



# HANDS UP MALLEE

## RED CLIFFS CONNECTED EVALUATION REPORT

2024

## Acknowledgement of Country

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 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.

## Contributor Acknowledgement

Hands Up Mallee recognises the generosity of all partners and community members who share their time, words, insights, and support to work collaboratively and create change. Their contribution is essential to our work. The stories and information shared, and outcomes achieved in our journey together to create a connected community where families matter and children thrive, belong to them and the Northern Mallee.

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# Report Purposes

The purpose of this report is to:

- Provide the background of the Red Cliffs Connected Events project.
- Summarise the process, activities, learnings, and outcomes of the 2023/24 extension of this project.
- Identify and recommend what's next for this project.

## Background

In 2021, Hands Up Mallee (HUM) began an ideation and prototyping phase of 'The Red Cliffs Project' with Red Cliffs families of children under 8 years old. The aim of this project was to understand what is needed to create a rich environment of learning in the home and the community in order to support children's development and help them be ready for school.

One of the five big ideas that emerged from this co-design process was to hold a series of free, fun events where children could play with peers, and families could connect with others in their community. Free play provides the opportunity to develop many of the key areas of school readiness.

Parents and carers also need peer support for parenting and social support for their own wellbeing. Meeting in low stress and casual setting enables them to connect and make new friendships.

The pilot phase was named Red Cliffs Connected and carried out a series of four events in public spaces in Red Cliffs during 2022. Reported outcomes included:

- Families involved in the design and delivery of the events felt an increase in self-esteem and the sense of belonging, connection within their community and increased pride and sense of ownership of their community.
- Families and children in the community appreciated having somewhere to go as a family for free, and the opportunity to meet other children, try new things and have fun.
- Social media patterns of the Red Cliffs Connect Facebook page showed an increasing reach to Red Cliffs families, and more are using this site to connect and share interests.

Previous signs of systemic changes included:

**Change of mindset:** of family members, with their agendas expanding from focusing on their own family's outcomes to those of all families in their community.



**Relationships and Connections:** for members of the co-design group both within the group and with members of the greater Red Cliffs community.

## Goals of Red Cliffs Connected 2024



### KEY GOAL 1

*Increase access to social and recreational activities for children 0-8 years and their families to promote a child's development and school readiness.*



### KEY GOAL 2

*Work with families to co-design and engage with the community in different ways to strengthen community connections and which lead to social support networks.*

## Guiding Principles

Taking an Equity Focused, Culturally Inclusive and Strengths-Based approach, these Guiding Principles were developed in the earlier prototyping phase as part of the overarching Theory of Change for Red Cliffs Project. They support people to come together to plan, deliver and participate in the events and ensure that decision making stays true to the collaborative design developed by families in the prototyping phase.



## Approach

The key features of Collaborative Delivery approach undertaken included:

**Relational:** A core function of Backbone teams in Collective Impact work is to connect and support relationships and to embed community voices into the ways of working for services, community organisations and government with a view to sustainable creating systems change.

Throughout the year HUM Backbone played a supporting role to enable local families to build relationships with local community groups, services, and government organisations.

**Knowledge and skills exchange:** For place-based change to be effective, it must be community-led. HUM recognises that in our work with families our team brings knowledge and skills that families may not have, but that the knowledge and skills that families bring equally enriches the work of collective change.

**Co-design:** with families the supporting activities to achieve key goals 1 and 2.

## Ways of working

True to the co-design principles from which the idea for these events came, each event was planned with the group having equal input, the event run, then a debrief/reflection held. Practical learnings such as “We should just stick to Sundays when people are more available” and “It’s too cold for folk, we gotta run it later” (for winter events) are noted and part of the constant learning cycle.

The understanding that everyone brings something special to the table is inherent in the discussions.



# Co-Design Considerations

|                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| Target audience: | Families and carers with children 0-8 years living in the Red Cliffs community.   |
| Vibe             | Safe, fun, relaxed, friendly, welcoming, inclusive and encouraging.   |
| Scope            | Four events throughout 2023-24, with the intention to run one in the winter school holidays, to try one in the summer school holidays at the pool and have a cultural focus for an event.   |
| Design           | <p>Activities that may provide the opportunity for both child and adult interaction.</p> <p>Activities that will promote a child’s development and school readiness.</p> <p>A mix of active and engaged activities as well as passive activities.</p> <p>Activities that can easily be replicated in the home</p> |





## Promotion

Families had developed promotional guidelines during the project prototype phase and while staying true to these, design evolved over the year with the intention to match the design with the type of event being held.

