Designing the Fun in the Park pilot

Hands Up Mallee designed The Fun in the Park pilot to further test the active outreach approach as a way for services to meaningfully engage with the community and support community connections and participation by:

- Bringing together a small collaboration of local services to deliver an 8-week series of planned family activities in three local neighbourhood parks in consultation with residents and community members.
- Delivering an orientation session with pilot partners to build experience, confidence and understanding of different ways of engaging and supporting the community
- Evaluating the impact and outcomes of this pilot to inform future action for services in the community.

Hands Up Mallee led the Fun in the Park pilot in partnership with Mildura Rural City Council, Sunraysia Community Health Services, Sunraysia Arts and Learning and Mallee District Aboriginal Services, who contributed to the planning and coordination of events. In addition to partnering on pilot collaboration and delivery, Mildura Rural City Council funded the Fun in the Park pilot. The Mildura Lions Club supported the Fun in the Park pilot by coordinating the free Barbeque at events.



Evaluation

Report Purpose

The purpose of the evaluation report is to summarise the process, activities, learnings and outcomes of the Fun in the Park pilot by:

- Capturing the reflections and learnings for service partners about what makes community outreach events/activities successful.
- Capturing initial insights and impacts on families and children.
- Identifying clear recommendations and opportunities for future work and ways of working.

Key Audiences

The report is designed to inform HUM service partners, particularly the services who were actively involved as part of the Fun in the Park pilot partnership:

- Mildura Rural City Council
- Sunraysia Community Health Services
- Mallee District Aboriginal Services
- Sunraysia Arts and Learning.

Secondary audiences include the HUM Backbone Team, local service providers not part of this pilot, interested community groups/ partners, and the broader community.

The report has been developed, prepared and designed by Hands Up Mallee Team members.

Our Key Evaluation Questions

- 1 How well did we design, deliver and manage the Fun in the Park pilot?**
- 2 What changes, innovations and practices resulted from taking a place-based approach to the Fun in the Park pilot?**
- 3 What are the key lessons of the Fun in the Park pilot and of working together?**
- 4 What do we need to do next to strengthen Active Outreach work to reduce inequities in accessing services?**

Methodology

Hands Up Mallee took a developmental approach to evaluating the Fun in the Park pilot. The pilot design, with short cycles of activities in three different locations, created the opportunity for the pilot partnership team to take an iterative learning and adaptive approach.

Qualitative evaluation technique which involved the collection of reflections and observations, drawn from service partners and community member feedback, and pivot logs underpin this evaluation.

These forms of evidence inform the shared reflection and review process undertaken in rapid cycles during the pilot. Within this reflection and review process, information or evidence that generates insights or creates shifts in understanding form what HUM refers to as learnings. By reflecting on learnings frequently during the pilot the pilot partnership team were able to identify and plan adaptive changes, referred to as pivots, and implement them to the pilot while it was being delivered. Learnings have also formed the basis for the key findings and recommendations in this evaluation report.

Data Collection

The HUM Backbone Team collected data to inform this evaluation using the following tools:

- Reflection, Observation, and Pivot Logs from the pilot partnership team
- Informal interviews with community participants
- Most Significant Learning stories gathered from our service partners
- Quantitative measures - Counts of how many services engaged, how many community members attended and how many successful events were held

Data Analysis

The qualitative data collected from observations, interviews and reflections were analysed thematically, referring back to the Journey of Change (*see appendix*) developed for the pilot and aligned to the key evaluation questions.

Limitations

The evaluation findings draw together information primarily informed by the voices of our pilot service partners. Most feedback that shares a community perspective is indirect and was drawn from the observations of community members by service partners. This way of working was actively chosen in order to prioritise connection and relationship building over a more formal evaluation. The choice of gathering informal conversational input from attendees acknowledges that participating in a formal evaluation process could overwhelm attendees, create barriers between them and service partners, or diminish family experiences at Fun in the Park. Ultimately services forming relationships and building trust with community members was a higher priority outcome and will have a more lasting benefit for the community than formal data gathering. A small sample of direct community feedback has been integrated into the learnings from this pilot.



