RICH HOME LEARNING ENVIRONMENT PROJECT
EVALUATION REPORT

Prepared for Hands Up Mallee

18 May 2022

HANDS UP
MALLEE

Clear Horizon

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Disclaimer

This document has been produced with information supplied to Clear Horizon by Hands Up Mallee, including reflection and impact logs, a review of proceedings from the co-design process, project data and Most Significant Learning stories told by the families. Clear Horizon also conducted a small number (3) of interviews with families and services involved in the project and facilitated the production of a journey map. While we make every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this report, any judgements as to suitability of the information for the client's purposes are the client's responsibility. Clear Horizon extends no warranties and assumes no responsibility as to the suitability of this information or for the consequences of its use.

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Acronyms

HUM	Hands Up Mallee
RHLE	Rich Home Learning Environment
TACSI	The Australian Centre for Social Innovation
MSL	Most Significant Learning
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019

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THE RED CLIFFS PROJECT

In 2021, Hands Up Mallee embarked on a co-design process with community members and Early Years Services ('the project team') to trial the Rich Home Learning Environment project ('the Red Cliffs project') in Red Cliffs, Mildura. The project's longer-term goal is to improve school readiness and developmental outcomes for local children ahead of formal education.

The purpose of the Red Cliffs project was to:

- trial a co-design project in Red Cliffs with families of children aged 0-8 and local services to explore the challenges and opportunities for supporting rich home learning environments

- develop and do some rapid and iterative prototyping of ideas that aim to contribute to rich home learning environments for families in Red Cliffs, and

- make recommendations for piloting one or more idea as the next phase of work.

THE PROCESS

11 MONTHS — Co-design process began February 2021, ended in December 2021.

5 PHASES — Families and services engaged through all five phases of the co-design process.

11 FAMILIES — 11 families began and 8 families progressed through the co-design process, including Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and CALD families from Red Cliffs.

4 SERVICES — 4 services: Mildura Rural City Council, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Mallee Family Care and Connected Beginnings.

13 WORK-SHOPS — 13 co-design workshops held at the Church Hall, local school, cafes and online.

Developing ideas

Together, the team developed a number of ideas that they recognised as having the potential to improve rich home learning environments in Red Cliffs. The team then selected four Big Ideas for testing.

Big Ideas selected for testing:

1. No and Low-Cost Activities for Children at Home and in the Red Cliffs Community

2. Family and Parent Support Sessions/Programs

3. Family and Community Events: Bringing Families and Community Together

4. Family and Child Hub in Red Cliffs.

Challenges

- Five lockdowns and 57% of project time progressed during restrictions.

- Online engagement and testing of ideas during lockdowns.

- Services had different understandings of co-design and what is involved.

OUTCOMES

At the end of the process:

- By community for community: the Big Ideas that were developed are community owned and driven by community voice.

- One Big Idea was voted as most important for taking to pilot: Family and Community Events. The first community event was held at the start of the pilot phase in February 2021.

- Families started to advocate for the Family and Child Hub to local government, with positive responses from Mildura Rural City Council. Changes are happening so that the Hub may become a reality.

- Families are stronger, empowered and better connected to community and each other as a result of the co-design process.

- Families feel they finally have a voice to say what they want and is needed in the community and feel they will be heard.

- Services involved recognise that co-design is a valuable process and they want to draw on the Red Cliffs project as an example for their own work.

- HUM is committed to incorporating similar co-design processes and prototyping into their future work.

- Everyone involved has improved cultural understanding and recognise the importance of sharing and understanding each other's culture.

WHAT WAS LEARNED?

The evaluation identified key factors that contributed to achieving project outcomes.

One of the most critical success factors was the importance of creating a safe space for community to engage.

A safe space means:

- Focusing on cultural safety, inclusion and diversity. This brings opportunities for everyone to feel culturally safe, to learn from each other and to build shared understanding.

- Taking the time to get to know each other: build trust and build ways of working together before diving into the work.

- Ensuring families have support with children – such as onsite childcare and a child-friendly venue.

- Making people feel welcome – being open and friendly, welcoming children and making it easy by providing food and refreshments.

- Ensuring there is balance of power and expertise in the group: this is really important and makes it much more enjoyable.

- Emphasising cultural expertise: having a mix of Aboriginal, CALD and non-Aboriginal families created a different dynamic and brought cultural expertise into the space.

- Making it fun and informal.

- Recognising that design thinking is new for everyone. It is important to build a sense of everyone learning together: embrace 'being in the grey'.

- Having sharing/caring facilitators.

Other key success factors were:

- The focus on taking time to build foundations, connections and a shared sense of purpose with the project team before getting into decision making.

- Payment for families so that their involvement and work was valued.

- The strengths-based approach, which ensured that activities and information were relevant to and tailored to the group.

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1. Introduction

This evaluation report is the final component of an evaluation undertaken by Clear Horizon of the Rich Home Learning Environment project in Red Cliffs, Mildura. The project was implemented by Hands Up Mallee (HUM) and ran from February to December 2021.

The report is structured in five parts: Introduction (Section 1); an overview of and key learnings about the co-design process (Section 2); snapshots of the Big Ideas that were developed for testing, including a summary of what was learned about them during the testing phase (Section 3); an overview and discussion of project outcomes for families, services and HUM (Section 4); and the final section – 'Recommendations and What Next?' – which highlights key considerations for HUM when it comes to implementing co-design processes in future.

About Hands Up Mallee

Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a place-based social impact initiative in the local government area of Mildura in the far northwest of Victoria. It was established in 2015 to bring local leaders and community together to address social issues and improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children, young people and their families. 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 to ensure action taken is the right action for its unique community. HUM is committed to continuous learning and improvement in relation to its programs to achieve positive social outcomes for the Mildura community.

About the Rich Home Learning Environment Project

Commencing in March 2021, HUM embarked on a co-design process with community members and Early Years Services ('the project team') to trial the Rich Home Learning Environment project ('the Red Cliffs project' or 'the project') in Red Cliffs, Mildura. The aim of the project was to co-design and test approaches to increase the capacity of local families and Early Years Services to provide an optimal home learning environment for children between the ages of 0 - 8 years. Focused specifically on Red Cliffs, its longer-term goal is to improve school readiness and developmental outcomes for local children ahead of formal education. The project fits within the broader collective efforts of HUM and local stakeholders, including community, to improve long-term community outcomes.

The purpose of the Red Cliffs project was to:

- trial a co-design project in Red Cliffs with families of children aged 0-8 and local services to explore the challenges and opportunities for supporting rich home learning environments

- develop and carry out some rapid and iterative prototyping of ideas that aim to contribute to rich home learning environments for families in Red Cliffs, and

- drawing on what was learned during the prototyping of ideas, make recommendations for piloting one or more idea as the next phase of work.

The aim was to test a small number of projects between March and October 2021, however due to COVID-19 impacts, this timeframe was extended to December 2021.

During this period, The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) provided coaching and mentoring to HUM in facilitating the co-design process and supporting the project team. Clear Horizon provided support to HUM in evaluating both the co-design process and the testing of the prototypes.

