



HOMEBASE HOOPS

Case Study



Hands Up Mallee (HUM) is a community-led collective impact initiative in the Mildura LGA, far northwest Victoria. Local leaders started HUM in 2015 when they realised the need for a different way of working to address social, health and wellbeing equity issues in the community.

HUM is a partnership involving the community, local service providers, agencies and all three levels of government, supported by a local Backbone (or support) Team. The initiative uses a place-based approach to co-design solutions for local issues, centring the community's voice and combining it with local data and current research to develop collective action for a better community for children, young people, and their families. HUM is dedicated to their community aspiration of 'a connected community where families matter, and children thrive'.

Some partners and the Backbone Team are continuously involved in the HUM collaboration, while other organisations and individuals contribute to specific HUM initiatives that align with their purpose, activities, interests, and expertise.

Hands Up Mallee's Overarching Theory of Change and associated Key Evaluation Questions serves as a guide to its work.

Figure 1: Simplified Levels of Journey of Change



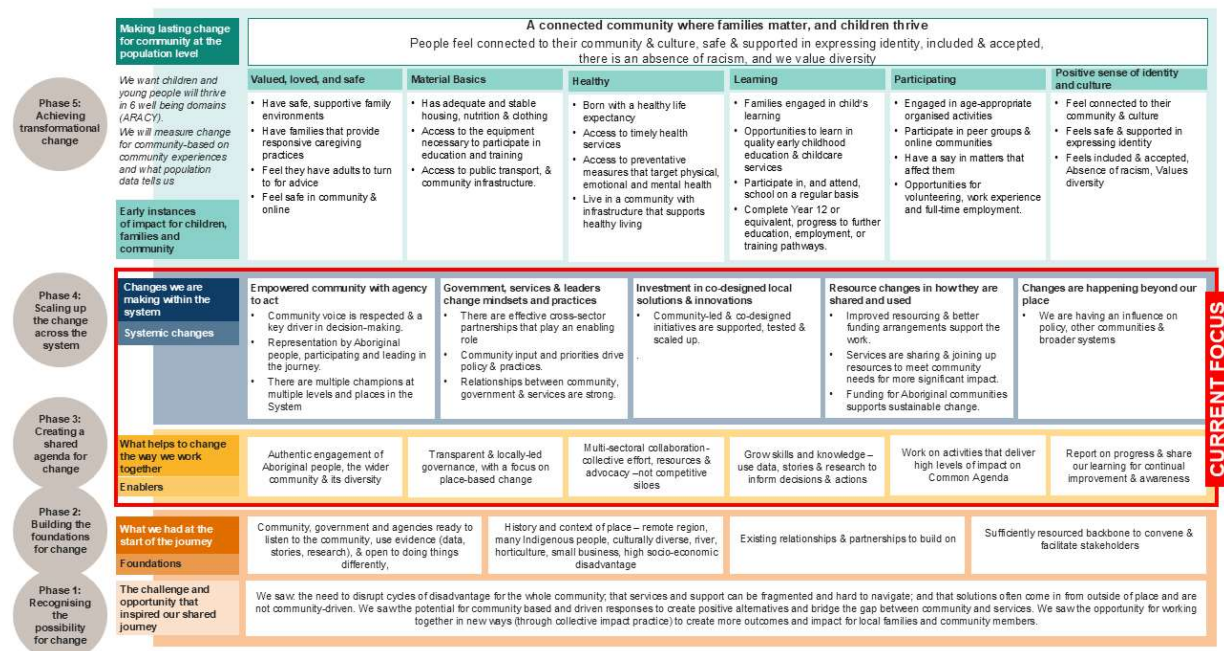
The HUM community identified in 2021 that by working on the enabling conditions there will be a greater likelihood of creating systemic changes, which in turn will lead to creating impact for children, young people and families, and in the longer term create lasting change in the NEST ARACY outcomes at the population level.

Three years on, three case studies:

- The Red Cliffs Project
- HomeBase Hoops
- The Covid Active Outreach Vaccination and Testing Response

have been chosen to illustrate the tactical work undertaken by the HUM backbone team to improve the enabling conditions and identify signs of early systemic changes as a result of this work. They, along with the evaluation report, will serve to inform funders, stakeholders and secondary audiences about the essential, independent and flexible role of the Backbone Team as a facilitator for place-based change.

Figure 2: Hands Up Mallee's Over-Arching Theory of Change



CONTENTS

SUMMARY	3
What HUM means by.....	3
Types of changes covered in this case study.....	4
Acronyms.....	4
Methodology	1
Data analysis	1
Joint sensemaking and verification	1
ABOUT THE HOMEBASE HOOPS CASE STUDY.....	1
The need for local, equity-focussed after-hours youth activities	1
The opportunity and approach.....	2
HomeBase Hoops Theory of Change	3
Contributions of the HUM backbone team to HomeBase Hoops	3
Contributions of HomeBase Hoops Project Partners	4
HUM TOC Enablers and Systemic Changes covered in this case study.....	5
Key outcomes	6
Journey map.....	7
KEY OUTCOMES OF HOMEBASE HOOPS	8
Outcome 1: HomeBase Hoops empowers young people	8
Outcome 2: HomeBase Hoops has improved connections between young people and service providers.....	12
Outcome 3: HomeBase Hoops providers are changing the ways they deliver youth services	14
CONCLUSION	18
REFERENCE LIST.....	19

List of figures

Figure 1: Simplified Levels of Journey of Change	2
Figure 2: Hands Up Mallee's Over-Arching Theory of Change.....	2
Figure 3: HomeBase Hoops Theory of Change.....	3
Figure 4: HomeBase Hoops Journey Map	7

SUMMARY

HomeBase Hoops is a late-night basketball tournament model which was called for by youth and locally designed over multiple iterations. In 2018 community conversations with young people identified a lack of after-hours activities for them which were free, safe, inclusive and accessible. The project developed in response to this need. A key intention of the model is to increase the social connectedness and participation in safe, enjoyable activities for all young people, but particularly those experiencing disadvantage, and thereby create a safety net for them on Friday nights in a space where there are qualified Youth Service workers and supportive volunteers present. The local youth participating in HomeBase Hoops come from diverse backgrounds and a wide variety of different schools. Approximately half of the young people attending each term are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, this is significant, as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders form 8.5% of the youth population in Mildura LGA.