Materials to promote the events included:

- Posters in local business windows.
- Flyers delivered to local letterboxes.
- Flyers handed out at previous NAIDOC events.
- Promotion on the Red Cliffs Families Facebook group as well as other Red Cliffs focused Facebook group pages.
- HUM social media.
- School communications such as newsletters and Compass.







### Event 3 - Promotion

Red Cliffs Connected  
Community Fun & BBQ

**Red Cliffs Connected  
Community Fun & BBQ**

**FREE**

- Kids hair cuts by Guilo
- Music & Activities
- CFA fire trucks
- Sausage sizzle

Come & meet other families in your community

**EVERYONE WELCOME**

Red Cliffs Primary School oval  
SUNDAY 21ST APRIL, 11AM-1PM

FOR MORE INFO, FIND US ON: RED CLIFFS FAMILIES @ FACEBOOK  
OR CALL MEL AT HANDS UP MALLEE ON 50217671



### Event 4 - Promotion

Red Cliffs Connected  
NAIDOC event

**RED CLIFFS CONNECTED  
NAIDOC COMMUNITY EVENT**

**EVERYONE WELCOME** **FREE EVENT**

**KEEP THE FIRE BURNING!  
BLAK, LOUD AND PROUD**  
7-14 JULY 2024

**LEARN TRADITIONAL DANCING - FACE PAINTING - FUN ACTIVITIES - FREE FEED**

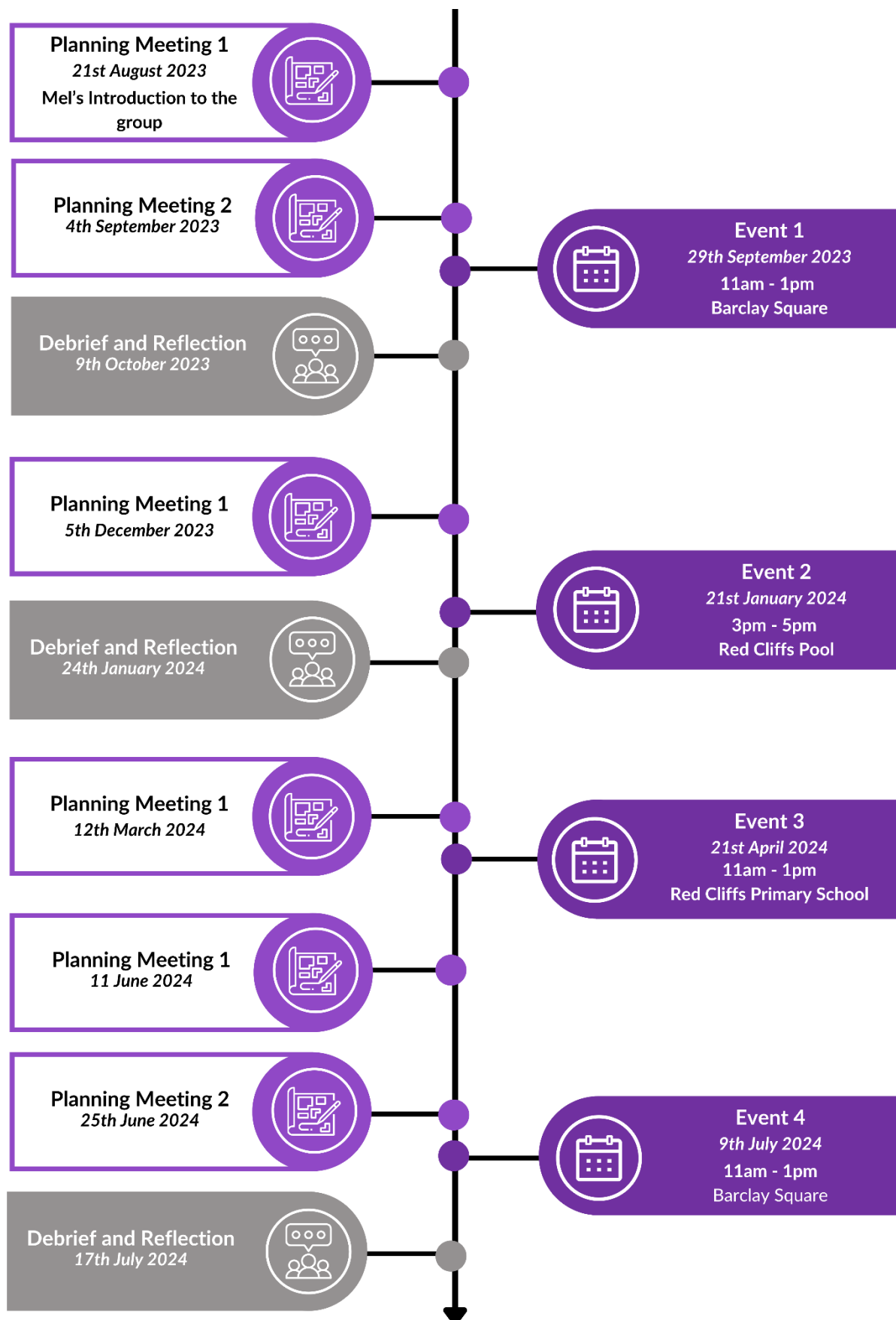
**TUESDAY 9TH JULY 11AM TO 1PM**

**BARCLAY SQUARE, RED CLIFFS**

Help us bring together our community for  
Red Cliffs first NAIDOC celebration event!