Key Findings

Key Learnings about the design and delivery of the pilot

HUM has sorted the learnings about the design and delivery of the park events into four key themes:

- The importance of place-based design
- Choosing activities to engage everyone
- Communicating with community
- Building and growing connections



1

The importance of place-based design

As explained earlier in this report, HUM developed the Fun in the Park pilot activities design based on the key success factors and learnings from the Active Outreach vaccination program. Analysis of the pilot results reinforces earlier findings of three essential elements for successful engagement with children and families in neighbourhood parks:

- Choice of location
- Providing food
- Organising free or low-cost activities

The participation numbers at each location validated that the park locations selected for the pilot were the right places to reach our intended community members. Choosing parks which were familiar and accessible to families in order to overcome barriers to participating in community activities was a key element in achieving pilot goals.

Some unanticipated challenges arose from holding events at parks, including the lack of public toilets. The pilot partnership planned these events to attract people who live close to the parks, which might suggest they have easy access to toilets. However, the lack of bathrooms in the park was difficult for families with children who did not live nearby or families who brought multiple children. Based on this insight and to better support attending families, the pilot partnership team had planned to hire a toilet for the second location. This pivot decision could not be tested, due to poor weather, that event had to be cancelled.

In addition to a lack of facilities the event held at the second park location highlighted another unexpected challenge; community members identified issues that people using wheelchairs or mobility scooters had difficulty accessing the park. This has illuminated a significant barrier to equitable access of public spaces. From these learnings the pilot partnership have identified that public spaces in some parts of our community are not well designed for families.

Food was an essential component of the events. The Lions Club provided a free barbeque at each of the events. The food created an opportunity for people to socialise over a meal together or enabled them to hang around longer. Many people could take food home, with some families telling us this made life a bit easier for the night. The pilot partnership invited the Lions Club as they have expertise in coordinating barbeques at local events, and this allowed the pilot partnership to focus on other aspects of event coordination. An unintended benefit of this arrangement was that the Lions Club provided the same people at each event, allowing them to strengthen relationships with local children and families through ongoing participation and conversation.

Free activities for children and families are a significant need in the community, with the cost to participate in many other community activities creating a substantial barrier to participation.

The pilot partnership designed most activities provided at the park events to be easy for families to replicate at home for low or no cost. Early reflections on the pilot identified that the pilot partnership could send activity packs or items home with families. Testing this began by providing books, at the third Fun in the Park event on the 29th of March, which families received well.

Alongside choosing the best locations for children and their families, providing free food and simple but enriching activities were critical components of the pilot design. Together these three elements created safe spaces which enabled connection with and between community members and opportunities to build trusting relationships with Hands Up Mallee and pilot partners.

“
The food was great, big draw card, and the first thing most of the children asked was 'what are we eating?' straight away
”
Service Partner - 1st event reflection

“
Free is our budget, hey Mum?
”
Young person





2 Choosing activities to engage everyone

Appropriate activities to attract and continue engaging children and families in the parks was a clear pilot goal. There were two key learnings concerning the types of activities happening:

- Activities that engage across the different ages
- Activities with a wow factor & those that families can replicate at home

The pilot partnership initially designed activities with a focus on suitability for children aged 0-8 years. This decision was influenced by the experiences of key partners, such as Supported Playgroup staff, involved in pilot delivery and the pilot partnership team's expectation that families with younger children were the most likely to attend Fun in the Park events.

However, most children participating in the first Fun in the Park event were those from mid-upper primary school ages. This learning meant that the pilot partnership team pivoted to include a range of activities suitable for a wider ranging age group through remaining Fun in the Park sessions.

At the first location, there were not many adults who came along and stayed. This experience changed in the third location, where more adults attended. However, this may have been influenced by the fact that many attendees at the third location had travelled from other parts of the community to participate in the events, where adults at the first location lived nearby and may have been more confident because of their closer connection to, and familiarity with, the location.

The children and families who attended consistently engaged with the activities such as music –drums and other instruments, giant Jenga, books, football and basketball. A 'wow' factor activity was part of each event, such as weaving, cultural dance, giant bubbles, and a live animal demonstration by EnviroEdu. A key learning from the pilot was the important role that balancing activity types plays in activating community events and building sustainability. 'Wow-factor' activities enabled the pilot partnership to draw people in to the parks while low-key consistent activities, that can be replicated by families, encourage peer connection and help to build longer-term sustainability of similar community connection events and activities.