HomeBase Hoops has received funding from the Alcohol and Drug Foundation through the prevention focussed Local Drug Action Team funding stream, as well as the Dhelk Dja Aboriginal Family Violence based funding from the Victorian State Government. Through the pooling of other in-kind resources across local service providers and the support of volunteers, the model provides an inclusive after-hours space for all youth, but specifically addresses the complex barriers to participation for youth experiencing disadvantage who cannot afford to join a sporting club and be supported by family with transport. It also identified the means and opportunities for youth services staff to be more flexible and available to support the delivery of the model outside of usual 9.00 to 5.00 Monday to Friday work hours. Sunraysia Community Health Services is the auspice and lead agency. Hands Up Mallee provides partnership development, coordination and evaluation support.

What HUM means by...

- **Equity** refers to the principle of creating the conditions for fair and just inclusion of all individuals based on their specific needs and circumstances. Unlike equality, which means giving everyone the same resources or opportunities, equity recognizes that people start from different places and may require different kinds of support to achieve similar outcomes. It means identifying gaps in opportunities, outcomes, and representation, and taking targeted actions to address those gaps not just for individuals but systemically so that everyone can have a good life. HUM has a strong equity focus and works on the assumption that solutions to complex challenges will only be effective and

sustainable with the active and meaningful involvement of community, particularly community members experiencing inequity.

- **Protective factors** refer to a core set of variables at individual, family and community levels that are strongly predictive of positive outcomes for young people. For instance, at the individual level, relational skills, self-regulation skills, problem-solving skills and involvement in positive activities can protect even highly vulnerable people from negative trajectories, especially when accompanied by strong parenting competencies, positive peers and caring adults, as well as positive community environment, school environment and economic opportunities.¹ Conversely, there is a core set of individual, family and community stressors and circumstances that are consistently predictive of a wide range of adverse outcomes for young people. The absence of positive attachment and warm family relationships, poor parenting behaviours such as harsh and inconsistent discipline and limited cognitive stimulation, the presence of contributors to toxic stress, such as parental mental illness, family violence or substance abuse, and community factors such as unsafe neighbourhoods and schools, social isolation and poverty. It is clear that many of these factors are malleable. There are a range of preventive interventions that have strong evidence to show they strengthen protective factors and reduce both the likelihood and severity of negative outcomes.²

Types of changes covered in this case study

This case study distinguishes between two types of changes:

- **Direct changes:** observable and measurable changes that happened right away because of something specific that HomeBase Hoops did. In this case study, these direct changes are presented as outcomes.
- **Ripple effects:** the indirect changes including new initiatives that emerged because of HomeBase Hoops. These effects go beyond the immediate, observable outcomes and include broader changes that were significantly shaped by the insights, learnings, and practices introduced by HomeBase Hoops. Ripple effects may manifest over time and can extend to areas or stakeholders not initially targeted, demonstrating the wider reach and influence of HomeBase Hoops.

Ripple effects can also contribute to or be a part of systems change, especially when multiple ripple effects accumulate over time to create significant shifts within a system. For example, small changes in community practices, influenced by HomeBase Hoops, might eventually lead to larger changes in social norms or policies, contributing to systems change.

Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
HUM	Hands Up Mallee
LDAT	Local Drug and Alcohol Team
MEL	Measurement, Evaluation and Learning Framework
MRCC	Mildura Rural City Council
SCHS	Sunraysia Community Health Services

¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway. (2020). *Protective factors approaches in child welfare*.

² Fox, et al. (2015). *Better systems, better chances: a review of research and practice for prevention and early intervention*.

Methodology

This case study forms a crucial component of a broader evaluation encompassing, the *Hands Up Mallee Mid-term Evaluation Report* and two further case studies covering The Red Cliffs Project and Active Covid Outreach Testing and Vaccination Response (ACOTVR).

The HomeBase Hoops case study was developed using a mixed methods approach for data collection drawing on six semi-structured interviews with key HomeBase Hoops stakeholders, 23 survey responses, and a comprehensive desktop review of 36 documents including:

- The 2022 HomeBase Hoops evaluation report conducted by Hands Up Mallee and midterm dashboard developed to support reporting.
- 34 additional academic and grey literature resources including articles, websites, public reports, and local Mildura LGA, Victorian and Australian Bureau of Statistics data sets.³

Data analysis

To create the HomeBase Hoops case study, an applied inductive approach was used informed by a combination of methods to meet HUM's unique needs. This included Significant Instances of Systems and Policy Improvements (SIPSI), Outcomes Harvesting, and Most Significant Change. Qualitative data was analysed thematically and cross-referenced against quantitative data from the surveys and documents. Using an evidence table, the results from different data sources were synthesised and coded. Data from the different datasets was triangulated to make the case study more robust.

³ A complete overview can be found in the evidence section.

To assess the significance of HomeBase Hoops' outcomes, the HUM backbone team and partners' level of contribution to outcomes, and the strength of the supporting evidence, three rubrics were utilised. These rubrics were designed by Clear Horizon with input from the HUM backbone team and were adapted from those used in the 'Logan Together Community, Maternal and Child Health Hubs' contribution analysis evaluation.⁴ The rubric's can be found in Annex 5 of the full report.

Joint sensemaking and verification

To ensure comprehensive coverage and accuracy of the case study content and findings, two sensemaking workshops were conducted: one with the HUM backbone team and another with key stakeholders involved in HomeBase Hoops. These workshops were instrumental in gathering feedback on the preliminary findings, identifying potential inaccuracies, and uncovering opportunities for improvement.

To further validate the case studies and assess the significance of HomeBase Hoops' outcomes, HUM's contributions, and the robustness of the evidence, a verification panel comprising four independent experts in place-based systems change was convened. This panel participated in two assessment rounds:

- **Round 1:** was used to identify opportunities to enhance the case studies. Insights from this session prompted the collection of additional evidence through further desktop review and follow-up conversations with interviewees and other key stakeholders involved in HomeBase Hoops or its ripple initiatives.
- **Round 2:** was used to undertake independent assessment of the case studies against the three verification rubrics and provide final judgments

⁴ Dart, J. (2021). Contribution Analysis – Logan Together.

ABOUT THE HOMEBASE HOOPS CASE STUDY

The need for local, equity-focussed after-hours youth activities

In 2017, Project Y⁵ conducted a co-design project to reach and identify the needs of diverse youth. Youth stated that they wanted a safe space to meet after-hours and after-hours activities that were affordable, inclusive and accessible. At the time, there were limited alternatives for young people to participate in activities at night that were free, safe and accessible and there were no youth spaces or hubs to serve as a gathering location. Further to this, youth service providers held a risk adverse view about delivering activities at night.⁶ Youth service networks were focused on information sharing and there were no active large-scale collaborations informed by youth at the time to test alternative ways to meet youth needs.