**HANDS UP MALLEE**

# Project Timeline



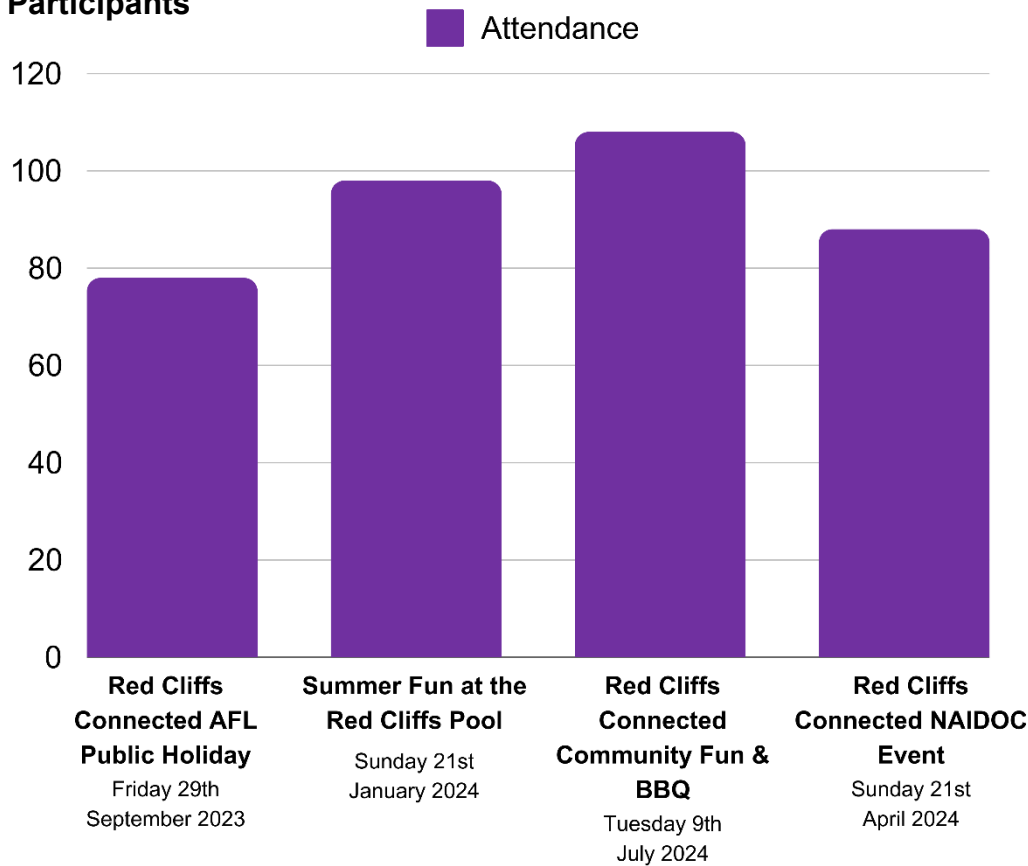
## Events Activities

| Event   | Details  | Catering  | Activities  |
|---|--|---|---|
| <b>Red Cliffs Connected AFL Public Holiday Fun</b>  | <b>Date:</b> 29 <sup>th</sup> September 2023<br><b>Location:</b> Barclay Square<br><b>Time:</b> 11am-1pm<br><b>Weather:</b> 30°C, Sunny                          | BBQ, fruit and bottled water                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participatory music making</li> <li>• Face painting</li> <li>• Egg and spoon decoration and racing</li> <li>• AFL pom poms</li> <li>• Colouring in</li> <li>• Bubbles</li> <li>• Quiet mat for reading and games</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Summer fun at the Red Cliffs Pool</b>            | <b>Date:</b> 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2024<br><b>Location:</b> Red Cliffs Pool<br><b>Time:</b> 3-5pm<br><b>Weather:</b> 31°C, Felt Pretty Hot                    | Pizza, cold water and cups, watermelon, icy poles | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pool play with inflatables &amp; sinker toys</li> <li>• Nature art &amp; sensory play</li> <li>• Music &amp; dance zone</li> <li>• Guess the watermelon the weight</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Red Cliffs Connected Community Fun &amp; BBQ</b> | <b>Date:</b> Sunday 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2024<br><b>Location:</b> Red Cliffs Primary School<br><b>Time:</b> 11am-1pm<br><b>Weather:</b> 24°C, Lovely and Sunny | BBQ, fruit, cold water and cups                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Red Cliffs CFA truck</li> <li>• Participatory music making</li> <li>• 3-legged races</li> <li>• Colouring in</li> <li>• Quiet mat for reading</li> <li>• MRCC information table for Early Years Hub</li> <li>• Sports equipment/playground</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Red Cliffs Connected NAIDOC Event</b>            | <b>Date:</b> Tuesday 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2024<br><b>Location:</b> Barclay Square<br><b>Time:</b> 11am-1pm<br><b>Weather:</b> 15°C, Very Cold                    | Kangaroo soup, damper, BBQ, water and cups        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledgment of country</li> <li>• Smoking ceremony</li> <li>• Cultural dance and teaching cultural dance</li> <li>• MDAS 2 activities plus a survey on gaps in health services</li> <li>• MRCC early years' service ran an information and activity table</li> <li>• Sunraysia Toy Library brought play equipment</li> <li>• Face painting</li> </ul> |