Attendance numbers increased with social media promotion of Fun in the Park event dates featuring 'wow' factor activities such as the live animal demonstration, cultural dance and giant bubbles. Future planning of park located events could leverage the use of these types of activities to initiate engagement, while selecting promotion methods based on whether the event is targeted to smaller neighbourhood areas or the broader community.

“

I'm wondering about how to consistently engage attending adults in activities that nurture them too

I loved one parents model yesterday of taking care of baby while their other children spent time weaving, and the other adults modelling giving it a go –

Service Partner - post event reflection

permission to play is so important.

”



3 Communicating with community

When planning this pilot, tailoring promotion to the desired target audience and ensuring communication materials are created in an accessible and attractive way was identified as critical. HUM identified some key learnings about which tools and methods most effectively reach different parts of the community.

The primary promotion tool for Fun in the Park was through letterbox drops of flyers within the neighbourhoods connected to each park. The pilot partnership chose this method of promotion to limit reach to community members living close to the parks. With members of the Hands Up Mallee team and pilot partners carrying out the letterbox drops this method had the additional benefit of initiating contact and conversations with neighbourhood residents to build interest and trust before events were held.

The flyer had a simple design, including images and plain language to promote key messages and activities. People living near the parks that attended events commented that receiving the flyers had prompted them to attend.

Flyers and letterbox drops do have limitations. They take extra time, it is challenging to communicate updates when changes occur (such as activities or poor weather cancellations), and they do not have the same wide reach as social media.

By the third location, the pilot partnership team decided to add social media to their promotion methods. Social media enabled a wider spread of information with community organisations such as schools, Kindergartens and childcare centres sharing and promoting Fun in the Park events to their families. Many families attending the third location commented that this is how they heard about the events.

Adding social media promotion to later events was an effective way to reach higher numbers of families. An unintended consequence of this broader promotion is that many of the participants at the third park had travelled in to Mildura from Red Cliffs, Irymple and nearby areas to attend Fun in the Park. The addition of social media promotion meant that, while well attended, events were not able to be as focused on the pilot objective of developing connection with and between families from the park area neighbourhood. The pilot partnership found that to achieve the goal of reaching and connecting families within a specific and small geographical area it is more appropriate to limit promotion to flyers, word of mouth, and local school newsletters.



4 Building and growing connections

Another core goal for the Fun in the Park pilot was to build and strengthen connections between services and community and peer to peer across the community through engaging activities held in local parks. There were some key learnings about what this takes and how it can be sustained and facilitated over time.

The kids who were returning from last week definitely were starting to build connections – I had great chats with the kids... they remembered things we had done together the week before and mentioned them when they came to say hi/join in and they were very relaxed in the space

Service Partner

I feel like we are only just scratching the surface with three events in each location – relationship building/trust/rapport and understanding the culture and needs of a community takes so much time and so many repeated experiences of consistently hanging out

Service Partner

I go to school with some of the other kids on the bus, but we don't say much to each other

Young Person

Although people live near each other, this doesn't necessarily mean they know their neighbours. Having activities in local parks helps build and strengthen connections between children and families by providing a neutral space for them to meet and get to know their neighbours.

One of the original goals of the pilot was to build the connections between services and the community with the intention that if a service could be supporting someone through a program or something that they offer to the community, services could make these connections or referrals informally. It was clear that there was potential for this to happen (families with a need for service support were attending).

However, it requires a more sustained involvement in the neighbourhood / community to enable this and increased adult participation, in particular parents and carers.

As far as engagement with the parents, I think the approach has been working, and they feel comfortable to chat and come back.