As illustrated in the table below, there was a legitimate need for safe places and activities for young people in Mildura, some of whom face significant challenges at home and in their community. In Mildura, family violence and youth crime were twice the average rate for Victoria. The region did and continues to face high rates of food insecurity; 6.7% of the local population report running out of food and unable to afford to buy more, compared with 5.9% of other Victorians.⁷ These challenges have a systemic flow-on effect on the completion and continuation of education and affecting successful transition into employment.

Table 1. Comparison of youth statistics between Mildura and state

Indicator	Mildura	Victoria	Year	Source
Rate of incidents of family violence recorded by police, per 1,000 population	30.9	12.4	Sept 2014-Oct 2015	Corporate Statistics, Victoria Police
Children on child protection orders (per 1,000 children aged 0–17 years)	15.0	5.2	2010	Department of Health and Human Services
Crime where the victim was a child or young person aged between 0–17 (per 1,000 children)	16.1	9.6	2014-2015	Law Enforcement Assistance Program, Victoria Police
Crime where the offender was a child or young person aged between 0–17 (per 1,000 children)	41.9	22.7	2014-2015	Law Enforcement Assistance Program, Victoria Police
Proportion of young people who have ever drunk alcohol (more than a few sips)	70.2%*	59.5%	2014	Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing survey, VIC DET
Proportion of young people who have ever used marijuana or other illegal drugs	18.6%*	12.8%	2014	Victorian Child Health and Wellbeing survey, VIC DET
Proportion of persons who did not complete year 12	54.7%	37.4%	2016	ABS Census of Population and Housing

⁵ Project Y was a youth engagement initiative delivered in partnership with Mildura Rural City Council and Hands Up Mallee.

⁶ Makkai et. al., (2003). Sport, physical activity and antisocial behaviour in youth.

⁷ Victorian Department of Education and Training. (2013). Victorian child health and wellbeing survey.

Indicator	Mildura	Victoria	Year	Source
Young people aged 16 to 24 receiving an unemployment benefit	7.3%	2.7%	2017	Public Health Information Development Unit
Jobless families with children aged less than 15 years	17.5%	11.0%	2017	Public Health Information Development Unit

(*) indicates statistic that uses Mallee Region (as opposed to Mildura LGA)

The opportunity and approach

In late 2017, a group of Mildura young people presented to the Hands Up Mallee (HUM) Community Leaders Table, advocating for a safe after-hours space for youth⁸ and to trial 'Midnight Basketball,' an inclusive, free, late-night basketball program.⁹ By 2019, HUM had formalised a collaborative approach with young people and other partners, including Sunraysia Community Health Services, Victoria Police and Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC). The collaboration sought funding from the Local Drug Action Team (LDAT) for a trial of Midnight Basketball, to test the program model in the local context. Some of the existing barriers to youth participation were identified and addressed early on; these included:

- The cost for youth to access and participate in a basketball club which, in the Mildura LGA is approximately \$500 per annum with club fees, player insurance, weekly game fees and uniform.¹⁰
- Transport, particularly for young people in satellite towns, as there is limited availability of public transport generally, but even more so in the evenings.
- Age restrictions for participants, as the original Midnight Basketball model is for 12- to 18-year olds; however, both young people and Victoria Police voiced the need for inclusion of 10- and 11-year olds in the program to ensure safety and inclusion of younger people still in need of a safe space to socialise in the evenings.

The trial approach prioritised collaborative partnerships, local knowledge and relationships, principles of equity and youth-led approaches, sharing of resources, and measurement, evaluation and learning. Each of these components have been leveraged to develop the current model of HomeBase Hoops and the collaboration that supports it.



⁸ The after-hours youth space ask was taken up as a separate project by Sunraysia Community Health Services who, after some trialling, established HomeBase in 2018.

⁹ Midnight Basketball Australia. <https://www.midnightbasketball.org.au/about>

¹⁰ Mildura Basketball Aussie Hoops registration fees for new participants in Summer Season (16-weeks) include: \$141.50 registration and insurance; \$192.00 weekly game fee; \$113 uniform for a total of \$446.50.

HomeBase Hoops Theory of Change

A Theory of Change was developed for HomeBase Hoops in its early iterations. Recently, it was revised to reflect some of the changes and growth of the model as it was being transitioned into the charge of a Sunraysia Community Health Services' HomeBase as the new lead agency. See the latest version below:

Figure 3: HomeBase Hoops Theory of Change

COMMUNITY ASPIRATION	Young people are valued, loved and safe, are healthy, participating, have a say in what affects them and have a positive sense of identity and culture			
BROADER GOALS	Connection to peers & supportive adults	Young people are empowered to have a say about what's offered and how	Program meets the needs of youth	Participation in activities in safe spaces
END OF PROGRAM OUTCOMES	Young people feel safe, engaged and connected	Partners adopt new approaches and involve young people in co-design	young people experience a safe, enjoyable and welcoming program	
INTERMEDIATE OUTCOMES	Program model is responsive to changing needs and is adaptable	Relationships between volunteers & youth are positive and supportive	Peer to peer relationships are strong and supportive	
	Volunteers have increased skills and confidence working with young people	Regular evaluation cycles to further shape model and meet youth & service needs	Players are encouraging others to participate	
	Volunteers are inducted and supported	Youth voice is centered in evaluation	Players are enjoying themselves and participating regularly	
	Planning and delivering a series of tournaments	Volunteer recruitment (inc. youth)	Regular meeting & debriefing to review	Engage players
INFLUENCE ACTIVITIES	Hoops Program model	Partnership model with key ways of working	Secure Resources	Promotion/engagement plan

Contributions of the HUM backbone team to HomeBase Hoops

The role of the HUM backbone team was to create or strengthen the enabling conditions for HomeBase Hoops to happen. This included:

- **Project leadership** of the Midnight Basketball trial which included responsibility for partnership management and relationships, financials, risk, service, community and youth engagement, securing resources including staff, volunteers, transport, food, materials, management of registration and communications.
- Establishing an **evaluation framework and leading rapid evaluation cycles** to refine the program model to fit the local context, maximize impact and adapt to changing needs from young people. The early phase evaluation prompted the move away from the Midnight Basketball program to a more fit for purpose localised model. Significantly, this included lowering the age of participation to 10 years old.