The key stakeholder groups in the Red Cliffs project are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Key stakeholder groups for the Red Cliffs project

Stakeholder group	Role
Families living in Red Cliffs	Project team
Services operating in Red Cliffs (including the Mildura Rural City Council, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Mallee Family Care, and Connected Beginnings Mildura)	Project team
Aunty Colleen	Cultural knowledge and support for families
Hands Up Mallee (HUM)	Co-design facilitators and support
The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI)	Coaching and mentoring support for co-design
Clear Horizon	Coaching and mentoring support for evaluation
Paul Ramsay Foundation	Funders

Story of Change for the Red Cliffs project

In the initial phases of the co-design process, the project team developed ideas that they recognised as having potential for improving rich home learning environments in Red Cliffs. The team then selected four of these ideas for testing. They also developed a 'Story of Change' for each selected idea. A Story of Change describes the short, medium and long-term change for families, services and community that we would expect to see as a result of successfully implementing an idea.

The stories of change for each idea were then combined into an overarching Story of Change for the Red Cliffs project. The Red Cliffs project Story of Change is summarised in Table 2 below. Annex 1 provides an explanation as to how the Story of Change informed the evaluation.

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Where we are now	In the short term	In the medium term	Where we expect to be in the long term

If we	Then	This will result in	And eventually lead to
Bring all of our community together (community and cultural events, community bbqs)	Families are connecting and communicating Relationships and trust are built through activities and events	Community belonging Reduced isolation	Children feel loved and safe in community Children grow and learn well
Create sports events/opportunities for children and young people (sports, free activities for children)	People get to know each other and make personal connections People feel comfortable to connect and share	Less stress and improved mental health Better care for self and others	All cultures strong and proud.
Hold family programs/lessons and coaching support	Children socialise and develop through doing different things Young kids connect and play with each other	Parents empowered to better support children Families knowing and supporting each other	
Have a place to go for our families that has services available	Services and carers are available, are supporting kids and families and understand our needs	Challenging stereotypes and attitudes in community	
Have accessible childcare.	There is increased opportunity and choice Parents have time to do parenting responsibilities Families identify their own support and information needs Families are empowered to be their own agents for change Service providers, planners and decision makers hear what families need and advocate for change.	Connection with and between Aboriginal community Families have support and reassurance when needed.	

Table 2 Story of Change for the Red Cliffs project

Impacts of COVID-19

The impacts of COVID-19 and related social restrictions were felt throughout the duration of the project. From 16 July 2021 to 28 October 2021, 61 out of 107 days were spent in lockdown in Mildura (57 per cent of this period).

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Whilst the project team continued to work together throughout, the frequency of lockdowns added uncertainty to the project and delayed progress. During lockdowns, workshops were able to be moved online. To stay connected during these challenging times, a closed Facebook group was created so that the families could stay in touch with each other and with HUM.

Even when stay-at-home orders were lifted, social restrictions limited group sizes as well as the locations where the project team could meet. As a result, some sessions were held in two groups of up to ten compared with other sessions when the team could meet in a group of up to 20.

About the evaluation

The three key purposes for the evaluation of the Red Cliffs project were to:

1. capture **learnings for families and services** involved in the project about what works in supporting Red Cliffs community and why

2. capture **insights and understanding for HUM as to the co-design process** in terms of its effectiveness in engaging families and supporting their voices to be heard, and

3. report to **funders as to progress and outcomes** of the project.

To meet these objectives, the evaluation sought to answer three high level evaluation questions:

What are we learning about the co-design process?	What are we learning about the prototype and its scalability? (Focusing on insights and potential)	To what extent has the project been effective in achieving intended outcomes?

The answers to each of these questions are provided in the following sections 2 to 4 below.

Further details about the evaluation approach, audience, evaluation sub-questions, data collection methods and limitations to evaluation findings are set out in Annex 2.

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JOURNEY MAP 2021

HANDS UP MALLEE

CHAPTER 1: GETTING STARTED
Connecting with local families and services

- Switch to less formal ways of engaging families. *(PIVOT)*
- Pay families. *(DECISION)*

CHAPTER 2: INTRODUCING CO-DESIGN
Understanding Red Cliffs context

- Before we ideate we need to feel safe and connected (culturally too). *(LEARNING)*
- We all want the same things for our kids. *(LEARNING)*
- Shift in thinking about our own families to all families. *(OUTCOME)*

PRE-WORKSHOP

WORKSHOP 1 – 2

LOCKDOWN 15 – 19 FEB

CHAPTER 3: LOOKING AT DATA
Generating ideas and refining the story of change

- Looking at what helps and gets in the way helped us to better understand the issues. *(LEARNING)*
- We can see how our conversations and ideas can help. *(LEARNING)*
- We have a shared vision for Red Cliffs families. *(DECISION)*

WORKSHOP 3 – 4

LOCKDOWN 28 MAY – 3 JUN

CHAPTER 4: PROTOTYPING AND MOST SIGNIFICANT LEARNING

- Sharing stories and learnings with each other helps to understand and respect culture; and we are valuing different perspectives. *(LEARNING)*
- Slowing down and testing ideas helps to unpack things rather than 'ready, aim, fire'! *(LEARNING)*
- Finally, we have our own voice in the community and we know it will be heard. *(OUTCOME)*
- COVID lockdowns were tough and changed the way we developed prototypes together. *(PIVOT)*

WORKSHOP 5 – 12

LOCKDOWN 5 AUG – 9 SEP

LOCKDOWN 8 – 22 OCT

MILDURA OUTBREAK

WORKSHOP 13 – 14

CHAPTER 5: PRIORITISING WHAT TO PILOT; PLANS FOR ACTION

- We can achieve change! Feeling proud of what we have achieved and feeling connected. *(OUTCOME)*
- We have built special friendships and belonging, and better understanding of our community. *(OUTCOME)*
- Where to next? *(DECISION)*

Legend
- **PIVOT**
- **DECISION**
- **LEARNING**
- **OUTCOME**

2. Learnings about co-design

> This section provides an overview of each phase of the co-design process and a summary of evaluation findings relating to key factors that helped or hindered in the co-design process.
>
> It answers the question: what worked for families, for HUM and for services?

Phase 1: Getting started – connecting with families and services

What happened?

Before the co-design process could begin, HUM commenced engagement with a focus on:

- ensuring that the diversity of Red Cliffs was reflected in the project team and that families from all parts of the community felt welcome and included, especially local Aboriginal families

- developing processes around engagement and payment for families, so that families could be appropriately recognised for their expertise and contributions

- taking a strengths-based approach, which meant drawing on and highlighting the strengths of the Red Cliffs community

- building relationships with families during the engagement phase before sharing local data that could be perceived as negative by families.[1]

Engaging families

HUM took a deliberately informal and community centered approach to engaging families and community from Red Cliffs, rather than reaching out to families through services. This meant meeting with key community connectors, including the Red Cliffs Resource Centre, Maternal Child Health, kindergarten and primary schools in Red Cliffs, who then put HUM in touch with families in the area. HUM met families in coffee shops and parks as well as online through Facebook to talk about the project, and these families then put HUM in touch with other families. As a result, **nine families** who had expressed interest got in touch. HUM then reached out to families via services for a second round of engagement, with another **two families** becoming involved.