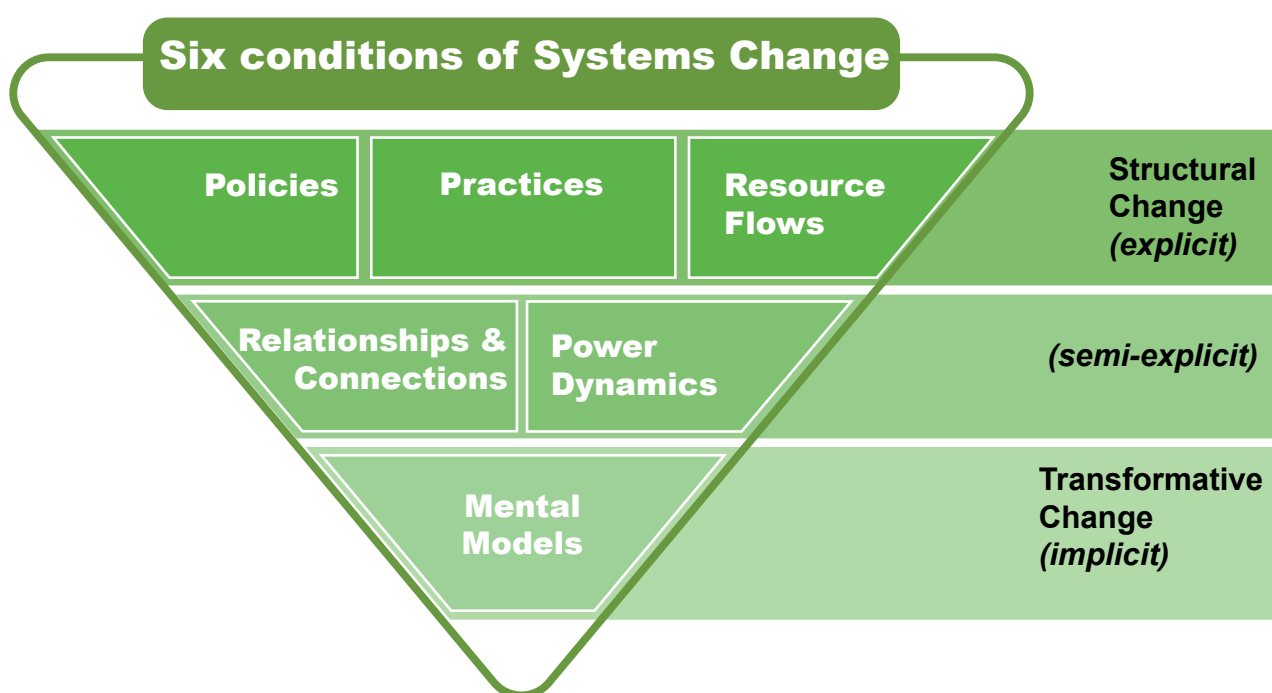
Service Partner

Early signs of Systems Change

To create the lasting social change that our community is seeking, the Hands Up Mallee initiative takes a collaborative systems change approach to our work. A systems change approach aims to address the underlying causes of social issues, focusing on prevention and early intervention rather than treating their “symptoms” or intervening at crisis points.

Because the systems that hold disadvantage in place are complex, and changing them requires multi-layered, long-term effort, it can be hard to identify early signs of change.

Using the *Waters of Systems Change* framework Hands Up Mallee have used the learnings from the Fun in the Park pilot to identify changes which reflect early shifts in the system.



from Kania J, Kramer M and Senge P
The Waters of Systems Change, FSG June 2018



Change in mindsets

Systems change condition **Mental Models**

Mindsets, or beliefs and values, that shape how people see the world around them can help hold existing systems in place. When working to generate broader systems change it is important to understand the role of changing mindsets.

The Fun in the Park pilot created opportunities for services to work differently and think about community relationships and spaces from a different perspective. As a result service partners were very open about how their mindsets had been challenged or changed due to involvement in this pilot.

”
It was a real eye-opener,
coming from my previous role
I thought I knew community,
but I knew stuff all
“

Service Partner - Debrief session reflection

”
For me, I took the time
to sit in silence and observe.
It's really hard to not be
'go, go, go'
I've had to change
my mindset about
what the work is
“

Service Partner - Debrief session reflection



Change in knowledge

Systems change condition **Practices**

At the end of the pilot, service partners reflected on what they had gained from the pilot experience. Partners identified that they now better understood the community and how to connect with community members. The events challenged some of the pilot partnership team's perceptions and assumptions about community members: what they knew about people in the community and how they think, feel and behave and what they know.