- Forming a **collaborative partnership** of youth services to support the program through volunteering and providing in-kind resources e.g. transport.
- **Securing funding through grants and donations**, holding responsibility for grant management and acquittal process, and identifying in-kind support and resources that could be provided by the HomeBase Hoops collaborative partners.
- **Modelling a different way of working** – collaborative action, shared resources, youth co-designed and informed model, strong reflection and evaluation to support key partner's learning through doing.
- **Exploring and supporting potential lead organisations** in order to embed the program locally and to support the long-term sustainability.
- **Responsive and adaptive leadership role** to help sustain the program through pandemic and changes of staff in the lead organisation.
- Demonstrating the value of and opportunities for **flexible work hours and involvement** in the program for youth services to strengthen youth engagement.
- Supporting **development of policies, procedures and evaluation framework** for the lead organisation.
- **Reaching Aboriginal families and youth** to explain the model and supports on offer to overcome access and participation barriers and assist with registrations.

Contributions of HomeBase Hoops Project Partners

Stakeholders	Roles and responsibilities
Young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advocacy, support design and collaboration • Participation, evaluation
Sunraysia Community Health Services (SCHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead agency and financial auspice of funding • Responsible for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies and procedures • Public Liability and accident insurance • Volunteer and staff management • Marketing and communications • Financial management • Registrations and record keeping • Venue hire • Engagement of additional staff such as referees • Catering • Game and program administration • Allocate key staff (youth workers) and other resources such as transport and materials
Local Service Partners *Service partners have engaged with and supported HomeBase Hoops at varying levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating in cyclic planning and debrief/evaluation of program. • Allocate staff to work at Hoops in either a paid capacity (flexible hours) or in a volunteer capacity • Support with promotion of HomeBase Hoops • Contribute to impact evaluation of HomeBase Hoops.

Stakeholders	Roles and responsibilities
and on consistent or ad hoc occasions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contribute resources such as busses for transporting youth, providers of off-court activities <p>Services include: Sunraysia Community Health Services (SCHS), HomeBase, Mildura Rural City Council (MRCC), Mallee Accommodation and Support Program, Sunraysia Mallee Ethnic Communities Council, Victoria Police, Mallee Sports Assembly, Youth Justice, Northern Mallee Local Learning and Employment Network, Mallee District Aboriginal Services, Christie Centre, Chaffey Secondary College, Korin Gamadji Institute, Aligned Leisure, Mildura City Heart</p>
Hands Up Mallee (HUM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitate the local HomeBase Hoops collaboration Support partnership development in relation to HomeBase Hoops. Support with promotion of HomeBase Hoops Lead the process and impact evaluation of HomeBase Hoops. Manage relationships with funders Assist with the development of initiatives, frameworks, partnerships and practices that support the growth and sustainability of HomeBase Hoops.
Program Funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation (through the Local Drug Action Team Community Action Plan program)¹¹ Local Dhelk Dja Partnership¹²
HUM Staff Funders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Department of Social Services (DSS) Victorian Department of Jobs, Skills, Industries and Regions

HUM TOC Enablers and Systemic Changes covered in this case study

Outcome level	Outcomes achieved
Which of HUM's systems change outcomes are addressed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An empowered community with agency to act Government, services, and leaders think and act differently There's investment in locally co-designed solutions / innovations Resources are shared and used in different ways Changes are happening beyond the Mildura LGA
Which of the enabling outcomes are present in this case study?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Authentic community engagement (Aboriginal, CALD, LGBTIQ+, etc.) Transparent and locally led governance. Multi-sector collaboration (collective efforts, resourcing, advocacy) A focus on growing skills and knowledge / Evidence-informed decision making A focus on activities that deliver high levels of impact Sharing of progress and learnings for improvement and awareness raising

¹¹ Australian Alcohol and Drug Foundation contributes \$30,000 per annum to the support HomeBase Hoops program.

¹² Dhelka Partnership contributes \$40,000 per annum to SCHS to support its HomeBase Hoops activities.

Key outcomes

The HomeBase Hoops program has achieved significant outcomes for both participating youth and service providers:

Outcome 1: HomeBase Hoops empowers young people.

By using a strengths-based model that offers young people opportunities for co-design, leadership and collaboration, the participants of HomeBase Hoops are more empowered both on and off the court.

Outcome 2: HomeBase Hoops has improved connections between young people and their peers and between young people and service providers.

By working together in a friendly, fun environment, young people and service providers are able to build trusting relationships that extend beyond the HomeBase Hoops program.

Outcome 3: HomeBase Hoops providers are changing the ways they deliver youth services.

Youth services providers are connecting and collaborating in new ways to adopt and apply the HomeBase Hoops ways of working to other youth-focused initiatives in community.