## Reach

### Participants



Attendance data was gathered through several head counts throughout the event by HUM.

### Geographical reach

Of people surveyed at event 3 (Red Cliffs Connected Community Fun & BBQ), held at the Red Cliffs Primary School:



These figures should be viewed as an indication only due to the small number of people surveyed (14 respondents).



Feedback took the form of:

- Noodle poll at event 2.
- A survey at event 3.
- Noting conversations with attendees at all events.
- Debriefs and reflections with families and HUM.

A noodle poll was used as a simple tool to gauge attendee's satisfaction at the Red Cliffs pool event with the visual clearly indicating they enjoyed their time.



## Event Contributions

The low-cost aspect of the events was enabled by the contributions tabled below.

|  |                      |   |
|--|----------------------|---|
| <b>Red Cliffs Farmers Market</b>                   | Community group      | Tables and chairs   |
| <b>Sunraysia Toy Library</b>                       | Community group      | Supplied and supervised play equipment  |
| <b>Red Cliffs Rotary Club</b>                      | Community group      | Volunteers cooked and served free BBQ   |
| <b>Red Cliffs Lions Club</b>                       | Community group      | Provided BBQ meat, volunteers cooked and served free BBQ  |
| <b>DJ Scopa</b>                                    | Private business     | DJ grooves and music - pro bono   |
| <b>Ritchies IGA Red Cliffs</b>                     | Business             | Fruit and icy poles   |
| <b>Red Cliffs Primary School</b>                   | Education department | Use of school grounds and facilities, including oval, bathrooms, tables, chairs, playground, sporting equipment       |
| <b>Mildura District Aboriginal Services (MDAS)</b> | Service              | Ran 2 activities  |
| <b>Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC)</b>           | Local government     | Free use of Barclay Square and Red Cliffs pool<br>Ran activities and/or information tables/surveys at events 1, 3 & 4 |