”
I have learnt that community
was right, people –
families and children want these
things in community...
I have learnt that community
is hungry for things to
do that are easy, accessible
and that this is quite
easy to make happen
“

Service Partner - Most Significant Change Story



Change in practice

Systems change condition **Practices**

Part of the commitment by the service partners when commencing this pilot was *'to show up in a different way: informal, fun, friendly, curious, brave and with a low-key service presence'*. An orientation session run by the HUM Backbone Team ahead of events empowered service partners to step into this role at different pilot stages.

Service partners consistently modelled different ways of 'doing' throughout the pilot. When reflecting on some learnings and changes, service partners shared that they felt this commitment was necessary. It was difficult for some to change their usual practice, but the pilot was an opportunity to change through doing.

I thought it was a great session and very much in line with our idea of low-key, and most lanyards etc. were put aside

Service Partner

I'm thinking differently about how to connect with community

Service Partner



Change in skills

Systems change condition **Practices**

Some of the ways people in services are required to work with the community can present barriers to forming the solid relationships essential for positive outcomes.

The Fun in Park pilot provided services with an opportunity to learn or build and strengthen their confidence and skills in casual engagement.

It's powerful when adult support people (services) join in with the activities – it forms a connection with kids when you play together.

Service Partner

The team's ability to 'play' really supported attendees to engage and participate, particularly those that had attended twice

Service Partner



Change in relationships

Systems change condition **Relationships and Connections**

Forming a pilot partnership with established partners and resources enabled the pilot partnership team to successfully deliver the pilot. The established trust and collaboration history between partners created a safe learning environment and the support to be adaptive and flexible to meet the community's needs. Some services were less engaged than others due to service pressures and limited staffing at the time, but the strong pilot partnership helped to ensure this didn't effect the delivery of the pilot.

Service partners reflected on how they were able to start forming relationships with the community through these events that were important for their role/service.

Families showed interest in participating in future park activities, offering support and volunteering to be involved. These insights demonstrate a relationship shift, where the community desires to collaborate on the events, not just participate in them.

I had the opportunity to get around to most families and introduce myself. This was my goal for the evening

Service Partner

I received a phone call and text from a parent who wanted to offer their time and expertise as an early childhood educator. They offered to help run activities one time. Community are not only participating in events but want to make them happen

Service Partner - post event reflection



Recommendations

Based on the learnings generated by the Fun in the Park pilot, Hands Up Mallee have identified five key recommendations for community centered active outreach actions going forward:

1

Further Fun in the Park trialling

The positive community response and strong participation in the pilot demonstrates the need for to trial more Fun in the Park sessions.

2

Staying in place, longer

Both the Fun in the Parks pilot and preceeding COVID-19 Active Outreach vaccination and tesing have highlighted the importance of staying in place, across a number of weeks with a consistent location, day and time. Staying in place creates space and greater opportunity to grow stronger relationships between community members and their peers and service providers.

3

Community led co-design

HUM has learned through several iterations of collaborative work with community members, that successful collective change requires families to be involved at the development stages of projects.

Involving community members early and in roles where they lead design and development increases community ownership, engagement and empowerment.

Incorporating community led co-design in future events, trials and pilots ensures greater impact can be achieved for the community.

4

Centring equity

Maintaining our focus on equity, by ensuring that parks and activities are accessible for the children and families that we need to connect with, is central to the success of future work with community.

5

Expanding the services involved

Involve and support a greater number and variety of service providers in future events to further test this way of connecting with and supporting the community.