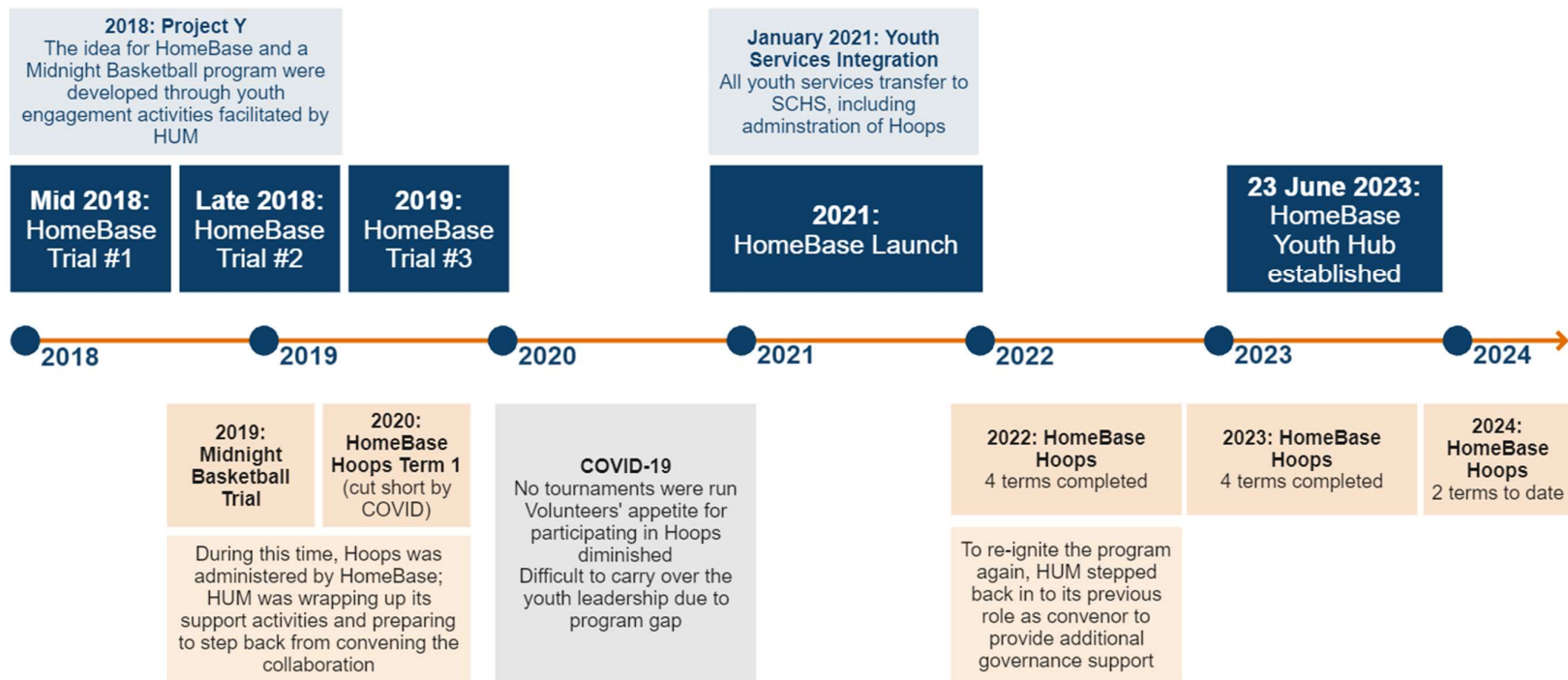


Journey map

A visual map of HomeBase Hoops' journey.

Figure 4: HomeBase Hoops Journey Map¹³

HOMEBase HOOPS JOURNEY MAP



¹³ This journey map was made for the purposes of this case study. It was developed through review of relevant background documents about the program's history, interviews with individuals who have been involved with the program in various roles and at various stages, and through a sensemaking discussion; it does not include input from the young people who have been or are currently involved with Hoops.

KEY OUTCOMES OF HOMEBASE HOOPS

This section provides detailed descriptions of each outcome, highlighting their significance and the contributions made by HomeBase Hoops collaboration partners in achieving these outcomes.

Outcome 1: HomeBase Hoops empowers young people

Since starting, the program has reached over 400 youth from diverse backgrounds including young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds, those living in out of home care and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.¹⁴ By 2022, players joining the program were from up to 19 out of 21 district schools and also included young people who had dropped out of school.¹⁵ Three out of every four players required transport home, and about 70% came from families with Health Care Cards. On average, about half of participants identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; this is significant when only 8.5% of young people in Mildura LGA identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁶ Approximately 60 young people consistently participate each school term cycle; participation numbers are capped at this number due to the size of the venue, although there are often more young people interested in joining.

"I think it has definitely sustained engagement from young people, which is a real strength of it in terms of numbers, but also in terms of reach...from the very get-go it had had a high number of participants of young Aboriginal people...and that has consistently been hovering around that 40 to 50 per cent, which when you look at our population is pretty high." (Backbone team)

HomeBase Hoops has helped to fill a gap in programs and activities conducted for youth after-hours, boosting key protective factors such as physical activity and social and service connection for young people in need.

HomeBase Hoops offers a safe space for Mildura youth to socialise after-hours; youth are able to play sport, eat a healthy meal and make friends with peers and adults in community in a safe pro-social environment. Participation is free of charge and includes a free meal, free transportation and uniforms to remove barriers to engagement.

"It's an option for kids that before Hoops Midnight Basketball [HomeBase Hoops] started, there was nothing. There was no youth centre, drop-in centre, there was nothing. So, this is 50, 60 kids every week on a Friday night, which can be a let your hair down type of time have now got a place to be." (Service provider)

Elevating and championing young peoples' voices is an integral component of HomeBase Hoops. From its inception, young people have been active members and leaders of the program. Through youth co-design workshops, young people identified the potential positive impacts that sport could have for youth in community, researched and adapted the original program model to enable upper primary school

¹⁴ Hands Up Mallee. (2022). HomeBase Hoops Evaluation 2022

¹⁵ Hands Up Mallee. (2020). HomeBase Hoops 2022 Mid Term Dashboard.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2021). 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, Mildura LGA.

children 10-11 years to also be included, and advocated for the program in front of local council and service providers.

As a direct result of their involvement with HomeBase Hoops, engaged young people have developed their leadership and advocacy skills, and gained more confidence in themselves. As they've grown older, some young people have become volunteers for the program, seeing it as an opportunity to give back to their community.

"...they definitely had stayed really connected to how it was going in those early years and had come back in and volunteered and supported." (Service provider)

Young people have continued to contribute to the program development in various ways including through program design and planning, mentoring other players, and supporting roles on the night including skills coaches, assistant coaches and night hosts. **As a direct result of these leadership opportunities, organisers have seen youth gain self-confidence and skills in leadership and self-advocacy through their time with HomeBase Hoops.**

"We've watched them develop their interpersonal skills, their confidence in talking around adults, observing probably the relationships and how they present themselves and advocate for themselves in Hoops as well as other programs as well." (Service provider)

"It's the confidence and the growth that I see in how they conduct themselves and how they get involved and how they're even getting an assist." (Government stakeholder)

"I became a leader, helped people with their confidence, became better at dribbling and shooting the ball."¹⁷

They also demonstrate greater confidence in how they engage and interact with other young people in their community. Relationships are created and strengthened between young people, including between siblings and family members. Young people also learn how to define, reinforce and respect boundaries – both their own and those of other young people.

"So young people that externally might be not getting on, but in that supported environment their behaviour was just completely different, and their caring for each other was really quite notable." (Service provider)

By using a strengths-based model that offers young people opportunities for leadership and collaboration, the participants of HomeBase Hoops are more empowered both on and off the court.

¹⁷ Hands Up Mallee. (2022). HomeBase Hoops Evaluation 2022.

HUM contribution to the outcome

The HUM Backbone Team

Authentic engagement of community is a key tenant of the HUM ways of working. The **HUM backbone team** supported engaging a broader diversity of through Project Y. Youth and families were engaged in the design process through evaluation of the Midnight Basketball trial. These activities ensured young people were listened to and valued in the design process, and that their specific needs and potential barriers to engagement were understood and addressed. This is critical to successful youth program design and youth empowerment.^{18 19} **The young peoples' knowledge and lived experience helped guide modifications to the Midnight Basketball program and transform it into HomeBase Hoops; the program would not be nearly as successful today if it was not for direct youth input.**

The HUM backbone team also supported interested youth in the initial steps required to research and develop a program plan for HomeBase Hoops and encouraged them to bring the proposal to the HUM Community Leadership Table forum for additional input and support. The HUM backbone team helped to nurture the foundations of the HomeBase Hoops program and the young people championing it; without that support, the young leaders may not have been able to get traction with the program.

