

# Hands Up Mallee

2025

## Collective Impact Learning Circle Report

Report prepared by  
Regenerative Communities  
for Hands Up Mallee  
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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY**

**Hands Up Mallee acknowledges all First Peoples of the countries where we work, live and connect with the community.**

**We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging and the ancient connection they hold with their Country. We value their knowledge, wisdom and legacies that continue to guide our work towards positive social change.**

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

CONTENTS

Background	01
Methodology	01
Challenge One: Better Data for Better Decision-Making and Accountability	02
What is the data?	03
Compelling argument to share	03
Accessing the data	03
Community stories	04
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty	04
Challenge Two: Challenging Implicit Drivers of Entrenched Disadvantage	05
Data and community voice	06
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth	06
Early intervention	06
Systemic racism	07
Service delivery	07

Challenge Three: Investment Mapping and Sustainability	08
Funders in silos	09
Holding the full picture	09
Key area of change	09
Environmental scan	09
Shared priorities	09
Interconnecting themes	10
Conclusion	10

# BACKGROUND

Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is one of ten Stronger People, Stronger Places (SPSP) sites in Australia. Funded via the Department of Social Services (DSS).

Each year, an independent evaluation is conducted to map the progress of the HUM initiative within the Collective Impact model. Regenerative Communities, an independent and locally operating community development service, were approached to conduct the 2024-2025 progress mapping for HUM.

In February 2025, Progress Mapping workshops were held with groups representing the HUM initiative, with the findings published in a Progress Mapping Report.

Findings from this report were used to identify three key challenge topics for HUM to address in a learning circle, to deepen the conversation with a range of people from across the initiative.

**Challenge One: Better Data for Better Decision-Making and Accountability (1 group)**

How may HUM gain access to a higher level of sophisticated data for better planning, shared decision-making and accountability for partners? (Federal, state, local, cohort specific etc)

**Challenge Two: Challenging Implicit Drivers of Entrenched Disadvantage (2 groups)**

How may HUM better identify systemic racism and exclusion, and work with community and partners to identify options for working differently to change practices, relationships, power and mindsets that are holding these issues in place?

**Challenge Three: Investment Mapping and Sustainability (1 group)**

What mapping should HUM and Governments do next as priorities:

- the amount of funding coming into the region and the guidelines for its use,
- and to identify where and how community needs can be better met?

*Challenges that weren't addressed due to time constrains:*  
*How may HUM influence the State Government to help with investment mapping?*  
*How may HUM work differently towards more secure funding and sustainability?*

# METHODOLOGY

In May 2025, a three-hour Learning Circle workshop was facilitated by Regenerative Communities and the HUM Backbone team. It brought together 20 attendees, including many who had participated in the earlier Progress Mapping sessions.

Backbone Team	5
Collaborative Governance Group	5
Yarning Group	2
Partners (Government & Services)	8

Three tables had a HUM Backbone team member well briefed on a challenge topic to support the conversation and answer any clarifying questions. Each table was given a capture sheet to scribe and help guide the conversation with four boxes:

- What are the challenges in this topic?
- What would enable the change we want to see?
- What can we focus on in the short term? (12 months)
- Who might help? (Our contributions, are there gaps?)

Each table explored one or two challenge topics, with a representative presenting the summary of their group's findings to the broader room, identifying key themes along the way.

This report outlines the findings from the Learning Circle and is a resource for the HUM Backbone team to identify the 2025-26 Action and Support Plan.

*All quotes throughout this report are attributed to the Learning Circle participants.*

# Challenge One: Better Data for Better Decision-Making and Accountability

**How may HUM gain access to a higher level of sophisticated data for better planning, shared decision-making, and accountability for partners? (Federal, state, local, cohort specific etc)**

**This challenge topic has been a long term, ongoing challenge for HUM. Participants dug into why this may be- asking worthy questions about how HUM can build a case to be a trusted data holder and be more specific about what data they need and why.**

**Gaining access to data through proper channels is something HUM would like to be enabled to do, rather than relying on someone they know for informal access points (this is discussed further in the progress mapping report).**

**There is a long-term view to being able to measure the impact of HUMs work by demonstrating data shifts over time.**

***‘Is what we are doing working if data doesn’t change?’***

**Community story is an essential and valuable form of data. The Aboriginal community is working hard to be heard and address systemic racism through Aboriginal Data Sovereignty projects with HUM.**

**The key questions that emerged from this challenge topic are:**

- How/what do we need to make HUM a trusted data holder/user?
- How do we have community story heard?