> '[This informal approach] worked really well. [We had] nine families interested, they would contact us, and then we called back and then met for a coffee. Then we reached out via services [for a] second round of engagement.' (HUM team)

The HUM team were also connected to local Aboriginal Elder Aunty Colleen through Mallee Community Voices, who they invited to join the Red Cliffs project. Aunty Colleen was keen to join as a support for the Aboriginal women in the group and to bring her cultural knowledge.

HUM's informal approach to engagement was successful in engaging **a diverse group of families and services** for the co-design process. **Eleven families**, including Aboriginal, non-Aboriginal and CALD

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[1] Reflection Log

families, joined the project team. HUM noted that despite their efforts, there was no one in the group from West Red Cliffs, a pocket of distinct social disadvantage.

The general sense at this stage was that families felt excited about being involved in the project even if they were unsure about what it would entail.

Connecting with service providers

The HUM team then focused on engaging service providers. Service pre-engagement work involved individual and group briefings on the project, including scope, timeline and commitments as well as a very basic introduction to co-design as a mindset and a way of working. HUM used criteria to determine best fit partners for this project. The criteria included:

- services that were funded to deliver an Early Years' Service in Red Cliffs

- levels of service partner trust and relationships, and

- the service's level of comfort to participate in emergent work.

Four services committed to engage with the project as part of their work with Red Cliffs, including the Mildura Rural City Council, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Mallee Family Care and Connected Beginnings Mildura.

What worked well for the engagement phase?

- Using **community and family connections** as well as social media and flyers for reaching out to community.
- Taking an **informal approach** to meeting up with families.
- Valuing people's time and expertise through **payment for families**.

What were the challenges?

Services have **different levels of understanding about co-design** and what is involved. It is important to build capacity of services as well as families in co-design so that everyone is on the same page.

Phase 2: Introducing co-design and understanding the Red Cliffs context

What happened?

Having engaged families and services for the project, HUM worked with TACSI to prepare for the first co-design workshops. The focus for this phase was 'getting to know each other' and building an understanding of the Red Cliffs context. The emphasis was on a slow start and a deep dive, to allow the group culture to grow, by:

- developing group norms for how everyone would work together

- building trust and connections between the project team, and

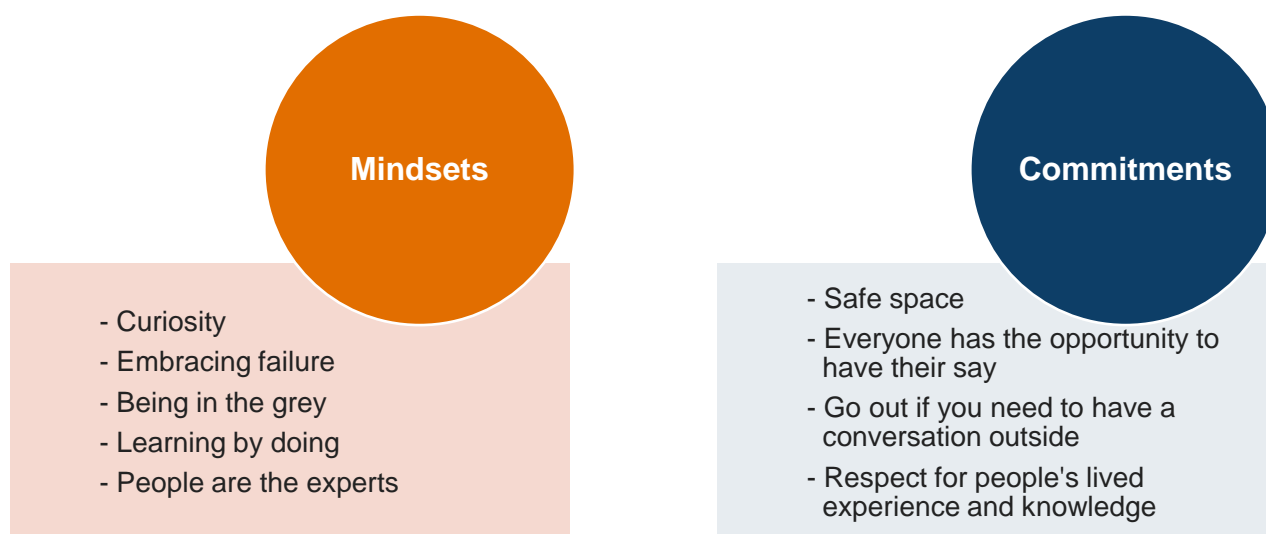- setting the scene for cultural safety.

'Loved Aunty Vicky helping set the scene for cultural safety.' (Project team, Journey Map)

The group norms that were created by the project team included mindsets (how we are thinking and being) as well as commitments (what we are doing):

Figure 1 Group norms: mindsets and commitments

Mindsets

- Curiosity
- Embracing failure
- Being in the grey
- Learning by doing
- People are the experts

Commitments

- Safe space
- Everyone has the opportunity to have their say
- Go out if you need to have a conversation outside
- Respect for people's lived experience and knowledge

Families observed that there was a sense of nervousness among the group as to their expectations and what they could achieve, as well as a sense of excitement for the opportunities.

'Still feeling nervous and unsure about what we are here for, what to expect and what would be achieved.' (Project team, Journey Map)

'We started to feel excited about the possibilities.' (Project team, Journey Map)

Families also expressed interest in taking their ideas to the Red Cliffs Focus Group - an **early sign that families were feeling empowered** to share their ideas with others in the community.

What worked well during the introduction to co-design phase?

- Prioritising **cultural safety**, creating a culturally safe space and focusing intentionally on **diversity and inclusion**.
- Building a sense of **everyone learning together**, including facilitators.
- Having **supportive facilitators** that lead by example and co-create a welcoming, safe and culturally inclusive space.
- Allowing sufficient time to **build trust** and to give families time to think.
- Providing a **child and family friendly place** for everyone to meet.
- Using **fun, creative activities** to engage families and services in the co-design process.

Phase 3: Generating ideas and refining our story of change

What happened?

During this phase, the project team:

- developed a shared understanding as to what a rich home learning environment looks like (captured in Figure 2 below)

- explored the enablers and barriers to a rich home learning environment in Red Cliffs

- identified opportunities for change (or 'how might we' questions).

Figure 2 Shared understanding about rich home learning environments

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The project team were also introduced to existing data around children starting school and being ready to learn. The Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data compared Red Cliffs children with children across the whole of the Mildura Government area. This data is captured every three years. Unlike other areas in the Mildura LGA, the trend for AEDC data in Red Cliffs shows an increasing proportion of children who are not developmentally ready for school.

The project team then drew on this data to start building ideas for testing. Initially, nine ideas were developed for selection and possible testing, ranging from affordable childcare, more local sports and activities for kids, to community events for families.

'This was when people got excited about the idea for a family child hub – loved it.' (Project team, Journey Map)

What worked well during the generating ideas phase?

- Taking time to **build connections** between the team before diving into action.
- Adopting a **strengths-based approach** when introducing local data, highlighting what the families do with their children and how this supports developmental readiness for school.
- Developing co-design activities that help families to **think deeply about connections to community** and to each other.
- Using **accessible and relevant language, props, visuals and metaphors** to communicate and capture information, including around data and stories of change.