Finally, the HUM backbone team has been the convener of the HomeBase Hoops collaboration, although it is currently transitioning out of this role as the collaboration is becoming self-sustaining. As the convenor, the HUM backbone team has held responsibilities such as:

- Stewardship of funding, reporting and evaluation requirements
- Coordination of governance structure and processes of collaboration
- Management of program-funder relationship
- HUM staff contact many of the Aboriginal families and youth to encourage them to register at the start of each cycle and explain what support is available for things like transport.
- Recruitment of new partners and management of current partnership
- Cyclic reviews to inform evaluation and refining the model
- Evaluation and reporting to partners, the broader HUM initiative and funders.

The behind-the-scenes coordination of the HUM backbone team enables the program's function and its continuous improvement.

"If we didn't have the backbone and the support of Hands Up Mallee, we wouldn't have done what we were able to do, which was implement HomeBase Hoops...because the work of Hands Up Mallee, the evaluation and the community voice that they would put behind that for us absolutely demonstrated that we were on the right path, but neither would be successful without each other, I think." (Service provider)

¹⁸ NSW Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). (2024). Youth work – agency and empowerment evidence review.

¹⁹ Metselaar, et al. (2015). Needs-led child and youth care: Main characteristics and evidence on outcomes.

The HomeBase Hoops collaboration

The HomeBase Hoops collaboration has contributed to the program in variety of ways:

- The HomeBase Hoops collaboration provide 16 staff, volunteers and coaches committed to running HomeBase Hoops. SCHS and HUM currently make up 50-75% of all staff and volunteers.
- The HomeBase Hoops collaboration have coordinated the necessary financial and in-kind resources to address barriers to engagement from the start of the program. This includes provision of venues, uniforms, meals and transport for each event, free of charge.²⁰ When internal resourcing options were limited, they organised community fundraisers such as the 'Boots for Hoops' donation drive to collect basketball shoes for participants. Without these essential needs met, young people would not be able to engage with the HomeBase Hoops program.
- The HomeBase Hoops collaboration also offered their deep knowledge of community and community needs to complement the youth co-designed informed approach. For example, Victoria Police identified that the program needed to include 10-year-olds as they were also at risk of involvement with the justice system and would benefit from the HomeBase Hoops program.
- HUM partner **SCHS** is responsible for coordinating and carrying out HomeBase Hoops collaborations' day-to-day activities, including insurance and financial management, venue hire, staff and volunteer management, program administration and marketing and communications.

Other contributing factors that enabled this outcome include the fact that HomeBase Hoops was based off a pre-existing model; this offered some initial guidance on how the program should be developed and run, even in spite of the subsequent modifications to the program to account for local context and needs. Additionally, the Youth Development Officer in MRCC was already aware of the need for additional youth interventions in community; the existing appetite for investing in youth programming may have helped facilitate the activation of HomeBase and HomeBase Hoops.



²⁰ The 2024 budget for the HomeBase Hoops program includes \$28,000 funding contributions and \$61,000 in-kind contributions from the HomeBase Hoops collaboration.

Outcome 2: HomeBase Hoops has improved connections between young people and service providers

HomeBase Hoops has helped to create and strengthen relationships between local youth and service providers. The program provides a youth-friendly environment for service providers and young people to meet and get to know each other and facilitates a more natural relationship-building process. HomeBase Hoops participants have reported that ‘they felt comfortable at Hoops because they were with nice, caring, fun helpful adults.’²¹

The relationships between youth and service providers have enabled more successful co-design efforts with young people. Youth know and trust the service providers running the co-design events, and therefore they are not only more likely to attend but they are also more willing to share their experiences and engage fully in the process.

“I think it does definitely help with that collaboration because young people can recognise you ... you’re from Hoops or from school holiday program or from something else or in the community. And they’re quite happy to share, happy that they’re in a safe place and that I’ll listen, or people will listen to their voice because youth don’t get heard a great deal so they feel confident and safe that they can actually give their opinion and feedback and stuff like that.” (Government stakeholder)

Given that youth crime and disengagement has been a significant issue in Mildura,²² the trust and relationships created between local youth and providers as a **direct result** of HomeBase

Hoops is significant. By having the foundations for trust, service providers and police volunteering at HomeBase Hoops can engage with local youth more effectively and earlier, which in some cases has helped to reduce the risk for offending behaviour or involvement with the justice system or enabled better outcomes for youth if they do become involved.

“We’re becoming aware of kids at a community level that, sometimes they do have [a] Court matter and it’s that first time offending or whatever, it’s just good to be aware of that young person or their family by the time they do get to say, having a Court matter. We can really support them because we know what they’re doing, we know what they’re trying to do, we know that they’re trying to stay out of trouble.” (Service provider)

A ripple effect:

HomeBase Hoops may help to divert young people from the justice system, both by offering alternative, low-risk activities for youth and facilitating early connections with support services.²³ Rather than engaging in offending activities, young people are choosing to invest their time and energy into healthy activities and relationships that can have a positive effect on their risk of justice system engagement. While it is still too early to tell, there is anecdotal evidence that HomeBase Hoops and initiatives it has inspired are helping to reduce youth crime rates in Mildura.

²¹ Hands Up Mallee. (2022). HomeBase Hoops Evaluation 2022

²² Mildura has one of the highest youth crime rates of all Victoria LGAs (41.9 out of 1,000 per children aged between 0-17). (2016 Census Data)

²³ A 2006 study found that “cities that were early adopters of officially sanctioned midnight basketball leagues experienced sharper decreases in property crime rates than other American cities.” However, this may also be due in part to those cities being more likely to have invested in other social interventions, so it is difficult to isolate the impact of Midnight Basketball at a population level. (Hartmann, D and Depro, B. (2006). Rethinking Sports-Based Community Crime Prevention: A Preliminary Analysis of the Relationship Between Midnight Basketball and Urban Crime Rates)

“I can see that the pro-social program, especially Hoops and the agencies that are a part of Hoops that they’re having contact with is maintaining that pro-social engagement in their life which is pushing them away from that negative involvement in the Justice system.” (Service provider)

HUM contribution to the outcome

By meeting youth where they’re at and taking a relaxed, friendly approach, **HomeBase Hoops collaborators** are able to create real relationships built on trust with participating youth. Decisions on how adults show up to HomeBase Hoops events, how they view their role at the tournaments, and ensuring that there are opportunities for relationship building embedded into program design are all contributing factors.