**The suggested actions from participants for this challenge topic are:**

- Choose a key area of change to build a case study for data collection, defining the data required
- Mapping data partnership opportunities for a key area of change
- Explore data sharing agreements with local partners for a key area of change

**Who can help?**

- Local partners and community
- National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)
- Primary Health Network (PHN)
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)
- Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC) Early Years
- Relevant Ministers
- Department of Education

Following is a more detailed account of the themes discussed under this challenge topic.



What is the data?

Participants identified it is important to define exactly what data is needed by HUM and why. Also, knowing what data is available, the validity of that data, and how useful/appropriate it is.

Often when data is requested it is only given at a Mallee level, when a Local Government Area level is of most use.

Having a clear purpose and goals for why the data is needed is a next step. This could be done by focusing on a ‘key area of change’ that HUM want to influence and building a case study around what the current data sets are, what they want to see change, how they plan to influence that change and how outcomes will be measured.

Making a concentrated effort in one key area of change is a great way to test approaches and measure success, to then use learnings for other areas in the future.

*‘Understand some of the data that we need, perhaps around a specific piece of work, to really be learning and getting our teeth into something to continue that journey, to see how it works and test the system on receiving and using data.’*

**Suggested action:** Choose a key area of change to build a case study for data collection, defining the data required.

Compelling argument to share

Participants discussed ways that HUM can create a compelling argument to take to Government and Services to request data access. There needs to be a solid demonstration of the opportunities that can be created through HUM having the data, and accountability as to why HUM need that data. If HUM can be clear about how they will store, use and share data, this should inspire confidence and assure government the required data storage and use protocols will be met.

*‘We have frameworks and systems and processes in place to actually receive and work with governments or services or people properly.’*

**Key question:** How/what do we need to make HUM a trusted data holder/user?

**Who might help:** Drumming up local investment in the cause will be helpful - bringing on local partners and community to help argue the case and demonstrate need.

Accessing the data

Many challenges to accessing data were discussed as this is a topic the HUM initiative are well versed in. (This is discussed further in the progress mapping report)

*‘We have a continuous challenge with data, identifying what data is out there, what’s collected, what’s actually important for us to know about or to understand, because there can be a lot of data, but it’s actually trying to get to the purpose of what it’s showing us and the data that wraps around that to make a more of a whole story.’*

Government and services may not know if it is safe to share their own data. Some of it may be sensitive or confronting. There is a broad suppression threshold in place that can be difficult to navigate, and HUM is often left without visibility into how data is being used or governed.

Participants felt that there is more data that can be freely shared at a local level than at a State or Federal government level. Understanding which partners hold data, who HUM has existing relationships with, and where the gaps exist can help map data partnership opportunities.

**Suggested Action:** Mapping data partnership opportunities for a key area of change  
**Suggested Action:** Explore data sharing agreements with local partners for a key area of change

Who might help?

- NDIS data sets
- Granular Medicare data
- PHN needs assessment and data analysis. Data sets that can be used in different ways - can breakdown Medicare data for service access/drugs dispersed in area
- MRCC Early Years- happy to share attendance rates and kinder this year
- Local partners- sharing their own data
- Relevant Ministers
- Department of Education (just starting capturing kinder attendance this year)

These need to relate to a specific piece of work, possibly that needs to be clearer in the articulation of the suggested actions.

## Community stories

Community stories are a valid and valuable form of data, however, participants identified concerns that local community stories are not always listened to properly by government and services. Participants suggested systemically gathering experiences from participants in a program to ensure community voices are heard and inform decision-making.