Phase 4: Refining ideas and prototyping

The prototyping phase was the longest of the co-design process, focused on the refining and testing of ideas with the project team. During this phase, COVID-19 restrictions started to have a significant effect on how the group could meet and what they could do.

From May to October 2021, the project team moved between in-person sessions, online and then back to in-person sessions to:

- select the Big Ideas for testing

- create stories of change for the selected ideas, to articulate the short, medium and long-term changes expected as a result of implementing the Big Ideas (captured in the Story of Change at Table 2 above and in Annex 1)

- delve deeper into the ideas and decide how and when to test them, and

- begin to test some of the ideas, including through tabletop prototyping at home, online and in-person.

Selecting the Big Ideas

Together, the project team developed selection criteria (Annex 3) to choose the Big Ideas from the original nine. Four Big Ideas were selected:

1. No and Low-Cost Activities for Children at Home and in the Red Cliffs Community

2. Family and Parent Support Sessions/Programs

3. Family and Community Events: Bringing Community Together

4. Family and Child Hub in Red Cliffs.

Testing the ideas: prototypes

Next, the project team developed a series of prototypes (that is, samples, models or experiments created to test an idea) to test the assumptions underpinning the ideas and dig deeper as to how they might work in reality.[2]

During this phase, nine prototypes were developed and tested in support of each of the four selected ideas. Idea 4 (Family and Child Hub in Red Cliffs) was identified as being too big for prototyping. Nonetheless, it was agreed that the other ideas being prototyped would create learnings around how a hub could be used. As such, the project team chose to advocate for this idea alongside the prototyping process for Ideas 1, 2 and 3. (See Section 3 for snapshots of the four Big Ideas and the related prototypes).

Despite multiple lockdowns dampening momentum, the project team continued to test and refine the ideas through various face-to-face, online and at home activities. Some of the activities that the project team engaged in during this phase included:

- testing the design of a newsletter for the community with the project team

- designing survey questions to inform planning and prioritising of the ideas with the broader community (which did not eventuate)

- tabletop prototyping of Ideas 1 and 2. (For example, for Idea 1, occasional activities with children were table-top prototyped and then tested individually at home under lock-down.[3] The team designed and created a banner as well as tried live prototyping for Idea 2. For Idea 3 (Family and Community Events), a barbeque had been planned for 25 July but this was cancelled due to restrictions).

- creating the Red Cliffs Families Facebook page, and

- reflecting on the co-design process so far, including what worked well and what didn't, through sharing of families' Most Significant Learning (MSL) stories (see Annex 4 for MSL themes).

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[2] Prototyping helps bring an idea to life and people can learn more about their idea by simply testing it. Achieving success isn't the goal. The key objective is to learn what works, what doesn't, and why and to gain insights into what could be done to improve a promising idea.

[3] Reflection Log 159

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At the beginning of every session, cultural safety, mindsets and principles were revisited as a guide for the families. The HUM team also focused on:

- using accessible language, visuals, and metaphors that fit the context to communicate and capture information.

- adapting co-design sessions to be in line with restrictions but to be meaningful and engaging for families and services involved. Due to COVID restrictions, HUM initially had to change the way the group developed prototypes together, pivoting to smaller groups and Facebook, and had to hold one workshop at a café rather than the church hall; they then had to pivot to online prototyping.

By the end of this phase, families reflected that 'things felt like they were starting to happen'. Despite the challenges of lockdowns, by working as a collective, families started to feel that momentum for the ideas was building and that they had a clear direction – although some were still unsure of what could be achieved.

The HUM team also shared a presentation during this time with the local council's Community Development team, to share the work and learnings from the project with a view as to how this project might inspire or influence other community development work or initiatives with a specific focus on Red Cliffs families.

'We felt like we were really starting to make plans and have a definite direction.' (Project team, Journey Map).

'We felt like we were working together collectively.' (Project team, Journey Map)

What worked well during the prototyping phase?

What worked well for families?

- **Creating a safe space** during the early stages meant the families felt safe to shift online during this phase.
- The **trust and relationships** that had already developed between families encouraged the project team to take risks and try new things.
- **Active, tabletop prototyping** helped the group to slow down and dive deeper into a big idea.
- **Storytelling** was powerful for encouraging reflection about what families and services were learning from each other and the co-design process. Hearing each other's stories energised the group around their shared purpose.
- **Creating a banner together** that included all cultures was a bonding experience, which led to a sense of achievement among the group as they worked on it together.

What worked well for HUM?

- **Using social media** helped to stay connected: Facebook was helpful for keeping everyone engaged and connected especially during the shift to online.

- Continuing to highlight **cultural safety, mindsets and principles** at every session proved a helpful guide for everyone participating in the process.
- During face-to-face sessions, setting up **engaging and supervised activities for children** helped parents to participate more fully.

What were the challenges?

COVID lockdowns and restrictions posed significant challenges for the project team during this phase:

- Families, services and HUM found online participation from home extremely challenging due to limited time, energy and focus.
- For a variety of reasons, some families and services were unable to participate or had limited engagement during lockdowns.
- HUM and the team had to be flexible and adapt the co-design and prototyping process in response to COVID restrictions and lockdowns.
- Some online activities (as adapted) were not able to achieve what they had initially intended. For example, introducing role play as an activity was challenging online. Nonetheless, it still helped to think about things from others' perspectives.
- It was difficult to reconnect with services after lockdowns, as services were stretched during this time.

Phase 5: Prototyping to pilot – plans for action

What happened?

As the community emerged from restrictions towards the end of 2021, the project team moved into the final decision-making phase. The focus was on assessing community readiness for implementing the ideas and progressing selected ideas into the next stage for piloting. The intention was for families and services to continue to 'own' the prototypes as part of this decision-making process. External community organisations and services were invited to join the final session in December to learn about and engage with the ideas developed through the Red Cliffs project.

To help choose the most promising ideas for piloting, the project team developed a set of criteria. Ideas that were going to be piloted had to be:

Figure 3 Selection criteria for piloting
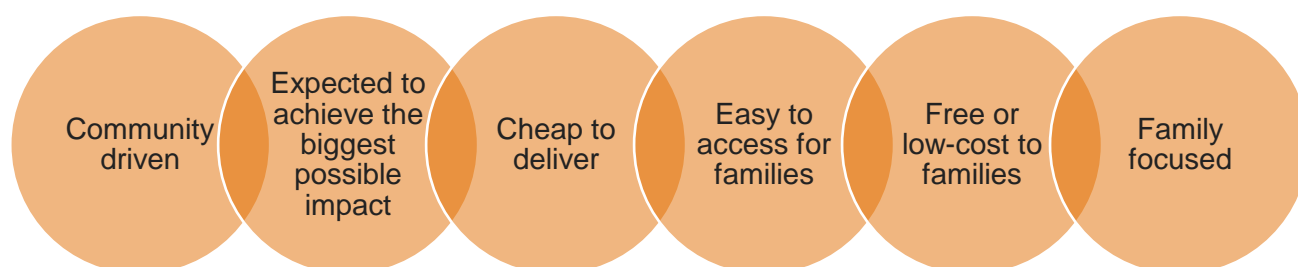
Using this criteria, the project team voted on one idea to take forward into the piloting stage. They decided that:

- the idea most suitable for piloting was Family and Community Events (Idea 3).