All volunteers and staff are required to hold a Working with Children card and undergo compulsory training on trauma-informed care, de-escalation strategies and Victorian Child Safety Standards. This ensures that all adults working at HomeBase Hoops have the tools and skills necessary to engage with youth a safe way that acknowledges their past experiences and respects their agency, enabling better conflict management and communication with young people.²⁴

Moreover, by using a model that empowers young people there is a shift in the power dynamics between participants and staff.²⁵ Young people have more responsibility and leadership within the program, which can promote greater equality with the adult staff.²⁶ This enables relationships to be formed based on trust and shared experiences, and which can be carried forward outside of the HomeBase Hoops environment. The youth-led approach that is central to HomeBase Hoops’ model is a direct result of the **HUM Backbone Team’s** advocacy and leadership within the collaboration.

“I think it’s helped develop relationships across different programs we come across young people. So, we’ve recognised a few young people as part of our school holiday program, we’ve been involved in collaborative walk throughs...and you come upon some young people, and you recognise and develop those relationships so they at times can recognise you as a safe person to have a chat to.” (Government stakeholder)



²⁴ In the 2022 HomeBase Hoops Evaluation, some changes that staff noted over the course of their involvement with the program included the development of rapport building skills with different groups of young people, working adaptively with young people, and managing challenging behaviours better.

²⁵ Ozer, E and Wright, D. (2012). Beyond School Spirit: The Effects of Youth-Led Participatory Action Research in Two Urban High Schools.

²⁶ In the 2022 HomeBase Hoops Evaluation, staff reported a change in their mindset regarding young people’s capabilities particularly for problem-solving. “Kids are better than what they are given credit for, they can work through problems when given the opportunity.”

Outcome 3: HomeBase Hoops providers are changing the ways they deliver youth services

There is strong evidence for changes in how providers are approaching their work with young people as a direct result of the HomeBase Hoops program. Providers are engaging directly with young people to develop a better understanding of the challenges they are facing. They are working outside of their traditional scope by reallocating resources to innovative approaches, adapting policies and process to better support youth engagement and applying a prevention lens to their work. For example, the MRCC have included expectations for working after standard hours and on weekends as essential for staff supporting on youth programs and offer flexible work arrangements and time in lieu accrual compensation.²⁷

"I think the out of hours work, having staff working flexibly so they can be working when young people are out has been a big change, a practice change." (Backbone team)

Providers are applying these innovative ways of working to the HomeBase Hoops program, such as how new volunteers and participants are being recruited. They are also being applied to external work; the Neon Night Disco by FReeZA Youth Crew is a salient example of this. Organised in September 2023 by one of the MRCC Youth Committees, the event was co-designed by the FReeZA Youth Crew and was supported by a number of HomeBase Hoops providers. When there was a challenge with obtaining consent for unregistered attendees, providers were able to adapt their approach and find a solution that enabled those additional young people to still participate.

"A heap of young people [showed up] who weren't signed up to the late-night disco with council, but because people who had worked at Hoops were working at the disco, had contact with families, they were able to get verbal consent. Like, instead of turning them away saying, 'You didn't get a ticket. Sorry, too late, you can't be here,' people were willing to just figure it out, which meant instead of riding from Mildura to, like, the next town, so instead of riding back up the street, they could come in and be a part of it." (Backbone team)

Through their shared experiences and formed relationships with HomeBase Hoops, providers are developing a better understanding of each other and the system as a whole, and the power of collaboration in creating systems-level change. By applying this collaborative approach to work outside of HomeBase Hoops, providers are in a position of influencing how the youth services sector responds to the needs of young people in Mildura.²⁸ This includes the way organisations work together, share information and resources, and understand the needs of young people.

"The way agencies have been networking with each other and trying to resolve community issues by everyone sort of chipping in different resources, away from the program, but that program helped bring everyone together at a community level." (Service provider)

²⁷ MRCC policy as described by Youth Engagement Services Coordinator staff via email

²⁸ Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2018). The water of systems change.

A ripple effect:

An informal roundtable of Mildura youth service providers has begun convening to discuss and address the challenges facing the young people in community. While not all participating providers have been involved with HomeBase Hoops, the roundtable has adopted many of the program's ways of working, in particular its use of multi-sector collaboration and authentic youth engagement.

When youth crime began to escalate in 2023, this roundtable came together to develop a response that was informed by young people and community. Providers began 'Collaborative Walk-Throughs,' visiting public areas of high youth crime rates and engaging with the young people there. For those young people involved with HomeBase Hoops, they appreciated seeing a familiar face; for those not yet in the program, it was a chance to learn about HomeBase Hoops (in some instances, to also register for next term) and begin building relationships with providers in community.

Some providers feel that this new way of working within the sector has contributed to a reduction in youth crime rates in Mildura.²⁹ While the crime escalation was a catalyst for convening the youth service providers, the networks and relationships established through providers' involvement with HomeBase Hoops helped to make that process easier and faster.

A lack of collaboration in the past meant that youth services used to work in silos, duplicating efforts without sufficiently addressing community needs and leaving critical gaps in support.³⁰ Now, they leverage these connections and create new opportunities from them, whether that be increased funding available in the social services sector in Mildura, new initiatives to support community, or improving how they work together on existing programs. **Greater collaboration between service providers has the potential to strengthen the support system in Mildura so that coverage is more comprehensive and effective.**^{31 32}

"Definitely developed greater collaboration between organisations, all directed at the young people that we work with. So definitely the relationships have developed, and the collaboration has become more. It's increased tenfold I think since I've been in this area in the youth services unit"
(Service provider)

*"The best evidence available suggests intersectoral interventions can improve the mental health of Indigenous children, their families, and their communities as a whole."*³³

The success of HomeBase Hoops has also provided evidence for the power of youth engagement and has inspired other organisations to invest in this type of work. There is early evidence of a community mindset shift regarding youth engagement which, if continued, could have the potential for sustainable change in the role young people have in determining their own needs and aspirations and the best ways to address them.

²⁹ While it is too early to see changes at a population-level, participating service providers in this evaluation have spoken about feeling that youth crime has reduced significantly compared to its peak March 2023.

³⁰ Mildura Rural City Council. (2020). *Youth engagement strategy 2020-2023*.

³¹ Petiwala, A., Lanford, D., Landers, G. et al. (2021). Community voice in cross-sector alignment: concepts and strategies from a scoping review of the health collaboration literature.