**Key question:** How do we have community story heard?

Racism is prevalent in our community, which can create barriers to having the right people at the decision-making table.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty

The persistence of Aboriginal community was credited as a key enabler of change in this area. HUM Backbone team and Yarning Group are currently actively working in this space, developing with Aboriginal community principles for localised Cultural Safety and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty.

The need for localised data, particularly on the stolen generation, was discussed as a key part of this challenge. This work needs to be led by the local Aboriginal community.

*‘Aboriginal people invite government people in instead of the other way around’*

# Challenge Two: Challenging Implicit Drivers of Entrenched Disadvantage

**How may HUM better identify systemic racism and exclusion, and work with community and partners to identify options for working differently to change practices, relationships, power and mindsets that are holding these issues in place?**

**Participants identified that there is a deeply personal and individual role in this particular challenge, and what's needed for people to play that role is capacity building across a range of areas.**

**This includes building an understanding of racism and its impacts on our community, how to build healthy relationships across cultures, having confidence to call out racism and have difficult conversations, and having a strong focus on listening to what community are saying.**

**Data and community voice is needed to paint a clearer picture of the impact of racism and intergenerational trauma on our community.**

**A key theme was how to shift systemic racism in organisations as well as the broader community. There are gaps in service delivery and a lack of accountability back to community from government and services, which contribute to further disadvantage.**

**Participants discussed the role of young people and how we can better introduce early intervention to support a shift in community racism, as well as the role of Cultural Education for organisations.**

**The key questions that emerged from this topic are:**

- What is our local story?
- How do we empower young people to challenge racism?
- How can we better support individuals to be able to play their role using individual power effectively and safely?
- What would an accountability methodology look like?

**The suggested actions from participants for this topic are:**

- Backbone and Yarning Group work together to identify what data they need to measure the impacts of racism and generational trauma on our community. Create a plan of who can help and an approach
- Invite more young people to join the Yarning Group, or other local groups, to support up and coming community leaders.
- Mapping current training and learning opportunities in the community that are helping to address systemic racism and exclusion, building knowledge of what it is and how it works (schools, organisations and general community)

**Who might help?**

- Child protection
- The Yarning Group
- Koorie Engagement Support Officers (KESO's)
- Heads of organisation and governance structures.
- Service provider allies and champions
- Statewide bodies, peak bodies, research universities

Following is a more detailed account of the themes discussed under this challenge topic.



Data and community voice

There is currently no data available to support measuring racism and the impacts of this on our community. We also don't know the data on the stolen generation locally.

This makes it difficult to paint a full picture of what is happening; to identify patterns and themes to see how community are impacted.

*'Having strong evidence from data, community voice, particularly around the impact of racism to inform action. Pulling together that story more tightly. We hear about it, and we know it's important for us to take action. So how do we set up for action?'*

More understanding of the effects of the stolen generation is needed, being able to see patterns of how trauma moves through generations, effecting people's lives and their children's.

Who might help?

Child protection has data on the stolen generation and can help trace the pattern of entrenched disadvantage.

**Suggested action:** Backbone and Yarning Group work together to identify what data they need to measure the impacts of racism and generational trauma on our community. Create a plan of who can help and an approach.

Emphasis was put on knowing our local story - local people need and hear local stories and local language shared in schools.

**Key question:** What is our local story?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth

There is intergenerational trauma affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth. They are growing up disconnected from cultural practices. Young people need access to opportunities to be supported by their community.

**Suggested action:** Invite more young people to join the Yarning Group, or other local groups, to support up-and-coming community leaders.

Who might help?

The Yarning Group can continue to create the space where young people can join the Yarning Group and participate fully, supporting them to join in on community issues and activities they are interested in.

Early intervention

Our young people don't know about the stolen generation and historical trauma that has happened locally. Education is not evolving to reflect what we need to learn to bring all our children along.

The change in KESO's job roles had quite a detrimental impact on community, schools, and families.

Local children need to hear local stories, learning about our history and cultures. If our community can focus on early learning and intervention through introducing on Country and other cultural learnings, such as Elders teaching language in local school and kinders, we can shift long term indicators of racism in the community.