- No Cost and Low Cost Activities for Children (Idea 1) was voted the next most suitable. It was agreed that this idea would flow on well from the first idea. It was also recognised as something that can be included small scale as part of Family and Community Events.

- the Family and Child Hub (Idea 4) was identified as a bigger, long-term idea that could sit alongside the selected idea – not for piloting but for community advocacy.

- Family and Parent Support Sessions/Programs (Idea 2) was identified as less important to start right now.

Having selected Family and Community Events for piloting, HUM determined next steps with the families and service providers. This included asking families what role they wanted to play, inviting select providers to partner and having informal conversations after the session with both services and families about the role that HUM could play in the future of the work.

Families expressed feeling proud of their achievements and have developed the confidence to continue their work. However, they are also very keen to ensure momentum for change is sustained and want to know what will happen after the project ends.

'The connection has built my confidence to continue in this community.' (Journey Map).

'Special friendships have been formed, so happy to have been a part of it.' (Journey Map)

'Finally we can voice out what we want in the community and know it will be heard and discussed.' (Journey Map; Family member 2)

'How will things continue once the project is over?' (Journey Map; Family member 1)

What worked well for the final phase?

Providing **opportunities for feeding back** to the group to make sure their voices have been accurately captured.

What were the challenges?

- **Reconnecting after lockdowns:** people need time to reconnect and warm up after online and lockdowns – it takes time to readjust.
- During this time there was **pressure on services** due to the surge in demand for services after ongoing lockdowns and the Early Years Conference.
- **Differences in services' understanding of co-design:** engaging services in some of the coaching from TACSI would have served to further build the capacity of services for the project's approach.
- **Learnings for HUM about moving into the transition phase:** how to have conversations about piloting whilst being clear on HUM's role in the next phase.

Clear H○rizon

3. Snapshots of the Big Ideas

This section provides snapshots of each idea and what happened during the testing phase. It also provides a summary of evaluation findings relating to the enablers and barriers that were surfaced through prototyping the Big Ideas

IDEA 1: No and Low-Cost Activities for Children at Home and in the Red Cliffs Community

Free and low-cost activities (cultural, creative, physical) for young children in Red Cliffs' local parks and venues that are planned and organised but also flexible and easy for families to attend.

Where is this idea now? Selected second most important for piloting.

Prototypes: Eight prototypes, including three tabletop prototypes and five live prototypes, were tested for this idea.

Pivot: Due to lockdowns, instead of testing public activities in local parks and venues, the team trialled no cost and low-cost activities with their children at home.

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT ENABLERS, BARRIERS AND SCALABILITY?

Enablers: It helps to…

- Have free and easily accessible activities that do not require an ongoing commitment.
- Make sure families know what activities are happening in Red Cliffs and when and that they know what to expect.
- Organise activities that are specifically for children and communicate this to parents – this helps them feel more comfortable to participate and connect with others as the attention is not on them.
- Use community activities to introduce new activities to families and inspire them to also try these activities at home with their children.

IDEA 2: Family and Parent Support Sessions/ Programs

Parents and carers come to organised sessions held regularly in Red Cliffs community venues. These sessions would be supported by experts who are relatable and welcoming and who share their knowledge and support in a safe and non-judgemental way. Aim of the sessions is for parents and carers to connect with each other and learn together about how to best support their children and families.

Where is this idea now? The project team decided that this is something to look at down the track. The other two ideas that were prioritised would build the readiness of community to engage with this type of idea. Not selected for piloting.

Prototypes: Four prototypes were developed including three tabletop prototypes and a role-playing activity.

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT ENABLERS, BARRIERS AND SCALABILITY?

Enablers: It helps to…

- Provide different levels of support, as people need different types of support at different times.
- Create a safe space for parenting sessions in Red Cliffs, that can reassure local parents to feel safe and comfortable to participate in a session or program that is focused on supporting them as a parent.
- Focus on the social experience as much as session content: families might like to attend something that is low key and social before delving into any other big topics. Families also want the opportunity to chat later and have time to connect with other parents.
- Make sure things are free, accessible and casual/informal. Parents can bring kids and there needs to be food or a cuppa. If they need transport someone can help them get there.

Barriers:

- The way professionals present is critical. Families need to feel like they can relate to them and do not want to feel judged or treated as if they don't know what they are doing.
- Small group sessions can feel uncomfortable for some parents.

IDEA 3: Family and Community Events: Bringing Community Together

Free community events for families with young children that bring them together and help build a stronger network through social interaction and fun. To be delivered by a local community partner and should include free food and fun activities for children.

Where is this idea now? Selected for piloting.

Prototypes: Four prototypes were developed and tested in support of Big Idea 3: a live prototype; project planning; enactment (site planning); and a poster.

Pivot: The group decided to organise a barbecue as their first community event. They conducted project and site planning and developed promotional materials. The barbecue was postponed due to COVID.

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT ENABLERS, BARRIERS AND SCALABILITY?

Enablers: It helps to…

- Hold events in locations that are easily accessible for Red Cliffs community.
- Include fun activities for young children so that parents and carers feel more comfortable to engage.

Barriers:

- Lack of transport: even if new activities or services are created, many services and activities are simply not accessible in Red Cliffs due to lack of transport or similar access issues for families.

- Lack of available community facilities: in trying to arrange the community barbecue, the team discovered that the only outdoor barbecue was inside the swimming pool and therefore inaccessible to the public.

IDEA 4: Family and Child Hub

A special place, created with and for families and children to gather, connect and participate in activities that support them. A place for families to meet with each other; for services to provide parenting support; to hold activities for children and young people; and a place to gather protected from extremes of weather.

Where is this idea now? Not selected for piloting. Families are undertaking community advocacy to support the hub.

Prototypes: Identified as too big for prototyping. Instead, the project team engaged in community advocacy to progress this idea. The team sent a letter to Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC), asking for the opportunity to consult with families about the idea of a Family and Child Hub and its alignment to the new kinder development. MRCC responded that they would be applying for a Building Blocks grant to support the planning phase for a potential Family Child Hub within the Red Cliffs kindergarten redevelopment. MRCC was also invited (and agreed) to visit the final session for the Red Cliffs project.

WHAT WAS LEARNED ABOUT ENABLERS, BARRIERS AND SCALABILITY?

Enablers: It helps to…

- Focus on creating a safe and friendly space where families feel comfortable and welcome to attend, not just the provision of activities.

- Provide activities for everyone – parents, children and young people.

- Find ways to bring community voice and support for this idea into the development of bigger initiatives like this one. For example, create connections between local families and levels of government and/or services so that government and services are better able to listen to and meet community needs.

- Advocate from a local perspective and find people to connect with at different levels of organisations who can help and align efforts.

Barriers:

- Whilst much needed, progressing initiatives like a Family and Child Hub needs commitment, resourcing and support from other levels of government.

- Lack of focus on Red Cliffs for service provision.