³² Hardin, L., Trumbo S., and Wiest, D. (2020). Cross-sector collaboration for vulnerable populations reduce utilisation and strengthen community partnerships.

³³ Lopez-Carmen, V., McCalman, J., Benveniste, T., et. al. (2019). Working together to improve the mental health of indigenous children: A systematic review.

A ripple effect:

The success of the youth co-design in creating HomeBase Hoops has provided evidence to support further youth engagement when developing community programs. Communities and service providers understand the importance of the youth voice, and young people have greater opportunities to advocate for themselves and their needs, all of which contributes to youth empowerment in the Mildura LGA.

Examples of this include:

- **Co-design of the Red Cliffs Pools Pilot.** In 2023, the Red Cliffs Pool Pilot offered free access to children and young people to the pool during the summer school holidays in January 2023, together with a range of fun and engaging activities and free snacks to encourage participation. The program was co-designed with HUM and service providers and included young people from HomeBase Hoops in their co-design activities. Those young people were able to contribute their ideas for community-led activities and initiatives and have influence over what services are provided for them in their community.
- **Co-design of the Red Cliffs basketball court.** In 2023, MRCC applied for a grant in to help fund a basketball court in Red Cliffs. With the support of HUM, MRCC staff have engaged with youth to help identify the best location for the court and have supported a youth co-design team to plan how the space is to be best activated and cared for.

"If we continue to develop services according to what we think are needed, we'll never get it right. The success of those programs is because of the community's feet and the community voice."
(Service provider)

HUM contribution to the outcome

The **HomeBase Hoops collaboration** is committed to doing things differently, such as running programs after-hours, collective pooling of resources and staff, and having a more flexible approach to processes that better accommodate the needs of youth. The **HUM backbone team** played an integral role in creating that environment, by supporting HUM partners to navigate the challenges of creating changes in their policies and ways of working that would allow for their participation in HomeBase Hoops.

"What we were dealing with at the start of that, getting late night basketball moving, was, staff and organisations that don't work out of hours, so there was a hell of a lot of work done to model or share experiences of how to work around some of that stuff. How staff members could be supported to be at Hoops in their roles, flex time, what kind of arrangements can we have because the skilled and experienced staff with knowledge and understanding of the young people who might be coming along was a really big part of the success factor, but it was a big challenge from organisations to enable that, which leads into the role of the backbone."

So, quite a bit of the things that you don't see around HomeBase Hoops is that partnership development, nurturing, problem solving, kind of understanding what the barriers are to be able to support a program like this when it clearly aligns with supporting outcomes for young people, it's how do you actually work with changing up some of those structures so that it can work." (HUM backbone team)

The HomeBase Hoops collaboration structure enables the adoption of HUM ways of working across providers, by embedding collaboration and learning across all its processes. For example, the HUM backbone team hosts planning and debrief meetings each term to ensure that all collaborators are prepared for the term and have had an opportunity to reflect on evidence gathered from youth surveys, their own insights and experiences and the lessons learned from the past term. They also create opportunities for ongoing co-design amongst providers to support the shared improvement of the program and ensure that volunteers meet all the necessary Working with Children Checks and have trauma-informed training.

Thus, both the experience of managing and delivering HomeBase Hoops allows providers to see, learn and practice the HUM ways of working while also facilitating the relationship-building that is critical for elevating these ways of working to the whole youth services sector. The networks created through HomeBase Hoops have helped facilitate easier, faster and more successful collaboration across the sector, and have helped shape programs and initiatives to be responsive to youth needs.

"I think having a long stint of being able to do this has created opportunities for partners to actually move from a bit of resistance to slowly engaging, experiencing, and then moving in to actually championing, I think that's been something I've found pretty incredible to witness." (HUM backbone team)

Furthermore, the HUM backbone team has led the Measurement, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) processes for this program that provides the necessary evidence for influencing adoption of authentic youth engagement across other sectors and communities. The 2022 HomeBase Hoops Evaluation demonstrates not only the program's impact but the role that youth engagement has played in creating the enabling conditions for the program's success. Learnings captured and shared in the program's MEL activities help spread the word about HomeBase Hoops beyond the Mildura LGA, with the potential for further downstream ripples in other communities. For example, the success of the HomeBase Hoops program in Mildura has piqued the interest of neighbouring communities of Ouyen and Robinvale, and learnings from the program have been shared in the hope that enabling other communities interested in Hoops can adapt the model to their place. HUM has also presented on the program at conferences, including the 2019 Alcohol and Drug Foundation conference.³⁴



³⁴ HUM presented on their Midnight Basketball pilot at the [2019 Alcohol and Drug Foundation Prevention in Practice Conference](#).

CONCLUSION

HomeBase Hoops is a strong example of a successful place-based, community-led youth initiative. Young people in Mildura want to participate, and those that do are able to benefit from the program's youth-centred approach. They don't just play basketball; they get to have a warm meal, spend time socialising with friends and caring adults, and have a safe ride home at the end of the night.

The HUM backbone team played a critical role in ensuring that HomeBase Hoops met the needs of young people in community by advocating for a co-design approach that established young people as leaders of the program development. This led to an adapted model that was fit for purpose and addressed critical barriers to participation. Without this, HomeBase Hoops would not have the reach it does, particularly for those most in need of free afterhours activities.

It has also supported a collective and deeper understanding of the needs of young people amongst local services through listening to young people and partnering with young people in community. The HUM backbone team ensured that key principles of equity and a youth-led approach were central to the development of the program and remain central to its implementation. As a result, young people are more empowered and are primed to receive support through their new and strengthened connections with local service providers.

The HUM backbone team also facilitated the collaborative resourcing required to activate HomeBase Hoops, and the governance necessary to keep the program running. The team built a strong case for a collaborative approach to better support youth through prevention approaches that strengthened protective factors for them, and they identified and connected existing and new resources to support the program and collaboration development. This consistent and flexible resourcing approach has been key to its success and sustainability, particularly when facing challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic and significant staffing and leadership changes across the lead and partnering organisations.

By being a successful model of authentic youth engagement and multisector collaboration, HomeBase Hoops has helped partnering organisations to understand the value of youth engagement and their approach to delivering youth services. The ways of working that the HUM backbone team has infused into the foundations of HomeBase Hoops are being taken up by partners and diffused throughout the sector. Providers are leveraging their HomeBase Hoops networks to deliver new initiatives and are integrating youth co-design approaches into their strategies. These ripples are indicators of a readiness amongst sector leaders for a sustainable shift to more equitable, youth-centred approaches to supporting young people in Mildura.



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