*'A focus on young people as future generations of this community, and what's in place for their own learning, relationships, connections that we know are going to change what the future looks like.'*

**Key question:** How do we empower young people to challenge racism?

Who might help?

KESO's might help - find out more about their role.

### Systemic racism

There is a lack of understanding across the system of systemic racism, exclusion and the impacts caused by this. There is racism against Aboriginal people and CALD communities, with a pushback on immigration.

Aboriginal people are often seen as the problem. There is a lack of being informed enough to call racism out. Individuals can be held back by fear or pride.

There are organisations and individuals within them with limited knowledge, expertise and training who hold power over decision making. There is a lack of transparency about decision making. Culture changes are needed within organisations, and frameworks to support this.

*‘Having the confidence that comes from information, knowledge, trust and relationships to be able to step up into our power to challenge systemic racism and exclusion, and be able to address it in the moment.’*

Building trust and healthy relationships across the system - working with HUM’s sphere of influence.

**Key question:** How can we better support individuals to be able to play their role - using individual power effectively and safely?

Knowing what’s already happening at a community-wide level in terms of cultural learning opportunities will be helpful- exploring training options locally in community, e.g. cultural awareness learning.

**Suggested action:** Mapping current training and learning opportunities in the community that are helping to address systemic racism and exclusion, building knowledge of what it is and how it works (schools, organisations and general community).

*‘We talked about the impact of cultural learning on Country on people’s knowledge and relationships, and the opportunity to broaden that or pilot, to see how that might lead to changes outside of HUM into a broader circle out.’*

### Who might help?

Heads of organisation and governance structures  
Service provider allies and champions  
Statewide bodies, peak bodies, research universities

HUM is already working on contributions in this space, by demonstrating new structures of power/leadership that centre community through the Collaborative Governance and Yarning Groups. The importance of celebrating community, centring, strengthening and elevating the role of community in the change will come through as part of the HUMs Strategic Communications role.

### Service delivery

There was a strong theme around enabling the change, which was greater accountability from services and government to community.

Not all service delivery models are not always accessible or appropriate. Operating hours, wait times, lack of transport and lack of diversity in staffing all lead to further disadvantage for those experiencing access challenges.

There is a lack of trust in the system and its supports. Community needs to have a say in how services can be improved and how to address the systemic exclusion issues.

There needs to be accessible, trauma informed cultural training for local service providers and more Aboriginal staff in roles working with children and young people.

For example, having a requirement to report back to the community on progress and outcomes on public documents such as Reconciliation Action Plans.

If a service or government department has a public statement or commitment such as a Reconciliation Action Plan, and their actions appear inconsistent, how can we be across that as a community?

**Key question:** What would an accountability methodology look like?

For the community to be aware of progress and outcomes what would the mechanisms to facilitate direct feedback from community to services and government be?

## Challenge Three: Investment Mapping and Sustainability

**What mapping should HUM and governments do next as priorities?**

- the amount of funding coming into the region and the guidelines for its use,
- and to identify where and how community needs can be better met?

The potential impacts of investment mapping were discussed, identifying the current challenges with funding delivery in the region, with a need for better coordination and flexibility in funding.

Participants suggested conducting an environmental scan in a key area of change- mapping funding, agency priorities, and community needs to identify gaps and opportunities for better coordination and collaboration.

Discussions were held around HUM being the agency holding the bigger picture of the funding mapping, and what that will require.

Youth was identified as a potential key area of change to map initially, outlining the benefits of taking one area to build a case study for how this may work in future for other areas.

The long-term goal is to see local partners and government working better together to distribute funding into the community in a way that meets community need, avoiding duplication and leveraging opportunities through sharing information and supporting each other.

***‘We actually need to do the doing by learning together.’***

**Fostering flexibility in contracts and service delivery was an important issue identified by participants.**

**The key questions that emerged from this topic are:**

- How could we utilise existing funding differently?
- Does HUM have capacity to hold investment mapping and subsequent actions?
- How do we collectively agree on what key area of change we're going to investment map?
- Who drives what the top priorities are and how can community be involved in that?