4. Across the whole journey: what changed?

This section provides a summary of outcomes that have emerged for families, services and community as a result of the Red Cliffs project. It answers the questions:

- **what were the changes that emerged for families, services and HUM as a result of being involved in the co-design process?**

- **what were the early signs of change relating to the Big Ideas?**

Summary of outcomes

Despite being challenged by the impacts of COVID-19 throughout its duration, the Red Cliffs project has resulted in very **positive outcomes for the families involved, for HUM and services**. In particular, the families who were involved have developed strong connections to each other and community; a deeper understanding and sharing of cultures; and a collective voice and confidence to progress their ideas for community.

> *'… It's been an amazing journey, not just for me but for others, a ride we got on but none of us have got off yet, I'm not getting off at the next stop – I'm still on this ride'. (Family member)*

Through the successful development and testing of ideas for improving rich home learning environments in Red Cliffs, the project team's co-design efforts also **led to a deeper understanding of the enablers and barriers to creating rich home learning environments** for children aged 0-8 in Red Cliffs. The project culminated in the **creation of a pilot program**, that was genuinely designed, tested and 'owned' by Red Cliffs families for Red Cliffs families.

> *'We didn't come up with fluffy ideas - everything is tangible and everything is possible'. (Family member)*

> *'[None of the things] that we discovered about are new… what is amazing is that a group of mums came up with the same thing as experts and it is wonderful it will come from community rather than an organisation saying this is what we are doing'. (Family member)*

Together, the families, services and HUM created tangible ideas based on community aspirations. These ideas were genuinely driven by community voice and a sense of ownership from the families, which has led to momentum and energy for driving the ideas. The piloting of Family and Community Events is now underway – a direct result of the project team's work through this project.

Nonetheless, there were **barriers to fully developing the ideas in the time available**. Families expressed some sense of incompleteness at the end of the process, as COVID had stalled progress and led to a feeling of being unfinished. For all the change that has been achieved for families, the team still feels there is more to do:

> *'… we spent so long in the planning and we were just getting on to getting community involved but those quick lockdowns happened and we sort of never did that bit – we never got to do community feedback that we were hoping for – so it just feels incomplete to me – there's more to do.' (Family member)*

Changes for families

- New friendships have developed and there is a strong sense of community belonging among the families.

- Families developed a shared understanding about who they are and what they want for themselves and their community. A shift in focus from 'my family' to community families.[4]

- Families felt energised by a sense of common purpose to improve things for themselves and the community.

- Aboriginal and CALD families are sharing culture and others in the group are really open to learning and understanding about culture.

- Families have confidence and pride in their work. Families are proud of the work that they are doing and have developed a confidence that comes from working[5].

- Families feel they finally have a voice to say what they want and is needed in the community; and they feel they will be heard.

- Families feel empowered and connected to each other and to community.

Changes for services

- Services want to **bring what they have learned into their own work**, such as the emphasis on creating safe spaces, ways of communicating and making people feel welcome.[6]

- Services note that the co-design process and table-top prototyping summary could be turned into a **policy or handbook for early years and family services** as to how things should be done.

Changes for HUM

Prototyping is new for HUM and they have come to see the benefits through this process. Given the long-term nature of HUM's work, they now know that **it is possible and desirable to invest in prototyping and to do this in partnership with community.**[7]

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[4] Journey Map
[5] Reflection Notes
[6] **'**Talking about how to help people feel welcome made me think about how to set up and communicate with parents/families at work.' (Journey Map)
[7] Reflection Notes.

Clear Horizon

Discussion: what changed for participants involved in the co-design process?

Families, services and HUM facilitators who were involved in the co-design process identified a number of significant shifts that occurred for them as a result of their involvement.

Improved connections

Families developed lasting connections and a sense of community and belonging. Over the life of the project, families (and the project team) developed strong connections with each other which in turn led to a sense of improved connection with and understanding of the Red Cliffs community. The emphasis on cultural safety and taking time to build relationships and trust helped to develop new connections between the families and built a sense of community, which the families really valued.

> *'The day at East school bought us together I think, with Aunty Vickey and Alazne and the wool activity, it connected us and we listened to each other.' (Family member, MSL 6)*

> *'Acknowledging people in the project out in the community and having common things to talk to them about rather than just hi.' (Project team, Journey Map)*

These connections have led to families having a deep appreciation of each other, of the importance of culture and of their community. The connections between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in the project team also led to further connections with the wider community, with some families having invited others to be involved in community groups, like the kindergarten committee:

> *'…we have two of us on the kinder committee and hopefully convinced another one to come on next year and become its own little community and family. [We've] done really well together'. (Family member)*

> *'… we have come together from all different backgrounds but made friendships as a group. … The positives of working in his way is that you make lifelong friends.' (Family member, MSL 7)*

> *'It's been really good to meet new people and new families, especially as I am still new to Red Cliffs.' (Family member, MSL 5)*

Culture and identity

Families learned to appreciate and understand cultural identity: By the end of the project, cross cultural sharing and learning had become a part of the co-design process. Aboriginal and CALD families shared their cultures with other families, which led to increased awareness and understanding around the importance of culture and cultural safety. A key outcome is that Aboriginal and CALD families felt confident to share culture and others in the group were open to learning and understanding about culture.

> *'I have learnt to extend my focus beyond my core group and activities by listening to other families' stories. I also now recognise the importance of culture within the community and how it can enhance shared experiences and help bring the town together.' (Family member, MSL 3)*

Non-Aboriginal mums in the project team also learned about new or different ways of parenting from Aboriginal mums and carers involved. This led to new positive experiences for some parents with their children[8].

Families developed empathy for and understanding of others in the community: As participants learned more about other people's situations and put themselves in their shoes, they changed their views of others in the community.

> *'It's been eye opening for me to understand about other families, I'm just used to my own. Meeting other mums I get a better understanding. I struggle from time to time but I take my hat off to mums trying to manage this all 24/7 they don't get much rest. It makes me sad thinking about how hard it can be.' (Family member, MSL 6)*

> *'I've learnt that everyone is struggling in their own way. We are all at different levels of the struggle.' (Family member, MSL 7)*

Confidence and empowerment

Family confidence and empowerment: families developed their confidence, both individually and as a group. They feel valued, part of the community and have recognised that they have a lot to give to community and the community has a lot to offer them. This confidence was empowering and led to a sense of community ownership among families.

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[8] Journey Map; Family member 2

Importantly, the families involved felt proud of their work and achievements. Mums were proud to say that they were working and it made them feel good when some heard their children say, 'Mum has a job'.

> 'I felt that - just because I am a stay-at-home mum – I can do stuff, you are not unvalued you still have good ideas. You can still do it!' (Family member)

> 'When this first started, I felt like none of us could talk in front of each other, but my confidence has built up. My voice was that shaky, I was trembling and everything, but now I am more confident.' (Family member, MSL 6)

The increase in confidence of mums involved in the project is also evidenced by their interactions with the group and their new involvement with community organisations outside the group.

Families came to value and respect each other's differences and opinions. They noted that everyone had an equal chance to share their opinions without feeling judged, which contributed to the success of the project. They felt willing to share their ideas and perspectives without having to agree.