## HUM's contribution included:

- Financial.
- Administrative tasks such as creating a risk matrix, note taking, creation of promotional material after input from families, booking event sites.
- Initiating contact with new contributors.
- Tapping into existing relationships with service providers to provide activities.
- Procurement of activity providers.
- Provision of materials for events.





# Outcomes for Families and Children

## Event Participants

**Free event:** Removing the financial barrier to attendance is a key component of these events, and conversations with community members throughout the year consistently reflect that this was a decisive factor in their attendance. 36% of respondents in our survey at event 3 stated this as a reason they go to these events.

A grandmother living in Red Cliffs who had brought her 9-year-old grandson asked when another free community event would be held. It was important to her that they were free, safe, had good supervision and that they were held on the weekend.

**Inclusion and participation:** Reduced isolation and community belonging are desired outcomes in the Story of Change for Red Cliffs Connected. Features of these events that contribute to providing an opportunity for those who find it difficult to socialise include:

- Qualified music and art therapists such as Sunraysia Arts and Learning (participatory music) and Mallee Arts and Wellbeing (nature art and sensory play) running activities.
- Having a quiet zone.
- Holding events in a place that is safe for supervision purposes yet allows space to take time out.

*“My son usually doesn’t participate in group activities, it’s just too much for him, but he was loving that one” - Red Cliffs mother referring to her son taking part in the participatory music*

*“I really appreciate having somewhere to take my girls that isn’t high traffic because of their social anxiety...I haven’t seen them this happy for a long time”*



**Social connection:** Supporting a child's school readiness and development was the key aim of the Red Cliffs Project and social skills are an important aspect of this. Parents at these events have commented to HUM staff that their child has played with children they previously didn't know.

*"Junior didn't move from the pool, he made a little friend and didn't move from the pool except for something to eat"*

**Cultural representation and learning:** The 2021 census shows 4.2% of the Red Cliffs population identifies themselves as being of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, yet the Red Cliffs Connected NAIDOC event was the first to be held in the community. Social media comments following the event reflect a sense of pride for those who attended.

*"too deadly my grandson love what you are doing my Barkindji warrior, Nan Pop"*

Sharing of food is a long-practised way to transcend cultural barriers. Sharing the meal of kangaroo and vegetable soup with damper, alongside a BBQ, helped people to come together and chat. Many attendees commented how delicious the food was, with Lions Club volunteers asking where they can purchase bush tucker meat for themselves.

## Outcomes for families as organisers

The families that held the NAIDOC event expressed great joy, increased connection as a group and with their community and extreme pride in having both held the first Red Cliffs NAIDOC event and to have taken part in it.

*"Parents as organisers I'm so proud of them. They had the input also and they jumped on board with the NAIDOC event, I wouldn't have done it without these two ladies" – Elder*

*"It made me feel more attached to the Reddy community. It's Latji Latji land and it helped me feel more connected" - Elder*

The family dance group, Men and Women Dance and Sing, shared their cultural dance and taught skills to others and expressed great pride in having done so.

## Outcomes For HUM

Over the past two years the Red Cliffs Connected project has provided an opportunity for new staff members to build relationships with families and make connections in the broader Red Cliffs community. This has been of great help when then undertaking more complex work in the community such as working with families to co-design how the new integrated Early Year Hub will increase social connectedness and parenting support for parents and carers.



## Learnings

### For the Red Cliffs Connected organisers

The group continues to see the value in these events and see that there is an opportunity to use their experience to support other events in Red Cliffs.

*“This event is still doing what it was intended to do; bring people together, making connections, a place to meet people if you don’t know people” - Parent Organiser*

HUM staff built the new connection with the local supermarket Ritchies who went on to regularly donate to the events and also reached out to services and local government to be involved. The families were surprised by the willingness of these bodies to contribute and HUM staff will encourage families to take on role of initially contacting a potential partner in the future with our support to do so.