**The suggested actions from participants for this topic are:**

- Investment map for a key area of change, using this as a case study for future issues.

**Who might help?**

- Local partners
- Contract managers
- Regional offices

Following is a more detailed account of the themes discussed under this challenge topic.

## Funders in silos

Funding and associated decisions often come from central offices and regional offices don't have oversight. HUM is seeing duplication of funding for similar purposes coming into the community as funding bodies act in isolation.

*'Regional Offices usually have far more idea of what's going on the ground and what's rolling out in community, but don't have full oversight over the funding that's coming in and what is being delivered into community.'*

Challenges exist internally in organisations. Distribution and mechanisms for determining funding are often hard to understand. Some government departments are moving toward larger contracts to streamline processes, which means a smaller number of contracts being issued.

Complexity is not always considered in regional areas. Ideally, participants would like to see funding bodies join at the table, not just providing the funds but being more involved with the region itself.

**Key question:** How could we utilise existing funding differently?

## Holding the full picture

Ideally funding information would be shared openly, fostering understanding across the system of what funding comes in and what for.

Gaining a full picture of what funding is coming into a region and for what purpose is really challenging. At this stage, that responsibility does not exist in our region. Participants raised HUM becoming the organisation who takes this on.

Participants also discussed the need for overarching structures for things that can't be sorted out at a local level. An example is an interdepartmental committee that operated previously, with deputy secretaries from the appropriate departments. Collectively identified issues were fed up with the committee to ask what action looks like at the next level.

**Key question:** Does HUM have the capacity to hold investment mapping and subsequent actions?

## Environmental scan

An investment map should include an 'environmental scan' of the key area of change chosen would look at what agencies are currently funded for and the guidelines around the use of that funding, the KPI's and capacity of the organisations.

*'How might we have an environmental scan that shows what funding is coming in, what the guidelines for its use are, but also what the interest of agencies are and their strategic intent?'*

How the issue is framed is important for approaching agencies for information on funding and KPI's, a case for why the information is needed will be helpful. Inviting everybody with an interest in the key area of change to the table and giving them a voice will be important.

Concurrently, mapping what the community voice, data and research is saying about what needs to happen in the key area of change and comparing that with the environmental scan. Identifying where there's underutilisation of existing funding, flexibility with existing funding, and the gaps.

**Suggested Action:** Investment map for a key area of change, using this as a case study for future issues.

### Who can help?

Contract managers need to be engaged in the process  
Local partners can get involved in the mapping and drumming up support  
Regional offices have the local knowledge

## Shared priorities

The aim will be then to co-create a list of mutually agreed high-level priorities for the key area of change, collaborating to leverage the impacts of this funding as much as possible.

**Key question:** Who drives what the top priorities are and how can community be involved in that?

# INTERCONNECTING THEMES

Participants identified that there were many interconnecting themes emerging across the three challenge topics.

- Defining what information HUM needs
- HUM being trusted to hold the bigger picture and sensitive information
- Overcoming challenges in the system
- Community voice and diversity in all processes
- Aboriginal youth and young people
- Systemic racism and accountability back to community

There is an opportunity for HUM to choose a key area of change, to test an approach that covers all three of the challenge topics, using evaluation to build a case study for future use in other change areas.

This will be determined by the HUM Backbone team who will use the learnings from this report to create the next twelve month Action and Support Plan.

# CONCLUSION

The Learning Circle was approached with some flexibility and responsiveness to how participants were engaging in the process. We had a wide range of perspectives from across the HUM initiative, with a high level of attendance. Participants were calm, kind and passionate in their conversations, sharing their own knowledge on the topics as well as listening carefully to each other.

The challenge topics given were complex and at times difficult to approach, but participants were able to unpack the meaning of the questions and provide valuable insights. I am consistently impressed by the people within the HUM initiative and their abilities to hold complex issues and bring the sometimes intangible impacts of their work to the forefront.

*Rhae Kendrigan*  
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