> '… what actually happened was us being able to learn to listen to other's ideas more, particularly for someone like me who always thinks she's right, I learnt to let other people suggest and not being the one [to do that].' (Family member)

> 'I have learnt about the bigger picture at the end: we started off small now I can see the bigger picture. I've learnt it's not an overnight decision, but now I can start to see where we want to end up. … I can hear and see everyone's point of view, everyone's input and ideas make this happen.' (Family member, MSL 6)

Changes for services

The co-design process and seeing community drive the process also had an impact on services involved. This was not uniform across services – which relates in part to the fact that not all services were able to engage regularly with the project. Nonetheless, services are keen to take the learnings they have developed through the co-design project and try to bring them into their work. One service was so committed to the co-design process that they noted that they would like to **turn the process for the co-design approach into a service policy**.

> '… what has been captured could also be turned into a policy of how to create a safe space and distributed among the areas – oh if every service could do this – it was community written – so powerful – never heard something so naturally flow that could be such an amazing policy. … You're not going to have community questioning policy because it's written from voice of community. I've seen pushback when policies are written by people in offices and they have no understanding of what's going on.' (Service team member)

Ripple effects of the project is that one service involved is keen to share the Most Significant Learning story technique with other community groups and services; and that services are keen to bring similar co-design approaches into their work.

> 'This project has highlighted to me that community led projects are the way to create change within communities. The passion the community has brought to the project is inspiring. It creates a real insight to the needs and wants of community at a grassroots level. In the beginning the group sessions were led by services while everyone was still grasping the concept of the project. When attending group sessions now it is evident that

the community takes the lead and voices their thoughts on what the families of Red Cliffs would benefit from most. Personally, this project so far has been such an inspiring story of creating change.' (Service team member)

Changes for HUM

Reflections captured with the HUM team throughout the process show that going on the co-design journey with TACSI, families and services has contributed to a **significant shift in both HUM's understanding of co-design** (what works and what doesn't) as well as a strong desire to **continue to bring genuine co-design with community** to the centre of their work.

What helped to achieve project outcomes?

The co-design and prototyping process and the way in which it was implemented underpinned the positive outcomes that were achieved through the project. The evaluation identified some of the main success factors that helped the Red Cliffs project to achieve these outcomes:

1. Take the time to build the foundations for prototyping: Learnings about the co-design process show that it is important to develop connections, a shared sense of purpose and understanding of community before testing ideas, even if it takes time.

Understanding enablers, barriers and scalability around prototypes is a long-term question for the project. Some families start the process keen to go straight into action but the emphasis at the initial stages needs to be on building the foundations for the group to be able to **develop connections with each other** and **a shared sense of purpose**.

> *'[T]he first couple of months was really us getting comfortable with each other so it felt like it started really slow and to the point that I almost felt frustrated because I was thinking, when are we going to do something? But […] there were a whole lot of people from different backgrounds and it was great because as we got to know each other and everyone became more comfortable, everyone started speaking up more.' (Family member)*

2. Find ways to ensure community members can continue to be involved: For example, being paid for participation supports retention and supports families to keep coming back. Families also valued that their involvement was recognised as work.

> *'You do get paid, so I went ok, that was a motivator. Given the time we had to put in, that helped to keep the group consistent. People would have dropped off if it was just volunteering, I heard from other community members. Getting paid certainly motivated me to take something extra on.' (Family member)*

3. Adopt a strengths-based approach to empower community to make their own decisions. As facilitators of the Red Cliffs project, the HUM team maintained a commitment to a strengths-based approach throughout. This meant that activities, visuals and project information were all tailored to and created for the project team, with a focus on empowering families to make and own decisions together. For example, the HUM team had been worried about the data conversation as the AEDC data had the potential to make a negative impact on the project team. However, the conversations included talking about strengths and what's available or not in Red Cliffs, with the project team drawing on the data to

make decisions about what to prioritise when creating ideas for prototyping.[9] This helped the project team to understand the issues and how to address them.

4. Recognise that creating a safe space is central to the work. This was the most significant learning for the Red Cliffs project – the importance of creating a safe space for community to engage. This helped people to open up, feel comfortable, learn new things and challenge themselves. It also helped participants to strengthen their confidence to share their ideas and build strong connections with each other.

> *'Culturally inclusive … - so diverse – I think that is huge … in being a safe space for everyone. […] When people feel safe and heard they feel ok not judged and can say what is really needed – that has really helped the project come to where it is at now. It's proven to me – if you make that safe space when it is community based in any environment, that is when it will grow to something amazing.' (Family member)*

The emphasis on cultural inclusion and safety was widely acknowledged as central to creating a safe space. The continued focus on understanding and sharing culture – and having cultural experts to guide and support the team in creating a culturally safe space – were key to the project's success.

Having a diverse group was highly valued by everyone involved and created ongoing opportunities for sharing and learning from different perspectives.

> *'Probably having different people from different backgrounds and not everyone thinking the same way was really key.' (Family member)*
>
> *'It was a really nice mix of people – it wasn't all just suburban mums. There were some with only one or two kids some with lots, a grandma, Aboriginal families, someone who is Malaysian. It was a really nice mix of viewpoints – getting ideas from other people that differ from me but still in line [with each other's thinking].' (Family member)*

Learnings from the Red Cliffs project show that a safe space also means:

- Ensuring families have support with children – having childcare and a child friendly venue made it easier for people to participate[10].

- Making people feel welcome. It is as simple as being open and friendly, welcoming children and offering refreshments.

> *'I heard and it rang true to me – someone said the other day – just being greeted at the door, saying hello to everyone, making them feel welcome as soon as they enter rather than awkward silence as you enter – just being made to feel welcome as you enter makes a huge difference - that is big.' (Service team member)*
>
> *'Beautiful food, friendly faces.' (Journey Map)*

- Making it fun and informal: make the space for laughter and make it easy by providing food and refreshments.

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[9] Reflection Log 63

[10] 'It helped to have minding with the kids. Often C had someone there to help with the kids. It helped people to relax.'.(Family member)

> *'I think people sometimes might overthink what a safe space is – that has made that project what it is. … I liked the whole non-formal approach that has been taken as a whole … it has just been co-designed really well.'* (Service team member)

> *'And it's fun – we get through this bit, have a food, have a cuppa, have a chat – really informal … So it was a bigger group to start with but Catherine was saying we have to do an ice breaker – it is all dodgy but made you feel like you have to do these things and have a laugh – so she has done it really well and now Catherine leads it.'* (Family member)

- Building a sense of everyone learning together: families, services and HUM all acknowledged that they were learning together and were encouraged to embrace 'being in the grey'. This mindset was highlighted as really critical to supporting the co-design process, and key to the testing and trying of ideas.

- Having sharing/caring facilitators who are also learning helped families feel safe and comfortable.

> *'Catherine is so wonderful and welcoming and Fiona has such amazing ideas and opinions and all the work behind the scenes – they complement each other so beautifully. I just love that pair.'* (Family member)

> *'… it's nice when someone cares about us - Dewella's birthday – [they] rushed out and got a cake – [it's] sharing and caring and being part of something that we all crave.'* (Family member)

5. Recommendations and What Next?

Recommendations

As the Red Cliffs project has already moved into the next stage, the following recommendations are presented as key considerations for HUM in any future implementation of co-design projects with community.