After running an event at the Red Cliffs Primary School, a site that is ‘on the West side of the tracks’, the group realised that they may need to think beyond what they have previously thought of to be a possible event site. The desire to run an event on the ‘West side of the tracks’ had been there previously but had been disbanded due to the lack of public amenities available in this part of the township. The group has decided to continue to explore suitable sites that can be activated.

Event times should change to reflect the seasonal weather. The extremely cold mornings experienced in the region at the NAIDOC event and the 11am start reportedly stopped people attending, and made those who did extremely cold.

### For HUM

Red Cliffs community groups and organisations are enthusiastic about and supportive of events such as these when the desired outcomes are communicated well and will contribute if they are able.

Managing time with a family is complex, the group understand this and expect the meetings to start on time.

Creating a rough plan with the families at the start of the year, with event focus and approximate date, allows planning for families and HUM.

Making sure all the group have a Team t-shirt creates the sense of belonging and is important to the members.

Our collection of evidence and data for these events requires greater fore-planning and more attention to evidence collection without this becoming arduous. When carrying this out at an event it should be undertaken by a HUM staff member.

The Red Cliffs Connected events align with HUM's overall work in the community of Red Cliffs, and the value of this foundational work continues to support this future work in terms of relationship building and empowering community through co-design.

## Some Event Challenges

Effective promotion of the events continues to be a challenge. Increased visibility prior to an event was suggested through methods such as large signs in a prominent place like the front fence at the pool.

New group members are needed to ensure energy and capacity of the project and for these events to continue this will need to be a focus over the next year. This was flagged last year, with a note to try to emphasise that dads and granddads are welcome, and one new family joined the group at the start of the 2023-24 period joined but this has not been a focus over the past year. This may require steering from HUM staff to be consistently addressed.



# Early Signs of Systemic Change

## Resource Flows

Over the year services have started to contribute to the events, through providing activities and/or taking the opportunity to connect with the Red Cliffs community and be available and approachable to discuss current issues or programmes they are working on. Examples are MASP having a survey at NAIDOC event on community's idea of gaps in the health system, MRCC early years and project management teams being available at the Red Cliffs Primary school event to answer questions on the new Early Years Hub currently being built in Red Cliffs.

There was an increased contribution from the Red Cliffs wider community and local services over the year in the form of donations, volunteering, in-kind resources and running activities. New contributors to Connected Community events this year were DJ Scopa, Ritchies IGA, Red Cliffs Primary School, MDAS, MRCC.

## Relationships And Connections

Increased involvement by services, community groups and local government in the events can be seen as an improvement in the quality of connections between the local family group and these formal organisations. The change in value given to such community-led events is reflected in the increase in time and resources allocated over the year, and throughout the Red Cliffs Project as a whole.

## Mental Models

The previous two years of the Red Cliffs project saw families reflecting on their own change in mindset or focus, from their involvement initially focused on their own family to 'it is about all children in the community'. Our final debrief this year brought to the surface a further progression in the group's thinking, that by utilising their skills they can plan to support the Red Cliffs community in other ways.

*"In the future this group can help support other events that are organised, this fits in with what we want for our community, let's look at the years Red Cliffs events and make a plan".*

Connection with and between Aboriginal community' was a desired outcome in the Red Cliffs Project theory of change. The realisation, and follow through by the group, that they could support the introduction of a cultural event such as NAIDOC is a great example that they have progressed from thinking what they would like to see happen to being the change makers and making it happen.

## Recommendations

### **Designing and Implementing Future Red Cliffs Connected Events**

- Increase visibility prior to an event with large signs in a prominent place.
- Run a NAIDOC themed event again and run it later in the day.
- Continue to explore and test new sites to see if they improve reach and equity.

### **Building Sustainability for Red Cliffs Connected Events**

- Investigate how Red Cliffs Connected Events may align with and support other Red Cliffs community events and test this approach.
- Focus on bringing new members into the group to ensure viability.
- Continue to explore opportunities to increase inclusion and accessibility.
- Investigate what additional skills and practices may add value to families as organisers.