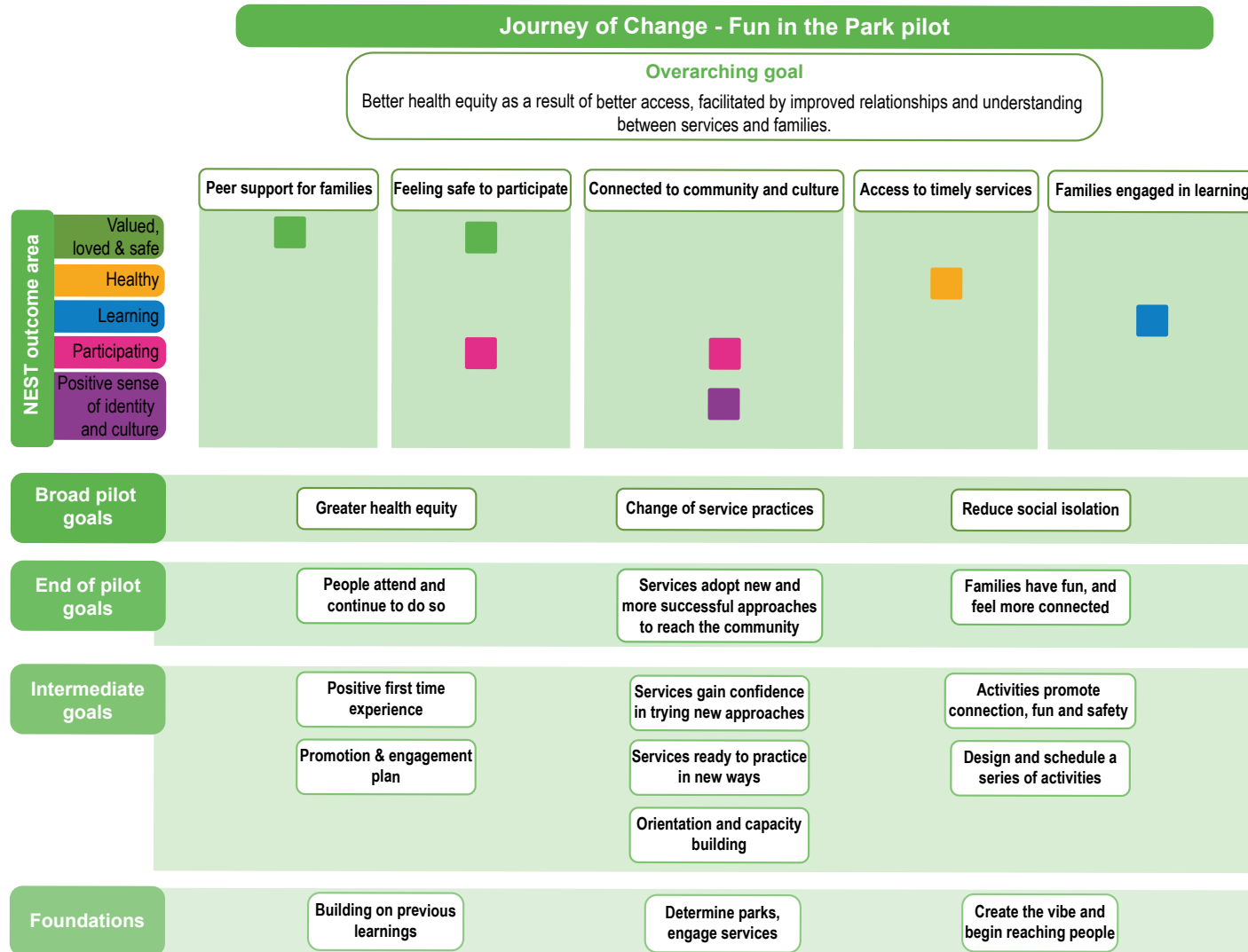
e.g. libraries, additional health services, employment, maternal and child health services.



Appendix

Journey of Change - Fun in the Park pilot

A Journey of Change shows us the many layers of change that we expect to see as we take action, working together toward our Overarching Goals and Opportunities.



Fun in the Park pilot flyer



Fun in the park

Hornsey Park

Join us for a fun
and **FREE** event
for kids and adults

Bottle flips • Ping pong shake • Frisbee throw
Drums and musical instrument playing



When

10.30am - 1.30pm, Wednesday 13 April

10.30am - 1.30pm, Wednesday 20 April



Where

Hornsey Park, Mildura 3500



All welcome!



Mildura Rural City Council



SCHS
Sunraysia Community
Health Services



MDAS
Mildura District Aboriginal Services

Promotion of Fun in the Park - ABC



Watch at <https://fb.watch/fGik--IWRg/>



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