1. Take the time to get to know each other: build trust, a sense of safety and build ways of working together.

2. Focus on cultural inclusion and diversity – this brings opportunities for everyone to learn from each other and to build shared understanding.

3. Create a welcoming and safe space – including through creating a casual and friendly environment; providing childcare and a child friendly space; offering payment support; and supportive staff.

4. Ensure there is balance of power and expertise in group: this is really important and makes it much more enjoyable.

5. Emphasise cultural expertise: having a mix of Indigenous, CALD and non-Indigenous families created a different dynamic and brought cultural expertise into the space.

6. Be adaptive and flexible to enable community involvement. Lived experience can impact on people's capacity to undertake co-design thinking, as participants need to balance their involvement in co-design with competing day-to-day pressures.

7. Recognise that design thinking is new for many: it helps to remind everyone to embrace 'being in the grey'.

8. Have fun and make it relaxed and enjoyable!

Recommendation for future evaluation

During the next phase (the piloting phase), there will be an opportunity to capture early outcomes that may emerge from the pilot. Any future evaluation of the pilot should seek to engage more broadly with different stakeholders, including families and services who are not directly involved with the co-design process, to capture outcomes for people and community beyond the project team.

What Next?

At the end of the Red Cliffs project, families and some services agreed that the next steps will focus on:

- piloting the Big Ideas. This will involve firstly holding some free, regular community events for families with young children that bring the Red Cliffs community together and that aim to build a stronger network through social interaction and fun.

- looking for opportunities to participate in the consultation phase of the design of the extension to the Red Cliffs Kindergarten.

Clear Horizon

Annex 1

Hands Up Mallee's Story of Change

This overarching Story of Change helped guide the evaluation and was used to identify the kinds of outcomes that the project could realistically expect to achieve during its ten-month duration. The evaluation focused on identifying any early signs of change relevant to the 'where we are now' and 'in the short term' stages.

Annex 2

Key Evaluation Questions

The evaluation sought to answer the following high level evaluation questions. These questions, referred to as key evaluation questions or KEQs, provide the framework for this report.

KEQ	Iconography
1. What are we **learning about the co-design process**? What worked for families? What worked for HUM? What did people learn about the community – the challenges, opportunities and resources?	
2. What are we **learning about the prototype and its scalability**? (Focusing on insights and potential) What are the barriers to success? What are the enablers for success? What elements of the model are transferable and/or relevant for scaling out?	
3. To what extent has the prototype been effective in achieving its intended **outcomes**? What were the outcomes for ourselves/the group? What were the outcomes for children and their families in Red Cliffs? (expected and unexpected) What were the outcomes for services? (expected and unexpected?) What – if any - were the systemic changes?	

**Audience: who is the evaluation for?**

The primary audiences for the evaluation were:

Audience	Information needs
Hands Up Mallee team	To identify whether a particular prototype is ready for scaling To learn about what works in our context and place To understand what works for our ways of working and engaging with families
Families and services	To support decision making as to what projects to scale To understand what works in our context and place
Project funders	To ensure accountability To build understanding as to how to effectively engage local families and services in a co-design process

Clear Horizon

Evaluation approach

The evaluation was underpinned by a reflexive approach to evaluation suited to the generative and rapid nature of the project co-design and testing. The methodology for the evaluation aimed to support strategic learning within the team and inform decision-making and end of pilot evaluation.

The evaluation approach was designed to support the iterative cycles that the Red Cliffs project planned to embark on, reflected in Figure 4 below.
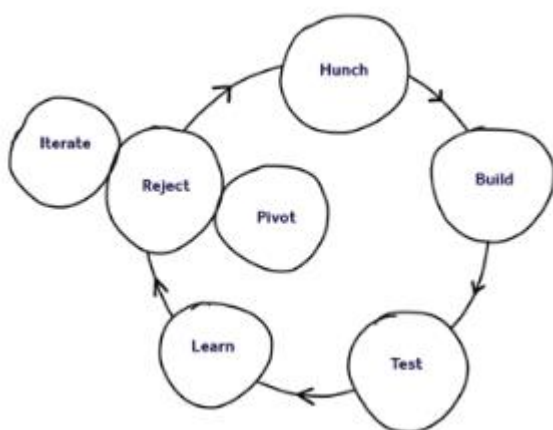
Figure 4 RHLE iterative cycles

This meant that the evaluation process included shorter loops of reflection and learning (conducted throughout the life of the project) as well as a longer loop for the end of pilot assessment. The MEL approach was an intentionally light framework to suit the emergent and iterative RHLE co-design approach, with short cycles for rapid reflection and pivots, drawing on logic, reflection huddles, and gathering and reporting data to support RHLE project development and implementation. The framework included a longer cycle to bring together overall evaluation findings at the end of the testing phase, the results of which are presented in this report.

Data collection methods

Evidence for this report comes from an analysis of impact and reflection logs, workshop outputs and materials, Facebook entries, interviews and journey mapping with families and services, and program data. It also comes from the collected Most Significant Learning stories (MSLs) of the families and services engaged with the project.

Stories are a meaningful method for evaluating and understanding people's experiences as well as identifying the changes that have occurred through a project or development. Indeed, a key finding of the evaluation was that storytelling has been a powerful component of 'what worked' for the families as part of the co-design process. As such, evidence draws on the overarching co-design story, captured in the journey map created by the project team, and individual Most Significant Learning stories told at different points in time by the people involved – the families, services and Hands Up Mallee facilitators.

Limitations

COVID-19 limited the opportunities for the prototypes to be tested in the community, impeding their potential to create any early impacts for the broader Red Cliffs community. It also affected the ability of the evaluation to reach out to families and services beyond the project team when collecting data.

Clear Horizon

As a result, the findings reflected in this report are:

- more focused on outcomes for the families and services who were involved in the co-design process than on outcomes of the prototypes themselves; and

- directly informed by the experiences of the project team (families, services and HUM), and are largely a reflection of the families and services who were engaged in the process.

Annex 3

Selection criteria

To facilitate decision making for the group in relation to selecting the initial set of ideas, selection criteria were developed. The criteria included the following six points:

- **Impact** - What will this do and change for children and families in Red Cliffs?
- **Readiness for school** - How does the idea relate to the five topics that were explored by the group in relation to children's developmental readiness for school: 1) Physical health and wellbeing, 2) Social skills and confidence, 3) Caring and coping with different feelings, 4) Language and getting ready to learn to read and use numbers, and 5) communication skills and general knowledge.
- **Deliverable** - Can we do this as a group? Do we have the resources, connections, and ability to test this idea?
- **Timely** - Can we test this idea in the short amount of time we have?
- **Sustainable** - Is this idea something that has potential to continue in the future? Is there an organisation or are there others in the community who might support the idea in the long-term?
- **Interest and Energy** - How much interest and energy are there in the group to try this idea?

Annex 4 MSL themes

Themes that emerged from the MSL stories shared by the project team (families, HUM and services) were:

- Ready for change
- Family empowerment
- Connections
- Culture and identity
- New view of others

Clear Horizon